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Walter Mostert's Thought on Justification

The Case for a Renewed Perspective on Christian Theology.

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My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all (Ps 71,15).

»Kein Artikel des Glaubens schwerer ist zu glauben, denn der Artikel, so da heißt: >Ich glaube Vergebung der Sünden<. Ursach ist, die ändern Artikel gehen allzumal außer uns und kommen mit uns nicht in die Erfahrung, treffen uns auch nicht, als daß wir glauben, daß Gott, Schepfer Himmels und der Erden, unser Vater sei, item daß Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn, gelidden und gestorben sei und so fortan, wie das Symbolum oder Kinder glaube halt [...]. Die ändern Artikel treffen einen ändern, kommen mit uns nicht in die Erfahrung. Sollen sie aber mit uns in die Erfahrung kommen und uns treffen, so müssen sie in diesem Artikel mit uns in die Erfahrung kommen und uns treffen, daß wir alle, ich für mich, du für dich und ein iglicher für sich glauben Vergebung der Sünde. Aber der Artikel >Ich glaube Vergebung der Sünde< trifft uns und kompt mit uns in die Erfahrung und macht, daß die ändern Artikel auch uns treffen und mit uns in die Erfahrung kommen. Darumb ist es der schwerest Artikel zu glauben« (LUTHER, M., WA 28, Reihenpredigten über Matthäus 11–15, Johannes 16–20 und 5. Mose, 1528-29, pp. 271f.).

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Meinem Partner Alex, der liebevoller mit mir umgeht als ich mit mir selbst.

Ai miei genitori.

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A Lucia Rugani, che ha creduto in me e nel mio lavoro prima ancora di conoscermi.

To all those who are afraid of God. May their fear be broken.

Abstract (English)

The study explores W. Mostert's theology of justification in dialogue with prominent alternatives as a source of valid impulses for theology today. Mostert's *Prolegomena* avoid both subjectivism and objectivism and interpret theology implicitly as the true soteriological answer provided to human being's fundamental problem. The problem is universal and is mirrored by the soteriological structure of thought as such. The answer is verified only within experience, in which human being is involved with the entirety of their being. The ontology of justification makes the *Prolegomena* explicit. Human being's fundamental problem is sin, the refusal to give up on soteriological activism and let God be God. The solution is justification, the christological reality of salvation which is truly and effectively received by human being whenever the Gospel is duly preached and apprehended by faith. Justification entails a specific anthropology of the receiver, whereby human being is not determined by the imperative of agency, but by the extrinsic indicative of salvation. This sharply distinguishes justification from ideology in general and ethics in particular. The relationship between justification and ethics belongs to the former and implies the exclusion of the latter from soteriology. Justification finds its necessary plurality in the church, which is therefore immediately included in justification. Correspondingly, the question of an ecumenical consensus on justification belongs to ecclesiology, and vice versa. The strength of Mostert's theology is the relational understanding of "God", "human being" and "the world", which carries on the core of the Reformation and enables a clear determination of the Gospel. Its weakness is its unilateral character, which at times unjustly delegitimizes important theological semantics. Upon integration with the alternatives, Mostert's thought proves a valid vantage point to illustrate the persistent criteriological character of justification doctrine.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Die Studie untersucht die Rechtfertigungstheologie von W. Mostert im Dialog mit prominenten Alternativen als Quelle gültiger Impulse für die heutige Theologie. Mosterts Prolegomena vermeiden sowohl Subjektivismus als auch Objektivismus und interpretieren Theologie implizit als die wahre soteriologische Antwort auf das Grundproblem des Menschen. Das Problem ist universell und spiegelt sich in der soteriologischen Struktur des Denkens als solcher wider. Die Antwort kann nur in der Erfahrung verifiziert werden, in die der Mensch mit der Gesamtheit seines Seins einbezogen ist. Die Ontologie der Rechtfertigung macht die Prolegomena explizit. Das Grundproblem des Menschen ist die Sünde, die Weigerung, auf den soteriologischen Aktivismus zu verzichten und Gott Gott sein zu lassen. Die Lösung ist die Rechtfertigung, die christologische Wirklichkeit des Heils, die der Mensch wahrhaftig und wirksam empfängt, wenn das Evangelium richtig gepredigt und im Glauben angenommen wird. Die Rechtfertigung bringt eine spezifische Anthropologie des Empfängers mit sich, bei der der Mensch nicht durch den Imperativ des Handelns, sondern durch den extrinsischen Indikativ des Heils bestimmt wird. Dies unterscheidet die Rechtfertigung deutlich von der Ideologie im Allgemeinen und der Ethik im Besonderen. Die Beziehung zwischen Rechtfertigung und Ethik gehört zur ersteren und impliziert den Ausschluss der letzteren aus der Soteriologie. Die Rechtfertigung findet ihre notwendige Pluralität in der Kirche, die daher unmittelbar in der Rechtfertigung enthalten ist. Entsprechend gehört die Frage nach einem ökumenischen Konsens über die Rechtfertigung zur Ekklesiologie und umgekehrt. Die Stärke von Mosterts Theologie ist das relationale Verständnis von „Gott“, „Mensch“ und „Welt“, das das Anliegen der Reformation weiterführt und eine klare Bestimmung des Evangeliums ermöglicht. Ihre Schwäche ist ihr einseitiger Charakter, der zuweilen wichtige theologische Begriffe zu Unrecht delegitimiert. In der Integration mit den Alternativen erweist sich Mosterts Denken als gültiger Standpunkt, um den bleibenden kriteriologischen Charakter der Rechtfertigungslehre zu verdeutlichen.

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Introduction

Walter Mostert (Wuppertal, 1936 - Zürich, 1995) studied Protestant theology in Bonn, Göttingen and Zürich, where he became G. Ebeling's assistant and later taught Systematic Theology from 1980 to his death. Ebeling's person and thought were particularly important for the development of Mostert's theological profile throughout the latter's career, also given that the professional relationship between the two theologians soon became friendshipⁱ. Moreover, Mostert explicitly claimed to have found in Ebeling his theological point of reference, a conviction that he maintained until his untimely deathⁱⁱ. As a matter of fact, Ebeling's influence on Mostert can hardly be overstated and translates to an intense theological proximity which will be outlined throughout this study. This proximity is clearly expressed by the unquestionable centrality of Luther's receptionⁱⁱⁱ, shared by both authors. A clear indicator of the professional and personal connection between Ebeling and Mostert is the latter's active participation and leading role in the so-called circle of Löwenstein (*Löwensteiner Kreis*)^{iv}. First convened by Ebeling in 1970 with the participation of thirty students and doctorate candidates, this yearly theological conference was organized by Mostert from 1972 to his death in 1995. Since then, the work of the group has been coordinated by Dietz Lange and focuses on the elaboration and further development of Ebeling and Mostert's theological legacy^v.

Once more in continuity with Ebeling, Mostert's systematic theology is vastly nourished by exegesis and church history, with particular reference to the Christology of the Early Church and the Scholastic, both of which were highly relevant, next to Lutherology, for the development of his interests. Mostert's theological sensibility will gradually emerge throughout the present work. At any rate, a brief sketch can be provided already at this point, in order to outline a general frame of reference within which his overall perspective acquires its meaning. Within the plurality of theological perspectives which originated or were further developed in 20th century European Protestant theology, Mostert's main concerns derive from his (and Ebeling's) intensive reception of Luther. An interesting question worthy of further examination would be to which degree Ebeling and Mostert's interpretation of Luther reflects similar concerns to those of the *Lutherrenaissance*, which, as the name suggests, also stems from a renewed reception of the Reformer's theology^{vi}. As A. Beutel

ⁱ The professional and personal relationship between the two theologians is mentioned by BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling. Eine Biographie, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2012. In particular, see pp. 354, 364, 368f., 446, 450.

ⁱⁱ BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling (see note i), pp. 368f.

ⁱⁱⁱ The centrality of Luther to Mostert's theology will emerge throughout this study. As for Ebeling, also refer to BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling (note i), pp. 178-185, 242-253, 381-387, 454-459, 469ff., 474-496.

^{iv} BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling (see note i), pp. 366-369.

^v BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling (see note i), p. 369.

^{vi} For lack of space and for reasons that will be clarified later on (for one, the fact that Mostert never explicitly deals with other theologians in his systematic works), this question is not going to be dealt with in the present study. For a detailed

points out, a certain convergence can be observed between these two schools of Lutherology. This does not entail positing something like a constantly interconnected and mutually enriching exchange across these authors. Rather, it seems safe to claim that points of contact, both personal and professional, exist between Ebeling and Mostert on the one hand and E. Hirsch^{vii} and R. Hermann^{viii} on the other. Ultimately, what is definitely common to these authors and specific to their theologies is the reception of Luther in the wake of K. Holl^{ix} and in dialogue with the intellectual categories of 20th century philosophy and theology. Specifically, theological features such as a nuanced evaluation of natural theology, the need for a fundamental differentiation (for instance the Law-Gospel rubric) in doctrine, the relative autonomy of creation theology with regards to the second article and a positive assessment of the dimension of the believer's subjectivity are elements which, amongst others and to varying degrees, seem shared by Ebeling, Mostert and the authors of the *Lutherrenaissance*. Thus, the question of an implicit theological commonality between the two approaches based on the reception of Luther's thought is all but trivial.

Coming specifically to Mostert, his thought gives prominence to the category of experience^x. As will be shown, this centrality acquires its meaning within a philosophical framework which is close to Heidegger^{xi} and in which other pivotal concepts are performative language, conscience, authentic and inauthentic constitution of the self, and the limits of human agency. In explicit theological terms, Mostert moves decisively in the wake of Ebeling's reception of Luther. This is shown with utmost clarity by the focus on justification as the forensic situation within which the authenticity of human life is effectively communicated by way of critical contrast with its inauthentic and ambiguous

and punctual presentation of the *Lutherrenaissance*, see ASSEL, H., *Der andere Aufbruch. Die Lutherrenaissance – Ursprünge, Aporien und Wege: Karl Holl, Emanuel Hirsch, Rudolf Hermann (1910-1935)*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1994.

^{vii} Beutel mentions Ebeling's intensive study of Hirsch's historical and exegetical work (BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling [see note i], pp. 145, 157, 173), and specifically of his reception of Luther (Ibid., p. 167). Simultaneously, their disagreement on the relationship between the Old and the New Testament is also touched upon (Ibid., p. 60), which presupposes an active exchange between the two. This exchange was not only professional, but also personal (Ibid., pp. 318ff.). All in all, according to Beutel, the theological proximity between Ebeling and Hirsch is unquestionable, even though implicit (Ibid., pp. 261, 419).

^{viii} Even though Beutel mentions that Ebeling had both professional and personal contacts with Hermann (BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling [see note i], pp. 235, 502), it seems that the latter's theology was less influential for Ebeling's reception of Luther than Holl and Hirsch's.

^{ix} According to Beutel, the theological impulse given by Holl to a new reception of Luther is pivotal also for Ebeling's own understanding of the Reformer's theology (BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling [see note i], pp. 59, 118, 167), to the point that Ebeling's work was at times perceived in strong, seamless continuity with the *Lutherrenaissance* (Ibid., pp. 248, 252, 492).

^x Understood in non-subjectivistic terms, as *Erfahrung*, and not as *Erlebnis*. In explicit theological terms, the experience (*Erfahrung*) of justification transposes the believer's whole subjective existence into the objectivity of God in Christ, without looking for subjective confirmations thereof in particular experiences (*Erlebnisse*).

^{xi} As a matter of fact, Beutel acknowledges the influence of Heidegger's philosophy on Ebeling's theology, with its growing focus on hermeneutics (BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling [see note i], pp. 258f., 274, 279). Moreover, Ebeling's in-depth dialogue with contemporary philosophy seems not to be limited to Heidegger. Rather, it extends to other central figures of hermeneutics as well as the analytical philosophy of language, such as Gadamer, Appel and the late Wittgenstein (Ibid., p. 333).

perversions^{xii}. With justification constantly remaining the point of reference, Mostert's theology revolves intensively around the Law-Gospel differentiation, understanding the fundamental polarities of God-human being and *iustus-peccator* in its wake.

In the present work, I am going to study Mostert's doctrine of justification from the point of view of four macro-areas: The *Prolegomena* (Part 1); the ontology of justification (Part 2); ethics and justification (Part 3); ecclesiology (Part 4). The selection of these topics resulted first of all from the intensive study of Mostert's works and wants to reflect his most prominent theological interests. As will be shown, Mostert's whole theology is to be interpreted as an intensive reflection on justification. Obviously, this does not mean that all subjects are *reduced* to this doctrine. Rather, they are presented in such a way that they contribute to illustrate the reality of justification as *the* core of Christian theology. This is particularly true for the macro-areas that I am going to study in the present work and which, in my interpretation, build the backbone of Mostert's theology as a whole. Furthermore, I chose these macro-areas because, throughout previous attentive study, I became convinced that they single out controversial and pivotal questions within 20th century Protestant theology. Thus, by discussing justification doctrine from the perspective of the four selected macro-areas, I intend not only to provide an account of Mostert's theology, but also to show the persisting relevance of the theological debates on these subjects, on which Protestant theology has by no means reached unanimous consensus. Throughout my study, the research question is going to be whether Mostert's theology of justification can provide valid impulses for theology today. As general as the question may sound as of now, it is going to become more and more concrete as the analysis unfolds. Specifically, in light of the whole study, it will be clarified what I consider to be "valid impulses" for theology. Since the clarification presupposes the answers successively given to the research question in each Part, it is going to be made explicit only in the general conclusion of my analysis^{xiii}.

To answer the research question, I am going to open up each Part by presenting Ebeling's position on the matter at hand, thereby situating Mostert within the theological frame of reference from which his thought originates. Then, I am going to analyze his own position. After that, I am going to compare Mostert's perspective with four (Parts 1-3) or two (Part 4) *theological alternatives*, i.e. different takes on the same topic provided by prominent 20th century theologians. As will be discussed and justified in each Part, the choice of the alternatives was always the result of my own considerations. This is because Mostert, in his work as a systematic theologian, never explicitly deals with other authors. His

^{xii} On this matter, it would be also interesting to devote further study to Mostert's reception of R. Bultmann's theology. As for Ebeling, he personally got to know Bultmann, attended his lectures in Marburg in 1930-1931, and came to regard him as his theological point of reference. The theological dialogue with Bultmann remained central throughout Ebeling's career, given the absolutely pivotal role of hermeneutics in both their theologies (BEUTEL, A., Gerhard Ebeling [see note i], pp. 263-270).

^{xiii} See here, pp. 333ff.

methodology is rather an *implicit dialogue* with different theological perspectives. In general, Mostert's theology unfolds through general assertions, often formulated in non-theological language. These assertions are subsequently developed and made explicit with reference to the particular *locus theologicus* under consideration. At times, the starting point is the exegesis of a Bible text or an examination of the history of theology. Nevertheless, systematic considerations are not merely juxtaposed to exegetical and historical ones, nor imagined as their completion. Rather, the systematic dimension in Mostert's theology always emerges *together with* exegetical and historical considerations. As a consequence, it would be both impossible and irresponsible to clinically separate the three dimensions in Mostert's work. However, the interconnection of the exegetical, historical and systematic dimensions does not mean that Mostert neglects the autonomy of each. On the contrary, whenever the focus is placed on one of these dimensions, the ensuing account is rigorous, and the relevant methodology is respected.

Based on all the above, the only possible way for me to select theological alternatives with which to compare Mostert's thought was my own informed decision. The decision came to be in two successive steps. Firstly, I came up with the selection of the macro-areas. Based on the study of Mostert's works, I realized that these are the topics which need to be analyzed to understand his theology of justification. Once the macro-areas had been established, I was able to get a first, pretty accurate glance of both the strengths and weaknesses of Mostert's approach, and understand where they come from. This made me realize that Mostert's theology remains at times entangled in ambiguities and weaknesses that well-known and prominent 20th century theologians tackle more successfully. However, I also saw that the reverse was true, in that Mostert's theology provides impulses to overcome weaknesses which remain unresolved within the thought of these prominent theologians. With that, it became clear to me that my study needed to start by fostering a sort of cyclical dialogue between Mostert and the theological alternatives. On the one hand, I studied the theological alternatives and found them particularly useful to overcome some of the weaknesses in Mostert's account. On the other, I expounded Mostert's theology and discovered its potential to overcome the weaknesses of the alternatives. Secondly, the intensive study of Mostert's thought convinced me that his fundamental theological concern with justification, if further developed, enables a discussion on the four studied macro-areas which is richer and more fruitful than the one carried out by the alternatives. Here, the aforementioned initial circularity between Mostert and the alternatives broke, and this showed the relevance of the research question. There are corresponding and mutually engaging weaknesses in both Mostert's theology and the alternatives, but the former appears worthy of further study as it carries a theological potential which, unlike that of his more prominent alternatives, has remained largely unexplored to this day. For sure, Mostert's overall

theology lacks the scope and the systematic character of the theological alternatives with which it is compared in the present study. After all, a serious illness put an untimely end to Mostert's life before he could further develop his work and perhaps systematize it. However, the study of the four selected macro-areas provides a glimpse on the depth and richness of his fundamental theological concern and on the path this concern can still open for theology today. Seen as the ultimate truth about human being, God and the world, justification can nurture a theology which, developing Mostert's concern in fruitful dialogue with the alternatives, can overcome the limits and weaknesses of both his and their accounts.

As will be illustrated in due detail every time, the preceding considerations ultimately mean that the choice of the alternatives in each Part was neither strictly necessary, nor arbitrary. Certainly, other theologians could have been selected if the study had been given a different structure, and Mostert's theology could have been explored also in dialogue with them. However, I am convinced that the resulting exploration would not have been equally suitable. Ultimately, my selection resulted from the structure of the present study, which in my view best interprets Mostert's theology of justification. Therefore, I am convinced that the choice of *these* specific alternatives is fully justified and appropriate for each Part.

After studying the accounts provided on each theological macro-area by Ebeling, Mostert and the alternatives, each Part is going to be concluded with a critique of Mostert's position aimed at showing both his strengths and weaknesses and assessing which of the alternatives, if any, could provide theological material for an integration. This way, the research question will be scrutinized each time anew and acquire growing specificity.

The resolve to study justification doctrine is far from obvious in the contemporary theological context. As a matter of fact, it might appear as an arbitrary focus on a doctrine which seems to have long lost its centrality in Protestant theology and in the ecumenical context. Therefore, I am aware that the selection of this topic needs to be illustrated. One thing must be pointed out to begin with: the concern embodied by this study does *not* come from any traditionalist nostalgia for the richness of past theological thought. As a matter of fact, I do not regard any moment in the history of church and theology (not even the Reformation!), as a golden era to which one should or could ideally go back. Far from that, I actually believe that theology can be meaningfully and responsibly pursued only if adequately put in critical dialogue with each successive historical context in which the church comes to be. This is because, in my view, theology means witnessing Jesus Christ in the form of thinking, and thinking, as a human act, is always and constitutively historically situated. Theological traditionalism appears therefore as the opposite of theological responsibility, namely as a temptation which ultimately signifies giving up the very task of theology under the illusion of preserving its core.

In my judgement, *theological responsibility* is threefold. First of all, theology has the responsibility of investigating *Scripture* as the *norma normans* for doctrine and life. When it actively and willingly puts itself under the sovereignty of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), the theologizing church is brought to regard itself not as the lord and author, but as the servant and recipient of its endeavor. Secondly, theology is responsible towards every cultural *context* in which the church – as the critical subject of theological discourse – exists and thinks. In its situated existence, the church uncovers every time anew that historical, social and cultural situations change the very structure of theological questions in such a way that different answers emerge and are continuously in need to be scrutinized in the light of Scripture. Simultaneously, each situation in which the church comes to exist and think necessarily generates new, unprecedented questions which become relevant for theology in that specific context. When these new questions arise, theology is found constitutively incompetent and must become competent in order to announce the Gospel meaningfully *in that context*. This kind of competence is not immediately theological, it does not come from any superior form of knowledge supposedly granted to the church and its theologians. Rather, it is humbly acquired only by intensive, critical and open dialogue with other disciplines, as well as by active but non-intrusive involvement in the social, cultural and political issues of the moment. Only at this point, after its responsibility towards Scripture and the context, theology is also responsible towards its own *tradition*, which I understand as the conflictual historicity of the normative interpretations of Scripture throughout the different contexts.

In light of the above, it is clear that my choice to turn to Mostert's justification doctrine is not intended as a nostalgic celebration of the past. Instead, it is a choice made here and now and needs to be understood as one attempt to hopefully intercept theological responsibility today, in the context of post-Christian Western Europe and from the perspective of Protestant Christianity. It follows that the present work is necessarily partial and in need of further integration and critique. As a matter of fact, all aspirations to completeness are explicitly renounced from the outset, not only in regard to different contexts, but also with respect to today's Western European Protestantism. Still, in this context and from my necessarily limited and situated point of view, I consider it imperative to focus on the reality of justification and I think that Mostert's contribution is interesting precisely as long as it helps do that. For sure, Mostert studies justification in his context, which does not simply overlap with ours. Hence, theological responsibility *today* cannot be envisaged as a simple reiteration of his theology, not even for those who, unlike me, would find themselves simply and utterly satisfied with his work. In light of that, this study should not be read first and foremost as though its interest were in Mostert's *answers*. Instead, the focus should be on his *questions* and how they originate from his fundamental concern. At least, this has been my focus in studying and discussing Mostert's theology. Thus, the

guiding interest of the present study is to follow his theological orientation today in order to come, with the help of his questions, to *our own* answers. My fundamental interest in Mostert arises precisely from the fact that I share his fundamental concern and regard theology as the overall critical reflection on it.

In the present study, justification doctrine is considered the concrete point of view whence theology constantly emerges. Put otherwise, Mostert's core thesis is that theology becomes theological in that which justification doctrine expresses. In all its historical and canonical partiality, justification interprets what the words "human being", "God" and "world" mean when considered *always* from the perspective of their overall interrelation. By becoming related with one another as they do in the message of justification, these three words and the corresponding realities acquire a highly profiled meaning which exists in polemical tension with all other meanings acquired by these same words in abstraction from this relation. In the present study, therefore, the *concept* of justification is understood as that principle which carries out a new semantic qualification of the aforementioned words and realities. Coming to its *content*, justification is regarded as God's salvation event in Jesus Christ addressed to sinners and communicated to them by faith alone (*sola fide*). Within its context, the present study finds in justification the *positive criterion* to articulate what "human being", "God" and "world" mean for today's theology. Also, justification is regarded as the *negative criterion* which excludes as non-theological all accounts in which "human being", "God" and "world" are understood in partial or whole abstraction from one another. Of course, the point is not to question the legitimacy and seriousness of these accounts within non-theological disciplines, but to stress that the understanding of these disciplines cannot be theologically normative.

Finally, a couple of remarks to complete the introduction to the present study. I have grown particularly interested in Mostert's justification doctrine also because it accounts for the relationship between *subject and object* in a way which I consider particularly fruitful for the theological endeavor as such. In justification, the focus is never on human being or on God in isolation, but always on their relationship. Is this not exactly the case, if one simply looks at one's own life of faith? In Mostert's perspective, justification has one strategic advantage compared to other images of salvation in Scripture. The advantage is that justification talks about human being in the world without ever ceasing to talk about God, and vice versa, with the qualitative difference between the Creator and His creation being maintained at all times. In my opinion, this is precisely the fundamental theological intuition which has made the Reformation possible and has given it its distinctive profile (*das Reformatorische*) amongst Christian confessions. The present study is born out of the conviction that Protestant theology can meaningfully and joyfully understand itself anew in today's context by reflecting on justification doctrine. Accordingly, the study of Mostert's endeavor is by no means to

be regarded as an end in itself. Rather, his doctrine of justification is worth studying as a prime example of a much broader task which, far beyond his work, concerns theology *as such*. Mostert follows the Reformation in the firm conviction that, in Jesus Christ, God, human being and the world meet and interact in a way which defines each of them in an unprecedented, non-deducible manner. As God's Word, Jesus Christ makes human beings aware of the fact that, in abstraction from him, they have not even begun to truly understand who or what they themselves, God or the world are. On the contrary, outside of Christ (*remoto Christo*), the way in which these three realities relate appears as highly problematic and by far not unambiguously *good*. With that, it is also to be noted incidentally that justification doctrine enables insight into an always relevant topic such as the constitutive ambiguity and distortion of the religious phenomenon.

All in all, the doctrine of justification outlines how the interaction between human being, God and the world is understood in Jesus Christ and in him alone (*solus Christus*). And yet, this claim in itself is insufficient to illustrate why theology should keep studying justification doctrine. The centrality and normativity of the interaction described by justification cannot be imposed to theological discourse, but only illustrated. If today this interaction were found to be theologically redundant or, even worse, an empty repetition of that which is said about human being, God and the world outside of Jesus Christ, then justification would have indeed lost all its meaning and become abstract, no matter how decidedly the church could possibly try to claim its normativity *ex auctoritate*. If, on the contrary, this interaction between the realities of human being, God and the world were still understood as containing and reiterating an unprecedented and non-deducible message about those realities, then it would become clear once more that the role of justification doctrine needs no further foundation than that which is already and immediately experienced in the dynamic whereby these realities interact with one another.

In conclusion, the particular *christological concentration* from where Mostert's justification doctrine emerges allows theology to talk about God, human being and the world simultaneously, without ever considering any of them from the supposedly neutral position of the observer. Thus, it becomes theologically impossible to distribute the three realities along the subject-object axis, as that would mean considering them from a point of observation which lies outside of justification doctrine and cannot therefore meaningfully interpret its corresponding event. Therefore, the immediate theological relevance of justification doctrine consists in it talking of God in the *only* way which is concrete in itself and does not need further actualization, as human being and the world are always already included in the discourse. However, justification does not only illustrate that human being, taken together with their world, is concerned by God immediately, and not at the end of a supposedly neutral process of reflection. More importantly, justification also shows that this immediate concern

of human being and the world with God is *good news* for them because of the way in which God has freely determined to position Himself towards them (*sola gratia*). In other words, justification makes it impossible and even blasphemous to wonder about God's identity and His intent towards His creation in abstraction from Jesus Christ, his cross (death-resurrection) and his life. As soon as justification doctrine talks about God, it talks about the gracious One who welcomes and affirms human beings in Jesus Christ and cares for the whole, good world. Ultimately, the focus on justification doctrine makes it possible to avoid both the Scylla of objectivism and the Charybdis of subjectivism in which 20th century theology often remained captive. Simultaneously, it also makes sure that "God" is no other than Jesus' gracious *Abba*, "human being" is no other than the one whom He wants to save, and "the world" is nothing else than His beloved creation.

1. The Question of the *Prolegomena* in Light of W. Mostert's Theology

The word “Prolegomena” is used in this work to refer to “what needs to be said beforehand”. The three following chapters are going to define what this *beforehand* refers to in light of *what* it comes before. Are the Prolegomena the doctrine concerning that which precedes theological doctrine? Are they a reflection on the formal possibility of theological thought? Or a study of some form of philosophy – maybe one in a constitutive relationship to Christian doctrine – to be known prior to engaging with the contents of revelation? These are some of the questions the Prolegomena traditionally refer to. In the present work, instead, the issue at hand is less broad and more localized than these questions might suggest. The point is, what are the Prolegomena within Mostert's theology? What things, in his approach, need to be “said before”? Specifically, *before what* are the Prolegomena to be said, for Mostert?

Already from this brief sketch of the content I am going to deal with in this Part 1, it is visible how the question of the Prolegomena is intertwined with the very question at the heart of all theological endeavors: What are we dealing with? What is theology all about? For Mostert, any answer to these questions has directly to do with justification doctrine¹. More specifically, the whole of theology, as I am going to explore throughout this work, has to do with justification doctrine as the theological place where the truth about God, human beings and their relationship is uncovered. Hence, for the sake of clarity, it is appropriate to define the terminology that I am going to employ in this work.

In my work, I call “Prolegomena” first of all the contents of Christian discourse around the foundation and the tenability of theological thought and doctrine. So, here, the Prolegomena investigate whether doctrine is founded exclusively and wholly upon the event of revelation and from the perspective of its unique christological content, or else it derives its tenability from philosophy and anthropology, that is from its universal relevance as a human existential placed (also) outside of revelation. As I am going to show, the intensive study of Mostert's Prolegomena introduces the question of the viability of a third option.

In constant reference to Mostert, I consider the Prolegomena what comes before justification doctrine. This means that the Prolegomena need to investigate whether justification tolerates, needs or even demands to be expressed not only with explicit theological (christological) reference to revelation, but also with reference to an anthropology observed through theological lenses. If the theologians whose thought is studied in this Part 1 do agree that justification doctrine expresses and

¹ For an exhaustive historical-theological account of the major developments of justification doctrine in Christian theology, see McGRATH, A., *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Cambridge University Press 2005³.

carries out God's self-revelation to human beings, they disagree, instead, on the question whether justification provides the solution to an anthropological, universal problem humanity experiences within existence. It is on this alternative that many theological paths do part. It is in light of this alternative that, after presenting Mostert's own perspective, I am going to explore what has been called the dilemma of the Protestant mind² and select four prominent theologians as possible, authoritative representatives of two different theological approaches to the question of the Prolegomena. To my knowledge, Mostert does not explicitly deal with the thought of any of them within his Prolegomena. However, when studying Mostert's theology I found myself confronted with questions that these theologians, among others, also approach. The selection is not exhaustive, others could have been selected instead. Still, it is not arbitrary either, and I maintain that such selection is justified based on the inner structure of Mostert's thought, on the questions which he asks and on the answers which he provides. In what follows, I am going to study Mostert's thought in the wake of Ebeling's (1.1.) and compare it to the selected theological alternatives (1.2.), namely P. Tillich and K. Rahner (what I call "theologies of correspondence") on the one hand and K. Barth and E. Brunner ("theologies of God's address") on the other. Afterwards, I am going to press my criticism of Mostert's Prolegomena and assess the possibility to integrate it with impulses coming from the alternatives (1.3.).

1.1. Language, Experience, Faith: G. Ebeling and W. Mostert

1.1.1. Language, Experience, Faith: G. Ebeling

The question of the proximity between Mostert and Ebeling's theologies is not going to be treated explicitly in what follows, and yet it emerges almost invariably on multiple occasions in all four Parts. At times, such proximity is really strong, at times it is more nuanced. All in all, as I already pointed out, Ebeling is a crucial point of reference for Mostert, even though, as will be seen later on, the latter does not simply replicate his mentor's theology. The proximity between the two theologians is such that, throughout my study, I am always going to illustrate Mostert's doctrine in constant reference to Ebeling's. As the present chapter will show, the two theologians express a multi-faceted but overall unitary theological position on the Prolegomena. Concerning this first macro-area, therefore, the

² LEHMANN, P., "Barth and Brunner: The Dilemma of the Protestant Mind", *The Journal of Religion* 20/2 (1940), pp. 124-140.

proximity between Ebeling and Mostert seems to be particularly strong. Accordingly, I am going to start the analysis by presenting Mostert's own account³ of Ebeling's doctrine of the Prolegomena.

According to Mostert, Ebeling sees life as a set of polarities illustrated by tensional word pairs⁴. These polarities are to be studied theologically, which means that life itself, for Ebeling (and Mostert), is a theological subject. Namely, theology is to be described starting from its object, which is the relationship between human being as a sinner and the justifying God. This relationship constitutes the original polarity of life (*Urpolarität*), the one to which all other polarities ultimately go back⁵. Theology has the task to show the connection between the original polarity and others, a task which does not dissolve, but further emphasizes the polarities. In them, the crucial point is always that human being as an individual is placed before God (*coram Deo*). As will be explored further later on, Ebeling and Mostert agree that justification – as the true resolution of the original polarity – can only involve human being as an individual⁶. This is a crucial point to explore Mostert's understanding of justification in its sharp difference from the alternatives.

Mostert explains that, for Ebeling, the Prolegomena have the fundamental task of assuring that the interpretation of the Gospel happens according to it⁷. To assess whether this is the case, theology has a constitutive hermeneutical task. This means that theology must derive from its matter (*Sache*) the appropriate hermeneutic as a doctrine of understanding which is in line with the Gospel⁸. In explicit theological terms, Ebeling is concerned with the question, *how* Jesus Christ is present through his Word⁹. Thus, for Ebeling, the hermeneutical question mouths invariably to Christology. Jesus Christ qualifies unambiguously God's agency on human being as forgiveness of sins. This is the theological matter (*Sache*) that needs to be understood again and again. Hence, its accurate understanding will be one that is in line with the characterization of the Gospel as God's gracious activity on passive human being, namely one that sees God's agency and human agency as categorically distinct¹⁰. Coherently, Ebeling argues in favor of the overcoming of traditional hermeneutics, as in it God's agency on human being is not adequately distinct from human agency¹¹, a thought which is also central in Mostert's theology.

³ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling. Theologie in den Gegensätzen des Lebens" in: s.a., BAUER, A., KOLLER, P., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. (eds.), *Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie. Theologische Brocken aus drei Jahrzehnten 1966-1995*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich 2008, pp. 165-186.

⁴ For instance, Word and faith, Reformation and modernity, Law and Gospel, Scripture and experience...

⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 166.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 171.

⁸ See e.g. JÜNGEL, E., SIEBECK G., "In memoriam Gerhard Ebeling", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 98/4 (2001), pp. 399-400. The short text identifies Ebeling's theology precisely as the search for a hermeneutic in accordance with the Gospel.

⁹ As will be shown, the *how* of revelation is investigated by all the theological alternatives included in Part 1, only to be dismissed as non-theological by Barth.

¹⁰ As will be seen at a later stage, this is another crucial element to understand Mostert's justification doctrine.

¹¹ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 171.

It follows that, for Ebeling, the question of hermeneutics cannot be reduced to a methodological matter. Since it has to do directly with the Gospel both formally and materially, hermeneutics needs to be founded anew within *fundamental* theology¹². There, an *evangelical* (*evangelisch*) hermeneutic is concerned with an ontological question, which is also central in Mostert's thought. Instead of dealing simply with the understanding of language (as the question of the method does), hermeneutics deals with the ontological dimension of language (as *Sprachlichkeit*)¹³. In Ebeling's view, language is the ontological reality in which life comes to understand itself. In explicit theological terms, hermeneutics is the doctrine of God's Word, and illustrates how the latter operates through the Law-Gospel interaction in order to make human beings true to themselves within faith¹⁴. Pointing to one thought of Ebeling which is also central in his own theology, Mostert argues that language is the only ontological reality that truly changes human being, and *with that* also changes their understanding of themselves, their neighbor and the world¹⁵. Thus, the essential being of humans and the world is understood through interpreting language ontologically as the foundational grid of reality¹⁶. This understanding is attained by the theologian through the intensive study of the Law-Gospel polarity. Accordingly, I would argue in favor of an integration of Mostert's reading of Ebeling. For Mostert, the original polarity of life in Ebeling's thought is the relationship between God and the individual human being. However, the Law-Gospel rubric seems to be unquestionably central in Ebeling's doctrine, to the point that it rather functions as an original polarity next to the one between God and human being, and not as a derivative one like the others. Only in this sense, in my view, is it possible to make sense of Ebeling (and Mostert's) claim that the confessional differences express questions of fundamental theology¹⁷.

At any rate, Ebeling and Mostert's focus on the ontology of language is not to be understood mainly in philosophical terms, notwithstanding the proximity with impulses coming from M. Heidegger's philosophy¹⁸. Rather, the two theologians point out that philosophy remains a phenomenon of the Law¹⁹, thus being constitutively incapable of accounting for the full dynamism of language. Specifically, language finds its concrete, creative dimension only in Christology. There,

¹² MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 177.

¹³ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), pp. 172f.

¹⁴ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 175.

¹⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), pp. 175f.

¹⁶ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 176.

¹⁷ Indeed, the treatment of the Law-Gospel rubric in Ebeling and Mostert's theology functions as a frame of reference to understand their view of the Reformation core (*das Reformatorische*) in its difference from Roman Catholicism. This difference is explored by the two theologians both historically and systematically. On the confessional difference as a question of fundamental theology, see also EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 67/4 (1970), pp. 479-524.

¹⁸ See e.g. HEIDEGGER, M., *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2007 (1950-1959).

¹⁹ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 174.

language is seen – against the backdrop of the Law-Gospel rubric – in its sacramental unfolding²⁰, as the dimension within which new life is truly communicated to human being, so that their complete set of relationships is founded anew. The presence of God, for Ebeling, is truly found only in language seen through the prism of the Law-Gospel rubric. Only there is God met not as a place-holder pointing to other goals beyond Himself²¹, but as a Subject in a real relationship with human being and the world. Thus, language grants the connection between human being, the world and God²². It is then in light of this connection, for Ebeling and Mostert, that fundamental theology sees human being as a linguistic being whose fundamental situation finds expression in the word (*Wortsituation*)²³. This word, however, is not the word human beings speak, but the one they hear. Once again, the proper understanding is *theological*, not philosophical and human being is defined by their hearing, not their speaking, by their believing, not their acting²⁴.

So, in Mostert's account of Ebeling's hermeneutics, the doctrine of language has the fundamental theological task of making God audible to human being. Moreover, God Himself becomes understandable only hermeneutically. This means that God can only be understood within His Word as the doctrine of understanding which places human being in their fundamental situation *coram Deo*²⁵. God's Word illustrates human being's fundamental situation in its polarities, in which, at the same time, such situation is hidden, forgotten or explicitly denied²⁶. And yet, the situation of human beings is made manifest exactly in those polarities. Precisely at this point, in my opinion, Ebeling articulates a hermeneutic of the cross in the strongest fashion. His doctrine of the polarities of life paradoxically intercepts the hidden presence of God where His reality remains absent and obscure to the natural understanding of human being. One could say that in the godlessness of life's polarities and in the attempts to understand them God and the knowledge of Him are present *sub contraria specie*.

Human being's fundamental situation appears fully and in the clarity of faith only where God's Word is manifested in its unhidden, perfect form, in Jesus Christ. In him, God has been unambiguously revealed as the gracious One, and *with that* human being has been found as the sinner who can attain their true self only outside of themselves²⁷. It is not enough to say that, for Ebeling and Mostert, the knowledge of God and that of human being happen together and are inextricably related. It is more accurate, I think, to say that they are the *same* knowledge. Human being and God,

²⁰ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 174.

²¹ As it happens, instead, in all legalistic understandings of God.

²² MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 175.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 176.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

for the two theologians, can either be understood together or ignored together, *tertium non datur*. The dynamics of this knowledge or lack thereof are illustrated by hermeneutics as the theological doctrine of language. This doctrine is the object of what Ebeling calls fundamental theology²⁸, an object to be investigated with philosophical tools. Philosophically, Ebeling's (and Mostert's) doctrine of language exemplifies a theory of experience²⁹. By studying experience, the core of the various matters at hand is identified and rephrased. However, for Ebeling, the philosophical frame of reference through which experience is tackled is not a paradigm to be accepted in advance in order to then attain theological truth³⁰. Rather, the discourse on human being issues spontaneously from the study of experience as a form of language illustrated through the Law-Gospel polarity³¹. This experience is itself always already given, as its content is ultimately the subject matter of theology³². Since it is presupposed, experience is close to human being but needs to be accounted for, interpreted. Experience needs to *become* language. To that end it becomes expressed in philosophical terms which strive to make it understandable. Further, this philosophical description of experience becomes theologically relevant as it points out that language is fundamentally a phenomenon of the Law. As such, language can express the Gospel not always, but only when articulated as God's Word. This articulation, for Ebeling, happens within faith. It is therefore only within the dynamic interaction between Word and faith that the fundamental problem of humanity can be understood theologically in its entirety and depth³³.

If the problem is to be understood through the Law-Gospel rubric, its solution, for Ebeling (and Mostert), is to be found in justification doctrine. Theology is correspondingly the study and experience of God's work on human being, understood as *materia Dei*, as *homo a Deo iustificandus*. It follows that the difference between human being and God is a theological subject that needs to be covered not in order to separate the two, but to concretely articulate the dynamism of God's agency on human being. This dynamism is human being's justification³⁴. God's agency is understood within faith, which is the organ, the existential *locus* where the whole relationship between God and human being (with the world) takes place. Thus, Ebeling starts with human being as a philosophical-anthropological subject, to then uncover their *theological* truth as one existing before God. In

²⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3) p. 177.

²⁹ On the legitimacy of a theological use of the semantics of experience, see KIETZIG, O., "Ist es theologisch legitim, bei der Behandlung von Glaubensaussagen von „Erleben“ zu sprechen? Erörtert in Auseinandersetzung mit Emil Brunner Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube", Archiv für Religionspsychologie 12/1 (1976), pp. 105-117.

³⁰ More or less along the lines of Barth's rejection of natural theology.

³¹ In his study of Barth's theology, Ebeling criticizes his treatment of the Gospel-Law rubric. In particular, Ebeling claims that Barth's understanding of the rubric fundamentally departs from the Reformation (see EBELING, G., "Über die Reformation hinaus? Zur Luther-kritik Karl Barths", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, suppl. 6: "Zur Theologie Karl Barths: Beiträge aus Anlaß seines 100. Geburtstags" [1986], pp. 33-75).

³² MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 179.

³³ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), pp. 179ff.

³⁴ MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 183.

Ebeling's theology, the same concerns all contents of the Prolegomena, which are investigated by fundamental theology. The latter is not charged with giving a strong positive foundation to theological elaboration³⁵, but with reflecting on the certainty of faith, on its foundations and tenability. These ultimately belong to the very concept of faith³⁶, so that the question of the foundation of theology ends up asking how theology appears before its subject matter (*Sache*). Correspondingly, I would argue already at this point³⁷ that Ebeling and Mostert share an understanding of the Prolegomena as a form of implicit theology. Their discourse becomes then explicit as soon as it is developed in its christological implications. In my view, Ebeling's approach, shared by Mostert, cannot be regarded as fideistic. In his account, faith is not a form of knowledge providing the foundation of theology. The reality of faith is not founded on itself but relies on the external reality of Jesus Christ. This reality is communicated to human being within the tradition of faith and is the event to which theology normatively refers³⁸. Therefore, theology does not ultimately rely on faith, but only on Jesus Christ. For Ebeling (and Mostert) faith is always to be understood as an instrument for the attainment of truth on the part of human being. This truth does concern human being's relationship with themselves and the world, but also with God. Hence, faith is itself christological in structure, as it always concerns the relationship between human being, their world and God, thus communicating the truth about them. For Ebeling, there is no characterization of faith which is not relational. Faith is always the true, effective relationship to Jesus Christ as the life-giving life³⁹. As such, the theological reflection on faith also needs to take into consideration its historicity, namely the instances of the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ within existence. Thus, Ebeling insists that the *locus* of theology is not the abstractness of thought, but first and foremost experience⁴⁰.

In Ebeling's theology, the claim that Jesus Christ is the foundation of faith finds its explanation precisely within fundamental theology⁴¹. This has to illustrate what the claim means and show in philosophical language in what sense Jesus Christ is the only event in which the truth of human being's life is affirmed. To do so, fundamental theology needs to illustrate the Law-Gospel rubric in constantly new, situation-sensitive categories, which are not to be limited to Christianity but presented as potentially universal⁴². Developing a thought that is also central to Mostert's theology, Ebeling equates the complex and differentiated interrelation between Law and Gospel with the tension of polarities in human life. More specifically, Law and Gospel are the two fundamental expressions of

³⁵ For Ebeling, this is instead the task of fundamental theology (as natural theology) in Roman Catholicism.

³⁶ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), p. 510.

³⁷ This claim is going to be further illustrated throughout the present study.

³⁸ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), pp. 510f.

³⁹ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), pp. 514f.

⁴⁰ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), p. 520.

⁴¹ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), p. 521.

⁴² EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), pp. 516ff.

life seen as human being's contentiousness with God⁴³. In it of itself, the Law-Gospel rubric is a structure of existence which cannot be limited to the Christian experience of life. Correspondingly, for both Ebeling and Mostert, the event of the differentiation and tension between Law and Gospel precedes theological reflection. Theology then uncovers the Law-Gospel dynamic retrospectively as the inner logic of that which happens in Jesus Christ⁴⁴. Coherently, Ebeling illustrates his understanding by claiming that Jesus Christ is the matter (*Sache*) of faith, while the Law-Gospel rubric is the matter of theology.

Since human being is for Ebeling (and Mostert) one of the fundamental contents of the theological matter, anthropology is not preliminary to theology, but constitutively belongs to it. Anthropology is implicit theology. This means that the theological characterization of human being and the other realities within experience only appears when these are understood christologically. After all, it is only so that they can be truly understood. This passage marks the difference between Ebeling and Mostert's position on the one hand and foundationalism on the other. Simultaneously, it also distinguishes them from the "theologies of correspondence"⁴⁵. In Ebeling's view, fundamental theology needs to go back to the beginnings of Christian understanding by localizing faith within human being's experience as a battle for the truth of life⁴⁶. In doing so, fundamental theology integrates human experience as such into the theological matter, while at the same time concentrating all Christian discourse on the foundation of faith. These two tasks of fundamental theology illustrate in what sense Ebeling understands experience as the place of verification of faith⁴⁷. Experience as such, even prior to faith, is theologically relevant, as it is by means of experience that faith irradiates into human life, making it true to itself. This means that fundamental theology, for Ebeling, helps dogmatics understand what happens in life as such. In turn, this understanding enables dogmatics to deliver its own contents more responsibly⁴⁸.

Ebeling is well aware that the hermeneutic of God's Word is a reality within faith⁴⁹. As such, theological hermeneutics is constitutively exposed to contentiousness (*Strittigkeit*). Following once again a thought pattern informed by a *theologia crucis*, Ebeling interprets such contentiousness theologically. The rejection with which theological hermeneutics is met inherently belongs to its matter (*Sache*)⁵⁰. Ebeling illustrates this insight by referring to the polarity between the power and

⁴³ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), p. 517.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See 1.2.1.

⁴⁶ EBELING, G., "Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie" (see note 17), p. 520.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See e.g. EBELING, G., "Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 56/2 (1959), pp. 224-251.

⁵⁰ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik zwischen der Macht des Gotteswortes und seiner Entmachtung in der Moderne", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 91/1 (1994), pp. 80-96, here pp. 81f.

the disempowerment (*Entmachtung*) of God's Word, which is paralleled by the one between hermeneutics and "God's Word" as a linguistic category. For Ebeling, the theological discourse on God's Word is faced with a twofold problem. Firstly, it is important to figure how a category pertaining to God's agency ("God's Word") can be articulated under the general conditions of human understanding. Secondly, it is necessary to attain an accurate articulation of the relationship between God's Word and the human word. Both layers of the problem express the contentiousness of theological hermeneutics, which is unavoidable. Thus, under the conditions of human understanding, both aspects of the problem are impossible to solve. Based on this impossibility, Ebeling denies that any demythologized hermeneutic could solve the *impasse* with which the validity claims of modernity confront theology⁵¹. Hermeneutics remains nonetheless necessary to theology, because God's Word is a human, oral and natural word⁵². The specific character of God's Word does not depend on any special quality, but on the identity of the One pronouncing it⁵³. Accordingly, listening to God's Word requires the same methodology needed for human words. However, God's Word – as the Word pronounced by the gracious One – differs from other utterances because it undergoes a soteriological turn (*soteriologischer Kehre*)⁵⁴. For the benefit of its addressees, God's Word becomes manifest in its dynamic movement *from Law to Gospel*⁵⁵. Only within this dynamism can God's Word be concretely apprehended by its addressees. Instead, outside of the Law-Gospel interaction, human beings never hear God's Word. This illustrates Ebeling's thesis that contentiousness inherently belongs to the dynamics of God's Word.

For Ebeling (and Mostert), there is only one *locus* where human being receives and concretely understands this Word within its soteriological turn: justification doctrine⁵⁶. Only there does it become manifest that God's Word is not ambiguous, but twofold⁵⁷. In fact, even its constitutive contentiousness is ultimately aimed at communicating God's righteousness. Deepening this thought is, once again, the task of fundamental theology. For Ebeling, the Law-Gospel dynamism – which enables the soteriological turn of God's Word – needs to be described through ontological and anthropological categories. As will be shown, this is also a crucial passage in Mostert's theology. Resorting to his ontology of language, Ebeling investigates first of all what type of language can correctly account for the dynamism of God's Word with its soteriological turn. Secondly, from an

⁵¹ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), pp. 95ff.

⁵² EBELING, G., "Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik" (see note 49), p. 244.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), p. 84.

⁵⁵ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), p. 85.

⁵⁶ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), pp. 84f.

⁵⁷ Specifically, as I am going to show in Part 2, the Law-Gospel interaction expresses the twofold way in which the two dimensions of God's Word work on sinners for their justification.

anthropological point of view, he asks what language truly apprehends the ontology of human being⁵⁸. Both questions imply that fundamental theology needs to focus on describing the linguistic structure of God's Word. When God's Word is listened to, a specific event takes place within human being's existence. This event, as Mostert also stresses, truly changes them. Thus, to understand the event, it is fundamental to study its language, in an attempt to find an answer to the question of how human being can truly hear God's Word. The Law-Gospel dynamics shows how the linguistic characterization (*Sprachlichkeit*) of God's Word apprehends human being in conscience and places them before a contentious situation (*Konfrontation*), in which life and death ultimately face each other. As language, God's Word moves human being to a place where said Word is met with adversarial powers, opposing words which seek to determine human being's ontology in contrast to the determination intended for them by God⁵⁹. These adversarial powers find expression in specific hermeneutics, for instance those of Positivism and Nihilism⁶⁰. For Ebeling, the adversarial powers typically dissolve the tension between Law and Gospel, thus making it impossible for the Gospel to find any space in human being's conscience⁶¹. God's Word, instead, happens in such a way that the tension is kept alive, and space is made for faith in the Gospel. Fundamental theology is tasked with describing the specific hermeneutic which fosters the dynamism of God's Word, so that it become possible to describe how faith can access human being.

Ebeling's understanding of hermeneutics and language has been quite harshly criticized by J. Barr⁶². The critique is instructive as it shows that Ebeling's fundamental theology is not foundationalist. In other words, Ebeling does not intend to secure the foundation of theological discourse by ways of a rational ontology of language. Specifically, Barr accuses Ebeling of confusing language and the ideas and systems of thought expressed through it⁶³. Barr defends a purely methodological understanding of language, as a vehicle delivering a content which is in principle separate from that which carries it⁶⁴. Conversely, Ebeling sees language not only as the vehicle of understanding, but also as the reality to be understood. In Barr's opinion, Ebeling uses language arbitrarily and almost anthropomorphically as an overarching category for the description of human being's life in its entirety. Further, Barr claims that Ebeling's category of language functions as a theological allegory. In Barr's interpretation, this points out that Ebeling's whole discourse is hiddenly

⁵⁸ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), pp. 94ff.

⁵⁹ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), p. 89.

⁶⁰ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), p. 93.

⁶¹ EBELING, G., "Hermeneutik" (see note 50), p. 95.

⁶² BARR, J. reviews EBELING, G., *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, Collins, London 1973. The review can be found in: *Religious Studies* 10/3 (1974), pp. 351-353.

⁶³ BARR, J. reviews EBELING, G., *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (see note 62), p. 351.

⁶⁴ BARR, J. reviews EBELING, G., *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (see note 62), p. 352.

theological from the outset⁶⁵. Most likely against Barr's intention, I find that his critique goes hand in hand with Ebeling's theology. Ebeling (and Mostert) intends precisely to exclude any foundation of theological discourse on non-theological disciplines. Further, as I already showed, he explicitly claims that theology is always met with an inherent contentiousness. If Ebeling's ontology of language and anthropology are (mis)understood in foundationalist terms, Barr's conclusions are, with all due respect, quite obvious. However, the point is precisely that Ebeling's positions are *not* foundationalist. They cannot be understood on the basis of an independently (rationally) acquired philosophical truth about existence, but only as the explicit (christological) formulations of an implicit (ontological and anthropological) *theological* discourse. This implicit theological discourse, for Ebeling, is the object of the Prolegomena. In his theology (as well as in Mostert's), the Prolegomena are not dogmatics *in nuce*. Rather, they deal with questions of principle (*Prinzipienfragen*) which accompany the whole of material dogmatics⁶⁶. These questions of principle are clearly involved in the contrasts that theology experiences in its relationships with other disciplines. Within such contrasts, theology is continuously confronted with essential features of human experience⁶⁷.

According to Ebeling, Christian dogmatics is constitutively placed between two poles: Jesus Christ as the truth of human being and sin as their fundamental, universal situation. Philosophy is not able to find the truth about either pole⁶⁸. That is instead the task of theology, which needs to take both Jesus Christ and sin seriously into account and then look back at general things (*das Allgemeine*). When doing so, theology finds hidden in those general things the same truth which was already made explicit by the study of the two poles. In this process, theology gains reliability through its adherence to the concreteness of both poles. Conversely, philosophy necessarily ignores this concreteness because it does not recognize Jesus Christ and sin. Thus, lacking true concreteness, it ends up prey to dogmatism⁶⁹. Correspondingly, Ebeling insists that not only the content of dogmatics, but also its very concept is to be understood from within dogmatics. The truth of dogmatics is not only verified within thinking, but also (and primarily) within human being's experience of life (*Lebensvollzug*)⁷⁰. As will be shown later, this is also a crucial passage in Mostert's thought. Both theologians see thinking as constitutively limited. The reason why philosophy cannot attain the truth is that reason is only *one* faculty of human beings' nature. The same applies, as will be seen in Part 3, to ethics. As such, neither can hope to account for the entirety of human being, which is however a precondition for attaining the truth about them. Only experience can account for human being's entirety. This is

⁶⁵ BARR, J. reviews EBELING, G., Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (see note 62), p. 352.

⁶⁶ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 1, Der Glaube an Gott den Schöpfer der Welt, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2012⁴, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 16.

⁶⁹ As will be illustrated below, this is also a core passage in Mostert's thought.

⁷⁰ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 17.

because experience is localized within the concrete relationship between God and human being, which is the subject matter (*Sache*) of theology. Dogmatics has the task of ensuring that theology remains loyal to its subject matter and in touch with the concreteness of the truth about God, human being and the world. This concreteness is given in experience and ultimately clarifies the methodological question⁷¹. In my opinion, Ebeling's position breaks significantly with the absolute centrality of this question within modern philosophy. Specifically, he points out that methodological problems are only clarified once one has dealt with the concrete objects of knowledge, not in advance and abstractly.

Ebeling sees dogmatics as the critical reflection on Christian proclamation. It is not proclamation itself, but it must favor faith in its coming to its full linguistic expression (*Sprachvollmacht*)⁷². This means that, for Ebeling, the task of dogmatics is eminently hermeneutical, and that is mirrored in the fact that dogmatics must aim at theological consensus⁷³. The hermeneutical task of dogmatics is constitutive and fundamental. Only on its basis can dogmatics resort to the Bible as its material *depositum*. Concerning the Bible, the hermeneutical task of dogmatics is responsible of focusing on the Gospel and showing how the latter is articulated from different points of view within the different articles of faith. This passage is in my opinion quite interesting, as it qualifies hermeneutically Ebeling (and Mostert's) position on the criteriology of the Biblical canon. For both theologians, the canonical primacy of the article of justification⁷⁴ is imposed first and foremost by the hermeneutic of God's Word, and is not an arbitrary form of *eisegesis*. Coherently, in Ebeling and Mostert's view, the whole canon cannot be considered equally criteriological for dogmatics. In fact, the hermeneutical task of dogmatics consists precisely in investigating how the different articles of faith are derived from Scripture. If the derivation is performed legitimately⁷⁵, the articles of faith are loyal to Scripture, which means that theology is carried out responsibly. This, however, cannot be established once and for all, but needs to be always verified within experience⁷⁶. In light of the above, the criterion to navigate Biblical interpretation, for Ebeling (and Mostert), can only be the *Christum treiben* as illustrated by justification doctrine. The latter expresses the intimate structure of all theological statements, as its *locus* is ultimately the Law-Gospel rubric. As I already mentioned⁷⁷, this entails that

⁷¹ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 20.

⁷² See EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 161.

⁷³ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 23.

⁷⁴ On the distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification, see e.g. McGRATH, A., "Der articulus iustificationis als axiomatischer Grundsatz des christlichen Glaubens", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 81/3 (1984), pp. 383-394. An interesting systematic reflection on the distinction, to which I will come back in Part 4, is found in KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums und die Rechtfertigungslehre", in: BEINTKER, M., HEIMBUCHER, M. (eds.), Verbindende Theologie. Perspektiven der Leuenberger Konkordie (Evangelische Impulse 5), Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014, pp. 36-69.

⁷⁵ According to the Gospel.

⁷⁶ See e.g. EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 14.

⁷⁷ See here, p. 4.

Mostert is not correct in interpreting the Law-Gospel polarity in Ebeling's theology as derivative. Rather, it seems to me that this polarity must be considered equally original and fundamental as the one between God and human being.

Ebeling explicitly denies that the Prolegomena could develop a doctrine of revelation⁷⁸. Therefore, also the doctrine of God is excluded from their scope. Instead, the Prolegomena must define the procedure and the explicit tasks of dogmatics. Formally, they can only appear as postulates, even though they do lose that appearance within material dogmatics. As a preliminary indication of the tasks of dogmatics, the Prolegomena lead to an illustration of experience as the overarching concept that dogmatics must take into consideration⁷⁹. To be responsible before what I called the two fundamental polarities of life – Law-Gospel and human being-God – theology needs to resort to experience in order to shed light on the depths of human life⁸⁰.

Further, the Prolegomena are tasked with investigating the criteria and conditions of dogmatic statements. In Ebeling's understanding, valid dogmatic statements are those which illustrate and fortify the certainty of faith (*Gewißheit*) in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sin of the world and in his being sent by the Father for its salvation. Thus, faith is constitutively inherent to dogmatics as its presupposition. Specifically, dogmatics articulates statements which require faith for both their comprehension and acceptance. However, this presupposition should not be understood in noetic terms. Ebeling does *not* claim that faith is a type of knowledge disclosing a specific understanding of dogmatics which would remain inaccessible outside of faith. In contrast to fideistic approaches, Ebeling regards faith as the situational-existential (rather than noetic) presupposition of dogmatic statements⁸¹. If received within faith, these statements directly alter the situation of those receiving them. From a purely noetic point of view, the statements are understandable regardless of faith, provided that they are logically well-construed. However, outside of faith, they are not understood *existentially*, so that their matter (*Sache*) may very well be logically and noetically understood, but not truly apprehended. This means that dogmatic statements are theological and situational. For them, the relationship with God is constitutive and can never be arbitrarily abstracted from the one with the world⁸². Dogmatics must serve the church by maintaining the tension between the foundation of faith (Jesus Christ) and the life situations of human being.

⁷⁸ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 14.

⁷⁹ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 16.

⁸⁰ EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), pp. 16ff.

⁸¹ "Glaubensaussage ist weder nur eine Aussage über den Glauben noch nur eine solche Aussage, für deren Verständnis und Bejahung Glaube als Vorbedingung gefordert ist. Das sind Teilaspekte, die erst von daher richtig einzuschätzen sind, daß Glaubensaussage eine Äußerung, eine Kundgabe des Glaubens selbst ist, deren Inhalt die Situation des Glaubenden angibt" (EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 [see note 66], p. 46).

⁸² EBELING, G., Dogmatik, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 41.

Correspondingly, the formal criterion to assess dogmatic statements is whether they faithfully express the whole of life situations in the form of the foundation of faith. If this happens, dogmatic statements are truly theological, in accordance with their matter (*Sache*)⁸³. If this does not happen, instead, they are arbitrary, as they fail to show the connection between a specific reality and human being's fundamental situation. Therefore, Ebeling rejects a foundation of dogmatic statements directly on revelation, as that would separate them from experience. As a matter of fact, the latter is constitutive for the verification of theology and is part of its matter (*Sache*). As such, experience describes human being's fundamental situation, which is found prior to the theological endeavor. However, this situation concerns the world of human being. As such, it needs to be investigated by theology not in isolation, but in dialogue with other disciplines. Therefore, the truth of theology, in Ebeling's view, only emerges as true in connection with life as a whole. In order to illustrate such connection, which is fundamental to theology as such, dogmatics undertakes a continuous dialogue with other disciplines.

The material criterion of dogmatic statements is found in the substantial accordance with the Gospel in its historicity⁸⁴. In particular, Ebeling insists on historicity as a disturbance factor for the systematic character of theology. Specifically, the Christian claim that God enters history only in the particularity of one concrete historical event stands in constitutive tension with systematic thinking. Moreover, God's coming into history takes the linguistic form of the Gospel, which breaks with the overall legal structure of reality. This happens within religion and qualifies it as the *locus* where life is at the same time threatened and in need of rescuing. This rescuing is only possible provided that religion is exposed in its legal structure and maintained in its tentional orientation to the Gospel. After all, this is coherent with the key insight of Ebeling's (and Mostert's) fundamental theology, that the Gospel can only function properly if kept in critical proximity to the Law. Dogmatics needs to use the instruments provided by the Prolegomena to illustrate the Law-Gospel rubric in a way that is both formally and materially adequate to the theological matter (*Sache*). Even in organizing the materials of his dogmatic work, Ebeling cares to express the interrelatedness between the foundation of faith (illustrated by Christology) and the fundamental situation of human being (described by linguistic ontology and anthropology)⁸⁵. With that, all theological topics are ultimately one matter which, for the sake of clarity, needs to be treated in separate *loci* and from different angles. The unity of theology results from Christian faith, which in turn represents the unity of life. Accordingly, the different theological topics tackle various aspects of one and the same matter within a plurality of life situations. Ebeling's dogmatics strives to show that the knowledge of God and that of human being

⁸³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (see note 66), pp. 44ff.

⁸⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (see note 66), pp. 53ff.

⁸⁵ See e.g. EBELING, G., *Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (see note 66), pp. 73ff.

go hand in hand and together express Christian faith. This twofold knowledge is verified within human being's experience. Because of the centrality of experience, the world becomes the third necessary element of this theological-anthropological knowledge. In my opinion, the centrality of the world in Ebeling's (and Mostert's) thought is to be understood from justification doctrine. However, this does not mean that the world becomes a space for the application or concretization of Christian righteousness. Instead, the world is directly theological, in that it inextricably belongs to God's relationship with human being. The world is the content (not just the container) of human being's fundamental life situation. After all, this is backed by Ebeling's insistence that theology needs to illustrate the difference between God and the world not by pointing to their separation, but to the different *modes of address* that God employs when addressing His creation⁸⁶. Going deeply into this topic, however, would exceed the scope of Part 1. In Part 2, I am going to resume precisely from God's modes of address to illustrate Ebeling and Mostert's ontology of justification.

In conclusion, for Ebeling, theological discourse is based on Jesus Christ as the foundation of faith and on the fundamental life situation of human being. The two are not to be separated, as they can be properly known only together. Given the centrality of experience, the world is also included in the relationship between the two. The knowledge of God, human being and the world is theological and not philosophical, since the relationship between them in Jesus Christ is precisely the matter of theology. However, the knowledge of these realities is explicitly theological only when its foundation on Jesus Christ becomes manifest. When human being's fundamental situation is considered, instead, the knowledge of God, human being and the world centers on anthropological and ontological categories and is only implicitly theological.

1.1.2. Language, Experience, Faith: W. Mostert

The question about the gracious God is more radical than the one about His existence, and yet both are overcome as legalistic once human being has made the experience of grace⁸⁷. This thought, for Mostert, expresses *in nuce* the fundamental soteriological understanding of the Reformation (*das Reformatorische*). Both questions lack the concreteness of the true experience of God in that they express human being's soteriological *quest* without acknowledging that salvation is already present in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, these questions insist on seeing human being as an active participant (a thinker or a doer) in search for grace. However, the one about the gracious God is a valid starting

⁸⁶ See e.g. EBELING, G., *Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (see note 66), pp. 59ff.

⁸⁷ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage nach der Existenz Gottes wirklich radikaler als die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott?", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 74/1 (1977), pp. 86-122. The impact of Mostert's insight on hermeneutics is picked up and exhaustively illustrated by KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Die Frage nach der Frage, auf die die Theologie die Antwort ist", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 48/8 (2007), pp. 407-423.

point to come to the christological answer because it is placed within experience, where it finds its verification place. The same does not apply to the one concerning God's existence, which remains metaphysical⁸⁸. Therefore, both questions are fundamentally wrong, but the one about the gracious God is asked from a perspective which allows the true answer to also be heard. For Mostert, this true answer is the one experienced by Luther, namely that God offers Himself as the solution to the fundamental problem of human being. As a sinner, the latter is a creature who can only think and act as an active partner of their Creator⁸⁹, thus not letting God be God and not attaining salvation.

Before themselves, in all their existential possibilities and relationships, human beings are radically unable to solve their fundamental problem. Because God is the One who, within their faith, makes human beings' true, essential reality present to them, He is *already* the gracious God⁹⁰. Thus, following Ebeling, Mostert argues that human being's self-knowledge and their knowledge of God are one and the same, but seen from two different perspectives. Salvation entails one's true understanding of oneself, which is attainable only before God, not in light of one's overall interconnection of relationships (*Zusammenhang*). Thus, Mostert exposes both questions about God as inherently sinful, since they are asked by sinners, those who can either despair for the absence of salvation or boast in soteriological activism, in the delusional conviction that the truth about human being is verified in their acts. The starting point for the true knowledge of God, human being and the world, therefore, is not to be found in questions, but in experience. Only there does the question about God's existence become completely uninteresting, whereas the one about the gracious God stops being an interrogation and becomes proclamation. This is because, in experience, God is found as the One who is present and gracious to human being. In short, for Mostert, the experience of the gracious God and of true human being replaces the questions about both with the revelation of their *reality*. Now, human being no longer strives to collaborate with God and God no longer functions as the supreme justification for human being's activism. Following Ebeling, Mostert claims that the effective communication of this reality happens within faith as the language of the Gospel which remains external to human being (*extra nos*)⁹¹.

Mostert's disqualification of the two questions about God is reflected in his elaboration on the reason-revelation coupling. If both concepts are abstracted from the particularity of experience and are placed at the general level, a false alternative originates. Focusing on the general requires the language of application and the question of how to apply the general truth to a particular case. To avoid this, Mostert defends an early modern understanding of experience as the *locus* where human

⁸⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), p. 91.

⁸⁹ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), p. 97.

⁹⁰ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), pp. 117ff.

⁹¹ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), pp. 118f.

being accesses the truth about themselves⁹². In experience, the experiencer is also always experienced. The understanding of that which they experience is the instrument through which they also understand themselves. Thus, according to Mostert, the truth can only be communicated effectively within experience. Before experience, morality and reason are compelled to acknowledge their failure at fully accounting for human being's situation. This is because they address human being's specific faculties of thinking and action. Within experience, instead, human being is concerned in their entirety as a person. At the same time, experience is also the place where this entirety is never fully present and human beings perceive themselves as insufficiently reunited with their true essence⁹³. Thus, the solution to their fundamental problem is only possible after they have found their verification in experience. There, they become disillusioned about the soteriological promises coming from thinking and action, they understand that their salvation concerns them as whole persons and yet they see that their existence is never whole. Therefore, experience is the place where the illustration of human being's problem is manifested in its ripeness for a possible solution. In experience, human being is met existentially with a "Yes" and a "No" which belong together and can only be heard in their dialectic.

Within experience, Mostert's anthropology finds that sin is the criteriologically determination of human being. His specific understanding of sin is formal. Qualitatively different from evil, sin is not a moral, but an ontological category. It is the fundamental characterization of human being as an individual observed from the point of view of their soteriological effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). In this view, the formality of sin is not located in moral wrongdoing, but in human being's unwillingness to face their inability to expect existential assurance on the basis of their actions. The materiality of sin, then, is understood from its formality, and consists in the association between soteriologically insufficient acts and the expectation to attain salvation through them⁹⁴. Mostert excludes a moral understanding of the characterization of human beings as sinners. Far from being evil, they are God's creatures, and as such they are good in their essence. As for their existence, they are also not evil, but soteriologically insufficient. Reference to human beings' good, created essence introduces a moment of ontological realism in Mostert's anthropology, thus preventing subjectivism. Specifically, human being exists in a discrepancy between their existence as a sinner and their obscured memory of a previously given (*vorgegeben*) goodness. This memory points to human being as a radical receiver and finds a symbol in the newborn's sheer dependance on their mother⁹⁵. The previously given goodness is the essential nature of human being. As such, it is never lost, even though sin determines

⁹² MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), p. 107.

⁹³ MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87), p. 97.

⁹⁴ MOSTERT, W., "Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72/4 (1975), pp. 427-460, here pp. 449ff.

⁹⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie" (see note 94), p. 457.

human being's existence wholly and radically⁹⁶. In my opinion, here Mostert's anthropology becomes contradictory, due to the mixing of two conflictual understandings of ontology, one metaphysical and one relational⁹⁷. By acquiring the memory of their previously given goodness within experience, human beings come to understand that they exist in contradiction with their God-intended essential nature. Therefore, their fundamental problem becomes how to be reunited with that goodness. To overcome the cleavage, human beings need to be addressed in their entirety, not at the level of particular faculties such as thinking or action. Following Ebeling, Mostert claims that only language truly restitutes human beings to their essence, in that it apprehends them in their entirety. This makes it possible for human beings to be restored to their previously given goodness⁹⁸. This restoration is not a general event to be subsequently applied to individuals. Rather, it is always radically new for each and every person and happens through faith⁹⁹.

Faith communicates salvation by restituting the appropriate *distance* between God and creation¹⁰⁰. In this restitution, God is revealed as the only salvific agent, and human being as a sheer receiver of salvation (*mere passive*). Since Mostert claims that this dynamic is inherent in existence itself, he employs general soteriological categories to describe it in terms that are not specific to Christian theology¹⁰¹. In Mostert's view, distance between the divine and the human enables viewing salvation as a movement. In this movement, both God and human being (with their world) are placed in the space that is appropriate to them. In the opposite situation (*Unheil*), human being moves towards God's space and usurps His soteriological agency, thus pushing Him into hiddenness. This qualifies human being's *hybris*, a concept that Mostert does not see as incompatible with the Biblical concept of sin¹⁰². In response to human being pushing Him into hiddenness, God indeed hides Himself and, in so doing, delivers sinners to their *hybris*. This delivery, however, is not devoid of God's salvific intent. Human beings are abandoned to their own *hybris* because there all their soteriological efforts are bound to fail¹⁰³. Therefore, within *hybris*, human being can understand their fundamental problem and aspire to finding its solution.

This solution, for Mostert, is the implicit or explicit subject matter (*Sache*) of thinking, which is inherently soteriological. In line with W. Weischedel¹⁰⁴, Mostert claims that thinking contains

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ I am going to illustrate the contradiction in detail in 1.3., where Mostert's Prolegomena are going to be critically assessed.

⁹⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie" (see note 94), p. 458.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ MOSTERT, W., BÜHLER, P., EBELING, G. (eds.), "Glaube – der christliche Begriff für Religion", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 95/2 (1998), pp. 217-231, here pp. 228f.

¹⁰¹ I am going to criticize this passage in 1.3.

¹⁰² MOSTERT, W., "Glaube" (see note 100), pp. 220ff.

¹⁰³ MOSTERT, W., "Glaube" (see note 100), p. 230.

¹⁰⁴ WEISCHEDEL, W., Der Gott der Philosophen. Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theologie im Zeitalter des Nihilismus, 2 voll., Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1972.

implicitly the relationship between the thinker and God. Hence, separating thinking as the search for knowledge from the quest for salvation is both unjustified and methodologically inconsistent. Soteriology is immanent to the very structure of thinking which, in turn, continually generates soteriological expectations. This is manifested by the historical manifestations of thinking in the Western tradition¹⁰⁵. Accordingly, Mostert follows Weischedel in rejecting any abstract and purely formal understanding of thinking¹⁰⁶. Since one always thinks of something determined, thinking is constitutively oriented to the question of the foundation of reality¹⁰⁷. In this fundamental orientation, thinking encounters a cleavage within reality, namely the one between possibility and actuality¹⁰⁸. Not everything which is possible necessarily becomes actual, which implies that actual reality is not (or not necessarily) the best possible reality¹⁰⁹. Having encountered the deficiency of reality, thinking embarks on the task of overcoming it. In this sense, thinking is overtly soteriological and testifies that the quest for salvation is a fundamental element of human existence¹¹⁰. In other words, Mostert sees soteriology as co-positing with anthropology, and equally constitutive of both philosophy and theology. There can be no space devoid of soteriology in human existence¹¹¹, so the question about the means to attain salvation (*Heilmittel*) becomes crucial. The answer is found within justification doctrine. As I am going to discuss in Part 2, Mostert considers justification the elementary goal of dogmatics¹¹². Dogmatics is immediately practical, because it is concerned with investigating the true soteriological *praxis*. Justification doctrine regards this praxis as God's exclusive agency in favor of sinners, whereby He reconciles them with themselves, the world and Him¹¹³. Through this reconciliation, God is manifested as the gracious One and human being is made righteous¹¹⁴. Furthermore, Mostert claims that the whole matter (*Sache*) of theology is precisely the relationship between God, human being and the world. This relationship is manifested in its true form within the doctrine of justification¹¹⁵. In other words, for Mostert, justification doctrine is the solution to human being's fundamental problem, as it reveals the true relationship between human being, God and the world. This relationship, however, is also what the Prolegomena are concerned with. Much like in

¹⁰⁵ This thesis is maintained at large in MOSTERT, W., MÖLLER, C., BAUER, K.A., GERHARDT, P., MAHLERT, U., WEINACHT, H. (eds.) *Rechtfertigungslehre. Biblisch-theologisch. Dogmengeschichtlich. Fundamentaltheologisch*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Specifically, the problem is the reduction of the content of thought to its method, as in positivism.

¹⁰⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 41.

¹⁰⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Mostert does not question the Aristotelian assumption of the primacy of act over potency. For an opposite reading, which defends the primacy of potency over act, see e.g. JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit. Zum ontologischen Ansatz der Rechtfertigungslehre", *Evangelische Theologie* 29 (1969), pp. 417-442.

¹¹⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre*, (see note 105), p. 43.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 254.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Mostert's ontology of justification is going to be thoroughly described in Part 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Ebeling's case, one could detect a certain circularity in Mostert's theology, in that his Prolegomena are already implicitly concerned with the same subject matter that dogmatics treats explicitly.

Once the solution to humanity's fundamental quest for salvation is found within dogmatics, thinking and moral action now appear as constitutively problematic¹¹⁶. While the latter focuses on human being's collaboration with the divine for the restitution of reality, the former, ever since the Enlightenment, has increasingly marginalized God's agency. In both cases, though, Mostert sees human beings placed at the center as secondary or primary soteriological agents. Because of that, the solution to the fundamental problem of humanity is ignored and the true knowledge of human being, God and the world goes lost as sinners try to fabricate their own solution to their problem. Put otherwise, they try to force the coming of salvation. This, for Mostert, shows that sinners view ethics as a valid soteriological option, which is instead excluded by justification doctrine¹¹⁷. Justified human beings are those who have welcomed the solution to their fundamental problem. Correspondingly, they are definitively disqualified as soteriological agents. This founds the impossibility of intending ethics as a restoration of human being's agency when it comes to attaining salvation¹¹⁸. From the point of view of the Prolegomena, the irreconcilable alternative between justification doctrine and ethics ultimately stems from the different anthropologies which undergird the two¹¹⁹.

Mostert's anthropology is interested in the anomaly of human being, or in human being as an anomaly. This anomaly is described biblically as sin, but the Greek concept of *hybris* is also considered suitable to refer to it¹²⁰. Human beings do not spontaneously understand their anomaly. Rather, they exist in it and, within experience, they grasp that this anomaly is not coincident with the essential nature with which they want to be reunited. True knowledge of the anomaly is not attainable through thinking or moral action, because both are partial, they refer to specific features of human being, not to their whole personality. Following Ebeling, Mostert considers language the only human feature (*humanum*) in which not a partiality, but the entirety of human being as a person is apprehended¹²¹. In this understanding, language is not viewed from the perspective of speaking, but of hearing. Language is the space in which human being *is told* something. Specifically, they are told about the whole scope of their anomaly and brought to interpret the rift between their essence and their existence as their unjustified separation from God¹²². First, language discloses to human beings

¹¹⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 255ff.

¹¹⁷ Correspondingly, Mostert considers justification and ethics as irreconcilable soteriological alternatives, as I am going to mention already in Part 2 and discuss more at length in Part 3.

¹¹⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 257.

¹¹⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 263-267.

¹²⁰ See here, p. 18.

¹²¹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 273-282.

¹²² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 277-280.

their fundamental problem as something that can only be understood as a whole (*Zusammenhang*)¹²³. Secondly, and more importantly, language is the instrument which has the ability to communicate the solution to the problem¹²⁴. However, as a general category, language remains ambiguous, because different, conflicting attempts at the soteriological solution are all expressed through it. This means that language is human being's only valid instrument of reconciliation, but it is misused in a way which actually deepens their problem by communicating false promises of salvation.¹²⁵ The ambiguity of language is only overcome if the latter is not considered in general, but in particular. This means that the solution to human being's fundamental problem is not given by language as such, but by one specific type of language. Only this type of language is unambiguous. Specifically, it is not a *genus* that human being secondarily fills with different, conflicting contents, but an *unicum* that belongs to no general category and is not posited by human beings, but comes to them. This qualified language is the reality in which the true essence of human being is found, together with the good order of their relationships with their world¹²⁶. Since this reality does not exist empirically, it can only be communicated to human beings from outside their existence (*extra se*). There is nothing in them which collaborates with this language, because they are not willing to listen to it, but only to talk in its place. In the case of this particular, concrete language, however, hearing is the primary feature¹²⁷. Within its good utterances, human beings undergo a transition from talking to hearing. Specifically, they are told first and foremost that all their talking, thinking and doing – all their soteriological activism – is bound to fail. Then, a good reality (*Ordnung*) is communicated¹²⁸ to them. It is a reality which never appears within existence, due to human being's obsession with their soteriological activism. This reality is communicated by the good language of the Gospel. In it, human being is negated in their *ontic* (sinful) determination and, precisely with that, also affirmed in their *ontological* determination. The Gospel restores them to their essence, as long as they hear what this language tells them and receive their true being¹²⁹. According to Mostert, experience verifies that only the Gospel – as a concrete and irreducibly unique form of language (*Sprachlichkeit*) – brings about salvation, while all other types of language fail to do so¹³⁰. Such claim, however, cannot be founded on thinking, as this would contradict the whole of Mostert's reasoning and deny the role of experience¹³¹ as the only

¹²³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 275.

¹²⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 275f.

¹²⁵ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 279f.

¹²⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 280.

¹²⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 281.

¹²⁸ According to Mostert, the specific ontology of the good language of the Gospel is performative. The Gospel truly and effectively communicates the reality which it announces. More about this is going to be described in Part 2, as it concerns specifically the ontology of justification.

¹²⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 281.

¹³⁰ Correspondingly, not only the Gospel, but already the Law is, for Mostert, a linguistic phenomenon.

¹³¹ By replacing it again with thinking and agency.

verification place of salvation¹³². For Mostert, the truth of received salvation can only be apprehended directly by the individual, it cannot be mediated to them. Only the individual does know that the Gospel has communicated salvation to them.¹³³

Mostert is not advocating for a philosophical foundation of theology, which would ultimately replicate the movement from the general to the particular to which he objects. Nevertheless, philosophy does play an important role in his theology. This role is not to be reduced to a sheer formal support to theological discourse. Rather, Mostert posits a distinction between philosophical theology and theological theology¹³⁴. They are both fundamentally concerned with the same subject matter (*Sache*), namely the interrelation of God, human being and the world. Philosophical theology studies these three realities in abstract separation from one another and considers their constellation only implicitly. Theological theology, on the other hand, describes how the knowledge of these realities is explicated in their overall interrelation¹³⁵. The articulation between the two forms of theology stems from Mostert's claim that human being's relationship with God is co-positd with existence, and yet it is hidden. Abstractly and implicitly, this relationship appears as a *problem*, an unanswered question. Within faith, instead, it becomes the place of manifestation of the three involved realities, God, human being and the world. This enables interpreting human being's problem within experience and rediscovering it as a solved question, a fulfilled quest¹³⁶. Hence, the question-answer pattern (which will be discussed in 1.2.1.) is not absent from Mostert's theology, but its presence is problematized. He claims that, under the conditions of existence, theology does not lead from one's relationship with God to the one with the world, but the other way around. However, this is only because human being exists in a fundamentally problematic situation, which obscures their true essence and prevents the intended spontaneity of their relationality with God and the world¹³⁷. Hence, from the point of view of the original created order, the opposite movement is actually required, from God to the realm of creature. This order can only be restored within faith, which reconnects human being to the previously given good¹³⁸. In short, for Mostert, the *ratio cognoscendi* of human being, God and the world follows a movement which mirrors that of natural theologies, from the world of creature to the world of God. Instead, according to the *ratio essendi*, the movement is reversed, from God to creation.

¹³² See here, p. 16.

¹³³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre, (see note 105), p. 282.

¹³⁴ MOSTERT, W., BAUKE-RUEGG, J., KOLLER, P., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. (eds.), Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche. Eine evangelische Lehre von der Kirche, Theologischer Verlag Zürich 2006, p. 30.

¹³⁵ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), pp. 30f.

¹³⁶ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 31.

¹³⁷ Such spontaneity is expressed in Mostert's concept of the previously given good, see here, p. 18.

¹³⁸ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), pp. 31f.

In line with Ebeling, Mostert understands the question of human being's righteousness as the unfolding of the problem of their relationship with themselves, God and the world¹³⁹. This relationship is regarded as an overarching ontological question to be analyzed linguistically. The ontology of human being can be discussed starting from the characterization of the types of language addressing them. These belong either to the Law, which favors an ontology of human beings as agents of righteousness, or to the Gospel, which conversely qualifies them as receivers of God's righteousness¹⁴⁰. The first type of language categorically excludes Jesus Christ or fundamentally misinterprets him as a "new Moses", thus favoring the activist ontology of human being. The second, instead, conveys the soteriological indicative of Jesus Christ, and with him also the truth about human being. The communication of this truth renders the ambiguous and insufficient imperative of the Law superfluous¹⁴¹. Thus, in Mostert's Prolegomena, language is the point of crystallization where the problem of the ontology of human being becomes manifest in its fullness. Both types of language claim to express the overarching constellation of reality, the relationship between human being, God and the world. However, only the Gospel reveals said relationship truly and unambiguously. This prevents the proliferation of human being's legalistic, ruinous soteriological activism, which disturbs and endangers the goodness of creation by not letting God be God and usurping His soteriological prerogative¹⁴². According to Mostert, the Law and the Gospel are mutually exclusive as they stem from alternative hermeneutics. Accordingly, Jesus Christ can only be the end of the Law¹⁴³, hence the rejection of the *tertius usus legis*¹⁴⁴. A hermeneutic of experience which seriously accounts for God's soteriological agency is incompatible with the alternative theory-praxis hermeneutic. The latter either coordinates God's agency with human being's or – in its atheistic versions – explicitly denies Him. As such, the theory-praxis model is a hermeneutic of the Law, while the one based on experience is the hermeneutic of the Gospel¹⁴⁵. One should refrain from considering Mostert's hermeneutic of experience as subjectivistic. On the contrary, in his perspective, it is the theory-praxis model which falls prey to subjectivism. As a matter of fact, in the theory-praxis model, reality is indeed posited by the subject¹⁴⁶. By modifying reality through action, human beings effect

¹³⁹ MOSTERT, W., "Jesus Christus und das Gesetz. Dogmatische Bemerkungen zu Röm 10,4", in: s.a., BAUER, A., KOLLER, P., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. (eds.), *Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie*. Theologische Brocken (see note 3), pp. 27-30.

¹⁴⁰ MOSTERT, W., "Jesus Christus und das Gesetz" (see note 139), pp. 26ff.

¹⁴¹ MOSTERT, W., "Jesus Christus und das Gesetz" (see note 139), p. 30.

¹⁴² See e.g. MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit? Versuche zu einer theologischen Kritik des dogmatischen Denkens*. Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1976, p. 37.

¹⁴³ See e.g. MOSTERT, W., BAUER, K.A., MAHLERT, U., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. (eds.), *Jesus Christus – wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch*. Zwei Vorlesungen und ein Vortrag zur Christologie, Theologischer Verlag Zürich 2019.

¹⁴⁴ I am going to expand on this in Part 3.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g.: MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch* (see note 143).

¹⁴⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch* (see note 143), p. 55. See also: MOSTERT, W., "„Fides creatrix“. Dogmatische Erwägungen über Kreativität und Konkretion des Glaubens", in: s.a., EBELING, G.,

themselves as lords of the world¹⁴⁷. For Mostert, the Christian faith is in explicit contradiction with this model. Specifically, faith disqualifies the connection between human being's action and the verification of their being, hence the theory-praxis model falls apart¹⁴⁸. The most scandalous claim of faith, in Mostert's theology, is precisely that the truth about human being is found only in Jesus Christ. There and only there, in another (*extra nos*), each and every person is verified. The connection between human being and Christ is operated by faith, not by the synergy between human being and God. It follows that, once the theory-praxis model is abandoned, the individual's action simply *cannot* contribute to the verification of their being. In Mostert's approach, *sola fide* means simply the exclusion of human action as a soteriologically active subject. As a matter of fact, religious (Christian) versions of the theory-praxis model place a hypertrophic focus on Jesus Christ as *exemplum* precisely because they do not have access to an alternative hermeneutic¹⁴⁹ which would illustrate the centrality of God's agency by focusing on the category of *sacramentum*. This is where reflecting on theological hermeneutics can prove very useful.

According to Mostert, the question of the truth of one's relationship with God is the core concern of the Reformation¹⁵⁰. Especially in Luther's theology, the explicit and aware emergence of such question becomes the center of theology as such. The question of the truth of human being before God has come to existence in Jesus Christ, has been apprehended in faith and normatively described within justification doctrine. This shows that, in Mostert's view, justification and the incarnation, soteriology and Christology refer to one and the same matter (*Sache*)¹⁵¹. Christian theology has the task of illustrating Jesus Christ as the absolute relationship with God, which is criteriological for all religions, since they all investigate the truth of human being's relationship with God. This, for Mostert, opens up a possible path to interreligious dialogue¹⁵². Specifically, exchange is considered theologically fruitful as long as it focuses not so much on doctrinal contents, but on the extent to which a religion allows God to be God. In short, the focus is formal and not material. This is because Jesus Christ is regarded precisely as the human being who fully lets God be God¹⁵³. The convergence between soteriology and Christology brings Mostert to rephrase his description of the task of theological discourse. Theology needs to express human being's relationship with God and the world

BÜHLER, P. (eds.), *Glaube und Hermeneutik: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1998, pp. 201-214, here p. 201.

¹⁴⁷ MOSTERT, W., „Fides creatrix“ (see note 146), p. 201.

¹⁴⁸ MOSTERT, W., „Fides creatrix“ (see note 146), pp. 206f.

¹⁴⁹ The alternative does not necessarily need to be understood as a hermeneutic of experience in Mostert's line. A different reading which also clearly subordinates the *exemplum* to the *sacramentum* is provided for instance by JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1999³).

¹⁵⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 41.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 40ff.

¹⁵³ This point is going to be further developed and criticized in 1.3.5.

not in abstract, but in concrete terms, in accordance with the utterance that God has already spoken in Jesus Christ. Since it is essentially concerned with the question of the relationship between God and human being, Christianity is indeed a religion. However, as it is aware of the truth of such relationship, the Christian religion is also structurally modified by it. As the truth of religion, Jesus Christ alters it¹⁵⁴. For Mostert, then, the core christological truth is the same as the one expressed by justification doctrine¹⁵⁵. Therefore, as a general rule, what applies to soteriology also applies to Christology. Both are verified only within the experience of faith¹⁵⁶. There, human beings find both theirs and Jesus Christ's verification. First of all, they experience him as God's Word making them righteous and true. Simultaneously, they find that God's Word is specifically directed to them (*pro nobis*), which reveals the One pronouncing it as God-for-them, and them as sinners¹⁵⁷. In my judgment, Mostert's account of the Prolegomena is implicitly concerned with the exact same matter which is discussed in justification doctrine and Christology. His concern is to show that human beings receive their essential and true relationship with themselves, God and the world only within faith in Jesus Christ¹⁵⁸. Thus, faith is not conceptualized as a form of thinking or a specific epistemology. Instead, it is regarded as the medium of a real but rather as the medium of a real, existentially verified relationship between human being, the world and God¹⁵⁹. This relationship encounters its truth in Jesus Christ. In Christology qualified as soteriology, Mostert's Prolegomena (philosophical theology) and his material dogmatics (theological theology) converge and become explicitly concerned with the same subject matter. This entails that dogmatic questions must not be restricted to their material contents. Instead, they need to be explored also as (somehow implicit) interpretations of the ontology of human being¹⁶⁰. More specifically, dogmatics presents Christology as the explicit knowledge of human being given in Jesus Christ. While in other products of thinking human being is internalized as an idea¹⁶¹ and separated from concrete, historical experience, Christology breaks fundamentally with all abstract interpretations of human being. The latter is viewed concretely as a justified sinner in Jesus Christ¹⁶². Christology provides the hermeneutics within which, for Mostert, all aprioristic metaphysical and ethical thinking is disqualified as it hinders the true understanding of human being.

¹⁵⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ More about this in Part 2.

¹⁵⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 51.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 54.

¹⁵⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 113.

¹⁶⁰ See e.g. MOSTERT, W., *Menschwerdung, eine historische und dogmatische Untersuchung über das Motiv der Inkarnation des Gottessohnes bei Thomas von Aquin*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1978, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ This internalization, for Mostert, is one instance of the *homo incurvatus in se*.

¹⁶² MOSTERT, W., *Menschwerdung* (see note 160), p. 4.

This thinking is replaced with a hermeneutic in which the only acceptable *a priori* element is the ontic reality of human being, interpreted within christological soteriology¹⁶³.

In Mostert's Prolegomena, the contrast between Christology and the alternative metaphysical-ethical answers to the fundamental problem of human being signals two opposite views of salvation as its solution¹⁶⁴. The first one is a legalistic understanding which seeks its verification in metaphysics and ethics and understands salvation as meaning (*Sinn*). The second, instead, is Christology verified within experience, which interprets salvation as assurance, certainty of faith (*Gewißheit*). The difference between the two understandings is qualitative and appears once it has been verified within experience that only the Gospel communicates the reality that it promises¹⁶⁵. Following Ebeling, Mostert claims that the difference between these alternative views concerns the ontology of language, and consecutively also affects anthropology. The qualitative difference becomes apparent in the interpretation of human being either as a sheer receiver of salvation (Christology), or as an active soteriological agent, a *restitutor mundi*¹⁶⁶. A christological hermeneutic of the fundamental problem of human being understands them as the *object* of God's justifying grace. The world is graciously given by God to human being within the relationship effected by faith. Therefore, it can no longer be the stage and the material for human beings' attempts at activistic self-verification¹⁶⁷. According to Mostert, an activistic anthropology is due to the internalization of God and effects the supreme consecration of *homo incurvatus in se*. This human being remains confronted with the failure at attaining salvation; therefore, they postpone it to the indefinite historical future. In such a view, salvation is not yet present, but it will eventually be¹⁶⁸. In this context, human being's action is soteriologically stimulated and charged with the overwhelming task of effecting salvation as meaning (*Sinn*). Such an approach places a hypertrophic focus on human being and correspondingly transforms God into a legitimizing factor which intensifies their action¹⁶⁹. Mostert claims that this activistic anthropology corresponds to a historical-philosophical understanding of salvation as a modification of the world¹⁷⁰. Good changes and the elements bringing them about constitute meaning, while the bad ones and that which favors them are meaningless and evil. Against this kind of thinking, Mostert resorts to what can be regarded as a conversion to theological concreteness. Specifically, he argues in favor of a christological hermeneutic which rephrases the question of salvation as certainty of faith

¹⁶³ MOSTERT, W., *Menschwerdung* (see note 160), p. 7.

¹⁶⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 35.

¹⁶⁵ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 67.

¹⁶⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 92.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

and the involved semantics¹⁷¹. Within this redefinition, human beings understand themselves as the object of a fundamental experience which is only attainable at the level of the individual, not as a truth accessible to thinking. Correspondingly, evil is interpreted anew as the reality originated in the world by the individual's sin, and not regarded as something that others bring about. What ensues is an ontological understanding of evil (*Bösen*), which manifests itself in human being's activistic abuse of the world, others and history as instruments for the restitution of good reality¹⁷². Mostert's conversion to theological concreteness disqualifies metaphysics and ethics as reliable places of verification of the truth about human being. This is because neither can express the overall entirety of the individual's existence. Instead, experience is the place where human being is indeed verified. There, the question of meaning (*Sinn*) – as a strive for the modification of reality – is replaced by the one of certainty (*Gewißheit*), which is given in faith as the fully present modification of human being effected by the gracious God.

In Mostert's view, the understanding of salvation as the certainty of faith constitutes the core of Reformation theology (*das Reformatorische*). This core stands in fundamental opposition to the understandings defended by medieval metaphysics and modern philosophy¹⁷³. For Mostert, Modernity understands human action eschatologically¹⁷⁴, as its full potential is expected to be fully manifested in the future¹⁷⁵. Further, traditional metaphysics regards it against the backdrop of the merit-collaboration pattern. Accordingly, metaphysics posits that salvation is primarily brought about by God's grace, with the inclusion of human being's secondary action¹⁷⁶. In contrast, the Reformation anchors human action in experience, thus preventing it from being overloaded with soteriological expectations and letting God be God¹⁷⁷. Correspondingly, the Reformation emphasizes faith as human being's present *blessed assurance*. In particular, faith prevents all projection of salvation into the future, and thereby liberates the world from being misused as the stage and material for human being's soteriological activism¹⁷⁸. Thus, Mostert's Prolegomena are concerned with disarticulating the

¹⁷¹ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 95.

¹⁷² MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 96.

¹⁷³ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 117.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Mostert emphasizes the continuity between modernity and the skepsis, and interprets the latter as a form of negative metaphysics in sharp contrast with the core insight of the Reformation. For a different reading, which does not only acknowledge the opposition but also the proximity between the Reformation and the skepsis concerning the metaphysical idea of God, see KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Die Frage nach der Frage" (see note 87). Along partially different lines but in substantial agreement with Körtner, see also JÜNGEL, E., *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt. Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1977.

¹⁷⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 96. Here, again, Mostert's theology is in the wake of Ebeling's, who defends the same interpretation of traditional metaphysics. In this context, Ebeling claims that Barth's understanding of God and human being's soteriological agency fundamentally departs from the Reformation and is close to the Scholastic (EBELING, G., "Über die Reformation hinaus?", [see note 31]).

¹⁷⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 117.

¹⁷⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 121.

couplings between God and meaning on the one hand, and grace and human action on the other¹⁷⁹. This makes human beings free to joyfully confess God as the sole author of the certainty of faith, within which their good, created essence is restored, whereas their existence is condemned to pass as sin.

In conclusion, for Mostert, theology is the true discourse about human being, God and the world considered from the point of view of their overarching relationality. Theological discourse unfolds implicitly as the study of human being's fundamental problem and the quest for its solution (philosophical theology) and explicitly as the articulation of soteriology and Christology (theological theology). This articulation re-centers the problem and provides its solution. The only valid verification place for theology is experience, where human being is accounted for not partially, but in their entirety.

1.2. "Correspondence" or "Address". Irreconcilable Theological Alternatives?

1.2.1. "Theologies of Correspondence": P. Tillich and K. Rahner

1.2.1.A. P. Tillich

In his article "What is wrong with the Dialectic Theology?"¹⁸⁰, Tillich analyzes in retrospect the reasons why he, alongside others, parted ways with Barth. The core thesis of the article is that Barth's theology is not truly dialectical but paradoxical and supernatural. In Barth's approach, says Tillich, the aim is to avoid all blending between the divine and the human. For Barth, the two are radically separate, no bridge is possible between them. Therefore, the very possibility of God's revelation is completely absent from history, it *happens* only as a break through history, as a miracle. For Tillich, this understanding of revelation as an event (actualism) is a form of supernaturalism¹⁸¹. While Barth does preserve God's sovereignty, the price, in Tillich's eyes, is his abandonment of creation and history to a radically non-theological analysis¹⁸². Conversely, Tillich understands the relationship between the divine and human possibilities according to a question-answer pattern. Even though the understanding of this pattern somehow changes over time¹⁸³, its core remains unaltered: the question about God is a human possibility; it is human being's ear to listen for divine revelation. Hence, the very question, for Tillich, comes from an answer which has been already non-thematically given and

¹⁷⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 122.

¹⁸⁰ TILLICH, P., "What is wrong with the Dialectic Theology?", *The Journal of Religion* 15/2 (1935), pp. 127-145.

¹⁸¹ TILLICH, P., "What is wrong with the Dialectic Theology?" (see note 180), p. 136.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ See BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian", in: RE MANNING, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 18-35.

exists in a fragmentary and obscure fashion throughout cultural history. The latter, for Tillich, harbors all along some *preliminary procedures*¹⁸⁴, which have made it able to welcome the definitive answer to humanity's question, namely God's revelation in Jesus Christ as the bearer of the New Being. Accordingly, the christological paradox can only be taken seriously as long as the relationship between God and human being remains unbroken. In particular, for Tillich, it is precisely the continuous bridge between God and creature which illustrates why revelation is truly paradoxical. As the answer to humanity's question(s), revelation needs to be a true answer to true questions founded on human being's finitude¹⁸⁵. Thus, the multiple (religious and secular) attempts at finding an answer throughout human history are erratic but authentic¹⁸⁶. The question-answer pattern, at least for the later Tillich, contains both a moment of mutual dependence and one of independence¹⁸⁷. On the one hand, the question is somehow independent from the answer, because it is given within the existential situation of human being. Similarly, the answer is in some way independent from the question, because it is provided within God's revelation. At the same time, the two exist in a *hidden dependency* from one another, because the revelation is indeed the true answer to the question. Theology needs to give the question such a shape that the answer derived from revelation appears to be the true and understandable answer to this question. This circular understanding of the question-answer pattern in Tillich's system is called "theological circle"¹⁸⁸. It has been asked whether such an approach truly maintains the independence of the questions, or rather swallows up possibly non-theological questions into theology starting from a hidden theological presupposition¹⁸⁹.

For Tillich, a truly dialectical approach is one that takes both the divine and the human pole seriously and centers on their interaction. Through such interaction, revelation breaks out within history and through it. The historical manifestations of revelation are intercepted by human beings within the history of culture. Thus, Tillich aims at articulating the meaning-giving power of culture in its transparency to the foundation of being¹⁹⁰. This articulation is the task of theology, which therefore stands in a constitutive relationship to the social and cultural reflection carried out by other disciplines. More exactly, theology finds expression precisely by means of such reflection¹⁹¹. Since all domains of reality concern it, theological discourse is tasked with operating critically so that the

¹⁸⁴ TILLICH, P., "What is Wrong with the Dialectic Theology?" (see note 180), p. 138.

¹⁸⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Reason and Revelation, The University of Chicago Press 1951, e.g. pp. 31, 38, 60.

¹⁸⁶ TILLICH, P., "What is Wrong with the Dialectic Theology?" (see note 180), p. 139.

¹⁸⁷ *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, Existence and the Christ, The University of Chicago Press 1957, pp. 20f.

¹⁸⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 8-11.

¹⁸⁹ See FISCHER, H. "Theologie des positiven und kritischen Paradoxes – Paul Tillich und Karl Barth im Streit um die Wirklichkeit", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 31/1 (1989), pp. 195-212.

¹⁹⁰ SCHWEIKER, W. "Theology of Culture and its Future" in: RE MANNING, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 138-151, here p. 139.

¹⁹¹ SCHWEIKER, W. "Theology of Culture and its Future" (see note 190), p. 140.

power of a radical “Yes” to being might become manifest in all domains of the human spirit. This manifestation is the depth of religion, which is the substance having culture as its form¹⁹². Theology needs to clear the way for the manifestation of the “Yes” to being within culture because, under the conditions of existence, the spiritual depth of cultural products is not transparent. Thus, an autonomous (from theology) study of cultural products is not able to uncover their spiritual depth. As the foundation of being and meaning, God manifests such depth by saying “Yes” to the cultural products of humanity¹⁹³. For Tillich’s theology *of culture*, the point is delimiting and analyzing the latter in the form of questions which somehow prepare the way to the Christian (revealed) answer¹⁹⁴. Methodologically, theology operates differently than secular disciplines. Specifically, it focuses on the deep content, the reality of meaning (*Gehalt*) of cultural products, while non-theological disciplines rather focus on their form¹⁹⁵.

Overall, the history of culture can be conceptualized as the positive unfolding of an erring knowledge, one which carries in itself the doubt about its own accuracy. The clearest place of articulation of this erratic striving for ultimate knowledge is the history of religion. Here, culture appears as human being’s ear listening for revelation. Without any cultural phenomena listening for it, revelation could not be received by human being¹⁹⁶. Correspondingly, Tillich interprets revelation as human beings transcending themselves through themselves. This dynamic relies on the Transcendent (God) having previously called out human being, thus initiating their self-transcending movement¹⁹⁷. Finitude is the philosophical category supporting Tillich’s discourse on human being’s self-transcendence. In it of itself, finitude is not sinful, even though it is the place where it becomes possible to experience sin¹⁹⁸ as the ontic-existential estrangement of humanity from God¹⁹⁹. Sin, for Tillich, does not make it impossible to know God. After all, it is constitutively intertwined with finitude, which is the place where the question of the knowledge of God is asked most radically²⁰⁰. In Tillich’s words, his approach sharply differs from Barth’s because it gives space to the three-dimensionality in which human being lives, namely the articulation of the divine, the demonic and the human (cultural) spheres²⁰¹.

¹⁹² SCHWEIKER, W. “Theology of Culture and its Future” (see note 190), p. 141.

¹⁹³ SCHWEIKER, W. “Theology of Culture and its Future” (see note 190), p. 142.

¹⁹⁴ SCHWEIKER, W. “Theology of Culture and its Future” (see note 190), p. 143.

¹⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, in systematic theology, human being themselves become “the door to the deeper levels of reality” (TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [see note 185], pp. 62f.).

¹⁹⁶ TILLICH, P., “What is Wrong with the Dialectic Theology?” (see note 180), p. 140

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), pp. 66ff.

¹⁹⁹ BAYER, O., “Tillich as a Systematic Theologian” (see note 183), p. 21.

²⁰⁰ TILLICH, P., “What is wrong with the Dialectic Theology?”, (see note 180), p. 141.

²⁰¹ TILLICH, P., “What is wrong with the Dialectic Theology?” (see note 180), p. 145.

H. Fischer²⁰² argues that, for Tillich, theology needs to describe reality in such a way that its carrying foundation (*tragender Grund*) may appear in it and emerge from it. To do this seriously, theological discourse needs not adopt supernaturalism but show that God is the real reality (*das wahrhaft Wirkliche*). This means that Tillich, conversely to Barth, considers reality as such *constitutive* for theological reflection. Thus, his version of Dialectical Theology implies a stronger focus on God's gracious "Yes" to reality than on the "No" expressed in His judgment²⁰³. Judgment and grace are united, and their union applies to the whole of reality. To understand and value such unity, Tillich's theology regards the world primarily as *creation*. God's presence in and for the world is such that the unconditional is revealed in history. Revelation is truly expressed only paradoxically, but its paradox necessarily takes place within nature and spirit, culture and religion²⁰⁴. Thus, reality stands in an uninterrupted relationship with God²⁰⁵, in that the religious moment is actual in all dimensions of the spirit.

J. Richard²⁰⁶ identifies the peculiarity of Tillich's theological discourse in the fact that, in it, the point of view of the thinker belongs to the studied matter. Only by being fully involved in it can theologians identify the spiritual situation of their epoch and investigate its relation to the meaning of the present. In so doing, they will not consider religion as one specific domain next to others, but as actually present in all cultural spiritual domains²⁰⁷. As I already pointed out, religion, for Tillich, is the experience of the unconditional made through the cultural world and its products. This experience is one of *theonomy* as the overcoming of the conflict between heteronomy and autonomy²⁰⁸. In Tillich's early theology, the irruption of a new theonomy against deformed autonomy is defined as *kairos*²⁰⁹. The latter is interpreted as the breakthrough of the eternal, deep content of cultural products (*Gehalt*) *within history*²¹⁰. Theological criticism of the situation at hand does imply, alongside Barthian lines, a firm "No" to the world. However, this "No", in Tillich's approach, must come from within culture and express the breakthrough of the *Gehalt*, not a wholly other Word coming from the heavens²¹¹. Later, Tillich moves past this dialectical approach toward a liberal one²¹². He now believes

²⁰² FISCHER, H., "Theologie des positiven und kritischen Paradoxes" (see note 189).

²⁰³ In Fischer's view, the later Barth goes in the same direction (FISCHER, H., "Theologie des positiven und kritischen Paradoxes" [see note 189], p. 203).

²⁰⁴ FISCHER, H., "Theologie des positiven und kritischen Paradoxes" (see note 189), p. 198.

²⁰⁵ For Tillich's understanding of the relationship between reality and God from the perspective of the doctrine of creation, see TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 252-270.

²⁰⁶ RICHARD, J., "Tillich's Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of his Time(s)" in: RE MANNING, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 123-137, here p. 123.

²⁰⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God*, The University of Chicago Press 1963, pp. 154f.

²⁰⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 147-150.

²⁰⁹ RICHARD, J., "Tillich's Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of his Time(s)" (see note 206), p. 126.

²¹⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 369-372.

²¹¹ RICHARD, J., "Tillich's Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of his Time(s)" (see note 206), p. 126.

²¹² RICHARD, J., "Tillich's Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of his Time(s)" (see note 206), p. 130.

that theology needs to fully accept the conditions laid down by reason, while at the same time pointing to theonomy as the transcending of autonomous reason. What remains constant is the overall religious interpretation of reality defended through an *extensive* understanding of revelation²¹³, in which the christological paradox can only be understood if the correlation between God and created reality is maintained²¹⁴.

To the extensive understanding of revelation corresponds the assumption that human being as *imago Dei* is *capax infiniti*, which is the baseline of an anthropology in constant reference to Acts 17, 22-32. In Tillich's interpretation²¹⁵, no one can be "godless" at an ontological level²¹⁶. Essentially, human being shares in God's being²¹⁷. Existentially, they are separate from their essential origin and hope to reunite with it. Since they have an obscured idea of the Unknown from which they are separate, their hope to bridge the separation takes the form of erratic religious knowledge and results in idolatry. This expresses the demonic at work within reality, that the theologian must uncover and fight (Protestant principle)²¹⁸. Human being's idolatrous *existence* is interpreted by Tillich as the estrangement from their true *essence*. Such estrangement is sin, which however does not interrupt the essential relationship between God and human being. Because this relationship continues to persist even in estrangement, the appearance of Jesus as the New Being overcoming estrangement within existence became possible²¹⁹. Tillich's understanding of the overcoming of estrangement²²⁰ has been called ecstatic humanism²²¹. Its foundational concept is that human existence is grasped by a power beyond it, a word addressed to it in a way that does not violate the freedom and self-determination of human being.

It has been argued that, in Tillich's theology, the question-answer correlation²²² is the methodological *pendant* of the essence-existence coupling²²³. The fundamental assumption is that God and humanity are in an essential unity, which explains the unconditional element present in reason and reality. It is this presence which gives meaning to the very question about God²²⁴. As for their differentiation, it is at the same time positively willed by God and a consequence of

²¹³ See e.g. TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), p. 127.

²¹⁴ In my view, this point clearly shows the remarkable difference between Tillich as a representative of the "theologies of correspondence" and Barth as a theologian of "God's address" (see also 1.2.2.A.).

²¹⁵ Which goes back to his philosophical view of God as the ground of all being.

²¹⁶ See TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 211-215.

²¹⁷ On the possibility of understanding this as a panentheistic radicalization of *analogia entis*, see LEINER, M., "Tillich on God" in: RE MANNING, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 37-55.

²¹⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 243ff.

²¹⁹ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 22.

²²⁰ With the ensuing attainment of human being's reunion with their essential nature.

²²¹ SCHWEIKER, W. "Theology of Culture and its Future" (see note 190), p. 138.

²²² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 18-28.

²²³ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 23.

²²⁴ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 24; TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), p. 206.

estrangement²²⁵. Bayer aptly points out that Tillich's understanding of sin is philosophical, not theological. Correspondingly, his justification doctrine is a theory of meaning in which the fundamental risk to which faith is exposed is the doubt questioning the meaningfulness of life²²⁶. Coherently, Tillich's concept of faith has no absolute contents, except for the determination of human beings as sheer receivers in the face of the unconditional. Justifying faith, for Tillich, is contentless and absolute, the deep dimension of all forms of faith²²⁷.

The example of justification is useful to show how Tillich interprets theological tenets by way of abstract conceptualization²²⁸. This way, as Bayer points out, he reverses the Reformational understanding of the relationship between the concrete and the abstract, the particular and the universal. While the Reformation anchors the salvific character of *special* revelation (*Heilsoffenbarung*) precisely to its concreteness, Tillich founds the certainty of faith on the abstractness of *fundamental* revelation (*Grundoffenbarung*)²²⁹. As a result, the concrete contents of religious answers risk being arbitrary²³⁰ and only relevant as long as they express human being's ability to listen for God. Thus, for Tillich, theological statements are not true in that they follow the movement of God's self-disclosure according to Scripture²³¹. Rather, true theology deals with its contents in such a way that they become an ultimate concern for human being²³². To sum it up, the foundation of faith is not in its contents, but in the unconditional reality to which these contents are transparent²³³.

As C. Danz²³⁴ argues, Tillich's focus is not on the materiality of the unconditional²³⁵, but on the process of its historical emergence in the spirit as the basis of *both* religion and culture. Culture is the form of expression of religion, which is the content of culture. The spirit understands itself in breakthroughs which specifically happen within religion²³⁶. There, the spirit grasps itself as the deep structure which supports and innervates the diverse forms of cultural activity. This movement of the

²²⁵ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 24.

²²⁶ As will be explained in Part 2, Tillich understands justification as God liberating human being from meaninglessness. This liberation happens within faith, which contains doubt. In particular, doubt expresses the relativity of the contents of faith. Faced with doubt, faith becomes negatively aware of not coinciding with the unconditional, whereby it also positively affirms an ultimate concern (justification of the doubter).

²²⁷ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 26.

²²⁸ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), pp. 28f.

²²⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 155ff.

²³⁰ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 30.

²³¹ As in the "theologies of God's address", see 1.2.2.

²³² After all, for Tillich, God Himself can somehow be regarded as human being's ultimate concern (TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, [see note 185], p. 243). However, at the same time, there is no immediate identity between the two (TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, [see note 185], p. 14).

²³³ BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183), p. 34.

²³⁴ DANZ, C., "Tillich's Philosophy", in: RE MANNING, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 173-188, here p. 180.

²³⁵ As a matter of fact, the unconditional is defined in strictly formal terms (TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, [see note 185], p. 26).

²³⁶ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 107.

spirit becoming reflexive in cultural creations is identified by theology, which has the task of making it apologetically explicit²³⁷.

In Tillich's work, in general, the traditional *theologoumena* are reinterpreted as philosophical concepts, so that it makes little sense to ask for the foundation of a specific theological discourse in his system²³⁸. In "Tillich on God"²³⁹, Leiner shows how theology and philosophy are intertwined already in Tillich's ontology²⁴⁰. Philosophy is a cultural product, and human beings participate in God (as the unconditional) because they are always already held by Him. Such participation takes the form of a breakthrough appearing in cultural forms which are open to transcendence²⁴¹. This is in line with Tillich's thesis that the unconditional is found fragmentarily in the conditional²⁴².

Theologically, the unconditional is the *locus* where judgment and grace are co-posit in paradoxical unity. This co-position constitutes the basis for the possibility of revelation. The unconditional is not (only) the answer that human being finds at the end of their quest. It is first and foremost present at the very beginning of it, in the very structure of reason and reality²⁴³. When acknowledged in faith, the unconditional breaks through as the Totally Own (*Ganz-Eigene*)²⁴⁴. In order to be properly conceptualized, the unconditional needs to be connected to concrete elements of ordinary experience. These function hermeneutically as translation instruments, they become symbols, which mediate knowledge of the unconditional²⁴⁵ as long as they paradoxically point beyond themselves and thereby negate themselves. Throughout the history of religions, symbols remain vital as long as they stay transparent to the unconditional. Instead, they collapse into the demonic whenever they try and replace the unconditional. Symbols point to the unconditional, which, unlike them, is a matter of immediate experience. According to Tillich, theology needs to investigate symbols and interpret them ontologically. The leading criterion for such interpretation is the identification between God and being itself.

Ultimately, it seems accurate to claim that conceptual elements do prevail over the phenomenology of revelation in Tillich's thinking²⁴⁶. Accordingly, his theology finds a much broader foundation in its correlation with philosophy than in special revelation. In faith, reason is ecstatically directed beyond

²³⁷ DANZ, C., "Tillich's Philosophy" (see note 234), p. 180.

²³⁸ Rather, theological discourse emerges via correlation with philosophy. For a detailed presentation of the method of correlation, see TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 59-66.

²³⁹ See note 217.

²⁴⁰ See also TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 20f.

²⁴¹ As well as in historical situations regarded as bearers of the *kairos*. See also RICHARD, J., "Tillich's Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of his Time(s)" (see note 206).

²⁴² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), p. 13.

²⁴³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), p. 208.

²⁴⁴ LEINER, M., "Tillich on God" (see note 217), p. 43.

²⁴⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 120-123.

²⁴⁶ LEINER, M., "Tillich on God" (see note 217), p. 52.

itself and fulfilled²⁴⁷. Tillich is well-known for arguing in favor of a *theology on the border* (with philosophy). His thinking intends to be theological and philosophical at the same time, because both disciplines strive to express the nature of ultimate reality²⁴⁸.

1.2.1.B. K. Rahner

F. Schüssler Fiorenza presents Rahner's method in theology starting from the two features on which it bases, namely his theological (and philosophical) anthropology and his theology of freedom²⁴⁹. With its focus on methodology and on the relationship between philosophy and theology, Schüssler Fiorenza's article is an interesting starting point to consider Rahner's take on the Prolegomena. Particularly interesting in this regard are Rahner's study of the epistemological requirements for a *possible* revelation²⁵⁰, his successive focus on the historicity of the Christian existence and his ontological outlook on the supernatural order of grace.²⁵¹ The latter is not mainly interpreted along juridical lines, but existentially²⁵². Grace characterizes human beings really and intrinsically²⁵³, in their very ontology²⁵⁴. This means that, for Rahner, human nature does not exist independently from grace, which is actually a mysterious but historical presence in it. Following the mystagogical evolution of his thought, Rahner comes to see human being as a question in the face of the mystery of meaning. In this context, the focus is not so much on being and its semantics, but on mystery²⁵⁵. This mystery unveils God (as the answer) and connects Him to humanity (as the question). Since said mystery concerns God *and* human being, elements of both a negative theology and a negative anthropology are present in Rahner's elaboration²⁵⁶. Humanity's quest for the mystery of God takes the form of a transcendental search for meaning in history²⁵⁷. It follows that general history and salvation history are inextricably interrelated. More exactly, a reciprocity exists between the two, so that Christology (as perfect anthropology) determines anthropology (as imperfect Christology)²⁵⁸. Accordingly, the criterion for anthropology – and for assessing all of human being's faculties – is

²⁴⁷ LEINER, M., "Tillich on God" (see note 217), p. 48.

²⁴⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), pp. 21f.

²⁴⁹ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology", in: DECLAN, M., HINES, M.E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 65-82, here p. 65.

²⁵⁰ See RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word*, Herder and Herder, New York 1969 (1941), p. 22.

²⁵¹ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 69.

²⁵² In the sense of a proximity to Heidegger's philosophy. For reference, see e.g. DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace", in: DECLAN, M., HINES, M.E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 43-62.

²⁵³ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 10f.

²⁵⁴ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 22.

²⁵⁵ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 69.

²⁵⁶ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 70.

²⁵⁷ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 15.

²⁵⁸ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 70.

God's self-communication in Jesus Christ, and specifically in his *life* spent for others²⁵⁹. The historical individuality of Jesus Christ allows to determine the meaning of human existence. Since revelation happened in him, human being is understood as someone who is radically open to the unforeseen²⁶⁰, to the ultimate mystery²⁶¹. On this basis, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that philosophy is only of limited necessary for theology in Rahner's discourse. Accordingly, no predetermined philosophy can lay the foundations for theology²⁶² and ensure its tenability²⁶³. In her anti-foundationalist reading of Rahner's system²⁶⁴, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that negative philosophy is employed by him in order to point out the constitutive limitation of all philosophical categories²⁶⁵. A similar reading is provided by K. Kilby, who argues that Rahner's theology is logically independent from philosophy and marks a shift away from his original philosophical positions²⁶⁶. No philosophy can express human experience adequately, as is shown already by the increasing and conflicting pluralism of philosophical schools. For the theologian, the primary and orienting criterion can only be the (christological) *concretissimum*, while philosophy is only to be employed as a support.

For Rahner, the theologian needs to connect the Christian faith with existence as it is experienced every day by human beings. Specifically, this connection shows that their nature is intrinsically dynamic because of the historical presence of God's grace in it²⁶⁷. Accordingly, for Rahner, nature and grace are isomorphic and never separate²⁶⁸, they share the same fundamental (ontological) determination²⁶⁹. As for the relationship between fundamental theology (or Christian philosophy) and dogmatics, the isomorphic character of human nature and God's (uncreated) grace entails that fundamental theology does not provide a preliminary foundation for the contents of faith²⁷⁰. Conversely, through the indirect method²⁷¹, it provides an interpretation of those contents aimed at illustrating their meaning²⁷².

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 26.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 9.

²⁶³ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 71.

²⁶⁴ For an opposite, foundationalist reading which interprets Rahner chiefly as a metaphysical thinker, see BROWARZIK, U., *Glauben und Denken: dogmatische Forschung zwischen der Transzendentaltheologie Karl Rahners und der Offenbarungstheologie Karl Barths*, De Gruyter, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, vol. 20, Berlin 1970.

²⁶⁵ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 24.

²⁶⁶ KILBY, K., "Philosophy, theology and foundationalism in the thought of Karl Rahner", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55/2 (2002), pp. 127-140.

²⁶⁷ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 26f.

²⁶⁸ RAHNER, K., *Nature and Grace. Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1964 (1957), pp. 135f.

²⁶⁹ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 59.

²⁷⁰ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 27.

²⁷¹ Contrary to the "scientific" Neo-Scholastic approach, the indirect method of fundamental theology does not claim to be independent of faith (SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" [see note 249], p. 74).

²⁷² Ibid.

Rahner's key reference is to the concreteness of human being's experience, not to a theoretically neutral and overarching philosophical point of view. His anthropology of grace is to be understood pneumatically as humanity's ontology of grace experienced in everyday life. For Rahner, this experience is a transcendental²⁷³ experience. Similar to Tillich's correlation, Rahner's transcendental method connects the contents of faith to fundamental human questions²⁷⁴. In particular, the knowledge of God is pursued *through* the knowledge of life, it occurs *within* the life that it transcends. In Rahner's gnoseology, the very act of knowing goes constitutively beyond all limited answers and all (empirical) known objects. This illustrates that Rahner's transcendental philosophy of human nature²⁷⁵ is anthropology and gnoseology at the same time; what human being is can be understood by studying how (and what) they know²⁷⁶. Human being can attain knowledge of objects because they are ontologically "othered". This means that they can only enter in a relationship with themselves by entering in a relationship with what is other. In Rahner's view, no direct knowledge of otherworldly realities is possible, human being can only know that which is in this world. By knowing objects, however, they understand themselves as other-oriented "spirit in the world"²⁷⁷ and are projected towards a horizon which does transcend worldly realities²⁷⁸. More precisely, when human beings know a specific object, they never merely know that object, but tend beyond their limited knowledge of it, towards a more comprehensive knowledge²⁷⁹. For Rahner, this occurs because human beings are always already pre-apprehended by being, therefore also by the knowledge that they seek²⁸⁰. Such pre-apprehension by being and knowledge²⁸¹ means that all of human beings' cognitive efforts tend to a finality that has already pre-apprehended them non-thematically. The pre-apprehension is called "pre-concept" or "anticipatory grasp" (*Vorgriff*)²⁸². This can only be known starting from faith, it has no philosophical foundation even though it is given *a priori* with human nature²⁸³ and functions as a theological hypothesis²⁸⁴. Therefore, as knowing subjects, human beings necessarily transcend

²⁷³ For a clarification of Rahner's understanding of "transcendental", which combines Scholastic, Kantian and Existentialist features, see e.g. SHEEHAN, T., "Rahner's Transcendental Project", in: DECLAN, M., HINES, M.E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 29-43.

²⁷⁴ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 35.

²⁷⁵ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 35f.

²⁷⁶ The thesis is defended by SHEEHAN, T., "Rahner's Transcendental Project" (see note 273).

²⁷⁷ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 59.

²⁷⁸ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 229), p. 37.

²⁷⁹ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 229), p. 38.

²⁸⁰ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 229), p. 59.

²⁸¹ Remarkably, the dimensions of being and knowing are articulated together throughout Rahner's discourse. See e.g. RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 229), p. 39.

²⁸² RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 229), p. 59. See also KILBY, K., "Philosophy, theology and foundationalism in the thought of Karl Rahner" (see note 266), p. 129.

²⁸³ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 59f.

²⁸⁴ Accordingly, Kilby denies that Rahner's theology may be founded on a universal experience of God attained philosophically (KILBY, K., "Philosophy, theology and foundationalism in the thought of Karl Rahner" [see note 266]).

themselves²⁸⁵, they are ontologically disposed to understand all things that they encounter. Their ability to know what they encounter is their very essence, they always know themselves as otherness²⁸⁶ in that they know what they encounter as other²⁸⁷. By experiencing otherness in this way, human beings also experience that they are limited self-transparency²⁸⁸, they can know themselves only limitedly²⁸⁹. However, by their own essence they are also capable of knowing all things. As a consequence, they possess some obscured knowledge that an absolute self-transparency might exist²⁹⁰, a Knower that knows Himself fully and wholly²⁹¹. For human beings to become familiar with absolute self-transparency, however, the constitutive limitation of their knowledge would need to be overcome by this same absolute self-transparency in a way that is understandable to them. For this to be possible, the absolute self-transparency (God) would need to *appear* in human beings' otherness without *belonging* to it. For Rahner, that illustrates precisely the possibility of the Christian paradox²⁹².

To sum it up, the questions asked by humanity are transcendental because humanity itself is transcendently oriented towards a horizon where the knower and the known finally coincide, namely God²⁹³. This orientation towards the mystery enables all knowledge as well as humanity's freedom. For Rahner, humanity's orientation towards the mystery (God) is ontological, therefore non-thematic, albeit real²⁹⁴. Accordingly, *all* human beings have inherently experienced the transcendental mystery²⁹⁵, because God has always already communicated Himself to them as the grace which constitutes their existential determination.

As Schüssler Fiorenza aptly points out, Rahner's theology unfolds as the concrete description of the historical experience made by human being as one whose nature is determined by grace. This experience happens in life as it is and within general history, but comes from salvation history and depends on God's agency in it. Furthermore, it also provides the illustration of the truth of Christianity²⁹⁶.

²⁸⁵ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 67.

²⁸⁶ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 138.

²⁸⁷ SHEEHAN, T., "Rahner's Transcendental Project", (see note 273), p. 32.

²⁸⁸ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 66f.

²⁸⁹ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 51, 62.

²⁹⁰ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 53.

²⁹¹ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 50.

²⁹² SHEEHAN, T., "Rahner's Transcendental Project", (see note 273) p. 40.

²⁹³ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 63ff.

²⁹⁴ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 64. See also SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 78.

²⁹⁵ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 67.

²⁹⁶ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, F., "Method in Theology" (see note 249), p. 76.

In Rahner's philosophical anthropology, human beings understand the *possibility* of a revelation of God in history by understanding themselves²⁹⁷. Rahner's interpretation of the category of revelation centers around the Word, the semantics of which, however, are quite broad. Specifically, the Word encompasses all the different ways in which God's revelation in Christ comes to human being²⁹⁸. Hence, his focus is not so much on a definite qualification of the Word (somehow along Barthian lines), but rather on human being as its hearer. Correspondingly, they are endowed with radical openness to the absolute and the infinite (*potentia obædientialis*)²⁹⁹, therefore being always in a relationship with God as infinite mystery. In this context, God is not known as an object among others, but is the very condition for the possibility of humanity's knowledge and agency. For Rahner, only the objects of this world are knowable, and yet the act in which they are known functions in such a way that, in knowing them, the subject already tends beyond them and towards the infinite horizon³⁰⁰. In the very act of knowing an object, human being becomes aware of the horizon towards which all acts of knowledge tend. This awareness, then, propels them to affirm the possibility that such horizon may reveal itself to them. For Rahner, this horizon is God who addresses humanity, inviting them into a dialogic relationship with Him in which He wants to become the very center of their life³⁰¹. Clearly, the presupposition of this reasoning is the identity of being and knowing, onto which Rahner holds firmly³⁰². From this identity follows that grace (level of being) can be experienced in the world³⁰³ whenever human beings understand themselves (level of knowing) as open to the infinite horizon (God)³⁰⁴.

Since all humans are ontologically confronted with the offer of grace, Rahner affirms the idea of a universal revelation and claims that human being is endowed with the freedom to assent to faith. This assent is possible precisely in light of Rahner's ontology of grace³⁰⁵, whereby human nature and grace are related analogically³⁰⁶. The offer of grace made to human being determines a new reality even prior to being accepted. This new reality is the *supernatural existential*³⁰⁷, which is not limited to the historical conditionality of particular revelation. While the latter is *categorical*, universal

²⁹⁷ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 67f. See also DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith", in: DECLAN, M., HINES, M.E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 83-97, here p. 83.

²⁹⁸ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 84.

²⁹⁹ See e.g. RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 22.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 87.

³⁰² RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 39.

³⁰³ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 47.

³⁰⁴ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 86.

³⁰⁵ RAHNER, K. *Nature and Grace* (see note 268), p. 132.

³⁰⁶ This thesis emerges throughout Rahner's work and is one of the core tenets of his theology.

³⁰⁷ The supernatural and the existential dimensions are articulated together by Rahner, for instance, in RAHNER, K. *Nature and Grace* (see note 268), pp. 123ff.

revelation is *transcendental*³⁰⁸, as it is common to all human beings. Transcendental revelation is possible based on the fact that human beings as knowers exist within a dynamism which propels them always beyond a specific object of knowledge and towards the infinite horizon. This horizon is the self-revelation of God. Transcendental revelation is non-thematic, it is not exclusively bound to the categorical (biblical and christological) one. However, it is also inseparable from its thematic expressions, namely the different forms of categorical revelation occurring throughout general history and under the sinful conditions of existence. In Rahner's view, God's revelation in Jesus Christ is the apex of categorical revelation, as in him God's self-communication attains its fullest manifestation³⁰⁹. Similar to Tillich, Rahner claims that revelation can be encountered historically mainly in religions³¹⁰. These are experiences of grace tainted by sin, hence imperfect. However, no religion is merely human or historical, because all have to do with the relationship between God and humanity. The specific of Christianity, in this reasoning, is its being guided through history by God's providence, who intends to lead all forms of categorical revelation to their fullness in Jesus Christ, in whom both God's self-revelation and humanity's answer are fulfilled³¹¹. More specifically, non-thematic, transcendental revelation is positively oriented towards its fullest thematic form, which is God's categorical revelation in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, Rahner's understanding of revelation is characterized by a graduality of movement from lesser to greater clarity, so that revelation is somehow always operational³¹², even if its fullness in Christ has not been accepted.

Rahner strives to articulate the need for an absolute savior in human experience. This need, which is met in transcendental revelation, permeates human being entirely. As such, it corresponds to faith³¹³ as the absolute determination of human being by which they respond to God's self-communication³¹⁴. Here, faith is first and foremost *anonymous faith*; it is understood non-thematically³¹⁵, as an implicit assent to God in Jesus Christ through the participation in experiences which echo his Person and life. This anonymous faith, however, constitutively tends to its most adequate expression in the categorical revelation of God in Jesus Christ³¹⁶.

According to S.J. Duffy, Rahner's anthropology is theology³¹⁷, because it is based on the claim that the incarnation has inextricably united humanity and divinity. Therefore, for Rahner, it is

³⁰⁸ For Rahner's understanding of the difference between transcendental and categorical revelation, see e.g. RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 152f.

³⁰⁹ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 88.

³¹⁰ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 13f.

³¹¹ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 90.

³¹² Because it is intimately connected with the nature of human being as determined by the ontology of grace.

³¹³ In conjunction with hope and love.

³¹⁴ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), p. 92.

³¹⁵ Similar to Tillich's *absolute faith*.

³¹⁶ DONOVAN, D., "Revelation and Faith" (see note 297), pp. 94f.

³¹⁷ DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 43.

impossible to talk about God or humanity without implicitly considering both³¹⁸. The clearest expression of the identity between anthropology and theology is Christianity.

As already discussed, Rahner understands God as the horizon (*das Woraufhin*) of human being's knowledge. As such, God is known by human being as the self-giving love which is revealed as a mystery in Jesus Christ. This self-giving love is the entelechy of history³¹⁹, and all the manifold manifestations of revelation testify to humanity's search for it. God giving Himself to the world is the gift of grace. In Rahner's understanding, this gift is participatory, it aims at the transformation of human beings understood as their divinization³²⁰. According to Duffy, Rahner struggles to preserve the gratuity of grace, while at the same time arguing for its ontological character. Nature and grace can be separated only theoretically, but, in reality, they form a differentiated unity³²¹. Nature is in continuity with grace and positively open to welcome it. Thus, it never exists *per se*, prior to the addition of grace. Even though it is understood as an ontological determination of humanity, grace, in Rahner's intentions, remains free. The very existence of human being is determined simply by God's willingness to become non-divine. This means that, by His free grace, the transcendent God becomes an inner and co-constitutive principle of human ontology³²², one that cannot be either deduced from nature nor be seen as an accidental addition to it. Of course, this statement is to be understood analogically³²³, as Rahner never posits a simple identity between God and the human nature. Sure, human being is regarded as the absolute self-communication of God, but this remains a gift, not something which is owed to finite human beings. If their being radically open to self-transcendence inherently belongs to their nature, this does not mean that it is not revelation. Rather, such openness is itself (transcendental) revelation³²⁴. Specifically, transcendental revelation is the condition for human being's possibility to respond to (categorical) revelation. Put otherwise, if human being can assent to Jesus Christ, it is because they have already been grasped by transcendental revelation³²⁵, the experience of which, for Rahner, is not to be juxtaposed to other experiences in the world. Unlike their objects, transcendental revelation is constitutive of human being because it is the source and depth of all other experiences. After all, these all point to the mystery of God without

³¹⁸ Browarzik goes so far as to claim that the analogical God-world relationship is the general framework of Rahner's reflection on being. This claim is advanced throughout BROWARZIK, U., *Glauben und Denken* (see note 264), e.g. p. 25.

³¹⁹ DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 44.

³²⁰ Ibid. Additionally, see RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 74f.

³²¹ RAHNER, K. *Nature and Grace* (see note 268), p. 137.

³²² DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 45.

³²³ Correspondingly, Browarzik defines Rahner's system as a "theology of analogy" (BROWARZIK, U., *Glauben und Denken* [see note 264], p. 17.).

³²⁴ DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 47.

³²⁵ RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), pp. 8f. See also DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 48.

being able to attain it. Therefore, all knowledge of God – since it depends on transcendental revelation – will be given only *a posteriori*³²⁶.

Similar to Tillich, Rahner employs an extensive concept of revelation. In particular, categorical revelation appears to be the fulfilment of a broader, non-thematic transcendental one. Hence, God's Word is hidden throughout history and takes social forms mainly in the religions of the world, in which God's grace is harbored and hiddenly present. Accordingly, general history mediates transcendental revelation anonymously and grace accompanies this mediation leading it toward its explicit, thematic fullness in the categorical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In him, the universal possibility of salvation is made actual and effective, so that he is to be regarded as the original sacrament (*Ursakrament*)³²⁷.

In conclusion, for Rahner, the Christian faith and the structures of existence are positively correlated³²⁸, as shown by his gnoseology. This definitely weakens Duffy's claim that Rahner's anthropology is not optimistic³²⁹. His theology appears to be founded not on categorical revelation, but on an overarching philosophical-theological system centered on transcendental revelation. This system relies on Rahner's anthropology of grace and provides the key to interpret categorical revelation and conceptualize the analogous relationship between God and human being according to the nature-grace pattern.

1.2.2. "Theologies of God's Address". K. Barth and E. Brunner

1.2.2.A. K. Barth

E. Jüngel³³⁰ calls Barth's theology an "intelligent theology". He interprets it as a demanding, critical reinterpretation of Anselm's *credo ut intelligam*. In the well-known phrase, the *credo* qualifies the *intelligo*, so that theology is free from all understanding which is not directly imposed by its subject matter (*Sache*)³³¹. The *intelligo*, accordingly, expresses the theologian's freedom and responsibility to let their understanding be shaped by the *Sache*. Barth's intention is to talk of God only in the light of the concrete event of His self-communication, and of human being only as His partner within such event³³². All abstraction, both philosophical and theological, is therefore regarded

³²⁶ Concerning the *a posteriori* nature of the knowledge of God, specifically in its implications for Rahner's view on religions, see RAHNER, K., *Hearers of the Word* (see note 250), p. 178.

³²⁷ DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 54.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ DUFFY, S. J., "Experience of Grace" (see note 252), p. 55.

³³⁰ JÜNGEL, E., "Karl Barth", *Evangelische Theologie* 29/1 (1969), pp. 621-626, here p. 625.

³³¹ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics Study Edition*, I/1, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1932), p. 2.

³³² JÜNGEL, E., "Karl Barth" (see note 101), p. 623.

by Barth as highly arbitrary³³³. Theology is concerned with observing the general only from the particular point of view of the christological *concretissimum*³³⁴. Christian dogmatics ensues from the fact that human beings ought to talk about God³³⁵, because He has freely chosen to disclose Himself to them³³⁶. At the same time, however, this is impossible, because all such discourse would necessarily remain entangled with the reality of human beings³³⁷, which is marked by sin, therefore ambiguous and arbitrary, “godless”³³⁸. Thus, theology is not concerned with finding an answer to the problems of human religiosity, but with following God’s self-manifestation witnessed to in Scripture.³³⁹ In religion, human being finds no point of contact to establish the basis for a true theological discourse³⁴⁰. However, on Jesus Christ’s cross, God does provide *the* foundation for theology. There, the sharp discontinuity between Him and His creatures becomes manifest³⁴¹. Only on the cross is the impassable cleavage separating created reality from the Creator is overcome by God in His gracious bending down to humanity. Correspondingly, God can only be found there, where He wills to encounter human being³⁴². Outside of His free condescension, all attempts to find Him are sinful and end up in failure³⁴³. It follows that Barth, insisting on the seriousness of sin, disqualifies philosophy as a means to acquire reliable theological knowledge, which is not a form of general knowledge³⁴⁴. More exactly, Barth maintains that philosophy’s claim to know the truth is rejected as idolatrous in Jesus Christ³⁴⁵. The relationship between philosophy and theology evolves throughout Barth’s thought. Initially, philosophy is confined to formal logic. Later, its necessity for theological discourse and the existence of philosophical presuppositions for theology are acknowledged³⁴⁶. Eventually, philosophy is once again understood mainly as a support for the robust articulation of theological discourse³⁴⁷. Correspondingly, the theologian will not elect one specific philosophy for the structuring of their theology. Instead, they will resort to diverse philosophical insights according to

³³³ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 4.

³³⁴ “Talk about God has true content when it conforms to the being of the church, i.e., when it conforms to Jesus Christ” (BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 [see note 331], p. 10).

³³⁵ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 44.

³³⁶ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 18.

³³⁷ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 36.

³³⁸ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 28.

³³⁹ WATSON, F., “The Bible”, in: WEBSTER, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 57-71, here p. 60.

³⁴⁰ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 29.

³⁴¹ BOWMAN, C. M., “Can Theologies Communicate?”, *Journal of Bible and Religion* 25/4 (1957), pp. 293-300, here p. 296.

³⁴² BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 186.

³⁴³ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 40. See also SCHWÖBEL, C., “Theology”, in: WEBSTER, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 17-36, here pp. 21f.

³⁴⁴ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 38, 187. See also SCHWÖBEL, C., “Theology” (see note 343) p. 26.

³⁴⁵ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 4. See also LEUBA, J.-L. et al., “Karl Barth et la philosophie – Essai de clarification”, *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 119/4 (1987), pp. 473-501, here p. 480.

³⁴⁶ LEUBA, J.-L. et al., “Karl Barth et la philosophie” (see note 345), p. 479.

³⁴⁷ LEUBA, J.-L. et al., “Karl Barth et la philosophie” (see note 345), p. 480.

the needs of the moment. For Barth, human intelligence does have the presupposed possibility to understand God's Word³⁴⁸. However, it is pointless to try and describe such possibility *a priori*, investigating for the "ear" with which the theologian must listen for revelation. Instead, the point is that revelation does communicate itself to the theologian, thereby establishing its own point of contact³⁴⁹. Therefore, theology is not to divert its attention from the reality of revelation to speculations about its possibility³⁵⁰. Accordingly, it has been argued that Barth makes it impossible to account for the methodology of human being's understanding of God's Word. On this basis, a serious gnoseological deficiency is reproached to him³⁵¹. Specifically, it is maintained that Barth's position ultimately results in discarding the difference between God's self-knowledge and human being's knowledge of His Word³⁵². Following this critique, Barth's theology ends up regarding human being as the *locus* where God knows Himself. Critics of Barth's approach frequently point out that sound theology must account for the methodology of human being's knowledge of revelation³⁵³. For example, R. Bultmann's methodological exegesis intends to be true to the rigorous responsibility of theology towards both modernity's validity claims and incarnation theology. For Barth, instead, any insistence on the method obscures the theological *Sache*³⁵⁴, as it neglects its immediate (actualistic)³⁵⁵ character (*Mediatisierung der Sache*)³⁵⁶. This ultimately subjects revelation to the normativity of an external philosophical principle³⁵⁷. Also, Barth's critics hold that the realization of human being's act of faith in revelation does presuppose some predetermined understanding of what a revelation is³⁵⁸. Clearly, this paves the way to a theological anthropology which is not based on God's self-communication in Jesus Christ as Barth understands it³⁵⁹. His underlying claim is that only theology finds its object (theological realism)³⁶⁰, whereas philosophy creates it. It might be observed, however,

³⁴⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 37, 45, 54.

³⁴⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 29.

³⁵⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 28f. See also: ANZ, W., "Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann. Briefwechsel 1922-1966", Theologische Rundschau 37/3 (1972), pp. 273-286; HAMILTON, K.'s review of SMART, J.D., The Divided Mind of Modern Theology; Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, 1908-1933, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1967. The review appears in: The Journal of Religion 47/4 (1967), pp. 378-379.

³⁵¹ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 491.

³⁵² LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 500.

³⁵³ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 495.

³⁵⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 37.

³⁵⁵ See BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 40f.

³⁵⁶ ANZ, W., "Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann" (see note 350), p. 279.

³⁵⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 28f.

³⁵⁸ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 488. Instead, Barth's position notably considers the view of revelation as a general category utterly unacceptable (BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 [see note 331], p. 40).

³⁵⁹ In my judgment, theologians such as Rahner, Tillich, and Mostert all elaborate a theological anthropology which, to a certain degree, presupposes a pre-understanding of revelation.

³⁶⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 26. Indeed, while talking about the possibility of omitting the Prolegomena from theological discourse, Barth mentions the "profound realism" which shows the limited but real legitimacy of such omission.

that this very claim is itself a philosophical position which has been traced back to Neo-Kantiansm³⁶¹. At any rate, Barth's radical questioning of the validity claims of philosophy presupposes a distinction between philosophy and rationality. In particular, the latter is a consequence of God's Word illuminating the human spirit rather than a natural faculty. Consequently, it exists either within faith³⁶² (in the case of the believer) or unbelief (for the non-believer). Hence, reason cannot lay the foundations for any Christian philosophy³⁶³. For Barth, the rationality of human being founds exclusively on the fact that God addresses them as rational creatures³⁶⁴. Nevertheless, on the gnoseological level this is problematic. As a matter of fact, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the *Sache* of theology and reason as the instrument employed to attain it³⁶⁵.

According to Barth, the only adequate theological method is to follow God's self-communication in thinking (*Nachdenken*), thereby finding Him where He gives Himself to be found, namely in the Biblical witness to Jesus Christ³⁶⁶. The ensuing theology will be truly "scientific", adequate to God as its Subject and Object. This adequacy also requires that theology must not adapt to the criteria of non-theological disciplines. Accordingly, the only valid hermeneutical principle disclosing the meaning of canonical texts comes from the Gospel to which these bear witness, not from other disciplines³⁶⁷. In Barth's understanding, only the illustration of God's free sovereignty does provide a reliable overcoming of theological contradictions³⁶⁸. The systematic illustration of this sovereignty is to be found in the doctrine of election³⁶⁹. Methodologically, Barth overturns a key feature of modern thinking by restoring the pre-modern relationships between being and knowing, as well as between actuality and possibility³⁷⁰. As a result, he questions the modern turn to the subject³⁷¹, as he intends to acknowledge the actuality of God as the sole foundation for theological discourse³⁷². Consequently, theology is understood rather actualistically as the ecclesial discourse having its source in the *reality* of God's Word, from which its *possibility* derives³⁷³. In other words, for Barth, the possibility to know

³⁶¹ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 490.

³⁶² BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 21.

³⁶³ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 4.

³⁶⁴ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 494.

³⁶⁵ LEUBA J.-L. *et al.*, "Karl Barth et la philosophie" (see note 345), p. 500.

³⁶⁶ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 41. See also WATSON, F., "The Bible" (see note 339), p. 67.

³⁶⁷ WATSON, F., "The Bible" (see note 339), p. 66.

³⁶⁸ SCHWÖBEL, C., "Theology" (see note 343), p. 28.

³⁶⁹ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 22, 50.

³⁷⁰ Concerning the relationship between actuality and possibility in theology, the opposite approach is defended by JÜNGEL, E., "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109).

³⁷¹ For Barth, not only Liberal Theology, but also the former members of his theological circle remain entangled with this core presupposition of modern thought (see ANZ, W., "Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann" [see note 350]).

³⁷² SCHWÖBEL, C., "Theology" (see note 343), p. 26.

³⁷³ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (see note 331), p. 186. This is also illustrated by the fact that, in the *Church Dogmatics*, the necessity of the Prolegomena is treated *before* their possibility (See BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 [see note 331], pp. 25-43). This is indicative of Barth's theological approach.

God is given only within the actuality of His revelation³⁷⁴. By revealing Himself, God places human beings in a knowing and responsive relationship with Him³⁷⁵. Only within the scope of this relationship is it possible for human being to know anything reliable about God³⁷⁶. Hence, Barth regards the knowledge of God as strictly supernatural³⁷⁷. In it of itself, this knowledge is impossible, and yet it occurs because God has revealed Himself³⁷⁸. Thus, revelation overturns the epistemic consequences of the Fall, pointing to the impossibility of human beings attaining any knowledge of God, as they lack both an active and a passive capacity for revelation³⁷⁹. However, their incapacity for revelation is not the content of a positive theological anthropology. In other words, it cannot be established through reasoning, but only believed whenever God reveals it by revealing first and foremost Himself³⁸⁰. Thus, for Barth, the actuality of God's Word is the sole condition for the possibility of revelation. God has indeed given Himself to be known in creation. However, only in Jesus Christ does it become possible for human being to attain reliable knowledge of Him³⁸¹. In history, revelation exists anhypostatically as faith³⁸² and enhypostatically within the event of God's self-communication³⁸³. When revelation takes its historical form, it becomes associated with creaturely realities, namely Jesus Christ's humanity, Holy Scripture and the preaching of the church³⁸⁴. This association establishes a correspondence between revelation and these realities. However, such correspondence is only manifest within faith³⁸⁵, outside of which those same realities actually obscure revelation (*analogia fidei*). After all, for Barth, reality as such is not a theological subject³⁸⁶. In his full rejection of *analogia entis*³⁸⁷, he insists that there is no essential correlation between revelation and the creaturely realities to which it is associated³⁸⁸. The resulting understanding

³⁷⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 46.

³⁷⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 49.

³⁷⁶ HART, T., "Revelation", in: WEBSTER, J. (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 37-56, here p. 46.

³⁷⁷ Additionally, Hart claims that such a view is favored by Barth's Neo-Kantian philosophical views, whereby knowledge is constitutively limited to what can be objectified as a phenomenon, thus excluding God from the possibilities of philosophical knowledge HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 39.

³⁷⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 192f.

³⁷⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 22f.

³⁸⁰ HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 42.

³⁸¹ WILLIAMS, D.D., "Brunner and Barth on Philosophy", The Journal of Religion 27/4 (1947), pp. 241-254, here p. 253.

³⁸² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 18.

³⁸³ HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 44.

³⁸⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 52f.

³⁸⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, II/1, vol. 7, The Doctrine of God, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1940), p. 83.

³⁸⁶ FISCHER, H. "Theologie des positiven und kritischen Paradoxes" (see note 189), here p. 195.

³⁸⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/1 (see note 385), p. 82.

³⁸⁸ HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 46.

of revelation is clearly *intensive*³⁸⁹, in contrast to the extensive one upheld by the “theologies of correspondence”³⁹⁰.

According to Barth, God’s revelation is to be understood along trinitarian lines both in its forms and in its contents³⁹¹. God discloses Himself in a trinitarian manner, which sheds light on the fact that He is the One trinitarian God³⁹². For Barth, the doctrine of the Trinity provides the criterion for revelation because it allows to interpret God from His self-interpretation³⁹³. More precisely, the doctrine shows that the Subject revealing Himself (God the Father) is identical with His act with His self-revealing act (God the Son) and with the ensuing effect (God the Holy Spirit)³⁹⁴. In Barth’s Prolegomena, the Trinity functions as the essential grammar explaining God’s involvement with humanity³⁹⁵. Scripture witnesses to a revelation dynamic which demands to be interpreted by means of a trinitarian logic³⁹⁶. God graciously gifts human being with knowledge of Him. In this gift, His trinitarian self-articulation extends into human being’s participation in His life as the Triune God³⁹⁷. Accordingly, through the revealed knowledge of God as the primary Subject, human being is included into His self-knowledge as a secondary subject³⁹⁸. Within Barth’s discourse, the key role played by the doctrine of the Trinity disqualifies as arbitrary all general and abstract concept of revelation³⁹⁹. The stress on the formality of God’s self-communication and the threefold understanding of His Word⁴⁰⁰ are necessary because they reflect and depend on God’s Trinitarian modes of being⁴⁰¹. Thus, the very being of the Triune God illustrates His freedom to be gracious towards human being⁴⁰².

For Barth, revelation includes a specific kind of existence, which issues either from human being’s response of faith or from their unbelief. Understood against the backdrop of the doctrine of election, this means that an individual human being will *exist* either as an elect or as a reprobate. However, this

³⁸⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, I/1, vol. 2, The Doctrine of the Word of God, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1932), p. 1.

³⁹⁰ See 1.2.1.

³⁹¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), pp. 1f.

³⁹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), p. 3.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity”, in: WEBSTER, J. (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 72-91, here p. 76.

³⁹⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389). This key passage for Barth’s theology is expressed most clearly on p. 3: “The question who God is in His revelation is to be answered thirdly with a reference to the men who receive the revelation, with a reference to what the Revealer wills and does with them, to what His revelation achieves in them, to what His being revealed thus signifies for them.”

³⁹⁶ TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity” (see note 394), p. 77.

³⁹⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), p. 4. See also TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity” (see note 394), p. 79.

³⁹⁸ TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity” (see note 394), p. 89.

³⁹⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), pp. 7, 9, 11.

⁴⁰⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), p. 10. See also MECKENSTOCK, G., “Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik – Entwicklungslinien vom „Unterricht in der christlichen Religion“ bis zur „Kirchlichen Dogmatik“”, Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 28/2 (1986), pp. 296-310.

⁴⁰¹ TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity” (see note 394), p. 82.

⁴⁰² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 389), p. 13. See also TORRANCE, A., “The Trinity” (see note 394), p. 85.

does not entail that they *are* either, because the sovereignty on election and rejection continues to rest solely on God's mystery⁴⁰³. In Jesus Christ, He has chosen reprobation for Himself and elected human beings. When it is received by faith, revelation does not divinize human being. To the contrary, it effects the proper distinction and separation between the Creator and His creatures. With that, revelation establishes an *ethical* relationship between God and human being⁴⁰⁴, centered around the semantics of the covenant⁴⁰⁵. For Barth, knowing God means precisely being included as His covenantal partner in His dynamic of self-disclosure.

Meckenstock⁴⁰⁶ studies the historical development of Barth's Prolegomena, showing how his position has changed over time. Even in the case of core tenets which remained constant⁴⁰⁷, Meckenstock argues that their relative importance within Barth's system did change. One key element of Barth's understanding is the already mentioned doctrine of the threefold Word of God, which expresses the relationship between revelation, Holy Scripture and Christian preaching. Initially conceptualized actualistically, this doctrine is later founded explicitly, to then finally become the leading methodological principle of the Prolegomena⁴⁰⁸. Specifically, the initial emphasis on preaching is later balanced by the increasing reference to the reality of revelation, which becomes the focus of Barth's discourse⁴⁰⁹. The contents of His dogmatics are developed with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, while the question of its possibility is treated objectively within Chalcedonian Christology and subjectively within Pneumatology. According to Meckenstock, the final structure and content of Barth's Prolegomena results from his intensive understanding of the universal efficacy and unitary structure of God's self-sufficient Word⁴¹⁰, along with the correspondingly diminished view of creaturely independence⁴¹¹.

In his account, Barth presents dogmatics as a reflection (*Besinnung*) on God's threefold Word⁴¹². The Prolegomena are concerned with providing an overall coherent understanding of the subject matter (*Sache*) of dogmatics. Thus, Barth's intent is not to ensure the tenability of theological thanks to some external principles regulating its validity. Instead, he strives to show that theology only rests on the self-revelation of God in His Word, standing or falling along with its *Sache*⁴¹³. Barth's position becomes particularly clear after his turn to Anselm and the subsequent reorganization of theological

⁴⁰³ HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 48.

⁴⁰⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, I/2, vol. 6, The Doctrine of the Word of God, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1938), p. 48.

⁴⁰⁵ HART, T., "Revelation" (see note 376), p. 54.

⁴⁰⁶ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400).

⁴⁰⁷ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), pp. 296f.

⁴⁰⁸ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 299.

⁴⁰⁹ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 306.

⁴¹⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 118.

⁴¹¹ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 302.

⁴¹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 85.

⁴¹³ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 304.

discourse around the principle of *fides quærens intellectum*⁴¹⁴. Basically, Barth understands dogmatics as a thinking witness to the self-articulating Word of God⁴¹⁵. Correspondingly, the validity of philosophy for theological discourse is increasingly questioned, as Barth's concern evolves. As a matter of fact, his focus shifts from the attempt to establish the conditions for the tenability of theological discourse before the scientific criteria of other disciplines towards the intense, doxological concentration on the theological *Sache*⁴¹⁶. In Meckenstock's view, Barth gradually moves towards theological objectivism and revelation positivism⁴¹⁷, with the corresponding annexation of the Prolegomena to material dogmatics.

Barth's turn away from the subject⁴¹⁸ is also reflected in his (christological) anthropology. For him, an independently founded theological anthropology is not compatible with revelation⁴¹⁹. The very ontology of human being is derived from the man Jesus Christ. In *this* sense⁴²⁰, for Barth, the anthropological question is to be answered theologically⁴²¹. Accordingly, he is not interested in characterizing human being religiously, for instance in terms of their radical openness to grace. As a matter of fact, this would erroneously base anthropology on a foundation which is not God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In other words, a religious qualification of human being would be arbitrary as it would not base in the *actuality* of God's self-disclosure⁴²². For Barth, human being is involved with God *because* the man Jesus Christ has been elected as His partner. In him and only in him, God has determined human beings as His covenantal partners and taken their rejection upon Himself, thus liberating them to responsibly live as His witnesses. This shows that the electing God's self-determination in favor of human beings is simply His eternal and free decision⁴²³. Barth's Augustinian doctrine of sin as aggressive nothingness is also to be understood in this context. In my opinion, Brunner⁴²⁴ aptly traces the later version of Barth's theological anthropology back to his hamartiology.

⁴¹⁴ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 306.

⁴¹⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 86.

⁴¹⁶ MECKENSTOCK, G., "Karl Barths Prolegomena zur Dogmatik" (see note 400), p. 307.

⁴¹⁷ Against similar readings of Barth's supposed "revelation positivism", see e.g. KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Komm, o komm, Du Geist des Lebens. Zur Pneumatologie Karl Barths", Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio 52/1 (2023), pp. 66-75.

⁴¹⁸ See HART, "Revelation" (see note 376).

⁴¹⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), p. 193.

⁴²⁰ In alternative approaches, anthropology is *theological* either in the sense that human being is ontologically open to God (e.g. Rahner), or in that they find in Him alone the solution to their fundamental problem (e.g. Mostert).

⁴²¹ KRÖTKE, W., "The humanity of the human person in Karl Barth's anthropology", in: WEBSTER, J. (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 159-176, here p. 164.

⁴²² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 190ff.

⁴²³ Krötke argues convincingly that the organizing principle of Barth's dogmatics is his reinterpretation of the Reformed doctrine of election (KRÖTKE, W., "The humanity of the human person" [see note 421], p. 163).

⁴²⁴ BRUNNER, E., "Der neue Barth: Bemerkungen zu Karl Barths Lehre vom Menschen", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 48/1 (1951), pp. 89-100.

At that stage⁴²⁵, his concentration on Jesus Christ as the real foundation (*Realgrund*) and *ratio essendi* of human existence favors an interpretation of sin as an ontological impossibility. In all its seriousness, sin cannot truly pose a fundamental threat to the ultimate determination of human being in Jesus Christ. As Brunner points out, prolonging the lines of Barth's hamartiology to its logical consequences would ultimately move the focus of his theology from redemption to creation⁴²⁶. When it comes to anthropology, this would pave the way to Christian humanism, thereby going against Barth's declared intentions⁴²⁷.

In conclusion, the foundation of theological discourse in Barth's thought is more complex than it might seem. On the one hand, he insistently claims that, in abstraction from Jesus Christ, human being is incapable of attaining true knowledge of God's free, Trinitarian self-communication. On the other, this very claim can be traced back to certain philosophical presuppositions. With his turn away from the subject and his instrumental view of philosophy within theological discourse, Barth manages to avoid both subjectivism and foundationalism. However, his theology is not as free from non-theological interference as he claims.

1.2.2.B. E. Brunner

Like Barth, Brunner regards dogmatics as a form of believing thought⁴²⁸. Thinking is the exclusively human process which serves as the instrument of dogmatics. However, since theological content does not originate from human thinking, dogmatics appears to be inherently limited⁴²⁹. Accordingly, it is not subject to the epistemic standards applying to other disciplines. This is because the truth of faith is the truth of an interpersonal encounter, not one which can be investigated by the scientific method(s)⁴³⁰. Even though dogmatics is not scientific knowledge, it has an objective content, since God's self-revelation confronts human being as an objective reality. Formally, there are therefore similarities between dogmatics and scientific disciplines, but the truth of the former is given to the subject within faith, not in the (ideally) complete separation between the researcher and their object of study. For Brunner, the closest discipline to dogmatics is obviously philosophy. However, the core difference is that the latter seeks the truth, while the former explains revelation as witnessed

⁴²⁵ In 1951, Brunner already detected in Barth's elaboration traces of the positions that the Basel theologian would later explicitly affirm at the conference held in Aarau on September 25th, 1956 (BARTH, K., *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*, Theologische Studien 48, Evangelischer Verlag Zürich 1956).

⁴²⁶ BRUNNER, E., "Der neue Barth" (see note 424), p. 94.

⁴²⁷ As a matter of fact, Barth explicitly denies the possibility of a non-problematized Christian humanism (see BARTH, K., *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes* [see note 425]).

⁴²⁸ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1, The Christian Doctrine of God, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1950 (1946), p. 74.

⁴²⁹ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 75.

⁴³⁰ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 61.

to in Scripture in the conviction that the truth is found there⁴³¹. According to P. Bridel⁴³², Brunner attributes to philosophy the faculty to establish the abstract possibility of a revelation. Nevertheless, the impassable limit of philosophical discourse is the fact that it cannot accept the paradoxical nature of the Gospel. Correspondingly, philosophy is problematic both as a theoretical and a practical discipline because it is not in the position to accept theology's personal God⁴³³.

The task of dogmatics is to explain Biblical revelation in a manner that is credible for contemporary thinking⁴³⁴. When performed properly, this task should enable the understanding of the contents of revelation in new contexts. For Brunner, God's self-communication remains the sole foundation of theological discourse⁴³⁵. Accordingly, he finds it necessary to develop a formal doctrine of revelation concerned with the criteria for the knowledge of God⁴³⁶. Specifically, Brunner's concern is to show that revelation does not function supernaturally⁴³⁷, as it always addresses human being as a responsible subject. Correspondingly, he rejects the simple antithesis between reason and revelation. The two actually exist in a dialectical relationship mirroring to the one between the cosmic Logos and God's *Verbum incarnandum*⁴³⁸. In Brunner's understanding, the predicates describing God and His agency (for example, the idea of truth) are indeed available to human beings, but this is because they are first and foremost God's predicates⁴³⁹. He has made these ideas available to human beings in order to enable their natural knowledge of both Himself and the world. Through these predicates, God is at work in human being as part of His general revelation in creation. Accordingly, He is indeed the foundation of all knowledge. However, the true knowledge in which God is *not* known must be carefully distinguished from the true knowledge in which He is known⁴⁴⁰. The second type of knowledge, which stands in a gradual relationship with the first, is theology. Non-theological disciplines have their specific jurisdictions, and the intensity of their interaction with theology varies depending on how close these jurisdictions are to the core problems of existence⁴⁴¹. Specifically,

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² BRIDEL, P., "La philosophie protestante de la religion d'après M. Emil Brunner", *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 18/74 (1930), pp. 25-61, here pp. 30f. In my judgment, the limit of Bridel's reading is that he tends to downplay the contrast between Brunner and Barth.

⁴³³ BRIDEL, P., "La philosophie protestante" (see note 432), p. 47.

⁴³⁴ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), pp. 60f.

⁴³⁵ The thesis is illustrated throughout BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft. Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis*, Zwingli Verlag, Zürich 1941.

⁴³⁶ This marks at the same time the proximity and the contrast between Brunner and Barth. While the second tends to stress their contrast, the first often focuses on their proximity.

⁴³⁷ Against Bridel's reading (see above).

⁴³⁸ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), pp. 307ff.

⁴³⁹ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 310.

⁴⁴⁰ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 312.

⁴⁴¹ See BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch. Die christliche Lehre vom wahren und wirklichen Menschen*, Zwingli Verlag, Zürich 1965².

theology shows that the human questioning of reality has the entirety of human existence as its deepest concern⁴⁴².

In dogmatics, the church reflects critically on its teaching to the benefit of its members⁴⁴³, for the sake of clarification of the contents of faith. Dogmatics strives to present the true doctrine of God and His relationship to human being⁴⁴⁴. For Brunner, knowledge of God is possible only because He has revealed Himself, whereas human knowledge as such is limited to the objects of the world⁴⁴⁵. Hence, the tenability of theology bases exclusively on revelation. The latter, however, is a multi-faceted concept, as different forms of revelation exist in a complex unity⁴⁴⁶. These gravitate around one criteriological center, namely the historical event of the incarnation. The core of revelation is that God's Word has become flesh in Jesus Christ. In Brunner's view, the incarnation makes it problematic to regard the Word as the main category of Christian revelation⁴⁴⁷. In light of Jesus Christ, revelation is now to be described chiefly as a Person, while the category "word" is mostly valid for the anticipatory times prior to the incarnation⁴⁴⁸. Put otherwise, the significance of Jesus Christ's Person as the fullness of God's self-communication exceeds the revelatory capacity of the category "word". In Brunner's understanding, the latter is understood quite restrictively; the word appears to be limited to its prophetic dimension⁴⁴⁹ and functions merely as a placeholder for Jesus Christ. With that, its noetic-informative element (God's word as speech) is sharply distinguished from the personal one (God's Word as Jesus Christ). Thus, for Brunner, the incarnation has significantly altered the meaning of the phrase "God's Word". This is no longer to be understood mainly in anticipatory terms, but starting from God's full, personal self-communication in Jesus Christ.

According to Brunner, the knowledge of God revealed by both His anticipatory word and the Person of Christ implies the existence of an original, prehistorical revelation. The latter is inseparable from the historical revelation given to Israel in anticipation of Christ, and yet it precedes it because it ultimately founds in creation. From an epistemological perspective, this means that the prehistorical revelation enables the understanding of the historical one⁴⁵⁰. Once understood, the historical revelation needs to be translated and apprehended by its receivers through the witness of the church.

⁴⁴² BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 13.

⁴⁴³ The debate with non-Christian thought, instead, is not the task of dogmatics, but of eristics (apologetics). The latter is the precondition for dogmatics, in that it gives the theologian a reliable understanding of their times (see e.g. BRUNNER, E., "Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie", *Zwischen den Zeiten* 7/1 [1929], pp. 255-276).

⁴⁴⁴ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 259.

⁴⁴⁵ Here, a proximity can be observed between Brunner's account and Barth's Neo-Kantian philosophical presuppositions concerning the possibility and limits of human knowledge.

⁴⁴⁶ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 20.

⁴⁴⁷ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), pp. 25ff.

⁴⁴⁸ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 25.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 137.

While the objectivity of revelation remains external to human beings as something coming to them, its subjectivity is instead completed in their faith and characterizes them as its receiving subjects.

By emphasizing the different forms of revelation, Brunner asserts that God has given Himself to be known in creation, even though this knowledge can only be derived from His christological revelation⁴⁵¹. Now, the content of the latter is a Person, yet it is conveyed through human words, which leads to a discrepancy. Therefore, a point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) is needed between God's revelation as Person and the human words that bear witness to it. In this sense, Brunner claims that God's self-revelation has employed human discourse, which cannot be neglected by theology. More precisely, the Spirit has taken up humanity's manner of existence and forms of agency, in a movement that parallels the Son's incarnation. Investigating on *how* human being may receive revelation is therefore a fundamental theological task. Since God's Spirit has witnessed *in* the apostles' "hearts"⁴⁵² that Jesus is the Christ, revelation is both historically objective (Jesus Christ) and inwardly subjective (faith)⁴⁵³. Objectivity and subjectivity exist in such a relationship that faith makes human being contemporary to Jesus Christ. In other words, the two dimensions of revelation relate as *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis* in Christ's Person⁴⁵⁴.

In Brunner's anthropology, the actual human being⁴⁵⁵ is a contradiction between creation and sin⁴⁵⁶. The full understanding of such contradiction is achieved by faith and elucidated by theological anthropology, which serves as the presupposition for the Christian proclamation. Therefore, anthropology can be correctly interpreted as the question finding its answer in Christology. The question-answer pattern, however, is itself known by faith and not attained by reason alone. Accordingly, human being is not an objective reality, their truth is found in faith. For Brunner, true anthropology and faith belong together, in that the truth about one cannot be known without the truth about the other. More specifically, faith itself emerges from the contradiction in which actual human being exists. As their existential decision to assent to God's Word, faith restores the actual human being to their original state in that it overcomes their enmity towards God. This overcoming occurs in the form of repentance, which issues from the painful "No" that human beings need to tell themselves before they can acknowledge their need for God's reconciling act. Hence, for Brunner, God's personal Word in Jesus Christ is not absolutely new. Rather, its *novum* consists in the fact that it effectively reconnects human being to their original, essential state⁴⁵⁷. This excludes (at least formally) the possibility of regarding salvation as *creatio ex nihilo*.

⁴⁵¹ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 1 (see note 428), pp. 132ff.

⁴⁵² Centers of personhood.

⁴⁵³ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 1 (see note 428), p. 216.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Human being in their factual existence.

⁴⁵⁶ BRUNNER, E., Der Mensch im Widerspruch (see note 441), pp. 85ff.

⁴⁵⁷ BRUNNER, E., Offenbarung und Vernunft (see note 435), p. 67.

In Brunner's view, the conflict between the actual and the real human being can be understood from the relationship between faith and reason⁴⁵⁸. The actual human being ultimately relies on reason, while the real human being subjects it to God's Kingdom through faith. In God, the believer finds a truth about themselves which can only be heard by faith, not achieved by natural reason. Further, faith acknowledges Jesus Christ's cross as the objective reality where the contradiction appears⁴⁵⁹. Accordingly, the cross is the *concretissimum* of the relationship between human being and God, therefore also between the actual and the real human being. Before the cross, human being is confronted with the objective anamnesis of their own past⁴⁶⁰, which is revealed as their former enmity towards God. At the same time, faced with the cross, human being gives up self-sovereignty, now receiving themselves anew as God's pure gift. Since it reveals the truth about human being the cross also manifests that their nature is identical with their attitude towards God⁴⁶¹. Therefore, what human being is can only be known before God (*coram Deo*) and on the basis of revelation. Only in the proclamation of Jesus Christ as God's Word in Person does human being receive the restoration of their true self. This occurs by faith, which alone involves the *personal entirety* of human being⁴⁶². Believers know that they are life coming from God. This knowledge is only possible by God's grace, but it presupposes that they have previously understood to have become strangers to themselves and have subsequently acknowledged God's sovereignty. In faith, human being is made new, even though their old nature, which is entirely determined by sin, keeps clinging onto them⁴⁶³. Once again, Brunner upholds the distinction between the objectivity of revelation and the subjectivity of faith. While the first is full, perfect and universal, the second is defective, incomplete and particular. An objective reality (*factum*) in Christ, salvation is in becoming (*feri*) within the individual's faith. The second dimension is co-extensive with human being's life as a believer⁴⁶⁴. Thus, Brunner understands faith existentially, not as an interpretation of the world, but as one's subjective participation in an event which has occurred and keeps occurring. In the believer's subjectivity, faith is a concrete, *present* determination of life enabling them to live in the *future*⁴⁶⁵.

Unlike Barth, to whom he nevertheless feels quite close⁴⁶⁶, Brunner defends what could be described as a *prepared* Christology. His idea that the New Testament revelation has a retrospective character not only with reference to the Old Testament, but also to a prehistorical revelation implies

⁴⁵⁸ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), p. 96.

⁴⁵⁹ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), p. 156.

⁴⁶⁰ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), pp. 528ff.

⁴⁶¹ BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), p. 156.

⁴⁶² This thought is also central in Mostert's anthropology, as I have explained in 1.1.2.

⁴⁶³ Here, one might recall Luther's image of the old man who, supposed to be drowned in baptismal water, yet manages to learn how to swim.

⁴⁶⁴ BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), p. 482.

⁴⁶⁵ Correspondingly, it seems accurate to say that Brunner holds present and future eschatology together.

⁴⁶⁶ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., "Der neue Barth" (see note 424).

that Christology needs to be connected with anthropology by an intensification of creation theology. This connection is established not only by means of the well-known doctrine of the mandates⁴⁶⁷, but also through Brunner's insistence on the *imago Dei*⁴⁶⁸. In his view, the *imago* is the starting point for the natural knowledge of God, in that it bears witness to His revelation in creation. The intention to distinguish such revelation from the christological one pushes Brunner to reflect on the difference between a formal and a material *imago Dei*⁴⁶⁹. The former is identical to the *humanum*, it expresses what human being is in their nature, whereas the latter characterizes them as the one to whom God reveals Himself in His love. Thus, Brunner follows the theological tradition in maintaining the concept of the *imago Dei*. However, he reinterprets it based on the Law-Gospel rubric. The *imago* does not refer to any remnants of human being's essential nature after the Fall. Instead, it illustrates the dialectical relationship between human being's original nature and their sinfulness⁴⁷⁰. The sinner's nature, therefore, is perverted but not completely destroyed⁴⁷¹, in that their humanity is safeguarded by its constitutive relationship to God. The *imago Dei*, in this view, is present in human being as a point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) for revelation. The *Anknüpfungspunkt* is a reality of the Law and stands therefore in a dialectical relationship to the Gospel⁴⁷². In general, Brunner interprets the whole of reality as a legal phenomenon which can be known by reason. However, its metaphysical background remains obscured outside of faith⁴⁷³. In the case of human being, the *imago Dei* enables the Gospel to perform its proper function and be effectively received.

The importance of the point of contact in Brunner's anthropology makes it necessary to explore his attitude towards natural theology, which is perhaps the sharpest contrast between his account and Barth's. Brunner claims that God keeps revealing Himself also in creation and that such revelation can be understood because human being is gifted by God with the faculty of language (*Wortmächtigkeit*). This faculty is precisely that which enables understanding. In his "anthropology outside of theology"⁴⁷⁴, Brunner is cautious not to reject the reliability of rational knowledge. Together with responsibility, reason constitutes the *humanum* and is able to attain knowledge of God

⁴⁶⁷ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen. Entwurf einer protestantisch-theologischen Ethik*, Zwingli Verlag, Zürich 1939.

⁴⁶⁸ See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), pp. 85-114.

⁴⁶⁹ However, the wording "formal *imago*" is abandoned by Brunner in order to avoid an interpretation of his position in line with Roman Catholic teaching.

⁴⁷⁰ BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), pp. 85ff.

⁴⁷¹ Correspondingly, Brunner's hamartiology regards sin as the *accident* of human beings' sinful existence. This is not meant to underestimate the seriousness of sin. Rather, Brunner's intention is to insist on the characterization of sin as an *act* rather than a condition (BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* [see note 441], pp. 148f.).

⁴⁷² See e.g. BRUNNER, E., *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (see note 441), p. 155.

⁴⁷³ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), pp. 321f.

⁴⁷⁴ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 533. The phrase is quite ambiguous, as Brunner simultaneously claims that human nature can be truly understood only theologically. My assumption is that the phrase refers to a theological anthropology entirely located within the Prolegomena, prior to the explicit exposition of Christian revelation within material dogmatics.

within general revelation. Nevertheless, natural reason does not attain true (*actual*) knowledge of God, which founds human being's responsibility as it shows that ignorance is sin⁴⁷⁵. Thus, Brunner locates responsibility not within revelation, but in natural law (*lex naturæ*)⁴⁷⁶. Accordingly, reason is competent outside of revelation, where human being exists legalistically⁴⁷⁷. Its jurisdiction extends to the different domains of the mandates of creation, even though proper knowledge of their meaning is provided only within faith⁴⁷⁸. Overall, in Brunner's understanding, reason is competent to know things, yet it lacks understanding regarding their true nature and origins.

Brunner's affirmation of natural theology is reflected in his diversified understanding of the interaction between God and human being's agency. The two are not to be dualistically separated, because God's Spirit always brings about the Kingdom by means of human agency. Similarly, the Law-Gospel rubric, as the point of contact for revelation, shows that human reason and God's self-communication are related both negatively and positively⁴⁷⁹.

In conclusion, for Brunner, the foundation of theological discourse is only revelation. As God's self-communication, the latter exists in different forms and not only in its christological fullness. Since they are made in the image of God, human beings are always already concerned with His revelation. Correspondingly, a point of contact between them and God is established by means of the dialectical interaction between Law and Gospel. Accordingly, human being is naturally endowed with both the possibility and the responsibility to investigate how revelation can be received, understood and described. Philosophy plays indeed a vital role in this investigation.

1.3. A Critical Assessment of W. Mostert's Prolegomena

My research in Part 1 has been investigating whether Mostert's account can contribute to rethink the question of the Prolegomena beyond the sharp alternatives which characterized some positions on the matter within 20th century theology. For the sake of clarification, I have not been looking for a *via media* between the theologies of correspondence and those of God's address. Rather, I have studied Mostert's theology and found some resources in it which, in my opinion, help conceptualize the Prolegomena in a fruitful manner. By studying the theological alternatives, I have pointed out that ignoring Mostert's view on the foundation of its discourse can lead theology into an impassable cleavage and impose an unjustified and dicotomic choice between "correspondence" and "address".

⁴⁷⁵ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), pp. 317f.

⁴⁷⁶ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 318.

⁴⁷⁷ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), pp. 380f.

⁴⁷⁸ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), pp. 379f.

⁴⁷⁹ BRUNNER, E., *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (see note 435), p. 318.

The study of Mostert's *Prolegomena* has revealed a perspective that is quite different from those of the alternatives. In particular, he does not ask what allows human being to talk theologically, but rather, what is the extent of theological discourse. From his perspective, the question that he does not ask would be all too abstract and could be given two answers. The first says that theological discourse is founded on a commonality, a shared property between its subject matter (*Sache*) and human being. This answer posits a fundamental correspondence between the Creator and His creatures, and thereby intends to protect theology from arbitrariness. The cost of such protection, however, is that theological discourse risks losing sight of its concreteness and specificity. The semantics of correspondence enable the theologian to base their discourse on a broad foundation, but not to articulate its specifically *theological* character. In short, this first answer can be defended only by positing a fundamental analogy between the theological *Sache* and all other subject matters of human thinking, which risks making theological discourse way too general and diluted. Instead, the second answer claims that the *Sache* of theology is that which enables human being to perform the theological task. Since God has revealed Himself, the theologian is allowed and commanded to follow His revelation in their thinking. Theological discourse is defined precisely and exclusively as the account of its own *Sache*. Quite circularly, human being may therefore discuss the subject matter of theology only in response to its self-revelation. This answer can be maintained only by assuming that a radical, qualitative difference exists already on the epistemological level between the theological *Sache* and all other contents of human thinking. For the theologian, the ensuing risk is being utterly unable to justify such qualitative difference in any way.

The question that Mostert does ask, instead, is a different one. He is interested in the *extent* of theological discourse and leaves the question of its tenability somehow on the background, even though he does not regard it as irrelevant. By reflecting on the extent of theology, Mostert incorporates concerns of both the studied alternatives. For him, theology understands human being from the point of view of their relationship with themselves, others and the world. When thought through, this relationship is found faulty and in need of a fundamental change that one can neither bring about themselves, nor expect from the world and from others. As long as it remains limited to human being and the world, the relationship is truncated, abstract and partial. Therefore, it is not fully and clearly understood unless it is expanded to explicitly include the Subject who defines it in its truth. This Subject is the One who can and does rectify the relationship, turning it from a faulty, chaotic set of misguided interactions into a fully restored and healed overall relationality. Clearly, this One is God, who is met by human being precisely *in contact with* (in German: *an*) their broken relationship with themselves, others and the world. However, for Mostert, theology does not merely point out how this encounter between human being and God occurs. If that was the case, theological discourse would be

reduced once again to a phenomenology of revelation⁴⁸⁰. Instead, theology also needs to illustrate that this encounter takes place in contact with and provides a solution to the fundamental problem of human being's existence. This illustration, however, is not founded on an abstract metaphysical ontology of human nature⁴⁸¹. Instead, it becomes possible when human being is concretely brought into contact with God through the intensive focus on their faulty relationship with themselves, others and the world. However, in my judgment, this core feature of Mostert's theology is not consistently and coherently upheld throughout his account. Therefore, this is the ideal starting point to introduce my critique of his Prolegomena. In particular, I have identified six points to be criticized. They concern: the conflict between two different ontologies in Mostert's Prolegomena (1.3.1.); the limits of his distinction between implicit and explicit theology (1.3.2.); his claim that faith and salvation are only verified at the level of the individual (1.3.3.); his understanding of the sin-evil coupling (1.3.4.); his view on the unicity of the Christian solution to human being's fundamental problem (1.3.5.), and finally his rejection of the futurity of God's promise (1.3.6.).

1.3.1. Two Conflicting Ontologies

As was already discussed in 1.1.2.⁴⁸², Mostert's hamartiology focuses on the formality of sin. This is a core tenet of his theology, in line with his intention to explicitly found theology on justification doctrine and eradicate all activistic anthropology. For Mostert, justification implies an anthropology in which human being is radically disqualified as a soteriological agent. Only God is the *restitutor mundi*, only He brings about salvation. As for human being, they are involved in justification only as a receiver. Their sin, therefore, does not lie so much in the materiality of their wrongdoing, it is not understood morally as the breaking of the Law. Instead, it is first and foremost their refusal to accept their soteriological insufficiency, that is their impossibility to bring about salvation. Sin lies first and foremost in human being's wanting to be like God and thereby usurping His soteriological agency. As unbelief, sin is regarded by Mostert as human being's guilty refusal to trust God's performative communication of salvation (*Zuspruch*). From the sinner's lack of trust ensue their desperate and fanatical attempts to collaborate with God in restoring true reality. The attempts are embodied by human being's ethical activism, which reflects the conviction that one can save themselves by following the Law. The sinner is the one who associates their acts with soteriological expectations. Therefore, they are not morally evil, but soteriologically incapable. In order to avoid a moralistic misunderstanding of hamartiology, Mostert is interested in defending the essential goodness of human

⁴⁸⁰ Following my classification, this would make Mostert a theologian of God's address.

⁴⁸¹ If this were the case, Mostert would be a theologian of correspondence.

⁴⁸² See here, p. 17.

being. This defense is mounted within his doctrine of the previously given good⁴⁸³. As God's creature, human being is not essentially evil. Since their original goodness is posited in creation, human being experiences existence as fundamentally problematic and seeks salvation as the solution to this problem. Within their life, they encounter situations which metaphorically refer to the solution that they seek. For instance, the image of the newborn suckling on their mother's breasts characterizes human being as radically dependent, an absolute receiver. Thus, in their existence, they find signs⁴⁸⁴ pointing to their essential qualification as God's good creatures, to which they now want to return.

In my opinion, with the doctrine of the previously given good Mostert introduces into his discourse a metaphysical (realist) category, which however conflicts with the existential (relational) ontology that he employs throughout his theology. On the one hand, as God's creature, human being is essentially good. Clearly, such a statement can hardly be interpreted through the relational categories which are typical of Mostert's Prolegomena. On the other, human being exists wholly as a sinner, as someone who is unable to perform good deeds until they are placed in the righteous relationship with God, themselves and the world. In my judgment, Mostert resorts to the doctrine of the previously given good in order to protect his concept of experience from allegations of subjectivism and his hamartiology from a moralistic interpretation. Experience is the place where that which is true also outside of it is verified. As for sin, it is not a moral category, but an anthropological reality which becomes clear only within soteriology. However, with the doctrine of the previously given good Mostert contradicts one of the core tenets of his own theology, namely the interpretation of justification as *creatio ex nihilo*⁴⁸⁵. If human being has some memory of their essential goodness, and the relational righteousness of God is needed for them to be reconnected with it, then two different ontologies conflict in Mostert's thinking. On the one hand, the concept of the previously given good makes sense within a metaphysical ontology which describes human being in themselves, prior to the constitution of their relationships. On the other, justification as *creatio ex nihilo* requires that human being attain their righteousness only *extra se*, in their relationship with the gracious God. In short, by claiming that human being is reminded of their essential goodness as God's creature, Mostert thinks metaphysically, which, against his own criteria, makes his doctrine abstract and unverifiable within experience. The previously given good is a concept which does not arise from the theological reflection on the brokenness of human being's relationship with themselves, God and the world. Therefore, such concept cannot be founded on justification. Instead, it posits goodness as an essential property of human beings, something which belongs to them since they are God's creatures. Correspondingly, Mostert claims that human being's essential goodness is not lost in sin but remains

⁴⁸³ See here, p. 18.

⁴⁸⁴ Here, it may be possible to detect some analogy with Augustine's concept of *vestigia*.

⁴⁸⁵ This point is going to be further developed when assessing Mostert's ontology of justification in 2.3.

under the conditions of existence as an obscured property⁴⁸⁶. With the intention of preventing subjectivistic readings of his anthropology and moralistic misunderstandings of his hamartiology, he ultimately replaces his relational-ontological thinking with metaphysical realism. In this way, at least concerning the matter at hand, his theology moves close to the foundationalism of the theologies of correspondence.

1.3.2. The Distinction between Implicit and Explicit Theology

I previously⁴⁸⁷ discussed how the delimitation of the extent of theological discourse in Mostert's discourse requires the distinction between an implicit and an explicit theology. Both are concerned with the relationship between the three realities of human being, God and the world. In Mostert's Prolegomena, this relationship mirrors human being's fundamental problem, which remains implicit whenever the realities are studied in abstraction from one another. Instead, the problem becomes explicit when these are seen in their interconnection (*Zusammenhang*), that is when the soteriological solution to the problem is expressed christologically. For Mostert, implicit theology is only hiddenly concerned with God as the soteriological agent who is active in Jesus Christ on behalf of human being. Explicit theology, instead, is the accurate description of salvation in terms of justification doctrine, which both clarifies human being's fundamental problem and describes the solution to it. For Mostert (and Ebeling), the two forms of theology inherently belong together, they are not originally separate accounts which later somehow complement each other⁴⁸⁸. In other words, they are both posited in human being's existence and verified within experience. It is therefore inaccurate to interpret implicit theology as the question and explicit theology as the answer. Rather, the first is concerned with the whole problem-solution dynamic in its hiddenness, the second in its manifestation. It follows that the relationship between the two forms of theology is not foundationalist.

However, it can be argued that, in Mostert's thinking, both implicit and explicit theology rely on experience as the *locus* where human being, the world and God are verified. This is an early modern understanding⁴⁸⁹ which, according to Mostert, goes back to Luther. The baseline is that, in experience, the experiencer understands themselves by understanding what they experience. This thought undergirds Mostert's claim that only experience is concrete, because only there does the individual access the truth about themselves, God and the world. Furthermore, Mostert's existential understanding of experience is qualified linguistically. Experience is the *locus* where human being is

⁴⁸⁶ See here, p. 18.

⁴⁸⁷ See here, pp. 7f.

⁴⁸⁸ Instead, this is the case of the theologies of correspondence.

⁴⁸⁹ See e.g.: MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" (see note 87).

confronted with the insufficiency of their soteriological activism. Whether in metaphysical thinking or in ethical action, human being is met with the failure of their attempts at salvation. In particular, these fail because neither the theoretical nor the practical faculty of human being can truly account for their entirety as a person. Instead, the faculty of language does involve them in their entirety and concretely, but this does not occur automatically. In fact, it cannot occur at all as long as language is regarded first and foremost as *speech* and employed enthusiastically as a motivational instrument to support human being's soteriological activism. As speech, language is just one more partial faculty of human being. Instead, it loses its partiality when it is regarded from the point of view of *hearing*. Then, language becomes able to account for the entirety of human being as a person, without individualizing any of their faculties to the detriment of the whole. For Mostert, language as hearing is precisely what enables experience to function as the place where the relationship between human being, God and the world is verified. In other words, experience can function as a verification point only as long as language can apprehend human being in their entirety and summon them before God. In short, in Mostert's anthropology, hearing functions as "the best part"⁴⁹⁰ that human being may and should choose.

The above entails that both implicit and explicit theology, in Mostert's view, largely rely on a specific philosophical understanding of experience coupled with a theory of language. His ability to avoid foundationalism when it comes to philosophical theology separates him from the theologies of correspondence. Instead, his insistence that philosophical theology is indeed necessary to illustrate theological theology separates him from the theologies of God's address. However, since he keeps the two forms of theology so strictly intertwined, his approach risks paving the way to a new kind of foundationalism. Concretely, the risk is not that explicit theology might eventually be based on implicit theology, but that theological discourse as a whole might ultimately depend on whether or not Mostert's theories of experience and language are accepted. A counter-argument might be that, for him, experience and language are mere instruments to illustrate the articulation of theological discourse. Therefore, they do not need to be accepted as philosophical truths independent of theology. However, the counter-argument proves quite weak, because Mostert explicitly rejects any reduction of philosophy's role to supporting theological discourse⁴⁹¹. Incidentally, he thereby distances himself from Ebeling's position on the matter. The paradoxical consequence is that Mostert's position risks falling prey to anthropological optimism as far as the accessibility of truth by philosophy is concerned. The paradox lies in the fact that such optimism would sever his theology from the classic Lutheran tradition that is however pivotal to his discourse as a whole. Also, even if experience and

⁴⁹⁰ Luke 10, 38-42.

⁴⁹¹ See e.g.: MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 30.

language are regarded merely as philosophical instruments and their relationship is not conceptualized in a foundationalist manner, they still remain essential to illustrate how Mostert regards theological discourse. Therefore, they are so intertwined with the very structure of his theology that it is difficult to imagine how the latter could function without employing them. Ultimately, even though Mostert's position on the Prolegomena is not foundationalist, it is undeniably construed in constant and critical proximity with specific philosophical theories, to the point that it can hardly be imagined without them.

1.3.3. The Individual Verification of Faith and Salvation

As discussed in 1.3.2., Mostert regards experience as the *locus* where the truth about human being and the world is manifested *coram Deo*. From the point of view of philosophical theology, this truth is communicated to human being within language (as hearing), by which they are summoned in their entirety as a person and not compartmentalized by way of metaphysical or ethical reductionism. Theological theology reveals that this language is the good, concrete and indicative word of the Gospel. Since the latter is communicated only by faith, it can only concern someone who has faith, meaning historical, specific individuals. Therefore, Mostert connects the particularity of experience and language with the concreteness of faith and salvation. Only the fundamental problem of humanity is general, its solution is particular. Specifically, the focus on the general is seen as ambiguous, abstract (*denkerisch*) and detrimental, it is linked with metaphysical (Scholastic) and ethical (Kantianism) attempts at solving human being's fundamental problem. All these attempts fail because of their partial (Scholastic) or complete (Kantianism) rejection of God's soteriological agency. If metaphysics and ethics focus on the general, experience is concerned with the particular reality of faith. While thinking and moral action regard the individual as a specimen within a collective *genus*, experience meets them as *this* individual, who resists being diluted into an overarching category. In my opinion, Mostert's insistence on the individual depends only secondarily on the fact that he does theology in a context marked by collectivistic utopias and by the theologies which tried to critically engage with them. Primarily, he insists on the concreteness of the individual due to theological reasons. Specifically, only the individual can have faith, through which they attain the truth about themselves, God and the world within experience. With that, I think that it is unjustified to interpret Mostert's anti-collectivism as mainly historically conditioned. Nevertheless, his focus on the individual as the verification *locus* of faith and salvation can indeed be criticized from a different angle.

In my judgment, Mostert's view of the individual holds within his implicit theology but needs to be questioned within explicit theology. As was already shown in 1.3.2., the former deals with the hiddenness of the relationship between human being, the world and God. Until this relationship is made christologically explicit within justification doctrine, its overall interconnection (*Zusammenhang*) remains opaque and the realities involved in it (human being, the world and God) are regarded in abstraction from one another. This abstract analysis, however, is not sufficient to exhaustively account for human being's fundamental problem and illustrate its solution. For Mostert, implicit theology can and must illustrate the three realities as *problems* in need of their solution. However, it is only faith that aptly communicates this solution, and this is described by explicit theology. In tackling them as problems, faith also illuminates the relationship between the three realities, it shows how they are interconnected within existence and manifests their core characterizations. This manifestation of human being, God and the world within faith changes their relationship with one another in such a way that they can no longer be regarded in isolation. With that, faith also modifies the way in which each reality is to be considered individually. According to Mostert, within faith God is revealed as the gracious One, the world appears as His good creation to be preserved from human being's soteriological activism, and the individual is manifested as a justified sinner who remains in need of forgiveness.

In my opinion, Mostert's view on the individual needs to be criticized precisely at this juncture. In particular, I would argue that his explicit theology is at least not compelled to replicate the focus on the individual which is specific to and legitimate within implicit theology. There, the isolation of the person from their community is necessary to show that faith can only be verified within experience. However, explicit theology may correctly characterize human being as *simul iustus et peccator* only because it regards them as someone who is fully understood within faith. As will be discussed in detail in Part 4, faith is also the instrument through which God's Word creates the church, and this is a pivotal tenet of Mostert's ecclesiology⁴⁹². Therefore, positing a separation between the individual and the church in explicit theology risks being ultimately incompatible with Mostert's interpretation of faith. From the perspective of justification doctrine, both the individual and the church are creations of faith⁴⁹³, hence they belong together. More precisely, I would argue that the church necessarily participates in the relationship between human being, God and the world that faith manifests in its righteousness. Only within implicit theology is Mostert justified in separating the individual from their community, the world and God. Within explicit theology, instead, faith makes such separations problematic and even dangerous. If the present critique is dismissed too quickly, it remains difficult

⁴⁹² See 4.1.2.

⁴⁹³ More exactly, they are both the creation of God's gracious Word communicated within faith.

to see how theological truth can be effectively communicated in Mostert's discourse. Indeed, this critique enables theology to account for the communication of its truth among believing individuals. In particular, this communication finds its criteriological vocabulary in the canon of Scripture and is effectively carried out by the Gospel, which is the church-specific type of language.

1.3.4. The Sin-Evil Coupling

In 1.3.1.⁴⁹⁴, I already mentioned Mostert's formal understanding of sin and its role within his overall theology. On its basis, he specifically rejects the straightforward identification of sin with wrongdoing. For him, sin is not a reality open to ethical investigation and contrasted by the keeping of the Law. Instead, it is the relational-ontological category under which human being willfully exists. The sinner is human being not accepting their soteriological insufficiency, thus destroying their context of relationships through fear-induced activism. In Mostert's theology, questioning the ethical interpretation of sin serves the fundamental purpose of showing that the Law, as the ethical reality *par excellence*, is not the adequate instrument to counter it. His understanding of the Law-Gospel rubric is going to be treated in Part 2, but its implications also concern the Prolegomena. At this juncture, it is important to stress that ethics, for Mostert, is an inherently problematic phenomenon. The Law is good and does indeed point to God's will. However, since it addresses sinners, it is made ambiguous. This is because sin clings onto its imperative mode of address, so that the sinner can only hear the Law as a command to actively bring about salvation. Ethics, for Mostert, is human being's reflection on *their* soteriological praxis, it is the sinner's attempt to find out how they can become soteriological agents for themselves, their neighbors and the world. More about the ambiguity of ethics and its misinterpretation as a soteriological strategy is going to be discussed in Part 3. As far as the Prolegomena are concerned, Mostert's position on the Law and sin can be summarized as follows: if the Law was an instrument of salvation (*Heilsmittel*), then sin would indeed be an ethical category. Since this is *not* the case, sin cannot be an ethical category. Rather, it is verified within experience as an ontological-relational characterization of human being. Accordingly, within Mostert's categories, an ethical understanding of sin is impossible, as it contradicts the core tenets of his theology and obscures the understanding of the Law-Gospel rubric, that he considers criteriological for the whole theological discourse.

However, a critique of Mostert's account is in order at this point. Specifically, in my judgment, his formal understanding of sin is correct, but unilateral. If, on the one hand, its formal aspect is defining and overarching, on the other sin and wrongdoing do belong together. Therefore, the material aspect

⁴⁹⁴ See here, pp. 58f.

of sin needs to be accounted for as well. To be clear, my claim is not that Mostert explicitly denies the sin-wrongdoing coupling. To my knowledge, the opposite is true. However, he does not make the coupling explicit enough, thereby neglecting its theological significance. In my view, this is inconsistent with the very tenets of his theology, especially when it comes to his understanding of the Law-Gospel rubric. Accordingly, I would argue that the relationship between sin and wrongdoing is to be made explicit in the present study precisely because, in Mostert's discourse, such relationship shares the same structure as the Law-Gospel rubric. The argument is going to be developed in what follows.

Indeed, the sinner's misinterpretation of sin as identical with wrongdoing fails to account for its depth. In my view, this false interpretation can occur precisely because, under the conditions of existence, wrongdoing necessarily happens wherever sin is. Correspondingly, the Law can be mistakenly interpreted by human being as an ethical-soteriological reality simply because its breaking is wrong. Therefore, the sin-wrongdoing coupling is both persistent in experience and witnessed to in Scripture⁴⁹⁵. If my critique holds, then the interconnection of sin and wrongdoing is theologically verified and valid not against Mostert's Prolegomena, but actually in accordance with them. After all, following Ebeling, he claims that Scripture and experience verify theological truth together. More precisely, *sola Scriptura* becomes understandable only on the background of *sola experientia*⁴⁹⁶. Therefore, if both Scripture and experience point to the interconnection of sin and wrongdoing, it would be shortsighted and even contradictory to disconnect them. In line with the intentions of Mostert's theology but beyond his explicit formulations, I think that dogmatics has the important task of maintaining the sin-wrongdoing coupling in a tensional unity, distinguishing but not separating the two elements. On the one hand, the distinction is fundamental because it keeps the ethical moment subordinate to the ontological-relational one, thereby preventing the moralization of human being, God and their relationship. On the other, avoiding the separation of the two elements is also pivotal, as it enables theology to attain the verification of sin *in contact with* (not in!) wrongdoing, in line with both Scripture and experience.

1.3.5. The Unicity of the Christian Soteriological Answer

In the context of his ecclesiology⁴⁹⁷, Mostert develops a christological-soteriological understanding of the truth and purity of religion. The latter is pure and true wherever it lets God be

⁴⁹⁵ See e.g. Deut. 30, 11-20.

⁴⁹⁶ See e.g.: MOSTERT, W., "Gerhard Ebeling" (see note 3), p. 179.

⁴⁹⁷ See MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134). An in-depth analysis of Mostert's ecclesiology is going to be provided in Part 4.

God. For Mostert, this happens fully and criteriologically in Jesus Christ, who is the truth of all religions because he has searched for and pointed to the right relationship between human being and God within the context of his own religion⁴⁹⁸. Once again, Mostert's focus is formal rather than material⁴⁹⁹. He is interested in qualifying religion as the *locus* within existence where human being problematizes their relationship with themselves, the world and God. The formality of religion, therefore, describes how the three realities are regarded from a soteriological perspective. Instead, its materiality is identical with the contents of faith, which express the relative weight of the related realities. For Mostert, the point is how specific religions illustrate this relationship. In particular, their truth depends on how clearly their specific soteriology points to God as the only agent of salvation, thus avoiding any soteriological activism on the part of human being. Formally, Christianity is to be preferred because it functions as the Reformation of all religions⁵⁰⁰. Therefore, for Mostert the Christian religion is not fundamentally different from all others, because it shares their fundamental question in that it reflects on human being's relationship with themselves, God and the world. The specifics of Christianity depend rather on the fact that the core question of religion as such, namely the quest for human being's truth before God, comes to existence in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Mostert does not view Christianity as the absolute religion, but Jesus Christ as human being's absolute relationship with God⁵⁰¹. As such, he argues that Christianity expresses the truth of religion first and foremost in formal terms. In other words, it allows the orderly and true relationship between human being, God and the world to unfold. It follows that all religions, for Mostert, ought to tend to the same formality which has come to personal existence in Jesus Christ and is witnessed to by Christianity. Interreligious dialogue is therefore christologically founded and Jesus Christ is universally criteriologically. Christians engaging in dialogue with other believers are called to illustrate Jesus Christ as the Person in whom the true relationship between human being, God and the world comes to existence, so that other religions, too, may orient themselves towards this relationship by removing all synergistic elements from their understanding of it⁵⁰².

A critique of Mostert's understanding on this point is necessary. In my opinion, it would not be entirely wrong to claim that his formal view of the particularity of Christianity goes in the direction of Rahner's Christian anonymity⁵⁰³. Surely, Mostert does not intend to describe the way in which

⁴⁹⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 41.

⁴⁹⁹ The categories are mine.

⁵⁰⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 41.

⁵⁰¹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 42.

⁵⁰² MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 42.

⁵⁰³ See e.g.: RAHNER, K., IMHOF, P., BIALLOWONS, H. (eds.), *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, Crossroad, New York 1986. For a stringent critique of the historical and systematic tenability of the idea of Christian anonymity, see JÜNGEL, E., "Extra Christum nulla salus – als Grundsatz natürlicher Theologie? Evangelische Erwägungen zur Anonymität des Christenmenschen: Karl Rahner zu ehren", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72/3 (1975), pp. 337-352.

grace might be at work within world religions. He is not saying that a life of radical openness to God within their structures, coupled with a morally upright life praxis, points to Jesus Christ's presence even in the absence of the explicit knowledge of his name. However, he is saying that religious dialogue, from a Christian perspective, is tasked with uncovering and stressing non-synergistic features in other religions, because these are formally aligned with Jesus Christ as the personal truth of the relationship between human being, God and the world. In my judgment, Mostert is once again⁵⁰⁴ focusing so much on the formal aspect, that he risks arbitrarily disassociating it from the material one. Whenever this disassociation occurs, the price to pay is too high. If the truth of Jesus Christ is founded first and foremost on the rejection of human being as a soteriological agent, then it is unclear what would distinguish Christian theology from a religion which, say, would equally exclude all soteriological activism on the part of human being without making the slightest reference to Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, this is, for instance, the case of Amida Buddhism. Such a religion would be formally identical with Christianity, and yet completely independent from its contents. On the one hand, this would not directly contradict the truth of the soteriological answer provided in Jesus Christ. On the other, it would make Christian soteriology superfluous or at least relative, as its (formal) truth would be also found *remoto Christo*. Therefore, either theology chooses to regard Jesus Christ as only *one* true way to salvation⁵⁰⁵, or it tries to correct Mostert's perspective. A correction which would not abandon his focus on Jesus Christ as the formal truth of all religions would require a material integration of his thought. For Christianity, the Christ is indeed the truth of religion and the answer to human being's fundamental soteriological problem. However, the reason is not necessarily that in Jesus Christ human being is disqualified as a soteriological agent. Perhaps, it is more appropriate to look at the matter the other way around; the reason why human being is disqualified as a soteriological agent in Jesus Christ is that in him the ultimate solution to their soteriological problem is provided. The priority must be clearly placed on Jesus Christ as the event of God's gracious freedom, not on the implications of this event for the formality of religions. In my opinion, Mostert does not make this priority clear enough in his doctrine of interreligious dialogue. His solution starts from a definition of religion in general as the place for human being's quest for salvation. The definition does not need to be rejected. However, if taken in isolation from God's freedom to reveal Himself where He intends to, Mostert's focus risks diluting the scandal of Christian particularity. Especially in the current theological context, it might seem easy and almost spontaneous to follow his insistence on the formality of the truth found in Jesus Christ, rather than on the specific, particular contents of God's revelation in him. Allegations of "Christian imperialism" and religious exclusivism

⁵⁰⁴ See here, 1.3.4.

⁵⁰⁵ This path is followed for instance by HICK, J., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York 1987.

place a burden on theological discourse that cannot be easily ignored. In my judgment, these allegations are misplaced and confuse ethics with dogmatics by moralizing theological discourse. For instance, it seems to me that non-pluralistic approaches to interreligious dialogue are regarded as *morally* unacceptable by the followers of pluralism. In particular, the claim that God has definitively revealed himself in Jesus Christ alone (*solus Christus*) is often treated as an arrogant offense to other religions or an “imperialistic” attempt to proselytize them. At this juncture, I would like to point to a possibly different interpretation of Christian soteriological particularism by referring to a core tenet of Mostert’s theology, namely the ambiguity of ethics, which will be thematized in Part 3. For him, ethics is ambiguous and constitutively insufficient as a possible solution to human being’s fundamental problem. This becomes apparent precisely when ethics comes into contact with dogmatics. Now, as far as I can see, the allegations of “imperialism” made against the defenders of the unicity of the Christian soteriological answer suggest that the question of salvation is interpreted chiefly as an ethical one. Conversely, my claim is that it does not concern ethics, but dogmatics. As such, it cannot be approached through hiddenly ethical categories and needs to be protected from the ethical *penchant* of the debate on interreligious dialogue. As a dogmatic question, the one about Christian particularity should not approach the paradox of God’s ultimate self-revelation in Christ by asking how God could have possibly neglected to also reveal Himself in the other world religions, in the context of which billions of pious people live truthfully. Starting from this or similar questions means giving in to a moralizing urge and considering God’s self-revelation essentially as an ethical question. Instead, from a strictly *theological* perspective, an ethically motivated interpretation of God’s agency is fundamentally from as it implies that He must subject His free self-revelation to external criteria. Accordingly, He is ultimately found as righteous or unrighteous *coram hominibus*, which I consider unacceptable. In revealing Himself, proven right or wrong depending on how generalized His grace is. Conversely, I would argue in favor of understanding Christian soteriological particularism as a *dogmatic* question. Due to lack of space, further elaboration on this matter is not possible within the present study. At any rate, whatever answer theology might give to the question at hand, it will have to be *theological*, in line with the scandalous⁵⁰⁶ claim that God has revealed Himself fully and definitively in the concreteness particularity of the man Jesus Christ. For this reason, I believe that Mostert’s own account enables overcoming his unilateral focus on Jesus Christ as the formal truth of all religions.

1.3.6. The Futurity of God’s Promise (Formal Analysis)

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. Matt 21,42, 1 Cor 1,23f.

In Mostert's Prolegomena, the good language of the Gospel qualifies human being as a receiver of salvation. The goodness of language is not understandable from the perspective of speaking, but only from that of hearing. Within philosophical theology, Mostert argues that the good language is the indicative mode of address which truly communicates to human being the solution to their fundamental problem. This communication can only be heard, as hearing is the only faculty of human being through which they are addressed in their personal entirety, not partially. Mostert's theological theology makes the same thesis explicit. The good language is the Gospel which mediates salvation to human being through faith, by which the center of their personhood is united with Jesus Christ, who is salvation in Person⁵⁰⁷. The formality of the good language is its indicative mode of address, which qualifies the Gospel as gift, not as command. Its materiality⁵⁰⁸ is the *merry exchange* between the sinner and Jesus Christ. Correspondingly, salvation is conceptualized as the former's center of personhood being transposed into the latter. Even though this concept is going to be discussed in detail in Part 2, it is necessary to mention it already here. In particular, it points out that the good language of the Gospel is God's promising address to the sinner (*Zuspruch*) in the *kerygmatic* present, the *punctum mathematicum* where the *merry exchange* occurs. It follows that Mostert understands God's promise as the salvation which is made present here and now by faith. Accordingly, for him, this promise is not to be understood from its futurity (*Verheißung*), as the eschatological category founding either the certainty of the coming fulfilment of all things or the future manifestation of a presently hidden consummation. Throughout his study on justification doctrine⁵⁰⁹, Mostert argues against the understanding of promise as *Verheißung*. His case bases on the assumption that such understanding denies the verification of theological truth within experience, thus turning it into an abstract reality. According to him, waiting for a future consummation of God's promise necessarily entails denying its real, *kerygmatic* presence here and now. Thus, for Mostert, promise as *Verheißung* facilitates soteriological synergism, as it mobilizes human being to collaborate with God for the establishment of an absent or incomplete salvation. Conversely, viewing God's promise only as *Zuspruch* remains true to the concreteness of salvation, which is given here and now, whenever the *merry exchange* between the sinner and Christ truly occurs. Therefore, Mostert regards God's promise exclusively as *Zuspruch* in order to protect his intensive understanding of the soteriological *extra se*. Correspondingly, he rejects *Verheißung* because he considers it irreconcilable with experience as the *locus* where theological truth is verified. In other words, he is convinced that the dimension of futurity

⁵⁰⁷ How this happens is the object of Mostert's doctrine of justification, which is the center of my study. Mostert's ontology of justification is going to be explored in detail in Part 2.

⁵⁰⁸ As I am going to show in Part 2.

⁵⁰⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105).

ultimately denies the concreteness of God's promise and enables human being's soteriological activism⁵¹⁰.

In my judgment, Mostert's perspective aptly accounts for the criteriological role of the incarnation within the history of salvation. His categories correctly point to the qualitative difference between the Law and the Gospel, the Old and the New Covenant, the reality of salvation before and after Jesus Christ. However, his rejection of the category of *Verheißung* needs to be criticized. On the one hand, his position aptly points out from multiple angles that Jesus Christ is the definitive and full accomplishment of God's promises. On the other, it is questionable whether his rejection of *Verheißung* responsibly accounts for the tension between faith in Jesus Christ and the historicity of the world. If the promise communicated in the Gospel establishes the true, righteous relationship between human being, God and the world *in all its dimensions*, then neglecting its futurity is utterly arbitrary. In particular, if salvation is truly and wholly communicated to human being, it remains unclear how elements of their overall relationality – such as the historicity of their life as *simul iustus et peccator* and the dynamics of their situatedness in their historical context – can be excluded from God's promise. Mostert insists that salvation concerns the individual not in the partiality of their faculties (like thinking and moral action), but in the entirety of their personhood. However, a person *is* history and exists always within a context and never in isolation. Ultimately, his rejection of *Verheißung* risks denying (surely against his intentions) one core feature of the good language of the Gospel, namely its capability to address human being in their personal entirety. On this specific point, it is doubtful whether Mostert's perspective can be integrated. Perhaps, it should be rather abandoned. At any rate, a task of a dogmatics which engages in critical dialogue with his theology could be to clarify how the historicity of human being, their relationship with their changing self in a changing world, is included within a soteriology of the *merry exchange*. Against Mostert, I do not see how including the historical and future dimension of God's promise would necessarily entail a rejection of the real presence of salvation. In fact, my claim is that *Verheißung* does not contradict *Zuspruch*, but expands its scope. Accordingly, the integration of both dimensions of God's promise effectively helps theology avoid a detrimental secularization of the future and illuminates the sovereignty of the One who is in becoming⁵¹¹.

1.3.7. Theological Integrations

⁵¹⁰ More about this in Part 2.

⁵¹¹ See JÜNGEL, E., *Gottes Sein ist im Werden. Eine verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth. Eine Paraphrase*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1986.

The assessment carried out throughout 1.3.1.-1.3.6. is obviously not an end in itself. In fact, it aims at illustrating that Mostert's Prolegomena cannot be interpreted within the dichotomy between the theologies of correspondence and those of God's address. He considers the truth about human being and the truth about God as two aspects of one and the same reality. His focus is not on either of them, but rather on their relationship. Therefore, the theological point of observation is neither the reality of creature (theologies of correspondence), nor God's revelation (theologies of God's address). For Mostert, the two alternatives are ultimately two variations of one and the same theological method. They both see God and human being as the two poles of theological knowledge, and provide alternative answers to the question of which conceptualization of their relationship may provide a solid foundation for the tenability of theology. In the correspondence approach, creature and God are coordinated in an ascending epistemology. Accordingly, responsible theological discourse illustrates revelation starting from creation. The opposite way is barred because it is considered to violate the specifics of creaturely reality. In the address approach, conversely, the epistemology is descending. This means that theology starts from revelation to illustrate creation. The opposite direction is regarded as arbitrary and inseparable from an idolatrous understanding of revelation which projects on God the specifics of creature. Instead, Mostert (following Ebeling) considers God and human being in their relationship, which is itself the subject matter of theological knowledge. Therefore, theological discourse must not articulate separately a knowledge of God and a knowledge of human being. Rather, the focus is always on the relationship between the two, be it considered starting from human being (implicit, philosophical theology) or from God (explicit, theological theology). Consequently, Mostert's theology never becomes confronted with the possibly conflicting epistemological claims of creaturely reality on the one hand and revelation on the other. For him, such conflict never occurs because he sees theological knowledge as *one* single epistemological endeavor. In it, God and human being are approached not as separate objects of knowledge, but as two related realities which are connected as specifications of one and the same knowledge. Therefore, theological discourse inherently concerns their relationship and is only accessible in contact with it.

The leading question in Part 1 has been whether Mostert's Prolegomena can contribute to rephrase the question of the foundation of theology. Additionally, I have assessed whether his perspective can engage in critical dialogue with the theological alternatives so as to overcome their problematic features. In my judgment, the analysis justifies an affirmative answer to the research question. Indeed, Mostert's theology does contain valuable resources to ask about the foundation of theology in a fruitful fashion. In turn, these resources reshape core questions which are relevant to the theological alternatives and help overcome their weaknesses. The core contribution is Mostert's consistent focus not on God or creature in isolation, but always on their relationship. This focus removes the need to

explain how a knowledge of God based on revelation can be transferred into creaturely epistemological categories or, conversely, how a knowledge based on creature can responsibly be extended by analogy to the reality of God.

As for the specific contents of Mostert's *Prolegomena*, my critical assessment should not be read as a case against his theology. Rather, I have discussed the weakness of his discourse in order to show where an integration with the alternatives might be theologically fruitful. Hopefully, my study will contribute to illustrate both Mostert's account and the alternatives in a new way. In what follows, I am going to outline actual or possible theological integrations. With that, the research question will have been entirely covered as far as Part 1 is concerned.

The critique presented in 1.3.1. has pointed out a contradiction between two ontologies in Mostert's *Prolegomena*. In juxtaposition to his overall existential-relational ontology (which is pivotal in his theology in general), the doctrine of the previously given good operates with a metaphysical-realist ontology. I already discussed why the coexistence of both ontologies in Mostert's theology can be regarded as problematic. Coming to the integrations of his approach with the alternatives, the coexistence of the two ontologies shows that his account moves significantly close to the theologies of correspondence. If a metaphysical-realist ontology nourishes Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good, then it is possible to (partially) read his *Prolegomena* as an expression of the theologies of correspondence. This would mean that he posits a reality *in* human being which ultimately serves as a point of contact between them and God. The connection would not be found in the righteous relationship between them communicated by the good language of the Gospel, but in human being themselves as God's creature. Thus, the doctrine of the previously given good would allow for interpreting Mostert's *Prolegomena* in consonance with Rahner's ontology of grace. I do not think that such a reading would be entirely wrong; as has been shown, the doctrine of the previously given good is a foreign element in Mostert's theology. Moreover, it seems to rather embody the concern of the theologies of correspondence. However, I also think that this doctrine should not be separated from other doctrines within the *Prolegomena*. Based on my critique, therefore, it is not possible to fully reconcile Mostert with the theologies of correspondence. In fact, the critique simply shows that an aspect of his theology (the doctrine of the previously given good) would tend towards that theological alternative. At the same time, however, my argument also points out the contradiction between this doctrine and Mostert's overall existential-relational ontology. Ultimately, for all its importance within his system, the doctrine of the previously given good does not express the center of Mostert's *Prolegomena*. Accordingly, his actual proximity with the theologies of correspondence on this point is neither to be underestimated, nor exaggerated.

The critique in 1.3.2. is concerned with the limits of Mostert's articulation of philosophical (implicit) and theological (explicit) theology. Specifically, I have shown how the close interconnection of both could qualify his theology as foundationalist. This does not mean that Mostert founds explicit theology on implicit theology, or that he shares a two-level approach in consonance with the Neo-Scholastic. Rather, he keeps the two forms of theological discourse in such a proximity, that his entire account relies (at times directly, at times indirectly) on his philosophical theories of experience and language. As a consequence, it is possible to regard Mostert's Prolegomena as somehow close to the theologies of correspondence, at the very least because a specific conceptualization of experience and language is central to his thinking. Accordingly, human being is called to interpret the same truth both philosophically and theologically in order to attain the solution to their fundamental problem. However, it would be incorrect to infer that Mostert's Prolegomena are ultimately just a variation of the theologies of correspondence. As I pointed out, this is not the case because he does not understand implicit and explicit theology as two separate forms of knowledge which somehow support or found each other. Instead, he regards them as one and the same knowledge observed from two different angles. The critique has pointed out once again that Mostert, in his demarcation from the theologies of correspondence, moves closer to them whenever the perspective of his discourse shifts from the relationship between human being and God to creaturely reality as the direct object of true knowledge. Whenever this occurs, then Mostert refers (at least implicitly) to philosophical truths which are theoretically independent from the knowledge of God, for instance in his accounts of experience and language. This reference is not directly normative, as theology is not founded on a previously accepted philosophy. However, it is indeed criteriological, as its absence would make the illustration of Mostert's theology quite difficult. In conclusion, on this point, a partial integration between his discourse and the theologies of correspondence can be observed.

In 1.3.3., I criticized Mostert's focus on the individual. While it makes perfect sense in implicit theology, such focus needs ecclesiological integrations⁵¹² within explicit theology. In particular, I showed how Mostert's view of faith may support the proposed integration. According to him, not only the individual, but also the church is verified in faith. If this is the case, however, both of them intrinsically belong to the relationship between human being, the world and God. Moreover, this relationship is itself newly characterized by faith, so that it must not be regarded as a natural *factum*, but as an event of grace. Accordingly, a possible integration of Mostert's theology could connect my critique with impulses provided by the theologies of God's address. The implicit relationship between human being, God and the world would then be illustrated as the covenant between God, Israel and the church. Correspondingly, Barth's or Brunner's understanding of the covenant as God's free and

⁵¹² Mostert's ecclesiology is going to be thematized in Part 4.

gracious decision in Jesus Christ could help express explicit theology in an unambiguously non-individualistic fashion. After all, Mostert explicitly rejects individualistic readings of his theology⁵¹³. For him, human being's relationship with God always includes the world. Any individualistic understanding of human being would ultimately project a false image of them, replicating the *homo incurvatus in se*. In my judgment, only an explicit integration between Mostert's discourse and covenantal theology would effectively clarify *why* the former necessarily conflicts with individualism. More precisely, reference to the covenant helps articulate that not only the individual, but also the church is a theological reality. The proposed integration would point out that God's relationship with the individual is not to be understood in isolation from the church. Conversely, the latter is the community in which *even* this specific individual is addressed by the gracious God within faith⁵¹⁴.

The critiques concerning the sin-evil coupling (1.3.4.) and the particularity of the Christian solution to human being's fundamental problem (1.3.5.) both aim at addressing Mostert's focus on the formality of theological concepts, which at times risks making their materiality secondary. As was already explained, his emphasis of the formality of sin plays a crucial role in his theology. He thereby aims at avoiding an ethical misunderstanding of sin and a legalistic interpretation equating it with wrongdoing. Just like the Law, sin cannot be satisfactorily interpreted through ethical categories alone. The critique does not concern the core of Mostert's hamartiology, which remains untouched. Instead, it points out that a unilateral focus on the formality of sin neglects that its coupling with wrongdoing is verified both in Scripture and in experience. Accordingly, the very logic of Mostert's theology implies that the sin-wrongdoing coupling needs to be maintained. However, the clear subordination of the material element to the formal one needs to be defended. Concerning this topic, the critique has not outlined possible integrations between Mostert's position and the alternatives. Instead, the sin-wrongdoing coupling has been interpreted as a natural development and a deepening of the former. Having said that, it is still possible to connect the intention behind my critique with possible insights coming from the theologies of God's address. For instance, the material concretions of sin are notably central in Barth's hamartiology. In particular, the centrality of the acts of sin (*peccata*) has been traced back to his understanding of the *simul iustus et peccator*, which for him is a situation to which the Christian must never accommodate, as it is highly problematic in the light of God's Law⁵¹⁵. For lack of space, I am not going to elaborate further on this view of the *simul*. At any rate, following Couenhoven, it is possible to regard the different emphasis on the materiality (Barth)

⁵¹³ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 32.

⁵¹⁴ See 1 Cor 15,8.

⁵¹⁵ See COUENHOVEN, J., "Grace as Pardon and Power: Pictures of the Christian Life in Luther, Calvin, and Barth", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28/1 (2000), pp. 63-88, here p. 84; s.a., "Law and Gospel, or the Law of the Gospel? Karl Barth's Political Theology Compared with Luther and Calvin", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30/2 (2002), pp. 181-205.

or the formality (Mostert) of sin, on the *peccata* (Barth) or the *peccatum* (Mostert) as a consequence of their conflicting understandings of the *simul*. Specifically, Barth fights it as a problematic moral conundrum, while Mostert conceptualizes it as a theological-anthropological reality. More on the matter cannot be discussed here. At any rate, the proposed integrated view of the sin-wrongdoing coupling is mostly internal to Mostert's theology and does not essentially concern the alternatives. Nevertheless, the theologies of God's address could indeed provide further insight to illuminate the sin-wrongdoing coupling within Mostert's theology.

Concerning the particularity of Jesus Christ as the soteriological solution to human being's fundamental problem, I criticized Mostert's view based, once again, on his unilateral focus on the formality of theological truth. Specifically, I have argued that he insists primarily on the rejection of any soteriological ability of human being and only secondarily on the christological foundation of this rejection. In my view, his approach risks presenting Jesus Christ exemplarily as *one* soteriological option, *one* solution to human being's fundamental problem. However, this conflict with Mostert's own claim that the only solution to the soteriological problem is provided within justification doctrine. Accordingly, I have pointed out the need to reverse the relationship between the formal and material aspects. In particular, Jesus Christ should not be regarded first and foremost as the formal exclusion of human being's soteriological activism, but as the concrete and full event of God's gracious soteriological agency. In 1.3.4., I defended Mostert's focus on the formality of sin and its material expansion by illustrating the theological legitimacy of the sin-evil coupling. In 1.3.5., conversely, the formal aspect was subordinated to the material one. In my view, this subordination enables the proper theological illustration of the paradox of the incarnation. In short, Jesus Christ is *also* the formal the exclusion of human being's soteriological agency because he is *first and foremost* the material event of salvation, as in him God has made Himself present as the gracious One. On this point, a direct integration of Mostert's discourse with the theologies of God's address is suggested. As a matter of fact, their accounts do maintain the priority of the reality of Jesus Christ over its implications for human being's soteriological insufficiency⁵¹⁶.

In 1.3.6., I criticized Mostert's outright rejection of the futurity of God's promise, which reflects his intensive concentration on *Zuspruch* and the corresponding exclusion of *Verheißung*. For him, the good language of the Gospel communicates salvation to human being here and now. In the *kerygmatic* present, the justifying God addresses sinners within faith and delivers them from their fundamental problem. Since salvation is also to be expressed christologically, this also means that, in faith, the center of human being's personhood is transposed into Jesus Christ. Correspondingly, the latter takes up human being's sinfulness, the power of which has been broken on the cross but continues to cling

⁵¹⁶ Some ecumenical implications of this critique are going to be treated in Part 4.

to the sinner throughout their life. In short, Mostert's view on promise as *Zuspruch* is to be understood as an emphatic reiteration of the Reformational *extra se*. Correspondingly, salvation is regarded as the event of human being's center of personhood being transposed outside of them into Christ. Incidentally, this supports Mostert's theological-anthropological understanding of the *simul*⁵¹⁷. Within his theology, the intensive understanding of promise as *Zuspruch* is an essential tenet. Accordingly, he rejects the dimension of *Verheißung* because, in his view, the latter endangers the identification of salvation with the Person of Jesus Christ. As was shown, Mostert interprets *Verheißung* as a reinforcement of human being's soteriological activism. By postponing the coming of salvation indefinitely, human being secures their active role in bringing it about. My critique has pointed out that the outright rejection of *Verheißung* risks arbitrarily dissolving the tension between the reality that one receives in faith and their historicity in the world. Following Mostert, I have argued that one's *entire* relationship with the world, with time and history and with one's ever unfolding life is concerned by faith and finds its truth in it. As a consequence, I have questioned his view of *Zuspruch* and *Verheißung* as incompatible qualifications of God's promise and argued for an integration of both. Specifically, *Verheißung* should be regarded as the broadening of *Zuspruch*, which remains the leading category to describe the good language of the Gospel. The theological resources in support of the proposed integration can be found both in the theologies of correspondence and in those of God's address. As will be shown in Part 2, this integration also concerns the ontology of justification. In Part 1, the target of my critique has been Mostert's view of God's promise and the rejection of its futurity on the formal level. In Part 2, a similar critique is going to be presented concerning the material level⁵¹⁸. Instead, as far as the relationship between justification and ethics is concerned, the integration of *Verheißung* and *Zuspruch* remains indeed problematic and incompatible with Mostert's theology. In particular, it would risk obscuring the typological difference between justification doctrine and ethical approaches to human being's fundamental problem⁵¹⁹.

The critical analysis of Mostert's Prolegomena has been enriched with contributions from the theological alternatives. All in all, it is suggested that the question of the tenability of theological thought is more nuanced than it might seem. The assessment has sufficiently pointed out that Mostert's theology indeed helps rephrase the question of the foundation of theology. Additionally, it also aptly incorporates some crucial concerns expressed by the alternatives. Specifically, his account indicates that theology must investigate the truth about human being, God and the world starting from their overall relationship. If the latter is considered only secondarily or not at all, theological perspectives on the Prolegomena become sharply conflicting and not fully convincing. The

⁵¹⁷ See here, p. 74.

⁵¹⁸ See 2.3.3.

⁵¹⁹ More about this in Part 3.

relationship between the three realities is not verified in thinking, but in human being's experience. Theologically, this relationship needs to be studied both implicitly and explicitly, by those forms of knowledge that Mostert calls philosophical theology and theological theology. The first concerns God, human being and the world *as though* they were separate from one another. Since they actually are *not*, and in fact they are constitutively related, it is more accurate to say that philosophical theology studies the *hiddenness* of their relationship as a *problem* in need of a solution. Theological theology, instead, studies God, human being and the world in the *clarity* of their relationship, which becomes fully manifest in faith. There, the truth about the three realities becomes manifest as the *solution* to the problem. Ultimately, both forms of theology express one and the same knowledge. Thus, for Mostert, theological discourse finds neither in revelation, nor in creaturely reality. More precisely, it does not need foundation, if thereby one means a basis for theological knowledge provided either within an actualist view of revelation or in creature's ontological openness to it. Rather, theology needs situatedness, it needs to be placed where it belongs. For Mostert, this place is human being's experience qualified by language.

In the present chapter I have criticized Mostert's Prolegomena and asked whether his account is theologically fruitful and helps provide new answers to the questions also raised by the alternatives. At this point, an affirmative answer is clearly in order. Mostert's position can and does enrich the theological discourse concerning the Prolegomena. More precisely, it takes the core concerns of both alternatives seriously enough without accepting neither their constraints nor the conditions to which they subject their discourse. In conclusion, Mostert's interpretation of the Prolegomena safeguards the concreteness of Jesus Christ and delimits the intellectual extent of theological discourse so that it can correspond to its subject matter (*Sache*). At the same time, his theology strives to illustrate the universal relevance of Christian discourse without diluting it into a general philosophical truth. Even though some of his doctrines can be regarded as wholly or partially problematic, the overall value of Mostert's contribution lies in its clear theological profile. In particular, his discourse maintains the distinct demarcation of dogmatics from metaphysics and ethics, while also remaining open to the question of how human being may listen for God's revelation and attain theological knowledge.

2. W. Mostert and the Ontology of Justification

In my view, the task of creatively illustrating the overarching role of the article of justification is always urgent for Protestant theology. E. Wolf, among many, explicitly denies that justification may be regarded as a piece of doctrine, albeit central. Conversely, he regards it as the normative starting point for the oversight of theological discourse as a whole⁵²⁰. Certainly, this is a statement with which Mostert would wholeheartedly agree. Reformation theology recognizes a critical and polemical⁵²¹ centrality to justification doctrine as long as the latter unambiguously illustrates the identity of God as the gracious One and of human being as a sinner. Specifically, this illustration is made from the point of view of their relationship, which means always in concrete terms and never in abstract. Since this relationship becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ and finds its truth in him, justification doctrine cannot be abstracted from Christology. On the contrary, E. Jüngel points out that its function is precisely to express Christ's being and work for, on and with sinners. This means that only the illustration provided by justification doctrine makes Christology adequate⁵²². As will be broadly discussed in Part 4, it is for this reason that Protestant theology often⁵²³ rejects⁵²⁴ the (not only) Roman Catholic argument whereby justification is not *per se* the criterion on which the church stands or fall⁵²⁵. For Mostert, the criteriological function of justification doctrine is the logical consequence of his understanding of theology as such.

As was illustrated in Part 1, he regards theology as the true discourse about human being and God from the point of view of their relationship. This relationship is understood hermeneutically⁵²⁶ with reference to the Law-Gospel rubric, which functions as the explicit (theological) formulation of his implicit (philosophical) theories of language and experience. This means that the Law-Gospel coupling is precisely that which articulates the formality of justification, while its materiality is Jesus

⁵²⁰ WOLF, E., "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie", *Evangelische Theologie* 1/9 (1949), pp. 298-308, here p. 300.

⁵²¹ See e.g. JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1/1 (1999), pp. 24-52, here p. 24.

⁵²² JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 22ff.

⁵²³ But not always. For opposite approaches, which explicitly deny the criteriological function of justification doctrine within contemporary Protestant theology, see e.g. WILLIAMS, D.H., "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57/4 (2006), pp. 649-667, here p. 665.

⁵²⁴ See e.g. JÜNGEL, E., "Um Gottes willen – Klarheit! Kritische Bemerkungen zur Verharmlosung der kriteriologischen Funktion des Rechtfertigungsartikels – aus Anlaß einer ökumenischen „Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 94/3 (1997), pp. 394-406.

⁵²⁵ Specifically, Roman Catholicism traditionally upholds that justification should rather be understood with reference to the overarching articulation of all the theological truths within the *depositum fidei*. This is notably Cardinal Kasper's thesis, criticized in Jüngel's article "Um Gottes willen" (see note 430).

⁵²⁶ On the hermeneutical understanding of justification doctrine, see also GLOEGE, G., "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als hermeneutische Kategorie", in: s.a., *Gnade für die Welt. Kritik und Krise des Luthertums*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1964, pp. 34-54.

Christ as the solution to human being's fundamental problem. In this Part 2, therefore, I will first of all use the Law-Gospel coupling as an observation point to elaborate on Mostert's ontology⁵²⁷ of justification.

Secondly, I will ask what it means, for him, that God justifies human being. With that, I will mention christological, anthropological and hamartiological implications of his doctrine of justification, showing that the latter is not to be understood as a theory of meaning. The analysis will necessarily include – but not focus on – the treatment of Jesus Christ as the personal event of God's righteousness for us, which implies broad reference to his cross (death and resurrection) and to his life and ministry, to his *sacrificium* and to his *exemplum*. In this context, the relationship between justification and sanctification will also be touched upon, before moving to the relationship between justification doctrine and ethics in Part 3.

Once again, Mostert's discourse is going to be studied with direct reference to Ebeling (2.1.) and compared with relevant theological alternatives (2.2.). In Part 2, these are going to be P. Tillich and W. Pannenberg ("theologies of historical salvation") on the one hand, K. Barth and E. Jüngel ("theologies of the performative Word") on the other. Throughout the analysis, I will be following the same methodology employed in Part 1. The goal is to investigate whether Mostert's approach is theologically productive and can help overcome the weaknesses of the alternatives. In conclusion, a critique of Mostert's position will be presented (2.3.), with reference to the theological alternatives and in light of possible integrations.

2.1. The Justified Sinner in Jesus Christ: G. Ebeling and W. Mostert's Justification Doctrine

2.1.1. The Justified Sinner in Jesus Christ: G. Ebeling

Ebeling's justification doctrine can be defined as the core of a theology of God's Word articulated pneumatologically⁵²⁸. For him, justification is the linguistic event which points to the Holy Spirit as the One who overcomes and defeats human being's impossibility to come to Jesus Christ, in whom salvation is present⁵²⁹. In Ebeling's theology, justification doctrine allows fully expressing both the

⁵²⁷ I chose to refer to the *ontology* of justification (and not simply to justification) because Mostert's discourse needs to be understood with constant reference to his relational ontology. For him, justification doctrine ultimately reveals who God and human being truly *are*. From his perspective, the Gospel would not be a reliable communication if it was not concerned with an ontological truth.

⁵²⁸ Albeit in a sharply different fashion, a pneumatological understanding of justification can be also found in the Finnish school of Lutherology. See e.g. KÄRKKÄINEN, V.-M., "The Holy Spirit and Justification: The Ecumenical Significance of Luther's Doctrine of Salvation", *The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24/1 (2002), pp. 26-39.

⁵²⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3, *Der Glaube an Gott den Vollender der Welt*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2012⁴, p. 191.

content (*Gehalt*) and the power (*Gewalt*) of God's Word⁵³⁰. Moreover, such doctrine needs to be understood precisely as the *universal* question of how human being may come to their rightful condition⁵³¹. To illustrate this question, the clarification of the relationship between Law and Gospel is needed, because this relationship, for Ebeling, substantiates the correct theological discourse on God's Word. Ultimately, this points to justification doctrine as the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*. For this reason, my account of Ebeling's doctrine of justification will center around the intensive study of his Law-Gospel differentiation.

For him, the category of God's Word is not the general starting point and the fundamental content of theology unless it is clarified as the *Word of faith*. Sure, God has the primacy over against faith, but His Word is always pronounced by believing human beings who trust it to be God's Word⁵³². Hence, Ebeling strongly stresses that God's Word is always and invariably pronounced in and with faith. As a consequence, an immediate emphasis on the reality of God's Word *per se* is theologically irresponsible because it obliterates the clear, concrete content and the specific characterization that the Word receives in faith. Thus, the reality of God's Word needs to be accompanied by the reflection on *how* human being comes to faith⁵³³, which is the fundamental qualification of the Word. For Ebeling, this qualification is made explicit by the fact that God's Word speaks of faith. This is to be understood in a twofold manner: The Word speaks *from* faith and has faith as its *aimed effect*. Specifically, the Word of God which speaks of faith in this twofold sense is the Gospel, which creates faith through the assurance communicated in the form of a promise (*Zuspruch*), not as command⁵³⁴. According to Ebeling (and Mostert), the proper knowledge of these theological statements is only attained once God's Word as Gospel is considered in its intricate interconnection with the Law. The latter is the other fundamental dimension of God's Word (or the other Word of God) next to the Gospel. Nevertheless, this knowledge of God's Word does not lead to the *formal* understanding of it⁵³⁵. Instead, it reveals its *content* as an event qualified by an opposition (*gegensätzliches Geschehen*)⁵³⁶. In Ebeling's theology, this event expresses the point of contact between God's Word and human being's situated existence and results in several polarities of life. Thus, the opposition-qualified event is that which illustrates the fundamental situation of human being as their disturbed and constitutive relationship with God. Unless they are interpreted by this relationship, both God's

⁵³⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 249.

⁵³¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 194.

⁵³² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 250.

⁵³³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 251.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ This claim does not mean that the formal dimension of the Law-Gospel differentiation is not central in Ebeling's theology. As I am going to show in the present chapter, it is indeed. What Ebeling means in this context is rather that the category of God's Word needs to be always understood concretely from the point of view of its christological content, never in abstract terms, as a principle or an overarching theological idea.

⁵³⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 252.

Word and human being's life situation remain obscure. For Ebeling, the correct interpretation of this relationship is only possible starting from the question of how God's Word interacts with human being⁵³⁷. This interaction is described by the Law-Gospel differentiation, which needs to be properly understood so that human being may attain the truth about their relationship with God. From this truth follows the characterization of God as the gracious Savior and of human beings as sinners. Therefore, for Ebeling, the Law-Gospel differentiation functions hermeneutically *together with* the original polarity of life (*Urpolarität*)⁵³⁸, namely the relationship between human being and God. As was already mentioned, I regard Ebeling's understanding of Law and Gospel not as a derivative of his view of the original polarity, but as an equally original interpretative instrument thereof⁵³⁹. By interpreting the original polarity on the basis of how God's Word addresses human being, the Law-Gospel differentiation uncovers the other polarities between human being's word and God's Word, command and promise, the Old and the New Testament, letter and Spirit.⁵⁴⁰ For Ebeling (and Mostert), the different polarities ultimately illustrate that human being is under the Law. This is a *general* truth, which is indeed theologically profiled, but also has anthropological validity⁵⁴¹. More precisely, the general character of this truth depends on the fact that the Law is a fundamental given of life.

As a general truth, the reality of human being and the world existing under the Law precedes the Gospel and stands without it. This means that understanding the Law is a *precondition* for fully grasping the depth of the Gospel. At the same time, one can only properly understand the Law once their discourse has already been determined by the Gospel. This is because the general truth that existence is under the Law is not fully accessible outside of faith. Thus, Ebeling claims both that one's being under the Law *precedes* the Gospel and that the theological understanding of the Law *follows* the Gospel⁵⁴². The Law is a phenomenon which is rooted in the linguistic determination (*Sprachlichkeit*) of reality⁵⁴³. For Ebeling (and Mostert), the relationship of the Law with human life exists in the form of dominance: the former rules over the latter. The Law's rule over life is experienced by (human) life itself as *command* (*Forderung*)⁵⁴⁴. However, the command does not

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ This substantiates and completes the claim advanced on p. 9 of the present work. In Mostert's reading, instead, Ebeling considers only the polarity between human being and God as original, whereas the one between Law and Gospel is the most important one among its derivatives.

⁵⁴⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 253-261.

⁵⁴¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 262. Here, Ebeling is *not* founding his philosophical anthropology on theology. Rather, he is observing the relationship between God and human being through the lenses of the Law-Gospel differentiation both in implicitly and explicitly theological terms.

⁵⁴² Using philosophical categories, this might be put as follows: Law-Gospel is the *ordo rei*, Gospel-Law is the *ordo cognitionis*.

⁵⁴³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 262.

⁵⁴⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 264.

bring about any absolute *novum*, as it is always tied to a *given reality* which precedes it⁵⁴⁵. Since givenness (*Gegebenheit*), in Ebeling's understanding, is a fundamental characterization of reality, it also qualifies the linguistic determination of the Law. Specifically, the givenness of life entails that the Law has a certain duplicity: it represents and offers its content (dimension of the givenness), and *together with that* it commands and prohibits something (dimension of the command)⁵⁴⁶. This means that the Law exists in a polarity with life as such, in that its characterization as command can only be in tension with the givenness of life. This polarity does not exist merely in abstract terms. Rather, it gains complexity as human being concretely comes into the picture. For Ebeling (and Mostert), the latter is a linguistic creature. Correspondingly, they are the addressees of the linguistic phenomena within reality. These have an essentially legal characterization, as they express a tensional polarity with the givenness of life. More precisely, the polarity between the givenness of life and the command of the Law becomes concrete in the *modality* in which human being relates to the latter. This is the crucial passage in Ebeling's understanding of the Law-Gospel differentiation. Here, he sees the ambiguity of life expressed in its sharpest form⁵⁴⁷. The ambiguity of life, for him, ultimately mirrors the duplicity of the Law. In short, both express the tension between givenness and command. In other words, the givenness of life needs the protection offered by the Law through its command. However, this protection cannot be truly effective because life cannot come from the Law⁵⁴⁸. For Ebeling (and Mostert), this is precisely the characteristic feature of the Law, which ultimately disqualifies it as a soteriological instance: It *cannot* produce reality⁵⁴⁹, but only *point to* the givenness of its content through the imperative of its command.

Further, the truth about the relationship between human being and God is not yet uncovered once the Law is understood philosophically. This understanding encompasses all the linguistic, legal phenomena which exist in the tension between givenness and command. For the relationship between human being and God to be fully disclosed and properly understood, the Law needs to be interpreted *theologically*⁵⁵⁰. This theological understanding is gained not only from Scripture, but also in the context of a given life situation⁵⁵¹. Thus, understanding the Law theologically implies not equating it with the historical reality of the Jewish *Torah*⁵⁵². Here, Ebeling is interested in emphasizing the

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 265.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ In Ebeling and Mostert's accounts, this does not only concern the Law, but the whole of theology. Both theologians couple the Scriptural principle (*sola scriptura*) with the hermeneutical one (*sola experientia*). For them, the full theological truth about the relationship between God, human being and the world is only apprehended when the two principles are considered together.

⁵⁵² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 266ff. The opposite reading, which understands the Law mainly as the historical reality of Jewish *Torah*, is upheld by Pannenberg, who explicitly rejects

effectiveness (*Wirkung*) of the Law, namely how the latter operates and what it is or is not able to bring about. Put otherwise, his hermeneutical account of the Law (just like Mostert's) aims at uncovering the formality of the Law, the imperative in its contrast to the indicative of the Gospel. First and foremost, Ebeling develops his theological understanding of the Law in order to show that the Gospel, the reality which comes *together with* the Law as its contrastive partner (*Gegenüber*), is *categorically* different from it, and not a new law (*nova lex*). The Gospel is the event of the *fulfilment* of the Law. In Ebeling's exegesis, this theological insight is sanctioned by Paul's underlying thought⁵⁵³ that the Law is a reality which is manifested not only in the Jewish *Torah*, but also outside of it⁵⁵⁴. Since the Law cannot be reduced to the historical reality of the *Torah*, it can be regarded as something which is always already operational in life. Therefore, being under the Law is the fundamental qualification of life in its ambiguity as a linguistic phenomenon. The experience (*Erfahrung*) of the Law is made in all those dimensions which carry and order life, but also destabilize it and obscure its givenness⁵⁵⁵. Secondly, Ebeling's theological understanding of the Law shows that its sharply different and often contradictory articulations⁵⁵⁶ operating within life tend to unity even though they contradict each other in their historical interactions⁵⁵⁷. Ebeling has in mind the cultural, philosophical and religious systems through which human being seeks soteriological answers to their fundamental problem. All these cultural phenomena are subsumed under the umbrella of the Law, because they are all interpreted as legalistic attempts at salvation. Specifically, their legalism is the unifying factor that they all share even though they contradict and oppose one another. That they are all expressions of one and the same legalistic soteriological approach is understood *negatively* by Christian theology. This means that there is no compelling positive feature showing that these cultural phenomena all share the same legal structure. The only reality indicating that the Law is one and expresses a unity is the Jewish *Torah*, which, due to its particularity and historical situatedness, cannot be considered universally compelling⁵⁵⁸. At any rate, for Ebeling, the proximity amongst all these cultural phenomena is only convincingly revealed by what they all categorically exclude, namely the Gospel. Only the latter does point to their structural uniformity and shows that they are soteriologically

Ebeling's hermeneutical account. In Pannenberg's judgment, such account arbitrarily elevates the Law to a general category, thus neglecting the turn in salvation history which has taken place in Jesus Christ (see note 736).

⁵⁵³ In light of today's exegetical and historical research on Paul's understanding of the Law and salvation (see e.g. BOCCACCINI, G., *Paul's Three Paths to Salvation*, Eerdmans 2020.), this core insight of Ebeling and Mostert's theologies may be criticized. The ways in which Systematic Theology has positioned itself with regards to historical and exegetical work on justification doctrine are multifaceted. For a glance on the different positions, see e.g. MATLOCK, B., "Zeal for Paul but Not According to Knowledge: Douglas Campbell's War on 'Justification Theory'", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34/2 (2011), pp. 115-149.

⁵⁵⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 268.

⁵⁵⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 269.

⁵⁵⁶ For instance, conflicting ideologies, that Ebeling interprets as covert soteriological doctrines.

⁵⁵⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 270.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

insufficient. This is possible because only the Gospel is *categorically* different from the Law and effectively communicates the soteriological reality that it promises. Instead, the Law points to it in the form of a command, that human being (as a sinner) always necessarily misunderstands as a call for the realization of salvation. This misunderstanding, for Ebeling, roots both in the formal qualification of the Law (the imperative mood of address) *and* in the fact that its command is always heard by sinners⁵⁵⁹, namely those who do not want to and cannot let God be God, the sole *restitutor mundi*⁵⁶⁰.

In Ebeling's (and Mostert's) elaborate reflection, the Law is conceptualized as a reality based on its effectiveness. The focus is placed on its *effects* because the point is to show *where* the reality of salvation may be verified⁵⁶¹. A verification *in* the Law would imply that the latter can effect salvation for its addressees. However, for Ebeling (and Mostert), this option is rejected by experience, which does not allow neglecting the ambiguity of the Law illustrated by the polarity of givenness and command. If salvation cannot be verified in the Law, then it either cannot be verified at all, or it can be verified outside of the Law. It is important to keep in mind that Ebeling does not conduct his reasoning on the verification of salvation in abstract terms. The opposite is true: Speaking *concretely* of salvation is the whole point of his (and Mostert's)⁵⁶² justification doctrine. Accordingly, he illustrates the verification of salvation not as a *possibility*, but as a given reality. Hence, the option that salvation might also not be verified at all (or even unverifiable in principle) is excluded. Ebeling's reflection *starts from* the reality of the Gospel⁵⁶³, which makes the right understanding of the Law-Gospel differentiation possible and effective. It is precisely *from* the given reality of the Gospel, from salvation, that Ebeling can draw his conclusion about the effectiveness of the Law. For him, the sole constraint on human being's conscience, the only verified soteriological assurance for sinners, is the one reality which does *not* come to them as an additional command⁵⁶⁴. This reality *placates* the Law because it fulfils it, thereby overcoming the tensional relationship between givenness and command which is structurally posited with it. Since the Law has been fulfilled by and in the Gospel, the diastasis between its given content and the command reacting against the brokenness of existence has disappeared. Consequently, love may now rule freely⁵⁶⁵. In Ebeling's (and Mostert's) interpretation, the disappearance of the diastasis between givenness and command validates the claim that the

⁵⁵⁹ Such duplicity ultimately reflects the ambiguity of the Law.

⁵⁶⁰ The same theological insight is also active in Mostert's theology, as will be illustrated throughout the present chapter.

⁵⁶¹ In Ebeling's (and Mostert's) theologies, the verification of salvation means the identification of the way in which and the *locus* where the true reality of human being's life is brought to expression (See e.g. EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 [see note 529], p. 272).

⁵⁶² In general, I would say this is the core intent of the Reformation.

⁵⁶³ For clarification, see here, p. 80.

⁵⁶⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 272.

⁵⁶⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 274.

justified is free from the Law⁵⁶⁶. This means that the overall interconnection of the legal phenomena of life can no longer rule over the justified as a righteous person, even though it keeps concerning them as a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*). Free from the Law, the Christian is enabled to live in the reality of (verified) salvation, in the Gospel, which is clearly not a new, specific Christian law, but a universal human reality⁵⁶⁷.

Thirdly, Ebeling's (and Mostert's) theological understanding of the Law in its differentiation from the Gospel means that the former is understood as *God's Law*, as the encounter with God happening in the form of the Law⁵⁶⁸. This insight points indirectly to what the Gospel gives directly, namely unconditional givenness as one constitutive element of life⁵⁶⁹. Thus, for Ebeling, the Law is qualified by a reference to ultimacy, which is perceived by its addressees and reinforces their expectation of receiving salvation from the Law. Basically, since ultimacy (givenness) is recognized as present within the Law, the command ensues and the addressees hear it⁵⁷⁰. Here, the key passage is that the Law's command does *not* misdirect its addressees. Instead, it truly points to givenness as the good content of the Law, the one that faith communicates⁵⁷¹. Thus, for Ebeling (and Mostert), the theological understanding of the Law shows that the latter is needed in order to direct human being to their fundamental situation. Nevertheless, this is only possible given the reality of the Gospel, which at the same time precedes the Law (*ordo rei*) and follows it (*ordo cognitionis*)⁵⁷². The theological understanding of the Law excludes the possibility to regard the Gospel as a new legal reality (*nova lex*), but it enables a newly qualified interpretation of the Law⁵⁷³. By this new interpretation, the latter is categorically excluded as a soteriological instance. In my view, Ebeling's (and Mostert's) disqualification of the Law from salvation concretely functions as a *pars pro toto* within experience. The specific command addressed to the individual in a concrete situation is

⁵⁶⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 275. See also MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), e.g. pp. 311f. In my opinion, it is necessary to criticize Ebeling's (and Mostert's) claim that the Christian is free from the Law. As far as I can see, the claim expresses a fundamental truth of the Reformation in an overly generalized manner. Sure, justification is also freedom from the curse of the Law (Gal 3,13), in the sense maintained by Ebeling and Mostert (among others). Only the Gospel, not the Law, brings about salvation, because only the indicative mood of address effectively and performatively gives the reality of salvation. Instead, the imperative can only point to such reality, which is its content (what Ebeling calls *givenness* [*Gegebenheit*]). However, it might be useful to also point out that justification is liberation from the curse of the Law, namely from the problematic diastasis between givenness and command which, in Ebeling's view, inhabits the Law. In my opinion, his account has one problematic aspect: It uses "Law" to refer *both* to the reality encompassing givenness and command *and* to individualize the command. But the curse of the Law is a category which, in my view, cannot meaningfully be extended to include the givenness of life. Hence, it is necessary to avoid an ambiguous and overly general use of the category "Law", so that the Christian's freedom from it can be better characterized. This will be discussed further in 2.3.1.

⁵⁶⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 277.

⁵⁶⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 279.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 280.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² This was already mentioned in note 542.

⁵⁷³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 281.

excluded as a means to attain salvation, and this signifies the exclusion of *all* legal phenomena. Consequently, the only reality that is not soteriologically disqualified is the one which does not share in the ambiguity of the Law, namely the Gospel⁵⁷⁴. In other words, the disqualification of the Law is needed in order to make room for Jesus Christ as the justification of human being. He is the one who succeeds where the Law fails, and truly changes sinners into God's children. In this context, Jesus Christ means first and foremost the primacy of God over human being⁵⁷⁵.

For Ebeling, justification clarifies God's intention towards the Law, the way in which He uses it to interact with human being⁵⁷⁶. By reference to the Gospel, this interaction shows that the power of the Law is at the same time the core of its powerlessness. This justifies the soteriological disqualification of the Law *a posteriori*, because it clarifies that the latter remains absolutely valid even if it is not fulfilled (power of the Law). In spite of its persisting validity, however, the Law simply cannot bring about its own fulfilment (powerlessness of the Law)⁵⁷⁷. This powerlessness is manifested in that the Law remains dependent on whether or not its addressee obeys its command. Conversely, the Gospel only depends on God's grace, and therefore it has power over against the Law⁵⁷⁸. Further, in Ebeling's account, only the Gospel enables the addressee of God's twofold Word(s) to accept both the power and the powerlessness of the Law. This is because the Gospel simply gives the reality that it promises. For Ebeling, *without* the Gospel, the obstinate legalistic mishearing of God's address entails that its addressee resorts to different sources of pressure to reinforce the Law and negate its powerlessness (*præsumptio*), or conversely aims at domesticating its power by making its command bearable (*desperatio*)⁵⁷⁹. Instead, *with* the Gospel, the liberated, non-legalistic hearing of God's address brings its addressees to acknowledge that the Law is structurally unable to undo the sinful brokenness that sinners have brought into reality. From the point of view of the relationship of human being with God, this means that the Law is unable to forgive. Accordingly, by means of the Law, sinners are unable to compensate for their sins against God's holiness⁵⁸⁰. In anthropological terms, this means that the Law is unable to make human being's *heart*⁵⁸¹ pure⁵⁸².

The above emphasizes a crucial aspect of Ebeling's understanding of justification. Specifically, the Law does not mainly point to the goodness of its content. More importantly, it highlights the

⁵⁷⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 282.

⁵⁷⁵ This thought is central, for instance, in Mostert's Christology and ecclesiology and illustrates their connection with soteriology. See e.g. MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch* (see note 143).

⁵⁷⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 283.

⁵⁷⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 283.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 283f.

⁵⁸⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 284.

⁵⁸¹ Biblically, the center of human being's person.

⁵⁸² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 284.

wrongdoing which has been committed in violation of its goodness⁵⁸³. If it was the other way around, it would still be (at least partially) possible for the addressees of the Law to expect life from it as long as they also perform actions that are in line with its good content. Instead, by pointing first and foremost to the actions by which its addressees have broken the goodness of life, the Law reveals that its core function is not to give life based on obedience, but to deliver death following disobedience. This finally uncovers the seriousness of sin⁵⁸⁴. According to Ebeling (and Mostert), the fundamental qualification of sin (its *seriousness*) is unbelief, not the ensuing wrongdoing. As such, sin makes it impossible to fulfil the Law. This does not mean that wrongdoing is inevitable (in fact, it is not), but that the fulfilment of the Law is not the avoidance of wrongdoing but *faith*, namely the exact opposite of unbelief.

Therefore, for Ebeling, the Law is theologically relevant precisely as *unfulfilled*, because, from that point of observation, it can be understood together with sin⁵⁸⁵. Instead, the fulfilled Law is silent, its command has been muted as soon as the discrepancy between reality as it is and as it ought to be has been overcome. Thus, the fulfilment of the Law makes it difficult to understand its true theological import⁵⁸⁶ and obscures the reality of sin. Instead, in contact with the unfulfilled Law, sin becomes clearly visible, and that disqualifies the Law as a soteriological instance. For Ebeling (and Mostert), this passage illustrates precisely the functioning of justification, in that it clarifies that the addressees of God's address cannot simultaneously live for Him and be under the Law. Rather, they can only live for God in freedom from the Law, because in their justification Christ truly lives in them, and they in him⁵⁸⁷. Clearly, Ebeling's account of justification bases on an intensification of the *merry exchange* between Christ and sinners. Accordingly, the *usus theologicus legis* is maintained as the criterion. The latter remains always active in all the experiences of legalistic pressure made by the addressees of the Law. Specifically, the *usus theologicus* illustrates that human being's self-experience must break against the command of the Law in order for the Gospel to be rightly understood⁵⁸⁸.

Furthermore, the correct understanding of the *usus theologicus* also illustrates the *usus politicus*. Specifically, the two are related in such way that the former *delimits* the latter⁵⁸⁹. This means that the *theological* interpretation of the Law ensures that the domain of the world (*das Weltliche*) is assigned a well-limited and clear right of its own. From the point of view of justification doctrine, this occurs because, through faith, the justified is set free to serve others in the community through a

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 285.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 285f.

⁵⁸⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 286.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

righteousness that is *categorically different* from that of faith⁵⁹⁰. Thus, in Ebeling's understanding, the *usus politicus legis* describes righteousness secularly, as the *iustitia civilis* reflecting God's Law in the domain of the overall relationality amongst human beings. As such, this righteousness does not only apply to the political domain, but also to culture and ethics⁵⁹¹.

Ebeling claims that the proper distinction between *usus theologicus* and *usus politicus* is also derived from the *contact* between Law and Gospel. Since the latter is absolutely univocal, the former is also brought to clarity when coming in contact with it⁵⁹². Therefore, to fully understand the fundamental differentiation between Law and Gospel, it is necessary to focus on what God operates through the Law. The two realities exist in the following relationship⁵⁹³: The Gospel is the *forma*, the qualifying element, the key to the whole; the Law is the *materia*, it is qualified and specified by the Gospel⁵⁹⁴. Further, Ebeling elaborates on the difference between the two by pointing out that the Law is *dependent* on words to be articulated and to acquire reality. In other words, it becomes (insufficiently) concrete through the interpretations that it is given in the history of humankind. However, in itself, it remains a *general*, mediated phenomenon⁵⁹⁵. Conversely, the Gospel is a *particular*, concrete phenomenon, the Person of Jesus Christ. It is not a mediated, but an immediate reality, it does not *depend* on historical interpretations. Instead, it calls for its own *integral repetition*, which happens through linguistically performative (*sprachschöpferische*) events⁵⁹⁶. The concretion of these events is the sinner's justification, which is communicated when the Gospel is kept in contact with the Law. Thus, Ebeling points out that, in order to understand the Law, one is required to consider life's reality in its entirety. Instead, to understand the Gospel, one only needs to look at the event of Jesus Christ, to *then* apprehend the whole of reality starting from him⁵⁹⁷.

Clearly, according to Ebeling (and Mostert), Law and Gospel are relational concepts (*Relationsbegriffe*), and their textual references in Scripture are also interrelated⁵⁹⁸. In particular, their

⁵⁹⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 287.

⁵⁹¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 288. As I am going to show more in detail in Part 3, this enlargement of the *usus politicus* to include aspects of the *usus didactus* is crucial to Mostert's interpretation of the relationship between justification and ethics.

⁵⁹² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 289.

⁵⁹³ Here, the terms *forma* and *materia* are used by Ebeling according to the Aristotelian understanding. Elsewhere in the present work, I use "formal" and "material", in the context of the Law-Gospel differentiation, in a sharply different sense. In those instances, what is meant is the *formal* qualification of Law and Gospel in the sense of their distinct moods of address (imperative or indicative), as against their materiality (their content, the goodness of reality to which the Law points or the justifying righteousness in Jesus Christ that the Gospel communicates effectively).

⁵⁹⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 290.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 291.

⁵⁹⁸ For this reason, it is entirely wrong and utterly simplistic to associate the Law with the Old Testament and the Gospel with the New. At the same time, for Ebeling, there is indeed a polarity between the Old and the New Testament. Accordingly, the two parts of the canon stand in a mutually complex relationship, and are *not* qualified in the same way (see EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3, [see note 529], p. 258). For a sharper radicalization of the theological polarity between the Old and the New Testament, see e.g. KALUSCHE, M., "Das Gesetz als Thema

textual interrelation mirrors the fact that, even though the Law precedes the Gospel (which is its *end*), it is nevertheless always undelain (*zugrunde gelegt*) by a gift, as is shown by the Old Testament⁵⁹⁹. This means that, in the reality of life, the precedence of the promise over the command is *hidden*. In justification, though, the correct order is Law-Gospel. Specifically, the first prepares human being for the second, by adding the proper *concretion* to the already present reality of sin. This makes the sinner aware of their ultimate dependence on grace alone⁶⁰⁰. Through the action of the Law, the sinner is slayed by God, so that He can change them into whom they are called to be as His beloved creatures. The Law is fulfilled by the Gospel, which also fulfils the promise that is *before* the Law. However, Ebeling specifies that, whereas the Gospel puts an end to the Law by fulfilling it, it does not deprive God's promise of its futurity. Rather, the present fulfilment of the promise in the Gospel is a *confirmation* of this futurity, which is therefore regarded as a constitutive element of salvation. Thus, God's promise is fulfilled by faith, yet it is *not* immediately present⁶⁰¹.

Ebeling emphasizes that the Gospel fulfils the promise *by faith*, since only the latter can correspond to the formality of the former. The believer is never to actualize the Gospel, which however has *consequences* (*Folgeerscheinungen*) in their life. Materially, the Gospel consists in the Law having been fulfilled on Jesus Christ's cross (death-resurrection), so that its accusing power is compelled to cease⁶⁰². However, this does not mean that the differentiation is done away with once and for all. Rather, it keeps occurring in the different life situations and accessing human being's *conscience* by the action of the Holy Spirit⁶⁰³ and through the repetition of Christian preaching⁶⁰⁴. This means that the justification of the sinner is to be understood (hermeneutically) as a *becoming* righteous, and not (in terms of a history of salvation) as *being* righteous. Specifically, it is *constitutive* of justification that the Christian is simultaneously in the *time* of the Law and in that of the Gospel, so that the two realities coexist in a critical contact with each other (*kritischer Beieinander*)⁶⁰⁵. This contact fully activates Law and Gospel, thus enabling the unfolding of justification. For Ebeling (and Mostert), conscience is the *locus iustificationis*, the existential reality where the sinner's "Yes" to the slaying judgment of the Law is met with God's "No". For the sake of human being's justification, God's

biblischer Theologie? Anmerkungen zu einem Entwurf Peter Stuhlmachers", Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche 77/3-4 (1986), pp. 194-205.

⁵⁹⁹ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 292.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. This is, in my judgment, the sharpest difference between Ebeling's and Mostert's accounts of justification. This difference impacts their understandings of the relationship between justification and ethics. As was already mentioned and will also be discussed further on, Mostert rejects any futurity of salvation. For him, the latter is present by definition, or it is not the true salvation given in Christ. God's promise is sheer *Zuspruch*, the presently and fully given assurance of salvation, brought to the sinner in Christ by the grace of the justifying God. Conversely, Ebeling strives to articulate together God's promise as present assurance (*Zuspruch*) and as future, eschatological consummation (*Verheißung*).

⁶⁰² EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 293.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 294.

⁶⁰⁵ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 295.

twofold Word counters the accusation of the Law. Thus, His “No” to the definitive destruction of sinners justifies human being, making them sovereign over the *good content* of the Law⁶⁰⁶. Therefore, justification liberates human being from heteronomy. Now, they are no longer called to heed a command, but to *creatively understand* situations. This creative understanding produces new behaviors, it “builds new Decalogues”⁶⁰⁷ and is continuously enabled by the forgiveness of sin. With that, the *negative* moment of justification, for Ebeling, is absolutely central and has clear priority over the positive one. Justification is first and foremost liberation from guilt and fear. As such, it needs to be described as one’s *ongoing process* of being ripped away from the domination of sin towards the liberating rule of God⁶⁰⁸. The negative moment is defining, the positive one is limited and simply describes the consequences of the ongoing change in domination. Ebeling (and Mostert) clarify that these consequences *of the Gospel* are *not* themselves Gospel. Correspondingly, they do not entail that human being is now enabled to better obey the Law. If that were the case, human being would be once again left alone and powerless before the ambiguity of the Law⁶⁰⁹. Against similar readings, which would in the end support a view of faith as a motivational power finding its actual truth in love (*fides caritate formata*), Ebeling is very clear: The only *usus evangelii* is faith, without good deeds. This intensive focus on *sola fide* indicates that the *ontology of justification* structurally corresponds to the ontology of human being: both are *relational*⁶¹⁰. This means that both the person and their justification are defined within the relationship with God. Formally, this means that human being exists before a forum. In this sense, they are a *coram*-reality, as prayer eminently shows⁶¹¹. Materially, human being is defined in and by Jesus Christ, who is the event of their justification apprehended *sola fide*. Thus, according to Ebeling, the person is a christological reality created by faith (*fides facit personam*)⁶¹².

The above entails that the Gospel needs to be understood intensively and exclusively, while the Law extensively and inclusively⁶¹³. In other words, the first is Jesus Christ, the one and only way in which human being is justified. Instead, the second encompasses all those ways in which human being is held captive by sin⁶¹⁴. Further, justification unravels as the result of the contrastive contact between Law and Gospel. In particular, the latter forces the former to obstruct all (false) salvation alternatives

⁶⁰⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 294.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ EBELING, G., “*Usus politicus legis – usus politicus evangelii*”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19/3 (1982), pp. 323-348, here p. 330.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ For a similar ontological understanding of justification, close to both Ebeling and Mostert’s theologies, see BAYER, O., “The Doctrine of Justification and Ontology”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 1/1 (2001), pp. 44-53.

⁶¹¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3, (see note 529), p. 198.

⁶¹² EBELING, G., “Über die Reformation hinaus?” (see note 31), pp. 67f.

⁶¹³ EBELING, G., “*Usus politicus legis – usus politicus evangelii*” (see note 608), p. 331.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

for human being, except for the (true) one in Jesus Christ, who alone brings peace to human being's conscience (*pax conscientiae*)⁶¹⁵. What is more, the categorical exclusion of the Law from soteriology clearly implies that the realization of true reality occurs entirely outside of the political and ethical domains: There can be no *usus politicus evangelii*⁶¹⁶, because there can be no salvation through faith and good deeds. For Ebeling (and Mostert), human being is only righteous *extra se*, in Jesus Christ. Thus, justification can only be properly explained with constant reference to Christ by means of the Law-Gospel hermeneutical contrast. This implies not emphasizing human being and their sudden conversion or their growth in righteousness. At any rate, Ebeling does acknowledge that the perfective dimension belongs to the adequate description of justification. This is signaled by baptism, the unsurpassable and unrepeatable occurrence in which justifying faith communicates the one-time christological event to the Christian⁶¹⁷. Nevertheless, this perfective dimension is utterly misunderstood if coordinated with a view of justification as the qualitative change in the justified. A similar interpretation is rejected by Ebeling (and Mostert) as an attempt to justify justification, thus negating *sola fide*⁶¹⁸.

Unlike Mostert, Ebeling claims that the category of sanctification may be used to deepen justification into eschatology⁶¹⁹, provided that the entire conceptualization remains governed by *sola fide*⁶²⁰. With that, Ebeling moves away from the usual Protestant understanding, which tends to regard sanctification as a consequence of justification, as the positive side which necessarily complements the negative liberation from sin. Incidentally, this usual view at times risks making sanctification criteriological *instead of* justification⁶²¹. According to Ebeling, progress in Christian life must be seen differently. Specifically, it is to be understood *baptismally*, as the practicing (*Einübung*) of justifying faith⁶²².

⁶¹⁵ EBELING, G., "Usus politicus legis – usus politicus evangelii" (see note 608), pp. 331f.

⁶¹⁶ EBELING, G., "Usus politicus legis – usus politicus evangelii" (see note 608), p. 332. Specifically, Ebeling is interested in rejecting as legalistic all theological interpretations which tend to regard faith as the abstract theory providing human being with the energy to collaborate soteriologically with God. For him, these views ultimately locate the concreteness of faith in the good deeds following from it, not in the Person of Jesus Christ whom faith makes present to the believer. Traces of a similar understanding can be found, for instance, in: EKD, Rechtfertigung und Freiheit. 500 Jahre Reformation 2017: ein Grundlagentext des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), Gütersloh 2014. For Ebeling's detailed account of the three *usus legis*, see also: EBELING, G. "Zur Lehre vom triplex usus legis in der reformatorischen Theologie", Wort und Glaube I (1950), pp. 50-68; s.a., "Erwägungen zur Lehre vom Gesetz", Wort und Glaube I (1958), pp. 255-293.

⁶¹⁷ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 240.

⁶¹⁸ "Hier wäre also die Rechtfertigung infolge der Gnadenausstattung in der qualitativen Veränderung des Menschen selbst begründet" (EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 [see note 529], p. 241).

⁶¹⁹ Here, the difference between Ebeling's and Mostert's doctrines of justification emerges once again (see also note 601).

⁶²⁰ EBELING, G., Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 242.

⁶²¹ Ibid. For instance, if one follows Ebeling, this would be what characterizes both Barth's and Moltmann's theologies, albeit in a very different manner.

⁶²² Ibid.

In conclusion, for Ebeling, justification doctrine is the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*, to be articulated theologically in its canonical (*sola Scriptura*) and existential (*sola experientia*) verification. Justification is the *becoming righteous* of the individual sinner whenever God's Word is apprehended in the creative power of faith, so that the sinner *is counted as* righteous. By faith alone, the center of their personhood is transposed into Christ, who in turn takes up the condemnation of the Law pronounced against them. With that, the accusing "No" of the Law is ridiculed by the justifying "Yes" of the Gospel. The two realities are to be hermeneutically kept in fruitful and contrastive contact. Their interaction describes justification formally, while its material description is identical with the Person of Jesus Christ.

2.1.2. The Justified Sinner in Jesus Christ: W. Mostert

As was already illustrated in Part 1, Mostert claims that religion and reason share the same fundamental soteriological structure. They both are embarked on the quest for salvation, interpreted as the ideal reality and truth of human being⁶²³. Philosophical theology⁶²⁴ clarifies that the quest for salvation is the quest *for (actual)*⁶²⁵ *being*. As such, it concerns both faith and thinking⁶²⁶. Even though the multiple answers⁶²⁷ to the soteriological question are often in fundamental and chaotic disagreement with one another, Mostert claims that their unity can be affirmed *negatively*, from the point of observation of the reality that they contrast. This reality is the evil-sin coupling, which is the object of a universally shared experience (*Erfahrung*)⁶²⁸. Mostert thinks that all soteriological attempts (including those that utterly deny salvation) exist in a structural unity. Specifically, they are forms of expression of one and the same reality, the Law. In spite of their structural unity, they conflict with each other. This conflict clearly prevents the recognition of salvation, as it makes it extremely difficult to discern amongst the chaotic options available the one(s) which may be different from the others and truly deliver the salvation that they promise. For Mostert, in order for a specific soteriological answer to be *categorically* different from the others, it must express a reality which cannot be described as Law. The uncovering of the different soteriological answer is enabled by the

⁶²³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 45.

⁶²⁴ See here, p. 22.

⁶²⁵ Notwithstanding his sharp critique of traditional metaphysics in the name of soteriology, it may be noted that, precisely when it comes to the very definition of salvation (in philosophical-theological terms), Mostert is cautious not to question the primacy of act over potency (see note 109 for more on the matter).

⁶²⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 46.

⁶²⁷ The chaotic plurality of the soteriological answers is due to them being phenomena of the Law. Here, Mostert is clearly following Ebeling's account of the plurality and ambiguity of the Law as against the univocity and clarity of the Gospel (see here, pp. 83f.).

⁶²⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 47.

question concerning the *active subject* (*Subjekt*) of the salvation event (*Heilsgeschehen*)⁶²⁹. This question, for Mostert, is answered precisely by justification doctrine, it has to do with its very ontology. According to him, the true theological answer to the question points to God as the sole active subject of salvation, which is understood as the justification of the sinner in Jesus Christ alone (*solus Christus*)⁶³⁰. Justification, therefore, describes the correct incorporation (*Hineinnahme*) of human being into the salvation event, a *process* in which the sinner is a *mere receiver* of the salvific reality communicated to them by the Gospel. With that, Mostert claims that the question concerning the identity of the soteriological agent is the hermeneutical instrument which reveals the structural difference between the (true) Christian soteriological answer on the one hand and its deformed versions (including their non-Christian alternatives) on the other. This structural difference reflects the one between Law and Gospel, understood in the wake of Ebeling. Specifically, Mostert claims that God's Word is heard as a Law carrying a judgement. This judgment is properly understood only if one asks *why* the Law has been issued in the first place. The answer is located in hamartiology: because human being is a sinner. As God's Word, the Law is good and aims at reconnecting sinners with the goodness of creation. However, they are unable to properly understand the Law, thus being bound to misuse it. Therefore, for Mostert, the sinner is unable to fulfil the Law. Instead, God fulfils it in Jesus Christ, who is its end. Thus, the specificity of Christian soteriology is precisely that Jesus Christ points to the *theological* (not ethical) interpretation of the Law. This is enabled by the Gospel, in which God's righteousness is communicated to the sinner in the form of a promising word (*zugesprochen*). Thus, the Law-Gospel coupling is to be understood from the categorical difference between the two realities: while the Law *commands* righteousness, the Gospel *is* righteousness. Expressed in philosophical (Aristotelian) terms, this means that the righteousness of the Law is potential, while the one of the Gospel is actual. As a consequence, following Ebeling, Mostert rejects the third use (*tertius usus*) of the Law.

To be clear, for him, the Law is heard in its imperative by *all* forms of soteriology, including the true Christian one. However, he insists that, thanks to the knowledge of the Gospel, *only the Christian answer* hears the Law correctly. Unlike the alternatives, Christian soteriology does not understand the Law as an appeal to actualize God's Kingdom metaphysically, ethically or politically, forcing the coming of salvation. Therefore, for Mostert, the distinctive element of the (true) Christian justification doctrine is that salvation is (pneumatically)⁶³¹ effected by God alone, without the collaboration of human being⁶³². The Christian is a work of the Holy Spirit in every single aspect of their life. This

⁶²⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 48.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ With Ebeling, Mostert understands justification as the work of the Holy Spirit on sinners (see here, p. 85).

⁶³² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 49.

explicit theological claim finds its implicit *pendant* in Mostert's thesis that human being exists in a way that requires a salvation event⁶³³. This event (salvation) is characterized as the process (*Übergang*) whereby *true* human being is actualized out of *real* human being⁶³⁴.

As I explained above, Mostert understands the difference between theology and secular soteriology from the identity of the author of salvation (*Heilsurheber*): God or human being. However, the difference also concerns the reality which opposes salvation (*was dem Heil entgegensteht*). For theology, the answer is sin, the perversion of the relationship with God caused by human being and impossible to abolish retroactively. Conversely, for secular thinking, that which opposes salvation is evil, the distortion of human being's relationship to their own true self⁶³⁵. For Mostert, the secular understanding is a manifestation of the fact that human being exists *under the Law*. Further, this legal existence is co-positd with life itself⁶³⁶. Being under the Law is constitutively ambiguous, because the legal instance points to the overarching ordered structure of reality but, precisely by doing so, also reveals the existence of disorder. This ambiguity manifests itself in the fundamental disturbance of human being's relationships⁶³⁷. According to Mostert, Paul's crucial insight on justification is that this disturbance *depends on* and *expands* the distortion of their relationship with God⁶³⁸. Hence, the structural flaw of all forms of soteriology (except for justification doctrine) is that they understand human being's relationship with God through the direct mediation of the Law. This, for Mostert, is fundamentally wrong and makes the access to salvation impossible. The only way to attain salvation is through the sole reality which presents the relationship between human being and God as *not directly* mediated by the Law, but by the interaction between its command pointing to salvation and the latter's givenness (the Gospel). This reality is faith (*sola fide*). Accordingly, only faith rectifies human being's relationship with themselves, God, others and the world⁶³⁹.

In Mostert's theology, justification is the experience (*Erfahrung*) of the Christ event. This experience is enabled by the preaching of the *kerygma* witnessed to in Scripture. Through the faithful hearing of the preached word, one's existence is incorporated (*eingebracht*) into Christ⁶⁴⁰. In consonance with Ebeling⁶⁴¹, Mostert adds *sola experientia* to *sola Scriptura*. In particular, the former serves as a hermeneutical instrument for delimiting experience as the existential *locus* where the

⁶³³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 51.

⁶³⁴ In Mostert's theology, justification doctrine describes the passage from real reality to true reality. The first is reality as it is, determined by sin, whereas the second is reality as it ought to be, qualified by the righteous relationship between human being and God (see MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre [see note 105]).

⁶³⁵ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 69f.

⁶³⁶ As was already pointed out, this is also Ebeling's position (see e.g. here, pp. 81f.).

⁶³⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 74.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 77.

⁶⁴¹ See here, p. 82.

kerygma witnessed to by the latter becomes verified. When this occurs, the overall relationship between human being, God and the world becomes true. According to Mostert, this is precisely Paul's experience with the *kerygma* that he received⁶⁴², and the key to his understanding of justification⁶⁴³. Correspondingly, in justification, the interpreter is deeply intertwined (*verwoben*) with the interpreted subject matter (*Sache*). More exactly, the interpretation process reveals this *Sache* as the most fundamental and profound concern of human being⁶⁴⁴. This means that the receptive interpreters of Scripture are bound to the *Sache*-witnessing text in a way that *constitutively includes* their own relatedness to this same *Sache*⁶⁴⁵. These interpreters hear the preached *kerygma* so that, through their hearing, the *event* of their justification may occur every time anew. As for the *doctrine* of justification (which is to be carefully distinguished from its event⁶⁴⁶), Mostert defines it as the intensive theological elaboration providing the *language* within which the soteriological event comes forth in the fullest and most powerful manner.

In his theology, this doctrine finds its implicit *pendant* in a theological-philosophical anthropology centered around the category of sin as the ontic determination of human being. Following Ebeling, Mostert rejects an immediately ethical understanding of sin and rather defines it in *transmoral* categories. Sin is the *lack of orientation* or the *wrong positioning* of human being's existence⁶⁴⁷. Thus, it is conceptualized in relational-anthropological terms. Within the broken relationship between God and human being, sin positions the latter in such a distorted manner that the corresponding Word addressed to them by the former becomes primarily one of wrath and judgment, rather than grace and promise⁶⁴⁸. As an *ontological-relational* category, sin consists precisely in the distortion of human being's relationship with God. Instead, (moral) wrongdoing encompasses the *consequences* of sin, the ensuing perversions affecting human being's existence. This is essentially an *anthropological* question because, for Mostert, human being is always and structurally constituted through their relationship with God⁶⁴⁹. Since they are ontically determined by sin in all the manifestations of their life, their freedom can only operate together with sin, never against it. Accordingly, human being's

⁶⁴² 1 Cor 1,3-8.

⁶⁴³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 75f.

⁶⁴⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 78.

⁶⁴⁵ For a robust and detailed account of the hermeneutical relationship between Scripture and experience in fundamental agreement with Mostert's theology, see KÖRTNER, U.H.J., Der inspirierter Leser. Zentrale Aspekte biblischer Hermeneutik, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1994. My use of the adjective *receptive* (readers) in this context is the one employed by Körtner in the book. Receptive readers are those whose interpretation of the Scripture happens pneumatically *within* the plurality of interpretations which are in accordance with the fundamental intention of the text.

⁶⁴⁶ Mostert claims that the event of justification is *not necessarily* bound to the language of justification doctrine. As a matter of fact, his study of the Christology of the Early Church shows that the event of salvation in Christ has been articulated *outside of* justification doctrine (for example within incarnation theology) and yet in implicit fundamental agreement with its concern (see MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch [see note 143]).

⁶⁴⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 80.

⁶⁴⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 81.

⁶⁴⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 82.

use of the Law cannot deliver them from sin. Instead, their liberation from sin necessarily requires that they be disentangled (*abgelöst*) from the Law⁶⁵⁰. Therefore, justification doctrine implies an anthropology which differs *categorically* from all accounts that understand human being from their obedience to the Law. Even their strive to obey, in Mostert's categories, belongs to the *dynamis* of sin⁶⁵¹. As long as they remain ignorant of the reality of justification, their existence can only be legalistic and they can only obstinately reject the *identification* between themselves and sin. This rejection prevents the right understanding of the Law-Gospel differentiation, thus preventing the language of the Gospel from truly and effectively communicating salvation to sinners. For Mostert, the understandings of human being based on Law need to be replaced by a theological anthropology⁶⁵², the only account which enables the right unfolding of justification doctrine. Specifically, theological anthropology allows for the distinction between the ontic reality of human being, which is identical to sin, and their ontology, which is *not* sin. In Mostert's categories, the passage from the ontic dimension to the ontological one defines salvation. The core of his theological anthropology is that this passage cannot occur through a reinforcement of human being's will, whereby they would become sovereign over their own action against sin⁶⁵³. That simply *cannot* be the case, because the will belongs to the *ontic* reality of human being. Therefore, it *is* sin, which does not fight itself⁶⁵⁴. Accordingly, for Mostert, salvation is the passage (*Übergang*) from the ontic, sin-determined *real* reality to the ontological, Christ-determined *true* reality⁶⁵⁵. This passage can only be conceptualized implicitly as a reality *outside of* the empirical-ontical dimension within which *the whole* of human being exists under the Law. In explicitly theological terms, this means that human being may receive salvation only *extra se*, and that necessarily means *without the Law*⁶⁵⁶.

For Mostert, not only sin but also the Law must be interpreted first and foremost ontologically, not ethically⁶⁵⁷. In particular, the latter is an essential instrument to describe the *ontology* of human being; therefore, it is also involved in the revelation of God's will⁶⁵⁸. As an ontological reality, the Law is properly interpreted according to its indicative mood of address. The latter shows that the Law is good and holy, that it represents God's true will and reveals what human being and sin are. However, its *address* is heard by sinful, ontic human being in the imperative, and that illustrates its ambiguity⁶⁵⁹. In its imperative mood, the Law calls human being to act against sin. However, the only possible

⁶⁵⁰ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 83.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 85.

⁶⁵³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 87.

⁶⁵⁴ Matt 12, 22-30.

⁶⁵⁵ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 47.

⁶⁵⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 87.

⁶⁵⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 88.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 89.

consequence of this appeal is the amplification of sin. To fully understand the ambiguity of the Law, Mostert engages with Luther's in-depth reading of Paul's theology⁶⁶⁰. The Law is ambiguous in its imperative because it points *both ways*: to the ontological *and* to the ontic dimension, to the divine *and* to the sinful being of its addressees. In Mostert's interpretation, Luther's core insight is that the Law takes on the imperative mood for sinners precisely *because* of their intention to actively contrast sin and be the creators of their own salvation⁶⁶¹. With that, the addressees of the Law refuse to receive the goodness of creation out of grace. Instead, they intend to participate actively in its restitution. Ultimately, Mostert regards the sinner as a *self-soteriologist*. In other words, their soteriological activism is the most intense and concrete ontic manifestation of sin⁶⁶². In order to overcome the ambiguity of the Law, a qualitatively different, non-legal reality must closely interact with it. This interaction points to a dimension of being which cannot be attained by human being's action. This non-legal reality is the Gospel, which reveals the gracious depth of God's will. The Gospel enables human being to have peace with God. This peace qualifies the relationship between sinners and the gracious God in the only way which truly corresponds to Him⁶⁶³. The Law refers to the same content as the Gospel, albeit ambiguously. However, this reference is *indirect*, therefore it remains obscure to sinners because they constitutively misuse the Law by focusing on its imperative⁶⁶⁴. The one reality which refers to the good content of Law *and* Gospel directly and clearly is Jesus Christ. He is the existential *locus* in whom it becomes apparent to sinners that the Law must be interpreted not from the imperative, but from the indicative which is hiddenly present in it. This interpretation disentangles the Law from all performance-oriented calls to fulfilment⁶⁶⁵. Thus, for Mostert, the Gospel of Jesus Christ unambiguously shows that sin consists in human being's guilty inability to understand their life as a gracious gift. Accordingly, salvation can only mean that human being is transposed into a different existential *locus*, because, if they remain in themselves, they are in sin⁶⁶⁶. This existential transposition does not occur *in spite of* the Law being unfulfilled by sinners, but because it has been truly fulfilled by Jesus Christ⁶⁶⁷.

The above shows that Mostert understands salvation as a question of *being*, *not of action*. The hamartiological consequence of this understanding is that God's answer to sin (as the obstacle to

⁶⁶⁰ See MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 88ff.

⁶⁶¹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 90.

⁶⁶² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 91.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ For Mostert's exegesis of Paul in support of his understanding of the Law-Gospel coupling, see MOSTERT, W., "Jesus Christus und das Gesetz" (see note 139).

⁶⁶⁵ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 92.

⁶⁶⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 94.

⁶⁶⁷ It is necessary to point out that, for Mostert, Christ is not a historical figure who has effected reconciliation once and for all. Rather, he is present at all times in the *kerygma* as the one who *keeps* communicating salvation (MOSTERT, W., "Er ist unser Friede", in: s.a., BAUER, A., KOLLER, P., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. [eds.], Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie. Theologische Brocken [see note 3], pp. 34-40, here p. 38.).

salvation) does not entail the destruction of sinful acts, but of human being as a sinner⁶⁶⁸. Anthropologically, the corresponding insight is that human being is not verified in their doing, but in their *receiving*⁶⁶⁹. This categorically excludes that human being may be verified in their obedience to the Law, because their relationship with it is fundamentally ambiguous. Further, Mostert completes this thought by arguing that the salvific power of Jesus Christ (who is *without sin*) depends precisely on his *exceptional relationship* to the Law. He fulfils it in his death in the place of sinners. Now, Christ's fulfilment of the Law *in his death* shows unambiguously that only he fulfils it genuinely, throughout his obedient life and all the way to his death, which was inflicted to him precisely in the name of the Law⁶⁷⁰. According to Mostert, Jesus' faithful obedience reveals that human being's life under the Law results in death and that he who fulfils the Law as Law must die. The one who has truly obeyed the Law throughout his life has taken up his own death as his conscious act of full obedience. In the perfect obedience of the one without sin, it has been revealed that grace has truly come into the world and visited sinners⁶⁷¹. Thus, Mostert claims that, in Jesus Christ's death, the imperative has been finally put to silence. Specifically, on the cross, the Law has ultimately shown its categorical inability to save, since it has executed the only one without sin. This shows the primacy of the *negative* side of the salvation event in Jesus Christ. Specifically, he saves in that he liberates human beings from sin, death and the enslaving power of the Law. Instead, so Mostert continues, an equally central role may not be attributed to the positive side. This is because Jesus Christ is not to be regarded as a political Messiah or a new Lawgiver in the manner of Moses⁶⁷². Ultimately, Mostert's understanding of the Law-Gospel differentiation follows Ebeling's hermeneutical analysis and develops a soteriologically-oriented Christology, which needs to be interpreted as a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*)⁶⁷³. In Jesus Christ, *a new order of being* appears and takes the form of the existence of faith. In it, it becomes clear that Christ is the alternative to and the disqualification of the Law, not its reinforcement or *telos*⁶⁷⁴. According to Mostert, only in Jesus Christ are sinners truly *justified*, declared free from the urge to actualize their true being through the fulfilment of the Law. The interrelation of soteriology and Christology in Mostert's account brings him to explicitly characterize his understanding of justification in christological terms: Jesus Christ *is himself*

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. In this case, I have argued in favor of interpreting Mostert's justification doctrine as the soteriological articulation of *creatio ex nihilo* (see here, p. 64). This has to be understood in relational terms, and, in my opinion, is not contradicted by the reality of the *simul iustus et peccator*. Only a metaphysical (non-relational) understanding of these categories would make it impossible to read Mostert's justification doctrine through the lenses of *creatio ex nihilo*, because it would be pointed out that the justified sinner keeps being the same person after their justification.

⁶⁶⁹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 95.

⁶⁷⁰ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 95f.

⁶⁷¹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 97.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 98.

⁶⁷⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 99.

justification. In him, righteousness (the right relationship between human being and God) does not exist abstractly, but *personally*, in the form of a given reality which is present prior to all doing and thinking and can only be attained by faith⁶⁷⁵. In faith, the *pro nobis* determination of Jesus Christ is apprehended by believers. That which determines his being-for-them becomes their being-for-him⁶⁷⁶.

Mostert's justification doctrine is an intensive and creative elaboration of Luther's fundamental categories⁶⁷⁷. Thus, he maintains that the object of theology is the guilty and lost⁶⁷⁸ sinner and the justifying and saving God, both considered *together* from the point of observation of their relationship. The reality of this relationship is the *event* of justification described by the corresponding doctrine⁶⁷⁹. For Mostert, in justification, the wrong orientation of human being is *interrupted*⁶⁸⁰ by God. His gracious address is directed to human being in such a way that the latter stops looking inwardly and confiding in themselves. The direction of their focus is truly changed by God in the event of justification. Without this change, their misdirected attention would turn God's gracious gaze into a punishing, terrible one, thus preventing the unraveling of the twofold work of His Word(s)⁶⁸¹. Put otherwise, human being's sinful persistence in looking at themselves rather than towards God falsifies their experience of Him. In particular, it prevents the hermeneutically fruitful and mutually oriented Law-Gospel interaction from occurring. Without this occurrence, righteousness cannot be delivered to the sinner. According to Mostert, the experience of the wrathful God is thus *false*⁶⁸², it is

⁶⁷⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Er ist unser Friede" (see note 667), pp. 38f.

⁶⁷⁶ MOSTERT, W., "Er ist unser Friede" (see note 667), p. 40.

⁶⁷⁷ Concerning Luther's justification doctrine, incredible amounts of literature have been written. For a general and cursory outlook, I will mention some relevant works here. A positive assessment of the value of his doctrine can be found for instance in SCHWARZ, R., "Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre als Eckstein der christlichen Theologie und Kirche", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, suppl. 10: "Zur Rechtfertigungslehre" (1998), pp. 14–46. For a theological-historical account of the difference between the Scholastic and Luther on justification, see OBERMAN, H. A., "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei'. Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification", *The Harvard Theological Review* 59/1 (1966), pp. 1–26. Instead, for an account which considers Luther's use of Pauline categories as arbitrary, see FRANK, G.L.C., "The doctrine of justification by faith in the early Catholic tradition", *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 3/1 (1992), pp. 80–93.

⁶⁷⁸ It is quite easy to reproach Mostert's justification doctrine of anthropological pessimism. After all, this is notably a charge that has been pressed against Reformation theology since its beginnings in the 16th century. However, in my view, this charge is rather simplistic, as it does not fully understand that God remains the sovereign of the *whole* unraveling of Law and Gospel, judgment and grace. For Reformation theology, sin is only truly pronounced as *sin*, it is only uncovered in its overwhelming power *in and by the Gospel*, where it has *already* been forgiven, defeated, graciously covered. When sin is truly revealed, when it is made known not just as wrongdoing, but as full-fledged *sin*, it is proclaimed *forgiven* and identified as the disqualified and yet somehow persisting determination of human being coming from their past and radically excluded from their future newness of life.

⁶⁷⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), pp. 239f.

⁶⁸⁰ On the theological significance of the concept of *interruption* in justification doctrine, see also JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 67f.

⁶⁸¹ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), pp. 244f.

⁶⁸² MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 245: "Wenn er [der Sünder] so den Zorn Gottes erfährt, dann ist diese Erfahrung die schrecklichste Beleidigung Gottes, denn Gott ist Liebe. Als zorniger Gott wird zwar Gott erfahren, aber er wird falsch erfahren, und dies nur darum, weil der Mensch den Blick auf sich selbst dem Blick auf Gott vorzieht". This specific element of Mostert's justification doctrine is going to be criticized in 2.3.2. Specifically, I will try to show why, in my opinion, his claim that God's wrath delivers a *false* experience of Him is problematic. In my critique, I will compare Mostert's understanding with an alternative view of God's wrath as the *true* experience of His *indirect* righteousness, the one that He has and demands by way of the Law. The experience of His wrath, following this alternative

the most powerful effect of sin. In this experience, the God who wants the justification of human being is presented as a liar. Correspondingly, the sinner keeps directing their soteriological efforts towards themselves, in what Mostert considers practical atheism⁶⁸³. Conversely, the true experience of God occurs only when His Word is heard and received as Gospel. The latter is the good news effecting the sinner's righteousness and their right positioning before God⁶⁸⁴. This happens outside of sinners, in Jesus Christ (*extra nos*), who is himself God's righteousness.

The full scope of Mostert's theology becomes truly visible when he develops the explicit link between the soteriological problem of human being (their quest for salvation) and the corresponding solution provided in justification doctrine. Therefore, his theology can be truly understood in its depth only when it is explored both as philosophical *and* theological theology⁶⁸⁵. Mostert's discourse investigates the truth about human being *and* about God from the point of view of their *relationship*. Accordingly, for him, justification can be described as the account of the true change needed for the right modification of the world to occur⁶⁸⁶. Specifically, his justification doctrine is a theory of the world's modification centered around the question of the identity of its author. In Mostert's view, what makes (the Reformation's) justification doctrine true and different from the alternative soteriological options is that, in the former, human being is regarded exclusively as the *object* of change, not as its subject⁶⁸⁷. Instead, in all the alternatives, they are (wholly or partially) its *subject*, the one who modifies the world. In Mostert's anthropology, the disqualification of human being as the subject of change is not self-contained. Rather, it extends into their liberation from the soteriological imperative and prevents them from trying to actualize their self-realization in the world. Correspondingly, understanding human being as the object of change liberates the world from being reduced to the material of their activistic manipulation and restitutes it as the reality *given* to them in their relationship with God⁶⁸⁸. In this relationship, the proper distance and clear distinction between God and human being are established. Correspondingly, Mostert argues that viewing human being as a subject of the soteriological change leads to the *internalization* of God, thereby annexing Him (along with the world and history) to the sphere of their potential action. This, for Mostert, occurs in metaphysics⁶⁸⁹. In particular, the world becomes the matter for a *justification syndrome* abstracted

understanding, is to be interpreted soteriologically and remains directed to the experience of His *direct* righteousness, the one that He communicates out of grace alone through the proclamation of the Gospel.

⁶⁸³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 246.

⁶⁸⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 247.

⁶⁸⁵ Alternative semantics to describe Mostert's philosophical and theological theology are implicit and explicit theology. These are usually employed by Ebeling. Both semantic couplings mean the same concepts, so I will use them interchangeably in the present work.

⁶⁸⁶ MOSTERT, W., Sinn oder Gewißheit? (see note 142), pp. 88f.

⁶⁸⁷ MOSTERT, W., Sinn oder Gewißheit? (see note 142), p. 89.

⁶⁸⁸ MOSTERT, W., Sinn oder Gewißheit? (see note 142), p. 90.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid. Here, Mostert understands metaphysics as the colossal attempt at finding true answers about human being and God based on reason, thus outside of the relationship between the two, which is verified in experience. Next to ethics,

from human being's overall relationship with God and the givenness of reality⁶⁹⁰. When this relationship is obscured, the absoluteness of God is transferred to human being, who is no longer a soteriological object before God, but before their own products. This metaphysical approach, in Mostert's view, fundamentally perverts the understanding of justification, which is not verified in the present experience (*Erfahrung*), but procrastinated into the uncertain future and changed from a hermeneutical category to one of salvation history⁶⁹¹. As a consequence, human being remains captive to the legalistic alternative between *præsumptio* and *desperation*. This is because they are deprived of the Gospel, the one reality in which they would truly access their determination as good creatures of God. As long as the Gospel remains excluded, the Law keeps human being ideologically anchored to their own soteriological action as their only hope for salvation, and dogmatism ensues, producing a plethora of false, ideological promises of justification⁶⁹². For Mostert, the essence of dogmatism (which is common to all soteriological answers alternative to justification doctrine) is the postponement of salvation, the negation of its present verification within experience. Thus, he interprets all forms of soteriological futurity as synergistic strategies to defer the actualization of salvation⁶⁹³, which, instead, is fully present within faith in Jesus Christ. Since its postponement produces anxiety and doubt as to its actuality, the effort to overcome this doubtful anxiety becomes the source of unprecedented and violent soteriological pressure. Through this pressure, God is either eliminated, or reduced to an instance ensuring the validity and ideological foundation of the possibility of salvation but negated as the true author of its actuality⁶⁹⁴. This utterly removes Him from experience (*Erfahrung*), which is however the only existential *locus* where He can truly become known as the justifying God and the author of salvation. Thus, the experience of justification is prevented, and human being's thinking becomes engulfed with dogmatism. Basically, Mostert argues that dogmatism results in the false experience in which human being understands themselves essentially as *active* and in the latent, corrosive doubt concerning the possibility of attaining salvation through soteriological action. For justification to be made accessible, instead, human being's false experience needs to be replaced by the manifestation of their *inability* to find a sufficiently effective strategy of self-actualization. Furthermore, it must become clear that this inability is co-posed together with human being's very existence as a sinner⁶⁹⁵. For Mostert, as long as this true experience

metaphysics is for Mostert the most serious alternative to justification doctrine. As for radical skepsis, instead, he considers it as an alternative form of metaphysics which ultimately does not really break with its fundamental presuppositions. For a different reading of the positioning of skepsis in regard to metaphysics, upheld for instance by Körtner, see note 175.

⁶⁹⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), pp. 90f.

⁶⁹¹ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 90.

⁶⁹² MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 91.

⁶⁹³ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 92.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

remains obstructed, human being can only project their own soteriological inability onto the world of their relationships: If salvation is not present, it has to be the fault of the world in its specific forms of existence.

The core element to be emphasized at this point is that Mostert is cautious not to interpret justification doctrine as yet another form of metaphysical thinking which (unlike the alternatives) would be somehow able to overcome its own fundamental flaws⁶⁹⁶. At the same time, he is not interested in finding a theory which can dismantle metaphysics. As a matter of fact, a similar theory would still be a product of thinking in abstraction from experience. As such, it would be a crypto-metaphysical theory, which would show the absurdity of employing it in order to demolish metaphysics. Regardless of how harshly this theory would possibly reject the contents of metaphysical thinking, it would ultimately reproduce a new version thereof⁶⁹⁷. Instead, in order to truly break with metaphysical dogmatism, a clear hamartiological-anthropological turn is needed⁶⁹⁸. Hamartiologically, the roots of evil need to be concretely acknowledged in the sin of each and every individual human being and not arbitrarily located in the domain of the world's interrelations. Anthropologically, human being needs to be understood as the object of a universal fundamental experience which remains only available to individuals. Within this experience, human being understands that they are fundamentally threatened by themselves and learns to see evil in the world as a reflection of this self-threat. Starting from this experience, which establishes the relationship between human being and God as the right point of observation for soteriology, theology gains valuable insights on metaphysics and anthropology. Concerning the first, it becomes possible to highlight its relativity. Specifically, metaphysics cannot express human experience in its entirety, hence it may not lay absolute truth claims. As for the second, the fundamental experience of justification discloses that human being activist forms of soteriology are an assaulting violation of the present and function by deferring salvation to the future.

Ultimately, in Mostert's view, justification doctrine clarifies that human being's fundamental problem is not the modification of the present, but the question of their own existence as an ambiguous (*fragwürdig*) subject⁶⁹⁹. Thus, he claims that justification doctrine rephrases humanity's fundamental soteriological quest by asking what needs to happen *to human being* for them to become authors of truly good deeds⁷⁰⁰. Within the experience which is made available to them in justification, their fundamental problem is illustrated as an instance of the categorical difference between thinking and

⁶⁹⁶ Namely the two crucial aspects of dogmatism described above, whereby human being understands themselves essentially as *active* and is oppressed by doubts and activist pressure concerning salvation.

⁶⁹⁷ This explains why Mostert insists that skepticism is ultimately a variety of metaphysics.

⁶⁹⁸ For the following hamartiological and anthropological claims, which illustrate key elements of Mostert's theology, see MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), pp. 93ff.

⁶⁹⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 95.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

present. The first remains utterly unable to understand that human being exists in a broader dimension than it can apprehend. Further, it is precisely within such dimension that the question of their *historical effectiveness* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) needs to be asked. Unlike thinking, the experience of justification has to do directly and precisely with this broader dimension, which is why the truth about sin, human being and God becomes available within justification doctrine. There, human being finds that they are *other* and *more* than what thinking apprehends. It follows that, within the experience of justification, evil is finally understood as an *ontological* (not ethical) question and its persisting effectiveness is not conceptualized by equating sin and wrongdoing. Correspondingly, Mostert claims that human being must endure the reality of evil (*Bösen*), which is an unavoidable element of their thinking and existing (*Sosein*)⁷⁰¹. Theologically, this means that the question of one's justification needs to be detached from the madness of one's fleeing from evil, because the latter does not have its roots in the world, but in human being. When this detachment occurs and human being finds the present verification of salvation within their experience of justification, then the anti-salvific reality (*Unheil*) within existence becomes manifest as the activist abuse of the world, human being and history as instruments of justification⁷⁰². Ultimately, Mostert thinks that the doctrine of justification provides the correct answer to human being's soteriological quest because it fully encompasses all of their dimensions: personal, political and social⁷⁰³.

In his soteriology-centered theology, Christology describes justification as the Person of Jesus Christ, whose divine and human natures have come together for the salvation of sinners. Specifically, Jesus Christ is salvation already in his incarnation and by virtue of the union of his two natures, not because of a subsequent salvation deed (*Heilswerk*)⁷⁰⁴. As was already explained, as long as human being's relationship with God is not restituted to its true determination by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, salvation remains a mere *potentiality* for them. This is because they keep viewing themselves as a self-soteriologist. Conversely, the Gospel is the fundamental breaking of this view, because it discloses a revolutionary understanding of salvation as an already given reality, fully present in its coming from God⁷⁰⁵. According to Mostert, the core of the Gospel, as illustrated by Christology, is that the solution to human being's fundamental problem cannot originate from their thinking and action, because it is already present as coming from God and only actualized by grace. Accordingly, he sees the cross as the revelation that not even Jesus Christ has established salvation by his thinking and doing, but in his death, where all activity ceases⁷⁰⁶. Thus, the cross favors an interpretation of

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 96.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ MOSTERT, W., BAUKE-RUEGG, J., KRAUSE, W., KOLLER, P. (eds.), "Bemerkungen zum Verständnis der altkirchlichen Christologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 102/1 2005, pp. 73-92, here p. 90.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ MOSTERT, W., "Bemerkungen" (see note 704), p. 91.

Jesus' life which does not found in his works, but in the always already present union of human being and God in his Person. The truth of this Person is apprehended and communicated to human being only through faith (*sola fide*), which is the only Gospel-appropriate instrument that the Holy Spirit creates and enables to receive Jesus Christ. Accordingly, Mostert claims that faith, by its own fundamental structure as the vessel receiving the Gospel, implies the impossibility of seeing Jesus Christ as a motivating power for the strengthening of human being's soteriological action in the world. Instead, faith in the incarnation (understood as faith in justification) points to him as the given presence of salvation coming from God, not from human being⁷⁰⁷. Therefore, Mostert regards Jesus Christ as the one who lets himself be fully actualized by God as the sole origin of salvation. Incidentally, this categorically excludes the possibility of integrating the eschatological category of consummation (*Vollendung*)⁷⁰⁸ into soteriology.

In his article on the implications of justification doctrine⁷⁰⁹, J. Bauke-Ruegg interprets the quest for the gracious God as constitutive for modern thinking and describes the loss of the theological category of grace as the main cause for the *overtribunalization* (*Übertribunalisierung*) of human being's life⁷¹⁰. According to him, once deprived of the epistemological categories to comprehend God's grace, modern human being is prevented from finding the soteriological answer and abandoned to their own before the pressure of their fundamental problem. This graceless pressure crushes them under its imperative to legitimize the world⁷¹¹. In this context, Bauke-Ruegg clearly sees that Mostert has understood Luther's theology not as the answer to, but as the *overcoming of* the (activistic) quest for the gracious God⁷¹². Basically, his theology argues that human beings has lost sight of grace because they have interpreted it as yet another legal phenomenon⁷¹³. Accordingly, only a creative, existential rediscovery of Luther's justification doctrine can safeguard the reality of grace, by pointing out that God's righteousness is not the one with which human being justifies God by declaring Him righteous based off their own philosophical concepts of justice⁷¹⁴. Rather, His righteousness is the one with which He declares sinners righteous. In doing so, He refuses to gracelessly identify them with the consequences of their past. Rather, He takes Himself the responsibility for those consequences, facing them on behalf of sinners in Jesus Christ⁷¹⁵. In Mostert's view, the only way in

⁷⁰⁷ MOSTERT, W., "Bemerkungen" (see note 704), p. 92.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott: Erinnerungen an einige Implikationen der reformatorischen Rechtfertigungslehre", *Evangelische Theologie* 57/5 (1997), pp. 474–495.

⁷¹⁰ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), pp. 477f.

⁷¹¹ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), p. 479.

⁷¹² BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), pp. 480f.

⁷¹³ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), p. 481.

⁷¹⁴ For an interesting analysis of how and to what extent the secular and theological understandings of justice overlap in ways which are relevant to justification doctrine, see McGRATH, A., "Justice and Justification: Semantic and Juristic Aspects of the Christian Doctrine of Justification", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35/5 (1982), pp. 403–418.

⁷¹⁵ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), p. 488.

which human being truly corresponds to the righteousness of God is through faith, which is active only as a *perception* of the world (*fides inventrix*). As such, faith rejects graceless activism and steadily safeguards an anthropology and an ontology in which human being is a receiver, not a doer⁷¹⁶.

In conclusion, Mostert regards justification as the true change brought about by God alone in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is the sinner's righteousness in Person. Human being receives God's righteousness every time anew outside of themselves, only through faith in Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, in themselves, they are sinners who strive to contribute to the actualization of salvation. Justification doctrine is criteriological because it asks the question about human being's fundamental problem in the right way and at the same time provides the right answer, which is the solution to the problem. Justification liberates the sinner from anxiety and protects the world from becoming the material of their activism.

2.2. "Historical Salvation" or "Performative Word"? Two Different Takes on Justification

2.2.1. "Theologies of Historical Salvation": W. Pannenberg and P. Tillich

2.2.1.A. W. Pannenberg

In his *Systematic Theology*⁷¹⁷, Pannenberg argues against any general readings of the Law, and identifies it with the Jewish *Torah*. This depends on his overall focus on salvation history. Far from being an appeal to agreement with the cosmic order, the Law originates in the history of Israel's election described in Exodus⁷¹⁸. Coherently, Pannenberg denies that Law and Gospel may be read as a hermeneutical dichotomy⁷¹⁹, whereby the full meaning of one would only be understood in close contact with the other. Thus, the Law is not the timelessly valid expression of God's demand⁷²⁰. Rather, it has reached an end in Christ's vicarious death, which marks the caesura between two successive epochs in salvation history. In Pannenberg's view, the Gospel is the new reality of faith which has been put to effect after the Law has come to an end and has been fulfilled⁷²¹. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is the historical-theological *locus* where God's righteousness is revealed. He has

⁷¹⁶ BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), p. 494.

⁷¹⁷ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, T&T Clark, London 1994 (1993).

⁷¹⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 58.

⁷¹⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 61.

⁷²⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 62.

⁷²¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 61.

kept faithful to the covenant by resurrecting Jesus Christ⁷²², who was crucified in keeping with the Law⁷²³. It is for this reason that faith justifies, in that it aptly responds to God's keeping the covenant⁷²⁴. The righteousness of faith is the one found in Abraham, which, in light of Christ's atoning death, is also the only form of justifying righteousness⁷²⁵. Thus, against Mostert, Pannenberg understands the Reformation insight that the Law is not the direct expression of God's will within *historical* categories⁷²⁶. Accordingly, the Law was given for a limited (chronological) time⁷²⁷, in which it increased sin. Then, it was fulfilled and set aside by Jesus Christ, in whom God's promise of life has been fulfilled by the Spirit and is continuously made concrete in the love of believers. Thus, in Jesus Christ, the Law has reached both its *telos* and its end. Clearly, the modes of conduct within which the Spirit actualizes love within faith is in material agreement with the Law⁷²⁸. However, this does not mean that believers live under its demands, as this would place them *prior* to the shift in the history of salvation which has taken place on the cross. For Pannenberg, the coming of Jesus Christ marks the dawn of a new objective situation for all humanity, which is no longer understandable as Law⁷²⁹. Correspondingly, the love actualized by the Spirit has no legal structure but works as an impulse to do that which is right⁷³⁰. Only once sinners are pronounced free from the Law are they enabled to do the will of God freely, because their sins are forgiven⁷³¹. For Pannenberg, the doing of God's will which is enabled by the Gospel (love) is categorically different from the Law. Love is not tied to specific norms valid in all situations. Instead, it is imaginative⁷³² and does create a new *praxis* to aptly meet new circumstances, so that agreement with the Law is not to be accepted in every situation⁷³³. While the Gospel never confronts believers with a demand, the Law constitutively binds them to a specific mode of conduct⁷³⁴. Even though Pannenberg explicitly refuses to see love as a

⁷²² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 63.

⁷²³ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 60.

⁷²⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 63.

⁷²⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 65.

⁷²⁶ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 66. Like Pannenberg, a hermeneutical understanding would also claim that the Law is the indirect expression of God's will. However, this would have a different meaning than in his account. Specifically, in the hermeneutical understanding (shared by Mostert), the Law's address is oriented to the full disclosure of the Gospel, which becomes clear and concrete only if heard in close contact with the imperative of the Law.

⁷²⁷ Instead, in my judgment, the hermeneutical understanding relates the "times" of Law and Gospel to the anthropology of the *simul iustus et peccator* and the two qualitatively different moods of address of God's Word.

⁷²⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 69.

⁷²⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), pp. 70f.

⁷³⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 95. Therefore, Pannenberg excludes both the Augustinian view of *caritas* as the law of faith and the Thomist interpretation of the Gospel as *nova lex* (PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, [see note 717], p. 72).

⁷³¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 75.

⁷³² On the imaginative dimension of love from a systematic perspective, see KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Die Liebe ist erfinderisch. Autorität, Hermeneutik und Kritik alttestamentlicher Ethik im Kontext Systematischer Theologie", in: SCHMID, K. (ed.), *Heilige Schriften in der Kritik* (Veröffentlichungen der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie, n. 68), Leipzig 2023, pp. 569-585.

⁷³³ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 77.

⁷³⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 76.

command, he does conceptualize it as a motivating force which shapes concrete forms of life issuing from the believer's gratitude for the Gospel⁷³⁵.

Pannenberg's critique of any hermeneutical understanding of the Law-Gospel rubric comes from his critical reception of Luther. In particular, he discusses the Reformer's position whereby God's Law is materially identical with the (Stoic) *lex naturalis*. Pannenberg regards Luther's position as historically and philosophically conditioned and rejects it on this basis. Specifically, he questions the Reformer's view of the Jewish *Torah* as a historically situated specification of the broader reality of the Law. Ultimately, Pannenberg's claim is that any hermeneutical view of the Law is an arbitrary generalization of the historical *Torah*⁷³⁶. For him, Law and Gospel do not stand in a contrast which is indefinitely repeated because it finds its ground in anthropology. Further, he argues that a hermeneutical understanding of the coupling places an excessive focus on the forgiveness of sins, which does not do justice to the breadth of the Gospel⁷³⁷. Rather than being set hermeneutically in antithesis to God's righteous demand, the forgiveness of sins is to be understood as a consequence of the proximity of His Kingdom dawning in with Christ⁷³⁸. For Pannenberg, the crucial point is that the eschatological turn inevitably belongs to the historical event in which God's Kingdom has come in the flesh. Hence, he claims that the incarnation as an occurrence in history implies interpreting Law and Gospel as successive epochs in salvation history⁷³⁹. Clearly, this excludes that Christians live under the Law⁷⁴⁰. The eschatological turn which has taken place historically in Jesus Christ is appropriated by individuals in baptism⁷⁴¹. Exposed to the new being in Christ, believers are no longer under the Law. However, they are indeed ethically instructed by the church (apostolic *paraclesis*)⁷⁴². Church instruction, for Pannenberg, is structurally distinct from any law⁷⁴³, because it illustrates the situation-specific contents of love. The latter fulfils the Law but not in the form of obedience⁷⁴⁴. Instead, the fulfilment occurs based on the fact that love and the Law share *the right* as their content⁷⁴⁵. Nevertheless, this content does not stand in the same relationship with both realities: ultimately, it is

⁷³⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 78. As will be illustrated in the next chapter, this marks a sharp difference between Pannenberg and Mostert, in that the latter rejects the view of love as a motivating force.

⁷³⁶ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 81.

⁷³⁷ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 83. On this point, Pannenberg's critique of Luther's emphasis on the forgiveness of sins clearly resembles Roman Catholic positions (see note 525).

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ M. Bachmann defends the same position from an exegetical perspective in his critical review of KUULA, K., *The Law, the Covenant, and God's Plan: Paul's Polemical Treatment of the Law in Galatians*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen 1999. Bachmann's review appears in: *Biblica*, 82/1 (2001), pp. 121-126, here p. 126.

⁷⁴⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), pp. 85f. Pannenberg elaborates on this in explicit disagreement with Ebeling.

⁷⁴¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 87.

⁷⁴² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 89.

⁷⁴³ Pannenberg employs the category of apostolic *paraclesis* within his pneumatological treatment of Christian ethics as descriptive ethics.

⁷⁴⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 91.

⁷⁴⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 93.

not based on the Law, but only on love. Accordingly, only the latter can fully express that which is right⁷⁴⁶. In turn, the right constitutively expresses God's will (which is inherently righteous), whereas the Law only expressed it in a specific chronological time. As such, the latter remains imperfect and inferior to former. In particular, the Law cannot do justice to the uniqueness of each specific case due to its abstract universality. Conversely, love is appropriate to all contexts, because it is supremely concrete⁷⁴⁷. Ultimately, in Pannenberg's view, the Law's difference from the Gospel is that only the latter is ultimate, as in it the inbreaking of God's Kingdom has truly dawned historically⁷⁴⁸.

For Pannenberg, salvation is the continued fellowship with Christ that attained by faith and includes one's participation in Jesus' relationship with the Father⁷⁴⁹. This continued fellowship is expressed through the biblical idea of *adoption*⁷⁵⁰, which is Pannenberg's chief soteriological category. In his account, justification does not exhaust the semantics of salvation, because it is the present expectancy of salvation, which nonetheless belongs to the eschatological future⁷⁵¹. Despite the centrality of adoption, justification does play a critical function in Pannenberg's discourse. In particular, it reassures believers concerning their eschatological salvation by excluding all of their attempts at self-justification before God⁷⁵². Similar to Calvin, Pannenberg understands justification from the believer's incorporation into Christ which happens through faith⁷⁵³. In the latter's view, this position is in agreement with Tridentine theology, which also derives justification from incorporation into Christ⁷⁵⁴. The difference between the two positions, in Pannenberg's reading, concerns the medium through which the incorporation takes place: faith alone for the Reformation, the sacramental mediation effecting faith, love and hope for Trent⁷⁵⁵.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 96.

⁷⁴⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 211. Here, Pannenberg mirrors Schleiermacher's focus on the believer's participation in Christ's sonship. However, it can be argued that the semantics of participation in Schleiermacher refer specifically to sanctification, while in Pannenberg they have a broader meaning (see NIMMO, P. T., "Schleiermacher on Justification: A Departure from the Reformation?", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66/1 [2013], pp. 50-73, here p. 57).

⁷⁵⁰ This focus goes at least all the way back to Ambrosianer, who elaborates on this matter in the wake of Hilary of Poitiers. For Ambrosianer, justification is an act of the Spirit that the believer receives in order to become a child of God (see e.g. WILLIAMS, D.H., "Justification by Faith [see note 523], pp. 661f.).

⁷⁵¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 214.

⁷⁵² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 236.

⁷⁵³ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 220.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology* 3 (see note 717), p. 222. In my judgment, Pannenberg's account of the confessional difference on justification is rather incomplete. I would say that, from a Protestant point of view, the problematic element in the Tridentine account of justification is not its sacramental focus. In all actuality, the Reformation has expressed positions whereby faith and the sacraments cannot be separated, so that an emphasis on the sacraments ultimately highlights on justifying faith. Instead, the difference between the Reformation and Trent is illustrated by the Protestant insistence on the extrinsicality of faith and the believer's righteousness (see McGRATH, A., "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification", *The Harvard Theological Review* 75/2 [1982], pp. 219-242, here p. 223). Only the *extra nos* unambiguously points out that the believer's righteousness does not depend in the least on their inner changing, or else it could be threatened, altered

According to Pannenberg, justification is the *declaration* of justice happening through faith, which is itself the righteousness that counts *coram Deo*⁷⁵⁶. Faith justifies because it is the instrument by which believers correspond to the covenantal righteousness of God and accept the atonement made for their sin⁷⁵⁷. Using Kantian categories, Pannenberg understands the justification verdict as an analytical (not synthetic) judgment⁷⁵⁸. God finds the reality of faith already present in the believer and deems it righteous because it allows them to appropriate His saving work. Thus, faith enables the indwelling of Christ in the believer, which is the basis for God's justifying verdict. Therefore, for Pannenberg, the fact of righteousness precedes the declaration⁷⁵⁹, which simply recognizes that which faith has effected⁷⁶⁰. Further, the concrete form of the doctrine of justification is baptism, which clarifies the relationship between the being of believers in Christ and their earthly existence⁷⁶¹.

According to Pannenberg, the universal hope of salvation is not only fulfilled, but also newly qualified in Jesus Christ. In him, human being's fundamental problem is not only solved, but also changed⁷⁶². Therefore, soteriology is a function of Christology, not the other way around⁷⁶³. Fellowship with Christ is salvific in that his resurrection grants access to the rule of God through the believers' adoption as His children. Pannenberg's focus on fellowship and adoption as chief soteriological categories leads him to also emphasize the future dimension of the overcoming of death. Thus, salvation is future, but already proleptically present in the case of believers⁷⁶⁴.

and even extinguished. This is, in my opinion, the sharpest contrast with the Tridentine position, which instead notably understands justification precisely as the inner changing of believers by grace.

⁷⁵⁶ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology 3* (see note 717), p. 223.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology 3* (see note 717), p. 225.

⁷⁵⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology 3* (see note 717), p. 229. A possible critique of Pannenberg's position, however, could ask whether this view takes the *iustificatio impii* seriously enough. In my opinion, his account rather resembles a *iustificatio credentis*, in which it is not grace alone through the mediation of faith, but immediately faith which saves, functioning more or less like the supreme virtue of the religious human being. Pannenberg explicitly rejects my reading of his position (PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology 3* [see note 717], p. 225), but I do not find his explanation convincing. In sum, I would say that his discourse risks moving away from the Reformational image of faith as the channel of salvation and closer to Trent's view of it as the first and decisive virtue at play in justification.

⁷⁶⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology 3* (see note 717), p. 231.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid. Pannenberg claims that Reformation theology does not emphasize the connection between justification and baptism strongly enough. However, his insistence on baptism *alongside* faith as a means of justifying grace may be criticized as a reduplication of the *media salutis*. In my judgment, it is to be said, with him, that baptism (and, for that matter, the Lord's supper) is indeed a full-fledged *medium salutis*. However, not *alongside* faith, but *because* of it. By God's grace and *propter nostram imbecillitatem*, the believer's trustful hearing of the proclamation of God's Word becomes visible in the sacraments. But this visibility of grace is like a hearing with the eyes; it is narration, it is actualized Scripture. If the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes visible, it is only because it is heard in the proclaimed Word and narrated in the words of institution.

⁷⁶² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, T&T Clark, London 1992 (1991), p. 398.

⁷⁶³ Ibid. As will be shown later on, a similar position is notably held by Barth, while Mostert, Ebeling and Tillich embrace the opposite position and claim that Christology is a function of soteriology.

⁷⁶⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 399. Interestingly enough, Pannenberg regards the futurity of salvation as a rampart against synergism. Precisely because it lies in the future, salvation cannot be achieved in the process of life and stands in critical opposition to all achievements of human life in this world. Conversely, as has been already pointed out, Mostert interprets all future eschatology as hiddenly synergistic. For him, a futurity of salvation implies human being's denial of its presence in faith and their attempt to actualize it through their own efforts.

Specifically, it is present as the assurance of pardon at the future judgment. This assurance bases on the fact that believers already now participate by faith in the atoning death of Christ⁷⁶⁵. Therefore, the crucial element for the mediation of salvation is Jesus' crucifixion in conjunction with his life and ministry. The *sacrificium* and the *exemplum*, thus, form an indissoluble unity, but the primacy pertains to the former⁷⁶⁶. Correspondingly, it is impossible to sever the believer's justification from their sanctification⁷⁶⁷. In short, Pannenberg ascribes an effective, performative significance to Christ's death, which sets up a new situation in the relationship between God and human beings⁷⁶⁸. In terms of justification doctrine, the cross enables the *merry exchange* between the believer and Christ: On it, the former's sin is transferred to the latter. Clearly, the atoning force of the cross is not self-evident, but it is manifested by the resurrection⁷⁶⁹. Christ's death is revealed as grace because, in it, God freely decided to reconcile the world with Himself even though He did not need to do so⁷⁷⁰. Thus, Jesus' crucifixion is the *telos* of the world's reconciliation intended by God. Nevertheless, Pannenberg claims that reconciliation occurred on Christ's cross in the form of *anticipation*⁷⁷¹. Against other readings⁷⁷², this position entails that salvation is not a self-contained reality. Rather, it remains open and includes the historical ministry of the church. Thus, the whole renewing of the believers' fellowship with God is a constitutive part of the salvation event⁷⁷³. For Pannenberg, it could not be otherwise, since all of God's acts (therefore also reconciliation) happen in the form of historical facts. As the meaningful center of a historical occurrence, Jesus' death and life function as a sponsoring representation which is oriented to and actualized in its future reception by believers⁷⁷⁴. Thus, reconciliation is consummated through the work of the Spirit in believers, and not without their participation. In Pannenberg's soteriology, the concept of *representation* is crucial, and it must be understood dialectically. The core idea is that Jesus Christ makes room for human being next to himself, thereby enabling fellowship and adoption. In particular, *exclusive* representation means that Jesus Christ took the place of sinners, he made the expiation in their stead and for them⁷⁷⁵. *Inclusive* representation, instead, means that he entered in their existential situation and took their place

⁷⁶⁵ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2, (see note 762) p. 401.

⁷⁶⁶ Here, Pannenberg breaks with the Liberal tradition, in that he does not share Schleiermacher's focus on Christ's *exemplum* and his active obedience to the Father as the key soteriological category (see NIMMO, P. T. [see note 749], p. 67).

⁷⁶⁷ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), pp. 402f.

⁷⁶⁸ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 409.

⁷⁶⁹ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 412.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 413.

⁷⁷² Barth notably sees the reconciliation event as self-contained. Mostert and Ebeling, instead, consider it as open-ended. Nevertheless, their understanding is sharply different from Pannenberg's, as has been shown above.

⁷⁷³ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 414.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 419.

temporarily, but did not replace them permanently⁷⁷⁶. For Pannenberg, the cross shows the covenantal righteousness of God. Since He has resurrected Jesus from the dead, the crucifixion cannot be interpreted as His punishment for Jesus' sins. However, given the fundamental connection between sin and death, if Jesus has not been executed as a punishment for his own sins, then he must have died for those of others. More precisely, he has died in the place of those who condemned him, namely Israel and the nations alike, without distinction⁷⁷⁷. For Pannenberg, this theological thought illustrates at best that God's faithfulness to the covenant is *grace*: On the cross, the exchange between the crucified and the crucifiers occurred, in that Jesus died vicariously for sinners⁷⁷⁸. In order for believers to be involved in this exchange, however, it is necessary for their lives to be connected with Jesus' vicarious death. For Pannenberg, this connection is effected by baptism. In other words, Jesus' death is the condition for the *possibility* of expiation, while baptism is necessary for its *actuality* in the lives of individuals⁷⁷⁹. Here, Pannenberg wants to highlight both the exclusive and the inclusive moments in reconciliation. The expiation which took place on the cross needs to be appropriated through baptism and faith. The historical event which occurred once and for all must be repeated as the church propagates the Gospel⁷⁸⁰.

Following his understanding of representation, Pannenberg regards Jesus Christ as the paradigm of humanity's relationship with God, as well as the condition for the possibility of creaturely independence within in⁷⁸¹. This independence liberates believers from the curse of the Law and in hope of the new life in the Spirit. In the adopted children of God, the Spirit brings the Son's mission to its completion by means of the ministry of the church, which is the pneumatological continuation of the salvation event⁷⁸². This entails that the believers' reconciliation must happen on their side as well⁷⁸³. Individual freedom illustrates that the work of the exalted Christ outside of human being and the one of the Spirit in them are two aspects of one and the same reconciliation⁷⁸⁴. Correspondingly, salvation cannot be limited to the forgiveness of sins (justification), but must include the new

⁷⁷⁶ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 420. Thus, in contrast to Barth or Jüngel, Pannenberg denies that God's justification verdict annihilates sinners and creates them anew as righteous persons.

⁷⁷⁷ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), pp. 425f.

⁷⁷⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 427.

⁷⁷⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 428.

⁷⁸⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 429. In my opinion, Pannenberg's use of the potency-act semantics to articulate the relationship between exclusive and inclusive representation is problematic. Without a philosophical critique of the semantics and a clarification of the relationship between potency and act, his account risks fostering (certainly against his intentions) an ontological subordination of the exclusive moment to the inclusive one, of Christ's death to the church ministry, of justification to sanctification.

⁷⁸¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), pp. 435f.

⁷⁸² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 437.

⁷⁸³ Therefore, Pannenberg rejects the anthropological category "*mere passive*", which instead remains central to the accounts of Ebeling and Mostert, among others.

⁷⁸⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 450.

commandment of love and the creative ways in which the latter plays out in a life of freedom (sanctification)⁷⁸⁵.

In conclusion, for Pannenberg, justification is part of the semantics of salvation, but not its chief category, which is adoption. Therefore, the theological account of salvation does not *necessarily* need the vocabulary of justification. As forgiveness of sins, the latter is provided through baptismal faith and provides the righteousness which counts before God. Salvation history has its center in Christ's vicarious death. However, the salvific significance of this death is not self-contained. Rather, it is open-ended, finding but its historical consummation in the ecclesial ministry of the Gospel, by which believers have fellowship with Christ.

2.2.1.B. P. Tillich

In Tillich's categories, the ambiguity of the Law is visible in its interaction with love (*agape*). In theonomy, love overcomes the ambiguity of the Law because it transcends its imperative form while confirming its content, which expresses the essence of human being⁷⁸⁶. As long as the imperative mood of address is not transcended, the Law remains ambiguous⁷⁸⁷. If it is transcended, the moral content of the Law becomes theonomous and confirms the reunion of the existential human being with their essential being⁷⁸⁸. Therefore, for Tillich, the Law is ambiguous when its imperative (the formality of the command) is considered as unconditional as its indicative (the moral content). Instead, love is the spiritual power in which both the unconditionality of the indicative and the conditionality of the imperative are affirmed. This is because love is itself unconditional in its essence and conditional in its existence⁷⁸⁹. Correspondingly, it can meet concrete situations appropriately, whereas the Law remains constitutively unable to do so. Thus, for Tillich, love is the unambiguous criterion for all ethical judgments, since it maintains the balance between the abstract and concrete elements of situations, thereby allowing the meaning of moral laws to change overtime⁷⁹⁰. Further, love does refer to traditional ethical norms⁷⁹¹ and takes their normativity seriously, but it also acts with courage to transcend them in light of changing circumstances⁷⁹². The basis of this thought is Tillich's claim that the continuous source of the ethical experience is the concrete situation⁷⁹³. In it,

⁷⁸⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 461.

⁷⁸⁶ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 271f.

⁷⁸⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 272.

⁷⁸⁸ This implies that, unlike Mostert or Ebeling, Tillich regards human being as ethically verified. Specifically, the moral content of the Law needs to be liberated by *agape* in order to be able to truly express human being's essence.

⁷⁸⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 273.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ For Tillich, love reflecting on the ethical tradition is wisdom.

⁷⁹² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 274.

⁷⁹³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 273.

courage helps love become and remain concrete and adequate. Further, love is unambiguous only as long as it is not interpreted as Law, but as grace. Grace is the reality commanded by the Law but actualized only by *agape*. If ethics bases on the Law, the result is legalism, whereby agency increases alienation⁷⁹⁴ while trying to fight it. If ethics bases on love, instead, its moral content ceases to be subjected to the legal instance and becomes manifest as the creation of the Spiritual Presence⁷⁹⁵.

In Tillich's theology, the ambiguity of the Law is shared by human existence. Essentially, human being has full centeredness⁷⁹⁶, but this condition is not existentially actualized. The actualization is performed by the moral act, which therefore is the instance that verifies human being⁷⁹⁷. Moreover, morality is the constitutive function of the Spirit, it brings about His Kingdom⁷⁹⁸. In other words, morality is the whole spectrum of those acts through which a potential person may become actual⁷⁹⁹.

According to Tillich, ethical norms have morality as their content, which enables them to express the essential order of the world as against the existential conditions in which human being lives. When ethically confronted, the individual is put in a situation where they either follow or disregard the order expressed by the norms. The possibility to respond to the ethical interpellation either way constitutes human being's responsibility⁸⁰⁰. The exercise of this responsibility, however, entails a conundrum for them. While responding to the interpellation, they necessarily have to make decisions, thereby only actualizing some possibilities while neglecting others. If the decision is right (if it matches the order expressed by the Law), human being's ensuing action is truly moral and goes in the direction of their self-integration. If it is wrong, the resulting action increases alienation. The crucial problem is that human being exists in situations where essential and existential features are always mixed together. This makes it impossible for them to ensure the correctness of their ethical decisions⁸⁰¹. With this thought, Tillich expresses the ambiguity of the Law from the point of view of anthropology⁸⁰². Specifically, the distortions of personal self-integration are rooted in the character of the Law. Accordingly, they have to do with the relationship between God as the Lawgiver and human being as the addressee of the Law⁸⁰³. Anthropology is connected with the ontology of love because in both dimensions the ambiguity of the Law is expressed. Correspondingly, the moral imperative points to

⁷⁹⁴ Tillich's category for sin. See e.g. TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 225.

⁷⁹⁵ Tillich's category for the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁹⁶ Tillich's category for the nature of human being as God's good creature.

⁷⁹⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 38.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.* In explicit theological terms, for Tillich, love is the power enabling a sinner to become righteous. If my reading is correct, then his justification doctrine departs from core Protestant soteriological categories. In particular, he seems rather close to the Scholastic soteriology of *fides caritate formata*.

⁸⁰⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 39.

⁸⁰¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 44.

⁸⁰² Above, I described Tillich's treatment of the ambiguity of the Law from the point of view of his ontology of love (see here, pp. 112f.).

⁸⁰³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 44.

human being's essence not in the individual's abstractness, but concretely in their encounter with a different person⁸⁰⁴. For the individual, the content of the moral imperative coincides with recognizing the other as a person. This remains an abstract order unless participation in the other becomes a concrete possibility for the individual. For Tillich, this participation needs to be truly personal, which means unconditional. One needs to participate in the center of the other's self and accept their particularity regardless of possible convergences with their own. Such participation can only be effected by *agape*⁸⁰⁵. Therefore, Tillich's personal anthropology needs to be explicitly connected with his doctrine of love. Only this connection makes it possible to fully comprehend his view of the ambiguity of the legal instance and his claim that only love makes the categorical imperative concrete, thereby enabling human being's personal self-integration without the Law. Love illustrates the only way in which the radicality of ethical principles remains united with their concrete content⁸⁰⁶.

Taken as the ethical alternative to *agape*⁸⁰⁷, the Law can never be truly fulfilled in the *hic et nunc* of particular decisions⁸⁰⁸. Even strict obedience, thus, can be wrong, depending on the situation. This shows the impossibility to trust the Law as a concrete means for achieving salvation. Hence, if the moral decision becomes mere adherence to the legal codex, there is no guarantee that it is one of love⁸⁰⁹. Correspondingly, human morality is constitutively unable to reach personal integration⁸¹⁰. The latter is attained only by *agape*, which becomes a human possibility only through revelatory experiences and in spite of the persisting ambiguity of human existence⁸¹¹. Since they are human, these experiences remain ambiguous. However, the love that they communicate does not demand the actualization of the moral good by human beings, which is why, unlike the Law, it does not stimulate their resistance. Instead, love *gives* the good to them as the New Being which is their personal integration⁸¹². *Agape* is therefore the reality in which the ambiguity of the Law is not only revealed as the chaotic and inextricable mixture of obedience and disobedience, but also overcome and set aside⁸¹³.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. Here, Tillich's position diverges sharply from Mostert's. For Tillich, the isolation of the individual before the Law belongs to the latter's ambiguity. As such, it is overcome by love, which places human beings in their relationship with others. In my critical analysis of Mostert's Prolegomena, I went in a similar direction (see here, pp. 61ff).

⁸⁰⁵ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 45.

⁸⁰⁶ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 46.

⁸⁰⁷ Interestingly enough, Tillich sees love in consonance with how Mostert sees justification: as the alternative to the ambiguity of ethics (this will be discussed at large in Part 3). Once again (as was already pointed out in note 799), this could mean that Tillich's view of justification is closer to the Scholastic paradigm than to the Reformation.

⁸⁰⁸ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 47.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ In this context, Tillich employs "personal integration" as a synonym of salvation.

⁸¹¹ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 46f.

⁸¹² TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 50.

⁸¹³ Ibid.

Notably, Tillich interprets justification doctrine as the Christian answer to meaninglessness, not as the illustration of the forgiveness of sins⁸¹⁴. Thus, he aims at presenting soteriology⁸¹⁵ in terms that are relevant to the question implicit in the contemporary situation of humanity. Accordingly, for him, justification doctrine can be regarded as the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* only after being actualized in situation-specific terms. At any rate, Tillich specifies that this doctrine is not identical to the material norm⁸¹⁶ of systematic theology, because it is a historical product of the collective experience of the church. The decisive, constant norm is the reality of the New Being, which is always the same throughout history⁸¹⁷. Nevertheless, according to Tillich, the ultimate criterion of Christology is soteriological. This is because Christology is existentially necessary: by its very structure, it provides the answer to human being's fundamental problem⁸¹⁸.

For Tillich, justification by grace through faith describes the experience of the New Being as a paradox, which is the core of Protestant theology⁸¹⁹. Specifically, justification is both a particular article of doctrine and the universal principle of Protestant theology⁸²⁰. As such, it illustrates that, when it comes to one's relationship with God, He alone acts and humans cannot lay any claim. Tillich rephrases justification as *acceptance*⁸²¹. In it, human beings are accepted by God even though they are unacceptable according to the Law. On their part, they are requested to accept this acceptance. While acceptance is the meaning and content of justification, forgiveness, in Tillich's view, is its symbol⁸²²; its objective reality is described by Christology as God's participation both in human being's existential alienation and in its overcoming⁸²³. On the objective level, justification is God's act in which He accepts those who are unacceptable by declaring them acceptable. This enables them to paradoxically accept to be accepted also on the subjective level. Thus, God's acceptance becomes human being's paradoxical self-acceptance. When the unrighteous accept themselves in this sense, they are overcome by a righteousness which truly makes them righteous⁸²⁴. For Tillich, the justified is the one who abandons their goodness by accepting that God accepts them even though they are

⁸¹⁴ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, (see note 186), p. 49. The opposite approach is maintained by MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 351).

⁸¹⁵ In Tillich's terms, the core of soteriology is the reality of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. He regards this reality as the material norm of theology.

⁸¹⁶ The reality of the New Being (see note 815).

⁸¹⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (see note 185), p. 50.

⁸¹⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), pp. 150f.

⁸¹⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 223f.

⁸²⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 224.

⁸²¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 241.

⁸²² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 225. For an explanation of Tillich's theory of symbols, which are not mere signs separated from the reality that they symbolize, see e.g. LEINER, M., "Tillich on God" (see note 217).

⁸²³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 226.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

unacceptable. Abandoning one's goodness to God is what Tillich calls the courage of faith⁸²⁵. Symbolically, this courage is manifested in the image of the crucified Jesus⁸²⁶.

As the Christian answer to meaninglessness, justifying faith, in Tillich's discourse, responds to radical doubt, which is the existential questioning or denial of the meaning of life. As such, it implies the rejection of the ultimate concern, which is notably the central category in his account of faith and theonomy⁸²⁷. Since they reject all ultimacy, radical doubters remain unaffected by the message of justification as God's acceptance of the unacceptable⁸²⁸. This is because, in their view, God and the problem of being accepted or rejected are meaningless⁸²⁹. Therefore, if radical doubters⁸³⁰ ask what they need to do for their doubt to be overcome, the answer is that they cannot do anything at all. For Tillich, the very structure of the question needs to be rejected; the answer is found formally only in the seriousness of the desperation behind it⁸³¹. Even though radical doubters are unacceptable because of their doubt concerning meaning itself, God is present to them in the very seriousness of their existential desperation⁸³².

For Tillich, other than as a paradox, the experience of New Being may also be described as a process. The theological symbol for this description is sanctification, which illustrates the *transformative* influence of the Spiritual Presence on the individual⁸³³. Tillich's view on sanctification centers around the semantics of growth. Moving closer to the Reformed than to the Lutheran view, Tillich claims that the sanctified grows in awareness, freedom, relationality and transcendence⁸³⁴. Still, this multi-faceted growth is not brought about by the Law. Conversely, sanctification entails precisely freedom *from* the Law, from its prescriptive form and even from its particular content. This is because *agape* disqualifies the legal instance as inappropriate to the concreteness of changing situations⁸³⁵. As the reality brought about by the spiritual force of *agape*, sanctification can be described, for Tillich, as one's process towards spiritual maturity. Its relationship to justification is

⁸²⁵ In my opinion, since this act of self-abandonment truly overcomes the ambiguity of good and bad (which is constitutive of all human ethical behaviors), it is accurate to say that Tillich's concept of acceptance functions theologically and not ethically.

⁸²⁶ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 226.

⁸²⁷ See note 226.

⁸²⁸ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 226.

⁸²⁹ In my view, this thought shows that, for Tillich, the question about God *per se* is more radical than the one about the *gracious* God. Once again, it seems worth asking if Tillich's theology is compatible with core categories of the Reformation. Could it be that the relationship between theology and philosophy in Tillich's system makes him diverge sharply from Reformation theology? This is, for instance, the position held by BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" (see note 183).

⁸³⁰ An interesting question worth exploring would be what Tillich's doctrine of justification as a question of meaning might have to say about nowadays Neo-Atheism, which, in my view, cannot be interpreted as a form of desperate radical doubt, but rather as the complete abandonment of the very question of meaning.

⁸³¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 228.

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁴ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 232.

⁸³⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 233.

articulated as follows: through their self-acceptance enabled by God, one gradually attains forms of mature self-relationality, overcoming both self-elevation and self-contempt⁸³⁶. In Tillich's transformative understanding, sanctification indicates the state of being concerned with the ultimate. This state increases over one's spiritual life and becomes gradually more and more manifest as they transcend themselves. The ideal goal of this growth is the person as *sanctus*, which however is a paradoxical category. The saint is not one in a particular state of perfection, otherwise they would not be the justified, which is non-sensical. Conversely, they are the *justified sinner* whose life increasingly participates in the Spiritual Presence⁸³⁷. The goal of sanctification is ultimately attained only in faith. In it, one is grasped by the New Being which, together with the Spiritual Presence, triumphs over the demonic elements of existence, thereby letting one's doubt finally acquiesce⁸³⁸. Ultimately, in Tillich's account, both justification and sanctification are encompassed within the broader concept of regeneration, which describes salvation in general as participation in the New Being⁸³⁹. At any rate, justification remains criteriological for sanctification, at least in the sense that nothing can be predicated of the latter which would contradict the former⁸⁴⁰.

In Tillich's system, the objective reality of regeneration, justification and sanctification is described christologically by the doctrine of atonement. The latter is concerned with the effect of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ on those grasped by him in their state of alienation⁸⁴¹. The fact that he is God's answer to the soteriological problem of humanity illustrates the universal importance of Jesus Christ⁸⁴².

For Tillich, atonement is always both God's action (objective element) and human being's reaction (subjective element). The objectivity of atonement is the removal of human being's guilt as the force separating them from God. The subjectivity of atonement is necessary to enforce its objectivity through human being's acceptance of God's act⁸⁴³. As a result, at least secondarily, atonement depends also on human beings, even though its subjectivity is effected by the Spiritual Presence at work in them. In this context, Tillich calls subjective the experience of the liberating impact of the New Being on individuals. This experience is a condition for the possibility of their liberation from alienation⁸⁴⁴. Objectively, atonement is described as Christ's deed enabling God to act mercifully towards human

⁸³⁶ Tillich's categories for *præsumptio* and *desperatio*. While traditionally the two are treated within justification, Tillich treats them within sanctification.

⁸³⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 238.

⁸³⁸ For the detailed discussion of how doubt and sanctification relate, see TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 238ff.

⁸³⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), pp. 177-180.

⁸⁴⁰ The contradiction is avoided thanks to the Protestant principle. See TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 243ff.

⁸⁴¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 170.

⁸⁴² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), pp. 150f.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁴ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 172.

being without violating justice⁸⁴⁵. If it was not for this deed, therefore, God's grace would be in contradiction with His justice. Conversely, the doctrine of atonement illustrates the possibility and the actuality of regeneration, justification and sanctification. The formal significance of this doctrine, for Tillich, is the exclusion of conflict in God between love and justice⁸⁴⁶. Its material significance, instead, is the illustration of human being's salvation. Specifically, God takes up the world's suffering and guilt into Himself, thus participating in human being's existential alienation. The crucial and criteriological *manifestation* of this participation is Christ's cross⁸⁴⁷. In this sense, Tillich argues that reconciliation (including justification) is actualized through the cross of Christ, in whom the New Being is fully manifested⁸⁴⁸. Therefore, by participating in the New Being through faith, individuals also participate in the manifestation of God's atoning act⁸⁴⁹, the effects of which are regeneration, justification and sanctification. As was already mentioned, Tillich regards regeneration as the overarching soteriological category, because it comes before both justification and sanctification⁸⁵⁰. Regeneration describes a status, the objective new order of things, the New Eon brought about by Christ into which human beings enter when appropriating atonement subjectively⁸⁵¹. This appropriation happens *sola fide*, because only faith is the organ which is able to accept Jesus Christ as the bearer of the New Being⁸⁵².

In conclusion, for Tillich, justification is a specification of regeneration qualifying human being's experience of the New Being as a paradox. The primary aim of the doctrine is to present a theory of meaning which is able to meet the needs of secular humanity. Thus, justification does not only concern the sinner, but also the doubter. It occurs through faith, which enables participation in Jesus Christ as the bearer of the New Being, in whom God has effected human being's liberation from existential alienation.

2.2.2. "Theologies of the Performative Word". K. Barth and E. Jüngel

2.2.2.A. K. Barth

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁶ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 174.

⁸⁴⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 175. For Tillich, manifestation is effective, not merely noetic. Through manifestation, something happens which has real consequences. In this sense – and keeping in mind Tillich's weighty view of symbols (see also note 822) – I deem it accurate to infer that he considers Jesus Christ's cross *symbolic*.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 178.

⁸⁵¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 187), p. 177.

⁸⁵² Ibid. This specification could relativize the critique formulated in note 829. If justification (and sanctification) are ultimately specifications of regeneration and the latter depends on faith alone, then Tillich's justification doctrine might be actually closer to core Reformational categories than I have claimed.

Barth notably reverts the Law-Gospel sequence and claims that the Law is embedded within God's gracious self-revelation⁸⁵³. The chief category to understand his view of the coupling is God's *command*⁸⁵⁴, a category which, from different perspectives, is both relevant here and later⁸⁵⁵. Essentially, Barth employs it in order to highlight the evangelical *concreteness* of the Law⁸⁵⁶. The command is not the immutable, enslaving legal instance having always the same content⁸⁵⁷. Instead, it is an act of grace⁸⁵⁸, it illustrates the freedom of the Christian person in specific situations⁸⁵⁹. The Decalogue, for Barth, is not identical with the Law as God's command. The former is the grammar of the latter⁸⁶⁰. The Decalogue provides examples of the *sphere* within which God's command happens, thus enabling discernment⁸⁶¹. In other words, it demarcates the scope of obedience by excluding what God has excluded. Within this scope, the command is revealed to human being as *permission*⁸⁶², which attests that God has liberated His partners for life. The key thought is that, for Barth, this attestation is an essential part of God's self-revelation⁸⁶³. Thus, the first and foremost determination of the Law is not its imperative mood, but its *christological* qualification⁸⁶⁴. The Law is taken up in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth's category of God's command paves the way to his understanding of soteriology⁸⁶⁵. For him, the Law is not primarily a burden, but a blessing⁸⁶⁶, the task and the form of the Gospel⁸⁶⁷. Accordingly, there is no antithesis between the two realities. Rather, his focus on the unity of God's Word in Jesus Christ⁸⁶⁸ leads Barth to abandon the traditional Protestant understanding of the coupling, which, for him, posits a problematic disunity in

⁸⁵³ See e.g. BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, I/2, vol. 4, The Doctrine of the Word of God, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1938), pp. 185ff.

⁸⁵⁴ Barth's understanding of God's command, which is essential to make sense of Gospel and Law in his theology, is studied for instance by ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth on the Decalogue", Scottish Journal of Theology 71/2 (2018), pp. 127-141.

⁸⁵⁵ In Part 3, I am going to study Barth's category of God's command from the perspective of the relationship between theology and ethics.

⁸⁵⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 853), p. 188.

⁸⁵⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 853), p. 199.

⁸⁵⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, II/2, vol. 12, The Doctrine of God, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1942), p. 29.

⁸⁵⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 56: "There is no divine claim in itself. There are only concrete divine claims. For it is the grace of God which expresses itself in these claims".

⁸⁶⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 151ff.

⁸⁶¹ ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded" (see note 854) p. 134f.

⁸⁶² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 74.

⁸⁶³ ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded" (see note 854) p. 138f.

⁸⁶⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 853), p. 176.

⁸⁶⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 75: "The command, as we have seen, is itself the form of the grace of God, the intervention of the God who has taken the curse from us to draw us to Himself – the easy yoke and the light burden of Christ, which as such are not to be exchanged for any other yoke or burden".

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 3. See also WOODARD-LEHMAN, D., "The Law as the Task of the Gospel: Karl Barth and the Possibility of an Apostolic Pragmatism", Journal of Jewish Ethics 2/1 (2016), pp. 62-85.

⁸⁶⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 3: "As the one Word of God which is the revelation and work of His grace reaches us, its aim is that our being and action should be conformed to His". See also BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/1 (see note 331), pp. 118ff.

the Word⁸⁶⁹. Instead, he regards the Law as the necessary form of the Gospel and grace as its content. The Law is precisely *the* form demanded by the Gospel as its content⁸⁷⁰. This means that the indicative of grace is inseparable from the imperative of obedience, which *deepens* it and shows that grace is not cheap⁸⁷¹. The Gospel-Law coupling, in Barth, aims at showing that both realities share the same content expressed in two different moods. The indicative of the Gospel reveals God's election as the primary determination of human beings as His covenantal partners. *Then* the imperative of the Law (to be understood as a concrete command) expresses their secondary determination as subjects called to correspond to God's action with their own⁸⁷². Therefore, for Barth, the Law is the *consequence* of the coming of the Gospel, and it is fulfilled by Christ, who is its *telos*. Further, the Law must follow the Gospel, because this is the movement chosen by God in His self-disclosure: first comes His gracious Word, then His command⁸⁷³. Jesus Christ has fulfilled the Law, and *that* is Gospel. Now, the Law is the form that human being's response to God's grace may finally take. However, Barth acknowledges that, while the Gospel is Law, the Law is *not* Gospel. Rather, it is present *in* it, in the form of concrete claims⁸⁷⁴. Therefore, Barth does maintain the priority of grace over the Law, but he also highlights that the two are inseparable⁸⁷⁵. This means that the Law is not grace *per se*, but only because of the Gospel. While not simply equating the two realities, Barth claims that the ultimate relationship between them is their harmony actualized in Christ's sovereignty⁸⁷⁶. Together, both express the one, undivided Word of God as undeserved divine goodness⁸⁷⁷, first as the proclamation of the *actuality* of Christ's lordship (Gospel), then as the illustration of its *possibility* (Law). As a matter of fact, Barth does *not* simply deny the ambiguity of the Law. His departure from the traditional Protestant understanding of the Law-Gospel coupling depends rather on *where* he locates this ambiguity. For him, the Law becomes sin and death instead of life and hope whenever one tries to establish righteousness through obedience⁸⁷⁸. This is because righteousness is provided only through

⁸⁶⁹ WOODARD-LEHMAN, D., "The Law as the Task of the Gospel" (see note 867), p. 65.

⁸⁷⁰ WOODARD-LEHMAN, D., "The Law as the Task of the Gospel" (see note 867), p. 67.

⁸⁷¹ I use this adjective in the sense meant by BONHOEFFER, D., *Nachfolge. Mit einem Nachwort von Eberhard Bethge*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München 1983¹⁴. In German, the phrase is *billige Gnade*.

⁸⁷² BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 3f. See also WOODARD-LEHMAN, D., "The Law as the Task of the Gospel" (see note 867), p. 68.

⁸⁷³ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (see note 858), p. 8. See also RAE, S.H., "Gospel, Law and Freedom in the Theological Ethics of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25/4 (1972), pp. 412 – 422, here p. 414.

⁸⁷⁴ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (see note 858), p. 56.

⁸⁷⁵ HARRELSON, W., "Karl Barth on the Decalogue", *SAGE Journals* 6/3 (1976), pp. 229-240, here p. 231. Incidentally, Barth's reading of Gospel and Law is at least partially consonant with exegetical works such as: BRAULIK, G., "Gesetz als Evangelium: Rechtfertigung und Begnadigung nach der deuteronomischen Tora", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 79/2 (1982), pp. 127-160; DUNN, J. D. G., "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43/1 (1992), pp. 1-22.

⁸⁷⁶ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (see note 858), p. 57.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁸ See e.g. BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 (see note 404), pp. 39f.

faith, which is human being's clinging to Jesus Christ, the one who has obeyed the Law for others⁸⁷⁹. So, the ambiguity of the Law, for Barth, is the result of its legalistic misuse. This does not depend on the imperative mood, but on sinners arbitrarily separating themselves from their determination given in Christ⁸⁸⁰. This means that, for Barth, the unambiguous Law *becomes* ambiguous if it is heard as a call to the autonomous realization of righteousness through obedience (outside of Christ). Ebeling argues that Barth's understanding of the Law-Gospel relationship departs from Reformation theology⁸⁸¹. Specifically, the core of the critique is that Barth's christocentrism is different from Luther's. This difference is mirrored by the fact that the Christology developed in the *Church Dogmatics* is often considered overemphasized in comparison to soteriology⁸⁸². For Ebeling, Barth's christocentrism is logical-analogical, while Luther's is forensic-antithetical⁸⁸³. A possible reformulation is: the former unfolds within the doctrine of God, whereas the latter depends on justification doctrine, hence on the relationship between the sinner and the gracious God. Thus, Ebeling quite provocatively argues that Barth's christocentrism is *not necessarily* bound to the Reformation insights on anthropology and hamartiology and rather close to Scholasticism⁸⁸⁴. Regardless of how it is received, Ebeling's critique, in my judgment, correctly highlights that Barth's understanding of Law and Gospel is indicative of his overall theology. From the point of view of justification doctrine, his interpretation of the coupling entails that human being's righteousness is

⁸⁷⁹ RAE, S.H., "Gospel, Law and Freedom" (see note 873), pp. 415f.

⁸⁸⁰ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (see note 858), p. 31.

⁸⁸¹ EBELING, G., "Über die Reformation hinaus?" (see note 31). In my judgment, the strength of Ebeling's argument is anthropological and hamartiological. Barth does not understand the ambiguity of the Law to its imperative mood, but from the way human beings react to it. I find this quite problematic. Provocatively, I am going to express the problem in the form of questions: Are sinners free to hear the Law's imperative mood otherwise than as a call to actualize righteousness by obedience? If they are, are they sinners in the sense of the Reformation, or rather in that of Roman Catholicism? Barth focuses on the *Law itself* and says that its address is not in itself problematic. Ebeling focuses on the *relationship* between the Law and sinners who hear it and rightly sees that they can *only* hear it wrong. If the Law is considered in itself, Barth's position holds. The Law is good, unambiguously. However, it is not given in itself, it does not float in an abstract vacuum. God does not give it to Himself, but to sinners. Therefore, in my view, the Law is ambiguous because it exists together with (in German: *an*) sinners. *Concretely* (which is a wonderful Reformational adverb, and Barth would agree), the Law can only and always be misheard as a call to restitute reality, simply because it is only and always heard by *sinners*. Certainly, the Gospel is only and always heard by sinners, too. The difference is that the Law is heard by them as a reality which should be present and yet is not, while the Gospel is immediately present to them as soon as they hear it. Ultimately, we go back to the criteriological distinction between the imperative and the indicative. In my judgment, this distinction has indeed to do with the ambiguity of the Law. In conclusion, I believe that the core of Ebeling's critique holds, even though his claim that Barth has departed from Reformation theology seems quite an exaggeration.

⁸⁸² See e.g. BEINTKER, M., PLASGER, G., TROWITZSCH, M., *Karl Barth als Lehrer der Versöhnung (1950-1968). Vertiefung – Öffnung – Hoffnung*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich 2016.

⁸⁸³ EBELING, G., "Über die Reformation hinaus?" (see note 31), p. 41.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Interestingly enough, a Roman Catholic theologian like S. J. Brinkmann advances a claim similar to Ebeling's. Specifically, he recognizes in Barth the inauguration of a new mode for Protestant thinking, which uses different categories from both traditional Reformation theology and Roman Catholicism (see BRINKMANN, S. J., "Karl Barth and Justification", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 25/3 [1958], pp. 274-284).

effectively enabled by the actuality of God's righteousness and cannot be regarded as a mere possibility⁸⁸⁵.

For Barth, justification is human being's *transition* from death to life, out of rejection (*Verworfenheit*) into election⁸⁸⁶. This transition is declared by God (*Gerechtsprechung*), therefore also effected (*Gerechtmachung*). More precisely, it finds in God's judgment on human being and is described by justification doctrine⁸⁸⁷. The latter expresses the inner *possibility* of the world's reconciliation with God⁸⁸⁸, not its actuality⁸⁸⁹. Consequently, Barth considers justification as one particular aspect of the broader semantics of reconciliation⁸⁹⁰, in need to be complemented by the doctrines of sanctification and calling (*Berufung*)⁸⁹¹. For him, justification finds in God's eternal gracious decree pronounced in Jesus Christ⁸⁹². Only in him does God determine Himself in favor of sinful humanity, thus keeping the covenant⁸⁹³. In him, both God's rejection and election are carried out. Through him, they are mediated to Israel and the church and finally, by means of those communities, also to individuals. In Barth's theology, therefore, justification finds in election, in which God's Word is spoken to all⁸⁹⁴, so that the two soteriological categories coexist asymmetrically. In Jesus Christ, God the Son⁸⁹⁵ has taken up rejection for Himself, thereby dialectically subjecting the "No" to the "Yes"⁸⁹⁶. In doing so, He has placed Himself in the position that was supposed to be of human being (rejection), in order for them to become elected⁸⁹⁷. Thus, the *actuality* of rejection has fully unraveled on Christ's cross, where God has rejected Himself *in order to* elect human

⁸⁸⁵ "The reality of the good as such, the reality of the command of God as the sum of the good, cannot be treated as a mere possibility": BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 27.

⁸⁸⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/1, vol. 23, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1953), p. 2. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung. Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung. Mit einem Geleitbrief von Karl Barth, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1957. In what follows, I am going to frequently refer to Küng's account of justification in Barth because the latter has explicitly judged it a correct rendition of his doctrine (see e.g. H.H. HARMS' review of Küng's book appeared in: Theology Today 16/3 [1959], pp. 423-424).

⁸⁸⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 3.

⁸⁸⁸ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 24.

⁸⁸⁹ In my opinion, this fully explains Barth's subordination of justification to election, as well as his subjectivistic reading of Luther. After his epistemological turn back to the object (see BARTH, K., Fides quaerens intellectum. Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenhang seines theologischen Programms, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München 1931), Barth increasingly develops a theology of Jesus Christ as the *actuality* of reality posited with God's eternal election decree. Hence the historical event of justification (happening on Christ's cross) does not found, for Barth, the actuality of reconciliation. Instead, it only illustrates its possibility. To my knowledge, unlike Jüngel, Barth never questions the primacy of act over potency. In fact, this primacy seems to become one key tenet of his theology once his interpretation of Anselm starts informing his epistemology. For Jüngel's opposite approach on the matter, see note 109.

⁸⁹⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/1, vol. 21, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1953), p. 142.

⁸⁹¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 37. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 25.

⁸⁹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 142.

⁸⁹³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 19.

⁸⁹⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 143. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 30.

⁸⁹⁵ For an exact account of Barth's doctrine of election, it is important to remember that Jesus Christ is not only the rejected and elected human being. As the Son, he is also the electing God.

⁸⁹⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 3.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

being⁸⁹⁸. As a consequence, in Jesus Christ, all human beings are elected, since they are all are actually represented in him⁸⁹⁹. Thus, the reality of election undergirds justification, which, for Barth, illustrates *one* fundamental aspect of God's grace and sovereignty⁹⁰⁰. In particular, justification is God's election becoming manifest in history. To understand this manifestation, Barth refers to the covenant which *is* God's electing decision in Jesus Christ. In the covenant, God has elected Himself as the One who wills to establish and keep a pact with human being, *therefore* upholding them as His covenantal partners despite their sin⁹⁰¹. Justification illustrates precisely that God reacts to humanity's sin through His gracious judgment, with which He confirms and applies the covenant⁹⁰². In my opinion, the first key element of Barth's position is that justification must not be regarded as the arbitrary decision to forgive humanity's sin *instead of* judging it⁹⁰³. To the contrary, it is the very execution of God's judgment⁹⁰⁴, which is not arbitrary, but righteous⁹⁰⁵. On the one hand, justification expresses the gracious *righteousness* of God, who keeps truly loyal to the covenant⁹⁰⁶ and reacts to sin by passing His annihilating judgment on sinners (in Jesus Christ's death). On the other, it manifests His *gracious* righteousness, in that He *prolongs* the annihilation of sinners into their new creation *ex nihilo* as righteous creatures (in Jesus Christ's resurrection)⁹⁰⁷ who are called to exist accordingly. The relationship between human beings' annihilation and their new creation is to be conceptualized as *one and the same movement* in two phases, from the "No" to the "Yes"⁹⁰⁸. God has chosen to keep the covenant even though sinners have broken it. Thus, justification, for Barth, expresses first and foremost *God's* righteousness, the one that He has and performatively communicates to human beings⁹⁰⁹. In other words, it is God's sovereign fulfilment (*Erfüllung*) of the covenant broken by humanity⁹¹⁰. In justification, God makes the covenant true and real in the midst of history. By annihilating sinners in His judgment, He shows that He is truly righteous. By reconciling them with Himself, He reveals that His keeping of the covenant, His very righteousness, *consists in* safeguarding sinners as His partners⁹¹¹. *This* is free grace and illustrates God's sovereign freedom.

⁸⁹⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 4.

⁸⁹⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 3.

⁹⁰⁰ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 32.

⁹⁰¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 1.

⁹⁰² KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 33.

⁹⁰³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 22.

⁹⁰⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 1.

⁹⁰⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 18.

⁹⁰⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 20.

⁹⁰⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 24.

⁹⁰⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 1. See also LANG, M., „JA zum Menschen, NEIN zum Menschen!“. Zur Ehre Gottes reicht's. Der doppelte Freispruch in der Rechtfertigungslehre von Karl Barth, Proseminararbeit: Einführung in die Systematische Theologie: Grundzüge von Karl Barths Versöhnungslehre, University of Tübingen 2020.

⁹⁰⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 25.

⁹¹⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 27. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 37.

⁹¹¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 28.

The second key element of Barth's position on justification is that the covenant has been *fully compromised* by sin⁹¹². Even though human being *is* already justified⁹¹³ and determined as God's creature⁹¹⁴, this gracious determination was destroyed when the covenant was broken. Accordingly, sinners now *need* to be justified in order to be reconciled with God⁹¹⁵. However, in the act of their reconciliation, God does not tragically twist their destiny. He certainly reacts to sin and effects sinners' justification in Jesus Christ⁹¹⁶, but, in this reaction, He is not being determined by their sin. Rather, He carries out the original act that He has freely chosen, namely the establishment and fulfillment of the covenant⁹¹⁷. If reconciliation were simply God's provoked reaction to sin, His free sovereignty over creation would be compromised, and sin would dictate His grace. Instead, reconciliation is Jesus Christ⁹¹⁸, the personal decision in whom God has unraveled His decree from the whole of eternity and prior to creation. Thus, for Barth, reconciliation (and justification as a part thereof) is due exclusively to Jesus Christ as true God and true man, not to the Fall of humanity. This illustrates that God remains free throughout reconciliation and nothing determines His will⁹¹⁹. Nevertheless, the category of sin does help theology understand grace. God freely deciding to be the partner of *sinful* humanity illustrates that His gracious judgment is utterly undeserved⁹²⁰. Grace means: God wills to remain the One who, in His authority, keeps the covenant not without, but with His creatures and for their sake⁹²¹. Thus, according to Barth, justification illustrates that God's grace is identical with His freedom and sovereignty⁹²². As such, it remains always *alien* to human being's possession⁹²³, it does not depend on any good remnant in their nature and only reflects God's freedom⁹²⁴. Grace is fully

⁹¹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 26.

⁹¹³ Here, the verb means "qualified", "determined by God's grace".

⁹¹⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 135.

⁹¹⁵ Here, "justified" means "reconciled", "made a new creation".

⁹¹⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 54.

⁹¹⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 29. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 38.

⁹¹⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 31.

⁹¹⁹ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 41.

⁹²⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 54.

⁹²¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890), p. 19: "Reconciliation is the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man."

⁹²² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 79.

⁹²³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/1, vol. 22, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1953), p. 55. However, in my opinion, Barth's understanding of *iustitia aliena* sharply differs from alternative readings in Reformation theology, and specifically from Mostert's. I am going to dwell longer on this in the remaining chapters of Part 2. Nevertheless, I would like to point out already what I consider to be the core difference. For Barth, *iustitia aliena* means God's righteousness being actual only in Jesus Christ as the Son, true God and true man. The event of justification involves human beings *directly*, not first and foremost by way of apprehension or communication. This is because they are co-positd with Jesus Christ, their *humanity* (not first and foremost their righteousness) exists only in him. In justification, God *makes* His true, righteous being *become* also human being's. Conversely, for Mostert, the event of justification involves human beings *indirectly*, it is communicated to them through faith. Thus, they are always *potentially* involved in it. Accordingly, their *righteousness* (not first and foremost their humanity) is immediately co-positd with Jesus Christ and exists only in him. Thus, in justification, God *transposes* Christ's being into human being and vice versa. The difference that I have outlined might help illustrate Küng's claim that Barth's account of justification is not extrinsic (KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung [see note 886], p. 45).

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

revealed in and identical with Jesus Christ, in whom it concerns the whole of humanity. Contrary to Pannenberg, Barth claims that the event of reconciliation taking place in Jesus Christ is self-contained⁹²⁵, it is not open-ended and does not need historical completion. This claim leads H. Küng to ask how the self-contained reconciliation event in Jesus Christ can possibly apply to other human beings⁹²⁶. Barth does not understand this *application* by interpreting faith as the vessel (*Gefäß*) of salvation⁹²⁷. Instead, he regards Christ's resurrection as God's new and autonomous work. In him, God has pronounced His sovereign, gracious and historical-factual (*tatsächlich*) "Yes" to human being, which can be heard only together with the "No"⁹²⁸. In the resurrection, God the Father recognizes the Son's cross as the rightful deed (*Rechtstat*) performed for the sake of human beings and counting as their salvation⁹²⁹. This deed has a negative and a positive pole. The first is judgment as the revelation of God's *wrath* and the rejection of Christ, which kills sinners. The second is this same judgment as the revelation of God's grace and the election of Christ, which justifies human being and calls them to newness of life⁹³⁰. *Remoto Christo*, there is no difference between sinner and sin⁹³¹. Consequently, Barth states that human being has no possibility of their own to come out of sin⁹³². This is shown by Jesus Christ, in whom God has become man to counter sin, dying alone⁹³³. However, *in Christo*, it becomes manifest that sinners are *fundamentally mistaken* in regarding themselves as identical to sin. Specifically, by doing so, they neglect the actual reality of atonement given in Christ⁹³⁴. Since the truth of their being is in him, their striving to exist as sinners, *as though* they were truly without God, is delusional⁹³⁵. In other words, by simply equating themselves with sin, sinners make God a liar. In particular, they forget that they are those who, in the seriousness of their Fall, have fallen exactly where God has already graciously lowered Himself in Jesus Christ for the sake of their salvation⁹³⁶. Correspondingly, the Gospel is God's address to sinners in which they are told that they are justified and sanctified. Clearly, this is only actual in Jesus Christ⁹³⁷, who has fulfilled both God's righteousness *and* the obedience demanded of His covenantal partners⁹³⁸. Hence,

⁹²⁵ See BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 890) pp. 49f.

⁹²⁶ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 51.

⁹²⁷ For an account of the means of salvation (*Heilsmittel*) in Barth's theology, see e.g. HERBERG, J., Kirchliche Heilsvermittlung. Ein Gespräch zwischen Karl Barth und Karl Rahner (Disputationes theologicæ, 5), Peter Lang, Berlin 1978.

⁹²⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 77.

⁹²⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 1.

⁹³⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 89.

⁹³¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 47. See also KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 54.

⁹³² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 55.

⁹³³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 43.

⁹³⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 45.

⁹³⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 53.

⁹³⁶ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 56.

⁹³⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 930), p. 56.

⁹³⁸ See e.g. MOLNAR, P. D., "The importance of the doctrine of justification in the theology of Thomas F. Torrance and of Karl Barth", Scottish Journal of Theology 70/2 (2017), pp. 198-226, here p. 201.

Barth's view of sanctification *cannot* be regarded as synergistic, since its core is that human obedience is Christ's. So, Accordingly, sanctification is the deepening of justification, the two belong inextricably together⁹³⁹. Once again, it is only in union with Christ that sinners are both justified and sanctified, but in him they *truly* are⁹⁴⁰. *Therefore*, they are called to Christian freedom⁹⁴¹, in order for the possibility of their existence to align with the actuality that they always already have in God's Word. In a nutshell, justification and sanctification mean that sinners are reconciled in Jesus Christ because in him they have their reality⁹⁴², to which they are called to respond. Thus, he is the act of humanity, while they are its potency.

In conclusion, Barth's justification doctrine is theocentric, participative and covenantal⁹⁴³ and founds in election⁹⁴⁴. It describes God's judgment as a movement in two phases, from the annihilation of sinners to their new creation⁹⁴⁵. This movement happens *realiter* in Jesus Christ, in whom God has rejected Himself for the sake of sinners (Gospel). *As a consequence*, these are now free to respond to His grace and live out their election fully (Law)⁹⁴⁶. However, they are enabled to do so only in the Spirit, since the whole of reconciliation remains under God's initiative and in His power⁹⁴⁷. Due to Barth's understanding of christocentrism, justification doctrine does not have an immediate criteriological value in his account⁹⁴⁸.

2.2.2.B. E. Jüngel

In Jüngel's theology, the Law-Gospel coupling is mainly treated within hamartiology⁹⁴⁹. This means that the right understanding of the two realities *depends* on the sinner's acknowledgment and

⁹³⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/2, vol. 25, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1955), p. 124. Specifically, sanctification, for Barth, means that the justified is claimed by God (*Inanspruchnahme*) for the fulfilment of His will and called to confirm their justification through good deeds (KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung [see note 886], p. 87).

⁹⁴⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/2 (see note 939), p. 135.

⁹⁴¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/2 (see note 939), p. 131.

⁹⁴² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 923), p. 137. See also MOLNAR, P. D., "The importance of the doctrine of justification" (see note 938), p. 202.

⁹⁴³ See TORRANCE, A., "Karl Barth on the Irresistible Nature of Grace", Journal of Reformed Theology 10/2 (2016), pp. 103-128.

⁹⁴⁴ Strangely enough, the same claim is also maintained by B. Hamm, even though his position on justification is much closer to Ebeling and Mostert's than to Barth's (see HAMM, B., "Was ist reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre?", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 83/1 [1986], pp. 1-38, here p. 24).

⁹⁴⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 60.

⁹⁴⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/2 (see note 939), p. 155.

⁹⁴⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/2 (see note 939), p. 132. See also MOLNAR, P. D., "The importance of the doctrine of justification" (see note 938), p. 208.

⁹⁴⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/1 (see note 886), p. 15: "The articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae is not the doctrine of justification as such, but its basis and culmination: the confession of Jesus Christ". See also MOLNAR, P. D., "The importance of the doctrine of justification" (see note 938), p. 206.

⁹⁴⁹ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), pp. 81-86.

confession of their sin. What identifies human being as a sinner is only God's Word within faith⁹⁵⁰. The knowledge of sin is *revealed* to them, not previously known. No one can say *what* sin is because everyone *is* sin. Correspondingly, Jüngel insists that only God reveals both sin and sinner. This knowledge is *not* manifested by the Law, but only by the Gospel, and this, for Jüngel, qualifies the latter as good news: Once sin is truly pinned and called by its name, the Gospel has *already* promised liberation from it⁹⁵¹. As a consequence, the distinction between Law and Gospel is essential. Without it, the first would usurp the function of the second by promising liberation from sin⁹⁵². The Law can and does unveil a dimension of sin, based on what the latter is directed against⁹⁵³. This means that sin is always coupled with wrongdoing⁹⁵⁴, with the breaking of the Law. However, what the Law unveils is not the deepest dimension of sin⁹⁵⁵. This dimension can be truly known only based on what is directed against sin, namely the Gospel⁹⁵⁶. Therefore, Jüngel claims that Law and Gospel are to be kept in tensional reference to each other in order to properly understand sin. This understanding, after all, is essential to fully comprehend God's grace communicated to sinners in Jesus Christ. For Jüngel, the Law is *insufficient* in identifying the deepest dimension of sin because it regards it only as wrongdoing, as transgression. This, in turn, makes it impossible to understand the depth of the Law, its *ambiguity*, thereby obscuring what human being is given by the Gospel⁹⁵⁷. The Law is ambiguous because its imperative mood determines the way sinners relate to it. They hear its fundamental request as something which defines human beings as those who must fulfill demands⁹⁵⁸. Regardless of how they respond to the imperative, the Law *always* identifies them as transgressors. This identification bases on two possibilities. According to the first, when they are faced with the imperative, sinners either fall short of its demands because they disobey or because they obey unwillingly. The second possibility, instead, is that they believe that they will attain salvation through their obedience. The impassable difficulty with the Law, its *crux*, depends on the fact that its fulfillment is its *indicative*⁹⁵⁹. In order to truly obey, sinners should hear the Law accordingly. However, to their impeded ears, the Law *always* resonates in the imperative and *never* in the indicative. Therefore, their salvation cannot occur through the Law, but only through a reality which, conversely, always comes in the indicative and never in the imperative. This reality is the Gospel, which communicates salvation to sinners by

⁹⁵⁰ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung Rechtfertigung (see note 149), p. 81.

⁹⁵¹ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), p. 85.

⁹⁵² JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), pp. 81, 86.

⁹⁵³ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung Rechtfertigung (see note 149), p. 81.

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. 1Jn 3,4.

⁹⁵⁵ A glimpse into the deepest dimension of sin is enabled by the fact that it existed prior to the Law, before transgressions. This is discussed by JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus: Eine theologische Studie zu Röm 5, 12-21", Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 60/1 (1963), pp. 42-74, here p. 54.

⁹⁵⁶ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), p. 82.

⁹⁵⁷ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), p. 83.

⁹⁵⁸ JÜNGEL, E., Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung (see note 149), pp. 83f.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid.

graciously covering up their sin and revealing it as a power which is bound to pass⁹⁶⁰. Therefore, for Jüngel, the Law-Gospel coupling functions as follows⁹⁶¹: The Gospel identifies the deep dimension of sin and uses the accusation of the Law to pin sinners down, leading them to confess their sin, so that salvation can be delivered to them. In a nutshell, the Law is a function of the Gospel, its complement, its *opus alienum*. It is employed by the Gospel in order to fully carry out its *opus proprium*, the salvation of sinners⁹⁶². Thus, according to Jüngel, the Law has been outdated (*überholt*) by the Gospel. Nevertheless, it continues to exist as human being's past and as the presupposition for the knowledge of the Gospel⁹⁶³. Since the time of the Gospel (as the reality of faith) *follows* the time of the Law, the coupling *reveals* that the latter is under the domination of sin. With that, Law and Gospel exist in a problematic and differentiated succession in salvation history (*heilsgeschichtliches Nacheinander*)⁹⁶⁴. Specifically, the word-event of the Gospel is determined in its structure by the future of faith, whereas the Law remains focused on the past of sin. Therefore, a historical Law-Gospel continuity is problematic, because it does not rightly account for the fact that the Gospel irrupts from the future into the domain of sin. By its irruption, the Gospel disturbs the interpretation of both sin and sinner anchored to the past and derived from the Law⁹⁶⁵. In other words, the Gospel disturbs the legalistic interpretation of history as a continuity of the domination of sin and death. This interpretation is inherently coupled with the Law's imperative, which demands works and qualifies human being as a subject actualizing themselves within a historical relationality (*Zusammenhang*) dominated by their works⁹⁶⁶. The disturbance brought about by the Gospel performatively *effects* a qualitatively new history. Now, the historical relationality of human being is determined by faith⁹⁶⁷. Accordingly, for Jüngel, the full knowledge of the Gospel unveils that its relationship with the Law is a disturbed correspondence. In its unfolding, the old history focused on the *act* of sinning (*Sündentat*) as a transgression of the Law is overcome by the new history centered around the *gift* of

⁹⁶⁰ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 84.

⁹⁶¹ In my opinion, the attentive study of Jüngel's position indicates that the right order, for him, is: (Gospel)-Law-Gospel. Specifically, the Gospel as the *always prevenient* reality of God's grace in Jesus Christ is already at work when the Law delivers its accusation. It is present not *in* the Law, but *with and under* it, it directs it and orients its function to the deliverance of sinners, not to their annihilation. However, from the perspective of sinners (who are ignorant of the Gospel), the order is Law-Gospel. They need first and foremost to hear the accusation of the Law in order to *then* be able to apprehend the Gospel. Accordingly, in Jüngel's understanding, the Law seems to function as the point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between the Gospel as the hidden and eternal salvific reality with God and the same Gospel as the revealed and historical reality graciously communicated to sinners.

⁹⁶² JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 85f.

⁹⁶³ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), pp. 44f.

⁹⁶⁴ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 45.

⁹⁶⁵ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), pp. 46f.

⁹⁶⁶ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 48.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

grace (*Gnadengabe*)⁹⁶⁸. The new history of the Gospel disqualifies the old history of the Law. When they were determined by the legal instance, human beings were defined as soteriologically active. Now, in their new determination by the Gospel, they are soteriologically passive (*mere passive*). Correspondingly, their truth is in faith, not in the works of the Law. However, the Gospel does not make the Law disappear. Rather, within faith, it includes it in a movement in which the Law still exists as the *past* continuity of sin leading to death⁹⁶⁹. Within this movement, the present of believers is eschatological, it is determined by their future. This is because faith directs them towards the paradox of their existence and makes them certain of their salvation. This certitude bases on God having overcome their hostility with Him⁹⁷⁰. In the salvation event, the eschatological *novum* comes out fully as the new appearing together with⁹⁷¹ the old, but also through it and as something which has imposed itself over against it⁹⁷². In this context, the old functions as the basis for the knowledge of the new, eschatological future of salvation coming into the present⁹⁷³. This illustrates the hermeneutical significance of the Law for Jüngel: it occupies a mid-position between sin and righteousness. Accordingly, it is theologically necessary⁹⁷⁴, but it is overcome by the future-determined Gospel. This thought also concerns the eschatological reservation, which is considered a consequence of justification doctrine⁹⁷⁵.

According to Jüngel, the justification of the ungodly⁹⁷⁶ (*iustificatio impii*) is the overall criterion and the category qualifying the whole of theology because first and foremost it determines the thinking, speaking and acting of believers before God⁹⁷⁷. As such, justification doctrine works as a catalyst for all theological truths. From a hermeneutical perspective, this doctrine transposes the whole of theology into a juridical controversy in favor of God's honor, *therefore* also in favor of human being's dignity⁹⁷⁸. The controversy is both awoken and regulated by the exclusive particles of Reformation theology⁹⁷⁹. Specifically, the five *sola* exclude human being from any soteriological

⁹⁶⁸ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), pp. 61f. Therefore, unlike Barth, Jüngel maintains the centrality of the *formal* difference between Law and Gospel, which goes back to the imperative and indicative moods.

⁹⁶⁹ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), pp. 48f.

⁹⁷⁰ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 49.

⁹⁷¹ In German, *an*.

⁹⁷² JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 63.

⁹⁷³ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 65.

⁹⁷⁴ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), pp. 68f.

⁹⁷⁵ JÜNGEL, E., "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus" (see note 955), p. 55.

⁹⁷⁶ Often enough, the word "ungodly" has a moral meaning. This is *not* the case in Jüngel's theology. The ungodly (*gottloser*) is a theological (not ethical) category, it is human being in their qualification as a sinner.

⁹⁷⁷ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 40.

⁹⁷⁸ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 41.

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

collaboration with God⁹⁸⁰, in order to include them correctly in their relationship with Him, namely as a receiver of His salvation.

In Jüngel's view, the justification of the ungodly is the result of God's determination to historically prolong His trinitarian self-relatedness into His relationship with sinners⁹⁸¹. From the perspective of trinitarian theology, God's righteousness consists in the fact that He is the Father and the Son at the same time. This means that God remains God precisely in that He takes on the consequences of human unrighteousness in the Son. God's righteousness as self-correspondence is His trinitarian self-determination. Accordingly, He brings human beings to correspond to Him by overcoming their contentiousness with Him in his gracious judgment⁹⁸². This does not occur as a necessity, but because of God's free, gracious decision. In short, God is righteous in Himself only as the One who also freely actualizes human being's righteousness⁹⁸³. Christologically, this entails that Jesus Christ, as the *sacramentum mundi*, is the one in whom God's righteousness is revealed as the differentiated⁹⁸⁴ union of divinity and humanity and effectively communicated to sinners. Thus, for Jüngel, the Trinity is the theological-ontological backbone of justification. Furthermore, historically, justification is the new creation⁹⁸⁵ which happens in Jesus Christ. In him, God's history with humanity unfolds truly and normatively for all humans and is manifested as good news. This is because, on Jesus' cross (death-resurrection), the power of life overcoming death has come out of one (Jesus') life marked by death⁹⁸⁶. For Jüngel, justification points out that God's⁹⁸⁷ righteousness is performative and *communicative*⁹⁸⁸; He proclaims it (*Gerechtersprechung*) in order to effectively communicate it to the sinner (*Gerechtmachung*). Similar to Barth, Jüngel elaborates a theology of the *performative* Word of God. However, in his Lutheran perspective, the overall *relationality* of justification is emphasized more than in Barth. For Jüngel, justification is not only the historical word-act performed by God in Christ for the sake of sinners. It also expresses an anthropological universal reality, namely that human being is *existence-before*⁹⁸⁹. Correspondingly, they strive to be justified before the *fora* of others.

⁹⁸⁰ For a Roman Catholic critique of Jüngel's insistence on the five *sola*, see e.g. I. Morali's review of Jüngel's book on justification (see note 149), in: *Gregorianum* 83/3 (2002), pp. 576-578.

⁹⁸¹ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 24.

⁹⁸² JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 71-74.

⁹⁸³ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 63ff.

⁹⁸⁴ The differentiations are the *simul iustus et peccator* (concerning humanity) and the trinitarian Persons (concerning God). See JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 68.

⁹⁸⁵ In regard to (the first) creation, justification is its greater analogous and is to be understood as *creatio ex nihilo* (See JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" [see note 521], p. 26).

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁷ In Jüngel's account, the Pauline genitive (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) is *genitivus auctoris*. God's righteousness is the one that He produces (JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* [see note 149], p. 63).

⁹⁸⁸ This adjective, in my opinion, expresses Jüngel's view of justification with utmost clarity. The word "communicative" conveys both the linguistic character of the proclaimed Gospel of justification and the reality of its apprehension by its recipients, who are truly and effectively given what has been proclaimed.

⁹⁸⁹ Here, the constitutive reference is to the *coram* category, which notably plays a pivotal role in Lutheran theology.

In Jüngel's account, justification is clearly forensic-relational, it unfolds when sinners are brought before God's *forum* (*coram Deo*) through the Law-Gospel articulation, whereby God's *opus alienum* and His *opus proprium* take place in their right correlation and joint effectiveness. What God does in justification is the one affirmation of righteousness which is utterly impossible for sinners: He pronounces freedom to the guilty *without* perverting the Law⁹⁹⁰. Thus, grace is the event in which the ungodly is found completely in the wrong before God, and *precisely as such* they are met with His irrevocable approval⁹⁹¹. This approval is given only when the Gospel is trusted (*sola fide*) and because of Christ's death for the sins of humanity (*sola gratia, solus Christus*). In Jüngel's view, theology and anthropology belong together, and that the truth about God is inseparable from the one about human beings. Specifically, wherever He is revealed as the gracious One, they are understood as the receivers of His grace⁹⁹². This happens *effectively* when the Gospel is proclaimed and received. In it, God truly *communicates* Himself, thus mercifully extending to creation the relationships that He embodies and fosters within Himself⁹⁹³. Thus, Jüngel regards justification as God being in accordance with Himself. This self-accordance is His righteousness, whereby He does not will to be for Himself, but for His creatures⁹⁹⁴. In His gracious judgment, God condemns the world's unrighteousness to pass in the person of Jesus Christ. In his death, the death of others is included and overcome, their unrighteousness is put to an end and they are eschatologically directed towards a new beginning⁹⁹⁵. The centrality of Christology *within* Jüngel's justification doctrine is indisputable⁹⁹⁶. Once again, the point of observation of trinitarian theology helps clarify Jüngel's position: Jesus Christ is the savior of humanity only based on the identity between the Son of God and the man Jesus, who is the only one in whom God Himself has acted⁹⁹⁷. Thus, human being is justified only in Jesus Christ. Since he is the one *kyrios*, faith in him categorically excludes awaiting another. This founds the exclusive principle of God's salvation act in Christ. The inclusive principle, instead, is expressed through the semantics of Christ's *vicarious representation*. The two principles are related teleologically: the first serves the second. This means that, in Jesus Christ, the determination of *all beings* is decided⁹⁹⁸. Since God the Son has self-identified with him, all humans are present in him. This thought is also

⁹⁹⁰ Here, Jüngel is aligned with Barth's crucial concern not to intend grace as the *arbitrary* suspension of righteousness. To the contrary, grace is the undeserved deepening of righteousness which recreates sinners.

⁹⁹¹ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 29.

⁹⁹² JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 32.

⁹⁹³ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), pp. 34f.

⁹⁹⁴ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 37.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁶ However, in contrast to Barth, Jüngel claims that justification interprets Christology. Thus, the latter founds in the former, not the other way around. Accordingly, the function of justification doctrine as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* is precisely to express the right Christology and illustrate the being and action of Jesus Christ for, on and with human being. Only the explanation provided within justification doctrine makes Christology sound and adequate (JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* [see note 149], pp. 15-26, and in particular pp. 22-25.).

⁹⁹⁷ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 138.

⁹⁹⁸ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 131.

formulated by Barth, but Jüngel understands it differently. For the Lutheran theologian, God's salvation act in Jesus Christ is *applied* to other human beings because God, in him, has taken up human nature *as such*⁹⁹⁹. Accordingly, in Jesus Christ all humans are incorporated proleptically into communion with God¹⁰⁰⁰.

Jüngel's trinitarian and incarnational focuses backing his justification doctrine are mirrored in his *relational* understanding of righteousness. For him, sin is guilty relationlessness, while righteousness is the substance of well-ordered relationality¹⁰⁰¹. The source and supreme confirmation of sinful relationlessness is death, where all relationships cease. Therefore, it is in (Jesus Christ's) death that God seeks lost sinners to communicate a renewed and full relationality to them. On the cross, the *merry exchange* takes place and the ungodly is justified¹⁰⁰². Thus, for Jüngel, justification is literally a matter of life and death, in that it proclaims that life has won precisely where death would appear to have triumphed¹⁰⁰³. Accordingly, justification doctrine illustrates the supreme battle for the definition of God and human being. Specifically, it clarifies that theology understands God as the Savior and human being as a sinner from the point of view of their relationship¹⁰⁰⁴.

In my opinion, the most original insight provided by Jüngel's justification doctrine is his reversing of the primacy of act over potency¹⁰⁰⁵. For him, these Aristotelian concepts inevitably imply that being exists for the sake of agency, in which it is actualized¹⁰⁰⁶. Correspondingly, the accounts¹⁰⁰⁷ centered around these semantics regard possibility as teleologically oriented to reality. Instead, Jüngel criticizes this thought based on his eschatological view of justification doctrine. Specifically, he argues that righteousness depends more on God's *imputation* than on reality. Therefore, the possibility effected by justification exists from the future and out of nothingness, not from the past and out of a previously actualized possibility¹⁰⁰⁸. As a consequence, justification doctrine criticizes the absolutization of reality, so that the fundamental dichotomy in the world is no longer between real and unreal, but between possible and impossible¹⁰⁰⁹. Thus, for Jüngel, justification doctrine implies

⁹⁹⁹ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 138. In my view, Barth's insistence on God taking up the humanity of the man Jesus (not human nature as such) stems from his focus on the doctrine of election as the *actual* foundation of justification in the free, eternal and gracious decree of God. Conversely, Jüngel's claim that God, in Jesus Christ, takes up *human nature* as such indicates that he connects justification doctrine to incarnation theology rather than the doctrine of election. Ultimately, this might depend on the confessional difference between the two theologians.

¹⁰⁰⁰ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), p. 70.

¹⁰⁰¹ JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* (see note 149), pp. 72f.

¹⁰⁰² JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 38.

¹⁰⁰³ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 52.

¹⁰⁰⁴ JÜNGEL, E., "On the Doctrine of Justification" (see note 521), p. 50.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109).

¹⁰⁰⁶ JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109), pp. 421f.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Both philosophical *and* theological.

¹⁰⁰⁸ JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109), p. 425.

¹⁰⁰⁹ JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109), p. 431. For Jüngel, justification doctrine overcomes precisely the dichotomy between possible and impossible, not the one between real and unreal.

the primacy of potency over act, with the crucial consequence that the truth about human being is found in the *vita passiva* of faith and not in the *vita activa* of good deeds¹⁰¹⁰.

In conclusion, Jüngel understands justification as the overall criterion of theology and as God's relational and performative word-act in which He decides to prolong His trinitarian relationality to include creatures. This inclusion, manifested in Christ's incarnation, qualifies God's righteousness as grace. Justification is effected by the Gospel, which is the *opus proprium* of God's Word delivering salvation to sinners by interacting with the Law, His *opus alienum*. Justification doctrine expresses the christological truth about human being, sin and God and invites theology to rethink the relationship between reality and possibility beyond the Aristotelian potency-act coupling.

2.3. A Critical Assessment of W. Mostert's Justification Doctrine

In Part 2, my study of the ontology of justification has once again focused on Mostert's doctrine in the wake of Ebeling's theology. Like his *Prolegomena*¹⁰¹¹, Mostert's justification doctrine is also independent from any explicit confrontation with the other theological accounts included in the present study. Rather, once again, it has been my intensive study of his theology which has brought me to critically juxtapose it to the alternatives. Specifically, I have found that Mostert's ontology of justification gives the relevant theological questions an orientation from where some key insights of the alternatives can be considered in a new, hopefully fruitful way. Once again, it is clear that Mostert does not tread a *via media* between the theological alternatives that I have selected. However, his theology does contain insights which intersect some core issues raised by the other theologians discussed in my study.

It is accurate to say that, in Mostert's theology, justification doctrine is like the town built on a hill which cannot be hidden, or the lamp which should not be put under a bowl¹⁰¹². In this doctrine, his whole theological endeavor is *uncovered*, it is made explicit in all its interrelations and implications, it is newly qualified. In other words, the theological questions are raised again before and in contact with the intensive, creative repetition of their criterion, namely the relationship between human being as a sinner, their world and the gracious God. Strictly speaking, for Mostert, justification doctrine (as the core of his theological theology¹⁰¹³) is not a question, but the *answer* on which theology is founded. From this answer, theological discourse reconsiders all its questions, such as the

¹⁰¹⁰ JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109), p. 435.

¹⁰¹¹ See Part 1.

¹⁰¹² Cf. Matt 5,14f.

¹⁰¹³ See here, p. 22.

Prolegomena, ethics and ecclesiology¹⁰¹⁴. In Mostert's account, this answer remains constitutively open-ended, it continuously illustrates the theological concentration on the relationship between the sinner and the justifying God. In Part 2, I have outlined his ontology of justification by focusing on three tenets of his doctrine. First, the *formality* of justification, which depends on the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation¹⁰¹⁵. Secondly, his account of the *event* of justification, which I have interpreted as an existential, intensive reinterpretation of the *extra se* category of Reformation theology. Thirdly, his *historicity* of justification, a broad concept centering around the relationship (given in faith) between the justification event and the person of Jesus Christ and encompassing the way in which this relationship extends into the life of individual believers and the world¹⁰¹⁶.

In my analysis, Mostert's overall justification doctrine results from the way these three tenets interact with one another. Specifically, his focus is on the constant interrelation between them, and moves from one to the other for descriptive purposes. All things considered, I would argue that Mostert's theology is understood most clearly when the focus is placed on the *formality* of justification. With that, he aims at distinguishing the two dimensions of God's Word(s) as Law and Gospel. The distinction illustrates that the answer given in justification doctrine truly exhausts human being's fundamental problem. Moving the focus onto the *event* of justification, Mostert investigates what justification is by asking the question as to *where* God's righteousness is to be found, namely in Jesus Christ, who is human being's incarnated justification in Person. Thus, their righteousness remains certain and safeguarded only because it is always found outside of them (*extra se*). When the focus is on the *historicity* of justification, Mostert presents his hermeneutical understanding thereof. Justification occurs every time anew as the Gospel *kerygma* is truly apprehended by sinners through faith. Therefore, its historicity is not linear, but circular, and that emphasizes Mostert's intensive understanding of human being as *simul iustus et peccator*. If my analysis of the three tenets holds, then his ontology of justification does not only express the *outer* relationality existing between human being, God and the world. Rather, it also concerns their *inner* relationality, posited within justification itself. Once again, Mostert's theology is chiefly relational: the doctrine as a whole is only aptly illustrated by the overall relationality between its parts.

¹⁰¹⁴ See Parts 1, 3 and 4 respectively.

¹⁰¹⁵ Particularly on this point, constant reference to Ebeling is essential to understand Mostert's doctrine.

¹⁰¹⁶ More specifically, following Mostert's theology, I use "historicity of justification" to refer to the relationship between the hermeneutic of the event of justification and the person of Jesus Christ as God's salvific presence in the history of the world. Thus, the historicity of justification, in my study, mainly concerns the relationship between the *kerygmatic* event of justification and incarnation Christology, which is central for Mostert's theology. Additionally, I have included questions which are relevant for the historicity of justification but lie outside the main scope of the present work. They touch upon the relationship between justification and sanctification and the futurity of salvation or eschatological reservation.

Based on the study of his justification doctrine, I have then turned to the analysis of two theological alternatives. In my view, these accounts meaningfully construe their doctrines of justification around the same tenets as Mostert's. However, they understand the interaction between them in different ways. These alternatives are the "theologies of historical salvation" (W. Pannenberg and P. Tillich) on the one hand, and the "theologies of the performative Word" (K. Barth and E. Jüngel) on the other. Once more, the selection is not strictly compelling, in that other theologians could also have been chosen. However, it is not arbitrary either. As a matter of fact, it is useful for the present study because it derives directly by the intensive analysis of the core of Mostert's justification doctrine.

In my account, I have based my interpretation of Pannenberg and Tillich's doctrines on the *historicity* of justification. Accordingly, the central question is how the reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ historically relates to the mission of the church, the sanctification of individuals and the futurity of salvation. In short, I claim that this approach finds in justification doctrine first and foremost the explanation of the *new historicity* opened up by the Christ event and prolonged into an open-ended salvation reality, with the remaining tenets (the formality and the event of justification) being derived from this one.

Instead, I have explained Barth and Jüngel's positions from the *event* of justification. For them, the point is illustrating that which has happened in Jesus Christ so that he is the actual justification of the world. Accordingly, justification doctrine focuses on God's salvation act performed wholly in Jesus Christ and graciously extended to human beings, whom God declares *and* makes righteous. Hence, following the classification that I have proposed, both the formality and the historicity of justification are understood from its *event*.

It is now appropriate to recall the research question one again: Can Mostert's theology, after being integrated with different impulses, prove useful to reshape crucial questions for Christian theology today? In Part 2, the question has become particularly sharp, because justification doctrine is precisely the foundation, the core and the apex of Mostert's theology. Accordingly, he regards the right understanding thereof as the core of Reformation theology (*das Reformatorische*). Therefore, for him, both theological discourse as such and its Protestant expression depend on this doctrine. Precisely for this reason, after having studied his position, I will now criticize it. This will hopefully enable me to assess the research question once more. The assessment will probe the tenability of the very core of Mostert's theology, both in itself and in comparative reference to the alternatives.

Specifically, my critique will cover the following points: the question of the freedom from the Law (2.3.1.); whether God's wrath is to be considered a *false* qualification of His Word (2.3.2.); the futurity of God's promise in its materiality (2.3.3.); the ontology of justification and the *simul iustus et*

peccator (2.3.4.); the relationship between the covenant and the *kerygma*, election and justification (2.3.5.).

2.3.1. Freedom from the Law?

Following Ebeling¹⁰¹⁷, Mostert claims that the Gospel is the *alternative* to the Law¹⁰¹⁸, and justification doctrine is the theological *locus* where the alternative becomes manifest. The Gospel is God's indicative, the gift of salvation communicated through faith. As such, it corresponds structurally to the givenness of life, which is also the content of the Law. Therefore, from a material point of view, Law and Gospel share the same good content. However, in Mostert's discourse, the crucial difference between the two qualifications of God's Word is that the Gospel is and remains *unambiguous*, because its indicative is not obscured by any imperative. Therefore, sinners hear and receive it as pure gift, not as a demand to be somehow actualized. Conversely, the Law is and remains *ambiguous*, since its good content is only one of its two dimensions. The other one is the imperative, the form of the Law. Thus, in its interaction with sinners, the good Law is experienced as a curse¹⁰¹⁹ and the demand which invariably comes with it obscures the goodness of its content, barring access to it. As a consequence, Mostert (with Ebeling) claims that the justified is indeed free from the Law. In his understanding, freedom from the *curse of the Law* means freedom from the Law *which works as a curse*. It is necessary to clarify that, for Mostert, the Law is not itself evil, it is and remains good. However, its working on human beings is determined by their being sinners; they do not let God be God, they want to actualize salvation through their action. Thus, in my opinion, Mostert's doctrine of the Law does not depend on an abstract Antinomianism. Rather, it is the coherent consequence of his hamartiology and anthropology. In his relational-ontological categories, the relationship between sinner and the Law *formally* implies that the letter, because of its imperative, is *always* misheard by the former as a call to soteriological activism. In Mostert's theology of justification, the imperative of the Law and the qualification of human beings as sinners belong inherently together, they cannot be abstractly separated. In my view, this has two implications.

First of all, Mostert is not interested in analyzing the Law in itself, he never¹⁰²⁰ sees it in abstraction from its overall working on sinners. Therefore, already on this level, it is clear why he rejects any

¹⁰¹⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 275.

¹⁰¹⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 312.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. Gal 3,13.

¹⁰²⁰ In my opinion, this is true of *both* his philosophical and theological theology, even though it is mostly clear within the second. At any rate, as was shown in Part 1, Mostert's philosophical theology is also not interested in God, human being and the world in abstract terms, but always and only in their relationship. After all, this is fully in line with Reformation theology, since the emphasis is never placed on the *theologoumena* in themselves, but always on their interrelation illustrating the *benefit* of God's salvation act for sinners.

tertius usus (in renatis). Namely, in his categories, the theologically meaningful understanding of the Law clarifies that human beings can only be under it *as sinners*. In Mostert's categories, if the hamartiological qualification is suspended and the question becomes that of a positive relationship between the justified and the Law, the ensuing discourse is not properly theological. In other words, it becomes abstracted from the sinner's experience.

Secondly, Mostert conceptualizes justification as the *passage (Übergang)* from being under the Law to being in Christ¹⁰²¹. This passage is neither to be understood historically (as a turn in salvation history) nor in actualistic terms. Its emphasis is neither placed directly on the historical dimension of Jesus Christ's cross (death-resurrection), nor on its actuality within God's eternal decree. Rather, for Mostert, justification is a *kerygmatic* passage, happening circularly whenever Law and Gospel interact in such a way that the *kerygma* of salvation can be truly communicated and apprehended by sinners through faith¹⁰²². Hence, he understands justification as the proclamation event whereby sinners are disentangled from their activist mishearing of the Law (its curse) and communicated salvation outside of themselves (*extra se*), in Jesus Christ. This paves the way to a possible critique of Mostert's position.

Specifically, I would argue that his concept of the Law (shared by Ebeling) has one problematic feature¹⁰²³. Namely, in his usage, the word "Law" encompasses both the givenness of its content and the imperative of its form. As was already explained, this protects Mostert's account from all allegations of Antinomianism. However, such an undifferentiated use of "Law" becomes problematic when reference is made to its *curse*. To understand where the problem lies, the word "Law" needs to be broken down and its components, the indicative and the imperative, need to be clearly distinguished. Obviously, in Mostert's account, the *content* of the Law is definitely *not* a curse, since it is identical to the Gospel, the reality of salvation as such. Strictly speaking, not even the *imperative* can be considered a curse in itself. Nevertheless, as was pointed out above, Mostert's methodology never considers the *theologoumena* in themselves, but always in their overall relationality. This means that, in theological terms, he is right that the *imperative* of the Law can indeed be described as a *curse*, because it is constitutively misheard by sinners as a call to soteriological activism.

However, when concluding that the Christian is free from the Law, Mostert does *not* maintain the distinction between the Law as command and the givenness of its content. Precisely this lacking distinction, in my opinion, makes his conclusion concerning the freedom from the Law highly problematic. Accordingly, I would argue that Mostert's position cannot be received as it is. In my judgment, only the imperative of the Law in its relational interaction with sinners, not its good content

¹⁰²¹ See e.g., once again, MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), pp. 312ff.

¹⁰²² See also here, p. 147.

¹⁰²³ The basis for this critique was presented, in a less articulated form, in note 566.

may indeed be described as a *curse*. Now, in Mostert's own categories, *both* the imperative and the good content belong to his definition of the Law¹⁰²⁴. Therefore, his claim that the justified is free from the Law needs to be problematized. Specifically, I would say that the justified is free from the imperative because in the Gospel they receive the reality of salvation, which is identical to the good content of the Law. In my opinion, it is necessary to clarify that the curse refers to the *hearing* of the Law by sinners. If the legal instance is heard, it is heard as an imperative. The critical question to be asked Mostert, therefore, is how the sinner's hearing of the Law is impacted by the Gospel. In my view, a valid critique needs to point out that the latter does not make the former disappear, but it makes it *silent* and deprives it of the imperative. The good content is *silent Law*, and as such it may be regarded not as a curse, but as a blessing. A silent Law cannot be misheard by sinners as a call to bring about salvation, but only acknowledged as a present, given reality, as the content which was captive to the imperative but now lives on in Christian witness. Thus, I would argue that Mostert rightfully claims that the justified is free from the *imperative* of the Law, which is inseparable from the sinner's *hearing* thereof. However, when the sinner hears the Gospel, the imperative disappears and the Law is no longer heard, but made silent. In other words, it is disassembled, and its content becomes the situation-specific dimension of the Gospel in the lives of believers, actualized by the Holy Spirit.

As a consequence, it might be useful to also briefly focus on Mostert's understanding of justification as the passage from being under the Law to being in Christ. I do think that he is right, human beings as sinners are *under* the Law, while as righteous (justified) persons they are placed into Jesus Christ as their salvation in Person. However, contrary to Mostert, I would say that "freedom from the Law" is, once again, an imprecise category. The point, in my opinion, is freedom from the *curse* of the Law, from having to hear it as a call to actualize salvation. It is this curse which prevents the justifying hearing of the Gospel in faith. However, I do not mean that the Law keeps being *heard* by the justified *after* the Gospel has been communicated, as the Gospel-Law order would suggest. According to Ziegler, D. Bonhoeffer claims that the justified is no longer under the Law, but *in* it¹⁰²⁵. In agreement with the intention of the claim, I would argue that the reality from which the justified is free is not the Law, but their being *under* it. However, unlike Bonhoeffer, I think that the justified cannot be simply described as one *in* the Law. Specifically, such a description would reproduce (from the opposite angle) the same imprecision that I reproached to Mostert's undifferentiated use of the word "Law". In short, Bonhoeffer's claim is exposed to the following critique: the expression "being *in* the Law" is imprecise, as it does not adequately differentiate between the imperative and the good

¹⁰²⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 314.

¹⁰²⁵ ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded" (see note 854) p. 137.

content of the legal instance. The lacking distinction suggests that the justified is liberated to hear the Law in a way which is structurally different from the sinner's hearing. In my view, this conclusion is highly problematic and difficult to reconcile with the *simul iustus et peccator*.

2.3.2. God's Wrath

According to Mostert, God's wrath expresses *one* possible qualification of human being's *coram* relationship with Him. Specifically, it is the way in which this relationship is qualified whenever human beings aim at understanding their defining relationship with God by looking at themselves and not towards Him. As a result, their experience of God is falsified, because, from their distorted perspective, they prevent the proper unfolding of the Law-Gospel interaction within God's twofold Word(s). As a result, they obscure the event of justification, which happens in the faithful preaching of the *kerygma*. By remaining *incurvatus in se*, the sinner disturbs their positioning *coram Deo*. In particular, they focus on their own, old sinful determination rather than on the new, righteous one that they receive by God alone in justification. God's wrath, for Mostert, is the *result* of this distorted way in which human beings place themselves *coram Deo* whenever, as sinners, they do not look towards Him but at themselves and, on this basis, arbitrarily infer who they are and who He is. Accordingly, for Mostert, the experience of a wrathful God is *false*. In particular, it is created by the misoriented look that sinners obstinately hold when their relationship with God is determined by the Law and not by the Gospel. If faith, for Mostert, is *creatrix* or *inventrix*¹⁰²⁶ in the sense it *finds* God as the gracious One that He truly is, sin is *creator* in that it *construes* a false god. This false god is wrathful and reacts to sin not by forgiving it, but by passing his condemning judgment on the sinner. While faith proclaims the truthfulness of the God who enters in a relationship with sinners in order to save them, sin is human being's unbelief which makes Him a liar¹⁰²⁷, by picturing Him as the one whose justice requires the condemnation of sinners. Further, while faith illustrates God's righteousness as the one that He gives to sinners in order to save them, unbelief misrepresents it as the righteousness that He keeps for Himself and uses to destroy them. This shows that, for Mostert, attaining a sound theological qualification of God's wrath is a crucial point. Specifically, this matter directly concerns justification doctrine because it co-determines how God's righteousness is understood.

¹⁰²⁶ The category of fides *creatrix* or *inventrix* in the sense of Mostert's theology is aptly illustrated by BAUKE-RUEGG, J., "Die Frage nach dem gnädigen Gott" (see note 709), pp. 490ff. For Bauke-Ruegg, specifically, faith is a faculty of perception by which human being does not encounter reality as a neutral, anonymous "il y a", but as a good, evangelical "il y a comme création de Dieu". In the article, explicit reference is made to E. Lévinas' thought. His reflection on the category of "il y a" is found in LÉVINAS, E., *Totalité et infini : essai sur l'extériorité*, Les Editions Klincksieck, Paris 1961.

¹⁰²⁷ Cf. 1 John 5,10.

After summarizing Mostert's understanding of God's wrath, I will now criticize it. In my opinion, his claim that the experience of a wrathful God is false risks being shortsighted. The strength of his position is that the Gospel is maintained in its criteriological differentiation from the Law and illustrated as the *unambiguous* Word of God which aims at the salvation of sinners, not at their condemnation¹⁰²⁸. With Mostert, I maintain that God's agency with human being aims unequivocally at their righteousness, namely the one that God *gives* in justification. However, I reject Mostert's claim that God's wrath reflects a false experience of Him. In particular, the claim is problematic because it places a hypertrophic focus on human being when considering their relationship with God. In Mostert's view, it is the hamartiological qualification of the sinner which *entirely* determines the category of God's wrath. Hence, he claims that the experience thereof is posited by sin, and ensues from unbelief, from human beings not hearing the Gospel but remaining under the Law.

Now, Mostert's focus, which usually remains firmly placed on the *relationship* between human being and God, here shifts to the former with such an emphasis, that the ensuing qualification of *God's* wrath is seen quite subjectivistically. More precisely, it is presented as an utter creation of the sinner determined by their being under the Law. Sure, human being is *always* under the Law and this is indeed an obstacle to their hearing of the justifying Word of the Gospel. However, if the focus is aptly placed neither on human being nor on God *per se*, but always on the *relationship* in which the theological truth about both emerges, then it seems problematic to regard God's wrath as a mere reaction to human being's sin. Accordingly, it might be useful to correct Mostert's position by saying that the experience of God's wrath is not false, but *indirect*. Specifically, the category of God's wrath does not have an independent theological value which could be abstracted from His overall soteriological intent effected in justification. Rather, it needs to be interpreted soteriologically, as a theological reality which is determined by the *relationship* between the sinner and God whenever the former is under the Law and in sin, therefore in a situation to which the latter reacts with His judgment. Following my critique, the good news is not that God's wrath is false, but that it is not an end in itself. God is not merciful towards sin, He does react to sin in His wrath¹⁰²⁹. This, however, remains graciously oriented to the salvation of sinners, which is delivered by the Gospel and without the Law. The Gospel manifests that God has pronounced a true Word in His wrath. However, this manifestation happens through and is inseparable from the revelation of a *higher* Word, the Word of the Gospel. Hence, the latter reveals that God's wrath is *indirect*, it does not express what He intends to do with sinners, but with their sin. Also, it is *oriented*, not self-centered. Specifically, it is unleashed not for its own sake, but in order to address sinners where they truly are, in their sin, with the intent

¹⁰²⁸ Cf. John 12,47.

¹⁰²⁹ Cf. Rom 1,18.

of taking them out of there and placing them graciously in Jesus Christ. Unlike God's wrath, the Gospel is not indirect and not oriented, but direct and self-referred. It is the end and the goal of God's interaction with sinners, the salvation act towards which the whole of His agency is directed.

With Mostert, it seems correct to conclude that God's wrath does not aim at the person of the sinner, because it does not express what God ultimately intends to do with them. Instead, it aims at sin, it is the experience ensuing from the misplaced way in which the relationship between God and human being exists when the latter is unrighteous and the former righteous. Thus, when God's Word is heard as wrath, the fullness of His address has not been heard yet, or not directly. He has not spoken the ultimate Word on sinners yet, He has not yet been known and adored as the justifying One and His righteousness is still being regarded mainly as the one that He has. However, against Mostert, it is important to maintain that, within the misplaced relationship between human being and God, the latter's wrath is *not* a false experience, but a true one. In particular, it is the reality which follows and condemns sin to pass into oblivion.

God's wrath, in my judgment, needs to be presented as the *separating* power of God's Word, while His grace is its *interrupting* and requalifying power. In my view, God's wrath is a legal reality, it is God's Word painfully separating sin from sinner, thus already operating something which cannot come *from* sinners, but only *to* them. This separation is not an end in itself, but it paves the way for an interruption and requalification, that is for the Gospel, God's gracious Word. Seen as an interruption, this Word counters and ridicules the sinner's persistent look at themselves. Based on this misplaced look, the only conclusion to be drawn would be their damnation. By interrupting their obstinate self-incurvation, the Gospel convinces sinners not to expect from themselves any true, ultimate word about human being, God and their relationship. Considered as a requalification, the Gospel is God's Word which truly gives and communicates to sinners the true and ultimate determination of their relationship with themselves, God and the world. This decisive determination is the reality of salvation, in which all of God's promises find their culmination and and confirmation. As such, the Gospel reorients sinners, removing their self-incurvation. As a consequence, they are directed upward towards God and, from there, again downward towards themselves (as *justified* sinners) and outward towards their neighbors. As a legal reality and viewed abstractly, the category of God's wrath does imply seeing His righteousness chiefly as the one that He has, with the ensuing uncertainty of what this righteousness might entail for sinners. In conclusion, God's wrath must not be viewed in isolation from His grace, but together with it, that is from the perspective of the Gospel. Accordingly, the category of God's wrath helps clarify that His righteousness is first and foremost the one that He gives to sinners, without any ambiguity or uncertainty as to His salvation intent towards them.

2.3.3. The Futurity of God's Promise (Material Analysis)

When criticizing Mostert's Prolegomena in 1.3., I already tackled the question of a possible futurity for God's promise¹⁰³⁰. Specifically, I focused there on the *formality* of God's Word as promise, wondering whether the category of *Verheißung* should find its worthy place and legitimacy in this respect. In my critique, I concluded that the dimension of *Verheißung* expands the central and essential qualification of promise in its christological presence given in faith (*Zuspruch*). Instead, Mostert's position, as I explained, is that God's promise must be only interpreted as *Zuspruch*, thereby entirely excluding the dimension of *Verheißung*. Specifically, Mostert regards *Verheißung* as a form of subtle synergism. In particular, he claims that it postpones the consummation of salvation to the future, thereby denying its fully present reality in Jesus Christ, who is the sinner's salvation in Person here and now.

The question of a possible futurity of God's promise is not only relevant for Mostert's Prolegomena, but also for his ontology of justification. If in Part 1 the point was looking at the formality of God's promise, in Part 2 the critique needs to focus on its *materiality*. Specifically, the question is how the reality of *Verheißung* relates to the ontology of the justified. According to Mostert, the latter is the sinner who has fully received their newness of life outside of themselves (*extra se*) in Jesus Christ through the faithful hearing of God's *Zuspruch*. Correspondingly, salvation is true only when it is complete, because only as such does it exist personally in Jesus Christ. In Mostert's intensive understanding of the *extra se* category, thus, justification describes the process whereby sinners are no longer in themselves but transposed into Christ. In him, their true reality is fully present as *good* reality, one which is saved by God's grace. The justified is thus the sinner who may now acquiesce in faith. This is because their "heart", the center of their personhood, is no longer to be painfully fought for in the complex, contradictory and sinful historicity of existence, but is kept safe by God in Jesus Christ. In Mostert's view, this implies, among other things, that the historicity of the justified does not undergo any existential transformation, let alone a moral one. Otherwise, a competition would emerge between the renewed life of the justified and the fullness of salvation which is already given to them in Jesus Christ. In a word, synergism would triumph, as the justified would not have truly ceased from wanting to usurp God's sole agency in justification. Even worse, this form of synergism would be a baptized one: it would (blasphemously) result from the Gospel and come back in force after having been chased away with the disqualification of the Law, not unlike the impure spirit coming back into the clean house with seven other spirits more wicked than itself¹⁰³¹.

¹⁰³⁰ See 1.3.6.

¹⁰³¹ Luke 11,24ff.

In my view, Mostert's focus on the present dimension of God's promise (*Zuspruch*) – which in his theology also founds the articulation between Christology and justification doctrine – is theologically sound and fundamentally loyal to the Reformation. Furthermore, his intensive recentering of justification doctrine around the *extra se* category is theologically productive. Specifically, it aptly illustrates the core of Reformation theology (*das Reformatorische*), because it safeguards God's agency in salvation by first excluding human beings from it in order to include them once again in the right way, as *receivers*. Mostert's *extra se* justification, in my view, rightly explains what it means that Jesus Christ *is* the believer's righteousness¹⁰³² and that *in him* they have themselves become righteousness¹⁰³³. However, just as I criticized his account of the formality of God's promise in Part 1, I will now turn to its materiality.

In my judgment, Mostert's exclusion of the category of *Verheißung* leaves an important *theological* question completely unanswered. Namely, it remains unclear how the historicity of the justified sinner (the overall relationality in which they exist) relates to God's promise. I would argue that the question remains unanswered precisely because *Verheißung* is not regarded as a legitimate determination of God's promise. I am not saying that Mostert's mistrust of the category of *Verheißung* is utterly arbitrary. However, I think that it is partial and unilateral. In particular, he risks equating *Verheißung* as such with those interpretations thereof which are theologically problematic or simply not theological at all. With him, it needs to be said that all accounts which employ *Verheißung* (or, more in general, the eschatological semantics of consummation) in order to postpone the verification of salvation are at best problematic. This is because they imply that salvation is not present and certain in Jesus Christ. However, Mostert fails to show why the category of *Verheißung* should be *necessarily* bound to those interpretations. In my view, there is no necessary co-implication between God's promise as *Verheißung* and the synergistic interpretations of justification doctrine. As a matter of fact, I consider *Verheißung* necessary in order not to arbitrarily secularize the historicity of relationships amid which the justified sinner continuously exists. In explicit theological terms, God's promise is first and foremost His *Zuspruch*. Correspondingly, salvation is truly present in Jesus Christ as the incarnated Son and faith apprehends salvation *realiter* whenever the preached *kerygma* is received by sinners. In justification, human being is displaced from themselves and transposed into Jesus Christ, in whom their center of personhood now truly is. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the historicity of the justified sinner is entirely phagocytized by the *merry exchange*. In my judgment, this is the core problem of Mostert's view on the matter. If the center of the sinner's personhood is truly transposed into Jesus Christ, this entails that the *whole* of their person is in him. In other words, there

¹⁰³² Cf. 1 Cor 1,30.

¹⁰³³ Cf. 2 Cor 5,21.

should be no abstract separation between the center of their personhood and their existing, historical personality. After all, a core tenet of Mostert's own theology is precisely that salvation is always whole. Now, the point is that the sinner's entire personality *includes* their historicity, their overall relationality, which plays out under the conditions of their life. Therefore, going beyond Mostert, their continued existence needs to be interpreted *theologically*. Questions concerning not only the individual believer, but also the church and the history of the world¹⁰³⁴ are not to be secularized, entirely abandoned to ethical reflection and disqualified as moralistic. Conversely, they should be given an existential interpretation: with that, it would be possible to correct Mostert's shortsighted position on *Verheißung* without breaking fundamentally with his theology. Specifically, I argue that God's promise as *Verheißung* is precisely the theological category which should be employed to interpret the whole of the sinner's personality and historicity *theologically*. In my view, this is possible and fruitful provided that two things are kept in mind.

First of all, *Verheißung* is to be presented as a derivative qualification of *Zuspruch*, as its expansion, not the other way around. The primary qualification of salvation, with Mostert, is not *Verheißung*, but *Zuspruch*. This is because salvation is fully present in Jesus Christ, just like the Son of God is fully incarnated in him, with whom the Father *is* well pleased¹⁰³⁵. Accordingly, the category of *Verheißung* should never signify the need to complete, actualize or verify salvation, least of all in Protestant theology. Otherwise, Mostert's rejection of the legitimacy of *Verheißung* would be indeed totally justified. Secondly, just like *Zuspruch*, *Verheißung* needs to be presented as *God's* promise. The soteriological agency pertains only to Him, and this is true not only for the *blessed assurance* of present salvation in Christ, but also for the promise of future consummation addressed to the sinner in the context of their historical relationality. God's promise as *Verheißung* means that salvation concerns the center of one's personhood in Jesus Christ in such a way that the entirety of one's historical existence (their personality) is included. The relationships of the justified sinner with themselves, their neighbor and the world are not severed from their relationship with God, and this is expressed theologically through the semantics of consummation. The full presence of salvation founds in God's *Zuspruch* and concerns the center of one's personhood, which is in Jesus Christ. At the same time, salvation inherently concerns the whole of one's personality, not only its core. Under the conditions of existence (in sin), this entails that a sanctified historicity (one authoritatively reserved for the service of God) is truly present as the sinner's salvation in becoming. Precisely this is illustrated by the category of *Verheißung*. Since it belongs to God and only to Him, the reality of

¹⁰³⁴ Some of these questions concern the relationship between justification and sanctification, the possibility of a progress towards righteousness in the sinner's life, the relationship between the church and the State and the possibility of an eschatological interpretation of the world's history.

¹⁰³⁵ Cf. Matt 3,17.

Verheißung must not be understood in ethical-political terms. In other words, it is not the synergistic collaboration of the sinner with God. Instead, it is a theological reality which illustrates the way in which salvation in Jesus Christ pervades the whole of human being's historical (relational) existence.

2.3.4. *Simul iustus et peccator*

Mostert's utter rejection of any active role played by human being in their justification is the negative expression of the positive thesis that human being is wholly a sinner. This does not simply mean that, in their ontic dimension, they are entirely determined by sin. More radically, all action with which they aim at reacting *against* sin is itself sin, it confirms and reinforces it. Human being's soteriological action, for Mostert, is sin in its utmost concretion. Accordingly, sin is human being themselves in their attempt to be self-soteriologists¹⁰³⁶. In Mostert's *existential-relational ontology*, human being is not conceived as an abstract reality, but always from the concrete point of observation of their overall relationality with themselves, God and the world. However, I already showed in Part 1¹⁰³⁷ that two conflicting ontologies coexist in his theology. Specifically, his relational ontology is contradicted by the category of the previously given good. This category refers to the essential goodness of human being as God's creature. This goodness is previously given, it is posited by God prior to the unfolding of His justifying relationship with sinners. As a consequence, human being's essential goodness, for Mostert, is not lost in sin, but remains under the conditions of existence as an obscured property. In regard to it, the relationship unfolding in the sinner's justification functions merely as the existential *locus* in which the essential goodness of human being is revealed, not created *ex nihilo*. As was already argued, Mostert resorts to the doctrine of the previously given good in order to prevent an ethical misunderstanding of hamartiology and a subjectivistic interpretation of anthropology¹⁰³⁸. By doing so, however, he juxtaposes a *metaphysical-realist ontology* to the existential-relational categories that he normally employs. As I already discussed in Part 1, this entails a first contradiction regarding the Prolegomena. Furthermore, in my opinion, Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good entails a second contradiction, this time concerning his ontology of justification. This second contradiction is going to be illustrated in what follows.

As was already pointed out, Mostert's ontology of justification can be interpreted as an intensive hermeneutical reorganization of the *extra se* category. Human being is fully justified not in themselves, but in Jesus Christ only, who in faith is made present to the sinner as the existential *locus* into which their center of personhood is transposed by God's grace. In themselves, human being is

¹⁰³⁶ "Der Sünder ist nach Paulus der Mensch als Autosoteriologe. Sünde ist das Aussein auf Heil, Heilsbeschaffung durch den Menschen. [...] Die Verworfenheit des Menschen also konkretisiert sich in der Heilsgier, die sich ihrerseits aktiviert in einem Heilsaktivismus" (MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* [see note 105], pp. 90f.).

¹⁰³⁷ See here, pp. 58f.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid.

fully a sinner, one whose soteriological activism – both in its explicit (*præsumptio*) and implicit (*desperatio*) form – indicates the strive to find an alternative verification to the one given in Jesus Christ. In short, Mostert’s ontology of *extra se* justification categorically upholds the *simul iustus et peccator*. For him, human being is wholly and fully a sinner whenever considered in abstraction from their relationship with God or whenever such relationship replicates the logic of the Law. At the same time, whenever they are transposed into Jesus Christ by God’s grace through justifying faith, human being is wholly and fully righteous and their concrete, good relationality with God is actualized. If one follows this approach, the two determinations stressed by the *simul* need to be interpreted qualitatively, not quantitatively. In other words, Mostert is *not* saying that human being is part sinner, part righteous. Instead, they are wholly a sinner and wholly righteous, depending on where the center of their personhood is placed: in themselves or in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Mostert’s theology regards the *peccator* and the *iustus* as two competing *whole* determinations of human being existing in a hermeneutical tension. The latter unfolds based on the interaction between the Law and the Gospel in the preached *kerygma*. Accordingly, the *simul* is good news because the determination of human being as *iustus* (given in faith) is the one which directly corresponds to God’s saving intention and to His salvation act in the incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ. Instead, their determination as *peccator* is at odds with God’s intention, and as such it is condemned to pass. Thus, faith prevents the *peccator* qualification from determining human being in an ultimate manner. In my opinion, Mostert’s understanding of the *simul* category is right and fully in line with sound theology. However, it is not upheld coherently throughout his overall theology, and this is due, once again, to his doctrine of the previously given good. Therefore, I think that it is now necessary to criticize this doctrine once again, in order to keep Mostert’s ontology of justification intact. In the following passage, reference to the *simul* is exemplificatory, as it illustrates why the doctrine of the previously given good contradicts the ontology of justification.

The point which crystallizes the contradiction, in my opinion, is Mostert’s claim that human being’s essential goodness is not entirely lost in sin¹⁰³⁹. Correspondingly, his surprising turn to metaphysical categories brings him to interpret justification as the restitution of human being’s previously given goodness¹⁰⁴⁰. In my judgment, if the sinner has an essential goodness which survives their sin, it becomes impossible to uphold the *simul iustus et peccator* according to the qualitative interpretation that Mostert (in my view, rightfully) maintains. The doctrine of the previously given good would be at best compatible with a quantitative understanding of the *simul*, whereby justification is interpreted as the gradual transformation of the (realist) ontology of human being *from* a sinner *to*

¹⁰³⁹ MOSTERT, W., “Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie” (see note 94), p. 457.

¹⁰⁴⁰ MOSTERT, W., “Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie” (see note 94), p. 458.

a righteous person. In such an understanding, justification is understood as a *linear transformation*, by virtue of which the (amount of) sinfulness of the justified decreases steadily throughout their life, whereas their righteousness continuously increases. This view is obviously incompatible with Mostert's theology, which instead understands justification as the *circular transposition* of human being's center of personhood into Christ's. Thus, the *simul* is not the linear progress from sinfulness to righteousness. Rather, it expresses a recurring event to be interpreted hermeneutically with reference to the unfolding of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation in the faithful preaching of the *kerygma*. However, in order to defend such a qualitative reading of the *simul*, it seems necessary to reject the doctrine of the previously given good, especially when it comes to his claim that the essential goodness of human being is not lost in sin. Once again, the critique does not intend to depart from Mostert's theology, but rather to safeguard the very core of his justification doctrine.

In my judgment, against Mostert, the question of the essential goodness of human being should not be conceptualized in metaphysical terms. Rather, if possible, it needs to be rephrased within the categories of an existential-relational ontology. Should this not be possible, the doctrine would need to be abandoned as a metaphysical interpolation which has little to say about the relational ontology of justification. In both cases, the result should be disqualifying all claims that human being's essential goodness is not lost in sin. This is because similar claims are incompatible with the *simul iustus et peccator*, therefore also with the foundation of justification doctrine on the *extra se* category. A detailed rewriting of Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good in alignment with his existential-relational ontology cannot be developed here, as it would require restructuring the whole of his theology. Still, I would like to try and map out two possible tenets around which this doctrine could be reorganized.

First of all, it should be part of a larger *covenantal* reformulation of the doctrine of creation. The point would be to redefine the previously given good as the created reality which always already enters in a relationship with ontic reality by God's grace. Therefore, created reality is good not in itself, but because God regards it as such, positively willing it to stand in a relationship with Him. In the covenant, God posits a relationship between reality as it is and reality as it should be. This relationship, not created reality *per se*, is the previously given good. Secondly, justification doctrine should be employed to criticize and interpret the semantics of the previously given good within this covenantal frame. Specifically, the *extra se* category should be extended beyond the individual and include created reality. Not just the individual sinner, but God's entire creation is wholly determined by sin and possibly finds its truth in Jesus Christ, in whom all things are created¹⁰⁴¹. In this reformulation, justification doctrine would directly anchor ontological (created) reality in ontic

¹⁰⁴¹ Cf. Col 1,16.

(sinful) reality, thus determining their relationship anew as one marked by the establishment of God's covenant in Jesus Christ. In him, a *saving* relationship between created and sinful reality is posited. Therefore, everything is fully lost in sin, but nothing is to be categorically abstracted from God's salvation intent. In short, the approach which has been sketched here comes down to possibly rethinking creation from justification.

2.3.5. *Kerygma* and Covenant, Justification and Election

In Mostert's theology, the covenant is not a central *theologoumenon* and is definitely not used paradigmatically for the understanding of the relationship between God and human being. Salvation, for him, is exclusively a category of justification doctrine and incarnation Christology. Accordingly, it concerns the individual who, in faith, truly apprehends the *kerygma* whenever the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation unfolds hermeneutically in the right manner. The salvation event happens circularly whenever the preached Word meets faith. In it, Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, is truly present and becomes the sinner's center of personhood. Correspondingly, as far I can see, Mostert never elaborates on election as a soteriological category. As was already maintained, for him, soteriology is an intensive reformulation of justification doctrine around the *extra se* category. In general, his justification doctrine unfolds in close dialogue with Ebeling's, and the proximity between the two is particularly clear when it comes to the understanding of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation. In spite of the existing differences – mostly concerning the futurity of God's promise and the category of *Verheißung*¹⁰⁴² –, the soteriological accounts of the two theologians are extremely similar. In particular, the comparative study of their theologies seems to allow for the conclusion that Ebeling's cursory treatment of election is compatible with Mostert's thinking on the matter. In short, Mostert's elaboration, which completely excludes the category of election, draws the consequences of Ebeling's weak treatment of it. Below, it will be clarified that this is no arbitrary claim. In this paragraph, I will assess whether Mostert's ontology of justification can be coherently upheld as it is, without any reference to election. Ultimately, the question goes back to the relationship between the *kerygma* and the covenant.

In Ebeling's dogmatics¹⁰⁴³, election is explicitly included in the semantics of soteriology, and it is claimed that the different terms describing salvation should not be set against one another, as they all ultimately describe one and the same salvation event¹⁰⁴⁴. Without explicit reference to election, the same is upheld by Mostert¹⁰⁴⁵. For both theologians, the criteriological description of the salvation

¹⁰⁴² See 2.3.3.

¹⁰⁴³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529).

¹⁰⁴⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 231.

¹⁰⁴⁵ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 31.

event, however, is provided by justification doctrine¹⁰⁴⁶. While the remaining soteriological images in Scripture are not self-sufficient but find their meaning in justification, the latter stands on its own ground¹⁰⁴⁷ and aptly illustrates the salvation event occurring in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the central soteriological issues, for Ebeling (and Mostert) are those to which justification provides an immediate answer, namely penance and the certainty of salvation¹⁰⁴⁸. In justification, penance is properly recentered and deprived of human being's soteriological activism. Correspondingly, certainty of salvation is provided by faith, which is *creatrix*, it truly changes the believer's entire personality by effecting the merry exchange between them and Jesus Christ. Faith means that one leaves themselves as their own ground and is placed in Jesus Christ as their new foundation. This is a central thought for both Ebeling and Mostert, and shows in what sense, for them, justification doctrine is indeed the criterion for all theological statements. Thus, in a theology which is organized around these categories, the question of a *certainty* of election is a derivative of the certainty of justification. Ebeling may well still claim that justification is based on previous election as the original "Yes" pronounced by God¹⁰⁴⁹. Nevertheless, the focus on the *certainty* of salvation makes the *theologoumenon* of election at best secondary (Ebeling), when not completely absent (Mostert). For both theologians, it is impossible to derive a certainty of justification from the certainty of election. Only the opposite path remains open. Accordingly, election can be understood theologically only as long as its knowledge (*Erkenntnisgrund*) is derived from the certainty of salvation communicated by justification¹⁰⁵⁰. At this point, associating the positions of Mostert and Ebeling on election appears as justified. Given the premises of their shared focus on the certainty of salvation within justification, the doctrine of election becomes an atemporal duplicate thereof. Mostert's silence on election is only the logical conclusion. Clearly, a doctrine of election has become superfluous for his theology. In my opinion, this silence is problematic and should be criticized. In order to mount my argument, I first and foremost asked myself why, in Mostert's account, the doctrine of election has become superfluous to the point that he never elaborates on it even though he concentrates his entire theology on soteriology. The point is that he does not develop any theology of the covenant. This entails that his discourse lacks the resources to conceptualize election in existential-relational terms, which, in his perspective, is the formal criterion for all meaningful soteriology. Without a productive and creative

¹⁰⁴⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 231. Mostert even explicitly states: "Das Heilsgeschehen ist bei Paulus die Rechtfertigung" (MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* [see note 105], p. 123).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Actually, I would argue that at least the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation is needed to fully explain the hermeneutical unfolding of justification. Strictly speaking, however, the coupling does not belong directly to the account of justification. It is therefore debatable whether in Ebeling and Mostert's theologies justification *doctrine* is really self-sufficient.

¹⁰⁴⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 232.

¹⁰⁴⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 235.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

covenantal theology, election remains an abstract term, which at most describes justification abstractly, thus superfluously¹⁰⁵¹.

In the previous section¹⁰⁵², I criticized Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good and I mentioned the *theologoumenon* of the covenant while trying to outline the possible tenets of a relational new foundation of creation theology on justification doctrine. Now, a similar critique is to be extended to Mostert's (non-existent) doctrine of election. His silence on election speaks volumes. In my judgment, the absence of this doctrine in his theology is highly problematic, because it risks isolating the *kerygma* from the overall relationality that God has posited with Israel and fulfilled for the whole of humanity in Jesus Christ. In my view, the overarching category describing this relationality is the covenant, the pact which shows that God has *eternally and historically* determined His freedom to be gracious, oriented to the salvation of humanity and not to its condemnation. The proclamation of the good news, the *kerygma* entrusted to the Christian church, belongs to this free self-determination of God *together with* the covenant, not without it. If the covenant is removed from the picture, it remains unclear whether God's intentionality of salvation is truly gracious for the whole of creation, humanity and the historicity of the world. In my opinion, Mostert's unilateral emphasis on the individual addressed by the *kerygma* is necessary and appropriate when describing the ontology of justification. However, a focus on the covenant is also necessary. In particular, it illustrates justification also through election. Without this illustration, the *kerygmatic* emphasis seems arbitrary, because it abstracts the experience of the justified from God's free and gracious self-determination in His dealings with creation. In my opinion, the covenant shows that salvation is God's intention for the individual because it has *also* always been His intention for creation, humanity and the historicity of the world¹⁰⁵³. God's gracious relationship is not only established with the individual. Rather, it needs to be explored theologically in its twofold soteriological determination: from the perspective of justification as well as election, from the point of view of both the *kerygma* and the covenant.

Beyond Mostert, I would argue in favor of a *mutual complementarity* of justification and election. Within soteriology, these are two powerful semantics expressing one and the same theological truth: God's eternal salvation decree who has become flesh, history and proclamation for the salvation of sinners in Jesus Christ. As such, election and justification together safeguard not only the reality, but also the *intentionality* of salvation. In other words, they clarify that God's Word aims at saving lost sinners and truly performs what it speaks¹⁰⁵⁴. The simultaneous reference to the *kerygma* and the

¹⁰⁵¹ As was already pointed out, this is the case in Ebeling's theology.

¹⁰⁵² See 2.3.4.

¹⁰⁵³ Cf. 1 Cor 15,1-9.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cf. Ps 33,9.

covenant clarifies what in Mostert's theology risks remaining obscure: God's salvation intent is always already relevant for humanity. In its overall scope, it includes His eternal covenantal decree, the death and life of Jesus of Nazareth, the church confessing and proclaiming its faith in the resurrected Christ and the individual's experience of him as the Savior within preached and celebrated *kerygma*. In short, as I am convinced that *concreteness* is a wonderful Protestant word, my critique aims at removing all abstractness from Mostert's ontology of justification. Ultimately, my thesis is that justification should not be thought abstractly, but only together with election and vice versa. Incidentally, in this way it might also be possible to rethink highly debated questions such as the doctrine of the *apokastasis*, so-called "double predestination" or the exact illustration of faith as a *medium salutis*. For me, integrating Mostert's theology with a relational reformulation of the doctrine of election is necessary and beneficial. As a result of the intended integration, it would be possible to regard justification as the subjectivity of election and election as the objectivity of justification. Clearly, this is to be understood under the specification that subjectivity and objectivity are not to be coordinated hierarchically, but relationally. I do not intend to turn Mostert's theology upside down and claim that election should have priority over justification, as this would ultimately incur the same charge of abstractness that has been reproached to him. Instead, I propose to conceptualize election and justification from the perspective of their relationship, which is expressed in God's salvation intent. The emphasis rests solely on His grace as it is manifested, from two different points of observation, in both justification and election. Metaphorically, this would qualify justification as the *katabasis* of election into history and experience and election as the *anabasis* of justification into eternity. As a consequence, one crucial point would be safeguarded: no determination of election can be in contrast with justification and vice versa. In my view, this makes my reformulation of election doctrine compatible with Mostert's ontology of justification, even though it clearly goes beyond it. Perhaps, this understanding of the relationship between justification and election could serve as a valid formal criterion for gaining insight into the highly debated questions mentioned above.

2.3.6. Theological Integrations

The critique that I pressed in the previous paragraphs¹⁰⁵⁵ has investigated Mostert's ontology of justification in order to assess its fruitful potential but also its weaknesses for the further development of theological thought. Like in Part 1, it has been the analysis of Mostert's doctrine that has propelled me to enlarge the scope of my study and refer to some relevant theological alternatives. Insight coming from them has been useful to formulate the critique of Mostert's theology. In short, the

¹⁰⁵⁵ See 2.3.1.-2.3.5.

analysis of his account in close and critical contact with the “theologies of historical salvation” and those “of the performative Word” has served me right for the purpose of my research. The focus has constantly remained on the question whether Mostert’s theology, after being integrated with contributions from the alternatives, may fruitfully stimulate Christian theology on some of its core questions. This means that his ontology of justification does not necessarily *need* to be understood by answering the questions possibly raised by a separate analysis of the alternatives. However, once again, the point has been to assess whether Mostert’s ontology of justification could be meaningfully enriched through its critical comparison with other approaches. In this paragraph, I will try and show how the critique of certain aspects of Mostert’s justification doctrine plays into my research question and helps answer it. In other words, I will investigate what (if any) possible theological integrations between his discourse and the alternatives can be formulated based on the critique carried out in previous sections.

For Mostert, the relational ontology of justification is the center of theological theology. As such, just like the question of the foundation of theology explored in Part 1, it too needs to be observed not abstractly, but concretely, from the point of view of the relationship between human being, God and the world. My reconstruction of Mostert’s doctrine has been centered around the three tenets which, in my judgment, best identify the inner articulation of his ontology of justification. These are the formality, event and historicity of justification¹⁰⁵⁶, with the theological focus always resting on the moving interrelation of the three, but also with a more decisive emphasis on the first one, the formality of justification. As was already discussed, what makes the analysis of Mostert’s ontology of justification particularly interesting and fruitful is that he does not only focus on the description of the *outer* relationality between human being, God and the world. Rather, also the *inner* relationality within the ontology of justification is considered¹⁰⁵⁷. For Mostert, justification does not only describe a relationship, but it *is* also itself one. As a consequence, placing of the chief theological focus either on its actuality or on its historicity would be not only too reductive or unilateral, but also highly problematic. Indeed, in both cases justification would only be considered in its outer relationality, as the relationship between God, human being and the world, disregarding the inner interrelation of its formality, event and historicity. As has been consistently maintained throughout the present study, Mostert’s chief concern is the overall relational-existential understanding of the ontology of justification, to the point that even the inner structure of justification can itself be described as relational. In my opinion, this reduplication of the existential-relational moment is usually absent in alternative theological accounts of justification doctrine, including those discussed in Part 2.

¹⁰⁵⁶ For my definition of what these tenets mean, see here, pp. 134f.

¹⁰⁵⁷ See here, p. 135.

Accordingly, my claim is that the alternatives lack an overall category to describe the ontology of justification, so that they end up focusing either on one pole of the relationship between God and sinners or on one moment in the unfolding of justification¹⁰⁵⁸. Specifically, in my opinion, the theologies of the performative Word are exposed to the risk of isolating God's agency from the overall relationality involved in justification doctrine. Thus, they do not disarticulate strongly enough the hierarchical coordination of the objectivity and the subjectivity of salvation¹⁰⁵⁹. As for the theologies of historical salvation, I would argue that they risk understanding justification merely as a general interpretation of the christological event. Thus, their point of observation is an almost abstract theology of history centered around the formal interpretation of Jesus Christ as continuity and/or discontinuity within salvation history. In contrast to both alternatives, Mostert's position seems to fruitfully avoid overemphasizing a specific pole or moment of the salvation event, as it consistently places the theological focus on justification itself. In my view, this is precisely what makes his justification doctrine particularly interesting and a valuable vantage point for raising crucial questions for Protestant theology today.

The critique unfolding in 2.3.1. concerns Mostert's claim that the Christian is free from the Law. In my view, when illustrating the freedom from the Law brought about by the Gospel, he uses the semantics of the Law in an undifferentiated manner, not distinguishing between its demand and its good content. The problematic aspect is that he thereby tends to equate the Law and its *curse*. This equation is only theologically justified if it refers to the imperative dimension of the Law, or, to put it better, to the way in which the imperative is misheard by sinners as the demand to try and actualize salvation through synergistic soteriological activism. Unless a clear distinction is maintained between the imperative and the good content of the Law, Mostert's imprecise semantics risk considering also the good content of the Law as a curse. However, this is unacceptable because such content is actually identical with the Gospel. When it comes to the theological integrations with the alternative approaches, Mostert's interest in the soteriological disqualification of the Law is shared by the theologies of historical salvation. As was pointed out, both Pannenberg and Tillich regard the Law as categorically overcome by the Gospel and claim that, once justification has occurred, the place which was occupied by the Law is now seized by the creative and spiritual reality of love (*agape*). In my view, Mostert's rejection of the Law functions differently, in that, for him, the central question is not so much what reality seizes the place of the disqualified Law. Rather, he asks what operates the

¹⁰⁵⁸ I would argue that this tendency can be observed in the theologies of historical salvation. Specifically, they risk attaining a limited understanding of justification because they regard the christological event in too general terms, as an epochal discontinuity in salvation history.

¹⁰⁵⁹ In my view, this hierarchical emphasis on the objectivity of salvation to the detriment of its subjectivity is the reason why Barth moves so close to the idea of *apokatastasis*, even though he ultimately decides against it in order to safeguard God's freedom.

disqualification, and the answer is faith alone (*sola fide*). In my judgment, the two questions do not exclude each other, they are complementary. Mostert's question clearly illustrates that justification points to faith, not to a new law (*nova lex*) as the reality which truly appropriates the Gospel and communicates salvation. However, asking *only* this question means forgetting that the Gospel has truly taken the place of the Law, and that the justified sinner does not only exist in the *kerygmatic punctum mathematicum*, but has a historicity, a life of relationships in the world. Accordingly, the question dear to the theologies of historical salvation should be *also* asked. The Law has been disqualified, the Gospel is apprehended and truly communicated by faith alone, the imperative fades away. In the life and historicity of the justified sinner, this entails an overall reorganization of the way in which they perceive reality and react to situations. To describe this, a non-legal theological category is necessary, one which expresses the formality and materiality of the Gospel. The integration of Mostert's discourse with the theologies of historical salvation indicates that such category is *creative love*¹⁰⁶⁰.

In 2.3.2., I criticized Mostert's claim that that of God's wrath is a false one. According to him, this category expresses the obstinate disposition of *sinners* who keep looking at themselves and existing in their self-incurvation instead of looking towards God and letting Him be the gracious One towards them. As a consequence, God's wrath corresponds to the false way in which the sinner's image of Him is continuously distorted by their obstinate refusal to be engaged by His gracious address. In my judgment, Mostert's understanding of God's wrath is problematic because it does not keep the relationship between Him and human being as its point of observation. Rather, Mostert seems to understand God's wrath from the exclusive perspective of sinners. I am convinced that this passage falls prey to a subjectivistic fallacy. In particular, I do not see how the principle of the sole agency of God within the whole process of justification is maintained here with reference to the category of *His* wrath. Also, this understanding even risks suggesting (for sure against Mostert's intention) that one's sin can wholly determine their relationship with God even beyond His salvation intent. In my view, Mostert's position on God's wrath could be fruitfully integrated with the theologies of the performative Word. As a matter of fact, both Barth and Jüngel refuse to qualify God's judgment (to which the category of His wrath also belongs) as opposed to His grace. In their view, forgiveness is not to be misunderstood as the *alternative* to judgment. Rather, it is its outcome and occurs precisely through it. This is because God is gracious in His righteousness, and this requires His wrath as the power which annihilates sin. In my opinion, when brought into contact with Mostert's position, such a view is useful to maintain the *reality* of God's wrath and avoid unilateral and subjectivistic interpretations thereof. Thus, God remains truly the sovereign of the whole process of justification.

¹⁰⁶⁰ See KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Die Liebe ist erfinderisch" (see note 732).

Correspondingly, it becomes impossible to place the focus only on sinners and on their persistent self-incurvation *coram* Deo. Once protected from subjectivism, Mostert's position can be rephrased as follows: The category of God's wrath does not reflect a false, but an *indirect and oriented* experience of God. This experience is not ultimate, it is not an end in itself, it is not what God aims at in His gracious salvation intent. Rather, it is the articulation of His preliminary Word, whereby all things are judged under the Law in order for the Gospel – which conversely is an end in itself and the fulness of God's salvation intent – to truly communicate salvation in the proclamation of the church.

My critique in 2.3.3. conducted a material analysis¹⁰⁶¹ of the futurity of God's promise. Specifically, I tackled Mostert's rejection of the category of *Verheißung*, God's promise in its orientation to eschatological consummation. As was already explained in 1.3.6., Mostert rejects *Verheißung* because he thinks that it *necessarily* implies a synergistic postponing of salvation into the future. In his view, all ideas of a future consummation of salvation entail denying its full presence in Jesus Christ. In my critique, I have argued that his position starts from problematic interpretations of *Verheißung* to then arbitrarily infer that *all* conceptualizations of this category are synergistic and need to be rejected to safeguard the purity of justification doctrine. To the contrary, I have maintained that God's *Verheißung* is not only a legitimate qualification of His promise (albeit in its subordination to the category of *Zuspruch*), but even a necessary one. In my view, dropping *Verheißung* entirely produces an arbitrary secularization of the historicity of relationships in which the justified sinner continuously exists. On this matter, Mostert's view is in clear contrast with both the theological alternatives. For instance, Pannenberg maintains that the reconciliation of the world in the salvation event is open-ended and not yet complete¹⁰⁶². In his account, this means that the ministry of the church belongs constitutively to this event. As a result, God's promise at work in salvation is indeed to be qualified as a *Verheißung* which proleptically bases on the historical event of Christ's cross. As for the theologies of the performative Word, an example can be drawn from Küng's account¹⁰⁶³ of Barth's justification doctrine. Küng explains that *Verheißung* is the crucial category for Barth's understanding of God's promise. Specifically, the futurity of the promise points to the necessary *correspondence* between one's being in Christ and one's being in themselves¹⁰⁶⁴. This correspondence is called into existence by God in justification, which, for Barth, is at the same time declaratory (*Gerechtsprechung*) and effective (*Gerechtmachung*). Moreover, Mostert's rejection of *Verheißung* is precisely the one aspect where, as far as I can see, his fundamental agreement with Ebeling's theology breaks. His

¹⁰⁶¹ For the formal analysis, see 1.3.6.

¹⁰⁶² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), pp. 401ff. and 414.

¹⁰⁶³ Barth notably regarded Küng's study as a correct rendition of his doctrine of justification.

¹⁰⁶⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 85. An interesting follow-up question concerning Barth's theology could be to what extent this correspondence between the objectivity and the subjectivity of reconciliation (or between one's being in Christ and one's being in themselves) extends to the other dimensions of the historicity of justification, for instance the relationship between God's actuality of salvation in Jesus Christ and the history of the world.

mentor, on his part, does acknowledge the legitimacy of the category of *Verheißung*, and that means that God's promise does have a dimension of futurity¹⁰⁶⁵. In my view, a possible theological integration of Mostert's position would need to remain loyal to his own core theological categories and bring his position in agreement with Ebeling's. Specifically, God's promise needs to be understood first and foremost as *Zuspruch*. This understanding requires the correct unfolding of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation and expresses the full presence and reality of the christological event communicated through faith. Secondly, God's promise needs to be also qualified as *Verheißung*, in the sense that it is extended to include the full historicity of the justified, namely their overall relationship with themselves, the world and history. Thus, against Mostert, God's *Verheißung* remains necessary for the responsible theological account of questions such as sanctification or eschatology.

In 2.3.4., I discussed Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good and its implications on the *simul iustus et peccator*¹⁰⁶⁶. The critique has raised the complex question of a possible new foundation of Mostert's theology of creation by referring to the covenant. As was already explained, Mostert regards the salvation of human being as God reconnecting them with their essential goodness, which qualifies them as His creatures. After discussing why this doctrine is problematic, I have maintained that, if possible, it needs to be rephrased in relational-existential terms, in accordance with the overall ontological categories of Mostert's theology. To this formal task, I have associated a material one, whereby the doctrine needs to be reshaped in order to avoid conflict with the *simul iustus et peccator*. Specifically, if one accepts Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good, it is then really difficult to avoid understanding both justification and the *simul* in quantitative terms. With that, justification would become the *linear* and gradual process of *transformation* from being a sinner to being a righteous person instead of the *circular* and hermeneutical passage in which their *transposition* from being under the Law to being in Jesus Christ is described. In terms of theological integrations with the alternatives, Mostert's position could engage in critical dialogue with the theologies of the performative Word. Their rejection of all metaphysical interpolations in theology¹⁰⁶⁷ would prove a valid instrument to question the tenability of Mostert's doctrine of the previously given good to its very roots. Specifically, this integration seems particularly necessary for justification doctrine. This

¹⁰⁶⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 292.

¹⁰⁶⁶ The material critique pressed there is the *pendant* of the formal one expressed in 1.3.1. There, I argued that two conflicting ontologies coexist in Mostert's theology, as is manifested precisely by his doctrine of the previously given good.

¹⁰⁶⁷ A brilliant, elaborate and in-depth critique of the legitimacy of metaphysics in theology is provided for instance by JÜNGEL, E., *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* (see note 175). When it comes specifically to the ontology of justification, the rejection of metaphysics enables Barth to claim, among other things, that God's judgment both annihilates the sinner and recreates them as a new creature in Christ (KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* [see note 886], p. 37.). Clearly, this is in sharp contrast with the thesis that some essential goodness remains in human being in spite of their existence being completely determined by sin.

is because the metaphysical presuppositions active in the doctrine of the previously given good substantiate Mostert's claim that human being, despite their fully sinful existence, is not completely lost in sin¹⁰⁶⁸. Other than being in contradiction with his overall theology, his doctrine of the previously given good marks a strange turn which seems to look back at the Scholastic and away from key categories of Reformation theology. An integration with the theologies of the performative Word is therefore imperative on this matter, if one intends to fruitfully employ Mostert's categories to rephrase the way in which Protestant theology asks its crucial questions today.

Finally, in paragraph 2.3.5., I criticized Mostert's silence on the doctrine of election. In my view, this silence is due to the absence of a productive interpretation of the category of the covenant. In my analysis, the total absence of election from his theology corresponds with a focus on the *kerygma* that at times risks becoming almost abstract. This risk of abstractness highlights the problematic aspect of Mostert's neglect of election. Without a serious soteriological elaboration on this doctrine, it remains difficult to see how God's salvation intent does not only concern individuals, but also the collective and overall historical dimensions in which they exist. Thus, I have argued in favor of a non-hierarchical association of election and justification, whereby election is the objectivity of justification or its *anabasis*, and justification is the subjectivity of election or its *katabasis*. Correspondingly, the *punctum mathematicum* in which the *kerygma* of justification resonates is not to be abstracted from the overall contextuality of God's salvation intent having the covenant as its sign. My critique of Mostert's position explicitly suggests integrating it with impulses from the theologies of the performative Word. Specifically, I find that his focus on the ontology of justification provides an excellent answer to the crucial question of the relationship between human being, God and the world. However, an integration with insights from Barth and Jüngel could possibly enable a theology in the wake of Mostert to also tackle the question of the scope, goal and unfolding of God's righteousness in its collective, historical and eschatological dimensions. In order not to arbitrarily abstract these dimensions from God's salvation event in Jesus Christ, a robust doctrine of election is necessary, and its relationship with justification doctrine should be of mutual complementing. From the point of view of human being's experience, however, justification will remain criteriological.

My critical study of Mostert's ontology of justification has tried to assess the theological tenability and productivity of his doctrine. As a result, has suggested possible integrations with both the theologies of historical salvation and those of the performative Word have been formulated. After pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of Mostert's ontology of justification, I am convinced that the research question is to be given, once again, a positive answer. After being challenged and partially rephrased through the theological integrations stemming from the alternatives, Mostert's account can

¹⁰⁶⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie" (see note 94), p. 457.

prove fruitful for fostering further reflection on justification doctrine. He tackles Christian theology from its core, the mystery of God's gracious self-determination in favor of human being. In his ontology of justification, the core categories of his discourse fruitfully engage with their theological core and make a considerable effort to illuminate it. In my opinion, when compared to the studied alternatives, Mostert's ontology of justification has the competitive advantage of focusing on both the relationship that justification *describes* and the one that it *is*. This twofold relational focus gives Mostert's justification doctrine a unique dynamism which makes it worthy of serious consideration. His ontology of justification is not devoid of problematic elements, to the point that, at times, the overall coherence of his theological endeavor cracks or even breaks. However, in my judgment, his account remains a serious and intensive attempt to responsibly describe the core of God's salvation event in Jesus Christ, namely the justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith. Mostert's ontology of justification, in my view, is well-construed, has a general inner coherence and is theologically productive. In conclusion, the merit of his doctrine is to have elucidated what he considers the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* without any reductionist or hypertrophic shortcuts. Mostert's theology aptly shows that the criteriological emphasis on justification doctrine is not an arbitrary limitation of the scope of theological discourse. Instead, his use of the doctrine is broad, intensive and creative. His account intercepts the concerns of the theological alternatives while removing their hypertrophic tendencies and enabling an overall convincing description of the ontology of justification. In Mostert's doctrine, the event and the historicity of justification are not statically isolated from the dynamism of its formality. This means that justification is described in its immediate significance for human being's experience and does not need to be made relevant by way of successive actualization or appropriation.

3. W. Mostert's Justification Doctrine and the Question of Ethics

As was illustrated in Part 2, Mostert's ontology of justification strictly depends on the unfolding of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation. Specifically, the way in which the two realities interact hermeneutically within Christian preaching is the formal illustration of God's salvation agency on human being. The overall contrastive interaction of Law and Gospel needs therefore to be described in such a way that the good language of the Gospel resonates in the preached *kerygma* and present salvation in Jesus Christ is truly and effectively communicated to the sinner. This true and effective communication is justification. In particular, Mostert understands it as a fully present, christologically qualified event and *not* as an unfinished process to be completed (with or without God's aid) within what I previously called the historicity of the justified¹⁰⁶⁹. This entails that justification doctrine, as the chief *locus theologicus* where this event is explicitly treated, understands salvation in its full presence. The intensive exposition of Mostert's ontology of justification was carried out in Part 2. In Part 1, instead, his Prolegomena pointed to the full presence of salvation as the solution to human being's fundamental problem. This problem comes to light whenever experience, in its overall legal structure, is linguistically addressed by a qualitatively different, non-legal language. But the good language of the Gospel, which brings about *the* true solution to human being's fundamental problem, is not the only linguistic reality resonating within experience. Together and against it, many different legal languages also present themselves as possible solutions to human being's problem. Moreover, their presence is *necessary*. They are not there by chance, but because they issue from human being's thinking, which, in Mostert's view, is inherently soteriological. Whenever one thinks, they participate in the search for a solution to their fundamental problem.

Thus, for Mostert, justification can only stand in critical and polemical contrast to the qualitatively different, alternative solutions that human being's thinking conceptualizes as possible solutions to the soteriological problem. All these options, including justification, are to be interpreted as attempts to find salvation. The point, however, is that justification is categorically different from the alternatives. Unlike them, it truly delivers the solution to the problem, thus uncovering all competing soteriological answers as false. Mostert claims that the most relevant and serious of these competing options is ethics. Therefore, my research must now turn to the examination of the relationship between justification and ethics. This is a crucial passage in Mostert's theology. Furthermore, given that he considers justification doctrine criteriological for the whole of theology, his account of this question

¹⁰⁶⁹ By "historicity" I mean the overall historical dynamics in which one exists in a relationship with themselves, their neighbor and the history of the world (see e.g. here, pp. 134f. and 143ff.).

can be legitimately regarded as the vantage point for addressing the overall relationship between theology and ethics.

Specifically, in Part 3, I will present Mostert's position on justification and ethics in the wake of Ebeling's theology (3.1.), to then compare it critically with the selected theological alternatives (3.2.). Once again, the selection was neither strictly necessary¹⁰⁷⁰ nor arbitrary. Just like in Parts 1 and 2, the intensive study of Mostert's position has interested me in critically comparing it with the selected alternatives. Thereby, I have intended to assess whether a possible integration of these different perspectives could prove beneficial for theology and help avoid the weaknesses and problems affecting them. This time, the alternatives are Tillich and Pannenberg ("theologies of *agape*") on the one hand, Barth and Brunner ("ethical theologies") on the other. The breakdown of the topics in this Part 3 bases on Mostert's own focus. However, to a certain degree, it can be extended to the alternatives. Therefore, it will be maintained throughout 3.1. (Ebeling, Mostert) and 3.2. (alternatives). Firstly, I will study the relationship between dogmatics and ethics from a soteriological point of view. Secondly, I will focus on ethics and problematize its relationship with the Law and the reality of love (*agape*), understood pneumatologically. Thirdly, I will investigate the relationship between ethics and the semantics of consummation (*Vollendung*), thus completing the study of the historicity of the justified started in Part 1. The analysis will also touch upon sanctification and the question of the legitimacy of a third use of the Law (*tertius usus legis*). In conclusion (3.3.), I will criticize Mostert's position and investigate whether fruitful integrations can be drawn from the theological alternatives, thus probing the research question once more.

3.1. G. Ebeling and W. Mostert: Ethics and Justification as Incompatible Answers to Human Being's Fundamental Problem

3.1.1. Ethics or Justification: G. Ebeling

For Ebeling, the definition of the relationship between dogmatics and ethics is a topic for systematic theology¹⁰⁷¹. Specifically, he claims that ethics is to be placed within dogmatics, while the opposite approach entails the dissolution of theology¹⁰⁷². Thus, dogmatics provides the observation point from which the ethical moment must be assessed and delimited. However, in order for this assessment and delimitation to be rightly performed, it is necessary for theology to acknowledge at the same time the specificity of the ethical moment. This comes to light whenever ethics is kept in

¹⁰⁷⁰ To my knowledge, Mostert does not explicitly engage in dialogue with them.

¹⁰⁷¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 21.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid.

critical juxtaposition with dogmatics, so that the categorical difference between the ethical and dogmatic dimensions clearly emerges. Thus, Ebeling offers a hermeneutical understanding of the relationship between ethics and dogmatics, which mirrors his view of the fundamental differentiation between Law and Gospel. With that, his intention is to exclude a simplistic, non-hermeneutical view in which ethics is *immediately* derived from dogmatics¹⁰⁷³. With clear reference to the Law-Gospel differentiation, Ebeling points out that the ethical dimension always precedes the dogmatic one. Since the ethical phenomenon is part of the interconnection of the reality of life (*Lebenswirklichkeit*), it is always already presupposed in it. Because dogmatics is equipped to analyze this reality of life, it also has the instruments to reflect on ethics. This qualifies the ethical moment as the horizon of experience (*Erfahrungshorizont*) of dogmatic statements¹⁰⁷⁴. Accordingly, the dogmatic reflection on ethics needs to explicitly start from studying the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation. Specifically, Ebeling claims that dogmatics is competent to discuss ethics within its study of the first use of the Law (*primus usus legis*). As a consequence, a principle-based separation between dogmatics and ethics is excluded. However, an operational separation is in order because of the high specialization of ethics and the increasing complexity of its questions¹⁰⁷⁵. When discussing its demarcation from ethics, dogmatics is constantly and fundamentally tasked with illustrating the clear, qualitative difference between its object (Christian faith) and the ethical realm.

According to Ebeling, ethics shares in the legal character of all the fundamental features of life (*Sachverhalte*), which exist in an overall interconnection¹⁰⁷⁶. This interconnection, to which ethics also belongs, is a phenomenon of the Law. Therefore, dogmatics needs to hermeneutically tackle the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation in order to intercept this legal phenomenon and illustrate the Gospel in its contrastive contact with the Law. As a consequence, the relationship between ethics and dogmatics must be understood from the point of view of the interconnection of the fundamental features of life. To argue for the need to distinguish, but not separate dogmatics from ethics, Ebeling maintains that the relationship between the two disciplines mirrors the one between Law and Gospel. Consequently, the differentiation between dogmatics and ethics qualifies the latter as a legal phenomenon sharing in the overall legal structure of life (*lebensmäßig*). On this basis, the appropriate articulation of the overall relationality between human being, God and the world unfolds. Formally, for Ebeling, the exact relationship between ethics and dogmatics is a complex intertwining: the two disciplines coexist in juxtaposition (*Beieinander*), interpenetration (*Ineinander*) and contrast

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁴ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 26/1 (1982), pp. 10-18, here p. 16.

¹⁰⁷⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 22.

¹⁰⁷⁶ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 11.

(*Widereinander*)¹⁰⁷⁷. This complex coexistence enables a hermeneutical understanding in which ethics points to the fact that the theological subject matter (*Sache*) is rooted in life. In turn, this supports the claim that dogmatics is competent to interpret life as such¹⁰⁷⁸. After having established the dogmatic competence in the investigation of life and ethics within it, Ebeling moves on to study the specificity of the ethical moment.

The specific qualification of ethics is its focus on human action from the point of view of the responsibility connected to it¹⁰⁷⁹. This responsibility originates from the fact that human being is given their life and exists under conditions in which this life is threatened. Therefore, ethics is human being's mandate (*Aufgabe*) to preserve the givenness of life through action. Precisely as long as this mandate aims at the preservation of the gift of life, the subject of ethics gets in close contact with the one of dogmatics and vice versa. In other words, Ebeling (like Mostert) believes that ethics has a crypto-religious dimension, which uncovers the constitutive soteriological intent of human thinking as such¹⁰⁸⁰. As a mandate, ethics is conceptualized both philosophically and theologically. In particular, philosophical ethics is concerned with elaborating a theory of human behavior, whereby the reality of the good is clearly determined and claimed for critical thinking as against unreflected traditional morals¹⁰⁸¹. As for theological ethics, the critical proximity with dogmatics needs to be maintained in order to prevent ethics from losing sight of the specificity of its own subject, which is qualitatively different from the dogmatic one¹⁰⁸². Ultimately, Ebeling claims that the right understanding of ethics and its relationship with dogmatics is given within faith¹⁰⁸³. This should not be understood as a form of fideism, as if faith would somehow grant a superior form of knowledge concerning ethics. Conversely, Ebeling regards faith as the reality which determines the moral element anew because it acknowledges human being's sinfulness together with their freedom in Christ. From this acknowledgment follow both the formal understanding of ethics with reference to dogmatics and the consequences affecting material ethics¹⁰⁸⁴. For Ebeling, it is precisely its connection with faith which enables the *liberation* of the ethical moment from all soteriological overload (*Überforderung*). This liberation is possible and real only in faith (*sola fide*), which truly effects and communicates the salvation reality for which ethics strives in vain. Thus, according to Ebeling (and Mostert), the full presence of salvation in faith disqualifies ethics' illegitimate

¹⁰⁷⁷ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), pp. 11f.

¹⁰⁷⁸ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 12.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁰ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 13.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸² EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), pp. 13f.

¹⁰⁸³ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 14.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid.

soteriological claim¹⁰⁸⁵. Similarly, present salvation also affects dogmatics, liberating it from all confusion between the theological and ethical dimensions. Once faith has liberated ethics from its soteriological overload, the latter is restored to its proper, non-soteriological dimension and can adequately focus on concrete moral action. For Ebeling, it is only under these conditions that the full legitimacy of ethics is to be affirmed from a Christian perspective¹⁰⁸⁶. Specifically, this legitimate ethics will be a *theory of the right moral handling* to be only operatively separated from dogmatics¹⁰⁸⁷. This theory of handling results from ethics having been placed in critical and contrastive contact with dogmatics and deprived of its hidden soteriological intent.

Furthermore, Ebeling claims that faith, precisely while uncovering and criticizing the hidden soteriological intent of ethics, also points to the reality of sin and its relationship to the ethical dimension¹⁰⁸⁸. For him (and Mostert), sin has a significatory function (*Vorzeichen*) with regards to the ethical moment. Specifically, the dogmatic reflection on the Law shows that sin is interconnected with ethics with such an intensity that both share one core characteristic: they are constitutively presupposed (*vorausgesetzt*) for human being¹⁰⁸⁹. Ebeling (with Mostert) defends a hamartiology in which sin is primarily understood as human being's universal condition of unbelief, which then becomes visible in corresponding actions (wrongdoing)¹⁰⁹⁰. This means that sin is not understood ethically, but theologically. Accordingly, the determination of sin is provided within soteriology. This makes it possible for Ebeling to uphold the otherwise absurd claim that also (morally) good deeds are sinful¹⁰⁹¹. For him, sin (just like faith) stands in categorical, structural proximity to the ethical moment, as a non-ethical category which however becomes individualized in moral acts. Precisely this proximity between sin and ethics enables theology to understand the second as a phenomenon in the sign of unbelief, which *as such* continuously concerns the justified (*simul iustus et peccator*)¹⁰⁹². This means that Ebeling views the Christian (a.) as the justified who is concerned with both an ethics of freedom issuing from the Gospel and an ethics of the Law *and* (b.) as the sinner who remains bound to the ethics of the Law. The two categorically different forms of ethics, of freedom and of the Law, interrelate in the life of the Christian in such a way that the first *interprets* the second¹⁰⁹³. This *hermeneutical superiority* mirrors the relationship between Law and Gospel. Namely, the ethics of freedom results from the good language of the Gospel, hence it is not oriented to the ethics of the

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁸ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 15.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹² EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 17.

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid.

Law but is an end in itself. Conversely, legal ethics is not an end in itself, but remains structurally oriented to the ethics of freedom unfolding from faith. Once interpreted by the first, the second form of ethics becomes a valid instrument in the life of the Christian. In particular, it is concerned with the question of how the givenness of life revealed by the Gospel can be maintained under the conditions of existence¹⁰⁹⁴. For Ebeling, this question needs to be answered by referring to the presence of the moral dimension in law and religion as life phenomena¹⁰⁹⁵. To sum it up, the Gospel reveals to faith the givenness of life, which precedes all commands heard by sinners within legal ethics. As a consequence of faith apprehending the good news, the sinner is justified, and an ethics of freedom and love ensues. This, however, remains always and constitutively in a critical, contrastive relationship with the ethics of the Law, because human being is both a sinner and a righteous person. Specifically, the ethics of freedom, in its formal difference from the ethics of the Law, interprets the latter as an endeavor tasked with the maintenance of life. This interpretation focuses on the moral content of law and religion, which are indeed life phenomena. Accordingly, this legal ethics interpreted by the ethics of freedom will strive and create consensus concerning concrete ethical questions in dialogue with other perspectives¹⁰⁹⁶. Ultimately, in Ebeling's account, the relationship between the two ethics mirrors the one between faith and works¹⁰⁹⁷.

After having established the categorical difference between the dogmatic and ethical moments and defined hamartiology as a topic belonging to the former rather than the latter¹⁰⁹⁸, Ebeling outlines the characteristics of his theological ethics as a theory of the right moral handling. Specifically, he understands Christian ethics through the fruit-tree analogy¹⁰⁹⁹, as the appropriate (*sachgemäße*) consequence of faith having at its core the semantics of freedom and love¹¹⁰⁰. Here, he intends to maintain the qualitative difference between dogmatics and ethics by excluding all agency driven by the category of command (*Forderung*) and understood as the *telos* of the reality given in faith. Instead, he aims at interpreting the ethical moment pneumatically within the semantics of fulfillment¹¹⁰¹. By excluding the category of command from the ethical domain, Ebeling defends the *formal* difference

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁵ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 18.

¹⁰⁹⁶ This dialogical openness to ethical alternatives is facilitated by the fact that legal ethics, for Ebeling, refers to the *primus usus legis*. Conversely, if theological ethics is elaborated with reference to the *tertius usus*, it is more difficult to have it engage in an open dialogue with non-theological alternatives. However, in my opinion, this difficulty does not *per se* solve the question of which *usus* of the Law should be criteriological for theological ethics. More about this will be discussed later in this Part 3.

¹⁰⁹⁷ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 18.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Nevertheless, to my knowledge, Ebeling does not explicitly deny that sin and wrongdoing happen together under the conditions of existence. Instead, as was pointed in Part 1, Mostert tends to emphasize the separation between sin and wrongdoing (see 1.3.4.).

¹⁰⁹⁹ See e.g. Matt 7,16-20.

¹¹⁰⁰ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 16.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid.

between Christian ethics and all the alternatives, which he understands as legal ethics¹¹⁰². This, however, does not mean that Christian ethics ought to be regarded as the special code of conduct of the church or any morally enlightened elite. Instead, Christian ethics corresponds indeed to the true needs of *all* human beings. Accordingly, as the right handling issuing from the conjunction of freedom and service in love, it is understandable and normative for everyone¹¹⁰³.

Coherently, Ebeling places the theological discussion of ethics within the first article: ethics is rightly understood by dogmatics when treated from the point of view of faith in creation (*Schöpfungsglaube*)¹¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, this right understanding interprets ethics as the question of the *modification* of human being's overall relationality with the world¹¹⁰⁵. This passage is pivotal to understanding both Ebeling and Mostert's view of ethics. In what follows, I will shed light on it starting from Ebeling's placement of ethics within creation theology. According to him, when the world is seen as God's creation, it appears before human being's eyes in a qualitatively specific way. Moreover, this specific outlook on the world (which results from faith) is *performative*, it modifies human being's behavior in and with their environment¹¹⁰⁶. This deepens and disambiguates faith in creation: the claim that the world is God's creation no longer appears as a statement about past events, but as a confession of faith concerning the present. Specifically, faith in creation interprets the pressing question of the modification of the world in light of the answer provided within faith. According to this answer, the true, liberating modification of the world sought after by the ethical endeavor is *already* hiddenly present in reality and becomes manifest to faith¹¹⁰⁷. The interpretation of reality enabled by faith in creation focuses on the differentiated relationship between human being and the world, considered together¹¹⁰⁸. From there, it then understands both in a qualitatively new manner, which can be interpreted through the categories of a relational ontology. Basically, Ebeling (with Mostert) claims that the world and human being are only rightly understood from the vantage point of their interrelation or being-together (*Zusammensein*)¹¹⁰⁹. This means that faith in creation *modifies* the way in which human being and the world are together. It is in this sense that, for Ebeling (and Mostert), faith and ethics *compete*: they are categorically different interpretations of the question of the world's modification. Faith in creation changes the world in that it understands it together with human being within the overarching relationality of both with God¹¹¹⁰. Thus, true modification is first

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

¹¹⁰³ EBELING, G., "Zum Verhältnis von Dogmatik und Ethik" (see note 1074), p. 17.

¹¹⁰⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 304.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁷ This is also crucial for Mostert's theology (see note 1026).

¹¹⁰⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 305.

¹¹⁰⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 306.

¹¹¹⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 307.

and foremost interpreted as a change in human being's quality of understanding. However, in my opinion, this view should not be simplistically discarded as subjectivistic. As a matter of fact, the change in human being's understanding of the world is not merely noetic, it is not a modified perception having no real effect on the world. A similar noetic interpretation of faith would be utterly incompatible with the theological and philosophical categories which undergird both Ebeling and Mostert's theologies. Instead, the qualitatively different understanding of the world given within faith in creation points to the *real* change of human being effected and truly communicated by this faith. Specifically, this real change of human being *is* their changed relationship with God. The understanding of the world enabled by creational *fides inventrix*¹¹¹¹ is not the subjectivistic and arbitrary application of human being's religious convictions to the world. Rather, faith truly changes the world precisely because it understands it as God's creation. In so doing, it aptly locates it within the linguistic event (*Sprachgeschehen*) of human being's fundamental situation, which always already includes the overall relationality between them, the world and God¹¹¹².

According to Ebeling, experience (*Erfahrung*) points out that the ethical endeavor of human being places them in a dichotomous ambivalence (*Zwiespalt*) between true and perverted self-love, true and perverted self-trust, commanded and stolen self-affirmation¹¹¹³. Specifically, human being undertakes the ethical endeavor because their doing remains constantly determined by this ambivalence. The latter sheds light on a fundamental disturbance¹¹¹⁴ affecting all their faculties, thus also perverting their judgment. Because of such disturbance, therefore, human being also experiences that they actively strive to deceive themselves concerning their own judgment. In other words, they try to convince themselves to be in the right while this is not the case. Explicitly following Luther, Ebeling does not interpret this self-deception by abstractly positing a more or less impassable friction within the person. Rather, more radically, he claims that human being exists as two whole persons with opposing determinations¹¹¹⁵. The underlying theological category is obviously the *simul iustus et peccator*, which remains absolutely central for both Ebeling and Mostert. In the face of their fundamental disturbance, human being has no way of getting out of it but can only interact with it. Ultimately, it all comes down to how this interaction plays out. The ultimate criterion, for Ebeling, is whether or not human being understands that the solution to the fundamental disturbance is provided through faith within the relationship with God¹¹¹⁶. It is only in that relationship, when it is rightly determined by justifying faith, that human being does receive peace with God, themselves and the

¹¹¹¹ See here, p. 105.

¹¹¹² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 1 (see note 66), p. 307.

¹¹¹³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2, *Der Glaube an Gott den Versöhner der Welt*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2012⁴, p. 55.

¹¹¹⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 56.

¹¹¹⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 57.

¹¹¹⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 58.

world. This peace truly and effectively changes them, operating their real *humanization* (*Menschwerden*)¹¹¹⁷. Once again, it is essential to point out that, for Ebeling (and Mostert), this humanization is not an ethical, but a theological question. Thus, it does not depend on the activistic (autonomous or semi-autonomous) becoming-human of the person, but on the gracious becoming-human of God¹¹¹⁸. Ethically speaking, instead, the subject of humanization appears as the question of the fulfillment of the person. As such, it can only be experienced as an open problem, never as a given solution. This means that, within the ethical domain, the fulfillment of human being can at best be realized fragmentarily and ambiguously¹¹¹⁹. Theologically, the humanization of the person is Jesus Christ only (*solus Christus*), whereby Christology also reveals that human being becomes truly human only in and as a consequence of the becoming-human of God.

It seems accurate to say that, for Ebeling, the interest of ethics in the humanization of the person clearly shows, once again, that the ethical endeavor is fundamentally concerned with the question of the world's modification. At the same time, the failure of ethics to truly account for this humanization uncovers its constitutive limit, thus reserving the question of humanization for the theological domain. There, this question is dealt with christologically and hamartiologically. Indeed, both Christology and hamartiology point out that the humanization of the person is the modification of their fundamental situation. This modification is not a matter of quantitative progress towards fulfillment through education, it is not the Greek *paideia*. Even though it does entail ethical consequences, the fundamental modification of human being is categorically non-ethical. Accordingly, it does not depend on the alteration or intensification of human being's action, but on the change of their existential *locus*¹¹²⁰. Theology solves the question of humanization by pointing out that, in faith, human being has been placed elsewhere, outside of themselves (*extra se*). Concretely, their being is now in Jesus Christ. In turn, he is now in them, a bidirectional *merry exchange* has taken place. When qualifying this exchange, Ebeling clearly maintains the priority of the direction going from human being to Jesus Christ. That is the primary and defining moment of the merry exchange. Instead, the opposite direction (from Jesus Christ to human being) is secondary and simply expresses the ethical consequences of faith within the life of the justified¹¹²¹. For Ebeling (and Mostert), this modification of the existential *locus* of human being (which truly effects their humanization) happens only through faith (*sola fide*). In particular, faith receives the life-creating and renewing power of Jesus Christ's

¹¹¹⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 119.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 120.

¹¹²⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 121.

¹¹²¹ Ibid.

presence¹¹²² and operates the modification of human being by letting them participate in the power of God's attributes and become *imago Dei*¹¹²³.

Ebeling (with Mostert) clearly conceptualizes the humanization of the person in a way which categorically excludes all action of the latter. Only God brings about the humanization, so that the true and concrete character of this modification can only be understood theologically¹¹²⁴. However, unlike Mostert, Ebeling claims that the concrete modification of human being effected by God and communicated through faith does concern the whole relationality of their life and world, their *historicity*. To protect this claim from all ethical misunderstandings, Ebeling clarifies that, when trying to conceptualize the outstretching of human being's humanization into their historicity, it is crucial to keep reasoning theologically, not ethically. Thus, the focus must remain on the believer's conscience and on the moment of joy and certainty, not the one of need and guilt¹¹²⁵. Under those clear specifications, Ebeling considers it appropriate to describe the modification of human being as the attainment of a life in the dimensions of truth, grace and love. Clearly, one's being in those dimensions needs to be understood as an illustration of their being in Christ¹¹²⁶. From the fundamental modification that they undergo through faith, human being truly lives a life of love and gratitude. This does not entail a form of correspondence to God's agency through their own. Rather, their new life is the real and concrete *consequence* of their being grasped by the powerful, life-changing external reality of the Gospel¹¹²⁷. For Ebeling, the fundamental qualification of this consequence of one's humanization is love, which is to be understood theologically as the *manifestation* of the new foundation of one's existence in faith¹¹²⁸. Since this love comes from God, it shares in the same essential qualification as His love. In other words, it is *forgiving love*, love of the enemy, namely the one power which truly overcomes all enmity because it mirrors and flows from God's justifying grace. Because this love involving the historicity of human being is in categorical proximity to God's love, the humanization of the person that the latter effects can be also described as one's *being in love*, understood as a creation of faith¹¹²⁹. As being in love, the humanization of the person is not to be misunderstood as a reality which produces the new world. Rather, it is the reality created and communicated by God who has pronounced the decisive Word in the old world, thus making the new one discernible in signs within it¹¹³⁰.

¹¹²² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 122.

¹¹²³ Ibid.

¹¹²⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 123.

¹¹²⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 124.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹¹²⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), pp. 125f.

¹¹²⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 127.

¹¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid.

Ultimately, Ebeling's account of the humanization of the person as the modification of their fundamental situation implies the impossibility of seeing them as a co-creator or a co-redeemer, namely as one who is soteriologically active¹¹³¹. Thus, human being can never be fully changed through the modification of their relationships, their historicity¹¹³². At best, focus on their historicity may have a provisional and signficatory value. Specifically, it may help point out that the real modification of human being is the one affecting their fundamental situation¹¹³³. As I said, Ebeling claims that signs of the new world are part of human being's life of faith as their being in love. However, their humanized, reconciled life is not visible, but hidden (*verborgen*) with Christ in God¹¹³⁴. Accordingly, the humanized person (the justified) clearly acknowledges before God to be the one who they are from themselves, but also and *most of all* the one who they are from Him. The good news is illustrated by the fact that their identity coming from God is defining, as it has to do with a deeper reality than the one that they access empirically while looking at themselves. Within the historicity of the justified, human being's reconciliation with God operates as their sanctification carried out by Him¹¹³⁵. Specifically, the Spirit effects in them that which corresponds to Jesus Christ's cross. This shows that, for Ebeling, the christological orientation remains criteriological for reconciliation even when it comes to the historicity of the justified. For sure, Jesus Christ is the reality of human life. However, his life is *qualitatively different* from the one of sinners existing in their dichotomous ambivalence and contradiction¹¹³⁶. Thus, the christological assessment of human life uncovers contradictions and makes it impossible to naively imagine any fulfillment of life without them. Positively, Ebeling expresses the same concept by saying that human life exists in polar tensions (*Lebensspannungen*)¹¹³⁷. Among those, the most important and defining one is between life and death, which reflects the fundamental decision between being and non-being¹¹³⁸ to which everyone is called¹¹³⁹. Now, since the defining polarity between life and death belongs to human life as such, this life needs to be understood as extremely ambivalent and ambiguous. Consequently, the fulfillment in the life of the humanized person can only be hidden and fragmentary and cannot find any unquestionable concretization in their works or deeds¹¹⁴⁰.

¹¹³¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 253.

¹¹³² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 254.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁴ *Ibid.* I would say that, here, Ebeling aims at locating the *locus theologicus* of sanctification entirely within a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). Despite the very strong theological differences between him and Barth, it might be worth noticing that Barth starts his account on ethics precisely by distancing himself from those account in which the ethical life of the Christian is not viewed as hidden with Christ in God (BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 [see note 404], p. 40).

¹¹³⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 255.

¹¹³⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 261.

¹¹³⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 262.

¹¹³⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 266.

¹¹³⁹ Deut 30,15.

¹¹⁴⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 278.

The hiddenness of the humanization of the person disqualifies the Law as a place where salvation is verified. For Ebeling, the Law has been overcome by Jesus Christ, who is the new intertwined with the old because he is both under the Law and the end of it¹¹⁴¹. Accordingly, Ebeling bases his disqualification of the Law on Jesus' own interpretation of *Torah* as radically non-juridical¹¹⁴². Through Jesus' reading, the horizon of the Law is changed and the latter stops being an end in itself and becomes the reality which points to the need to take God seriously¹¹⁴³. With that, Ebeling (with Mostert) defends a non-politicized interpretation of the Law, even though he admits that certain consequences impacting the social order are to be drawn from it¹¹⁴⁴. The key passage is that the Law is to be kept in criteriological reference to faith, which interprets it. Specifically, Ebeling points out that faith brings about freedom from the Law, which however does not unleash chaos (freedom is not *arbitrium*) but takes the form of situation-specific behaviors¹¹⁴⁵. The superiority of faith over the Law depends on the fact that the assurance of faith is directly actualized by Jesus' authority, while the power of the Law is constitutively misheard by sinners as a separate, self-sufficient reality. As such, even though it is oriented to Jesus, the legal instance ends up competing with his authority¹¹⁴⁶. This is precisely what disqualifies the legal instance as a soteriological category. The liberation from the Law granted by faith, however, is not to be interpreted negatively, but positively. Thus, Ebeling emphasizes that the humanized person (the justified) is free from the Law, but this does not mean that they are left in an arbitrary vacuum in which the consequences of their faith lack necessity and find an expression in ultimately irrelevant behaviors¹¹⁴⁷. Instead, freedom from the Law (based on Jesus' authority) entails its overall fulfillment. Therefore, it has a positive content, it is necessary, non-arbitrary and liberating freedom, directed to all things which promote life¹¹⁴⁸. So, the consequences of the humanization of the person have a concrete orientation. This means that one's being bound to God's goodness does imply the ensuing foundation of their good relationships to others. In sum, the becoming-human of the sinner, enabled by the becoming-human of God, implies that the former truly receives and lives out their true humanity (*Menschlichkeit*) in their overall relationality with the world¹¹⁴⁹. Specifically, for Ebeling, this true humanity will take the form of acts derived from and shaped after Jesus' humanity. The latter is qualified as self-giving life (*Hingabe*), which is both an act of freedom and a fulfilment of the double commandment of love¹¹⁵⁰.

¹¹⁴¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 428.

¹¹⁴² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 429.

¹¹⁴³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 430.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 432.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 437.

¹¹⁴⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 438.

¹¹⁴⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 533.

¹¹⁵⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 2 (see note 1113), p. 534.

According to Ebeling, the semantics of consummation (*Vollendung*) are theologically problematic unless they are clearly maintained in their criteriological reference to Jesus Christ as the full presence of personal salvation¹¹⁵¹. The problem is that these semantics also concern human action as a behavior oriented to *fulfillment*. Thus, the question becomes which human action may be considered properly fulfilled, that is radically appropriate to the situation (*sitautionsgerecht*) and love-driven¹¹⁵². Ebeling does not exclude the possibility of a properly fulfilled action performed by human being¹¹⁵³. However, he points out that their true modification is not found in the fulfillment of their action, but in the humanization of their being. As long as they are not fulfilled in their being, the dichotomy between what they are and what they ought to be persists. This means that, if they keep looking at their own action, human being can never know *when* they have attained fulfillment¹¹⁵⁴. This uncertainty is unavoidable whenever the attempt is made to answer the question of human being's modification from their action and not from their relationship with God. For Ebeling, the same uncertainty concerns history, in which it is possible to detect symptoms of a certain progress, but not a harmonious movement toward a future *telos*. Thus, history cannot attain its fulfillment otherwise than through the modification of human being¹¹⁵⁵. To try and conceptualize the first without the second is an illusion. For Ebeling, the consummation of "all things", finds its certainty already with faith in creation¹¹⁵⁶. Accordingly, the point is to understand its semantics *ecstatically*, with constant reference to its entirety and not to its specific manifestations (*Erscheinungen*)¹¹⁵⁷. In contrast to Mostert, Ebeling claims that the dimension of futurity legitimately belongs to the semantics of salvation¹¹⁵⁸. For sure, salvation is imparted (*zueignet*) here and now through faith, but it does bring about effects. The key passage, at any rate, is that the decisive word has already been spoken once and for all. References to consummation as the futurity of salvation need to be judged accordingly¹¹⁵⁹. In Ebeling's perspective, the future and the present exist inside each other (*ineinander*) and together establish the certainty of consummation¹¹⁶⁰. Specifically, consummation is the existential element in which the believer lives as one who receives their existential *locus* in Jesus Christ. In him, the present is already eschatologically filled and determined by a certainty of consummation (*Vollendungsgewißheit*) from which concrete consequences derive¹¹⁶¹. Ultimately, for Ebeling, the category of consummation is

¹¹⁵¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 33.

¹¹⁵² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 37.

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 38.

¹¹⁵⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 39.

¹¹⁵⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 41.

¹¹⁵⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 40.

¹¹⁵⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 42.

¹¹⁵⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 44.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 45f.

legitimate if kept in criteriological reference with God. In short, it becomes sharply manifest and certain only in contact with (*an*) His agency¹¹⁶². Instead, if the point of observation is that of human action, no certainty is possible, because signs of a fulfillment of history which affirm salvation always exist next to opposite signs which deny it¹¹⁶³.

Ebeling claims that, from an ethical perspective, action and the dimension of futurity belong together¹¹⁶⁴. Specifically, the future appears as the object of action, and is therefore put under activistic pressure. More precisely, the legal reality of ethics demands proof that fulfillment is not a *flatus vocis*, but a reality actualized in action¹¹⁶⁵. For Ebeling, theological discourse must not react to this ethical misunderstanding by denying the very legitimacy of the category of consummation¹¹⁶⁶. Rather, it must insist that a fulfilled future can only be awaited from the agency of *God*¹¹⁶⁷. In contrast to Mostert, Ebeling refuses to give up the category of consummation just because it is often occupied and distorted by ethics. Instead, theology has something meaningful to say about it, because it is inherently concerned with the dimension of futurity and the historicity of the justified. Specifically, all the semantics pertaining to consummation need to be qualified *theologically* and interpreted from the fundamental modification of human being's situation (*Situationsveränderung*) given in Christi and communicated through faith¹¹⁶⁸. Thus, Ebeling makes the effort of coordinating a christological understanding of present salvation with a pneumatological-eschatological determination of the category of consummation. With that, this category becomes referred to both the historicity of the justified (sanctification) and the dimension of historical and post-historical futurity (eschatology). Specifically, for Ebeling, salvation is the already present *eschaton*, which *therefore* enables an unlimited hope for clear, situation-specific consequences of faith¹¹⁶⁹. This means that salvation assurance founds exclusively in God's agency, that is both in Christ's presence in faith and in the Spirit-inhabited future, in which all competing, godless forms of future shall be overcome¹¹⁷⁰. Thus, in its demarcation from ethics, Ebeling's dogmatics shows that the leading ethical concern cannot and should not be how to bring about God's Kingdom, but how to identify the responsible human agency determined by reference to it. First and foremost, this agency will *be* hope for the Kingdom (*Reichgotteshoffung*)¹¹⁷¹. This illustrates consummation theologically with reference to both the historicity of the justified and the future of the world. Negatively, consummation means the end of all

¹¹⁶² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 47.

¹¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 441.

¹¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶⁶ Instead, this is precisely Mostert's solution.

¹¹⁶⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 442.

¹¹⁶⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 443.

¹¹⁶⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 444.

¹¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 502f.

godless power working against God. Positively, it is the full establishment and manifestation of His sovereignty without contradiction (*solī Deo gloria*)¹¹⁷².

To sum it up, Ebeling claims that ethics and theology are categorically different answers to the soteriological problem. As a legal phenomenon of life, ethics has its own specificity, which should not dissolve into dogmatics. However, the separation between the two should be operational rather than a matter of principle. This is because dogmatics has jurisdiction over the deep dimension of ethics, namely the soteriological question. Dogmatics disqualifies ethics as a soteriological answer because it shows the ambiguity of the Law and, in the Gospel, finds a doctrine of the modification of human being (humanization) based on the sole agency of God. This humanization is conceptualized both christologically and pneumatologically, thus including present salvation and the dimension of future consummation.

3.1.2. Ethics or Justification: W. Mostert

Similar to Ebeling, Mostert understands the relationship between theology and ethics from the question of the modification of the world. For him, this question is inherently soteriological and reflects the very structure of thinking. Accordingly, it is not just relevant for theology, but for all forms of thinking which concur to outline a possible solution to human being's fundamental problem. All thinking is ultimately soteriological and immediately concerned with the question of the world's modification. As a thought-produced answer to the soteriological problem, ethics, for Mostert, is therefore concerned with this same question. However, due to its qualification as a phenomenon of the Law, ethics, just like metaphysics, inevitably operates within *ideological* categories. This passage is particularly important to articulate the relationship between theology and ethics in Mostert's account. For him, theology and ethics diverge fundamentally because the second treats the question of the world's modification based on the theory-praxis model (ideologically), while the first broaches it as an ontological question rooted in experience (*Erfahrung*)¹¹⁷³. Thus, according to Mostert, theology is categorically different from ethics because it tackles the question of the world's modification in a way which fundamentally overcomes the theory-praxis model, while ethics is constitutively based on it¹¹⁷⁴. Accordingly, theology decidedly breaks with ideology and its dogmatic¹¹⁷⁵ presuppositions. These, for Mostert, include the teleological view of history and a theory

¹¹⁷² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 508.

¹¹⁷³ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung theologischen und ideologischen Denkens", in: s.a., BAUER, A., KOLLER, P., MÖLLER, C., WEINACHT, H. (eds.), *Erfahrung als Kriterium der Theologie*. Theologische Brocken (see note 3), pp. 187-206, here p. 187.

¹¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁵ In Mostert's critique of ethics as an expression of ideological thinking, the words "dogmatic" (*dogmatisch*) and "dogmatism" (*Dogmatismus*) are used negatively, in line with the Kantian tradition. Therefore, for Mostert, dogmatic and

of evil whereby conflicts are determined by structural relationships or caused by an impassable opposition within human being. Concerning the teleology of history, theology delegitimizes it because, within experience, it receives an understanding of history as a horizon of thinking which, like experience itself, is and remains impossible to transcend¹¹⁷⁶. In Mostert's account, the deconstruction of the teleological interpretations of history works as a delegitimization of utopias. As was already shown¹¹⁷⁷, these are regarded as a synergistic postponing of salvation into the future and a denying of its presence in the Person of Jesus Christ. By rejecting all teleological views of history, theology also delegitimizes the aforementioned theory of evil which sees conflict as a reality either issuing from structural relationships or internalized in human being. Specifically, it is precisely the impossibility to transcend history and to view it as a harmonious progress towards a righteous goal which makes it impossible to dogmatically posit a future historical stage in which conflict will be transcended¹¹⁷⁸. Therefore, Mostert rejects as dogmatic all positions whereby human conflicts are determined by social structures or result from an internalized opposition within human being. These positions are dogmatic because they are not verified within experience. As a matter of fact, Mostert insists that experience does not show that human being exists without conflict either when they are placed in optimal social contexts or when they successfully overcome certain moral struggles within themselves¹¹⁷⁹. His critique of the premises of ideological thinking is based precisely on what these have in common: they spring over the present of experience and project salvation into the future. As a consequence, ideological thinking is fundamentally *uncertain*, it is not and can never become verified because it is abstracted from experience¹¹⁸⁰. Thus, ideology expresses an approach in which the thinkability and realizability of something are arbitrarily considered to be one and the same, which is an abstract and dogmatic claim. For Mostert, theology needs to counter this claim by intensively focusing on its subject matter (*Sache*). Simply by being correctly placed, this focus simultaneously illustrates the true answer to the soteriological question of the world's modification¹¹⁸¹.

According to Mostert, the clear distinction between ideology and theology becomes manifest when the two are studied contrastively from a truly theological perspective. This becomes accessible when the overall relationality of human being, God and the world is held as the criteriological point of observation. This means that theology has the task of continuously recognizing and thematizing its

theological thinking conflict with each other and express two fundamentally divergent answers to human being's soteriological problem. Accordingly, when describing his position, I adapt to his negatively qualified usage of these semantics to refer to ideological thinking (ethics and metaphysics as attempts to answer the soteriological question), and *not* to theology.

¹¹⁷⁶ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 188.

¹¹⁷⁷ See here, note 696.

¹¹⁷⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 188.

¹¹⁷⁹ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 189.

¹¹⁸⁰ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), pp. 190f.

¹¹⁸¹ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 192.

qualitative difference from the “world wisdom” (*Weltweisheit*) that ideologies embody¹¹⁸². In Mostert’s view, ethics (understood as an attempt to answer the soteriological question) eminently belongs to this world wisdom¹¹⁸³. Together with all other ideological answers to the question of the world’s modification and contrary to the theological solution provided in (Reformational and Pauline) justification doctrine, ethics shares an activist anthropology which regards human being as verified in their action. When open to transcendence, ethical ideology also shares a metaphysical, non-biblical, concept of God¹¹⁸⁴, whereby the affirmation of the teleology of history includes reference to the idea of God as its ultimate warrant. Instead, in its atheistic versions, ethics uncovers that this idea is a reality which is not verified in experience, thus eliminating it and promoting a secularized eschatology instead¹¹⁸⁵. This points once again to what, for Mostert, is the fundamental difference between theology and ethics, namely anthropology, with hamartiology closely following it. Specifically, ethical ideology regards human being as the soteriological author fighting against the evil emerging from historical existence. Since this evil cannot be appropriately (hamartologically) interpreted within ethical thinking, it is transcended ideologically within a teleological view of history which hopes in its future overcoming. Thus, ethics annexes the overcoming of evil to the concept of a history fulfilled by human action, whereas (correct) theology leaves it to God alone¹¹⁸⁶. Thus, the anthropological and hamartiological contrast between theology and ethics becomes manifest whenever the second, with its activist anthropology and theory of evil, posits an *illegitimate analogy* between God and human being. To the contrary, the first vindicates that precisely this analogy makes it impossible to access the truth about human being and the solution to their soteriological problem¹¹⁸⁷. Therefore, from Mostert’s justification-centered perspective, the first and most important anthropological truth is that there is no (soteriological) analogy between human being and God. In other words, human being is *not* an agent actively involved in the modification of the world. By dismantling the aforementioned analogy, theology shows its qualitative difference from ethical ideology. This difference depends on the specificity of theological discourse, which regards experience (*Erfahrung*) as the only place where the truth about human being, God and the world finds

¹¹⁸² MOSTERT, W., “Zur Unterscheidung” (see note 1173), p. 194.

¹¹⁸³ Accordingly, in what follows, I am going to employ the words “ethics”, “ideology” or “ethical ideology” as synonyms. With that, I do not mean any specific version of general or special ethics, which is not what Mostert calls ideological thinking. Indeed, it would not make any sense to consider ideological a version of ethics construed along the lines of Ebeling’s theory of the right moral handling (see here, p. 163). Such a theory is an ethics that has been deprived of its soteriological overload by theology. Accordingly, this non-ideological ethics no longer tries to provide a solution to the fundamental problem of human being, leaving it to justification doctrine. I consider such an ethics fully legitimate from a theological perspective and not at all ideological in Mostert’s sense. Instead, when talking of “ideological ethics”, I mean ethics as the attempt to provide a solution to human being’s fundamental soteriological problem outside and against justification doctrine as upheld by the Reformation.

¹¹⁸⁴ MOSTERT, W., “Zur Unterscheidung” (see note 1173), p. 195.

¹¹⁸⁵ MOSTERT, W., “Zur Unterscheidung” (see note 1173), pp. 197f.

¹¹⁸⁶ MOSTERT, W., “Zur Unterscheidung” (see note 1173), p. 199.

¹¹⁸⁷ MOSTERT, W., “Zur Unterscheidung” (see note 1173), p. 200.

its verification¹¹⁸⁸. Based on this understanding of experience, theology radically delegitimizes the very foundation of ideological ethics. Put otherwise, by claiming to be the only discipline which truly accesses and correctly interprets experience, theology reclaims for itself both the question of the world's modification and the God-human being-world relationship which comes together with such question. As a consequence, ethical ideology and all other forms of ideological thinking are categorically disqualified as soteriological answers.

In short, for Mostert, the disqualification of ideological ethics relies on the theological understanding of experience. Specifically, it occurs because experience changes the presuppositions of all discourse about God and human being¹¹⁸⁹. This enables illustrating the soteriological question of the world's modification in a qualitatively new way, which remains barred to ethics because the latter does not share the anthropological and hamartiological presuppositions of theological discourse. Concretely, these presuppositions, for Mostert, center around an anthropology in which human being is a *receiver* of salvation, not a doer called to actualize it through responsive action. The corresponding hamartiological presupposition (which is equally central to Mostert's account), clearly distinguishes between sin and wrongdoing and rejects all the already discussed ethical views of evil¹¹⁹⁰. Thanks to its elaborate anthropological and hamartiological presuppositions, theology, for Mostert, works out the liberation of human being for the sheer present and from all soteriological projections into the future¹¹⁹¹. As a consequence, an eschatology understood as a supplement for the insufficiency of faith disappears completely from what Mostert considers the truly theological understanding of God. Ultimately, this understanding bases on the rejection of all teleological premises¹¹⁹². Accordingly, eschatology is reinterpreted as the articulation of the certainty of God's present in the history of human being's life. It follows that only faith can aptly be qualified as the carrier of the soteriological hope for the world (*sola fide*).

For Mostert, theology has the task of reclaiming its full sovereignty over the soteriological question of the world's modification. To this end, it needs to criticize all forms of ideological thinking, in order to completely exclude them from soteriology. In and of itself and before being properly reclaimed in justification doctrine, the question of the world's modification is not exclusively theological but is shared by ideology. Accordingly, both theology and ideological ethics are concerned

¹¹⁸⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 201.

¹¹⁸⁹ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 202.

¹¹⁹⁰ For my detailed analysis of Mostert's anthropology and hamartiology, see both Parts 1 and 2. At a later point in this chapter, I will go back to Mostert's hamartiology to explain his radically non-ethical understanding of the category of consummation.

¹¹⁹¹ MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 204.

¹¹⁹² Ibid. Against Mostert, I have claimed, from both an eschatological and a pneumatological perspective, that the category of futurity legitimately belongs to soteriology because it contributes to illustrate God's promise. For my detailed critique of Mostert's position, see 1.3.6. and 2.3.3.

with it. The question becomes particularly sharp when coordinated with the problem of soteriological agency: whether the salvific modification of the world is actualized by human being's doing and thinking¹¹⁹³. Precisely when they are confronted with this problem, theology and ethics fully appear as incompatible and mutually polemical answers to the soteriological question. In particular, ethics bases its systems on activistic anthropology and understands the world's modification as the *operational* change actualized *by* human being with or without the idea of God. Instead, theology views human being as a receiver of salvation and interprets the modification of the world as their *ontological* change actualized by God. For Mostert, the specific theological way to illustrate the question of the world's modification as *the* soteriological problem is justification doctrine¹¹⁹⁴. *Together* with ethics, this doctrine is faced with the insufficiency and inadequacy of human action under the conditions of existence. This shows that the category of modification is quite obscure, as in it the very ambiguity of human being is reflected¹¹⁹⁵. Thus, both justification doctrine and ethics are ultimately met with an ontological problem. In other words, both are tasked with outlining a theory of human possibly capable of connecting anthropology with the question of the world's modification¹¹⁹⁶. Specifically, Mostert claims that justification and ethics are divergent anthropological options which do not only compete to define human being's doing and thinking, but, much more radically, fight over the determination of their ontology. Therefore, the quest for true anthropology, namely the question of the correct determination of human being, is the necessary foundation of both ethics and justification doctrine¹¹⁹⁷. However, unlike the first, the second does not understand anthropology as a philosophical theory of human being, but as the doctrine of their *position* in the world from the concrete perspective of their *relationship* with themselves, the world and God¹¹⁹⁸. In contrast to ideological ethics, true (Reformational) justification doctrine cannot be coordinated with a general (metaphysical) ontology of being. Instead, for Mostert, this doctrine points out that human being cannot be reduced to the abstractness of their nature, but always needs to be viewed within their overall relationality. This relationality is verified only within experience (*Erfahrung*). Thus, justification doctrine is the sole solution to the soteriological problem and points to the true anthropology, the one concretely verified in experience. Resorting to Heidegger's categories, Mostert qualifies this anthropology as an ontology of *Dasein*¹¹⁹⁹, thus highlighting the impossibility to conceptualize human being in abstract terms.

¹¹⁹³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 259.

¹¹⁹⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 260.

¹¹⁹⁵ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 263.

¹¹⁹⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 264.

¹¹⁹⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 265f.

¹¹⁹⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 267.

¹¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

In contrast to justification doctrine, ethics *cannot* express true anthropology because it is a legal phenomenon¹²⁰⁰. Following Ebeling, Mostert regards the Law primarily as a linguistic structure expressing the original order (*Urordnung*) of the whole cosmos¹²⁰¹. As language, the Law orients itself to the order of being and reproduces it linguistically. In this process of linguistic reproduction of the original order the Law acquires its historicity by resonating in a given time and place¹²⁰². With that, Mostert claims that the fundamental qualification of the Law is not historical, but ontological. Indeed, if the Law *acquires* its historicity through the process of its reproduction, this means that it cannot be first and foremost a historical category. Instead, it *precedes* history, it has to do with the very structure of reality and is posited with it¹²⁰³. Then, the Law *becomes* history only secondarily, whenever it appears as address, and this *historicization of the Law* is due to human being's sin¹²⁰⁴. Specifically, the Law exists as language, as something calling out and directing its hearers (human beings as sinners) to the original cosmic order that they always already break¹²⁰⁵. Therefore, for Mostert, it is human being's sinful determination which historicizes the Law and lends it its aggressive and demanding character, its imperative mood. Through its historicization, which depends on its interaction with sinners, the Law becomes *nomos*. Accordingly, if one employs Mostert's categories, Jewish *Torah* cannot be simply equated with the Law as such. As a matter of fact, this would arbitrarily abstract the historicization of the Law from its ontology. Instead, the *Torah* is to be seen as a legal phenomenon, a situation-specific derivative of the overarching reality of the legal instance and a prime example of its historicization. Now, for Mostert, ethics is exactly the product of the historicization of the Law. Specifically, it originates from the experience that the mere existence of the Law, its historicization in relation to sinners, does not help reconstitute the righteous order towards which the imperative points¹²⁰⁶. The reason for the failure of the Law is that its imperative is *categorically unable* to operate the world's modification which would effect the restitution of the original order. The imperative cannot truly modify the world because it addresses sinners, whose very being is *outside* the original order. Accordingly, Mostert says that they are *extrinsic* with respect to that order. However, this same extrinsicality is shared by the Law. In addressing sinners, the legal

¹²⁰⁰ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 268.

¹²⁰¹ Ibid.

¹²⁰² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 269.

¹²⁰³ In my opinion, this philosophical-theological thesis finds Mostert's rejection of all immediately historical accounts of the Law-Gospel coupling. As was shown in Part 2, Mostert maintains, with Ebeling and against Pannenberg, that Law and Gospel cannot be interpreted in terms of salvation history. They are not two successive epochs separated by the christological event. If this was the case, the Law would be reduced to the Jewish *Torah*, and justification doctrine could not be interpreted hermeneutically and criteriologically as the description of the true unfolding of the soteriological event in the preached *kerygma*. For Pannenberg's position, which instead defends precisely the historical and non-hermeneutical understanding of the Law that Mostert attacks, see here, pp. 105f. For Ebeling and Mostert's perspective on the matter, see here, pp. 82-85.

¹²⁰⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 269.

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁰⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 269f.

instance has become historicized, it has entered their reality, which is *not* the original order. Since sinners are not *inside* the order but outside of it, therefore the imperative of the Law, which belongs to the same reality as them, cannot but deliver a false soteriological promise to them¹²⁰⁷. This explains in what sense, for Mostert, the *nomos* (historicized Law) has both the function and the inability to deliver salvation to sinners. Both ethics and justification doctrine are confronted with this function and this inability. As a legal reality, ethics focuses on the *function* of *nomos*. This focus makes it unable to disarticulate the expectation that the Law may operate the salvific modification of the world. Instead, as a non-legal reality, justification doctrine emphasizes the *inability* of *nomos*. This emphasis makes it possible to fully disqualify the Law and bring its soteriological claim to silence. So, Mostert's argument is that both justification and ethics are phenomena through which existence tries to understand itself. Correspondingly, they share the task of attempting to uncover the truth about human being¹²⁰⁸. However, only justification doctrine succeeds in performing this task, since only in it does the full restitution of the righteous original order truly occur. This is because justification doctrine effectively interrupts the reiteration and reinforcement of the imperative of historicized Law, which shares in the extrinsicality of sinners. Justification doctrine succeeds because it has access to the reality of the Gospel, the good indicative which truly communicates salvation to human being and does not share in the extrinsicality of sinners, but in the goodness of the original order. Ethics, instead, can only reiterate and reinforce the legal imperative, as it does not have access to any qualitatively different (non-legal) reality, thus only participating in the extrinsicality of sinners.

Ultimately, in Mostert's theology, justification and ethics are *competitively interrelated*, so that building ethics on justification doctrine is not natural. Rather, it is already an interpretation of their relationship¹²⁰⁹. At any rate, Mostert is not interested in developing a material ethics based on justification, because that would remove the focus from the ambiguities of ideological ethics as a false attempt to answer the fundamental soteriological question¹²¹⁰. Accordingly, a material ethics based on justification doctrine would imperil the *ontological* understanding of ethics as a legal phenomenon. However, this understanding is needed to safeguard precisely the exclusive soteriological competence of justification doctrine. Therefore, Mostert continuously insists on characterizing ethics as a linguistic phenomenon having the description and normative reference to an ideal original order (*Urordnung*) as its essential feature¹²¹¹. In its historicization, ethics *remains*

¹²⁰⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 270.

¹²⁰⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 272.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹²¹⁰ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 282: "Wir wollen hier [keine] materiale Ethik, kein System der Ethik entwickeln; sodann wollen wir immer daran denken, daß Ethik fest wurzelt einmal im gesamten Rahmen des menschlichen Daseins, wie es Ontologie, Ethologie, Anthropologie, Religion bedenken, sodann speziell in dem am Dasein des Menschen erscheinenden Phänomen der Anomalie".

¹²¹¹ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 283.

language and is passed down. Thus, it becomes ethical tradition without ever being separated from its referential character. As a legal phenomenon, it continuously reproduces itself in its historicization, which becomes reinforced and actualized anew whenever ethical norms are broken. This provokes human thinking to react and seek a new, better foundation for ethics under the pressure of two questions: *what is the good* and *how can it be established*¹²¹². Now, according to Mostert, the fixation on these questions reinforces the sinner's determination to understand themselves as the author of salvation, *restitutor mundi*. Specifically, the very formulation of the questions treats the good as an abstract reality. This obscures the ontological relationality within which the good is concretely found and understood, namely the indicative mood of the Gospel. Also, asking how the good can be established presupposes (or at least insistingly suggests) that those who raise the question are also those who are called to establish the good. In a word, this way of asking about the good obscures human being's constitutive inability to attain it. As a result, this keeps them and the good at an impassable distance. For Mostert, the core weakness of ideological ethics lies precisely at this juncture. As a soteriological solution, ethics necessarily fails because, in all its different ideological versions, it attempts to overcome evil and injustice without first having answered the question of human being's ontological determination (*Beschaffenheit*)¹²¹³. The sinner's failure to recognize and understand first and foremost the anomaly that they *are* works counterproductively for their ethical endeavor. Therefore, the more the Law, in its continuous historicization, fails to deliver salvation, the more legalism is reinforced. In Mostert's view, this means that ideological ethics is always necessarily bound to a teleology of history¹²¹⁴. Moreover, when justification doctrine is not employed to criticize and disqualify ideological ethics, the result is the ethicalization of theology and the upfront negation of justification, with the ensuing transformation of the Gospel into a new Law (*nova lex*).

According to Mostert, the theological disqualification of ethics as a soteriologically competent discipline implies the rejection of (future) eschatology. In particular, for him, the dimension of futurity necessarily accompanies with the legalistic interpretation of the Law, since both postpone salvation into the future¹²¹⁵. Mostert's exclusion of eschatology from theological discourse entails a strong emphasis on creation theology. This is because, for him, the only true function of the Law (which is reflected in its non-legalistic interpretation provided in justification doctrine) is to point to the created original good order. When understood within creation theology, the Law points therefore to a truly theological anthropology which qualifies the sinner as one who attacks and breaks the goodness of life. Conversely, all theological views which attribute to the Law the function of contributing to the

¹²¹² MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 285.

¹²¹³ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 293.

¹²¹⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 294.

¹²¹⁵ MOSTERT, W., *Rechtfertigungslehre* (see note 105), p. 296.

future realization of salvation are illegitimate and legalistic, because they necessarily regard the sinner as one who does not operate well enough for the creation of the good¹²¹⁶. Thus, for Mostert, the correct *theological* understanding of the Law firmly connects it to creation theology. The access to this understanding is provided by justification doctrine alone, because only this doctrine uncovers who human being as a sinner truly is. Instead, ethics necessarily connects the Law to eschatology because it needs to find an explanation to the absence of salvation in the world. As a result, a truly theological (hamartiological) anthropology remains barred to ethical ideology. As a consequence, Mostert claims that the fundamental difference between justification doctrine and ethics is anthropological¹²¹⁷. For him, experience manifests that human being's ethical knowledge, and the ensuing behavior, remain constantly insufficient. The point is how ethics and justification doctrine react to this insufficiency based on their underlying anthropological accounts. The impassable problem of ethics is that it does not recognize the ambiguities of the Law, thus necessarily reinforcing them. Specifically, ethical discourse clearly sees that human being needs to be positively qualified (*beschaffen*) in order for good actions to follow from them. However, it is unable to effect the needed positive qualification because it bases on an anthropology which trusts the Law as a soteriological category¹²¹⁸. On the contrary, justification doctrine founds in an anthropology which is able to reveal and account for the ambiguities of the Law. This is because it understands that the positive qualification of human being requires the recognition of their overall relationality within existence, including their relationship with God¹²¹⁹. In Mostert's categories, this can be summarized as follows: justification doctrine makes relational ontology transparent, while ethics obscures it.

At this point, the ontological competence of justification doctrine enables theology to answer the questions of the legitimacy (*Legitimation*)¹²²⁰ and motivation¹²²¹ of ethics¹²²². These questions remain obscure to ethics because the latter fails to understand itself as a linguistic phenomenon within relational-ontological categories. Mostert answers them *theologically*, starting precisely from interpreting ethics as a linguistic phenomenon. For him, human being needs a language teaching them *ethos* in the form of a system of statements claiming to shape a correct interpretation of existence¹²²³.

¹²¹⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), pp. 296f.: "Das Gesetz in seiner Gesetzmäßigkeit ist nicht so sehr an die Schöpfung wie an einen neuen, erst noch kommenden Zustand gebunden. Und darum verschiebt sich nun auch elementar das Verständnis des Menschen und seiner Anomalie: Orientiert sich das Gesetz an der Schöpfung, dann erscheint der Mensch, sofern er Sünder ist, als Schöpfungsbrecher, Ordnungsbrecher, Gemeinschaftszerstörer. Orientiert sich aber das Gesetz am Eschaton, so erscheint der Mensch, sofern er Sünder ist, als ein Subjekt, das zu wenig oder Falsches tut, um den besseren Zustand herbeizuführen".

¹²¹⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 297.

¹²¹⁸ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 298.

¹²¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²²⁰ Who or what legitimizes ethics?

¹²²¹ Why is there ethics?

¹²²² MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 298.

¹²²³ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 299: "Die Frage nach der Motivation und Legitimation der Ethik vergegenwärtigt uns noch einmal, daß die Ethik ein Sprachphänomen ist. Denn die Motivation der Ethik bedeutet

However, ethics has a constitutively restricted competence when it comes to the qualification of human being. This is because it only covers part of their humanity. Specifically, ethics only encompasses human being's action (*praxis*). To the contrary, justification doctrine has unrestricted anthropological competence, because it is well aware that one's humanity also encompasses and actually centers around what they *receive*. Therefore, Mostert's theological answers to these two questions found in justification doctrine. Further, as far as its *motivation* is concerned, ethics exists as a linguistic phenomenon because human being is continuously faced with a discrepancy between their factual reality (their anomaly) and the desired, righteous reality described by ethical language. Therefore, Mostert's understanding of the motivation of ethics is existential: its necessity consists in its sheer *Daß*¹²²⁴. Consequently, ethics does not primarily need to be founded philosophically or theologically, but first and foremost investigated as to its necessity. Ethics is necessary because it reveals the anomaly of human being and is developed simply because this anomaly is always already there. This then illustrates in what sense ethics needs to be understood soteriologically. Specifically, the point is its close connection with the anomaly of human being, whereby the reflection on ethics becomes strongly associated with anthropology. With that, the ambiguous subject, namely human being in need of the ethical language, becomes correctly thematized¹²²⁵. Moving to the *legitimacy* of ethics, Mostert derives it from the existence of different and mutually conflictual ethical accounts with diverging contents. It is this conflict which, in his view, makes the question of the legitimacy of ethics stringent. Specifically, the chaotic plurality of the available ethical options points to the need of a Legislator who is capable of judging between them¹²²⁶. Once again, only justification doctrine is competent to answer the question. This is because only this doctrine aptly links the chaotic conflict of ethical positions with the understanding of ethics as a phenomenon of the Law. Further, justification doctrine also uncovers that, in the good language of the Gospel, the ethical conflict is always already resolved even before it is unleashed by the historicization of the Law misheard by sinners. Ultimately, the knowledge of justification provides the answer to the question of the legitimacy of ethics, pointing to God as the sole author of the good language of the Gospel. At any rate, Mostert's core intention is to show that the question of the necessity of ethics is not to be answered within ethics itself, but elsewhere, in justification doctrine¹²²⁷. Thus, his thesis is that this doctrine is the explicit form of the question concerning the *foundation* of the necessity of ethics. At the same time, it is the doctrine of the language of the Gospel. As such, it is also, and most importantly, the *overcoming* of this necessity.

ja nichts anderes, als daß der Mensch einer ihn ethisch belehrenden Sprache bedarf [...]. Die Legitimation der Ethik muß ja in einem System von Sätzen begründet werden, dass eine richtige Auslegung, eine richtige Interpretation des Seienden zu sein beansprucht".

¹²²⁴ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 300.

¹²²⁵ Ibid.

¹²²⁶ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 301.

¹²²⁷ MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105), p. 302.

Previously¹²²⁸ I claimed that, in Mostert's theology, the category of consummation (*Vollendung*) does not find its place in eschatology, but in hamartiology. Given that he rejects the theological legitimacy of the dimension of futurity, this could give the impression of an utter disappearance of the semantics of consummation from his theology. As was already discussed¹²²⁹, the impression is (at least partially) justified, since, for Mostert, the category of *Verheißung* is not a theologically legitimate qualification of God's promise. However, to fully understand his position on consummation, it is necessary to study his hamartiology once again. This time, the point of observation will be the relationship between evil (*das Böse*) and God's righteousness. From this specific perspective, I think that it is no longer accurate to claim that Mostert simply abandons the semantics of consummation altogether. Rather, he qualifies them anew in radically non-ethical terms. Accordingly, consummation is the overcoming of sin by God's grace in the event of justification. Mostert points out that the concepts of evil and God's righteousness are interrelated and together form theodicy¹²³⁰. Moreover, the questions concerning these concepts are universal, they belong to every human being because they are co-positated with thinking. As such, the theodicy question points to an experience made every day¹²³¹. In Mostert's view, trying to solve this question with reference to future consummation is ultimately a strategy to neutralize it. This is because a similar attempt ignores experience (*Erfahrung*) and springs over the present, where consummation is already a reality in Jesus Christ and accessible to faith. Thus, Mostert vindicates that the correct understanding of consummation results from the intensive study of evil in contact with the questions of God's righteousness and theodicy. Specifically, he argues that justification doctrine deprives the category of consummation of all uncertainty and emphasizes its full presence by showing that God's righteousness *is* the consummated overcoming of evil in faith. Because of this and only in this very limited and precisely qualified sense, Mostert can say that only faith is the *Verheißung* for the world¹²³². At any rate, this quite surprising formulation – which at first sight would seem to contradict Mostert's fundamental soteriological categories – does not in fact question his overall rejection of *Verheißung*. On the contrary, by saying that *only* faith is *Verheißung*, Mostert means that the full presence of salvation is given only in faith, but there it is fully given. In its presence and from the perspective of the justified, faith is *Zuspruch*, the consummation of salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ truly communicated to the sinner who is *now* saved. In its absence and from the perspective of the unredeemed world, faith is *Verheißung*, in the sense that it pronounces the only valid and reliable soteriological promise to the sinner who does *not*

¹²²⁸ See note 1190.

¹²²⁹ See 1.3.6. and 2.3.3.

¹²³⁰ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes", in: s.a., EBELING, G., BÜHLER, P. (eds.), *Glaube und Hermeneutik* (see note 146), pp. 176-185, here p. 176.

¹²³¹ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 177.

¹²³² MOSTERT, W., "Zur Unterscheidung" (see note 1173), p. 204.

yet have salvation. This means that, in Mostert's account, consummation is exactly the same as the forgiveness of sins. In other words, it is what God's promise as *Zuspruch* truly and effectively communicates to human being. In this sense and to the exclusion of all semantics of futurity, it is accurate to say that, for Mostert, justification doctrine is all about consummation.

Thus, consummation simply is the overcoming of sin. This, in turn, qualifies evil in a fully hamartiological, non-ethical way. In short, evil is understood on the basis of God's righteousness. Specifically, annexing the semantics of consummation to hamartiology allows Mostert to avoid an interpretation whereby evil is reduced to passive suffering (*Leiden*)¹²³³. Instead, the truly *theological* understanding of evil regards it as that which is fully and completely overcome in the forgiveness of *sin*. As a consequence, evil is not to be defined first and foremost as that which human beings suffer, because its core is sin. Hence, evil finds its deepest dimension in the immediate determination of human being as a sinner, not in the imperfection and constant frustration of their expectations¹²³⁴. For Mostert, the correct understanding of justification doctrine lays the foundation for recognizing that evil has its origin in human being, not outside of them. Therefore, when confronted with the disheartening question of theodicy, justification doctrine identifies human being not with the victims of evil, but with its perpetrators¹²³⁵. Following Mostert's categories, only this changing identification in regard to evil can properly show in what sense faith alone justifies (*sola fide*). Further, he insists on God's righteousness as it is understood in justification doctrine in order to show that the problem of consummation is identical with the question of the overcoming of evil. This question is not first and foremost to be tackled historically¹²³⁶. To the contrary, its correct understanding is *mythical*, radically non-historical. For Mostert, the Biblical account of the Fall has fundamental theological significance precisely because it is *not* historical¹²³⁷. The myth of Adam, in his interpretation, shows precisely that the theological description and understanding of the depth of evil is categorically different from all historical categories and depends on God's righteousness as presented in (Reformational) justification doctrine¹²³⁸. Specifically, human being sins with Adam not because they inherit sinfulness from the first man, but because they all do as he does, they all want to be like God, they are all usurpers of His glory¹²³⁹. Precisely thanks to its non-historical character, the myth of the Fall aptly places the questions of God's righteousness and evil (therefore also the ensuing problem of theodicy) *outside* of ethics and within the domain of relational ontology. Here, Mostert aims at closing off all possibilities to regard history as a reality which is or can become able to transcend itself. The

¹²³³ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 179.

¹²³⁴ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 181.

¹²³⁵ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 182.

¹²³⁶ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 192.

¹²³⁷ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 193.

¹²³⁸ MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), p. 185.

¹²³⁹ Ibid.

point is that evil does not originate in historical time and does not somehow *happen* to human beings. Instead, the myth of the Fall shows that evil simply *is* always there, where human being also is. Thus, if one embraces Mostert's categories, the only solution to the question of the overcoming of evil is the hamartiological qualification of the semantics of consummation. This concurs to explain Mostert's rejection of the third use of the Law (*tertius usus*), interpreted as the result of the historicization of evil and an expression of activist anthropology articulated in a wrong relationship with the Gospel. Mostert's hamartiological interpretation of consummation aims at understanding human being in the mirror of Adam's myth¹²⁴⁰. This understanding should then enable a fully *theological* illustration of God's righteousness as the decisive overcoming of sin and the only true, present consummation of every individual's historicity in faith.

In short, Mostert conceptualizes ethics and justification as incompatible soteriological solutions. Ethics is ideological in that it founds in activist anthropology and ignores hamartiology. Therefore, it fails as a soteriological answer. As a legal reality, it shares in the ambiguity of the Law, and is related to justification like the Law to the Gospel. As a relational-ontological reality, justification truly communicates the soteriological solution and has anthropological and hamartiological competence. Accordingly, it shows both the necessity and the overcoming of ethics. Both a material ethics based on justification and the third use of the Law are excluded. Consummation needs to be understood within hamartiology, without any reference to futurity or ethics.

3.2. Theology and Ethics. Alternative Understandings of their Relationship

3.2.1. "Theologies of Agape": P. Tillich and W. Pannenberg

3.2.1.A. P. Tillich

Tillich's understanding of the relationship between theology and ethics can be fruitfully explored by looking at how, in his system, the religious and moral dimensions of life interconnect. According to him, these dimensions, with that of culture, belong together according to their *essential* nature¹²⁴¹. They are distinguishable but not separable functions of the spirit, they interpret one another. Within the interconnection of these three dimensions, morality is identified formally as the spiritual function in which the person is constituted in their encounter with others. The interaction with culture and religion is such that the moral dimension derives its contents from the first and its unconditionality

¹²⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁴¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 94.

from the second¹²⁴². Specifically, religion gives morality its ultimate moral goal. This is, on the one hand, the reunion within *agape*¹²⁴³ of that which is separate¹²⁴⁴ and, on the other, grace as a *motivational power*. In other words, for Tillich, the religious moment is the realm within which morality finds its ontological dimension in the *nature* of human being¹²⁴⁵. Since morality, in its depth, is an ontological reality, Tillich claims that *values*, as the contents of ethical discourse, need to be derived from the essential structure of being¹²⁴⁶. Put otherwise, he thinks that morality is concerned with claims (*Forderungen*) derived from the essential nature of human being. As a consequence, ethical knowledge is identical with (philosophical) anthropology¹²⁴⁷. Thus, in Tillich's view, it seems legitimate to derive reality as it ought to be from reality as it is. This is because the ought-dimension (*das Sollen*), which is in objective values, roots in the essential nature of human being. Accordingly, the interaction between morality and religion points to the moral Law as the essential nature of human being in its appearing as a claiming authority¹²⁴⁸. Furthermore, for Tillich, the relationship between religion and morality is mirrored by the one between philosophical and theological ethics. Specifically, a *theological* ethics is problematic and needs to be rejected. Instead, he argues for a *theonomous* ethics. In it, ethical principles and processes are not derived from theology, but from (metaphysical) ontology¹²⁴⁹ and described in the light of the Spiritual Presence, which is open to ultimacy¹²⁵⁰. As such, theonomous ethics is not part of a theonomous theology, but of a theonomous *philosophy*. This illustrates that, for Tillich, ethics legitimately belongs to philosophy, not to theology, even though all theological statements do have ethical implications. In theonomous ethics, the unconditionality of the moral imperative and the theonomous qualification of ethics are to be tackled philosophically¹²⁵¹. This entails that ethics remains autonomous from theological discourse and is

¹²⁴² Ibid. On this basis, M. Neugebauer claims that ethics, in Tillich's system, is constitutive of theological thinking (NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs", *International Yearbook for Tillich Research* 10/1 [2015], pp. 103-141, here p. 104). In my judgment, Neugebauer's claim is quite dubious, as it clearly depends on how theological thinking is defined. For the sake of clarity, I would rather say that, for Tillich, ethics is a constitutive dimension of *theonomous* thinking, and specifically of theonomous philosophy (see also here, p. 192).

¹²⁴³ For a detailed account of Tillich's understanding of the category of *agape*, see FLETCHER, J., "Tillich and Ethics: The negation of law", *Pastoral Psychology* 19/2 (1968), pp. 33-40.

¹²⁴⁴ See e.g. NOVAK, D., "Theonomous Ethics: A Defense and a Critique of Tillich", *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 69/4, *Papers for The Tillich Centennial* (1986), pp. 436-463, here p. 441. The article compares and criticizes conflicting interpretations of Tillich's ethics in its relationship with dogmatics.

¹²⁴⁵ TILLICH, P., "Ist eine Wissenschaft von der Werten möglich?", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 5/1 (1961), pp. 171-176, here p. 174. Interestingly enough, Mostert, too, claims that the depth of ethics as a soteriological endeavor pertains to ontology. However, he and Tillich are in sharp contrast when it comes to the meaning of the claim. While Mostert's ontological categories entail his *relational* anthropology, Tillich is interested in human being's *nature* as a *metaphysical* category. In my judgment, this difference is fundamental and determines the opposite understandings that the two theologians maintain concerning the relationship between theology and ethics.

¹²⁴⁶ NOVAK, D., "Theonomous Ethics" (see note 1244), p. 444.

¹²⁴⁷ Ibid. See also: SHAW, E., "All You Need is Love: Ethics in the Thought of Paul Tillich", *Modern Believing* 37/1 (1996), pp. 24-30, here p. 25 and NOVAK, D., "Theonomous Ethics" (see note 1244), p. 447.

¹²⁴⁸ TILLICH, P., "Ist eine Wissenschaft von den Werten möglich?" (see note 1245), pp. 175f.

¹²⁴⁹ GRABER, G., "The Metaethics of Paul Tillich", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 1 (1973), pp. 113-133, here p. 114.

¹²⁵⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 266.

¹²⁵¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 267.

treated within a philosophy open to the dimension of ultimacy. At the same time, the deep dimension of ethics is indeed ultimately religious because it is identified by its orientation to an ultimate concern. However, it is not *theological* in the sense that the ethical discourse would have to be articulated somehow in proximity to the contents of the Christian faith. Ultimately, for Tillich, *effective* theonomous ethics expresses the intrinsic religious substance of the moral dimension¹²⁵² implicitly, by means of free philosophical discussion, without explicit reference to theology. This is because, as soon as explicit theological reference is made, the resulting ethics becomes heteronomous¹²⁵³, thus marked by estrangement¹²⁵⁴.

Concerning culture, religion illuminates the inexhaustible depth of genuine cultural creations, those which remain open to the dimension of ultimacy. According to Tillich, the overall relationality of morality, culture and religion points to the third as the self-transcendence of life. As such, religion is *essentially* connected with the other two dimensions within a relationship which has both a historical and an ultra-historical scope¹²⁵⁵. The essential unity between the three dimensions of life is actualized within and by the Spirit¹²⁵⁶, of which they are functions. However, this unity is broken under the conditions of existence, in which the three dimensions are ambiguous and separate, estranged from one another¹²⁵⁷. This separate existence of religion, morality and culture is highly problematic, since none of the three is able to fully transcend itself in existence, thus remaining estranged from ultimacy¹²⁵⁸. According to Tillich, the necessity of theology and ethics results precisely from the fact that the corresponding functions of religion and morality, when separate from one another in existence, are unable to transcend themselves. Thus, theology and ethics are first and foremost necessary as the disciplines affirming the self-transcendence of religion and morality within the spiritual dimension. For Tillich, none of the three dimensions is necessary in itself, in separation from the other two. *Essentially*, none is necessary as a separate reality. This is because all are transparent to ultimacy, in which they are one and the same. Instead, *existentially*, their separation is a given, which is why they exist as closed up to self-transcendence and are therefore unable to access their own spiritual depth, their openness to ultimacy¹²⁵⁹.

In Tillich's view, the transcendent unity of life is the essential reality of human being's nature, broken within existence and restored by the Spiritual Presence. The Spirit apprehends the whole of

¹²⁵² GRABER, G., "The Metaethics of Paul Tillich" (see note 1249), p. 118.

¹²⁵³ GRABER, G., "The Metaethics of Paul Tillich" (see note 1249), p. 113.

¹²⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵⁵ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 95.

¹²⁵⁶ GRABER, G., "The Metaethics of Paul Tillich" (see note 1249), p. 130.

¹²⁵⁷ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 95.

¹²⁵⁸ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 96.

¹²⁵⁹ TILLICH, P., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 97.

reality and actualizes its essential unity in the Spiritual Community¹²⁶⁰. Thus, in this Community, the estranged functions of life are reconciled by the Spiritual Presence. It follows that the essential relationship between religion, morality and culture is realized, albeit in anticipatory form. As far as its *essence* is concerned, religion is one's being apprehended by the Spiritual presence. In this sense, which characterizes it as openness to the dimension of ultimacy, religion *presupposes* morality as the self-institution of the person in the unconditional moral act¹²⁶¹. Once again, the point is that the religious and moral dimensions are essentially united in the Spiritual Community. In this essential union, morality is neither autonomous nor heteronomous¹²⁶², but *theonomous*. In theonomy, the moral imperative is truly unconditional, as it expresses the essence of human being without ambiguity. Thus, for Tillich, the moral imperative belongs to the *essence* of morality, not to its existence. In explicit theological terms, this means that the imperative of the Law is *not* to be interpreted as its curse. Specifically, this mood of address calls out human being to affirm who they truly are by demanding obedience¹²⁶³. In short, it is necessary to them because it tells them that they must affirm their own being instead of destroying it. Thus, once addressed by the imperative, human being becomes aware of their infinite value¹²⁶⁴. However, this awareness is not actualized through obedience to the moral imperative but provided by the Spiritual Presence and accepted by faith. With that, Tillich argues that the act of faith is identical with the acceptance of the unconditionality of the moral imperative¹²⁶⁵. Further, within the Spiritual Community, grace functions as the motivational power pointing to the moral imperative. However, the moral act itself, in which the person is truly actualized, is not made possible by the Law, but by the transcendental union of life enabled by the Spiritual Presence. It is only this union which makes the moral act possible, because it precedes and enables the self-centeredness of the person. Theologically, this means that Tillich does affirm the prevenient character of grace, even though he regards it as the motivational power for the moral act¹²⁶⁶.

At any rate, he also acknowledges the ambiguity of the Law. This is expressed by the possibility that one might understand and try to effect their own personal self-constitution without grace¹²⁶⁷. For Tillich, this is the error of legalism, which denies that the only reality in which the moral imperative

¹²⁶⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 157.

¹²⁶¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 158f.

¹²⁶² According to Tillich, both autonomy and heteronomy are existential (estranged), not essential qualifications of the moral dimension.

¹²⁶³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 159.

¹²⁶⁴ NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs" (see note 1242), p. 140.

¹²⁶⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 159. See also NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs" (see note 1242), p. 131.

¹²⁶⁶ In my judgment, Tillich's view of prevenient grace as a motivational power is definitely closer to the Scholastic than to the Reformation. As a matter of fact, his position knowingly and intentionally refuses a principle-based separation (and, I would say, also a clear distinction) of the theological and ethical moments. In my view, this confirms, from a different point of observation, Bayer's thesis whereby Tillich fundamentally departs from the core categories of Reformation theology (BAYER, O., "Tillich as a Systematic Theologian" [see note 183]).

¹²⁶⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 159.

and the ethical content effectively meet is *agape*, not the Law¹²⁶⁸. The legal instance is ambiguous because it makes theonomous morality impossible. Thus, legalism neglects that, in the Spiritual Community, there are no commandments next to the Spiritual Presence. This entails that, in the perspective of ultimacy, no ethical laws are needed, because *agape* continuously assesses the validity and specific applications of the unconditional imperative¹²⁶⁹. In this sense, *agape* is the very *principle* of ethics¹²⁷⁰. Accordingly, the ambiguity of the Law leads to moralism because it allows for the practice of morality without *agape*¹²⁷¹. This practice separates the dimension of morality from those of religion and culture and from the unity of life provided by the Spiritual Presence¹²⁷². Whenever a similar separation occurs, ambiguities follow and the essential unity of the three spiritual functions is destroyed under the conditions of existence. The overcoming of the ambiguities of life is precisely the function of *agape*¹²⁷³. Specifically, this overcoming consists in the Spiritual Presence making religion, culture and morality *paradoxical*¹²⁷⁴. In Tillich's account, this adjective has a very precise meaning. It means that the Spirit enables each dimension to transcend itself by making it theonomous¹²⁷⁵. Thus, theonomy qualifies religion, morality¹²⁷⁶ and culture anew as a transreligious, transmoral and transcultural reality respectively.

For Tillich, theonomy also concerns the soteriological dimension¹²⁷⁷ of consummation¹²⁷⁸. In particular, awareness of theonomy guides the interpretation of historical situations and enables the distinction between utopian thinking (*Utopismus*) and the spirit of utopia (*Geist der Utopie*)¹²⁷⁹. Thus, Tillich acknowledges the ambiguity of the semantics of consummation but does not entirely disqualify them as a soteriological category. For him, the discernment between true and false

¹²⁶⁸ Ibid. See also FLETCHER, J., "Tillich and Ethics" (see note 1243), p. 36.

¹²⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁰ SHAW, E., "All You Need is Love" (see note 1247), p. 28.

¹²⁷¹ For a more detailed account of the relationship between the ambiguity of the Law and *agape* in Tillich's theology, see here, pp. 112-115.

¹²⁷² Avoiding this separation between morality and *agape* is a matter of seriousness. See TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 160f.

¹²⁷³ NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs" (see note 1242), p. 137.

¹²⁷⁴ For a further illustration of Tillich's category of paradox, see also NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs" (see note 1242), p. 109.

¹²⁷⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 266.

¹²⁷⁶ Concerning the self-transcending of morality enabled by *agape*, see FLETCHER, J., "Tillich and Ethics" (see note 1243), pp. 36f. For the overall transcendental foundation of ethics in Tillich's theology, see also MATERN, H., "Eschatologie und Ethik bei Paul Tillich", *International Yearbook for Tillich Research* 10/1 (2015), pp. 19-39, especially pp. 26ff.

¹²⁷⁷ In this sense, Marten aptly claims that the interpretation of the meaning of history and the ethical endeavor are both guided by a soteriological interest in Tillich's account (MATERN, H., "Eschatologie und Ethik bei Paul Tillich" [see note 1276], p. 33).

¹²⁷⁸ In the present work, I have included this dimension in the semantics of historicity (see note 1069). Tillich does not explicitly talk of consummation. However, he refers to its concept and is interested in its discernment (enabled by theonomy) when covering true prophecy. Therefore, when discussing his position on consummation, I am going to employ "theonomous consummation" and "true prophecy" as synonyms. For Tillich's treatment of true (theonomous) and false (idolatrous) prophecy, true and false utopia, I am going to refer to TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 3/1 (1959), pp. 325-331.

¹²⁷⁹ TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), p. 325.

prophecy (between a theonomous and an idolatrous discourse on consummation) reveals that the two relate to the ultimate and the penultimate in categorically different ways. Accordingly, false prophecy is not one which will not be fulfilled, but one which effects a demonic distortion (*Verzerrung*) of the truth. As such, false prophecy entails a misplaced expectation of consummation. This expectation is not open to ultimacy and is exclusively articulated *horizontally*, within the intra-historical dimension¹²⁸⁰. Therefore, the category of consummation is theologically illegitimate whenever a penultimate reality is treated as the ultimate concern¹²⁸¹. When this occurs, Tillich's *Protestant principle* is violated. Instead, the category is legitimate as long as the prophecy referring to it is *true* prophecy. By that, Tillich means a discourse which announces God's judgment on all things penultimate and at the same time also pronounces a promise (*Verheißung*) concerning them. In short, the theonomous understanding of consummation necessarily implies the judgment and disqualification of all idolatry¹²⁸². Also, for Tillich, theonomous consummation issues from a kind of knowledge which is qualitatively different from (empirical) scientific knowledge. Specifically, true prophecy does not strictly depend on empirical observations, even though these can be used to clarify its contents¹²⁸³. To the contrary, true consummation is a theonomous reality. As such, it is made possible by the knower participating in their historical situation with the center of their personhood¹²⁸⁴. This happens through *agape*. The moment in which this *agapic* participation takes place is the *kairos*. For Tillich, participating in the *kairos* opens up the possibility for a *vertical* understanding of consummation. Accordingly, this category is not only understood intra-historically, but also in a way which transcends all expectations of intra-historical fulfillment¹²⁸⁵. According to Tillich, this transcendental understanding of consummation remains barred to utopian thinking and is instead accessible to the spirit of utopia. The fundamental criterion for distinguishing between the two is thus openness to transcendence. This openness is signified by the symbol of the Kingdom of God. Since it has both an intra-historical and an extra-historical (transcendental) dimension, the image of the Kingdom is behind utopian thinking *and* the spirit of utopia. However, in and of itself, the Kingdom of God remains constantly *beyond* history. Thus, utopian thinking is fundamentally disqualified because it distorts the symbol by annexing the extra-historical dimension (transcendence) to the inner-historical one¹²⁸⁶. Within history, theonomy emerges whenever a new manifestation of God's Kingdom occurs in a specific *kairos*. When this happens, both heteronomy and autonomy are

¹²⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁸¹ For Tillich, the demonic dimension consists precisely in particular cultural forms and contents claiming absoluteness for themselves (MATERN, H., "Eschatologie und Ethik bei Paul Tillich" [see note 1276], here p. 24).

¹²⁸² TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), p. 326.

¹²⁸³ TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), p. 328.

¹²⁸⁴ In Tillich's categories, this means full participation in the dimension of *agape*.

¹²⁸⁵ TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), pp. 328f.

¹²⁸⁶ TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), p. 330.

overcome by God's presence. However, intra-historical theonomy is not itself consummation, but an image (*Abbild*) thereof. Specifically, theonomous manifestations in history are prolific new creations of the symbol of the Kingdom which do not exhaust it but refer to it in order to point to final consummation, which is transhistorical¹²⁸⁷.

Since consummation is ultimately a transhistorical category, Tillich does not simply embrace a progressive, teleological view of history. His understanding of consummation and its relationship with historicity is quite complex. On the one hand, he does maintain that history progresses towards the ultimately new with in both theory and praxis¹²⁸⁸. This posits a certain progress of the contents and forms of religion and morality¹²⁸⁹ in their quantitative dimension. Therefore, the concept of a teleology of history is not absent from Tillich's discourse. On the other hand, he rejects the application of the category of progress to the qualitative moment (the depth) of religion, morality and culture. This moment is not concerned by any progress¹²⁹⁰. In a word, progress in the dimensions of religion, morality and culture is possible in quantitative, but not in qualitative terms¹²⁹¹. Accordingly, the ultimate concern (the deep reality towards which the three dimensions transcend themselves) knows of no progress¹²⁹². Therefore, Tillich maintains that the revelatory and redemptive manifestation of the Spiritual Presence is always the same. Accordingly, the depths of religion, morality and culture remain constant as long as they keep being oriented to self-transcendence. Instead, their different historical symbols are situation-specific, thus open to progress¹²⁹³. Therefore, the category of consummation cannot be equated with progress without ambiguity. Similarly, the historicity of the justified is also characterized by ambiguity. According to Tillich, the political dimension is the most important one when it comes to the illustration of human being's agency¹²⁹⁴. Specifically, he claims that all functions presupposing the creative freedom of the person depend on this dimension. However, regardless of any specific political system, the ambiguity of agency persists¹²⁹⁵. This indicates that historical ambiguity is inescapable. As a consequence, the questions of the meaning and consummation needs to be treated both in particular (in regard to history) and in general terms¹²⁹⁶.

¹²⁸⁷ TILLICH, P., "Kairos und Utopie" (see note 1278), pp. 330f.

¹²⁸⁸ Once again, the difference with Mostert's category is well apparent. In sharp contrast to him, Tillich does articulate the relationship between religion and morality according to the theory-praxis model. For Mostert's position on the matter, see here, pp. 23f.

¹²⁸⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 333.

¹²⁹⁰ Ibid. This depends on Tillich's view of theonomy as formally necessary, but substantially contingent (see NOVAK, D., "Theonomous Ethics" [see note 1244], p. 457).

¹²⁹¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 335.

¹²⁹² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 336.

¹²⁹³ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 337.

¹²⁹⁴ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 346. According to Matern, Tillich's eschatology is in its entirety a transcendental theory reflecting the conditions of the constitution of agency (MATERN, H., "Eschatologie und Ethik bei Paul Tillich" [see note 1276]).

¹²⁹⁵ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 347f.

¹²⁹⁶ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 350.

Moreover, the two questions are interrelated in such a way that the interpretation of history and that of existence belong together. Correspondingly, they are experienced in one and the same act, namely in faith as one's being grasped by ultimacy¹²⁹⁷. Thus, for Tillich, the category of consummation remains ambiguous unless it is interpreted in light of the symbol¹²⁹⁸ of the Kingdom of God. In particular, reference to the Kingdom prevents fragmentary moments from being absolutized, and this concerns the fulfillment of both history and the individual¹²⁹⁹. From the perspective of the Kingdom, consummation is *already and not yet* there and remains oriented to transcendence. However, Tillich states that the transcendent dimension of the Kingdom can only be attained through *agapic* participation in the intra-historical fight for it¹³⁰⁰. Wherever individual victories for the Kingdom are obtained, consummation takes place anticipatorily and fragmentarily. Furthermore, these fragmentary, intra-historical affirmations of consummation are connected with and depend on the non-fragmentary fullness of consummation. This fullness transcends both history and the life of the individual, thus expressing their *telos*, namely eternal life¹³⁰¹. Therefore, the latter is identical with the consummation of the Kingdom of God, in which the three spiritual functions of religion, morality and culture attain essential unity and the definitive goal of their historical existence as separate, individualized dimensions¹³⁰².

In conclusion, Tillich understands ethics and theology from the perspective of the essential unity of morality, culture and religion within theonomy¹³⁰³. Ethics does not pertain to theology, but to theonomous philosophy, which remains open to ultimacy. In Tillich's perspective, the ambiguity of the Law is not inextricably connected with its imperative mood. Instead, it depends on the fallacious legalistic attempt to realize the unconditional moral imperative without *agape*. *Agape* is effected by the Spiritual Presence and expresses one's full, personal participation in the other. This participation corresponds to the essential nature of human being without ambiguity. Consummation is a legitimate soteriological category concerning both history and the individual, provided that it is understood theonomously in both historical and transhistorical terms.

3.2.1.B. W. Pannenberg

¹²⁹⁷ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 349f.

¹²⁹⁸ Accordingly, Matern points out that the concept of symbol is criteriological for Tillich's ethics, because it connects the ethical dimension to the intra-historical and transhistorical inbreaking of transcendence (MATERN, H., "Eschatologie und Ethik bei Paul Tillich" [see note 1276], here p. 23).

¹²⁹⁹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 391.

¹³⁰⁰ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 392.

¹³⁰¹ TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), p. 394.

¹³⁰² TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 207), pp. 401ff.

¹³⁰³ Once again, for Tillich, the dogmatics-ethics coupling mirrors the relationship between faith and love (NEUGEBAUER, M., "Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs" [see note 1242], p. 131).

In Pannenberg's case, too, the relationship between theology and ethics mirrors the one between religion and morality. For him, the former is concerned with human being's relationship with the divine, while the latter deals with relationships among human beings¹³⁰⁴. The two dimensions are to be distinguished but not separated, along the lines of Jesus' articulation of the double commandment. After looking at its historical development in Western thinking, Pannenberg tackles directly the problem of the exact relationship between theology and ethics. Specifically, he claims that religion provides the *motivation* for moral handling, because a just ordering of common life is ultimately founded only in God and in the honor due to Him¹³⁰⁵. While he focuses on the religious *motivation* of moral handling, Pannenberg rejects all views whereby ethics derives its *contents* from revelation or faith. Instead, he maintains that the moral norms known by faith and the rational (philosophical) acknowledgment of the good belong together and share the same contents, expressed by natural law¹³⁰⁶. Thus, God's will as the object of the ethical investigation is identical with the norms that can be rationally known¹³⁰⁷. Accordingly, for Pannenberg, the function of religion in regard to morality is eminently formal: the first grants the *normativity* of the second, even though, in a secularized context, this normativity is restricted to the individual level¹³⁰⁸. In Pannenberg's view, this restriction is detrimental and needs to be countered by the awareness that morality has its origin in faith¹³⁰⁹. Specifically, faith in God the Creator enables the recognition of a universal ethical normativity for human beings¹³¹⁰. Thus, faith is morally relevant, and Christians are called to be loyal to firm moral criteria founded on faith. Therefore, with M. Horkheimer¹³¹¹, Pannenberg maintains that ethics ultimately resorts to theology. A (formal) religious foundation of ethics is necessary because, with Nihilism, all attempts at a strong rational foundation of ethics have resulted in the end of morality itself, at least viewed as a collectively binding system of norms¹³¹². Accordingly, Pannenberg thinks that the foundation of morality on faith is the only viable strategy to support the universality of ethics¹³¹³. In short, morality founds formally on religion and ethics on theology. However, within Pannenberg's categories, this only makes sense if the foundation of ethics on theology is understood *philosophically*. This means that ethics founds on the metaphysical idea of God. Thus, Pannenberg's claim is not that ethics founds on dogmatic theology, for example on God's self-revelation or the

¹³⁰⁴ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" in: s.a., Beiträge zur Ethik, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2003, pp. 80-89, here p. 80.

¹³⁰⁵ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 84.

¹³⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁰⁷ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 85.

¹³⁰⁸ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 86.

¹³⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹³¹⁰ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 87.

¹³¹¹ See HORKHEIMER, M., Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen. Ein Interview mit Kommentar von Helmut Gumbor, Furche Verlag Hamburg 1970, especially p. 61.

¹³¹² PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 87.

¹³¹³ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), p. 88.

overall relationality between Him, human being and the world. Instead, ethics, with its contents identical with natural law, needs to be formally based on a reason open to transcendence¹³¹⁴ and ready to view the duty to honor God as the very foundation of this law¹³¹⁵. Without this openness to transcendence, after Nihilism, a normative ethics is impossible. This is because reason necessarily ends up considering moral laws empty, thus restricting all normativity claims to the dimension of positive law¹³¹⁶. As a consequence, Pannenberg points out that only God's authority can truly function as a secure foundation for proportional justice¹³¹⁷, bringing order to the chaos of conflictual ethical perspectives. For him, without a normative reference to divine authority, it is impossible to overcome the ethical conflict in society. Further, he maintains that the attempt to construe ethical consensus around the sole principle of reciprocity (an attempt that he considers the most serious alternative to the universality of ethics¹³¹⁸) is bound to fail. This is because the attempt defines reciprocity only vaguely¹³¹⁹. The theological-metaphysical foundation of ethics, in short, safeguards the intersubjective normativity of moral norms in a context in which their foundation on a reason open to transcendence tends to no longer be viewed as philosophically viable¹³²⁰.

Pannenberg's conception of the relationship between (philosophical) theology and ethics is mirrored in the inner articulation of his concept of *justice*. Specifically, he defines justice as God's own righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ. This justice has the *same qualification* as human being's righteousness (justice), the one that they have as long as they participate by faith in Jesus Christ's relationship with the Father¹³²¹. Since human being's justice is identical with their participation in God's righteousness effected by faith, Pannenberg states that living in justice and living in faith are one and the same¹³²². Consequently, there can be no justice in complete abstraction from Israel's God¹³²³ and human being's relationship with Him. Accordingly, for Pannenberg, the universality of justice finds in its connection to the Creator, which explains human being's universal ability to distinguish between good and evil¹³²⁴. This interconnection between the Creator and the semantics of justice allows the latter to function as a general concept (*Maximalbegriff*), which necessarily and

¹³¹⁴ PANNENBERG, W., "Moral und Religion" (see note 1304), pp. 88f.

¹³¹⁵ PANNENBERG, W., "Verbindliche Normen ohne Gott?" in s.a., *Beiträge zur Ethik* (see note 1304), pp. 147-157, here p. 147.

¹³¹⁶ PANNENBERG, W., "Verbindliche Normen ohne Gott?" (see note 1315), p. 152.

¹³¹⁷ PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" in s.a., *Beiträge zur Ethik*, (see note 1304), pp. 202-212, here p. 205.

¹³¹⁸ For Pannenberg, the principle of reciprocity is the basis of the very concept of law. Specifically, by insisting on the harmonious proportion between giving and receiving, this principle qualifies natural law as the endeavor to universalize such proportion (PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik", in s.a., *Beiträge zur Ethik*, [see note 1304], pp. 135-146, here p. 136).

¹³¹⁹ PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" (see note 1317), p. 206.

¹³²⁰ PANNENBERG, W., "Verbindliche Normen ohne Gott?" (see note 1315), p. 155.

¹³²¹ PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" (see note 1317), p. 207.

¹³²² *Ibid.*

¹³²³ Who, for Pannenberg, is also the One to whom the philosophical idea of God refers.

¹³²⁴ PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" (see note 1317), p. 208.

unambiguously includes moral handling as a whole¹³²⁵. Instead, other concepts pertaining to the semantics of ethics are *minimal* and limited because they lack immediate reference to the Creator¹³²⁶.

In Pannenberg's account, the religious foundation of the semantics of justice, which safeguards its universality, corresponds to the *unity* of God's Law in the face of the conflicting plurality of human laws¹³²⁷. From a theological perspective, Scripture illustrates that both God and the Law have a constitutive relationship with justice. Accordingly, divine Law is not arbitrary¹³²⁸. Thus, for Pannenberg, both God *and* the Law are criteriological references for all people. However, they do not derive their universality from themselves, but from the semantics of justice with which they are inextricably associated¹³²⁹. Therefore, ethical consensus is conceptualized as an agreement about the formality and materiality of the moral law. This agreement can only exist together with a corresponding consensus in regard to the understanding of God. For Pannenberg, this view of justice, which presupposes the doctrine of natural law, is also the negative presupposition for justification doctrine¹³³⁰. As such and in consideration of the Fall, natural law needs to be viewed not only as universal, but also as *relative*. The constitutive role played by natural law in Pannenberg's account entails that ethics cannot be *immediately* founded on the doctrine of God. Rather, following both Jewish and Christian ancient Apologetics, he maintains that the religious grounding of ethics is to be mediated by the idea of the *Logos*. This enables a philosophical-anthropological foundation of universal ethics¹³³¹. For Pannenberg, the universality of natural law does *not* entail that the knowledge of the Law comes before the Gospel. If that were the case, faith would be *motivated* by this knowledge, and the Law would be potentially separable from God¹³³². For Pannenberg, this potential separation (which actually occurred in Modernity) roots in the traditional Lutheran understanding of the Law-Gospel interaction¹³³³. At any rate, Pannenberg's rejection of all separation between morality and religion should not be interpreted as a direct foundation of the form and contents of ethics on Christian *dogmatics*. Otherwise, ethics could not be truly universal¹³³⁴. Instead, Pannenberg argues in favor of a *metaphysical* foundation of ethics precisely in order to ensure its

¹³²⁵ PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" (see note 1317), p. 209.

¹³²⁶ Ibid.

¹³²⁷ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), pp. 136ff.

¹³²⁸ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 139.

¹³²⁹ Ibid.

¹³³⁰ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 140.

¹³³¹ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 141.

¹³³² PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 142.

¹³³³ Ibid. Interestingly enough, Pannenberg criticizes Bultmann and Ebeling because he interprets their intensive focus on the Law-Gospel interaction as a development essentially belonging to the same modern endeavor which dismantled the religious foundation of ethics. However, Ebeling does not understand his hermeneutical focus on Law and Gospel in terms of modern metaethics, but as the unfolding of the early modern (*frühmoderne*) reflection on experience as the place for the verification of knowledge. As was already shown, Mostert follows his mentor on this matter (MOSTERT, W., "Ist die Frage" [see note 87], p. 107. See also here, pp. 16f.). For Pannenberg's own understanding of Law and Gospel, see here, pp. 107f.

¹³³⁴ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 144.

universality at both the formal and material level¹³³⁵. Formally, the point is the reference to the authority of the Creator. Materially, it all comes down to the principles of reciprocity and proportionality expressed by the *golden rule*¹³³⁶. In Pannenberg's theology, reciprocity illustrates the relationship between the Law and love (*agape*) as the foundational category of ethics. Specifically, the principle of reciprocity calls on human being to be ready to operate in favor of creation and for the maintenance of God-willed community. Now, this readiness for engagement is human being's *participation*¹³³⁷ in God's love for the world. As such, it takes the concrete shape of active love: it addresses others just as God's fatherly love addresses His creation¹³³⁸. Correspondingly, for Pannenberg, love is the reality actualizing the good content of the Law. This is because love is both the content of the commandments, and the power needed to fulfill them¹³³⁹. In a word, *agape* is the *fulfillment* of the Law¹³⁴⁰. However, it is not sufficiently described as the motivational power to obey the imperative. Love does not have obedience in sight, but fulfillment. In other words, it constitutes a reality that not even the most perfect obedience or the stainless keeping of the Law could ever actualize. This reality is fellowship through mutual acknowledgment (*Anerkennung*)¹³⁴¹. Thus, love is the criteriological *principle* of Pannenberg's ethics. Accordingly, together with faith, it effects human being's *ecstatic* relation to the One God revealed in Jesus Christ¹³⁴². Put otherwise, *agape* actualizes one's participation in God's righteousness. As such, love is a *sphere of being* qualifying the Spirit's presence in believers and at the same time working on them as a power issuing from God¹³⁴³. Thus, human being's love is not categorically different from God's love for the world¹³⁴⁴. Nevertheless, a distinction is to be maintained between human being's love of God and their love of the world. Once again, orientation is provided by the semantics of participation¹³⁴⁵. Specifically, Pannenberg maintains that love of neighbor is to be viewed as human being's participation in the Father's trinitarian love for the Son, which extends to creatures¹³⁴⁶. Against all moralistic

¹³³⁵ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 145.

¹³³⁶ Ibid.

¹³³⁷ As a matter of fact, Pannenberg employs the semantics of *participation* to qualify not only love, but also righteousness. Specifically, he claims that human being's righteousness consists in participating (by faith) in Jesus' relationship with the Father (PANNENBERG, W., "Leben in Gerechtigkeit" [see note 1317], p. 207). Accordingly, it could be argued that Pannenberg understands both ethics and justification doctrine as complementary specifications of a doctrine of participation in God's righteousness. Not coincidentally, as I already showed, his chief soteriological category is *adoption*, namely the believer's participation in Jesus' relationship with the Father viewed from the vantage point of justification doctrine (see here, p. 108).

¹³³⁸ PANNENBERG, W., "Religion und Ethik" (see note 1318), p. 146.

¹³³⁹ PANNENBERG, W., "Gesetz und Evangelium", in s.a., Beiträge zur Ethik, (see note 1304), pp. 185-201, here pp. 189f.

¹³⁴⁰ PANNENBERG, W., "Gesetz und Evangelium" (see note 1339), p. 198.

¹³⁴¹ Ibid.

¹³⁴² PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 182.

¹³⁴³ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 184.

¹³⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁴⁵ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 193.

¹³⁴⁶ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 187.

misunderstandings, Pannenberg points out that human being's relationship with God is not qualified first and foremost as love, but as faith¹³⁴⁷. However, faith necessarily brings along love and hope. Therefore, in his view, love is somehow constitutive of faith¹³⁴⁸, since both realities are extrinsic. Accordingly, for Pannenberg, both faith and love let God be God and properly acknowledge His divinity¹³⁴⁹. Specifically, faith connects with God as the object of human being's trust, whereas love determines this connection as the possibility of fellowship. Based on the overall proximity and interconnection of love and faith, Pannenberg ultimately interprets both as expressions of human being's certainty of fellowship with the Father¹³⁵⁰.

His participatory view of love is also the foundation of his understanding of consummation. In particular, he maintains that human being's hope for participation in God's life fulfills their deepest longings as well as those of the entire creation¹³⁵¹. Thus, according to Pannenberg, the category of consummation illustrates the Gospel as the good news of the imminence of God's lordship. Countering both the reduction of eschatology to the ethical dimension and the claim that consummation is fully present within faith (this is notably Mostert's position), Pannenberg believes that the whole of Christian doctrine is eschatologically qualified¹³⁵². Correspondingly, the dimension of futurity is constitutive of the concept of the good as well as of God's identity as the One who is in becoming¹³⁵³. Thus, Pannenberg posits an ontological primacy of the future, which is understood not merely as the source of the contingency of events, but first and foremost as the dimension from where salvation comes¹³⁵⁴. Thus, consummation is regarded as the fundamental soteriological dimension towards which the whole of creation tends. Consequently, Jesus' history and work are interpreted as the *anticipation* of God's future lordship coming to consummate His rule over creation¹³⁵⁵. However, at a closer look, it needs to be added that Pannenberg's understanding of consummation is not only eschatological, but also metaphysical and ethical. As a matter of fact, he conceptualizes God's coming Kingdom as the reality within which creatures attain the *telos* of their nature (metaphysical dimension)¹³⁵⁶. Specifically, he claims that God has destined His creatures for *independence*. Therefore, they can freely strive for the realization of their own *telos* within their historicity (ethical dimension)¹³⁵⁷. However, this implies that God does not violate the freedom of His creatures, who

¹³⁴⁷ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 188.

¹³⁴⁸ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 191.

¹³⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁰ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 196.

¹³⁵¹ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 527.

¹³⁵² PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 530.

¹³⁵³ PANNENBERG, W., "Einer ist gut (Mt 19,17)" in: s.a., Beiträge zur Ethik, (see note 1304), pp. 90-99, here p. 96.

¹³⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁵ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 531.

¹³⁵⁶ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 580.

¹³⁵⁷ PANNENBERG, W., Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 57.

therefore need time in order to bring their lives into conformity with their God-given *telos*¹³⁵⁸. Thus, in Pannenberg's eschatological and metaphysical-ethical perspective, consummation is the universal orientation of God's agency bringing creatures to exert their freedom in time so that their overall historical relationality can be effectively directed towards their *telos*. This teleological orientation of both human being's life and history as a whole is concealed from the empirical analysis, but not entirely hidden¹³⁵⁹. Rather, Pannenberg's teleological understanding of life and history helps illustrate his view of God's *œconomia salutis*, which is manifested within special revelation. In order to attain their fulfillment, creatures need to acquire knowledge of God. Without this knowledge, their nature remains unfulfilled, and just life fellowship among them is impossible¹³⁶⁰. Ultimately, Pannenberg's fundamental thesis on consummation is that God's lordship and the teleological actualization of His will in and among human beings belong together. Specifically, the relationship between the two dimensions is that the eschatological consummation as the coming of God's Kingdom *presupposes* the metaphysical-ethical fulfillment of both the individual and society¹³⁶¹. The interconnection of the two dimensions which constitute consummation-fulfillment is affirmed by Pannenberg with reference to God's salvation intent. From human being's perspective, God's salvific will appears as a twofold qualification of their *telos*, namely their fellowship with God and its *pendant*, active and just fellowship with one another¹³⁶². Clearly, for Pannenberg, the second qualification of human being's *telos* bases on the first¹³⁶³. Further, since special revelation makes the soteriological category of consummation known to Christians, these are called to embody already now a *historical model* of the coming Kingdom. With that, ecclesiology clearly becomes a vantage point to fully understand Pannenberg's view of consummation. For him, human being's fellowship with God's Kingdom is present in the church in *anticipatory* form. This anticipatory presence is actualized in the sacraments and produces an awareness whereby the church is kept open to God's incoming future¹³⁶⁴. Moreover, this openness to God's Kingdom qualifies the very existence of the church. In other words, the latter exists precisely due to the inbreaking of the eschatological future into history through Jesus' life and work¹³⁶⁵. In short, in Pannenberg's view, the church is the historical reality which sacramentally participates in consummation¹³⁶⁶. This ecclesiological perspective illustrates the unicity and necessity of the church from the point of view of the history of salvation. Moreover, it substantiates

¹³⁵⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 580.

¹³⁵⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 581.

¹³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶¹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 584.

¹³⁶² PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 522.

¹³⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁴ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 524.

¹³⁶⁵ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 51.

¹³⁶⁶ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 52.

Pannenberg's claim that the existence of the church aptly relativizes and judges all claims on consummation laid by secular realities. In short, only the church and its liturgy effectively function as a signficatory representation of consummation¹³⁶⁷. This means that the ecclesial community is distinct from God's Kingdom, and yet it already signficatorily harbors it¹³⁶⁸. This is because the church is uniquely concerned with the category of consummation as the multi-faceted *telos* of all creaturely reality¹³⁶⁹.

In sum, for Pannenberg, ethics founds in theology because true morality bases on religion. Also, it has universal normativity as it is grounded on natural law. This universality does not rest on reason alone, but on the idea of God, which is inherently coupled with the concept of justice. Theologically, the ambiguity of ethics emerges whenever knowledge of the Law becomes separable from the Gospel. This separation neglects love as the guiding ethical principle, the extrinsic reality effecting (with faith) one's participation in God's life, thus fulfilling the Law. Consummation is an essential soteriological category which needs to be understood both eschatologically and ethically-metaphysically. Specifically, the *telos* of the individual and of the world can only be attained through the anticipatory and sacramental participation in God's future.

3.2.2. "Ethical Theologies": K. Barth and E. Brunner

3.2.2.A. K. Barth

For Barth, there can be no ethics independent from dogmatics. More precisely, dogmatics is at the same time ethics. A Christian ethics claiming its independence from dogmatics would ultimately assume that there is a goodness and holiness of the Christian which is not hidden with Christ in God and can be pointed to empirically¹³⁷⁰. If this were the case, then the good conduct of the Christian would be separable from the reality of their faith. This would make it possible to describe and prescribe a definite behavior presumably identifying the Christian and presenting them as a model for others. In a word, Christian ethics, so understood, would be a form of human conduct resorting to a general anthropology¹³⁷¹. Barth rejects a similar Christian ethics because its separation from

¹³⁶⁷ The fact that only the church functions signficatorily as an anticipation of the Kingdom also founds the legitimacy of positing a qualitative difference between church and State. For Pannenberg, this difference is constitutive of Christianity (PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 [see note 717], p. 52). Specifically, the church constitutively limits the State's right over individuals and categorically delegitimizes all its absolute claims. In a word, the very existence of the church and its reference to the category of consummation operates a sane secularization of the State and weakens all ideological thinking (PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 [see note 717], p. 53).

¹³⁶⁸ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (see note 717), p. 52.

¹³⁶⁹ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (see note 762), p. 55.

¹³⁷⁰ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 (see note 404), p. 39.

¹³⁷¹ BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 (see note 404), p. 40.

dogmatics makes the latter too narrow and even superfluous. Put otherwise, it subjects the conduct of the Christian to the arbitrary idea of the good and not to the revealed Word of God¹³⁷². Because of that, the separation between dogmatics and ethics necessarily breaks with the Reformation¹³⁷³. Instead, for Barth, the two disciplines belong together, because God's one Word founds and completes the true relationship between Him and human being¹³⁷⁴. This means that both God and human being *in their entirety* are the subject of the one and undivided Word of God. Therefore, a separate space for special ethics next to the doctrine of the Word would be utterly arbitrary and the ensuing ethical discourse would be non-theological¹³⁷⁵. Also, a principle-based separation between God and human being would end up obscuring and reverting their real relationship. Thus, for Barth, an ethics viewed as the *consequence* of dogmatics would ultimately place the real focus on the holy human being and no longer on the holy God¹³⁷⁶. This view is illegitimate because it neglects that theological discourse is always concerned with God's revelation and work in themselves, never with their consequences¹³⁷⁷. This means that, for Barth, the holy human being has no independent existence. Rather, they exist from the holiness of God. They are not His consequence, but, if I may say so, always and only His *predicate*. Accordingly, keeping dogmatics and ethics together aptly shows the seriousness and full effectivity of God's Word addressed to human being and absorbed in their agency¹³⁷⁸. Correspondingly, the ethical question (the problem of the Christian life) is always already determined by the Word of God¹³⁷⁹ and needs to be understood within His self-revelation, not as an *addendum* to it. Specifically, the *locus* where dogmatics becomes ethics is the doctrine of sanctification¹³⁸⁰. Further, Barth's view of the relationship between dogmatics and ethics is illuminated by his theological anthropology, whereby human being *is* what they do. Thus, the question of right conduct is simply identical with their existential problem. In short, human being exists in that they act¹³⁸¹. Therefore, the ethical question concerning the continuity of their good action coincides with the problem of the

¹³⁷² Ibid.

¹³⁷³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 44.

¹³⁷⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 45.

¹³⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁶ "Appealing to the supposed consequences of dogmatics as the revelation or work of God to man, in ethics we suddenly allow ourselves to open a new book: the book of the holy man which is the sequel to that of the holy God. But in theology we can never have to do with the consequences of God's revelation, or work to man, but only with the revelation and work itself" (BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 [see note 404], p. 48).

¹³⁷⁷ "What theology has to learn and teach with regard to the holy man can be derived only from the one book. In this book it is, of course, very emphatically a question of the holy man as well. But in this book the holy man has no independent existence. Therefore, he never becomes an independent object of thought. He exists only in the course of the existence of the holy God and of the study of His speech and action" (Ibid.).

¹³⁷⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 49.

¹³⁷⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 50.

¹³⁸⁰ From a different angle, it is also possible to locate Barth's foundation of theological ethics in his christological reformulation of conscience (ZIEGLER, P. G., "Doing Conscience Over": The Reformulation of the Doctrine of Conscience in the Theological Ethics of Karl Barth and Paul Lehman", Toronto Journal of Theology 14/2 [1998], pp. 213-238). In light of Barth's mistrust of theological subjectivism, this reading might appear surprising.

¹³⁸¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 50.

continuity their existence¹³⁸². In this sense, human being *derives* from the ethical question. At any rate, their existential problem does not have any foundation outside of the reality of God's Word. Instead, it is posited and also fully answered by it. Therefore, it is only the Word of God, not any reality outside of it, which gives theological significance to human existence¹³⁸³. This entails that the problem of human existence, the ethical question, only acquires theological significance *within* God's Word. Accordingly, ethics is the responsibility of sound dogmatics, and the two share one and the same *substance*¹³⁸⁴. Starting from these premises, Barth claims that the *direct inclusion* of ethics within dogmatics is the preferable path due to its clarity¹³⁸⁵. Nevertheless, he still concedes that a merely operational separation between the two disciplines is not impossible¹³⁸⁶.

In his categories, ethics is directly included within dogmatics because it finds in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is both the holy God and the sanctified human being in one¹³⁸⁷. With that, Barth insists on the unity of God's Word. This corresponds to his claim that the primary function of ethics is to bear witness to the grace of God by interpreting the Law as the form of the Gospel¹³⁸⁸. In its bearing witness to grace, ethics contributes to illustrate the covenant, which, for Barth, completes the very concept of God¹³⁸⁹. Specifically, in the covenant, human being is made a partner of God, *therefore* they belong to Him. However, this belonging does not mean an *essential* bound between the two partners. Rather, it points to the actuality of God's freedom, which is described in the doctrine of election as the sum of the Gospel¹³⁹⁰. In Barth's account, election determines human being as the one who is qualified for service, thus revealing the very purpose of the covenant. Since God has elected the man Jesus Christ, human being, who is co-elected with him, is to be ruled by God as His covenantal partner. Now, the point is that this determination of human being within the election of Jesus Christ *includes* the ethical question about their conduct. This question asks what self-determination of human being corresponds to their determination by God¹³⁹¹. The answer is found within the doctrine of sanctification, which illustrates that grace solves the problem of conduct because it sanctifies human being¹³⁹². This implies that, for Barth, human conduct has to do with

¹³⁸² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 8.

¹³⁸³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), pp. 50f.

¹³⁸⁴ For Barth, it is precisely this same substance shared by dogmatics and ethics which grants their mutual intelligibility and shows that both belong to the doctrine of God's Word (BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 [see note 404], p. 53).

¹³⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, I/2 (see note 404), p. 52.

¹³⁸⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 1.

¹³⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 2.

¹³⁹¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 3. Not only the doctrine of election, but also trinitarian theology plays an important role in structuring Barth's understanding of human being as determined by God. This is shown for instance by ALEXIS-BAKER, A., "Theology is Ethics: how Karl Barth sees the good life", Scottish Journal of Theology 64/4 (2011), pp. 425-438. The author specifically explores Barth's view of the relationship between dogmatics and ethics starting from the doctrine of *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis*.

¹³⁹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 7.

grace *directly*, not indirectly. Specifically, grace is the content of the one Word of God, which is both Gospel and Law¹³⁹³. As Law, the Word of grace is God's prior decision concerning human being's self-determination, the impulse directing them towards their future. According to Barth, the Law aims at one's being and action becoming conformed to God's¹³⁹⁴. Thus, the indicative of the Law is true precisely in its imperative¹³⁹⁵, because the problem of human obedience to God is directly implicated by His lordship¹³⁹⁶. For Barth, it is impossible to speak seriously of God's lordship without at the same time covering the ethical response of (active) human being. With His sanctifying claim, God wills that His partners become responsible as He has made them by preveniently claiming responsibility for them¹³⁹⁷. Put otherwise, human being is always already determined by God and destined to concrete *obedience*, not to the encounter with an abstractly open ethical riddle. Thus, human being *is* the answer to the ethical question¹³⁹⁸, which is both asked and answered by God within one and the same movement. Conversely, if the ethical question is treated as a riddle, namely in abstraction from the concrete reality of grace, it is a sinful endeavor¹³⁹⁹, the result of the Fall¹⁴⁰⁰. For Barth, grace protests against all ethical systems claiming an abstract independence from the reality of God's Word¹⁴⁰¹. Human being must *not* insanely ignore that their predetermination to obedience is already fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, ethics *cannot* be their attempt at deciding what the good is, since this would mean trying to escape God's grace¹⁴⁰². Instead, ethics is the confirmation of the truth of God's grace, the attestation that His *command* is good¹⁴⁰³.

God's command is arguably the most important category within Barth's theological ethics. It is not a particular norm referring to a universal law, but a reality which is not to be measured against anything else¹⁴⁰⁴. Accordingly, for Barth, God's command is qualitatively irreducible to the general categories of the ethical enquiry¹⁴⁰⁵. Only the concrete reality of God's command aptly intercepts and

¹³⁹³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 3.

¹³⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁵ Ibid. See also STUMPF, A. D. H., A Theological Assessment of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the Christological Foundation of Ethics, University of Waterloo 2013, pp. 5-40, here pp. 5ff.

¹³⁹⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 4.

¹³⁹⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 3.

¹³⁹⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 8.

¹³⁹⁹ Indeed, Barth explicitly maintains that the Christian conception of ethics cannot be reconciled with the traditional one. In particular, theological ethics entails the negation of the ethical endeavor understood in traditional terms (BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 [see note 858], 1998], pp. 10f.). For a non-theological perspective on the contraposition between theological and traditional ethics in Barth's understanding, see CLOUGH, D., "Barth, Karl", International Encyclopedia of Ethics, John Wiley & Sons (2016), pp. 1-7.

¹⁴⁰⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 8.

¹⁴⁰¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 9.

¹⁴⁰² Ibid.

¹⁴⁰³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 10.

¹⁴⁰⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 13. See also WHITEHOUSE, W. A.'s review of WILLIS, R. E., The Ethics of Karl Barth, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1971. The review appears in: Scottish Journal of Theology 29/2 (1976), pp. 177-182.

¹⁴⁰⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 14.

explicates the ethical question, without having to resort to the abstractness of a universal law. With that, Barth rejects all synthesis between theological and general ethics as well as all attempts at a demarcation of competences between theology and ethics¹⁴⁰⁶. Briefly, he is convinced that these options are to be rejected because they allow *philosophy* to take over the leading role in the determination of human being, thus claiming universal normativity concerning the question of their conduct¹⁴⁰⁷. Against the rejected options, Barth maintains that all ethical truth is enclosed within God's command and tasked with its exposition. So, the whole ethical problem lies within the competence of dogmatics, and human being has no independent knowledge of good and evil¹⁴⁰⁸. Correspondingly, the doctrine of election shows that all human actions stand under God's command, where the question of good and evil is solved once and for all. This means that, according to Barth, the very *possibility* of the good is included in the reality of God's command. As a consequence, all abstract enquiry about the right conduct is arbitrary and illegitimate¹⁴⁰⁹. Thus, theological ethics illustrates that in Jesus Christ human being finds the Gospel which reconciles them with God and the Law which really binds them¹⁴¹⁰. Since human being is not an actor operating in separation from God, their righteousness cannot be an immanent reality, but only their participation in *Christ's* righteousness. Thus, they simply have to *endorse* the reality of their righteousness already given in Christ through a *corresponding action* functioning as a glorification of God's grace¹⁴¹¹. Therefore, in Barth's view, the goodness of human being's action does not illustrate their quality as a holy person. Rather, it belongs to the movement with which the holy God acts towards them. Their good conduct is not their independent choice to act on the basis of their faith, but their hearing of God's command and acting in endorsement thereof¹⁴¹². This endorsement is both supremely free and supremely bound action, in that God's command entails human being's concrete freedom to obey His good will here and now¹⁴¹³.

In Barth's christological understanding, God's command always already includes human being, whose transgression is condemned in Jesus' death and whose righteousness is pronounced in his

¹⁴⁰⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 15f.

¹⁴⁰⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 17.

¹⁴⁰⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 18f.

¹⁴⁰⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 27.

¹⁴¹⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 28. For the implications of Barth's unitary understanding of Gospel and Law on his political theology, see for instance WERPEHOWSKI, W., "Justification and Justice in the Theology of Karl Barth", *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 50/4 (1986), pp. 623-642 and HAVENGA, M.J., "Worship as primary ethical act: Barth on Romans 12", *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 1/76 (2020), pp. 1-7.

¹⁴¹¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 30f.

¹⁴¹² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), pp. 35ff.

¹⁴¹³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 37.

resurrection¹⁴¹⁴. Accordingly, His command is an *event*, not an obligation derived from being¹⁴¹⁵. As such, it is supremely particular and cannot be articulated systematically in a legal code. Rather, it corresponds in its structure to the (unitary) multiplicity of the trinitarian life of God¹⁴¹⁶. God's command is always that of the Creator, the Reconciler and the Redeemer¹⁴¹⁷. None of the three modes should ever be absolutized, even though the christological one remains criteriological. To the contrary, for Barth, the theologies of orders¹⁴¹⁸ arbitrarily select one mode of God's command (namely the one of the Creator) and regard the theology of creation as the primary and normative *locus* for the development of theological ethics. By doing so, they neglect the historicity of God's encounter with human being in its overall dimension and only focus on one of its modes¹⁴¹⁹. Most importantly, the theologies of orders are to be rejected because they base on the claim that concepts like creation and the Creator are accessible to human being's understanding, in separation from the event of God's self-revelation¹⁴²⁰. In Barth's perspective, God's threefold command embraces a multitude of particular demands which together qualify the reality of the ethical event¹⁴²¹. This event is one, but it takes place in the different *spheres* opened up in the life of human being by their encounter with God's command. These spheres are *not* the laws according to which God commands. Rather, they are the realities within which His command meets human being's action. In them, the irreducibly particular truth of the command acquires a general form, in the sense that God commands always in these spheres and human being obeys or disobeys always in them¹⁴²². In other words, the spheres give reliable indications as to *where* God's command meets human being, they account for the *horizontal dimension* of the *continuity* of both the command and the response to it. However, the *encounter* itself happens in the *vertical dimension*, so that both God's command and human being's response remain irreducibly *particular* in spite of their historical continuity¹⁴²³. Accordingly, God encounters always

¹⁴¹⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 219. For a detailed analysis of Barth's view of command as grace, see also ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded" (see note 854), especially pp. 129-132.

¹⁴¹⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 38. See also ZIEGLER, P. G., "Graciously commanded" (see note 854), p. 130. Whether or not Barth's view of God's command as an *event* is a form of actualistic intuitionism is the subject of an interesting debate. See for instance RASMUSSEN, A., "Theology and Moral Reflection and Practice. Karl Barth, David Haddorff, and Christian Ethics", *Pro Ecclesia* 26/3 (2017), pp. 249-260 and WERPEHOWSKI, W., "Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9/2 (1981), pp. 298-320.

¹⁴¹⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, II/2 (see note 858), p. 41.

¹⁴¹⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, III/4, vol. 19, The Doctrine of Creation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1951), p. 25.

¹⁴¹⁸ Here, Barth has clearly (but not only) in mind Brunner's version of theological ethics, that I am going to discuss next (3.2.2.B). Interestingly enough, P.T. Nimmo offers a different reading of Barth's approach to the orders of creation. In Nimmo's view, the rejection of the orders is a lot milder than usually maintained in Barth studies (NIMMO, P. T., "The orders of creation in the theological Ethics of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64/4 [2007], pp. 24-35). For lack of space, I am not going to tackle this question in depth.

¹⁴¹⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 25.

¹⁴²⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 34.

¹⁴²¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 26.

¹⁴²² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 27. See also WILLIAMS, J.R.'s review of Barth's ethics of creation. The review appears in: *Interpretation, A Journal of Bible and Theology* 17/1 (1963), pp. 84-89.

¹⁴²³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 15.

this human being in a specific situation and in a unique way, in the particularity of an unprecedented encounter¹⁴²⁴. However, since He is One and remains faithful to Himself and to human being, His demands are not chaotically disconnected, but together express the continuation of God's guidance of history in light of final consummation.

In Barth's theology, *consummation* is a fully legitimate soteriological category. As a matter of fact, he claims that the fulfillment of the whole of creation, history and human life has the same content as the Easter event, in which the reconciliation of the world with God has been performatively revealed¹⁴²⁵. Accordingly, the Easter event is the *new coming* of Jesus Christ in the form of the public declaration of his lordship. This declaration is performative because God acts in that He speaks¹⁴²⁶. Therefore, Easter declares (and *thereby* puts into effect) what Jesus' cross has achieved for the whole world¹⁴²⁷. As one distinctive form of Jesus' new coming, Easter is, for Barth, an eschatological event. It is one of the three forms of Christ's *parousia*, together with the impartation of the Spirit and consummation. Thus, in Barth's view, the latter is the definitive, eschatological form of the *parousia*¹⁴²⁸. Its basis and full reality are already actually present in the Easter event, the primal and basic pattern of all three forms¹⁴²⁹. Accordingly, the category of consummation points to Jesus Christ as the *telos* of creation and history. Correspondingly, it has the same content as Easter but takes place in a different manner¹⁴³⁰. As such, its semantics are necessary and cannot be confined to the final stage of *parousia*¹⁴³¹. Coherently, for Barth, the Christian's expectation of consummation in faithful and active hope¹⁴³² is simply the expression of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Easter event, God has publicly committed Himself to be and act in favor of human being, who is therefore permitted and commanded to hope that He will keep being and acting in the same way throughout

¹⁴²⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, III/4 (see note 1417), p. 14.

¹⁴²⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/3, vol. 27, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1959), p. 279.

¹⁴²⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 286.

¹⁴²⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 279.

¹⁴²⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 282.

¹⁴²⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴³¹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 284. I would say that Barth employs the category of consummation both extensively and narrowly. Extensively, consummation refers to the whole of reconciliation and has exactly the same content as the Easter event. Narrowly, it is the third and final form of the *parousia*, the manifestation of reconciliation in its definitive form.

¹⁴³² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/3, vol. 29, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 (1959), pp. 242f. Barth's understanding of hope as active responsiveness to the Gospel might provide impulses for immediately political and even humanistic readings of his theological ethics. In this direction goes, for instance, BETTIS, J., "Political Theology and Social Ethics: The Socialist Humanism of Karl Barth", Scottish Journal of Theology 27/3 (1974), pp. 287-305. In consideration of Barth's overall theology, I do not find similar readings convincing. In my view, his *theological* understanding of reality prevents him at all times from confusing the ultimate with the penultimate. Even in his later reflection emphasizing of the humanity of God, Barth does maintain, in my opinion, an ultimately non-humanistic view of theology, regardless of how close he might move to humanistic categories. Similarly, a counter-modern reading of Barth's theological ethics is upheld by McINTOSH, A., "Christian Ethics in a Secular Society: Karl Barth in Conversation", Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies 25/1 (2012), pp. 37-50.

the historical exercise of His lordship and until the last day¹⁴³³. This means that, according to Barth, consummation is the unfolding of the actual and effective modification which has been irrevocably introduced into the world. This modification is due to Easter having truly taken place in this same world, thereby giving it a new determination¹⁴³⁴. Thus, Easter entails a real alteration of reality prior to Christ's resurrection, and this alteration already contains the ensuing fulfillment. In this sense, consummation is both already actual (Easter) and future (the *eschaton*). In other words, it is the definitive present of Easter, the affirmation of Christ's lordship in the process of its universal, total and unrestricted fulfillment for the whole of creation¹⁴³⁵. So, for Barth, the theological legitimacy of consummation founds in Easter, which is the *commencement of the revelation* of the world's reconciliation, but not its full development¹⁴³⁶. In a way, consummation has already really taken place at Easter, in that the qualitatively new future of reconciliation is indeed fully present in the resurrected Christ. However, next to this future determined by the resurrection, the old future prior to it keeps existing in contradiction to it¹⁴³⁷. In Barth's theology, the category of consummation is necessary precisely to interpret this contradiction between the "already" and the "not yet" of reconciliation. The contradiction is positively willed by God and belongs to the reality of faith. Specifically, Jesus Christ reveals himself in the unfolding of this contradiction, not in its removal¹⁴³⁸. This is because he is the one who *moves* from the reconciliation already accomplished to its not yet fulfilled revelation. Thus, the persisting diastasis between Easter and the *eschaton* is itself a matter of grace. The continued existence of the old world is due to Jesus' positive will to grant time and space for His creatures to exist in active and hopeful freedom to serve and partake in the full revelation of reconciliation¹⁴³⁹. With that, the category of consummation refers to the effective promise of salvation which is actual and valid for the whole of creation¹⁴⁴⁰. As for its subjective and particular forms¹⁴⁴¹, consummation can be legitimately accounted for only within this context of objective and universal fulfillment¹⁴⁴².

¹⁴³³ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), pp. 285f. The process whereby Christ's lordship is affirmed historically and eschatologically is to be understood pneumatologically. As U.H.J. Körtner shows, Barth's christological insistence is *not* christomonist. As a matter of fact, pneumatology is absolutely central for the understanding of his core theological category, namely God's Word (KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Komm, o komm, Du Geist des Lebens" [see note 417], especially pp. 2f. and 5).

¹⁴³⁴ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 287.

¹⁴³⁵ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 291.

¹⁴³⁶ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 305.

¹⁴³⁷ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), p. 306.

¹⁴³⁸ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), pp. 313f.

¹⁴³⁹ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1425), pp. 317f.

¹⁴⁴⁰ BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1432), p. 242.

¹⁴⁴¹ Here, I am referring to the individual and historical dimensions of consummation, that I have called "historicity of the justified". In my definition, this term indicates the overall historical relationality in which one exists and interacts with themselves, their neighbor and the history of the world (see here, pp. 143f. and 154ff.).

¹⁴⁴² BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics, IV/3 (see note 1432), pp. 242f. Once again, the subjectivity and particularity of reconciliation is understood by Barth as the attestation and confirmation of its objectivity and generality. In my view, this indicates that, in his overall understanding of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, the first accounts for the actuality and effectiveness of a specific reality (for instance reconciliation). Instead, the second indicates its ensuing

In conclusion, for Barth, ethics and dogmatics belong together because the problem of human being's conduct is raised *and* answered by God in Christ. The election of Christ includes human being in their entirety, so also in their action, which is demanded by God's command. The latter is God's Word addressing human being and determining their free obedience. It is not a general law, but an always particular event. Still, it does have a certain historicity because the One God always meets human being within certain spheres of their existence. Consummation is the third and final form of Christ's *parousia*, the definitive revelation of his universal lordship performatively declared at Easter. The tension between "already" and "not yet" is positively willed by Christ as a space for creatures' responsibility.

3.2.2.B. E. Brunner

For Brunner, the ethical question is the investigation of what is good. Human being necessarily understands the good starting from the problem of its realization and believes to be the one who is called to actualize it¹⁴⁴³. This means that they seek to be justified by their action¹⁴⁴⁴, because they expect the good as the result of their own effort¹⁴⁴⁵. Now, this expectation is both the core of the ethical question and the very definition of sin. Therefore, by locating this question in close contact with dogmatics (hamartiology and justification doctrine), Brunner shows that human being's ethical failure concerns first and foremost the sphere of *personality*, not that of conduct¹⁴⁴⁶. In other words, human being's ethical effort is what is ultimately evil¹⁴⁴⁷, thus determining the invariable failure of all natural (legalistic) attempts at actively realizing the good. Positively, the same theological truth is expressed by the claim that God alone is good¹⁴⁴⁸. Accordingly, the failure of the ethical endeavor, in Brunner's view, consists in ethics being unable to accept that the righteousness of the Law *is* sin. For an ethics detached from dogmatics, this claim is absurd and needs to be rejected. As a consequence, a similar ethics is theologically disqualified. As a matter of fact, for Brunner, only the acceptance of the claim enables the recognition that the good is always the gift of God and that it is in Him, not in

possibility and endorsement. Interestingly enough, this relationship mirrors exactly the one between dogmatics and ethics. Accordingly, I think that a stimulating question for Barth studies would be whether and to what extent, in his categories, the subjective dimension of a specific theological reality is constitutively *ethical*. An impulse towards an answer is provided, in my opinion, by Barth himself in his non-sacramental treatment of baptism in water as the subjective and ethical reality attesting and confirming the objective, theological (christological) reality of baptism in the Spirit (BARTH, K., Church Dogmatics Study Edition, IV/4, vol. 30, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, A&C Black, Bloomsbury, London 2010 [1967]).

¹⁴⁴³ BRUNNER, E., The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1936 (1932), p. 69

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁵ BRUNNER, E., The Divine Imperative (see note 1443), p. 70.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁷ BRUNNER, E., The Divine Imperative (see note 1443), p. 71.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Matt 19,17.

the Law, that human being finds their true self¹⁴⁴⁹. This means that their action is truly justified only in and by God, whose Word enables them to apprehend the good reality of the Gospel. With that, Brunner vindicates that the ethical concern with the Law in itself is bound to fail its attempt at answering human being's question about the good. This is because an ethics independent from dogmatics (and perhaps accompanied by metaphysics) can at best claim that the Law is the will of God. However, once it has been coupled with dogmatics, ethics acknowledges that which is essential to answer its own question: the imperative mood of the Law is due to sin¹⁴⁵⁰. This acknowledgment is only available to faith, which knows that human being is a sinner, thus in a legal relationship with God. By knowing this, faith also understands that the Law carries a curse which is removed only by God on Jesus' cross, namely there, where He reveals Himself as the One who gives life¹⁴⁵¹. As a consequence, in their appropriate relationship, dogmatics and ethics clearly belong together. Ultimately, for Brunner, all alternatives in which ethics claims its independence from dogmatics are put aside in the same way in which the Law as a soteriological endeavor is disqualified by the Gospel. However, this disqualification does not entail that the Law ceases to exist. On the one hand, it is *abrogated* as the sinner's instrument to try and answer the question about the good. On the other, it is *not abolished*. Instead, Brunner claims that the Law is rightly set up by the Gospel, and its relationship with sinners is corrected¹⁴⁵². Deprived of the legalism due to its soteriological overload¹⁴⁵³, the Law is liberated to become a reality which *instructs* without condemning (*tertius usus legis*). At the same time, the actuality of the decision about the good is now aptly reserved for faith¹⁴⁵⁴. Therefore, for Brunner, the ethical failure at answering human being's question about the good needs to be understood with immediate reference to justification doctrine. Specifically, this failure mirrors the soteriological incompetence of the Law, its inability to deliver that which it promises.

According to Brunner, the failure of the ethical endeavor also entails that no general conception of ethics is to be maintained¹⁴⁵⁵. Accordingly, the question of theological ethics needs to start from the impossibility to define the good as a principle. Further, the very category of principle is to be rejected from a theological point of view, because all attempts to predetermine what is good are inherently legalistic¹⁴⁵⁶. Instead, theological ethics knows that the good is identical with obedience *to God*, not

¹⁴⁴⁹ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 71.

¹⁴⁵⁰ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 75.

¹⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵² BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 81.

¹⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵⁴ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 79.

¹⁴⁵⁵ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 82.

¹⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.* However, at the same time, Brunner claims that certain ethical postulates are indeed universal, in the sense that they can and must be recognized by all as a common human task. As such, they provide a good basis for an international *ethos*. However, they are not absolute and need to be understood relatively and non-ideologically, so as to prevent them being destructively pinned against one another. These postulates have universal rational evidence and include the dignity

to a general law which can be known beforehand. Thus, the criterion for good (Christian) conduct is not the idea of the good but love (*agape*), which, for Brunner, is *not* a principle¹⁴⁵⁷. Actually, it is hostile to principles¹⁴⁵⁸. Based on this non-legalistic view of love, Brunner defines Christian ethics as the science of good conduct *within* dogmatics¹⁴⁵⁹. Specifically, ethics is part of dogmatics because it is always concerned with God's action happening in and through human being, never with the latter's independent action¹⁴⁶⁰. With that, Brunner claims that Christian ethics is concerned with human being's grateful and responsive agency unfolding within God's action. Therefore, the paradigm which regards Christian ethics as descriptive in opposition to all normative ethics is rejected¹⁴⁶¹. Accordingly, Brunner locates the ethical moment within the dogmatic one and defends an activistic anthropology whereby human being is verified in their actions¹⁴⁶². Since ethics is concerned with human conduct as determined by God's agency, all claims of universal validity and intelligibility laid by a principle-based ethical account need to be rejected. This is because the only valid point of view for theological ethics is God's free action¹⁴⁶³. Moving from these premises, Brunner states that, although Christian ethics cannot attain universal recognition, it does have universal validity, because it is concerned with God's will, which can only be universal¹⁴⁶⁴. Brunner's categorical exclusion of all principle-based ethics entails that, in his view, ethics does not have an *absolute* predictive value¹⁴⁶⁵. In other words, it is not capable of identifying good conduct based on a previously established knowledge of what is good. Conversely, ethics aims at preparing the way for voluntary decisions which cannot be predicted because they are only enabled by the hearing of God's free command¹⁴⁶⁶. Thus, ethics is tasked with providing reliable *instruction* for conduct based on the discernment of God's will, which is simultaneously a gift and a task and is always the same, because it articulates God's self-disclosure. At the same time, it becomes manifest always in different ways¹⁴⁶⁷, because human being (its addressee) inevitably exists within the several historical-situational determinations of reality. These are the divine orders, namely God-willed structures within which

of the human person, human rights, equity and freedom (see BRUNNER, E., CUNNEEN, S. S., "In search of an International Ethos", *CrossCurrents* 8/1 [1958], pp. 1-8, here pp. 5ff.).

¹⁴⁵⁷ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 83.

¹⁴⁵⁸ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*, James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, 1962 (1949), p. 310.

¹⁴⁵⁹ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 84.

¹⁴⁶⁰ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 85. Here, the proximity between Barth and Brunner is quite clear.

¹⁴⁶¹ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), pp. 85f.

¹⁴⁶² BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 86.

¹⁴⁶³ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 88.

¹⁴⁶⁴ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 90.

¹⁴⁶⁵ However, as I am going to point out, Brunner's understanding of the orders of creation does imply that ethics has a *relative* predictive value.

¹⁴⁶⁶ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 91.

¹⁴⁶⁷ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 92.

human being exists and in accordance with which their agency ought to unfold¹⁴⁶⁸. Thus, according to Brunner, the orders expound the *grammar* of God's command, they describe how it comes to human being so that they hear it. In their interaction with God's command, the orders are qualified as the realities posited by the Creator in order to clarify the meaning of love within human being's historicity of life.

For Brunner, God's command is the self-giving of God in which it becomes manifest that love is the meaning of the Law¹⁴⁶⁹. Apart from God's self-disclosure, human being knows the Law, but remains ignorant of God's command. In contrast to the first, the second is primarily a gift. *As such*, it is also a demand¹⁴⁷⁰ by which God claims human being's whole existence for His Kingdom, for universal love¹⁴⁷¹. Thus, love is a concrete reality, not an abstract principle and can never be arbitrarily separated from God's command. Brunner maintains that the command is constitutively oriented to *situational obedience*¹⁴⁷². Put otherwise, it explicates God's freedom here and now and cannot be known in advance. Accordingly, theological ethics does not abstractly base off the good done for its own sake. Instead, it is concerned first of all and immediately with human being's life as belonging to God's will. Secondly and derivatively, theological ethics is also concerned with all that which contributes to determine human being's life as such¹⁴⁷³. This means that, for Brunner, God's command has two dimensions. The first points *vertically* to the command as the free expression of God's will; the second indicates the aim of this will *horizontally* within the historical situatedness of human being's life in the world. So, the command has always the same basis, but its content varies with the circumstances¹⁴⁷⁴. Correspondingly, theological ethics needs to acknowledge that its endeavor can only *pave the way* for decisions concerning good conduct, but never predetermine them¹⁴⁷⁵. Since God's command is not Law, but situational obedience, love as its fulfilment is *occasionalist*. This means that its addressee can only recognize God's will here and now¹⁴⁷⁶. However, this recognition is not abrupt and abstract. Rather, it is always performed on the basis of the previous historical revelation of God's will witnessed to in Scripture. Thus, God's command is eminently situational, but it always happens according to *paradigms of love*. These are examples of the intentionality of God's will in the concrete situations of life as the reality within which human being is addressed by the

¹⁴⁶⁸ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 93. A great deal has been written on Brunner's orders of creation and their significance for his understanding of theological ethics. A very short but clear analysis is provided for instance by PAUCK, W., "Barthian Theological Ethics", *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 13, iss. 3 (1933), pp. 349-351. The author reviews Brunner's masterwork *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443).

¹⁴⁶⁹ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 115.

¹⁴⁷⁰ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 114.

¹⁴⁷¹ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 116.

¹⁴⁷² BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 118.

¹⁴⁷³ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 120.

¹⁴⁷⁴ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 132.

¹⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷⁶ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), pp. 134f.

command and called to obedience in love¹⁴⁷⁷. These paradigms describing the inner grammar of God's command are the commandments, whose fundamental structure is embodied by the Decalogue¹⁴⁷⁸. At any rate, Brunner's understanding of God's command centers on its qualitative difference from the Law. In contrast to the latter, the former results from the assurance of grace. In other words, it is a salvation event¹⁴⁷⁹ spontaneously united with God's will¹⁴⁸⁰. Accordingly, God's command entails freedom *from* the Law and breaks fundamentally with all legal logics. Through the Spirit, the justified is claimed by the command and enabled to obey the living Lord, not the ambiguous Law. Therefore, obedience is possible and real only with reference to the command. Instead, the Law is constitutively unable to fulfill God's will¹⁴⁸¹. This is because, unlike the command, it is not a reality of grace immediately inhabited by the Spirit. For Brunner, God's command is a pneumatological category. It is the Spirit who actualizes love, thus truly enabling obedience. Thereby, the Spirit also manifests the essential interconnection between the command and grace. As real obedience, love is God's grace communicating itself, and not the result of human being's activistic keeping of the Law. As such, love remains barred to the Law, so that the two realities end up having opposite qualifications. While the first is non-rational, historically bound¹⁴⁸², ecstatic¹⁴⁸³ and individualizing, the second is rational, universal, immanent and based on reciprocity. Correspondingly, from the point of view of theological ethics, Brunner's understanding of God's command implies that the Law is disqualified because it remains unable to attain love, which is not a legal reality, but a spiritual one. Accordingly, love is regarded as the material identification of the "I" with the "Thou" which can only result from justification¹⁴⁸⁴. Precisely because it comes from justification, love is the end of the Law. As the justified is called to live in the freedom of obedience, non-legal love takes the form of God's command and becomes the motivational power of agency¹⁴⁸⁵ guiding the justified towards consummation.

According to Brunner, consummation is a fundamental soteriological category which refers to the eschatological coming of Christ in glory. From the perspective of faith as human being's encounter with God¹⁴⁸⁶, consummation is the final manifestation of the *parousia*. Put otherwise, it is the fully

¹⁴⁷⁷ BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 135.

¹⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷⁹ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 307.

¹⁴⁸⁰ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 306.

¹⁴⁸¹ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 308.

¹⁴⁸² This means that love is inseparable from the christological event. Therefore, it is particular and concrete in its essence.

¹⁴⁸³ In Brunner's categories, the ecstatic character of both love and faith qualifies them as realities of the Spirit. Here, "ecstatic" refers to the Reformational *extra se* category. Ecstatic (or extrinsic) categories are those which aptly describe the situation of the justified as one whose center of personhood has been truly and effectively placed in Jesus Christ, so that the ultimate truth about him has become the ultimate truth about them, too. By saying that love is ecstatic just like faith, Brunner is defending the legitimacy of a theological understanding of the ethical category *par excellence*.

¹⁴⁸⁴ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 309.

¹⁴⁸⁵ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 312.

¹⁴⁸⁶ For Brunner's understanding of faith as encounter, see BROWN, C. B., "The Personal Imperative of Revelation. Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics and Theological Existence*", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65/4 (2012), pp. 421-434, here p. 432.

revealed and future presence of that which is already now present *sub contraria specie*¹⁴⁸⁷. Correspondingly, the category of consummation refers to the final, positive fulfillment of the salvation which has already come in Christ. With that, the category is conceptualized by Brunner as a direct implication of the Christ event, a clear illustration of the soteriological significance of the cross. Therefore, consummation clearly shows that the dimension of futurity inherently belongs to faith¹⁴⁸⁸. Thus, for Brunner, rejecting the soteriological legitimacy of consummation entails a fundamental misunderstanding and even an amputation of the christological event¹⁴⁸⁹. This is because the *parousia* is the fullness of revelation, so that a faith without consummation could only be a faith (impossibly) remaining in concealment¹⁴⁹⁰. Since it refers to the final event, consummation is constitutively unimaginable and wholly other in relation to historical existence as it is. At the same time, it is *not* wholly other with reference to the new reality which has already been fully actualized by God in the christological event¹⁴⁹¹. Rather, consummation is precisely the full manifestation of this new reality, the final transformation of faith into sight¹⁴⁹². In other words, for Brunner, this category necessarily belongs to faith, and it illuminates its messianic character. More precisely, it helps faith interpret the delay of the fulfillment of reconciliation as the expression of God's concern for creation, which is not yet ready for the *eschaton*¹⁴⁹³. Accordingly, consummation is the ultimate goal of God's self-revelation, thus illustrating the cosmic significance of the christological event¹⁴⁹⁴. With that, Brunner means that eschatology belongs directly to the very concept of God's self-revelation, which necessarily concerns both the origin and final destiny of the world¹⁴⁹⁵. Ultimately, in his perspective, the theological legitimacy and necessity of the category of consummation depends on the fact that God's self-revelation makes it impossible to arbitrarily secularize the dimension of the future. Just like the past and the present, the future belongs to God's self-revelation. Specifically, He makes Himself known in the past through *faith* in the christological event, in the present through *love* as a reality of the Spirit and in the future through *hope* for the full manifestation and universalization of that which is already actual in faith and love¹⁴⁹⁶. Thus, in Brunner's account, consummation immediately belongs to the Christian confession of faith and cannot be removed from it. As a consequence, faith necessarily confesses that God's will is both the cause and the *telos* of the

¹⁴⁸⁷ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 394.

¹⁴⁸⁸ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 395.

¹⁴⁸⁹ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 397.

¹⁴⁹⁰ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 396.

¹⁴⁹¹ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 398.

¹⁴⁹² BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 399. Cf. 2 Cor 5,7.

¹⁴⁹³ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 400.

¹⁴⁹⁴ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 425.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁶ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 395.

world¹⁴⁹⁷. This statement does not only posit the necessity and legitimacy of consummation as a soteriological category; it also implies the need to understand it in close reference to justification doctrine. Specifically, for Brunner, consummation is the *cosmic expansion* of the forgiveness of sin¹⁴⁹⁸. In justification, human being is addressed by God as (the divine “Thou”¹⁴⁹⁹), and this address produces faith. As a consequence, the justified believes in the forgiveness of sins. This very belief, however, is not self-contained, but necessarily implies belief in consummation as the extension of justification to the whole cosmos. This is because, for Brunner, it is impossible to believe in Jesus as the Christ without also believing in Him as the one in whom the Creator has spoken and acted in the beginning and will speak and act in the end, too¹⁵⁰⁰. In short, justifying faith is that which ultimately founds the legitimacy and necessity of the category of consummation¹⁵⁰¹. This is because this same faith understands human being as dependent on God, therefore also created by Him and destined for Him¹⁵⁰². As a consequence, according to Brunner, justification doctrine implies that what is true of the being of the justified is also true of the being of the world. Similarly, one’s being as a *creature* is not thinkable without a generalization of creatureliness to include the whole world¹⁵⁰³. For Brunner, the same applies to the question of the meaning and *telos* of history¹⁵⁰⁴. Because the world is God’s creation, *therefore* history has a meaning. However, Brunner is *not* defending an intra-historical teleology of history. In and of itself, history has no meaning. The *telos* towards which God directs it is eschatological. Additionally, it is qualified both negatively and positively. Negatively, the fulfillment of history means the overcoming of the four “powers” which obscure and negate Christ’s lordship in it: The Law, sin, “Satan” and death¹⁵⁰⁵. Positively, it means that God’s “Thou” is fully revealed as the true life of human being who is finally manifested as His son or daughter¹⁵⁰⁶. According to Brunner, in both its negative and positive dimensions, consummation ultimately entails the uncontested uncovering (*apokalypsis*) of the creaturely perfection of the world¹⁵⁰⁷. As it derives its certainty from the Word of justification, consummation concerns both the historicity of the justified¹⁵⁰⁸ and the reality of the whole world. The two dimensions cannot be separated. In short, for

¹⁴⁹⁷ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 426.

¹⁴⁹⁸ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), pp. 426f.

¹⁴⁹⁹ In Brunner’s theology, the category of personal encounter is a paradigm which shapes anthropology as well as justification doctrine. For a detailed account, see, at large, BROWN, C. B., “The Personal Imperative of Revelation” (see note 1486).

¹⁵⁰⁰ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 427.

¹⁵⁰¹ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 428.

¹⁵⁰² BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 427.

¹⁵⁰³ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 428.

¹⁵⁰⁴ For Brunner’s own discussion of the question of a teleology of history, see BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), pp. 367-374.

¹⁵⁰⁵ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 436.

¹⁵⁰⁶ BRUNNER, E., Dogmatics, vol. 3 (see note 1458), p. 438.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰⁸ See note 1069.

Brunner, consummation is the theological category interpreting the semantics of eternal life and the Kingdom of God¹⁵⁰⁹.

To conclude, for Brunner, ethics belongs to dogmatics. It is not a separate discipline derived from faith, but the science of good conduct issuing from the correct distinction between the Law and love. An ethics of principles is to be rejected because no pre-determined definition of the good holds. Only love, which is not a principle, concretely fulfils God's will, while the Law remains too abstract. Love is demanded by God's command, which is not Law but grace. The command, which meets human being within the orders of creation, is an unprecedented vertical event, and yet it happens according to horizontal paradigms of God's revelation. Consummation is a fundamental soteriological category directly implied by justification. The justified rests assured that their sin has been forgiven by the same God who acted and will act until the whole of creation will attain its *telos*.

3.3. A Critical Assessment of W. Mostert's Position on Ethics and Justification

In Part 3, I have studied Mostert's understanding of the relationship between justification doctrine and ethics, as well as some of its relevant theological implications. Once again, Mostert's position was first studied in parallel with Ebeling's, then in juxtaposition with theological alternatives. Like in Parts 1 and 2, the selection of the alternatives was not dictated by stringent necessity. As a matter of fact, Mostert does not include a critical analysis of any theological alternatives when elaborating on the relationship between theology and ethics. However, the selection was not arbitrary either. On the contrary, the intensive study of Mostert's account has illuminated the possibility of a redefinition of the question at hand. Assessing whether his perspective truly overcomes some weaknesses of the alternatives has been the task posed by the research question in this Part 3. The juxtaposition of Mostert's theology and the alternatives has enabled a critical dialogue aimed at understanding the relationship between the theology of justification and ethics. The goal of the analysis has been to hopefully provide new impulses for Protestant theology today. Thus, the study of Mostert's discourse in the wake of Ebeling and in enriching confrontation with the theological alternatives has once again functioned as a probe and an exemplification of its potential, relevance and inner merit. The analysis has found that Mostert does not construe a *via media* between the alternatives. Instead, his understanding of the relationship between the theology of justification and ethics immediately derives from his intensification of his own categories. At the same time, precisely by deepening itself, Mostert's theology does intercept some of the core concerns of the alternatives. This indicates that

¹⁵⁰⁹ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), pp. 439f.

his categories remain fruitful for the theological endeavor in general. This, in my view, justifies once more the structure of my study as well as the analysis of the theological alternatives included within it.

In Mostert's perspective, justification doctrine is the vantage point to understand the overall relationship between theology and ethics. As was shown in Parts 1 and 2, this doctrine, for him, provides the one true answer to human being's fundamental soteriological problem. The study carried out in Part 3 provides further clarity on Mostert's ontology of justification. Specifically, the critical and polemical juxtaposition of justification doctrine and ethics determines human being's fundamental problem as the question of the world's *modification*. This determination, in Mostert's view, shows that justification doctrine and ethics stand both in proximity and in categorical contraposition. The proximity depends on the fact that both disciplines react to evil in the world by trying to outline the soteriological modification needed for it to be overcome. The contraposition becomes manifest because ethics and justification are associated with opposing views of this modification. For Mostert, only justification provides the true soteriological answer to human being's problem as it alone understands the question of the world's modification *theologically*. From this understanding follows an equally theological view of God and human being, the subjects always already involved in the soteriological question. One could claim that, in Mostert's view, the *relationship* between theology and ethics is a consequence of the very ontology of justification. However, my study has convinced me that this is not the case. Rather, that relationship is *itself* justification, now viewed not in its foundation (Part 1) or in its ontology (Part 2), but from the perspective of what it *polemically excludes*. To be clear, I am not arguing that a material ethics possibly derived from justification is itself justification¹⁵¹⁰. Rather, I am saying that the *relationship* between ethics and justification belongs to justification doctrine and does not simply follow from it. At a later point, I will show that a similar reasoning applies to Mostert's ecclesiology (Part 4). At any rate, he never abandons the realm of justification doctrine. For him, the relationship between justification and ethics clarifies what justification *excludes* when aptly understood as the true soteriological answer to human being's fundamental problem. That is why this relationship does not become involved with justification only secondarily but belongs primarily to it. Similarly, Mostert's ecclesiology also belongs to justification and illustrates what is *included* in it when human being's fundamental problem is aptly solved.

In Part 3, I first broke down Mostert's (and Ebeling's) understanding of the relationship between ethics and justification and focused on the three questions which, in my judgment, inherently belong to it: the articulation of theology and ethics, the fulfillment of the Law, and the legitimacy of

¹⁵¹⁰ See 3.3.1.

consummation (*Vollendung*) as a soteriological category. As a matter of fact, these questions are the *loci* where both the proximity and the categorical contraposition of ethics and justification doctrine become clearly manifest in Mostert's thinking. I treated the articulation of theology and ethics as *the first question* because it is the broadest one and aptly introduces the other two. Specifically, studying how theology and ethics interact and how they are positioned before the soteriological question implies a clearly profiled view of what they *are*. By juxtaposing them, the specificities and depths of both are made to emerge. Consequently, it becomes clear that both are faced with the fundamental problem of human being's existence and assessed based on how effectively they face it. Here, the emerging theological constellations include (a1.) positions which account for both the extreme proximity and the impassable conflictuality between dogmatics and ethics, with the resulting disqualification of ethics as soteriology; (b1.) perspectives whereby ethics somehow derives from dogmatics, so that their relationship is understood as a demarcation of competences; and (c1.) views in which dogmatics and ethics belong together and are mutually interrelated because they ultimately express two aspects of one and the same theological reality. Theoretically, it would also be possible to conceptualize the relationship by defending (d.) views in which dogmatics is utterly rejected as meaningless and fully replaced by ethics. However, this last option does not deserve any consideration in the present study, as it is wholly non-theological. The *second question* derives immediately from the first, because, as I have observed, in all the studied theological positions the articulation of ethics and theology always mirrors the one of Law and Gospel. Thus, the demarcation of the ethical domain in reference to dogmatics overlaps with the distinction between the sphere of the Law and that of the Gospel. In particular, the more a theological position disqualifies ethics as a soteriologically competent discipline, the more it correspondingly focuses on the ambiguity of the Law and its clear distinction from the Gospel. Instead, the more ethics is considered to be in continuity with dogmatics (and therefore included within soteriology), the weaker the resulting account of the ambiguity of the legal instance, and the stronger the proximity between Law and Gospel. In my analysis, both the ambiguity of the Law and its demarcation from the Gospel are aspects of the questions of the fulfillment of the Law: How can an ambiguous Law be fulfilled and how does the Gospel interfere with its fulfillment? Specifically, the second part of the question demands a theological qualification of that which fulfills the Law, namely love (*agape*). Here, the possibilities which have emerged include (a2.) understandings of love as a categorically non-ethical reality resulting from the end of the Law; (b2.) views whereby love is an ethical principle actualized as a spiritual and motivational force and lying beyond (the scope of) the Law, but not categorically different from it; and (c2.) positions claiming that love is the responsive reality which aptly intercepts the occasionalist, unprecedented and free event of the encounter between a qualitatively different kind of Law (God's

command) and human being as its addressee. In my study, the *third question* deepens the second and completes the semantic horizon opened up by the first. As a matter of fact, the question of the soteriological legitimacy of consummation can be regarded as the problem of the historicity and teleology of love. In this perspective, love is the reality actualized by the salvation event. So, the semantics of consummation try and provide a theological account of how the historicity of justification is impacted by Jesus Christ as the true and final modification of the world in Person. Now, for Mostert, the question of the world's modification is the soteriological problem as such. Accordingly, both ethics and justification are concerned with it. Therefore, it is impossible to thoroughly analyze and truly understand his view of the relationship between ethics and justification doctrine without determining whether or not consummation is a legitimate soteriological category. On this point, the studied theological positions only allow for two possibilities. Specifically, the alternative is between (a3.) views which deny the legitimacy or the need for consummation as a soteriological category because they consider it a dangerous postponing or a mythological redundancy not adding anything to justification; and (b3.) perspectives which maintain consummation as a vital part of soteriology because it accounts for elements which inherently belong to the salvation event and its correct interpretations.

After studying Mostert's perspective, I have kept the same threefold breakdown of questions when discussing the theological alternatives. These include what I have called the "theologies of *agape*" (W. Pannenberg and P. Tillich) on the one hand and the "ethical theologies" (K. Barth and E. Brunner) on the other. Once again, the selection of the alternatives was not dictated by strict necessity. Rather, it wants to be an exemplary representation of the intrinsic potential of Mostert's theology for critical contribution. In the present study, this potential appears to be always located in the intensity with which he tackles justification doctrine as the core and criteriological observation point for theology as a whole. As a result, his thinking paves the way for the possibility to overcome the weaknesses of the alternatives. This possibility can only be illuminated indirectly in my research, since Mostert never directly engages with the alternatives.

In my account, I identified the *principle of agape* as the core of Tillich and Pannenberg's views of the relationship between theology and ethics. In this approach, the reality of love is the deep truth of the ethical endeavor and the domain which connects it with and theology in the proper way. Between the two disciplines there exists a demarcation of competences, which however results from the deep unity between them. This deep unity is effected by *agape*, which belongs both to the theological and to the ethical domain. As such, *agape* is the spiritual (not legal) and ecstatic reality which truly meets the (ethical) demands of the legal imperative, thus also intercepting and qualifying the semantics of consummation anew.

When it comes to Barth and Brunner's perspectives, their view of the relationship between ethics and theology is one of mutual penetration and interconnection. For this reason, I have described the positions held by these theologians as *ethical theologies*. Here, the deep unity between the two disciplines does not derive from a shared principle belonging to their semantics. Rather, it results from the consistency and conclusiveness of God's performative agency, which calls into being both human being's response and the manifestation of consummation as the reconciliation of the whole world. Thus, for this alternative, ethics as the study of human being's conduct belongs to a theology of God's Word, because good handling results from His agency in Jesus Christ and illustrates the possibility of human being's free obedience to His sovereignty.

Before criticizing Mostert's position in contact with the theological alternatives, a terminological clarification is in order. My research question asks whether his *theology of justification* can usefully contribute to reshape core questions for Christian theology today. In Part 3, this question has been observed from the point of view of the relationship between justification and ethics. As was already shown, for Mostert, justification doctrine is not simply one theological question among others. Rather, it is the clearest illustration of what theology is. Specifically, theological discourse is the critical reflection on God, human being and the world in their overall relationality. The *theological* about theology is precisely this relationality kept as the constant point of observation. Justification doctrine is the concrete explanation of what this relationality is about. The immediate proximity between justification doctrine and theology as a whole is a pivotal element in Mostert's thinking. Now, this proximity concerns the contents of his discourse, therefore also his language. For this reason, in this Part, I have quite freely alternated between the words "theology" and "justification doctrine". This is in line with Mostert's own understanding. Of course, I am well aware that the two are not simply synonyms. However, I have deliberately chosen to employ this loose differentiation because my study is dedicated to Mostert's theology. For him, the difference between theology and justification doctrine is a matter of intensification. The object of the two is one and the same, the overall relationality between God, human being and the world. Therefore, also their semantics intertwine. Within Mostert's categories, the semantic identification between theology as a whole and justification doctrine (as its core) simply depends on how directly the theological object is treated. The more intensified its discourse becomes, the more directly theology appears in its immediacy as justification doctrine. For this reason, I believe that my usage of "theology" and "justification doctrine" as synonyms is justified in this context and with reference to Mostert's thinking. Of course, my semantic choice would not have been justified if the study had focused first and foremost on one or more of the theological alternatives. But since the emphasis is on Mostert, I have based my language on his categories, and not on those of the alternatives. Nevertheless, I have carefully avoided to arbitrarily

generalize his understanding of the relationship between theology as a whole and justification doctrine. For this reason, when covering the alternatives, I more often preferred the wording “ethics and theology” rather than “ethics and justification doctrine”. At any rate, the point of Part 3 has been consistently one and the same, regardless of the terminology employed: to study the relationship between the theological and the ethical moment.

In my analysis, I have encountered some weaknesses concerning Mostert’s understanding of the relationship between ethics and justification. In order to try and provide a solid answer to the research question, it is now necessary to tackle them. In what follows, I will therefore criticize Mostert’s position on the topic at hand, also in light of the theological alternatives included in my research. Specifically, my critique will develop the following points: the question of a foundation of material ethics on justification doctrine (3.3.1.); the ambiguity of Mostert’s anthropology of human being as a receiver (3.3.2.); the problem of the historicization of the Law in his theology (3.3.3.); His treatment of consummation within hamartiology (3.3.4.); the question of a teleology of history (3.3.5.).

3.3.1. Material Ethics and Justification Doctrine

Mostert’s understanding of the relationship between ethics and justification centers around their contrast. For him, the two provide conflictual, thus incompatible solutions to human being’s fundamental problem. Specifically, he argues that justification doctrine has exclusive jurisdiction on soteriology. This deprives ethics of the deep dimension from which its soteriological overload derives. This derivation is illegitimate because ethics, which is a legal phenomenon, is constitutively unable to solve the soteriological problem. Thus, the ethical failure at delivering salvation mirrors precisely the disqualification of the Law as a saving reality. According to Mostert, justification doctrine legitimately claims sovereignty over soteriology because it aptly intercepts the Gospel as the one, true soteriological reality, and describes how its good indicative disqualifies the Law and abolishes its imperative. This means that, for Mostert, the relationship between ethics and justification issues directly from the categorical difference between Law and Gospel. In soteriology, a harmonious coordination of the two is impossible, because they express the qualitative incompatibility of two conflicting languages. The linguistic determination (*Sprachlichkeit*) of the Law is its *imperative*. In the interaction with sinners, this mood always demands the actualization of true reality. Instead, the determination of the Gospel is its *indicative*, which effects a new anthropological qualification of sinners by addressing them in a way which simply *communicates* true reality rather than demanding it. In Mostert’s relational-ontological categories, the ethical and the theological dimensions are *ontologically* different. Within the ontology of ethics, a specific determination of God, human being

and the world originates. This determination is categorically incompatible with the one appearing within the ontology of justification. As a consequence, ethics *cannot* derive from justification doctrine. As a matter of fact, such a derivation would mean that the triad of God, human being and the world would be understood identically by ideological ethics¹⁵¹¹ and by theology. Now, this is impossible, because the ethical understanding of the triad is ontologically different from the theological one. Specifically, the way in which God, human being and the world interact with one another within ideological ethics is determined by the Law as a linguistic reality informed by the imperative. Instead, the way in which they relate within theology is determined by the Gospel and its gracious, creative indicative. Since Mostert's ontology is relational, the way in which the members of the triad interact illustrates their very qualification, it says who and what they *are*. Therefore, God, human being and the world are *not* the same within ethics as within theology. For this reason, Mostert excludes the possibility of founding material ethics on justification doctrine¹⁵¹².

In my view, he is right in pointing out the categorical difference between justification doctrine and ethics. However, I argue that this categorical difference is only valid as long as both disciplines remain concerned with the soteriological problem. When this is the case, Mostert aptly shows that ethics functions *ideologically*, thus illegitimately occupying soteriology. In other words, the ontological difference between justification and ethics results from both disciplines dealing with the soteriological problem. However, if this is true, then it is the ideological dimension of ethics, not the ethical endeavor as such, that produces the specific ethical ontology which is incompatible with the ontology of justification doctrine and makes it impossible to derive material ethics from it. With Mostert, I maintain that the contents of an ideological ethics cannot be derived from justification doctrine. This is because the former works with determinations of God, human being and the world which are totally incompatible with the latter, and vice versa. However, unlike him, I think that a reduction of ethics as such to its ideological dimension is abstract and arbitrary. When criticizing Mostert's category of freedom from the Law¹⁵¹³, I argued against his imprecise and problematic identification between the Law and its curse. A critique along the same lines needs to be pressed here. For Mostert, the impossibility to disentangle the Law from its curse is mirrored by the corresponding impossibility to separate the ethical endeavor from its ideological dimension. Undoubtedly, this correspondence illuminates the overall coherence of his theology. Therefore, as I criticized his position on the freedom from the Law, I now need to also criticize his corresponding thesis on material ethics and justification. Since the first position implies the second, my first critique also implies the second. In my view, Mostert's account is problematic because it abstractly limits the liberation truly

¹⁵¹¹ For clarification on my use of "ideological ethics", see note 1183.

¹⁵¹² See here, p. 179.

¹⁵¹³ See 2.3.1.

communicated by the good language of the Gospel. For him, the Gospel liberates from the Law, but it does not liberate the Law. This position rightly maintains the constitutive ambiguity of the legal instance and disqualifies it as a soteriological reality. However, in my opinion, the price paid to follow Mostert is too high. Specifically, his account ultimately regards the Law itself as an impassable limit for the Gospel. Thus, the good language of the Gospel, which can effectively liberate the sinner from their sin, is not equally capable of liberating to liberate the Law from its curse, its indicative from its imperative. Coherently, theological discourse aptly disqualifies ethics as a soteriological ideology, but it does not have the resources to liberate the former from the latter. In my view, this needs to be criticized. With Mostert, I argue that, in its competitive and conflictual interaction with ethics, justification doctrine dismantles the ideological dimension of the ethical discourse. This means that justification doctrine shows the constitutive soteriological incompetence of ethics. However, against Mostert, I claim that the dismantling of its ideological dimension effects the *liberation* of ethics, not its disappearance. Ethics is a phenomenon which is co-positing with life and cannot simply cease to exist. By refusing to disconnect this phenomenon from its ideological dimension, Mostert's position creates a principle-based separation between justification and ethics. While this separation is correct within soteriology, it must not be absolutized. Its generalization, in my view, neglects that ethics does *not* dissolve when met with the justification event. As a life phenomenon, it keeps existing. Accordingly, theology has to account for the continued existence of an ethical endeavor aptly deprived of its ideological dimension. Similarly, the justified does not dissolve when addressed by the *kerygma*. Instead, they keep existing as a justified sinner, now no longer determined by their sin, but by God's righteousness.

If my critique holds, then it is indeed possible and theologically legitimate to derive material ethical consequences from justification doctrine. This position is rejected by Mostert, and yet, in my opinion, it does not break fundamentally with his theology. As a matter of fact, an ethics of justification in the sense defended in my critique can only be an account deprived of all soteriological claims. Therefore, it can only be radically non-ideological in Mostert's sense. Specifically, I have in mind an ethics that the Gospel makes free and responsible by disentangling it from its illegitimate soteriological concern. At this point, clarification is in order. In my judgment, a material ethics stemming from justification is legitimate and necessary. However, it is *not* the same thing as justification, it does not immediately belong to it and illustrate its truth, it does not make it concrete. Justification is concrete because and as long as salvation is concrete. Its concreteness does not strictly depend on its ethical consequences. Thus, while the relationship between justification doctrine and ethics inherently belongs to the former and is not its consequence¹⁵¹⁴, the same is not true for a

¹⁵¹⁴ See here, p. 215. In Part 4, I am going to show that the same concerns ecclesiology.

material ethics of justification. This is indeed a *consequence* of justification, and not justification itself seen from a different angle. I introduced here my considerations on the distinction between justification and its consequences because they show on which basis material ethics can legitimately be derived from justification. In my view, for the derivation to be legitimate it is necessary to maintain two points. First of all, as was illustrated, material ethics can be meaningfully derived from justification provided that a distinction between the two is maintained. On this first point, as I argued above, it is necessary to depart from Mostert, who conversely rejects the possibility of this derivation. Secondly, the derivation makes sense only as long as the ensuing ethical account is not ideological in Mostert's sense. For example, this account cannot be an ethics of principles which demands absolute validity and claims explicit or covert soteriological jurisdiction. In general, an ethics of justification is only possible if utterly deprived of all soteriological claims. This is because salvation is truly communicated in the good indicative of the Gospel, not in the ambiguous imperative of the Law. Correspondingly, in my judgment, a material ethics can be truly based on justification if it conforms to its ontology. In other words, it must abide by the precise and concrete qualifications of God, human being and the world that are determined by the Gospel, and not by the Law. These qualifications are given in and with the salvation event and are communicated within faith. With Mostert, I argued that the conflict between justification and ideological ethics is ontological. Accordingly, it is a battle to define who God and human being are and what their world is. Thus, a Reformational material ethics deriving from justification doctrine can only be shaped by the ontology of justification. Only so can it be alien to the curse of the Law and not in contrast with the indicative of the Gospel. So, my critique intercepts Mostert's position in a complex manner, in which disagreement and agreement intertwine. The disagreement concerns his refusal to derive material ethics from justification. Instead, the agreement refers to his interpretation of the conflict between justification and ethics as an ontological-relational question.

3.3.2. Human Being as a Receiver: Clarification

From the point of view of Mostert's theological anthropology, the disqualification of ideological ethics as a soteriologically competent discipline entails the rejection of an activist understanding of human being. For him, the basic anthropological assumption supporting ideological ethics is that human being is verified in their actions. Instead, justification doctrine does *not* posit their verification in their actions, but in the language addressing them within experience (*Erfahrung*). Thus, as was already explained, Mostert views human being not as a doer, but as a *receiver*. In his categories, the incompatibility of ethics and justification doctrine stems from the fact that the two disciplines work

with two opposing anthropologies. Ethical ideology in Mostert's sense necessarily requires what I would call an *imperative anthropology*. Thereby I mean an activist understanding of human being which issues directly from the Law's imperative (mis)heard by them as a soteriological call for the restitution of true reality. To the contrary, justification doctrine clearly implies an *indicative anthropology*. With this term, I refer to a conception of human being which draws on the Gospel's indicative heard by them as a liberating language and, through this sheer hearing (*sola fide*), also immediately received by them as a true reality. The reason why I decided to qualify the opposing anthropologies as "imperative" and "indicative" is that, in Mostert's ontological-relational categories, the determination of human being is a linguistic event. They are not defined metaphysically based on their nature, but relationally, starting from the overall relationality between them, God and the world¹⁵¹⁵. Thus, the verification of human being (the determination of who they are as subjects in the world) is co-positing linguistically and depends on *what kind* of language (*Sprachlichkeit*) intercepts them within their existence. Therefore, in Mostert's understanding, the determination of human being is *always* the result of their being involved with an addressing reality.

In explicit theological terms¹⁵¹⁶, there are two addressing realities: the Law and the Gospel. The Law belongs to reality as it is (the conditions of existence), even though at the same time it participates in structuring it. Specifically, it expresses the very structure of all life phenomena and reproduces them in its historicization. This means that the Law perpetuates itself again and again through all the historical instances in which it repeats its address. This repetition determines reality imperatively. In other words, it points to true reality from a distance and calls for its actualization. Now, the continuous happening of the Law within existence necessarily meets human being, who is the relational being *par excellence*. Accordingly, they become the addressee of the Law, in that they hear its imperative as a soteriological call. Therefore, Mostert's categories imply an immediate connection between the imperative of the Law (and ideological ethics) and activist anthropology. This connection is *not* accidental, it is not a secondary determination of human being. Under the conditions of existence, human being is co-positing by the Law as being-in-the-imperative. Hamartologically, this corresponds to the fact that they do not become a sinner accidentally and secondarily, by way of their actions. Rather, they *are* one immediately and primarily, as they are the addressee of the imperative. Contrary to the Law, the Gospel does not belong to the conditions of existence. Rather, it is *ecstatic*, it does not participate in the legal structure of all life phenomena but is qualitatively different from them. Accordingly, it communicates true reality, and it does not reproduce the conditions of existence. In

¹⁵¹⁵ This is the core of Mostert's anthropology. However, I have pointed out that this tenet is not coherently maintained throughout his theology. In fact, in his doctrine of the previously given good, Mostert abandons his relational ontology in favor of a metaphysical one. For a detailed explanation, see 1.3.1.

¹⁵¹⁶ For the categories of explicit and implicit theology in Mostert (and Ebeling), see 1.3.2.

contrast to the Law – which, in its historicization, operates the repetition of reality as it is –, the historical-*kerygmatic* event of the Gospel entails its *interruption*. This interruption creates the space for true reality, reality as it should be. Thus, the event of the Gospel determines reality indicatively. In other words, it simply introduces true reality in the midst of existence, overcoming all distance from it and thereby silencing all calls for its actualization. In contrast to the Law, the event of the Gospel does not meet human being necessarily, but *graciously*. This is because it is ecstatic and does not belong to the legal phenomena of life which are necessary components of reality as it is. By meeting human being in the dimension of grace, the Gospel does not intercept them as a doer. Instead, it determines them as a receiver, namely someone who is of a new, unprecedented quality (*Beschaffenheit*) and does not issue necessarily from legal reality but unexpectedly springs out of the non-legal dimension of givenness. Correspondingly, in the Gospel, human being becomes being-in-the-indicative. In light of the above, I believe that Mostert's relational anthropology needs to be followed, because it convincingly accounts for the radical, impassable qualitative difference between Law and Gospel, sin and grace. By means of his ontological-relational categories, he correctly shows that anthropology *belongs* to soteriology and is not a secondary *addendum* to it. Human being truly *changes* depending on how their relationality with God, themselves and the world unfolds. Specifically, for Mostert, the change becomes visible when the question of the verification of human being (the core anthropological question) is raised. While the sinner is one who is verified in their acting, the justified is verified in their receiving. So far, I believe that his position is correct, and that theological anthropology needs to define human being as a receiver. At the same time, his account needs clarification precisely on this point.

Specifically, I argue that Mostert does not qualify human being as a receiver clearly enough. In my judgment, saying only, with him, that human being is a receiver does not sufficiently break with the category of agency. As a matter of fact, his view of human being as a receiver risks remaining ambiguously open to misinterpretation. Unless properly qualified, the receiver may be (mis)understood as one who does *not* act. Therefore, Mostert's anthropology needs to be prolonged and completed with a clear definition of the receiver. In my understanding, the definition needs to point to the category of reception as a *categorical break* with the semantics of *agency*. Mostert's account rightly concentrates on delegitimizing *action* as the verification *locus* of human being. In my view, this is correct but insufficient. Not only action, but agency in all its dimensions needs to be disqualified. In the definition that I propose, agency encompasses both action and inaction, soteriological activism as well as the corresponding quietism. Thus, I understand Mostert's anthropology of the receiver as the fundamental interruption of human being's activism *and quietism*. Expanding on the interconnection between anthropology, the doctrine of the Law and the ethical

discourse, I propose to interpret quietism and *inaction* as a manifestation of ideological ethics. Specifically, a receiver interpreted as a non-doer remains a doer, albeit somehow *sub contraria specie*. Now, since the determination of human being as a doer *belongs* to the Law, it is *ipso facto* categorically incompatible with the Gospel. As a consequence, a qualification of human being as a non-doer remains captive to legal categories. In other words, it does not break with the language (*Sprachlichkeit*) of the Law but rather confirms and historicizes it once again, therefore remaining barred to the Gospel and its gracious reality. In my view, the *in-activistic* determination of the receiver as a non-doer is simply a new, ideologically conservative version of its activistic and progressive *pendant* which views human being as a doer and against which Mostert legitimately focuses his efforts. If my critique holds, then the receiver needs to be described in a way which emphasizes the categorical break with all crypto-political versions of anthropology. While these support and reiterate the verification of human being *within their agency* (meaning both their action and their inaction), theological anthropology breaks with their categories altogether and employs non-ethical, non-political semantics instead. Therefore, I claim that the receiver is human being removed from agency as the dimension of their verification. This removal both follows and mirrors the event of the Gospel. In this extrinsic event, God is made known to human being not as the gracious One whom they need to attain, but as the One who *already is* gracious, and therefore is a reliable subject and object of hope. Correspondingly, in the same event, human being becomes manifest not as the one who makes themselves a receiver by acting or not acting, but as the one who is always *already made* a receiver by God's prevenient grace. Furthermore, the clarification of the anthropology of the receiver has relevant implications concerning the relationship between ethics and theology. This is because this relationship needs to be understood in close contact with the articulation of Law and Gospel, therefore also with anthropology. Specifically, in my opinion, an integrated and revised anthropology of the receiver clarifies the impossibility to annex the theological domain to the ethical-political one. Accordingly, the irreducible specificity and proper qualification of theological discourse is maintained against all non-theological reductionism. By insisting on human being as a receiver, that is someone whose verification fundamentally escapes agency, theological discourse vindicates the irreducible specificity of its own anthropology. Simultaneously, it also critically shows the constitutive limits of an often undisputed ethical-political determination of human being as one who is verified in their agency. Therefore, a clarification of Mostert's anthropology of the receiver is necessary. In particular, it could help bring theology and ideological ethics in critical contact before the exemplary question of who human being is, thus showing that theological discourse is qualitatively different from the ethical-political one. From a theological perspective, compatibility

between the two is only possible once the second has been deprived of its ideological dimension in Mostert's sense.

3.3.3. The Historicization and Historicity of the Law

According to Mostert, the Law is not first and foremost a historical reality. Rather, it is to be understood ontologically as a linguistic phenomenon of life which is co-positd with it and *before* its manifestations within existence. Thus, the Law as an ontological reality is good, and its goodness is the content of the original order (*Urordnung*) of reality as it should be. Accordingly, the legal instance *precedes* the occurrences in which its imperative resonates within specific historical situations. In Mostert's discourse, the historicization of the Law is the category which describes the resonating of the impartive within existence. The legal instance, for him, *becomes historicized* by resonating within reality as it is in order to point to reality as it should be. In other words, the Law in its historicized manifestations is a pointer to the Law in its ontological determination, the imperative is a pointer to the indicative¹⁵¹⁷. Now, for Mostert, the historicization of the Law is to be understood hamartiologically. The Law becomes historically manifest *nomos* because, in its historicization, it encounters human being as a sinner. By becoming historical, the Law as the carrier of good reality meets human beings as those who have broken it. In this encounter, both acquire a definite determination by interacting with each other. Specifically, the Law becomes determined by its *imperative*, and human being by their *sin*. As a consequence, for Mostert, the historicization of the Law is due to human being's sin and vice versa. I would argue that, here, a *circular relationship* is posited between the historicization of the Law and the sinner. On the one hand, the first *depends on* the second. Since human being has always already sinned, they can only encounter the Law in its condemning the destruction of good reality carried out by them and calling for its restitution. On the other hand, the historicization of the Law *produces* the sinner. This is because, when meeting human beings with its imperative, it necessarily qualifies them as those who are called to try and retribute the good reality that they have broken.

In light of the above, it is accurate to say that Mostert views ethics as the product of the historicization of the Law. Specifically, for him, ethics is not human being's response to evil as such, but to the experience that the successive historical repetitions of the Law (its historicization) fail to deliver proper liberation from evil. In his categories, the soteriological failure of the ethical endeavor depends on the fact that it insists on imagining the deliverance from evil as yet another historicization of the Law. This is because ethics is constitutively unable to connect the historicization of the legal

¹⁵¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of Mostert's category of the historicization of the Law, see here, pp. 178f.

instance with sin. Therefore, ethical discourse always naively interprets every successive soteriological failure of historicized Law as the failure of *this* particular historicization, and never radically as this particular case of the generalized failure of *all* historicizations of the Law. Therefore, ethics does not break categorically with the Law. To the contrary, it becomes its most refined and self-perpetuating ideological reiteration. Instead, by categorically uprooting all soteriological claims of the Law, theological discourse truly fosters new, non-ethical (non-legal) categories. These truly break with the Law because they express the Gospel. For Mostert, it is precisely the entirely non-ethical qualification of theological discourse which enables it to emphasize the generalized soteriological failure of all the historicizations of the Law. Through this emphasis, the self-reiteration of the legal instance as a soteriologically competent reality is interrupted. In my judgment, Mostert's position is correct. Once again, he accounts for the categorical difference between a theology of justification and all forms of ethical ideologies and rightly connects the contrastive relationship between the two with the Reformational articulation of the Law-Gospel coupling. However, in my view, his account also needs to be criticized as shortsighted.

As I already argued¹⁵¹⁸, Mostert focuses on the existential-*kerygmatic* encounter between Law and Gospel and correctly disqualifies the first based on how the encounter unfolds. However, in doing so, he refuses to interpret theologically the continued existence of the Law after this *kerygmatic* encounter. This refusal depends ultimately on his rejection of the *tertius usus (in renatis)*. This use of the Law is interpreted by Mostert as a new legalization of the Gospel in a categorically absurd confusion with the Law which risks dismantling the whole theological endeavor. In my view, he is *not* to be followed in this respect. Here, I propose to call what he rejects the *historicity* of the Law, which needs to be clearly distinguished from its historicization. As I said, the justified keeps existing *as a sinner* both within and after the *kerygmatic* event of their salvation. This event is communicated to them in faith every time anew, whenever the Gospel is duly preached and celebrated. Now, the continued existence of the justified as a sinner is described theologically by the semantics of the *simul iustus et peccator*. In my perspective, it is precisely the *simul* which requires and explains the continued existence of both the sinner and the Law within and after the *kerygmatic* salvation event. Specifically, in this event, the sinner does not disappear but lives on, with the decisive difference that they are now also qualified as a justified person and that this qualification is deeper and more profound than their determination as sinners. In contrast to Mostert, I believe that the same reasoning also applies to the Law. In the salvation event, the legal instance does not disappear but continues existing in a new qualification, namely as *silent Law*¹⁵¹⁹. The latter is not a curse but a blessing, and

¹⁵¹⁸ See 3.3.1.

¹⁵¹⁹ See here, p. 138.

it keeps existing as the goodness of the original order signified by Christian witness. Therefore, I argue that Mostert's position on this point needs to be critically expanded. On the one hand, the historicization of the Law is necessarily bound with sin in a deep, circular interconnection. Thereby, the soteriological incompetence of the Law is manifested, and ideological ethics is disqualified as a soteriological discipline. On the other hand, the historicization of the Law is also the *condicio sine qua non* for its historicity. Theologically, it is necessary to responsibly account for both the distinction and the interconnection between the historicization and the historicity of the Law. If the second is not granted adequate space, the continued existence of the justified as a sinner becomes abstractly disconnected from the fact that the Law, too, keeps existing. Correspondingly, this disconnection risks damaging the theological understanding of the *simul*. More importantly, a theological understanding of the historicity of the Law paves the way to an interpretation of its historicization *sub contraria specie*. This means that it becomes possible to regard the continued existence of the legal instance within the historicity of the justified as a sign of its goodness. This goodness of the Law does not disappear from any instance of its historicization but is hidden (*verborgen*) with and under all of them. With that, the reference to the *simul* becomes qualified as follows: the historicity of the Law pertains to the justified as its historicization pertains to the sinner. This analogy entails that the historicity of the Law and its historicization are not simply juxtaposed. Rather, the first accesses a deeper layer of reality compared to the second. In other words, the historicity qualitatively (not quantitatively) prevails on the historicization like the justified prevails on the sinner. Thus, the moment of historicity significatorily points to the goodness of the Law based on the *already communicated Gospel*. This discloses a deep dimension which remains barred to the moment of historicization. Additionally, since the former is already hiddenly present within all the successive instances of the latter, the Law can truly keep existing as liberated Law (*in renatis*) whenever properly met with the Gospel in the *kerygmatic* event.

At this point, clarification is in order. My reflection on Mostert's category of the historicization of the Law and my plea for its critical expansion with reference to its historicity does *not* aim at reversing the order of the Law-Gospel coupling. Instead, the point of the critique is to show that the continued existence of the Law is a theologically relevant subject because the historicity of the justified is as well. In my view, the historicity of the Law remains at all times in critical interconnection with its historicization. At the same time, the Gospel liberates the legal instance in such a way that the ensuing historicity of the Law needs to be regarded as the *eschatological breaking* of its process of historicization. Even though it keeps existing after the salvation event, the Law is qualified by it in such a way that its end approaches. *Eschatologically*, therefore, it is accurate to say that the Gospel is the *end* of the Law. Put otherwise, the former operates the definitive disqualification and breaking

of the latter's process of historicization. However, the end of the Law is *not* to be understood historically. From a historical point of view (and in light of the fact that the justified keeps existing as a sinner), it is rather to be said that the Law is *liberated* by the Gospel. Undoubtedly, the liberated Law is without any further historicization, as the latter both depends on and reproduces sin by way of its imperative mood. However, this liberated Law is not without a continued historicity, since the eschatological fulfillment of all things has not yet been consummated. Ultimately, the relationship between the historicization and the historicity of the Law mirrors the one between the *eschaton* and existence. In order to fruitfully criticize and complete Mostert's reflection on the Law, it is therefore necessary to uphold two claims. The first is that the Law has been made silent by the Gospel, its imperative has been eschatologically ended. Accordingly, it no longer works as a curse falsely claiming a jurisdiction on soteriology. The second is that the eschatological silence of the Law effected by the Gospel does not entail a corresponding historical silence but qualifies the continued historical existence of the legal instance. With that, a dimension is disclosed within which the Law, liberated by the Gospel, becomes the instruction for the life of the justified. Against Mostert, this shows, in my view, the theological legitimacy of the third use of the Law (*tertius usus legis*).

3.3.4. Consummation within Hamartiology?

Mostert's rejection of futurity as a soteriologically legitimate category¹⁵²⁰ does not entail the full disappearance of the semantics of consummation (*Vollendung*) from his theology. Instead, these are fully relocated within hamartiology and interpreted as the question of the relationship between evil (*das Böse*) and God's righteousness observed from the angle of the theodicy problem¹⁵²¹. Specifically, Mostert understands consummation as the overcoming of evil. This overcoming is not a question of ethics but of justification doctrine, because the depth of evil is sin, which is a non-ethical category. Therefore, the overcoming of evil does not and cannot result from justice understood ethically as human being's autonomous or semi-autonomous soteriological activism. Instead, it immediately follows from the overcoming of sin, that is from its *forgiveness*. Accordingly, consummation is the category which aptly describes the overcoming of sin, therefore also of evil. As such, it is an articulation of justification doctrine and contributes to point to God's righteousness as the solution to the theodicy problem. Since consummation belongs to justification doctrine, what it overcomes cannot be first and foremost evil in the sense of passive suffering (*Leiden*). To the contrary, Mostert operates with the semantics of consummation in order to thereby also define suffering anew, in a way

¹⁵²⁰ See 1.3.6. and 2.3.3.

¹⁵²¹ See here, pp. 183ff.

which points to human being as the *origin* of evil. Interestingly enough, his redefinition of the categories of evil and consummation within justification doctrine entails a de-historicization of both. For him, consummation is the overcoming of evil understood as the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, the corresponding doctrine shares the same existential and hermeneutical-*kerygmatic* structure which characterizes Mostert's justification doctrine. This means that consummation is not understood historically, as an event which has happened or will happen within history or at the end of it. Instead, it is regarded as a *mythical* category¹⁵²², that is as radically non-historical. The dimension of myth, for Mostert, carries an ontological-relational significance. In the mythical description of reality, the latter is not determined historically by what *happens* to all existing things, but by the relationality which always already *is* there and interconnects all that is. In this sense, for Mostert, consummation and evil are mythical categories. This means that evil does not enter into the world following a specific event (for instance the Fall). Rather, it is simply there, it exists within historicity because it *is* first and foremost part of the relationality among all that is. Therefore, according to Mostert, the solution to the problem of evil (its overcoming) cannot come from history, since it belongs to a different qualification of reality which is not hystorical, but mythical. It follows that evil, as that which consummation overcomes, is not sufficiently understood in historical terms. With the rejection of the historical understanding of evil, Mostert is simply drawing the necessary consequence of his theological (non-ethical) qualification of sin. In short, he extends to consummation the same operation of theological new semantization which also concerns the category of sin. Brought in critical proximity with the semantics of God's righteousness, both sin and consummation are interpreted in radically non-ethical terms. As a matter of fact, this is particularly meaningful in the case of sin. Mostert maintains that, unless it is determined *theologically*, sin remains captive to all sorts of ethical misunderstandings and ultimately dissolves into the semantics of evil. In regard to consummation, too, Mostert intends to avoid what he considers the illegitimate ethical occupation of theological semantics. In his view, the eschatological interpretation of consummation is ultimately an example of this occupation. An eschatology of consummation regarded as the futurity of salvation, for him, is *not* properly theological. This is because it works by postponing salvation into the future, thus denying its full presence in the christological event and paving the way to what I have called an imperative anthropology¹⁵²³. Therefore, for Mostert, a truly theological discourse on consummation needs to remove it from the domain of eschatology and incorporate it hamartologically within justification doctrine. In other words, he associates consummation to hamartiology from the perspective of justification doctrine as the disqualification of all ethical and crypto-ethical occupations of

¹⁵²² For Mostert's own analysis of the category of myth with reference to evil, see MOSTERT, W., "Über das Böse und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes" (see note 1230), pp. 192f. For my own presentation of his position, see here, pp. 184f.

¹⁵²³ See here, p. 223.

soteriology. At this point, it is clear that Mostert treats consummation within hamartiology because, in his theology, the latter functions as *the* rampart against ethical ideology. Specifically, his hamartiology centers around the rejection of an ethical definition of sin and shows the impossibility of naively identifying it with evil¹⁵²⁴. Conversely, he resorts to justification doctrine in order to defend a *theological* understanding of sin as the expression of human being's soteriological insufficiency. Now, in Mostert's theology of justification, the determination of sin is particularly important because the latter stands in immediate proximity with evil. By being deprived of all jurisdiction claims on sin, ideological ethics becomes disqualified with reference to a category (sin) which is in immediate and critical proximity with evil, namely with the core semantics of the ethical endeavor as such. In a word, Mostert's hamartiology of justification shows the weakness of ideological ethics as a soteriological answer by emphasizing how ethics can be disqualified even in respect to sin, a subject which is so close to the very core of ethical questions (evil). The above highlights the centrality of hamartiology in Mostert's disqualification of ethical ideology. Correspondingly, everything which, in his theology, becomes associated with hamartiology is also removed from the ethical domain. In my view, it is for this reason that Mostert annexes the category of consummation to hamartiology, therefore also to justification doctrine. By doing so, he intends to delegitimize all ethical and crypto-ethical interpretations thereof. Now, as I already pointed out, in his perspective, an eschatology qualified by reference to futurity is one of those illegitimate interpretations.

In my judgment, Mostert's full annexation of the category of consummation to hamartiology is problematic. On the one hand, his perspective can be embraced as long as hamartiology functions as a bridge connecting consummation to soteriology in general and justification doctrine in particular. On the other, the point is *how* consummation relates to the understanding of the ontology of justification, especially when it comes to the relationship between justification and the historicity of the world. At this juncture, I am convinced that Mostert's account needs to be criticized. Specifically, in his understanding, consummation becomes a duplicate of the assurance of faith (*Zuspruch*), another word to express the christological presence of salvation. As a consequence, it risks becoming superfluous, in that it no longer adds any meaning to what the category of *Zuspruch* already expresses. In my view, in order to avoid this emptying of the semantics of consummation, it is necessary to question the legitimacy of Mostert's basic assumption on eschatology. In particular, I think that consummation becomes superfluous in his soteriology because it gets included in the process of ethical disqualification concerning the category of sin. In my opinion, this inclusion is arbitrary because, as I already pointed out¹⁵²⁵, there is no necessary connection between eschatology and

¹⁵²⁴ For my critique of Mostert's understanding of the sin-evil coupling, see 1.3.4.

¹⁵²⁵ See here, pp. 75f., 155f.

ethical ideology. Therefore, Mostert's position on the semantics of consummation becomes flawed because of the indemonstrable assumption that treating it eschatologically would automatically entail its occupation by crypto-ethical categories. To the contrary, in my view, an eschatology open to the dimension of futurity is fully theological and does not (necessarily) fall prey to ideological ethics. Thus, against Mostert, I would argue that the category of consummation legitimately belongs to an eschatology qualified by its reference to the futurity of salvation. Clearly, this does not mean that its semantics should be removed from soteriology. A similar removal would indeed prove Mostert's point, as it would be exemplary of the ethical occupation of the category of consummation. With Mostert, I think that this category is indeed soteriological. Therefore, it needs to be treated within justification doctrine and with reference to hamartiology. However, in contrast to him, I claim that consummation brings a specific qualification and value to soteriology. Put otherwise, it is not a superfluous semantics functioning as an unnecessary duplicate of the *Zuspruch* given in faith. Rather, it is possible to interpret consummation as a category pointing to the pneumatological *expansion* and eschatological *generalization* of the christological presence of salvation communicated by faith. As the expansion and generalization of the salvation event, consummation functions as a theologically legitimate and necessary category because it intensively interprets Christ's cross (death-resurrection) in a way which aptly coordinates both the presence *and* the futurity of salvation. Specifically, in my critique of Mostert's position, reference to eschatological consummation implies regarding Christ's death as the *event* of reconciliation and his resurrection as the *proclamation* or *publication* of this event as well as the *beginning* of the fulfillment of all things. This means that the category of consummation expands the semantics of reconciliation in a fundamental way and cannot be reduced to a mere rewording of the assurance of faith. In other words, it is the theological semantics interpreting the event of justification as that which is promised to the whole of creation, in correspondence with God's saving intent. For this interpretation to be theologically responsible, it is necessary to treat reconciliation *in its entirety* as the intensive interpretation of Christ's cross. Consummation does not add a secondary dimension to reconciliation, it is not a new word *after* justification. Instead, it accounts for the fact that Christ's cross is inherently inhabited by an expansion dynamic whereby the dimensions of *Zuspruch* and *Verheißung* intertwine and imply each other. What I mean is that reconciliation is truly effected by Jesus' death on the cross, which is not overcome by his resurrection. If this were the case, the semantics of consummation would be utterly meaningless, because the resurrection would entail the contradiction of the cross. Therefore, the cross would not be regarded as the core of the salvation event to be eschatologically manifested and fulfilled, but as the embodiment of evil overcome by God. To the contrary, Christ's resurrection *reveals* the cross as the *concretissimum* of God's soteriological agency for sinners (*pro nobis*) and thereby also

communicates salvation to them by awakening faith. Furthermore, the resurrection indicates that this revelation and communication are open-ended events. This does not mean that they are incomplete, but that they are processual and teleological, they continuously extend to all things that God loves. This is precisely what the category of consummation intercepts, thereby responsibly articulating that, in light of Christ's resurrection, God's salvation intent *cannot* be limited to the dimension of the individual's assurance. Rather, it is inhabited by an inner proleptic structure which inherently strives beyond the individual, to include their whole historicity and the whole of creation¹⁵²⁶. In short, one's *Zuspruch* becomes the world's *Verheißung*. This inherent striving forward of salvation, this proleptic structure of the Easter event is described by consummation as the inbreaking of the *eschaton*. Thus, this theological category aptly illustrates that reconciliation *tends* to become *public*, it unravels within a movement of generalization which constantly oversteps all rigid limitations to God's free¹⁵²⁷ and sovereign self-communication to the world that He has so dearly loved¹⁵²⁸.

3.3.5. A Teleology of History?

In the previous paragraph¹⁵²⁹, I criticized Mostert's annexation of the category of consummation to hamartiology and explicitly connected it to its presupposition, namely his understanding of the relationship between evil and God's righteousness. For Mostert, a theory of evil not founded hamartologically is one of two dogmatic¹⁵³⁰ presuppositions of ideological thinking¹⁵³¹, the other being a teleology of history¹⁵³². Specifically, both are ideological because they defer the verification of salvation beyond the present of experience and into the abstract future. As a consequence, both entail (a.) an activist anthropology whereby human being is mobilized as the active *restitutor mundi*, as well as (b.) a metaphysical or skeptical view in which God is either transformed into a motivational power for human being's activism or simply rejected as an illusion. Furthermore, Mostert sees a direct co-implication between a non-hamartiological theory of evil and a teleology of history. For him, the two premises of ideological thinking are not simply juxtaposed, they exist within each other¹⁵³³.

¹⁵²⁶ Cf. John 12,32.

¹⁵²⁷ Since God's salvation intent is and remains *free*, I do not think that my critical reflection on consummation necessarily entails the affirmation of *apokatastasis*. Rather, I believe that the doctrine is itself a rigid determination of God's saving intent, in that it risks moralistically prescribing to Him what His sovereign intent *should* entail. At the same time, my proleptic understanding of the category of consummation implies that salvation needs to be seen as *tendentially* universal.

¹⁵²⁸ Cf. John 3,16ff.

¹⁵²⁹ See 3.3.4.

¹⁵³⁰ Ideological. See note 1175 for clarification.

¹⁵³¹ See here, p. 173.

¹⁵³² See here, pp. 174-180.

¹⁵³³ Actually, it is also possible to separate the two and uphold an ethical, intra-historical view on evil while at the same time rejecting a teleology of history as abstract. This would be a Neo-Atheistic position. To my knowledge, Mostert never explicitly tackles such a position in his theology. At any rate, studying Neo-Atheism from the point of view of his categories would be really interesting. In particular, Mostert's use of theological discourse *against* all theories of meaning

Particularly, the ethical (non-hamartiological) understanding of evil views the latter as a historical reality which originates in the world because of the conditions of existence, for instance the unfair distribution of power and resources in society. As a consequence, history is also the context within which this evil can and must be understood, fought and definitively overcome. Therefore, when thought through, the full historicization of evil entails that the only possible overcoming of it needs to be the intra-historical. Put otherwise, an ethical theory of evil implies that its overcoming is the goal (*telos*) of history. Thus, Mostert's rejection of non-hamartiological theories of evil necessarily co-implies his rejection of a teleology of history. His fundamental objection against all ideological thinking (and its two presuppositions) is that it is contradicted by experience (*Erfahrung*). Therefore, ideology escapes the true verification place of human being, God and the world. Concerning history, experience contradicts ideology because it receives an understanding whereby the historical dimension is impossible to transcend. In other words, experience and history share the same qualification, they cannot be transcended. As a consequence, history is not to be regarded teleologically because there exists no valid point of observation from where a harmonious progress towards a goal can be detected. Therefore, Mostert rejects as dogmatic the assumption that there is or can be a future intra-historical stage where the conditions of existence will be set in such a way that evil will be overcome. Further, he considers that a similar assumption is the core of all teleology of history, which therefore is inherently dogmatic and categorically different from theology. In his view, this categorical difference can be expressed as follows: a teleology of history works as a variation of the quest for meaning, whereas theology intercepts and aptly answers the quest for certainty¹⁵³⁴. It can be observed that Mostert's rejection of both a non-hamartiological theory of evil and a teleology of history ultimately replicates and prolongs his position on *Zuspruch* and *Verheißung*. At this point, for the sake of completeness, it would be appropriate to present Mostert's anti-teleological view of history as yet another variation of his rejection of the futurity of salvation. However, since my research has already covered this topic in detail¹⁵³⁵, I deem it preferable to avoid repetition and rather

(*Sinn*) completely removes his theology from the polemical scope of Neo-Atheism. With its impressive dismantling of the very concept of meaning, Neo-Atheism is convinced to be disqualifying theological discourse as such. However, albeit quite strong, the Neo-Atheistic rejection of meaning is not nearly as radical as Mostert's. For him, theology deals with semantics which are *qualitatively* different from those of meaning. Ultimately, I think that Neo-Atheism can be legitimately interpreted as yet another variation of the old question of meaning, in the form of its negation. The problem is that this negation remains captive to the same categories, it reasons with meaning and accepts its hermeneutical paradigm. Conversely, Reformation theology in Mostert's sense overcomes the very semantics of meaning and shows that the soteriological interpretation of the quest for meaning is abstract and ideological. Instead, theology uncovers that the true and concrete soteriological quest is that for certainty (*Gewißheit*) (see, at large, MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* [see note 142]).

¹⁵³⁴ For Mostert, the two quests ultimately go back to two opposing understandings of human being's fundamental soteriological problem. Therefore, they are incompatible (see for instance note 1533).

¹⁵³⁵ See 1.3.6. and 2.3.3.

move directly to my critique of Mostert's position on a teleology of history, provided that its connection with the question of futurity is to be kept in mind.

In my view, his rejection of all ideological views in which history inherently possesses a specific *telos* needs to be maintained because it comes from the ontology of justification. Specifically, I find that justification doctrine fully explicates its polemical and criteriological character in that it works as a de-ideologizing power. In light of the hermeneutical and *kerygmatic* understanding of the Law-Gospel coupling, justification doctrine carries out a constant and fully legitimate hamartiological relativization of all penultimate realities. Coming to the theory of history, this means that justification doctrine operates a *sane secularization* of history, just like the doctrine of creation secularizes nature¹⁵³⁶. When brought into contact with the semantics of justification – which describe how the ultimate reality of salvation irrupts into the penultimate realities of existence and qualifies them anew –, the penultimate is necessarily emptied of all ideological (idolatrous) overloading. From a Reformational perspective, this *emptying* of the penultimate restores it to its proper character because it establishes the righteous relationship between the Creator and His creation. Far from demeaning the penultimate, justification doctrine rightly celebrates and liberates it. This is because it disassociates it from a violent absolutization, which instead carries out a fundamental distortion of the penultimate into a (false) image of the ultimate¹⁵³⁷. In my judgment, a fully immanent teleology of history is precisely a prime example of a violent absolutization of the penultimate. Therefore, I think that Mostert is correct in employing justification doctrine as an instrument for the secularization of history. However, I am also convinced that his position needs to be criticized from a different angle. In particular, I would argue that, unless properly integrated and qualified anew, Mostert's rejection of all teleology of history implies an arbitrary limitation of Christ's universal sovereignty. As a matter of fact, his position fails to take into account the distinction between immanent and transcendent teleology. This distinction makes it possible to reject the first while affirming the second. In his categories, this is impossible because history, for him, shares the same core characteristic as experience, so it cannot be transcended. This is coherent with Mostert's annexation of the whole scope of salvation to its christological presence in faith as *Zuspruch*, with the corresponding rejection of *Verheißung*. This means that his rejection of a teleology of history *starts* from what I have called the sane secularization of history brought about by justification doctrine, to then move beyond it. Ultimately, Mostert's position ends up rejecting all teleology of history, including positions centered around eschatological considerations. Therefore, his rejection is not limited to the dismantlement of all idolatrous absolutization of the penultimate, in this case all intra-historical and immanent

¹⁵³⁶ Cf. Gen 1,14ff.

¹⁵³⁷ What I have in mind is aptly described by Tillich's category of the *Protestant principle* (see here, p. 32). Specifically, I call "emptying of the penultimate" what Tillich designates as the theonomous victory over the demonic.

teleological views of history. Instead, he couples this dismantlement with silence on the question of an eschatological, transhistorical *telos* of history. Now, I would argue that this silence is theologically irresponsible and needs therefore to be overcome. Against Mostert, I would like to present the foundation of a possible *theological* teleology of history by reference to the semantics of Christ's sovereignty, and specifically to the image of his Ascension and his "sitting at the right hand of the Father"¹⁵³⁸. In my view, the semantics of Ascension are particularly helpful to illustrate what I called a theological teleology of history. Their specific value lies in the fact that they present the whole of history as a reality *in the process* of becoming included into God's kingdom under Christ's lordship. In other words, the image of the Ascension functions as a rampart against both the idolatrous absolutization of the penultimate and the arbitrary limitation of Christ's sovereignty to the dimension of the believer's individuality. Ultimately, reference to this image is necessary to couple the affirmation of a sane secularization of history with the rejection of its *arbitrary* de-theologization. Mostert's discourse, in my judgment, only accounts for the former, while it totally ignores the latter. From his perspective, the secularization of history carried out by justification doctrine risks being prolonged into the utter disappearance of God from the historical horizon. This risk is avoided by Ascension, which instead helps interpret the secularization of history as an instance of the proper relationship between the ultimate and the penultimate, not as a disappearance of the ultimate. Against Mostert, I therefore claim that a teleology of history is not *necessarily* an ideological category. Instead, it can be interpreted theologically in a way which does *not* entail an idolatrous and crypto-theocratic absolutization of history. Rather, a theological teleology of history tries to responsibly account for the expansion and generalization of the reconciliation effected in the christological event¹⁵³⁹. Thus, I consider a transhistorical account of the teleology of history fully legitimate and necessary. Negatively, such an account illustrates that God negates all absolute claims of an intra-historical fulfillment of history. Positively, it vindicates that consummation (which is this same fulfillment viewed theologically) can only unfold as *God's own* salvation intent, which has triumphed on Christ's cross (death *and* resurrection). The rejection of all immanent teleology of history, therefore, does not entail regarding history as a battlefield for a yet undecided war between God and "the powers of this world"¹⁵⁴⁰. Instead, an immanent and ideological teleology of history needs to be rejected because it illegitimately occupies the intellectual space which belongs to its transhistorical and theological alternative.

¹⁵³⁸ Mark 16,18f.

¹⁵³⁹ Along the lines of what I already maintained about the category of consummation in 3.3.4. without explicit reference to history.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Eph 6,12.

The *theological* teleology of history that I have defended is *not* ideological. This implies one more thing, which needs to be said in conclusion. To be truly non-ideological, a teleology of history needs to be severed from all immanence. In other words, it must not be misunderstood as the question of the *visibility* of the intra-historical fragmentary manifestations of the *telos* of history. Rather, I argue for a teleology of history *in signum crucis*, which is to be entirely developed within a hermeneutic of hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*). From a theological perspective, the *telos* of history, the incoming Kingdom of God, *cannot* be pointed to¹⁵⁴¹, let alone precisely outlined as some sort of supreme principle. Also, the question of the visibility of the historical *telos* must not be interpreted criteriologically, as though the truth of the coming Kingdom depended on its visible manifestations. To the contrary, the affirmation of a theological teleology of history belongs to the reality of faith, not sight¹⁵⁴². Accordingly, the fragmentary signs of the incoming *telos* are to be qualified *theologically*. They are events *of grace* which cannot be expected or detected empirically, but only welcome in amazed gratitude as moments in which the progression towards the final consummation of Christ's universal sovereignty becomes manifest within faith.

3.3.6. Theological Integrations

In the previous paragraphs¹⁵⁴³, I criticized what I consider the most relevant theological implications of Mostert's view on the relationship between ethics and justification doctrine. Like in Parts 1 and 2, my critique in Part 3 has been once again pressed after a scrupulous analysis of Mostert's position in the wake of Ebeling. The presentation of his account has been followed by a study of the selected theological alternatives, in this case the "theologies of *agape*" (Tillich and Pannenberg) and the "ethical theologies" (Barth and Brunner). The methodology employed in this Part¹⁵⁴⁴ is coherent with the rest of the study. Correspondingly, the choice of the alternatives was neither strictly necessary nor arbitrary. I chose these alternatives because the intensive analysis of Mostert's thought has confronted me with questions that, in my opinion, are answered somehow unsatisfactorily within 20th century theology. Thus, the selection of the alternatives needs to be understood as an opportunity to enrich my research on Mostert's theology by exemplarily testing its productivity in critical contact with different perspectives. Once again, the theological alternatives help illuminate the research question, which asks whether an integrated version of Mostert's account can fruitfully stimulate theological reflection today.

¹⁵⁴¹ Cf. Matt 24,23-26.

¹⁵⁴² Cf. 2 Cor 5,7.

¹⁵⁴³ See 3.3.1.-3.3.5.

¹⁵⁴⁴ See here, pp. 214-219.

It is not necessary to repeat at this point how his understanding of the relationship between ethics and theology is articulated¹⁵⁴⁵. However, it is important to recall that, in his categories, this relationship *belongs to* the ontology of justification. Thus, it is not subsequently added to it as its consequence, let alone simply juxtaposed to it. For Mostert, what justification *is* immediately implies how it relates to ethics. Therefore, the ontology of justification studied in Part 2 is the vantage point to address the subject at hand in Part 3. Undoubtedly, one could say that this is not specific to Mostert's position; the relationship between the salvation event and the ethical endeavor is also of critical importance for the alternatives. They, too, regard it as an unavoidable question which is directly dependent on justification doctrine, or at least on soteriology at large. Nevertheless, in my view, Mostert's outlook on the relationship between ethics and justification is particularly fruitful. Specifically, it fully accounts for their intertwined proximity while at the same time refusing to downplay or harmonize their conflictuality and incompatibility as soteriological answers. That being said, it is now appropriate to refer briefly to each point of the critique pressed in 3.3.1.-3.3.5. My goal will be to assess the legitimacy and need for possible theological integrations of Mostert's theology with the alternatives.

In 3.3.1., I criticized his rejection of a material ethics based on justification. In my view, his position does not aptly distinguish between the ethical endeavor and its ideological dimension. Further, I claimed that his rejection of a material ethics founded in justification results precisely from the lack of this distinction. Against Mostert, I am convinced that the disqualification of ethics as a soteriological discipline (ideological ethics) does *not* imply a corresponding disqualification of the ethical endeavor as such. Prolonging here the critique of his position on the curse of the Law¹⁵⁴⁶, I have maintained that the liberation and new qualification effected by the *kerygmatic* event of the Gospel also concern ethics. In other words, the soteriological disqualification of ideological ethics which becomes manifest in justification doctrine does not only reveal the ultimate incompatibility between the two. Rather, it also separates ethics from its ideological dimension, thus enabling a non-ideological ethical endeavor which is fully legitimate from a theological point of view. In this sense, ethics finds precisely in justification doctrine and in the corresponding disqualification of ideology. On this point, I therefore think that a theological integration of Mostert's position is necessary and justified. Specifically, I deem it appropriate to resort to Ebeling's view of an ethics of justification understood as a non-soteriological, *therefore* non-ideological theory of the right moral handling¹⁵⁴⁷. In my judgment, the proposed integration does not break fundamentally with Mostert's theology. Rather, it is compatible with it because it shares its fundamental concern, the overcoming of the

¹⁵⁴⁵ See here, pp. 215ff.

¹⁵⁴⁶ See 2.3.1.

¹⁵⁴⁷ For a detailed account of Ebeling's position, see here, p. 163.

illegitimate soteriological claim laid by ideological ethics and the vindication of the exclusive soteriological competence of justification doctrine. Furthermore, reference to Ebeling's thought prolongs and expands the scope of Mostert's theological discourse. Accordingly, the proposed integration seriously accounts for both the necessary confrontation between justification doctrine and ideological ethics on the one hand and its concrete outcome on the other, namely the liberation of the ethical endeavor from the ideological dimension and the disqualification of its illegitimate soteriological claim.

In 3.3.2., I tackled the ambiguity of Mostert's anthropology of the receiver, which in my view risks remaining captive to the semantics of agency. Specifically, I argued that an understanding of the receiver as a non-doer does *not* categorically break with the semantics of agency but perpetuates them *sub contraria specie*. In my judgment, the crucial difference between an anthropology of the non-doer and one of the receiver needs to be intensively expressed with reference to the Law-Gospel coupling. The non-doer, just like the doer, results from the Law, not from the Gospel. In both cases, human being is verified in their agency, namely in their action or inaction, with the opposition between the two being merely a variation within the same category (agency). Instead, the receiver results from the Gospel, not from the Law, as the corresponding verification of human being happens within experience (*Erfahrung*), not in agency. Accordingly, the receiver is one to whom reality is *communicated*, not one who is called to shape it. With that, the category of the receiver belongs to a qualitatively non-legal reality. Therefore, it brings the Law to silence by entering into close and conflictual contact with it. On this matter, the integration of Mostert's position which I have in mind consists first and foremost in a deepening and clarification of his own theology. However, I believe that fruitful impulses in this direction can also come from ethical theologies. There is clearly a sharp anthropological opposition between Mostert on the one hand and Barth or Brunner on the other. Mostert bases his anthropology on the category of the receiver, whereas both Barth and Brunner explicitly maintain that human being is verified in their agency¹⁵⁴⁸. Put otherwise, he upholds what I have called an indicative anthropology, while they defend an imperative anthropology¹⁵⁴⁹. Without downplaying or harmonizing the opposition between the two approaches, I think that the concern of ethical theologies can be fruitfully integrated with Mostert's category of the receiver. Specifically, this alternative understands human agency as (*cor*)*responsive* to God's. As such, albeit expressing an imperative anthropology, ethical theologies regard human being's behavior pneumatologically. Their agency is conceptualized as the work of the Spirit which stretches into and secondarily becomes human being's response, without ceasing to primarily be *God's* agency. In my judgment, this can

¹⁵⁴⁸ See e.g. BARTH, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 (see note 404), p. 50; BRUNNER, E., *The Divine Imperative* (see note 1443), p. 86.

¹⁵⁴⁹ See here, p. 223.

usefully clarify the anthropology of the receiver. Thus, the proposed theological integration is productive as it focuses, with Mostert, on a view of human being as someone who is not verified in their agency stimulated by the imperative of the Law, but in their being addressed by the indicative of the Gospel. At the same time, the integration goes beyond Mostert. *Because* and to the extent that they are truly addressed by the Gospel, human being is determined as someone who in faith *receives* pneumatically a new determination which *truly corresponds* to God. In short, I propose to conceptualize the receiver as human being letting God be God, *therefore also* living responsibly as His creature.

In 3.3.3., I studied Mostert's concept of the historicization of the Law¹⁵⁵⁰ and proposed to integrate it by focusing also on the dimension of historicity¹⁵⁵¹. In my perspective, the historicity of the Law aptly complements its historicization. In other words, it makes it possible to responsibly account for the continued existence of the Law after its hermeneutical encounter with the Gospel within the preached *kerygma*. On the one hand, I deem it correct to interpret the Law-Gospel interaction hermeneutically as the very unfolding of the *kerygma* in the event of justification, and not historically¹⁵⁵² as the succession of two epochs in salvation history. On the other, I think that it is also necessary to prevent the annexation of the dimension of historicity to the reality of the preached *kerygma*. As a matter of fact, the encounter with the Gospel does not result in the annihilation of the sinner and the ensuing disappearance of the Law. Instead, the Gospel operates the justification of the sinner and the liberation of the Law from its curse. Accordingly, in my view, both the justified sinner and the liberated Law exist in a dimension of continued historicity which needs to be theologically described. Therefore, I consider Mostert's exclusive focus on the historicization of the Law rather shortsighted and I argue that it can and must be theologically integrated. Specifically, the theologies of *agape* prove particularly fruitful for a possible theological integration on the matter. For both Tillich¹⁵⁵³ and Pannenberg¹⁵⁵⁴, the dimension of historicity is directly concerned with the unfolding of the Law-Gospel coupling. In particular, I have in mind Pannenberg's view of *agape* as a spiritual reality which is at the same time qualitatively different from the Law *and* truly able to fulfil its deep concern¹⁵⁵⁵. In my judgment, this position is a prime example of how the historicity of the Law could

¹⁵⁵⁰ For my detailed study of Mostert's semantics of the historicization of the Law, see here, pp. 178f. and 226f.

¹⁵⁵¹ See here, pp. 227ff.

¹⁵⁵² For an illustration of how I conceptualize the difference between the two approaches, see e.g. note 1203.

¹⁵⁵³ In my judgment, the tensional and contrastive interaction of Law and Gospel resonates within Tillich's discussion of the disruption of the essential unity of religion, culture and morality under the conditions of existence (TILLICH, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 [see note 207], pp. 158f.).

¹⁵⁵⁴ PANNENBERG, W., "Gesetz und Evangelium" (see note 1339), p. 198.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Here, I chose to refer first and foremost to Pannenberg and not to Tillich even though their accounts of *agape* share many commonalities. The reason behind my choice is that, in Tillich's perspective, there is no clear categorical break between the semantics of *agape* and those of the Law. Instead, this is the case in Pannenberg's theology. As a matter of fact, Tillich claims that the moral imperative is confirmed and not disqualified by the theonomous reality of *agape*. This,

and should be integrated theologically. Further, I am convinced that the integration is also (and especially) necessary for a theology in the wake of Mostert. Specifically, Pannenberg's treatment of *agape* shows that it is possible and necessary to interpret core ethical categories (such as love) theologically, thereby defining them anew as spiritual, non-ethical realities (love as *agape*). This goes clearly in Mostert's direction, but also beyond the scope of his theology. Pannenberg's operation affecting love-*agape* shows that theological discourse is not merely interested in disqualifying the ethical occupation of categories. The disqualification is not an end in itself. Rather, theology is also concerned with the ensuing new *theological* qualification of those categories. In other words, the continued existence of a reality which has been addressed by the Gospel becomes *itself* theologically interesting. Therefore, it needs to be accounted for within theological discourse. In this case, the integration with the theologies of *agape* is necessary to illustrate that the new qualification does not only concern *agape*, but also the liberated Law, as both are determined anew by theological discourse. Thus, the historicity of the Law is *enabled* by the fact that its historicization is disqualified by the Gospel. *Thereby*, its continued existence is also determined as a liberated reality, one deprived of all illegitimate soteriological claims.

Finally, in 3.3.4. and 3.3.5., I criticized Mostert's annexation of consummation (*Vollendung*) to hamartiology (3.3.4.), and his rejection of all teleology of history (3.3.5.). As was pointed out, I consider his treatment of consummation with direct and criteriological reference to justification doctrine fully legitimate, as it emphasizes that theological discourse is constitutively and immediately concerned with soteriology. However, confining consummation to hamartiology risks making it a superfluous duplicate of the assurance of faith (*Zuspruch*) which does not bring any added value to soteriology. Therefore, I argue that Mostert is not to be followed on the matter. Rather, I think that both theological alternatives are correct in vindicating the specific theological legitimacy of the semantics of consummation. In particular, I think that ethical theologies aptly illuminate consummation as the reality of salvation which is both presently fulfilled in Jesus Christ's cross (death-resurrection) *and* tends dynamically to become the futurity of creation. Specifically, I maintain that a theological integration of Mostert's position must strive beyond Mostert's intensive but limited focus on the believing individual and towards an extensive and broad qualification of Christ's lordship over reality as a whole.

In my analysis, a responsible theological reflection on Christ's universal lordship also entails the need to criticize Mostert's rejection of all teleology of history. In particular, I argued that his view does not properly distinguish between immanent and transhistorical versions of teleology. This is

in my opinion, makes his understanding of the relationship between theology and ethics incompatible with Mostert's, thus not fruitful for a possible integration (see also here, pp. 188f).

because he considers teleological thinking as such *necessarily* ideological. To the contrary, I claim that a teleology of history can also be expressed in non-ideological terms. In particular, history can be legitimately interpreted theologically when brought into contact with justification doctrine. In light of justification, a theological interpretation of history is constitutively anti-idolatrous. Such an interpretation will interact with history by operating a *sane* secularization of it. For me, this means emphasizing that God alone is the *telos* of history. By entering in a relationship with history, He reveals the *creaturely* qualification of the latter. Accordingly, all discourse arguing for an independent, intra-historical *telos* of history and all insistence on possible visible signs of an intra-historical *telos* are immediately disqualified. With and beyond Mostert, I claim that, on Christ's cross, all teleology is both strongly negated and strongly affirmed. In particular, it is negated as a theory of the *meaning* of history, and it is affirmed as the doctrine of the *certainty* of salvation. Ultimately, since this certainty unfolds concretely within history and cannot be abstracted from it, theological discourse must affirm the legitimacy of a teleology of history. On this matter, I believe that productive integrations of Mostert's perspective could come from both the theologies of *agape* and ethical theologies. In particular, I find that Brunner's account can prove the most helpful, because of the explicit link that he maintains between justification and the *telos* of history. Specifically, he clearly sees that the *telos* of history results from the *certainty* of justification¹⁵⁵⁶, not from some doctrine of meaning. Now, focus on the certainty of salvation (*Gewißheit*) is also the core of Mostert's ontology of justification. Therefore, I consider Brunner's perspective particularly inclined to integrate Mostert's position. This is because Brunner explicitly coordinates one's certainty of salvation with the concern for the continued historical existence of the world, showing that the two are not to be separated.

By studying the question of the relationship between justification doctrine and ethics, my research has investigated yet another key aspect of Mostert's theology of justification. As was already argued¹⁵⁵⁷, he is convinced that this relationship inherently belongs to justification itself and does not secondarily derive from it. Therefore, by assessing the productivity of Mostert's position on this question, the present study has probed once more the tenability and resourcefulness of his theological endeavor and the possibility to integrate it with the alternatives. The analysis of both the strengths and criticalities of Mostert's position on ethics and justification doctrine has persuaded me that the research question finds here again a positive answer. When thought through conclusively and upon being integrated with impulses from the alternatives, his theology can fruitfully and provocatively stimulate the contemporary discussion and help it find its own answers to both traditional and new

¹⁵⁵⁶ BRUNNER, E., *Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (see note 1458), pp. 439f.

¹⁵⁵⁷ See here, p. 215.

questions. The analysis of the subject at hand has convinced me that Mostert's discourse can be one vantage point to reflect on ethics and justification doctrine. Indeed, when compared to the alternatives, Mostert's view takes the categorical difference between the two disciplines very seriously. Coherently, his understanding of this difference mirrors his view of the Law-Gospel coupling, thus confirming and reinforcing his theology as a whole. In my judgment, the study of the relationship between ethics and theology can only benefit from Mostert's contribution. In him, one finds a theologian who investigated the matter sharply and competently, uncovering that both justification and (ideological) ethics are soteriologically interested. However, a shared jurisdiction over soteriology between justification doctrine and ethics is theologically untenable. Consequently, Mostert rejected as naive and shortsighted all accounts which tend to ignore or minimize the qualitative difference between the two disciplines. Thus, the key contribution offered by his theology on the subject at hand is precisely that he saw and discussed both the extreme proximity and the conflictual relationship between ethics and justification doctrine. In my view, none of the alternatives is able to account for both elements as clearly as Mostert does. Conversely, the core weakness of the alternatives lies specifically in them misinterpreting the proximity between ethics and theology as a sign of *categorical compatibility*. In other words, since the core concerns of both disciplines are so close, ethical and theological discourse are mistakenly considered to be similarly qualified. Thus, the ensuing main questions raised by the alternatives are how to co-articulate the two disciplines together, how to delimit their separate jurisdictions and how to qualify the category of agency with respect to them. In my perspective, the resulting answers remain fundamentally flawed: either the proximity or the qualitative difference between ethics and theology end up being neglected. Instead, as my research has pointed out, Mostert's perspective makes it possible to rephrase the very question of the relationship between ethics and justification in a radically new way. Within his theology, the leading questions asked by the alternatives undergo a *qualitative modification*. Specifically, the point is no longer how to articulate the separate jurisdictions of ethics and theology, thus either ultimately separating or uniting them. Instead, Mostert brings the two disciplines in critical proximity at all times, which shows that separating them is arbitrary. *Precisely in doing so*, he also emphasizes that this proximity invariably results in conflict, so that uniting them is erroneous. In conclusion, Mostert correctly illustrates that ethics and theology belong together because they share the same soteriological concern. At the same time, they conflict with each other because they mirror two different qualifications of this concern and of reality as a whole. This is why, in spite of all its weaknesses, I believe that Mostert's position has the potential to become one of the leading references for theology to carry on its conversation on ethics and justification.

4. W. Mostert's Ecclesiology of Justification and the Question of Ecumenism

In Part 3, I addressed the relationship between ethics and justification in Mostert's thought. For him, this relationship is not an *addendum* to justification doctrine, the core of his theology. Rather, it directly belongs to his understanding of the ontology of justification (Part 2) as the solution to human being's fundamental problem (Part 1). As I already maintained¹⁵⁵⁸, Mostert regards the relationship between ethics and justification doctrine as *justification itself* viewed from the perspective of what the latter excludes, not simply as its consequence. As I showed, this means that justification, for Mostert, is the exclusion of all ideological-ethical attempts at solving human being's fundamental problem. Therefore, studying this relationship in a work devoted to Mostert's justification doctrine is not an arbitrary selection of one of many possible theological implications thereof. Rather, it is a pressing and unavoidable question which originates within Mostert's own understanding of what justification *is*. In Part 4, I will engage with the other pressing question which needs to be addressed in order to complete the study of Mostert's justification doctrine. Specifically, after having discussed what the ontology of justification excludes, it is now necessary to turn to what it *includes*¹⁵⁵⁹. As the following chapter will show, what justification doctrine includes is the theological reality of the church. Accordingly, I would argue that, for Mostert, the church is the reality in which the Gospel becomes historicized. This historicization of the Gospel is justification, which needs to be understood in contrastive reference to ethics as the historicization of the Law¹⁵⁶⁰. Therefore, in the present work, reference to Mostert's ecclesiology is not to be understood as a different topic having at best something in common with justification doctrine. Instead, ecclesiology is tackled here as the final word completing the subject matter (*Sache*) of justification and qualifying it from yet another angle. Before mentioning the structure of this Part 4 the following methodological considerations are in order.

Given Mostert's understanding of ecclesiology as an aspect of justification doctrine, this final Part of my study necessarily takes up an ecumenical concern. On the one hand, theologians move and think today in a context in which, at least in the so-called West, a certain agreement is said to have been reached among many churches on the doctrine of justification. On the other, the ecumenical endeavor has halted, precisely among Western churches, in the face of ecclesiological questions such

¹⁵⁵⁸ See here, p. 215.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶⁰ See here, pp. 178f.

as the recognition of ordained ministers or the possibility of a shared celebration of the Eucharist. Since my study of Mostert's thought has developed within this theological context, it has seemed inevitable to me to devote this Part 4 not simply to his ecclesiology of justification as such, in abstraction from the question of the unity of the Christian church. To the contrary, Part 4 will be exploring Mostert's ecclesiology to then critically ask what, in the wake of his discourse, might be said about the unity of the Christian church. Since Mostert's ecclesiology *is* justification doctrine, my choice to tackle it as an ecumenical question has required me to also analyze previous attempts at studying justification ecumenically. This has not been an easy task, since the available material on justification and ecumenism is incredibly vast. At the same time, after careful study, I have become convinced that the question of an ecumenical consensus on justification, when not utterly rejected, has so far been approached in two fundamentally alternative ways. These ways somehow function as overarching theological thought-maps within which the different contributions of theologians are then developed. Specifically, the first alternative, that I propose to call "positional", regards theology as a coherent set of doctrinal positions. These are understood based on how they relate with one another to form the overall *depositum fidei*. Correspondingly, this alternative focuses on justification as *one* doctrine within a broader set of theological *loci*. The various doctrines are coordinated christologically with one another, and justification doctrine, in all its importance, cannot be ascribed a unique criteriological value among them. In this approach, the article of justification tends to be regarded as identical to the corresponding doctrine. Further, efforts are made to show how both main Western confessional families understand justification along compatible lines, even though they use different terminology and do not always uphold reconcilable positions about specific aspects of the doctrine. As a representative of this first alternative – which has been officially received by several churches with the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ, 1999) –, I have selected Küng, of course with reference to his well-known study on justification doctrine¹⁵⁶¹. Conversely, the second alternative, that I would call "structural", views theological positions as emerging from a deep structure of thought which qualifies the ensuing doctrines fundamentally. Therefore, for this approach, it is pivotal to precisely outline what identifies deep theological structures, since it is from them that specific positions originate. When it comes to justification, structural theology regards it as the touchstone against which two qualitatively different hermeneutics of Christian theology and life become manifest. Thus, the article of justification is not simply regarded as identical with the corresponding doctrine. What is more, the different positions historically (and presently) maintained by Protestantism and Roman Catholicism on justification are considered to be coherently emerging from two profoundly different underlying theological thought-maps. To study

¹⁵⁶¹ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886).

this alternative, I have focused on D. M. Hampson's doctoral thesis¹⁵⁶², that I consider representative of this approach. Even though Hampson no longer calls herself a Christian, her study aptly illustrates how Reformation theology has viewed justification doctrine and what this view implies (or could imply) for a theologically sound ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholicism.

Now that the necessary methodological premises have been made explicit, the structure of this Part 4 can be presented. First of all, I will analyze Mostert's *ecclesiology as justification* with reference to Ebeling's theology (4.1.). The topic breakdown of this first chapter mirrors directly the two theologians' understanding of the matter. This means that I will first and foremost look at what both of them consider the *fundamental ecclesiological question*, namely what constitutes the church. Secondly, I will tackle the corresponding answer, which is both christological and soteriological. Finally, I will present the ensuing understanding of the relationship between justification and ecclesiology. Afterwards, I will turn to the analysis of the selected alternatives (4.2.), namely the perspectives of Küng ("positional theology") and Hampson ("structural theology"). The analysis will be carried out following the specific inner articulation of each of the alternatives, focusing on (a.) the relationship between the article of justification and the truth of faith; (b.) the overall relationship between sin, human being and justification; and finally (c.) the relationship between faith and the reality of justification. The theological questions raised in each paragraph are partially different. These differences do not only exist between Ebeling and Mostert on the one hand (4.1.) and the theological alternatives on the other (4.2.), but also between each alternative. This situation is going to be methodologically justified at a later point. For now, I would like to point out once again that the choice of the alternatives was not dictated by strict necessity, since, to my knowledge, Mostert never explicitly engages with Küng's thought. The same obviously applies to Hampson's work, which appears six years after Mostert's death. As a matter of fact, other theologians could have indeed been chosen as representatives of what I consider the two fundamental approaches to the question at hand, *how justification relates to ecclesiology*. Nevertheless, I am deeply convinced that my choice, while not strictly necessary, is not arbitrary either. What was already discussed for previous Parts applies here, too. In particular, my in-depth analysis of Mostert's ecclesiology of justification has convinced me to critically engage with these selected alternatives. Once again, the goal has been to assess whether a careful consideration of his thought can usefully contribute to reshape the way in which theology has so far tackled the relationship between justification and ecclesiology in the ecumenical context. In conclusion (4.3.), I will criticize Mostert's position and investigate what (if any) useful integrations can be formulated thanks to the insight provided by the theological alternatives. With

¹⁵⁶² HAMPSON, D. M., *Christian Contradictions. The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, Cambridge University Press 2001.

that, the research question will be assessed one last time, before drawing the conclusions of the present study.

4.1. The Church Stands on the Gospel: W. Mostert's Ecclesiology in the Wake of G. Ebeling.

4.1.1. The Church within Justification: G. Ebeling

According to Ebeling, a *theological* understanding of the church necessarily starts from the question of its source and foundation (*Quellgrund*)¹⁵⁶³, which is apprehended within faith. The church is essentially a community of faith (*Gemeinschaft des Glaubens*), so that one's coming to faith points to their already being in this community. The church exists because faith is essentially historical, in the sense that it intercepts and takes up the existence of historical individuals¹⁵⁶⁴. Correspondingly, Ebeling views the church as a reality having a connecting function (*Brückenfunktion*), linking up Jesus Christ with world history. This means that the church is not to be conceptualized in abstract terms, but always with concrete reference to the historically existing community of believers. However, this community can be regarded as *the church* – as the “bridge” connecting Jesus Christ with the history of the world – only as long as it is understood as an object of faith. Thus, the church is first and foremost a believed reality. As such, it must not be treated in isolation from the other objects of faith, but together with them and in accordance with the same criterion¹⁵⁶⁵. For Ebeling, the church is not simply there. When met with its empirical reality, one encounters something which is not simply identical with the church as an object of faith. The positivity (*Positivität*) of the church is not in and of itself the answer to the fundamental ecclesiological question of what constitutes the church¹⁵⁶⁶. Instead, this positivity, which is accessible to the empirical analysis, needs to be considered in its historical intertwining with the theological reality of the community of faith, which is *not* apprehended empirically. Neither dimension of the church is to be absolutized and abstracted from the other, the two are to be considered together. However, for Ebeling (and Mostert), the decisive discourse on the church is theological. This entails that all accounts whereby the ecclesial community is understood first and foremost empirically are largely inadequate.

As a reality of faith, the church founds in Jesus Christ, because by faith the believers' centers of personhood are transposed into him. Thus, I would say that Ebeling conceptualizes the church as the

¹⁵⁶³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 333.

¹⁵⁶⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 332.

¹⁵⁶⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 332f.

¹⁵⁶⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 334.

expression of the *plurality of justification*. The church becomes concrete in its individual members, but at the same time it manifests them as a community. In other words, it expresses the fact that those justified individuals who come to faith are not to be considered in isolation. Rather, they truly (*realiter*) belong together¹⁵⁶⁷, because it is through, together and in view of others that each one of them has come to faith. Correspondingly, Ebeling's ecclesiology centers around the semantics of *soma*. This is the instrument whereby human life becomes concrete and one's participation in the other is actualized¹⁵⁶⁸. When it comes to theological anthropology, this means that human being is first and foremost *body*, and their historical reality must be conceptualized according to their corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*)¹⁵⁶⁹. As Christ's *soma* after his resurrection, the church is, for Ebeling, a community of life (*Gesamtleben*) which is only effective in the world according to its own specificity as long as it truly keeps participating in Christ¹⁵⁷⁰.

Instead, when even theological discourse¹⁵⁷¹ considers it chiefly and normatively as an empirical reality, the church is misunderstood as an ideological structure (*Vorstellungshypostasis*)¹⁵⁷². Once again, Ebeling (with Mostert) claims that the theological and empirical understandings belong together, they are intertwined. What is more, this intertwining is itself theologically significant. In particular, the empirical understanding removes all religious prejudices from the analysis of the historical existence of the church, thereby forcing also theology to take these prejudices seriously. Thus, for Ebeling, a truly theological account of the church cannot be carried out in abstraction from the empirical one. Precisely in its profanity, the latter carries out a service which is relevant for the correct unfolding of ecclesiology¹⁵⁷³. Specifically, the empirical understanding of the church contributes to uncover the conflictual element running through its historical existence¹⁵⁷⁴. Now, according to Ebeling, the understanding of this conflict is theologically fruitful. Consequently, a sound ecclesiology needs to include insight coming from the empirical understanding of the

¹⁵⁶⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 339.

¹⁵⁶⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 341.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. This, in turn, sheds light on Paul's anti-spiritualistic insistence on the sovereignty of Christ over the believer's body (1Cor,13-20).

¹⁵⁷⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 342.

¹⁵⁷¹ Of course, the empirical understanding of the church is the only possible and adequate approach for non-theological disciplines.

¹⁵⁷² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 343.

¹⁵⁷³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 346. In his ecclesiology, Ebeling frequently relies on the polysemic value of the German word *Dienst* (service, worship). Accordingly, in the present paragraph, I have had to choose between "service" and "worship" depending on the context. Since the choice must ultimately rely on my own interpretation, a certain degree of uncertainty is unavoidable. At any rate, this semantic uncertainty does not seem to be crucial for the overall interpretation of Ebeling's ecclesiology. As for Mostert, he is not concerned by this uncertainty. In his case, the dimension of service is clearly distinguished from that of worship. This is clearly shown by his exclusion of the diaconal ministry from the primary institutions of the church, which will be discussed later. Therefore, I take it that Mostert's use of *Dienst* within ecclesiology always refers to worship.

¹⁵⁷⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 347.

church¹⁵⁷⁵. In particular, Ebeling maintains that the contrastive intertwining and the correct distinction between the theological and empirical understandings enable the proper rephrasing of all questions concerning the church and its distinctive marks (*notae ecclesiae*), which are central in his analysis. As a consequence of this rephrasing, the focus shifts from the church and its own relevance to the relevance of Jesus Christ as the source and foundation of the community of faith¹⁵⁷⁶. In Ebeling's thought, the theological and empirical accounts are the source of distinctions¹⁵⁷⁷ concerning the nature of the church and the criteria for recognizing it. These distinctions stem from the intertwining of the two understandings, which are qualitatively different from each other. At the same time, the distinctions are never to be interpreted as if, on their basis, there could exist two separate churches. Instead, theology must think *within the tension* opened up by the interaction between the theological and empirical understandings. Concretely, this means that ecclesiology will have to correctly account for the fact that the two understandings are to be distinguished but not separated. On the one hand, they belong to two qualitatively different dimensions of reality. On the other, they both refer to the church as one and the same object¹⁵⁷⁸. As long as it acknowledges both the need to distinguish and the impossibility to separate the two understandings, theology maintains what Ebeling considers to be the *ecclesiological fundamental differentiation*¹⁵⁷⁹. Specifically, for him, this differentiation is the one between the church and Jesus Christ as its criteriological foundation¹⁵⁸⁰. Accordingly, it requires a hermeneutic of the cross, so that the resulting ecclesiology can only be *in signo crucis*. Thus, whenever the fundamental differentiation is acknowledged, Jesus Christ is recognized to be both the foundational beginning and the continuous source of existence of the church as his body¹⁵⁸¹. In contrast to Mostert's view, Ebeling's dynamic understanding of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church as his body is also eschatologically qualified. For him, the consummation (*Vollendung*) of the church is not wholly present within its historicization¹⁵⁸². Once again, the concept of *soma* is pivotal in his ecclesiology. Thus, the body of Christ is not a metaphor, but the reality of his whole personal existence¹⁵⁸³. Accordingly, individual believers are members of Christ's body precisely

¹⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. Clearly, Ebeling understands the relationship between the theological and empirical understandings of the church as a specification of the fundamental Law-Gospel differentiation.

¹⁵⁷⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 351.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Particularly important for Ebeling is the distinction between visible and invisible church.

¹⁵⁷⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 354f.

¹⁵⁷⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 356.

¹⁵⁸⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 357.

¹⁵⁸¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 358f.

¹⁵⁸² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 358. Once more, Ebeling and Mostert diverge on eschatological matters. In particular, the first defends the theological legitimacy of the dimension of futurity, which cannot be simply equated with the christological presence of salvation. Instead, the second fully annexes eschatology to Christology. For him, a theological treatment of futurity would destroy the inner coherence of soteriology by operating an ambiguous and ideological postponing of salvation into the future. In the present study, I have already discussed various consequences of these diverging views (see 1.3.6. and 2.3.3.). More on the matter will emerge later.

¹⁵⁸³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 360.

because of their personal connection with him. Based on this connection, which is effected by faith alone (*sola fide*), believers, as justified sinners, receive Christ's life as their own. In this way, their communion of life with one another is established. Correspondingly, Ebeling's *ecclesiologia crucis* contends that Jesus Christ himself is the life of the church, its inner foundation, not an outer addition to it¹⁵⁸⁴. Coherently, the failure to acknowledge the fundamental differentiation invariably results in a *theologia gloriae*. In it, the criteriological role of Jesus Christ with reference to the church is denied and usurped by the latter¹⁵⁸⁵. Therefore, the point of Ebeling's account is Jesus Christ as the criterion for an ecclesiology determined by the *sola fide*.

Accordingly, he claims that the church must be understood theologically based on the reality characterizing Jesus Christ as the being-together (*Zusammensein*) of God and human being¹⁵⁸⁶. Since this reality is described by Christology and interpreted by soteriology, a theological understanding of the church derives from the interpretation of Christ's Person provided by justification doctrine. In Jesus Christ, God has enacted the reconciliation of human being in their stead, so that the reverse agency (of human being in God's stead) is no longer legitimate¹⁵⁸⁷. As such, justification doctrine interprets the church as a christological reality of faith. Since God has accomplished reconciliation in Jesus Christ, human being's service of Him can no longer be (mis)interpreted as their participation in the actualization of salvation. Rather, by excluding all soteriological agency on the part of human being, justification shows that faith alone is the service which can be rendered to the Creator by His creatures¹⁵⁸⁸. Thus, human being's service of God is at the same time intensified and restricted by justification doctrine. The justified sinner can only serve God by passing on the message of the reconciliation that has been fully accomplished in Jesus Christ. Now, the passing on of this message is worship (*Gottesdienst*), which therefore belongs to the very essence of the ecclesial community. The church simply *is* worship¹⁵⁸⁹. By worshipping, the community of believers continuously returns to Jesus Christ as the foundation of its existence. Thereby, it also constantly acknowledges the fundamental differentiation between itself and him. In other words, for Ebeling (and Mostert), worship points to the fact that the church does not possess its life, it *receives* it from Jesus Christ. In particular, worship effectively illustrates Christ as both the foundation of the church and its counterpart (*Gegenüber*). This illustration avoids all confusion between the two and keeps them in a tensional conjunction¹⁵⁹⁰. What is more, it is precisely this pointing to Christ which makes worship necessary. Additionally, worship is necessary because the justified is at the same time a sinner (*simul*

¹⁵⁸⁴ Cf. John 15,1-8.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 361.

¹⁵⁸⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 362.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 361.

¹⁵⁹⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 362.

iustus et peccator). Under the conditions of existence, the life of Jesus Christ is not yet given to them as the entirety of their existence, so that their newness of life is also a reality of faith¹⁵⁹¹. At this point, it becomes clear in what sense, for Ebeling, the church illustrates the plurality of justification¹⁵⁹². Both the ecclesial community and the justified sinner are grasped within faith. They are *not* understood empirically as factual realities, but theologically as spiritual realities. Correspondingly, the contrastive intertwining of the empirical and theological understandings of the church can be interpreted as the plurality (the collective dimension) of what the semantics of the *simul* express at the level of the individual. This interpretation of Ebeling's account, in my opinion, founds ultimately in his understanding of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation. After all, for him, this differentiation equally relates to the church and the *simul*, thereby disclosing the appropriate theological hermeneutic interpreting both. Specifically, the church and the *simul* are properly acknowledged in their theological truth only as long as they are interpreted as specifications of the Law-Gospel contrastive interaction.

Accordingly, Ebeling views worship as the conversation between human being and God considered from the perspective of the Gospel, which properly comes to language whenever its interaction with the Law unfolds correctly. In worship, both human being and God receive their own. In particular, the former receives the very *presence* of God, while the latter expects the *heart* of human being, the center of their personhood¹⁵⁹³. Thus, for Ebeling, human being is not partially, but entirely involved in worship. Their gratitude for this overarching involvement takes the form of service, both to God (faith) and to human being (love). It is important to note that Ebeling does *not* regard (diaconal) service to human being as a secondary moment, after the primary service to God. The service carried out by the church is always primary. This entails that the Gospel is not the totalitarian intensification or ultimate sacralization of an all-encompassing religious dimension. Put otherwise, it is not the final triumph of religion and the ensuing annihilation of the worldly dimension¹⁵⁹⁴. Rather, the worship of the church points to the Gospel as that reality which makes all things relative when they come into contact with it. This relativization of things does not diminish them. To the contrary, they are now properly qualified as that which is relative because it is *not* Gospel. Precisely as such, they acquire their own goodness and truly stand *as created realities* in their newly qualified, worldly autonomy. From the perspective of the Gospel, this relativization of worldly realities *is* their liberation. Therefore, the service of the church *always* consists in making all things relative in order to enable the true service of God¹⁵⁹⁵.

¹⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹² See here, p. 249.

¹⁵⁹³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 363.

¹⁵⁹⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 362.

¹⁵⁹⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 363.

It follows that, for Ebeling, the criterion for (theologically) recognizing the church *as church* is the intensive concentration of the whole of its service onto the decisive element (*das Entscheidende*), namely the Gospel¹⁵⁹⁶. As justification doctrine aptly points out, this concentration on the Gospel makes even the church (Christ's historical body after the resurrection!) relative to it. This means that the ecclesial community is not there for itself, but for the world. Because of this, Ebeling claims that the historical existence of the church is *identical* with its vicarious being-for-the-world¹⁵⁹⁷. Now, it would be possible to simply understand this along the lines of a *baptistic*¹⁵⁹⁸ view of the church. Accordingly, the church is a transient reality, and its *kerygmatic* witness to Jesus Christ consists precisely in its diminishing for him to grow¹⁵⁹⁹. I do not intend to counter this position, as I actually find it theologically sound. Also, I do think that this baptistic element is indeed part of Ebeling's conception. However, I am under the impression that his perspective centers elsewhere. As was already pointed out, Ebeling's ecclesiology is built on the image of the church as the body (*soma*) of Christ, his historical presence after the resurrection. The corresponding ecclesiology is eminently christological, which of course means that it needs to be interpreted by justification doctrine. Because of such an intensive christological and soteriological view of the church, I do not think that Ebeling's ecclesiology is essentially baptistic¹⁶⁰⁰. Rather, his claim that the historical existence of the church *consists in* its being there for the world is immediately Christological. Put otherwise, it refers first and foremost to Jesus Christ, not to his relationship with John the Baptist. For Ebeling, the church is immediately the *soma* of Jesus Christ. He is the Son who is entirely one with the Father, and yet also clearly distinguished from Him precisely in his being completely and wholly devoted to His gracious salvation intent towards the world. Therefore, when Ebeling says that the church is not there for itself, but for the world, he is saying that of *the Person of Christ*. This being-for-the-world is the essence of the church because it is the very being of Jesus Christ, that which corresponds to the center of his divine personhood. Christ's being-for-the-world expresses in the language of soteriology what the semantics of his *enhypostasis* describe in Christology. Christ is for the world because in him *God* is for the world. Therefore, the church as the body of Christ is for the world not in itself, but only in him and as long as he is its continuous source and foundation. From the perspective of justification doctrine, this means that the church, as the plurality of justification, is the community of those whose centers of personhood are no longer in them, but outside of them (*extra se*), in Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁹⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 364.

¹⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹⁸ With this designation, I mean a view whereby Jesus Christ's relationship with the church is analogous to his relationship with John the Baptist.

¹⁵⁹⁹ See John 3,30.

¹⁶⁰⁰ See note 1598.

Since the church exists for the world, Ebeling also claims that there is a correspondence in nature between the ecclesial community and political institutions, in the sense that both aim (each in its own specific realm) at the promotion of life. Specifically, the church and worldly institutions share in their *vicarious role*: they take up responsibilities for all, especially in the face of the powers hindering life and freedom¹⁶⁰¹. Clearly, this correspondence does not mean confusion. Rather, it points to the fact that both the church and political institutions are (differently) rooted in the will of God. This passage is specifically important when it comes to justification doctrine. For Ebeling (who is in line with the traditional Reformational teaching on the matter), the church gives up to the State what pertains to it *as State*. Precisely in doing so, the church also checks that the State does not press claims on what does *not* pertain to it and actually lies outside of its prerogative¹⁶⁰². Since the State is a reality of the Law and the church is *the* reality of the Gospel, the relationship between the two is interpreted by justification doctrine. Specifically, this doctrine entails that no absolute claim on reality laid by the State is compatible with the Gospel given to the church. Correspondingly, the sheer existence of the church as the plurality of justification serves as a vibrant critique against all ideological hypostatizations of the political domain¹⁶⁰³ in general and worldly institutions in particular. By confessing Jesus Christ as the *Kyrios*¹⁶⁰⁴, the church as his *soma kerygmatically* points to him as the one true and gracious sovereign of all things. This clearly qualifies worldly institutions as belonging to the dimension of the penultimate. Therefore, by reflecting on the relationship between the church and worldly institutions, an ecclesiology of justification in Ebeling's (and Mostert's) sense criteriologically establishes the Christian preference for those political systems, such as parliamentary democracy, in which a *parable* of the Gospel is manifested and all claims to absoluteness are rejected by principle.

Ebeling's ecclesiology of Christ's *soma* should not be understood in contrast to the view of the church as *creatura verbi divini*. To the contrary, he explicitly holds the two perspectives together. Specifically, the life of the body of Christ is constitutively determined by the fact that, in it, God's once-and-for-all salvation event in Christ keeps occurring kerygmatically¹⁶⁰⁵. Now, this *kerygmatic* occurrence of the salvation event is only possible and actual through the Word¹⁶⁰⁶. In particular, the preached and celebrated Word enables the very constitution (*Formierung*) of the church. Specifically, for Ebeling, the preached *kerygma* as the Word of justification truly transposes one's center of

¹⁶⁰¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 365.

¹⁶⁰² Ibid.

¹⁶⁰³ Cf. Mark 16,18.

¹⁶⁰⁴ This pointing function of the church is clearly baptistic in the sense of note 1598. Once again, my claim is not that Ebeling's ecclesiology of Christ's *soma* diverges fundamentally from what I have called a baptistic view. Rather, it integrates it through the christological (Chalcedonian) understanding that I have just illustrated (see here, p. 253).

¹⁶⁰⁵ Therefore, also sacramentally.

¹⁶⁰⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 366.

personhood into Christ. Simultaneously, baptism constitutes one's belonging to the church, and the Lord's supper is the core (*Keimzelle*) of the church structure (*Ordnung*)¹⁶⁰⁷. With that, the criteriological function of justification doctrine in Ebeling's ecclesiology becomes clearly visible. Correspondingly, this doctrine is also the criterion to navigate the problems affecting the existence (*Existenzprobleme*) of the church and its identifying marks, the *notae ecclesiae*¹⁶⁰⁸. The theological treatment of the *notae* is essential to Ebeling's *ecclesiology within justification*, as it clarifies that the church is a matter of *faith*, not of sight¹⁶⁰⁹. In particular, he maintains that the *notae* are ideologically misunderstood if regarded as inalienable possessions of the church¹⁶¹⁰. Rather than being factual descriptions, the *notae* are polemical statements. Like justification (their criterion), they refer to a reality which is not transparent to empirical analysis, but radically questioned by it¹⁶¹¹. In short, Ebeling contends that the *notae* are true predicates of the church only in a strict theological sense, from the perspective of justification as the overall relationship between human being, God and the world. Thus, his ecclesiology immediately depends on justification doctrine. The latter provides the theological framework within which the christological foundation of the church (which *per se* is accepted and affirmed by all Christian churches) becomes concrete and precise, therefore also divisive. Specifically, justification doctrine determines the church as the justified sinners' community of life with the gracious God. In particular, it illustrates that He is the One who has acted in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners. *Therefore*, He also comes to them in the power of His promise (*Zuspruch*) when they hear, preach and celebrate His Word faithfully, that is in accordance with the very unfolding of the already accomplished (*vollbracht*) salvation event. This event does not in the least depend on sinners. Rather, it has been fully accomplished *for* them (*pro nobis*)¹⁶¹², so that they may now live and love accordingly (*Verheißung*). In Ebeling's understanding, the relationship between justification doctrine and the church is twofold, having both a positive and a negative moment. Negatively, this relationship entails that the church can never become its own foundation, not to mention the foundation of faith¹⁶¹³. Positively, it means that the church belongs to the salvation event and is therefore to be described theologically within justification doctrine. Correspondingly, for Ebeling (and Mostert), the *notae* are only understood theologically as long as they say something of

¹⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. By saying that the Lord's supper is the core of the church structure, Ebeling is not referring first and foremost to church discipline. After all, such a reading would consider discipline as directly *belonging* to the Gospel. This would be more in line with a Reformed approach and rather surprising in a Lutheran theologian like Ebeling (and in fact, as I will show later on, a similar reading is explicitly denied by Mostert). Rather, he contends that the supper is the actual *locus* where Christ's presence is really (*realiter*) encountered and experienced. Through faith, the supper truly *constitutes* the body of Christ.

¹⁶⁰⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 368.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Cf. 2 Cor 5,7.

¹⁶¹⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 369.

¹⁶¹¹ Ibid.

¹⁶¹² Cf. John 19,30.

¹⁶¹³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 370.

the church which comes from its foundation and accompanies its existence as a promise (*Verheißung*), not as a factual description¹⁶¹⁴. This entails that the theological understanding of the *notæ* unfolds *in signo crucis*. In other words, it constitutively refers to the dimension of hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*)¹⁶¹⁵, which culminates in Christ's cross. For this dimension to be correctly and satisfactorily accounted for, it is necessary to keep the theological and empirical understandings of the church and its characteristics in continuous, contrastive contact. As was already explained¹⁶¹⁶, this contrastive contact is viewed by Ebeling as a specification of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation. Ultimately, it is Ebeling's treatment of the *notæ ecclesiæ* which clarifies in what sense his ecclesiology is concretely located within justification doctrine. In what follows, it is therefore necessary to carefully study the *notæ*.

For Ebeling, the central *nota ecclesiæ* is *apostolicity*¹⁶¹⁷. Essentially, apostolicity illustrates that faith is the foundation of the church. Accordingly, it expresses the historical unity of the ecclesial community with its christological origin and foundation¹⁶¹⁸. This means that apostolicity is the critical pointer to Jesus Christ as the sole condition and criterion of ecclesiality. The church is the church as long as it is apostolic, meaning as long as it rests on Jesus Christ as God's salvation event for human being. Historically, apostolicity intercepts and judges the fact that the church changes overtime and expresses the need for a theological criterion to assess these changes. This entails that the authority of the church depends on and derives from its apostolicity, not the other way around¹⁶¹⁹. Thus, the ecclesial authority is legitimate to the extent that it corresponds to the Gospel and is shaped after it, thereby functioning as a *liberating* authority which brings justified sinners to the courage of faith. Correspondingly, Ebeling regards the apostolic church as the community of life (*Zusammenleben*) for which it is true that the Person of Jesus Christ is the only touchstone. Clearly, the ecclesial normativity of Christ is not to be understood as a new Law (*nova lex*), but as the liberating, dynamic power¹⁶²⁰ of the Gospel¹⁶²¹. Accordingly, apostolicity points to the church being immediately defined by justification doctrine. Specifically, this doctrine provides the theological orientation for true ecclesiology. This is because it safeguards the correct relationship between Jesus Christ as the foundation and continuous source of faith and the church as his body, which is at the same time fundamentally united with him (as its head) and clearly distinguished from him (as its Lord). Thus, justification doctrine rightly places the church within the overall interrelation of God, human being

¹⁶¹⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 371.

¹⁶¹⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 370.

¹⁶¹⁶ See here, pp. 252f.

¹⁶¹⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 369.

¹⁶¹⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 375.

¹⁶¹⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 376.

¹⁶²⁰ Cf. Rom 1,16f.

¹⁶²¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 376.

and the world. In justification, both God and the church are given their own. This means that the church is *not* apostolic as long as it is the church. Rather, the church is the church as long as it is apostolic. As a consequence, there can be no empirical guarantee of the continuous apostolicity of the church in history. In fact, in Ebeling's view, wanting to establish the apostolicity of the church empirically risks obscuring its christological foundation, which becomes *de facto* subordinated to the ecclesial institution¹⁶²². For him, the correct (christological) understanding of apostolicity is safeguarded by the *sola Scriptura* principle. For the church, Scripture is the only normative access to Jesus Christ as its foundation. Therefore, Scripture continuously points to the once-and-for-all character of apostolicity because it connects it with Jesus Christ as God's salvation event. This necessarily implies rejecting all reification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of apostolicity¹⁶²³. Given its crucial role in paving the way for the correct christological understanding of apostolicity, the *sola Scriptura* also entails some hermeneutical tasks (*hermeneutische Aufgaben*) for the church. These mainly consist in dealing critically with the historical dimension of Biblical texts (formal task) and promoting the understanding and constant application of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation when studying Scripture (material task)¹⁶²⁴.

Since he regards apostolicity as central, Ebeling claims that all other *notae ecclesiae* are its functions. As he (like Mostert) contends, the *unity* of the church founds in its apostolicity. Therefore, it is not threatened by the plurality of the theologically legitimate manifestations of the one church, but only by the division originating from the forceful and ideological attempts at creating artificial uniformity¹⁶²⁵. Thus, pushing towards artificial and visible unity is illegitimate, as it takes the *theological* reality of the church for granted. Thereby, the fundamental ecclesiological differentiation is misunderstood and the criteriological function of justification is ignored. According to Ebeling, the

¹⁶²² Ibid. From a Protestant perspective, it is quite difficult to distinguish between this risk and the Roman Catholic account of *apostolic succession* as such. Nevertheless, I would argue that this account is not *eo ipso* the expression of a hypertrophic focus on an empirical understanding of the church. As a matter of fact, ecumenical dialogue has shown that the Roman Catholic position cannot be simply equated with the absolutization of an empirical understanding of the church. For instance, P. De Witte shows that the Roman Catholic perspective essentially distinguishes between apostolicity in itself, which founds exclusively in the Gospel, and its external signs, which are ultimately ordained to the Gospel and not an end in themselves. The argument is clearly built upon the distinction between the primary reality of faith (*res*, in this case apostolicity as such), and what points to it as a secondary, empirical reality (*signum*, in this case the historical succession of bishops). The two are constitutively connected and should not be separated. However, there can be situations in which the *res* is preserved even in the absence of its *signum* (DE WITTE, P., "The Apostolicity of the Church' in Light of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consensus on Justification", *Ecclesiology* 7 [2011], pp. 317-335, here pp. 327f.). On the one hand, if the De Witte is to be followed, these considerations could help Protestants reconsider their often too superficial equating of the Roman Catholic view on apostolic succession with a merely empirical and institutional understanding of the church. On the other, I am convinced that this does not yet solve the core difference between the two confessional positions on apostolicity. Much more radically, the point is the diverging understandings of the Gospel. Specifically, both confessions regard apostolicity as a reality of faith founded on the Gospel. However, at the same time, they seem to understand the Gospel in very different ways. The difference depends on whether or not both confessions interpret justification doctrine as *the* criterion for understanding what "Gospel" means.

¹⁶²³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 377.

¹⁶²⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 372.

immediate focus on the unity of the church (instead of apostolicity) is the very root of (legitimate) division in the church, because it obscures the question of what truly constitutes the ecclesial community¹⁶²⁶. Instead, he claims that unity is not simply there as an institutional given. Rather, it happens as *communio* whenever the different churches live off their shared relationship with Jesus Christ as the body of the one church. Once again, it is pivotal that the church relates to Christ in a twofold manner: in him, it finds in him its head, but also its counterpart (*Gegenüber*). The image of the *soma* of Christ makes it impossible to immediately identify any particular church with him¹⁶²⁷. The theological reality of the body of Christ is transversal to the empirical churches and relativizes them all. However, this relativization is only enforced to the extent that the different churches remain oriented to what truly constitutes them. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as God's salvation intent graciously addressed to human being as a sinner¹⁶²⁸. The common orientation to the Gospel is the positive criterion for the unity of the churches, as it explicates what is indeed necessary for this unity to be confessed. Simultaneously, a negative criterion is also implied. Specifically, it is also necessary to establish what is *not* necessary for unity to be confessed. This negative criterion is needed in order to illustrate the positive one in the clearest manner. Thus, for Ebeling, all things but the Word of Christ are to be necessarily excluded from what qualifies church unity. As a positive criterion, the Word is precisely the only essential reality qualifying the church as one, thereby effecting *communio* among the different churches and making the confession of unity possible and real¹⁶²⁹. According to Ebeling (and Mostert), only an understanding of the church and its unity which founds in the Gospel effectively breaks with legalism. Instead, all approaches whereby ecclesiology is derived from the ecclesial *institution* are inherently legalistic¹⁶³⁰, as they show a lack of understanding of the fundamental Law-Gospel differentiation. In short, from a theological perspective, church unity is not understood as possibility for human agency, but a reality of God's grace. Since it is grace, church unity happens whenever the ecclesial community is not considered as an end in itself, but understood as *semper reformanda*, thus constantly subjected to the criteriological function of the Gospel of justification¹⁶³¹. Ultimately, church unity is expressed not so much by a visible uniformity of different churches, but by their shared christological orientation¹⁶³².

Coming to the church *holiness*, Ebeling is well aware of the scandal which has become associated with it in history¹⁶³³. The church is confessed to be holy, and yet far too often its witness has painfully

¹⁶²⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 373.

¹⁶²⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶³¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 374.

¹⁶³² EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 375.

¹⁶³³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 378.

and blasphemously become a counter-witness. This can be observed already from a mere empirical perspective. Theologically, an empirical understanding of church holiness implies the utter rejection of justification doctrine, thereby dismantling ecclesiology as a whole. This distorted understanding is embodied by an activist anthropology whereby the “saints” are not regarded as justified sinners, but as soteriologically capable human beings¹⁶³⁴. Furthermore, the anthropological misunderstanding becomes immediately hamartiological. This happens whenever the church, as the community of justified *sinners*, is not seriously willing to give up on its supposed holiness in order to aptly point to its true holiness, which is not its own, but Jesus Christ’s. For Ebeling, a lack of clarity on the matter persists and is propagated in and by the church embracing the worldly (mis)understanding of holiness. In this misunderstanding, virtue (not faith) is the opposite of sin, and holiness results from the distinctive ethical-religious markers of a (supposedly) sinless life¹⁶³⁵. The church can only firmly hold onto such a misunderstanding – and draw on it to make sense of what its holiness *should* be like – as long as it forgets what its holiness truly *is*. If the ecclesial community understands holiness in a worldly manner, it is because it prefers the *securitas* of walking by sight over the *certitudo* of walking by faith. Thus, Ebeling contends that the true holiness of the church is Jesus Christ alone (*solus Christus*). Correspondingly, it is promised (*zugesprochene*), believed holiness, a holiness *in signo crucis*. This is the only understanding which does stand affirmed whenever justification doctrine is duly applied as the touchstone for what is truly christological, thereby also truly ecclesiological. Accordingly, Ebeling connects church holiness to the semantics of the *simul*¹⁶³⁶, with the latter interpreting the former. In particular, the *simul* points to that holiness which corresponds to Jesus Christ and is understood and apprehended only as a specification of justification doctrine. Holiness is a reality intercepted by the sinner within the relationship between God’s Word and faith. From this perspective, holiness comes to be regarded as that mark of the church which correctly signifies its obligation to the world¹⁶³⁷. The church is holy in the sense that, notwithstanding and against its own unholiness, it owes the world Christ’s holiness as his liberating Word. The holiness of the church, for Ebeling, is not its own possession. Rather, the holy church is the community on which God’s liberating claim (*Inanspruchnahme*) has been hiddenly laid. As a consequence of this claim, something now may appear as *also* true of this community because it is first and foremost true of Jesus Christ. In him, this community and all its individual members, as the plurality of justification, find their own centers of personhood. The church holiness and its freedom to serve, which is also its self-fulfillment, inherently belong together. Rather than being a contingent *addendum* to the ecclesial community, this

¹⁶³⁴ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 378f.

¹⁶³⁵ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 379.

¹⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶³⁷ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 380.

freedom to serve, for Ebeling, is a necessary form of its life (*Lebensäußerung*). As such, it results in actions which modify the world. However, it is essential not to confuse these actions (ethics) with their foundation (justification). The actions are ethical *consequences* of the foundation, which is the core modification having already happened in and to the church in the power of God's salvation event in Jesus Christ¹⁶³⁸. In other words, the church can and does intervene in the world to change it with its liberating ethical agency because and only to the extent that it has been preveniently changed itself (both as a community and as individuals) through justifying faith¹⁶³⁹.

For Ebeling, the empirical understanding of the church *universality* results from a shifting focus from the universal *mission* (*Sendung*) of the ecclesial community to its universal *presence* (*Bestand*)¹⁶⁴⁰. If this empirical understanding becomes absolutized and is fully abstracted from the theological one, the church risks seeking a universality for its own sake. This fundamentally differs from Christ's universality, thereby contradicting justification doctrine and ultimately hindering ecclesial witness¹⁶⁴¹. The theological understanding, instead, points once again to Christology interpreted by justification doctrine as the criterion for understanding this *nota*. Specifically, the universality of the church illustrates that the community of faith founds in Jesus Christ as God's full and unconditional self-emptying love for the sake of sinners¹⁶⁴². Correspondingly, the church is universal in the sense that it is constitutively oriented not to itself, but to the world¹⁶⁴³. As the *soma* of Christ, its universality is the same as his. This simply means that the church is there for all because Jesus Christ is there for all, since he is the Lord of the whole world and the only begotten Son of the One Father and Creator¹⁶⁴⁴. From the point of view of justification doctrine, the universality of Jesus Christ consists in his being given for all, so that everyone is in the same situation before God. Once again, Ebeling thinks with reference to the semantics of the *simul*. Interestingly enough, he also connects the church universality with the question of consummation (*Vollendung*)¹⁶⁴⁵. In this sense, the church is universal because God's salvation intent is universal. As such, God's intent unravels within a dynamic movement throughout history in which the overall orientation of all things towards their eschatological goal (*Gesamtziel*) is apprehended (by faith)¹⁶⁴⁶. In particular, by discussing the universality of the church, Ebeling contends that this overall orientation indeed concerns all things, as it ultimately founds in the universality of God as the Creator. Additionally, justification doctrine

¹⁶³⁸ For my detailed study of Ebeling's understanding of justification as the question of the modification of the world and the resulting ethical theory of the right moral handling, see here, pp. 163-167.

¹⁶³⁹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 380.

¹⁶⁴⁰ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 382.

¹⁶⁴¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 384.

¹⁶⁴² For the christological foundation of Ebeling's ecclesiology, see here, pp. 249ff.

¹⁶⁴³ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 383.

¹⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴⁵ For Ebeling's account of consummation, see here, pp. 171ff.

¹⁶⁴⁶ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 383.

points to universality as a task (*Aufgabe*) for the church. Clearly, the normative reference is to Jesus Christ as the true being of the ecclesial community. Accordingly, the church is universal in that it does not take up for itself the universality of Christ¹⁶⁴⁷. Once more, reference to Christ, for Ebeling, entails that the focus is immediately and intensively placed on what is essential, and not on its consequences. When it comes to the agency of the community of faith in its interactions with the world, this entails that the body of Christ needs to focus on what it owes to the whole world. Put otherwise, the emphasis is on the message of God's reconciliation with sinners in Jesus Christ. This specifically includes missionary work, which is the reason why and the goal towards which the church is convened in the first place¹⁶⁴⁸. Thus, for Ebeling, missionary work is the concrete manifestation of the church universality, and as such it is owed to all human beings regardless of their ecclesial membership.

To summarize, Ebeling's ecclesiology is an application of the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation, which enables the correct distinction between an empirical and a theological understanding of the church. Like Law and Gospel, these understandings are contrastively intertwined. The church is founded christologically within justification doctrine. The image of the ecclesial community as the *soma* of Christ qualifies both its essential foundation in him (as its head) and its radical distinction from him (as its Lord). Justification doctrine is the hermeneutical instrument which interprets the relationship between the church and Jesus Christ theologically. Formally, this doctrine makes it impossible to either identify or disconnect the two. Materially, it qualifies the church as the plurality of justification and interprets its *notæ*.

4.1.2. The Church as Justification: W. Mostert

In the wake of Ebeling, Mostert conceptualizes the church as a reality of faith. It is the community of those who, by their faith in Jesus Christ, believe in God¹⁶⁴⁹. In particular, for Mostert, the church consists of primary and secondary institutions. The primary institutions express the very essence of the ecclesial community as it becomes manifest in worship (*Gottesdienst*). These are: preaching, the Lord's supper, baptism and prayer¹⁶⁵⁰. According to Mostert, these four institutions enable the right understanding of worship as the localized actualization of the relationship between human being as a sinner and the gracious God as their Savior. In particular, the first two understand this relationship from the point of observation of God, while the last two view it from the perspective of human being¹⁶⁵¹. Clearly, this means that worship is interpreted in light of justification doctrine.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴⁸ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), p. 384.

¹⁶⁴⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 55.

¹⁶⁵⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 125.

¹⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

Consequently, Mostert contends that the very essence of worship can be described in a twofold manner: as human being's gratitude towards God and as the announcement (*Verkündigung*) of the ground for such gratitude. Thus, worship is the free, joyful celebration of the presence of God as the One who graciously and unexpectedly brings to human being the solution to their fundamental problem. As such, worship is not rigidly limited to a set of actions in a specific space and time, it does not simply coincide with the liturgy of the church. Rather, it encompasses the believer's whole life, it cannot be contained as it springs from and actualizes every time anew God's free, outreaching self-emptying (*Selbsthingabe*) for the sake of sinners¹⁶⁵². Accordingly, Mostert understands liturgy not simply as worship, but as its *intensification*. In liturgy, the reality of faith which encompasses the whole of the believer's life gets localized, individualized and thematized. Thereby, life as a whole becomes concentrated on the Gospel, that which is elementary and essential¹⁶⁵³. Thus, for Mostert, the liturgical dimension of worship is the essential *crystallization point* of human being's existence, as it thematizes the question of their relationship with God¹⁶⁵⁴. As such, liturgy relates to human being's entire existence as a *pars pro toto*. In worship, human being's existence for God, which is generally true, becomes particularly true as the celebration of His being-for-sinners¹⁶⁵⁵. Within church liturgy, sacraments highlight that God is the One summoning the ecclesial community, He is the subject of reconciliation. For Mostert, God's salvific interaction with the church *determines* the whole of the liturgy and qualifies the church agency as the *recollection* (*Begängnis*) of His prevenient agency¹⁶⁵⁶. With that, the church becomes human being's *existential correspondence* to God's agency, and not the autonomous subject of sacred handling. The primacy of God's agency founds worship, because this agency is identical with Jesus Christ's being-for-sinners. This entails that, for Mostert, the christological qualification of the church stands or falls with the affirmation of God as the sole soteriological agent. According to him, the church is understood as a christological reality of faith both formally and materially. Formally, it is christological in that its essence is Jesus Christ's being-for-sinners, which becomes apprehended in and by the community whenever the Gospel is purely preached and celebrated. Materially, the church is christological because and as long as, in its primary institutions, God is recognized and honored as the sole agent of salvation. This shows to what extent Mostert's ecclesiology centers around the primary institutions of the church. They are fundamental because they *communicate* to sinners God's being-for-them in Jesus Christ¹⁶⁵⁷. Correspondingly,

¹⁶⁵² MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 126.

¹⁶⁵³ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 126f.

¹⁶⁵⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 127.

¹⁶⁵⁵ "Mit den Einsetzungsworten [...] macht die Kirche sich theologisch klar, daß das, was sie tut, das Begängnis eines Handelns Gottes an ihr selbst ist" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 128).

¹⁶⁵⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 129.

¹⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

primary institutions point to both the formality and materiality of the church as a christological reality. Ultimately, they tell believers that their reconciliation is complete, it is posited by God in their favor. By doing so, primary institutions also call on believers to correspond to such reconciliation in their lives by means of their faith (*sola fide*)¹⁶⁵⁸. Mostert contends that, in its liturgical acting, the church does *not* act in Christ's stead (*in persona Christi*). Instead, it corresponds to God's acting in him and experiences this acting as *present*. Once again, the point is that salvation is truly and fully present wherever Christ is present. This is why, in Mostert's view, the church does not play any vicarious role. Rather, God being made present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) is the essence of all acts carried out by the ecclesial community, to the extent that presence is a predicate of the very being of God¹⁶⁵⁹. Accordingly, Mostert maintains that the (often experienced) absence of God is merely the reflection of sinners not being with Him¹⁶⁶⁰. Sin consists precisely in human being existing outside of God's presence. Correspondingly, worship is the fundamental contradiction of sin, because it makes Jesus Christ present to sinners as God's being-for-them, which has truly defeated their not being for Him¹⁶⁶¹. This presence of Christ is communicated by the primary institutions of the church.

In particular, these are necessary for the actualization (*Vollzug*) of both Jesus Christ's being for sinners (*pro nobis*) and their corresponding faith in him. In turn, this faith actualizes their being-for-God. Thus, for Mostert, the church becomes true by faith, because it is faith which apprehends (*hinnimt*) Jesus' being-for-sinners¹⁶⁶². Furthermore, it becomes true *as* a christological situation, that is whenever Jesus Christ is made present as the sinners' relationship to God¹⁶⁶³. Following Ebeling¹⁶⁶⁴, Mostert understands the liturgical presence of Christ as the actualization of his personal being (*soma*). This means that Jesus Christ is made present in his concrete relationship with God, human being and the world. This happens first and foremost *kerygmatically* and is appropriated by faith. Thus, for Mostert, Christ's liturgical presence happens in and by the Word. Accordingly, his ecclesiology centers first and foremost on the church as *creatura verbi divini*. Specifically, he claims that the Word is the only dimension within which personal being truly appears¹⁶⁶⁵. Apart from the Word, there can be no personal presence, because there is no concrete relationality. Correspondingly,

¹⁶⁵⁸ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 130.

¹⁶⁵⁹ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 131.

¹⁶⁶⁰ "Gegenwart ist ein Prädikat des Seins Gottes selbst. D.h., wenn Gott nicht gegenwärtig ist, so ist das ein Reflex unseres eigenen nicht bei Gott-Seins, unserer eigenen Gegenwartslosigkeit" (ibid.). Interestingly enough, this position seems to ignore that hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*) is a key theological category for the Reformation. In particular, it belongs to the semantics of *theologia crucis*, that Mostert usually integrates in his discourse. Like God's wrath (see 2.3.2.), in my opinion, His hiddenness plays a positive role within the *oeconomia salutis*. Therefore, it cannot be simply regarded as a reality which is solely due to human being's sin. I will criticize Mostert's position on the matter in 4.3.3.

¹⁶⁶¹ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), pp. 131f.

¹⁶⁶² MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), pp. 132.

¹⁶⁶³ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 56.

¹⁶⁶⁴ See here, pp. 249-254.

¹⁶⁶⁵ "Aber das Wesentliche des Sakramentes erscheint im Wort, weil eine Person im Wort, nicht in ihrer physischen Substanz erscheint" (MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], p. 140).

the reality of a personal being, which exists relationally within the Word, can only be apprehended by an equally relational personal act, which is faith. This entails that, for Mostert, the Word and faith truly correspond because they share the same ontological determination. The Word expresses and carries the (relational-ontological) reality of the Person of Christ (his *soma*), and faith apprehends and actualizes this reality as God's gracious self-communication to the sinner here and now¹⁶⁶⁶.

In and through Jesus Christ's *soma*, the sinners' relationship with God becomes *pure*, since it shares in Jesus' own relationship with the Father. According to Mostert, this purity does not entail an ethical or religious higher status. Instead, in line with Ebeling¹⁶⁶⁷, it needs to be interpreted through the prism of justification doctrine. This means that, by this relationship, all persisting differences among church members are made relative¹⁶⁶⁸. This relativization concerns first and foremost the secondary institutions of the church and qualitatively distinguishes them from primary ones. Accordingly, the secondary institutions are co-positd with the church and define its image, but do *not* embody its essence immediately¹⁶⁶⁹. Specifically, they ought to express the space and instruments for the actualization of primary institutions¹⁶⁷⁰. The secondary institutions are, among others, the doctrine, organization and discipline of the church. Against Ebeling¹⁶⁷¹, Mostert argues that also the diaconal ministry belongs to the secondary institutions. In other words, it does not immediately express what constitutes the church, even though it is always and necessarily present there, where the church is¹⁶⁷².

¹⁶⁶⁶ Among other things, this passage also provides a clear example of Mostert's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology, or at least between philosophical theology and theological theology (see here, pp. 22-25). As a matter of fact, his particular theological claim that God's Word expresses and carries the reality of the Person of Christ is to be placed within his general view whereby the linguistic category "word" is that which carries the reality of personal being. This statement concerns reality as such, language and personhood as philosophical categories. Thus, it is not specific to the christological reality of God's Word and Christ's Person. As was already shown, this does *not* mean that Mostert's position on the relationship between theology and philosophy is foundationalist (see here, pp. 60f.). To the contrary, his thought is articulated in the constant interaction and interrelation of implicit and explicit theological discourse. The two forms of discourse express one and the same truth about reality from two different points of view: the hiddenness of existence experienced as a soteriological problem (implicit, philosophical theology) and the clarity of revelation experienced as the solution to this problem (explicit, theological theology). Nevertheless, it remains true that, in light of this interrelation between the two kinds of theological discourse, Mostert's theology is inevitably located in extreme proximity to specific philosophical positions. This is exemplified by the relationship between the word as a linguistic reality and the constitution of personal being. Looking at this example, the advantage of a similar proximity is that Mostert is able to account for the reality of God's Word and Jesus Christ's personal being without seeing them as instances of a qualitatively different kind of reality, for the understanding of which some special hermeneutic would be necessary (this is the weakness often reproached to Barthianism). Instead, the disadvantage of said extreme proximity between theology and philosophy is that, as a result, a specific philosophical description of reality becomes so intertwined with theological discourse that it ends up co-structuring its expressions within a hermeneutical paradigm (for instance that of Aristotelianism within the Roman Catholic tradition) outside of which this theological discourse risks fundamentally losing its meaning, or at least its critical effectiveness.

¹⁶⁶⁷ See here, p. 251.

¹⁶⁶⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 56.

¹⁶⁶⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 19.

¹⁶⁷⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 23.

¹⁶⁷¹ See here, p. 252.

¹⁶⁷² "Die diakonischen Aktivitäten der Kirche und die dazu notwendigen Institutionen sind mit dem Sein der Kirche mitgesetzt, aber sie sind als sekundäre Institutionen von den primären zu unterscheiden" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 57). This position will be criticized in 4.3.1.

Mostert explicitly maintains the Protestant position that the church is present where and when the Gospel is purely preached, and the sacraments are orderly celebrated¹⁶⁷³. The purity of the Gospel and the orderly celebration of the sacraments are the essence of the primary institutions of the church. This purity and this orderly celebration establish the community's true correspondence to Jesus Christ as God's being-for-us (*pro nobis*)¹⁶⁷⁴. In Mostert's ecclesiology, there is a clear connection between the primary institutions and that which the church does *not* share with worldly institutions. This means that the primary institutions and the *notae ecclesiae* are not only essential to the church, but also unique to it. Thus, the church is identified only by those elements which lack parallels in worldly realities. Incidentally, on the basis of this conception, Mostert claims that *discipline* cannot be considered an essential feature of the church. As a matter of fact, a discipline in the sense of inner structure, governance and order is also a feature of the State. As a consequence, regarding discipline as a primary institution of the church would entail confusion between the Law and the Gospel¹⁶⁷⁵. The same applies to *hierarchy*, which is also not church-specific. Additionally, against Trent, Mostert contends that hierarchy cannot be regarded as primary because it is not sacramental. As a matter of fact, for him¹⁶⁷⁶, the term sacrament only makes theological sense as long as it is understood in strict christological terms¹⁶⁷⁷. Since Jesus Christ alone is the *mysterion* of God's salvation act (*solus Christus*), nothing can be called a sacrament unless it contributes to pragmatically illustrate and *kerygmatically* actualize the reality of salvation in him¹⁶⁷⁸.

Such an immediate christological insistence in Mostert's ecclesiology entails that, in his view, the church is first and foremost understood as *communio sanctorum*. Put otherwise, it is the community of justified sinners who are summoned by and around Jesus Christ¹⁶⁷⁹. Following Ebeling¹⁶⁸⁰, Mostert also distinguishes between an empirical and a theological understanding of the church¹⁶⁸¹. In his view,

¹⁶⁷³ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 56.

¹⁶⁷⁴ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 58.

¹⁶⁷⁵ "Die Zucht ist [...] auch dem Staat eigen und keine spezifische nota der Kirche. Denn die *notae ecclesiae* nennen ja das Spezifische der Kirche, das nur die Kirche hat" (MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], p. 57). Especially from a Reformed perspective, Mostert's clear-cut, categorical separation between the Gospel of justification and church discipline does appear problematic. As a matter of fact, it is also possible to claim that church discipline belongs to the Gospel, therefore to the primary institutions of the church. Mostert's view on the matter will be criticized in 4.3.2.

¹⁶⁷⁶ And many others, not only in Protestant theology.

¹⁶⁷⁷ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 59.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Due to lack of space and to the limitations imposed by the topic breakdown, I cannot provide an in-depth analysis of Mostert's doctrine of the sacraments here. The subject, however, is extremely interesting, especially when it comes to the relationship between the Word and sacramental acting (see MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], pp. 140-151).

¹⁶⁷⁹ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 61. In this respect, Mostert's ecclesiology closely resembles Ebeling's view of the church as the *soma* of Christ, for which I have employed the phrase "plurality of justification" (see here, p. 249).

¹⁶⁸⁰ See here, pp. 248-251.

¹⁶⁸¹ Specifically, in Mostert's terminology, Ebeling's empirical understanding is called *institutional* or *hierarchical*, while the theological one is called *original*. Since these different terms share the same meaning in the accounts of both theologians, in Part 4 I will be using Ebeling's and Mostert's terminology interchangeably, depending on the context.

the two understandings are qualitatively different and mutually exclusive, as they result from two categorically alternative hermeneutical approaches to the reality of the church. In particular, the institutional understanding derives from a misunderstanding of the ecclesial community as a hierarchical societal body¹⁶⁸². Instead, the original understanding, which for Mostert appears specifically within Protestantism¹⁶⁸³, views the church as the reality of faith emerging whenever the question of the truth of the Gospel is raised in and by the Christian community in such a way that it becomes criteriological for its very existence¹⁶⁸⁴. Since the original church is a reality of faith, it is characterized by the dimension of hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*), which determines all realities of faith. However, Mostert does not have in mind an abstract and arbitrary separation between an invisible, original (pure) church, and many visible, institutional (corrupt) churches. Instead, with Ebeling, he contends that the differentiation between the visible and invisible church implies the *tensional unity* of the two. The church is visible, and the *notae ecclesiae* refer to it as a concrete, historical reality, not to some abstract, otherworldly dimension. However, the *manner* in which its *notae* refer to the church and qualitatively determine its essence in distinction from all worldly realities is a question of faith, not of empirical investigation. On the one hand, there is no such thing as a merely invisible, abstract church. On the other, the visible church, in all its historical manifestations, is never simply and fully identical with the invisible church as a hidden reality of faith¹⁶⁸⁵. Here, Mostert clearly follows Ebeling's interpretation of the ecclesial community *in signo crucis*¹⁶⁸⁶. As an invisible reality of faith, the church is truly (*realiter*) present wherever the Gospel is purely preached and celebrated. Since it is truly present, therefore it also emerges into visibility¹⁶⁸⁷. However, this emerging into visibility is never wholly deprived of ambiguity. This is because the church, in its original understanding, never ceases to be a hidden reality of faith. Thus, its coming to visibility in its primary institutions is only true to the Gospel when it does not tend to replace the christological *mysterion* through its visible signs, but actually emphasizes and deepens it through them. Accordingly, the true church remains an object of faith. Furthermore, for Mostert, this object of faith is not *another object*, next to *the* criteriological one, the sinner's justification. Rather, as was already mentioned¹⁶⁸⁸ and will be discussed in detail at a later point, the church directly and utterly *belongs* to justification, it is included

¹⁶⁸² "Umgekehrt wird man als Evangelischer sagen müssen, daß gerade in der evangelischen Kirche Kirche ursprünglich erscheint" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 62). See also: MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 138.

¹⁶⁸³ At the same time, Mostert is cautious not to equate any historical-institutional church, including the Protestant church(es), with the church as the plurality of sinners' pure relationship with God in Jesus Christ, which is a reality of faith.

¹⁶⁸⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 62.

¹⁶⁸⁵ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 66.

¹⁶⁸⁶ See here, p. 250.

¹⁶⁸⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 67f.

¹⁶⁸⁸ See here, p. 245.

within it. In particular, the ecclesial *community* emphasizes that individual justified sinners are not self-contained, but always openly oriented to a community of life with one another based on Jesus Christ as the center of their personhood. For Mostert, justification is the essential identity of the church, as it immediately intercepts and duly interprets its christological foundation. This means that the church, in its original understanding, is the believers' communion with God and with one another¹⁶⁸⁹. Because it lives off this communion, the church has an obligation towards the world, it is called to share this communion with it. The true qualification of this obligation can only be correctly interpreted from the vantage point of justification doctrine. This is because only this doctrine makes it possible to understand that this obligation is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the salvation event which is offered to sinners out of grace alone as the solution to their fundamental problem. From a theological perspective, this entails that, if it fails to preach the pure Gospel, the church ceases to be itself and does not fulfill its obligation towards the world¹⁶⁹⁰. This occurs when this obligation is misunderstood in ethical-political terms. For Mostert, that which fundamentally distinguishes the original and institutional understandings of the church is ultimately the way in which *faith* is regarded. In particular, within the original understanding, faith is the dimension within which the christological reality of salvation (the Gospel) is truly communicated to human being as a sinner. Instead, in the institutional understanding, faith is (mis)understood as a theory to be translated into praxis through human being's soteriologically capable agency¹⁶⁹¹. Thus, for Mostert, the understanding of the church results specifically from the understanding of faith, which has its criterion in justification doctrine. Accordingly, the misunderstanding of the church corresponds to the failure to truly acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This acknowledgment means understanding him from and in his relationship with God¹⁶⁹². The true understanding of Jesus as the Christ occurs pneumatically and is identical with the constitution of the church as *communio sanctorum*. As such, the ecclesial community is a polycentric reality of the Holy Spirit and not simply identical with the local congregation, even though it is necessarily bound to it¹⁶⁹³.

In light of all the above, it is now both possible and necessary to turn to the very core of Mostert's ecclesiology, which I already mentioned *en passant* more than once. The church, for him, is immediately posited by justification. This is not only to be understood in Ebeling's sense¹⁶⁹⁴, whereby the church needs to be interpreted *within* justification. More radically, Mostert immediately

¹⁶⁸⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 69.

¹⁶⁹⁰ "Und vor allem wird gesehen, daß es eine Reduktion nicht nur der Kirche, sondern auch des modernen Menschen, des Menschen überhaupt ist, wenn man ihm vorenthält und dann auch noch als Kirche, sich selbst im Gottesverhältnis wahrzunehmen" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 70).

¹⁶⁹¹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 71f.

¹⁶⁹² MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 72.

¹⁶⁹³ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 75.

¹⁶⁹⁴ See here, pp. 248f.

conceptualizes the ecclesial community *as* justification. The church is justification viewed inclusively¹⁶⁹⁵, it is brought about by justification as its own foundational form (*Gestalt*) and mode of existence. This is because the church, as a reality of faith, has as its core and essence the reconciliation of human being with God actualized by the latter and described hermeneutically as a true change in the former's relational ontology (justification)¹⁶⁹⁶. Thus, Mostert contends that the church is the reality which originates from and consists in multiple individuals being liberated by God from the dominating rule of their past (*peccatum regnans*), which however still reproduces itself within their existence (*peccatum regnatum*) by means of the Law¹⁶⁹⁷. The constitution of the church is immediately co-positd with the individuals' *kerygmatic* liberation from their enslavement to sin. Thus, the church is not simply the already given context within which this liberation happens. Correspondingly, it is preaching which makes the church present as the plurality of those sinners who, by faith, are fundamentally changed by the gracious God. The constitution of the church as justification happens as the Gospel of God's being-for-sinners finds human being as one who is entirely determined by their context. Concretely, this human being is the sinner and the context determining them is the Law¹⁶⁹⁸. Once again, it is an essential feature of Mostert's theology that the Gospel only and always appears in contrastive contact with the Law. Furthermore, it is precisely because of this constant contact that the Gospel can and does appear as the good news. Thus, for Mostert, the Gospel is the Word carrying the personal reality of Jesus Christ. Only in him is the fundamental differentiation between Law and Gospel posited in all clarity¹⁶⁹⁹. The critical proximity between the two linguistic qualifications of God's Word entails that the Law does hiddenly carry the Gospel. This claim might at first sound at odds with Mostert's theology as a whole. However, he is *not* saying that the Law carries the Gospel as a reality identical with its own good content. Also, the Law is neither, positively, a specific form of the Gospel, nor, negatively, something like a Gospel *sub contraria specie*. Instead, by saying that the Gospel is hiddenly present in the Law, Mostert means that the legal instance carries the *presupposition* that human being needs to be changed¹⁷⁰⁰ and explicates it by way of its command. In my view, this entails that the church, as a reality sharing the very essence of the Gospel, is also presupposed by the Law. As a reality of the Gospel, the church is the community of those who receive the ontological-relational change which is presupposed by the

¹⁶⁹⁵ In this sense I have previously argued that ecclesiology (that which justification *includes*) corresponds to Mostert's view of the relationship between justification and ethics and completes it. This relationship also belongs to justification as that which it *excludes* (see here, pp. 215f.).

¹⁶⁹⁶ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 151.

¹⁶⁹⁷ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 152.

¹⁶⁹⁸ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 153.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Ibid. Incidentally, this is also, for Mostert, the fundamental theological meaning of Jesus Christ's sinlessness.

¹⁷⁰⁰ "Das Gesetz, und das ist sozusagen das verborgene Evangelium in ihm, geht davon aus, daß der Mensch gewandelt werden muß" (Ibid.).

Law. At the same time, because of this presupposition, the church is also the reality which prepares human beings to receive their change¹⁷⁰¹. According to Mostert, this preparation is the preaching of the Gospel, which is qualitatively different from all legal realities. As a matter of fact, human beings *cannot* prepare themselves. They can only be prepared by the Word which also fulfills the aim of this preparation by truly effecting their reconciliation. Thus, for Mostert, the church becomes concrete in the fact that several human beings experience the truth of their reconciliation whenever they hear the preached Word and apprehend the Gospel by faith. The church is not a legal reality. Instead, it is the reality effected by the Gospel which has been preached in such a way that the Law has been clearly recognized as soteriologically faulty, and therefore disqualified as a valid instrument for the reconciliation of sinners with God. Whenever the Gospel is preached in this way and the Law is accordingly disqualified, the Holy Spirit constitutes the church as the sinners' acceptance of the Gospel involving the very core of their existence, their whole personal relationality¹⁷⁰². Arguably presupposing Ebeling's view of the church as the historical actualization of the conversation between God and human being¹⁷⁰³, Mostert contends that the preaching of the Gospel is aimed at telling sinners that they are more than the subject of their acts. From the perspective of the Gospel and in light of its fundamental differentiation from the Law, human beings are a new reality, which is qualitatively different from the historical instances of their agency under the Law¹⁷⁰⁴. In explicit ecclesiological terms, Mostert's understanding of the Law-Gospel differentiation entails a view whereby the church as justification *is* the fundamental differentiation between God and human being. This differentiation is intensively loyal to the Gospel (*sachintensiv*) and functions as a corrective against all confusion between human being and God¹⁷⁰⁵.

According to Mostert, the church is the place where the fundamental character of religion as human being's existential relationship with God is called to become manifest in its purity¹⁷⁰⁶. This manifestation, however, does not happen automatically. In other words, it is not simply granted by the historical and institutional existence of the church. To the contrary, it can and does occur that, even in the church, the aforementioned fundamental character of religion is forgotten and obscured.

¹⁷⁰¹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 154.

¹⁷⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰³ See here, p. 252.

¹⁷⁰⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 158.

¹⁷⁰⁵ "Die Hybris, die Selbstverwandlung ins Göttliche geht so weiter und damit schwindet die Hoffnung. Das Evangelium setzt dem die gegenläufige Verwandlung entgegen, die Entgöttlichung, die Verendlichung, das Geschöpfwerden entgegen, das sich in der Erscheinung Jesu Christi vollzieht" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 159). See also: MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 138.

¹⁷⁰⁶ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 36. In what follows, I am going to briefly elaborate on Mostert's view of religion as a question of justification doctrine. The topic was already introduced in Part 1 (see here, pp. 25f., and especially note 153) because it is also relevant for the question of the Prolegomena. Still, it needs now to be properly developed, as it belongs for the most part within Mostert's ecclesiology.

When this is the case, religion becomes ideological¹⁷⁰⁷. Instead, its true essence aptly comes to light in Jesus Christ¹⁷⁰⁸, in whom religion becomes identical with the question of how human being and God relate¹⁷⁰⁹. For Mostert, Jesus Christ is human being's pure relationship with God, because he is the only one who truly and fully lets God be God, that is the sole author of human being's salvation¹⁷¹⁰. However, this pure relationship with God which is actual in Jesus Christ is not to be understood statically, as a self-contained determination of Jesus as an individual. Instead, his relationship with God is truly *personal*, it concerns the overall relationality of his being. Therefore, it is caught within the open-ended dynamism of God's salvation intent, which dynamically tends to extend to the whole of creation. Put otherwise, the pure relationship of human being with God which is truly posited in Jesus Christ *includes* the invitation to enter into this same relationship with God. The propagation of this invitation¹⁷¹¹, which is to be extended to the whole world¹⁷¹², is the essential task of the ecclesial community. Thus, Mostert interprets the church as the community of those who, as brothers and sisters, help each other in their relationship with God¹⁷¹³. In his perspective, the essence of the church is *derived* from the pure relationship between human being and God which is established in Jesus Christ. The church is this relationship to the extent that its members participate in Christ's relationship with God and help each other remain in it¹⁷¹⁴. In its primary institutions, the church becomes concrete as the sinners' mutual help to remain in Christ. As the personal truth of religion, Jesus Christ is also the criterion to assess the question of human being's true relationship with God (the religious problem). In this sense, he is the formal truth of religion and the Reformer (the criterion) of all religions. This is because, in him, the true relationship between human being and God finds its pure expression, which is correctly articulated in the form of justification doctrine¹⁷¹⁵. In the person of Jesus Christ human being and God are in the one true relationship. Therefore, a theological understanding of religion in Mostert's sense will point to Jesus Christ as human being's *absolute relationship* with God¹⁷¹⁶. Correspondingly, Jesus comes to be the solution to the religious problem, which is universal and co-essential with the religious phenomenon as such. If religion is the

¹⁷⁰⁷ For the meaning of "ideology" and "ideological" in Mostert's usage, see here, pp. 174-177, and especially note 1183.

¹⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, but only secondarily, also in Christianity: "Im christlichen Glauben tritt die Religion als Gottesverhältnis in Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden in denkbarer Reinheit in Erscheinung, [...] und zwar primär als Jesus Christus in Person, sekundär als Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden, sofern die Gemeinschaft an dem Ursprung, Jesus Christus, bleibt" (MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], p. 37).

¹⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹¹ Cf. 2 Cor 5,20.

¹⁷¹² Acts 1,8.

¹⁷¹³ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 38.

¹⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷¹⁵ "Jesus [...] ist die Wahrheit der Religion, aller Religionen. Er setzt der jüdischen Religion nicht eine christliche entgegen, den hellenistischen nicht eine christliche, sondern er ist, als wahres Gottesverhältnis, das Kriterium aller Religionen" (MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], p. 41).

¹⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

relationship between human being and God experienced as a *problem*, Jesus Christ is this same relationship experienced as its *solution*. Accordingly, Mostert contends that the critical and contrastive contact between Jesus Christ and religion produces a *reformation of religion*. This means that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, interpreted by justification doctrine, modifies the quality of the religious phenomenon as it comes into contact with it. In particular, Mostert maintains that the Gospel of justification acts on religion by disqualifying and overcoming those elements in it which function legalistically and do not let God be God. These pervert religion into *disreligion* (*Dysreligion*)¹⁷¹⁷. Thus, justifying faith emphasizes that Jesus Christ is human being's true relationship with God not only for the church, but for humanity as a whole¹⁷¹⁸. Even more radically, Mostert claims that faith does not understand and apprehend Jesus Christ otherwise than in his universal being-for-all, which echoes the universality of sin. As the original and overarching trust that the justified places in the One God who has truly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, faith puts an end to the struggle for truth which is the essence of religion.¹⁷¹⁹ Consequently, the church, as a reality of faith, is inseparable from the question of the *truth*.

From the centrality of this question in his theology coherently follows Mostert's view of the church as justification¹⁷²⁰. For him, the question of the truth is the very essence of the Reformation¹⁷²¹. Applying it to the problem of the existence of the church, Mostert¹⁷²² analyzes the *notae ecclesiae*. Like Ebeling¹⁷²³, he also regards *apostolicity* as the central *nota*, because it binds the church to its christological foundation¹⁷²⁴. With that, apostolicity belongs to the very essence of the church, as it intercepts and answers the question of how the ecclesial community can be and remain in communion with Jesus Christ¹⁷²⁵. Specifically, apostolicity points to *faith* as the only reality which maintains this communion (*sola fide*). Accordingly, faith needs to be kept in its categorical difference from the Law, which otherwise does prevent communion with Christ¹⁷²⁶. For Mostert, apostolicity depends precisely

¹⁷¹⁷ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 42.

¹⁷¹⁸ "Dieses wahre Gottesverhältnis, Jesus Christus als Mensch, ist zugleich historisch einmalig, zeitlich und örtlich gebunden, als historischer Mensch; zugleich aber universal, kosmisch, nicht im Sinne eines mystischen kosmischen Christus [...], sondern dadurch, daß dieser historische Mensch für alle da ist, für alle Menschen, nicht bloß für den Christen" (MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche [see note 134], p. 43).

¹⁷¹⁹ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 45. Mostert's understanding of the universality of Christ in parallel to that of sin will be further analyzed in 4.3.4.

¹⁷²⁰ MOSTERT, W., Sinn oder Gewißheit? (see note 142), p. 143.

¹⁷²¹ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 104.

¹⁷²² The same applies to Ebeling, in whose ecclesiology the analysis of the *notae ecclesiae* seems however to be much more central than in Mostert's (see here, p. 256). Compared to his mentor, Mostert devotes far less space to the treatment of the *notae* within his ecclesiology. I have tried to reflect this difference in the topic breakdown of the present chapter by allocating more or less space to individual topics on the basis of the choices made by the two theologians. Accordingly, I have devoted to Mostert's study of the *notae ecclesiae* roughly half of the space allocated to Ebeling's account.

¹⁷²³ See here, pp. 256f.

¹⁷²⁴ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 105.

¹⁷²⁵ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 98.

¹⁷²⁶ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 99.

on the historical maintenance of the categorical difference between the Gospel of faith and the Law. In other words, the point of apostolicity is to uphold the truth of the traditions about Jesus Christ against false interpretation. Accordingly, Mostert emphasizes that the *regula fidei* is precisely the hermeneutical instrument expressing the fact that the church safeguards its true faith, *therefore* remaining with Jesus Christ¹⁷²⁷. Ultimately, according to him, apostolicity is not an independent qualification of the church, but simply a feature which fundamentally confirms and reinforces its christological foundation. In this sense, Mostert's ecclesiology is profoundly *baptistic*¹⁷²⁸. Specifically, apostolicity points out that the church, in its essence, is nothing less and nothing more than a pointer to Jesus Christ¹⁷²⁹. Accordingly, apostolicity must be understood starting from the original christological confession. It is Christ as its Lord who maintains and carries the church as his servant. Christ's lordship prevents all confusion between him and the church, and thus *effects* apostolicity. This means that, for Mostert, apostolicity is not simply co-positd with the historical existence of the church. Rather, it is conditional: the church remains apostolic as long as, in its primary institutions, it performatively carries Jesus Christ (*Christum treiben*)¹⁷³⁰.

As for church *unity*, Mostert excludes that it could possibly be based on secondary institutions¹⁷³¹. Instead, it is a christological reality, it is co-positd with the church itself in Jesus Christ¹⁷³². As a reality of faith, church unity is therefore communicated (*ermittelt*) christologically. Correspondingly, it is actualized whenever the question concerning the identity of Jesus Christ is both asked and answered starting from Christ himself¹⁷³³. Additionally, since the church is justification, its unity is that one, essential qualification shared by all justified sinners: the center of their personhood is no longer in them, but outside of them, in Jesus Christ (*extra nos*). Correspondingly, Mostert clearly maintains that Jesus Christ is both the criterion of church unity and this very unity, which bases on the knowledge of his being-for-sinners¹⁷³⁴. When defined christologically with normative reference to justification doctrine, church unity ceases to be ideological, and rather becomes manifest as the unity of Jesus Christ's *soma*. From an ecumenical perspective, this entails that the unity of the churches, for Mostert, cannot be achieved through minimal consensus. Faith is not first and foremost the formulation of the ecclesial knowledge about Christ, but the reality through which the community of believers apprehends him as God-for-sinners. Therefore, a church unity truly based on faith can

¹⁷²⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 99f.

¹⁷²⁸ For the meaning of this term in my usage, see note 1598.

¹⁷²⁹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 100.

¹⁷³⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 101.

¹⁷³¹ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 78.

¹⁷³² MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 154.

¹⁷³³ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 141. Cf. Mk 8,29.

¹⁷³⁴ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 79.

only find its expression in a maximal consensus concerning Jesus Christ as God's being-for-sinners, which is the same as justification¹⁷³⁵.

Mostert (with Ebeling¹⁷³⁶) understands *holiness* as one's being defined by their relationship with God (*Bestimmtheit für Gott*)¹⁷³⁷. Clearly, this means that holiness is a reality of faith, as it explicates the specific quality of the believer's relationship with God in Christ. Accordingly, Mostert equates the holy church with the hearers of the Word, those whose selves are intercepted by God's Word in their justification. When this happens and the Word performatively addresses the community of the justified, Christ's power (*Kraft*) is affirmed in the ecclesial community¹⁷³⁸. For Mostert, the criterion to describe holiness according to the original¹⁷³⁹ understanding of the church is clarity concerning the *subjects* of holiness¹⁷⁴⁰. Once again, a *nota ecclesiae* counts as the crystallization point for Mostert's ecclesiology of justification: the holiness of the church accounts for the truth of the ecclesial relationship with God. Thus, the church is holy as long as it is defined by its justifying relationship with God. Holiness is a true and profound qualification of the very essence of the church. However, it is not found *in* the church, but outside of it (*extra nos*), in Jesus Christ¹⁷⁴¹. In him, holiness is truly communicated to the community of believers, as long as they remain loyal to the *certitudo* that they receive within the *verbum externum* of justification¹⁷⁴² and never look back at themselves in search for *securitas*. Within the dynamism of justification, the church is holy in that it corresponds to the holiness of God, namely to His lordship. Therefore, the church can only be holy as long as it refuses to constitute itself as a holy subject, since that would fundamentally contradict God's lordship¹⁷⁴³.

Following Ebeling¹⁷⁴⁴, Mostert directly connects the church *universality* (*Katholizität*) to the universality of Jesus Christ. The former depends on and expresses the latter. Since Jesus Christ's being-for-sinners is valid for all, the church is universal¹⁷⁴⁵. Once more, for Mostert, this relationship between Christ and the church is not an external correspondence between two separate realities.

¹⁷³⁵ "Einheit ist, wie ich sagte, ja nicht Ideologie, doktrinale Einheit, sondern Jesus Christus als Person, der gerade jedem Menschen als diesem selbst sein Für-den-Menschen-Sein mitteilt" (MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* [see note 134], p. 80).

¹⁷³⁶ See here, pp. 259f.

¹⁷³⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 76.

¹⁷³⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 77.

¹⁷³⁹ For the specific meaning of this adjective within Mostert's ecclesiology, see note 1681.

¹⁷⁴⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* (see note 142), p. 148.

¹⁷⁴¹ Interestingly enough, Mostert connects the semantics of extrinsicality (*extra nos*) with the alternative between truth and power in the church. Specifically, he contends that the church is removed from the truth unless it relinquishes its own power. For him, the realities of truth and power exist in a conflictual tension. The self-centeredness of the church expresses and strengthens its orientation to power. Instead, its criteriological reference to the *extra nos* dimension intercepts and actualizes its obedience to the christological truth of justification (MOSTERT, W., *Sinn oder Gewißheit?* [see note 142], p. 145).

¹⁷⁴² MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 82.

¹⁷⁴³ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 83.

¹⁷⁴⁴ See here, p. 260.

¹⁷⁴⁵ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 96.

Rather, the universality of the *communio sanctorum* consists in the universal real presence of Jesus Christ in time and space. At the same time, Mostert understands this universal presence of Christ through anthropology and hamartiology. Thus, the universality of Jesus Christ corresponds to the universality of sin. Since human being's sin is anthropologically universal, their need for forgiveness is, too¹⁷⁴⁶. It follows that the universality of the church is not at all identical with its worldwide presence¹⁷⁴⁷. Rather, the church is universal as long as it is made *whole*, in full correspondence with Jesus Christ. In Mostert's view, this correspondence founds ultimately in apostolicity¹⁷⁴⁸ and expresses that the ecclesial community tends towards all human beings because Jesus Christ is the answer to their fundamental problem¹⁷⁴⁹. Additionally, as its Lord, he founds the universality of the church: the latter is convened in his name, and not in its own. Therefore, all attempts to base the universality of the church on its own structure ultimately obscure the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over the *communio sanctorum*¹⁷⁵⁰.

In conclusion, Mostert regards the church as the religious community in which Jesus Christ is received as the pure relationship between sinners and God and the religious problem is solved. The solution finds its expression in the community of those individuals who are transposed into Christ by faith. Wherever Christ is present, the church is also present as a creation of the preached Word, which enables sinners to receive themselves anew in justification. Thus, the original understanding of the church unfolds from justification only. The latter is communicated through the primary, essential institutions of the church and interprets the meaning of the *notae ecclesiae*. Instead, the institutional understanding of the church puts an excessive focus on secondary institutions, which always co-exist with the church but do not embody its essence.

4.2. For and Against Inter-Ecclesial Compatibility on Justification Doctrine

Before embarking on the analysis of Küng's view on the positional compatibility¹⁷⁵¹ between Protestant and Roman Catholic interpretations¹⁷⁵² of justification, I deem it necessary to clarify once

¹⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴⁷ At best, for Mostert, the worldwide presence of the church can be described as the *signum* of universality, not its *res*.

¹⁷⁴⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 98.

¹⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 75.

¹⁷⁵¹ For the definitions of "positional compatibility" as well as "structural incompatibility" within the present study see here, p. 246.

¹⁷⁵² Within the present study, I will not cover the question of how representative Küng's analysis of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic positions on justification doctrine is. As a matter of fact, neither his choice of Barth's theology to represent the Protestant account nor Küng's own interpretation of the Tridentine decree on justification can be regarded as fully representative of *the* Protestant or *the* Roman Catholic position on justification, even assuming that there could be such thing as *the* position of a Christian confession on any theological *locus*. Still, in my judgment, the significance of

more what may appear to be the thematic incongruity of this Part 4. In 4.1., I covered Ebeling and Mostert's accounts on ecclesiology and interpreted them as expressions of their views on justification. In 4.2., instead, I am going to cover Küng and Hampson's accounts on justification as points of observation from where a theological compatibility between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is either affirmed (Küng) or denied (Hampson). It is therefore clear that the structure of the two chapters is different. In particular, I will tackle three fundamental questions. First of all, I will describe how the theological alternatives view the relationship between the article of justification and the overall truth(s) of faith. Then, I will cover their interpretation of the relationality between sin, human being and justification. In conclusion, I will tackle their understanding of how faith relates to the reality of justification. I will focus on these questions when studying both Küng and Hampson's accounts, as they are particularly useful to place the alternatives in critical and contrastive dialogue with Ebeling and Mostert's positions on ecclesiology, which were studied in 4.1.¹⁷⁵³. In the case of Küng, these questions can be answered directly by following the unfolding of his thought. Instead, in Hampson's case, the three questions acquire meaning and can be tackled only indirectly, that is after having been placed within a broader discourse on what she calls *theological structures*. Hence, Hampson's position on the three aforementioned questions will not emerge immediately like Küng's. Instead, it will be illustrated through (a.) the discussion of what she calls the Protestant structure and (b.) the analysis of the Roman Catholic alternative, to then conclude with (c.) a brief summary of Hampson's position on structural incompatibility.

The difference in structure between 4.1. and 4.2. might seem a bit estranging at first, since no similar instance is previously found in this study. However, I believe that said difference is fully justified. As a matter of fact, I think that the specificity of Mostert's account on the church is that he, going beyond Ebeling, views the ecclesial community as justification doctrine itself. For Mostert,¹⁷⁵⁴ the church is not only included within justification doctrine, but an immediate expression of it. The church does not result from justification but expresses it. As a consequence, within Ebeling and (even more) Mostert's theological categories, the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of the different confessional accounts on justification can only be meaningfully explored within ecclesiology. This is because, for them, the church is not a given community which, in its theological

Küng's work consists in showing that, from his perspective, there can be authoritative and theologically sound accounts of the doctrine which are not mutually incompatible, but in material agreement. This is precisely what makes Küng a prime example of the theologies of positional compatibility, which have found exemplary expression in the JDDJ (1999).¹⁷⁵³ The difference in structure between 4.1. and 4.2. was already introduced on page 247, where the specific topic breakdown of the theological alternatives included in 4.2. was also briefly mentioned.

¹⁷⁵⁴ And for Ebeling, even though somehow to a different degree. Their difference has emerged here and there in 4.1. and I have signaled it already in the designations which I thought up for characterizing the two ecclesiological accounts. Specifically, I described Ebeling's view as an ecclesiology *within* justification, and Mostert's as an ecclesiology *as* justification.

expressions, holds this or that doctrine on justification. Rather, the church (in its theological, original understanding)¹⁷⁵⁵ is inseparable from justification and, in its dimension as a hermeneutical community, *results from* the sound understanding of justification doctrine. Conversely, Küng and Hampson, as I will show in what follows, *start from* the churches as communities of faith holding each its specific theological position(s) on justification doctrine. Therefore, both Küng and Hampson's accounts study justification doctrine as a topic which, at least in principle, is regarded in separation from ecclesiology. In these accounts, the church is *not* immediately an expression of justification, but a reality which can be thought *next to* it. Because of this, studying Küng or Hampson's ecclesiology¹⁷⁵⁶ would be off the mark in the present study, as doing so would not truly meet the concern of Ebeling and Mostert's view of church and justification nor cover the same theological reality which they address within ecclesiology. Instead, it is the question of justification doctrine as a prime example and manifestation of a theological compatibility (Küng) or incompatibility (Hampson) between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism which makes it possible to fruitfully put Küng and Hampson's accounts of justification in critical contact with Ebeling and Mostert's ecclesiology. At this point, the material continuity between the previous chapter and the present one becomes visible and can be explicitly mentioned. The common ground which justifies the joint study of the theological alternatives studied in this Part 4. is the question (common to all the four theologians) of *what justification includes*. For Ebeling and Mostert, the answer is expressed by ecclesiology. For the alternatives, as I am going to show, the answer is either a fundamental, positional compatibility (Küng) or a structural incompatibility (Hampson) between the theologies of different churches. Thus, it is by looking at this question on compatibility or incompatibility that the same theological *locus* studied in 4.1. can now be tackled in the present one.

4.2.1. Positional Compatibility on Justification: H. Küng

Küng views justification doctrine as one of the multiple forms (*Strukturformen*) in which the fundamental structure (*Grundstruktur*) of faith exists¹⁷⁵⁷. These forms are expressions of the truth, the deep content of which is the *mystery* of faith. As such, this mystery always exceeds its explicit formulations. Thus, the deep content of faith is regarded as fundamentally unitary, it is the one *depositum fidei*, the structure within which different forms emerge throughout the history of the church as specific answers to contextual theological questions. For Küng, the Roman Catholic dogmatic definition on justification doctrine, outlined and proclaimed at Trent, is one of these

¹⁷⁵⁵ For the meaning of what the theological (Ebeling) or original (Mostert) understanding of the church entails, see here, pp. 256f. (Ebeling) and pp. 275f. (Mostert).

¹⁷⁵⁶ By the way, as far as I know, Hampson never outlined any specific ecclesiology before leaving Christianity.

¹⁷⁵⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 107.

historical forms of the dogmatic *depositum*, and has expressed authentic Christianity¹⁷⁵⁸ within the historical context determined by the Reformation and its theological concerns. In Küng's categories, the historicity of the context within which the Council has spoken is what determines the *limits* of the proclaimed doctrine. Trent is historically conditioned¹⁷⁵⁹. Nevertheless, Küng's thesis is that, *despite* its historical conditionality¹⁷⁶⁰, the Council truly and faithfully upholds the truth of faith, because it is concerned with the overarching sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ¹⁷⁶¹. Due to the historical context, Küng continues, Trent defends the truth of faith against the overemphatic misinterpretations of the Reformers. Within this context, the ensuing anthropocentricity of Trent appears to be a side effect, which is surely a sign of the historical limitedness of theological discourse, but does not alter or invalidate the truth of the underlying theological concern¹⁷⁶². Concretely, this concern, for Küng, is the insistence on the reality (effectiveness) of human being's salvation, against all interpretations whereby grace risks being regarded as an empty word (*flatus vocis*)¹⁷⁶³. As a consequence, Küng contends that Trent's justification doctrine is a specific, historically conditioned form in which the fundamental structure of faith is replicated. Put otherwise, the definition of justification doctrine is an instance of the historical maintenance of the one-time character of Christian revelation¹⁷⁶⁴. This is the theoretical frame within which Küng's view of the relationship between justification and the overall *depositum fidei* is to be understood. For Küng, the former is a historical reverberation of the latter, and their relationship reduplicates the one between general and particular truth. Accordingly,

¹⁷⁵⁸ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 112.

¹⁷⁵⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 110.

¹⁷⁶⁰ An interesting question is whether it is truly sound and inevitable to regard historical conditionality as a factor limiting and relativizing theological doctrine, as Küng does. The alternative is viewing historical conditionality as a feature which immediately and constitutively belongs to Christian revelation as such. Within this alternative view, which I consider preferable, theological truth cannot be imagined as a general *depositum* which meets its particular limitation in historicity. Rather, theological truth acquires its meaning precisely within its historical contextuality, and not in spite of it. Accordingly, the historicity of theological truth is not a limitation of the Gospel, but its necessary concrete outline. Both justification doctrine and incarnation theology can provide valid theological conceptual frames within which this thought can be developed further. However, this cannot be the object of the present study.

¹⁷⁶¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 115. For Küng, this same concern is notably shared by Barth, which is the fundamental thesis of Küng's book and founds his view of the positional compatibility between Trent and Barth on justification doctrine. As I already mentioned, the question of the extent to which Küng's reading of Trent expresses *the* Roman Catholic understanding of justification (if this *one* understanding exists!) is not going to the object of the present study. The same goes for the parallel question as to how representative Küng's account of Barth may be of the Protestant understanding of justification doctrine (once again, provided that it makes sense to speak of *one* Protestant understanding...). Accordingly, the aim of the present study of Küng is to function as an authoritative and well-known example of what I have called "theologies of positional compatibility". Because of his role in outlining a theology of positional compatibility on justification, I think that Küng's significance for the development of ecumenical discourse within Western Christianity can hardly be overstated. What is more, I would say that the JDDJ would not only be incomprehensible, but utterly unimaginable outside of Küng's paradigm of positional compatibility. Ultimately, I would argue that Küng's work relates to the Joint Declaration not only as a preparatory work. More importantly, Küng's account has created the very theological framework within which the Joint Declaration has found both its possibility and realization.

¹⁷⁶² KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 112.

¹⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 122.

he maintains that justification doctrine cannot be the central theological truth of Christianity¹⁷⁶⁵. Such centrality only pertains to the mystery of Christ, as the overall theological principle and fundamental truth of dogmatics. Thus, justification doctrine is for Küng one form of the truth operating a constant interpretative reference (*Besinnung*) to Jesus Christ. As such, it cannot be regarded as the overall theological principle which structures and normatively interprets the truth of faith. Correspondingly, Küng claims that justification doctrine needs to be distinguished from Christology, within which the decisive questions of that doctrine are however already answered¹⁷⁶⁶. In my view, a certain critical weakness of Küng's (and Barth's¹⁷⁶⁷) approach becomes visible here, which has to do ultimately with the question, also crucial to Mostert's ecclesiology, whether the article of justification can be regarded as criteriological for the interpretation of theology as a whole¹⁷⁶⁸. In Küng's perspective, an affirmative answer to this question would entail an illegitimate theological hypertrophy which would arbitrarily acknowledge a central theological role to one theological *locus* amongst many. For Küng, the criteriological role pertains formally to the *depositum fidei* as a whole, and materially to God's eternal salvation plan in Jesus Christ, with creation and justification being specifications thereof¹⁷⁶⁹. In particular, God's eternal plan consists in the preexistence of Jesus Christ by the Father. There, Christ is not alone, but with the church and the whole of humanity, that is co-elected with Christ in God's eternity¹⁷⁷⁰. Correspondingly, for Küng, the mystery of Christ is the unity of human beings with God, and this unity is the same as God's eternal salvific decree¹⁷⁷¹. As for justification, it has to be understood precisely with reference to this decree, as God upholding His salvation intent against human being's sin¹⁷⁷². As is to a certain extent the case for all events in time, redemption, too, is the historical unfolding of God's salvation plan. For redemption to take place, there needs to be creation. Prolonging this Barthian insight, Küng contends that the whole of creation is shaped after Christ (*christusförmig*) and has a hidden trinitarian structure¹⁷⁷³. As a consequence, Küng's understanding of the mystery of Christ implies a soteriology which is kept in close contact with creation doctrine. Thus, the relationship of creation with Christ is an integral part of Küng's soteriology, as he claims that Jesus Christ is the root of all the general structures of being¹⁷⁷⁴. With that, Küng also makes room for human being's reason, philosophy and morality as realities which are posited in creation and

¹⁷⁶⁵ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 128.

¹⁷⁶⁶ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 128f.

¹⁷⁶⁷ See note 948.

¹⁷⁶⁸ I am going to elaborate on this critical weakness and tackle the question of the criteriological character of justification in 4.3.

¹⁷⁶⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 139.

¹⁷⁷⁰ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 134.

¹⁷⁷¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 135.

¹⁷⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷³ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 140.

¹⁷⁷⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 147.

persist in spite of sin, as in Jesus Christ they are given a factual foundation which cannot be overcome by sin¹⁷⁷⁵. Within this overall soteriological structure, Küng introduces justification as God's initiative to contain and counter the rule of sin in the world¹⁷⁷⁶. Therefore, it is appropriate to now look at Küng's understanding of the relationship between sin, human being and justification.

Küng views sin as human being's foul attempt at diverting themselves from the very foundation of their existence, which is given in Jesus Christ¹⁷⁷⁷. Thus, sin is the attempted replacement of human being's foundation in God with a foundation in themselves. Since no foundation can be found for human being's existence outside of God, the consequence of sin would be the annihilation of the sinner. The good news is that this annihilation is *not* what God intends for the sinner¹⁷⁷⁸. Since He does not want the death of the godless, God intervenes and does not let the sinner bring their own sin to its ultimate consequences, but, in His grace, gives them time for repentance. In this context, Küng qualifies God's grace as *sparing grace* (*schonende Gnade*), which becomes manifest in God's omnipotence receding before His wisdom and mildness¹⁷⁷⁹. Clearly, this sparing of the sinner is not the sign of a contradiction in God. Rather, it is a confirmation of His eternal salvation intent. Specifically, Küng claims that God can spare the sinner because He has determined from all eternity to take their death upon Himself in Jesus Christ¹⁷⁸⁰. This means that the sinner receives from God a continued existence, namely the patient containment of the annihilating condemnation of the sinner that sin, if considered in abstraction from God's grace, would entail. This continued existence of the sinner is maintained and accompanied by God, who has in sight not the sinner's annihilation, but their redemption¹⁷⁸¹. From the point of observation of creation theology, the continued existence of the sinner notwithstanding their sin points to the fact that creation and redemption are intimately connected with each other. Specifically, creation is already the hidden (*verborgen*) beginning of redemption. This clarifies in what sense Küng views Jesus Christ as the fundamental ontological constitution (*Bestand*) of all things. What Küng means is that existence has been given such an ontological status in Jesus Christ in *anticipation* (*Voraussicht*) of sin¹⁷⁸². Since creation is to be thought of christologically, it follows that redemption is not a subsequent *addendum* to it. Instead, it is already co-implied by creation as its goal and fundamental orientation. The mystery of redemption is hiddenly posited within the mystery of creation¹⁷⁸³. Accordingly, human being's sin cannot bring

¹⁷⁷⁵ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 146, 172.

¹⁷⁷⁶ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 150.

¹⁷⁷⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 156.

¹⁷⁷⁸ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 157.

¹⁷⁷⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 159.

¹⁷⁸⁰ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 162.

¹⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸² KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 163.

¹⁷⁸³ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 166.

about sheer darkness, it cannot wield such an ultimate power to vanquish God's grace. Thus, even though sin does bring death with itself, this does not mean that the fundamental ontological constitution of the sinner in Jesus Christ is lost and destroyed. Rather, the very death of the sinner is given a new determination (*Vorzeichen*) by God's grace, and this happens in Christ's death¹⁷⁸⁴. For Küng, this determination is *positive* for those who, in Christ, die to sin because they are made correspondent (*gleichförmig*) to his death by faith and baptism. With that, their own death is deprived of the element of ultimacy. Through Christ's own death, the sinner's death – which does reveal their sin as the event of their being on the way to damnation (*Unheil*) – is transformed into their dying in Christ, which marks their incorporation into God's christological salvation event in light of eternal life¹⁷⁸⁵. Instead, the death of the sinner receives a *negative* determination in the case of those who reject the grace offered to them until the very end, thereby making God's judgment the ultimate reality for them¹⁷⁸⁶. At any rate, Küng contends that even damned sinners somehow still retain their fundamental ontological constitution (*Bestand*) posited in Christ, because he has become incarnated not for his own sake, but for the sake of all human beings. Thus, in Jesus Christ sin is truly and effectively overruled by God's grace¹⁷⁸⁷. In Küng's account, sin is a reality which has been prevented from ultimately unleashing its full deadly character. In spite of sin, the sinner lives on, even though their life is missing its proper qualification, peace with God¹⁷⁸⁸.

In light of the above, it is accurate to claim that, for Küng, the sinner is the starting point (*Ausgangspunkt*) to illustrate the event of justification¹⁷⁸⁹. The fact that, by God's grace, the sinner may live on notwithstanding their sin already indirectly and hiddenly points to both the overwhelming power (*letztere Macht*) and the decisive powerlessness of sin, in the face of God's ultimate sovereignty (*allerletzte Macht*)¹⁷⁹⁰. According to Küng, sin is a reality characterizing the sinner in their entirety, so that no remnant of goodness persists in them¹⁷⁹¹. The sinner lives on notwithstanding the destructive power of their sin, but this is not due to a persisting goodness in them, but to God's grace only. The sinner remains a human being because God spares them in view of justification. Thus, Küng understands the ontological discourse on human being's essence from the christological relationship between the sinner and God. The sinner is maintained in their humanity not because of their nature, but because God, in Jesus Christ as the *fundamentum* of all reality, opposes His sparing "No" to the dismantling power of sin. This thought is clearly soteriological, and means that Jesus

¹⁷⁸⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 167.

¹⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁶ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 168.

¹⁷⁸⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 172.

¹⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 175.

¹⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 176.

Christ has maintained the sinner in light of their justification¹⁷⁹². Outside of Jesus Christ, there is no room for justification, because human being is fully a sinner, so that *from* them nothing good can issue¹⁷⁹³. In this context, K  ng’s usage of “good” (*gut*) is not to be understood ethically. Rather, he means that no act performed by sinners, regardless of its moral quality, can be soteriologically valid (*actus salutaris*)¹⁷⁹⁴. Therefore, the sinner’s justification does not in the least come from them, but only and wholly *to* them, in Jesus Christ, from whom no reality can be absolutely separated. Once again, in K  ng’s discourse, the core qualification of the christological mystery is that Jesus Christ is the fundamental ontological constitution (*Bestand*) of reality. To understand the specifics of K  ng’s view on justification – which he considers to be representative of Roman Catholic theology¹⁷⁹⁵ –, it is therefore necessary to ask how his ontological view of the christological mystery relates to the event of justification. Essentially, K  ng’s answer is that all the fundamental questions concerning justification find their answer within Christology, that is within the doctrine of Christ as the *Bestand* of reality¹⁷⁹⁶. This means that justification doctrine is *derivative*, it flows from the doctrine of the *Bestand*. Now, since K  ng regards the latter as the very foundation of Catholic doctrine, the consequence is that justification doctrine needs to be understood within the overall *depositum fidei* and as a specification and endorsement thereof¹⁷⁹⁷. In critical dialogue with Barth’s theology, K  ng contends that there is clear material agreement between specific contents of the Roman Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification¹⁷⁹⁸. In particular, K  ng defends the fundamental christocentricity of Roman Catholic theology, denies that in the latter a crypto-humanistic autonomy of creation is found and outlines a hamartiology and an anthropology which are not in material disagreement with the core insights of the Reformation as interpreted by Barth¹⁷⁹⁹. This material agreement between K  ng’s account of Roman Catholic and Barthian theology is what founds his positional view on the theological compatibility between Roman Catholic and Protestant accounts on justification. In the present research, I have used the terms “positional theology” and “theology of positional compatibility”¹⁸⁰⁰ to describe K  ng’s approach. The reason behind my choice of words is that, in my view, K  ng’s noteworthy endeavor shows that the theological *positions* of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism on justification doctrine can be correctly formulated in a way which emphasizes a broad cross-confessional and inter-ecclesial material agreement. Nevertheless, next to

¹⁷⁹² K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 178.

¹⁷⁹³ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 186.

¹⁷⁹⁴ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 187.

¹⁷⁹⁵ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 193.

¹⁷⁹⁶ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 189.

¹⁷⁹⁷ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 190.

¹⁷⁹⁸ See note 1761.

¹⁷⁹⁹ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 192f.

¹⁸⁰⁰ See here, p. 246.

this material level, there is also a formal one, which no longer has to do with doctrinal positions as such, but with the theological *structures* within which and from which these positions emerge. This formal level is what I will be turning to in the next paragraph¹⁸⁰¹. Before doing that, however, it is necessary to study what Küng regards as the Roman Catholic position on justification. As I am going to show in what follows, Küng illustrates the Roman Catholic interpretation by discussing the doctrine of grace, justification as declaratory (*Gerechtserklärung*) and effective (*Gerechtmachung*) and the differentiation between objective and subjective justification¹⁸⁰². Afterwards, Küng embarks on the discussion of specific points of doctrine which have been at the core of confessional controversies between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. These include: the active and passive dimensions of justification; the question of the *simul*; the *sola fide*¹⁸⁰³; the relationship between God's decree of righteousness and its endorsement in the being and life of the justified; the passivity and activity of faith; and the problem of merit or reward in justification.

In Küng's presentation of Roman Catholic doctrine, grace is to be understood theocentrically, as a personal-relational concept which qualifies first and foremost the living God¹⁸⁰⁴. Thus, grace is not an abstract, intermediate reality between God and human being. Rather, it distinctively points to the identity of God. Accordingly, grace is fundamentally unitary, and is given *as a whole* to human beings in Jesus Christ, who is God's grace in Person¹⁸⁰⁵. As it is not a *quantum* operating in the individual, grace is to be viewed as the eminently ecclesiological reality creating community with Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit¹⁸⁰⁶. Specifically, within the church, the Spirit gifts believers with grace in Christ, so that, *as a consequence*, sinners are truly changed. For Küng, the change brought about by grace in sinners consists in God disclosing and communicating Himself to them, so that they may share in Him and He may dwell in them¹⁸⁰⁷. For human being to be ready to truly (effectively) receive God's self-communication, they need to be prepared. In Küng's account, this preparation is carried out by *gratia creata*, which designates the renewed reality created by God within the sinner. Even

¹⁸⁰¹ See here, 4.2.2.

¹⁸⁰² As Küng aptly points out (see KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* [see note 886], pp 224ff. and 257f.), the material agreement between Roman Catholic theology and Barth on this point depends on a fundamental terminological clarification, due to the fact that Barth and Roman Catholicism understand something different by *justification*. Namely, justification (*Rechtfertigung*) in Barth corresponds to redemption (*Erlösung*) in Roman Catholicism. To avoid confusion, Küng calls *objective justification* Barth's justification and Roman Catholic redemption, while he talks of *subjective justification* to refer to Roman Catholic justification.

¹⁸⁰³ I am going to be giving central importance to this question in particular in my discussion of both Küng and Hampson's accounts on justification. This is because, in my view, the focus on how justification and faith relate opens up an ideal point of observation to place Küng and Hampson's perspectives in critical dialogue with Ebeling and Mostert, which is the aim of this Part 4 (see also here, p. 256 and note 1753).

¹⁸⁰⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 196f.

¹⁸⁰⁵ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 197f.

¹⁸⁰⁶ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 199.

¹⁸⁰⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 200.

though he recognizes that the phrase “created grace” is problematic¹⁸⁰⁸, Küng claims that the underlying theological concern is legitimate. The point is maintaining both the theocentricity of grace and its anthropological relevance, namely the fact that God’s gracious action does affect the reality of human being. With that, Küng vindicates the legitimacy of the category of *habitus*, which he uses to illustrate that grace does become human being’s, and yet only as *God’s grace*¹⁸⁰⁹. According to Küng, the semantics of both grace and justification are theological designations of realities which are broader than the terms used to refer to them. As such, the words “grace” and “justification” each describe one central aspect of the corresponding realities, but not those realities *in toto*. This entails that, for Küng, the semantic differentiations within grace in Roman Catholic theology do not imperil the fundamental unity of grace. Rather, they qualify different aspects of the reality grace points to¹⁸¹⁰.

Coming to justification, Küng claims that the central reality to which the term refers is indeed the forensic-declaratory qualification of salvation. Put otherwise, justification is first and foremost the *declaration* of the sinner’s righteousness in judgment (*Gerechtserklärung*)¹⁸¹¹. At the same time, this declaratory qualification does not exhaust the meaning of justification, which is broader than the sheer declaration of righteousness. In it of itself, justification is said declaration, and *not* the internal renewal of the sinner¹⁸¹². However, since said declaration is God’s performative word-act, it *does* creatively entail internal renewal. This means that, in Küng’s view, justification as the declaration of the sinner’s righteousness *causes* something to be now true, which was not true before¹⁸¹³. This thing is the sinner’s righteousness, in light of which justification needs to be also regarded as the making righteous of the sinner (*Gerechtmachung*)¹⁸¹⁴. Together, the declaratory and effective dimensions of justification make up the christological salvation event. This event is Jesus Christ himself, who is the sinner’s justification and sanctification at the same time. Within the same movement in which He declares the sinner righteous in Christ, God also makes them so¹⁸¹⁵. According to Küng, this is precisely what the Council of Trent also intended to proclaim, albeit with a certain lack of clarity¹⁸¹⁶. Thus, for Küng, the Council’s insistence on justification as a change in status does not entail a theological focus on the changed creature, but deepens the understanding of God’s justifying act¹⁸¹⁷.

¹⁸⁰⁸ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 205.

¹⁸⁰⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 203.

¹⁸¹⁰ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 204.

¹⁸¹¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 206.

¹⁸¹² KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 210.

¹⁸¹³ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 211.

¹⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹⁵ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 213.

¹⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.* The question of how faithfully and exactly Küng interprets Trent is a side question which cannot be treated within the present work. At any rate, even Küng himself contends that the Council is, to say the least, ambiguous in certain passages of its doctrine of justification. In the face of this ambiguity, Küng maintains that it is necessary to read Trent with reference to the whole history of dogma, and not in isolation from it.

¹⁸¹⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 216.

Ultimately, Küng defends a view whereby justification is God's declaration of righteousness which, *in and through His judgment*, makes the sinner live (*lebendigmachende*). Accordingly, Küng interprets the confessional difference on the matter as a shifting focus: on the declaratory dimension of justification with the inclusion of the effective one (Protestantism), or vice versa (Roman Catholicism)¹⁸¹⁸.

The centrality of God's judgment in Küng's justification doctrine, which clearly echoes Barth's theology¹⁸¹⁹, depends on the fact that said judgment is inextricably bound to the event of Jesus Christ's cross (death and resurrection). This event, for Küng, is justification in its objective dimension, namely the redemption (*Erlösung*) which has happened in Christ so that sinners may now be subjectively justified by God's grace (subjective justification)¹⁸²⁰. In this view, faith is the channel through which the subjective dimension of justification *comes to endorse* the objective one. Specifically, through faith, sinners correspond to the objectivity of justification. The objective and subjective dimensions are inseparable, they are bound together because of the divine character of the judgment taking place once and for all on Christ's cross¹⁸²¹. Thus, Küng contends that, in its objectivity, justification is general and concerns all human beings. Instead, in its subjectivity, justification is the ecclesial and individual correspondence to Christ's cross. This correspondence – and *not* justification as such – happens by faith. Accordingly, Küng regards the subjective dimension of justification as a *secondary specification* of the objective one¹⁸²², so that there is a clear imbalance between the two¹⁸²³. Furthermore, Küng understands said imbalance as the expression of the covenantal relationship between God as the Creator and human being as His creature. The two covenantal partners are clearly not equal, so that justification can be only regarded as the God-effected reconciled submission of human being to His judgment. With that, Küng aims at maintaining the theocentricity of justification and vindicates that the situation of the sinner is indeed changed in justification, but this true change happens in the objective dimension of justification, not in its subjective endorsement by human being¹⁸²⁴. Thus, justification as the salvation event is a close-ended reality identical with Christ's death and resurrection. On its part, faith cannot change anything to this reality. Instead, according to Küng, faith operates the active recognition (*tätige Anerkennung*) of that which has been fully

¹⁸¹⁸ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 218.

¹⁸¹⁹ See e.g. note 908.

¹⁸²⁰ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 219.

¹⁸²¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 220.

¹⁸²² In the present work, I have already discussed why I consider that a similar subordination of the subjective dimension to the objective one is particularly problematic when it comes to soteriology. Specifically, I have argued that an integration of Mostert's theology of justification through the intensification of the semantics of election can offer valid theological impulses for overcoming all hierarchical understandings of how the objective and subjective dimensions of salvation relate (see 2.3.5.).

¹⁸²³ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 226.

¹⁸²⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 227.

accomplished on Christ's cross¹⁸²⁵. Therefore, in Küng's view, it is possible to find material agreement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism on justification as a close-ended event which has been accomplished once and for all on Christ's cross¹⁸²⁶. Since Küng maintains that justification refers first and foremost to the objectivity of God's judgment, it follows that he understands it primarily as God's *active* salvation event for the sake of sinners. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the legitimacy of a secondary, *passive* understanding of justification as the psychological process taking place in the justified sinner¹⁸²⁷. The two aspects are not to be separated, and the passive understanding does not fundamentally imply any complementary self-justification of human being next to their justification truly effected by God's grace on Christ's cross¹⁸²⁸.

Küng's reflection on the active and passive understandings of justification leads him to critically engage with the Protestant doctrine of the *simul iustus et peccator*. Specifically, Küng interprets the doctrine of the *simul* as the semantic accounting for the fact that *in some way* the justified does remain a sinner¹⁸²⁹. In this sense, for Küng, the doctrine is also acceptable to Roman Catholic theology and concerns not only the individual sinner, but also the church, which keeps sinning and thereby contradicts its very essence¹⁸³⁰. Küng's understanding of the *simul* is linear and quantitative. In his interpretation, the doctrine means that the justified is really, wholly and truly righteous, and yet they sin. If they were not fully righteous in this sense, the seriousness of God's justifying act would be put in question, which is precisely what Küng reproaches to the Reformers¹⁸³¹. Correspondingly, in Küng's view, there can be no talk of the justified being at the same time wholly and truly a sinner. Rather, he argues that the justified remains a sinner in the sense that they are a *viator*¹⁸³², one who is on their way to salvation and whose justification needs therefore growth towards eschatological consummation. At any rate, the core difference between the Protestant account and Küng's perspective is that, for the latter, the justified and the sinner are *not* two relational determinations of human being *as a whole*. Instead, the justified is *totus iustus*, and yet they remain capable of sinning as long as they live¹⁸³³. Furthermore, Küng connects his interpretation of the *simul* with a reflection on time. In one's life, past and future are not unqualified determinations, they are always this person's past and future, they can never become separate from them. Therefore, for Küng, it should be said of the justified that they *were* a sinner, because their sin is truly forgiven by the justifying God. At the

¹⁸²⁵ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 228.

¹⁸²⁶ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 229.

¹⁸²⁷ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 230.

¹⁸²⁸ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 231.

¹⁸²⁹ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), pp. 231ff.

¹⁸³⁰ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 241.

¹⁸³¹ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 232.

¹⁸³² KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), p. 234.

¹⁸³³ KÜNG, H., Rechtfertigung (see note 886), pp. 237f.

same time, the justified is still the same person that they were, so that their sinful past is included in their personal existence¹⁸³⁴. In this sense, they are somehow still a sinner.

In K  ng's clearly Augustinian account of justification, it is pivotal to maintain that human being is completely incapable of self-justification, as they cannot give anything to God. Rather, they receive all things from Him¹⁸³⁵. Thus, K  ng explicitly maintains that human being does not respond to justification by working, but by believing, so that *all* deeds, including acts of obedience to the moral law, are excluded from justification¹⁸³⁶. Accordingly, K  ng claims that the *sola fide* principle also belongs to Roman Catholic doctrine¹⁸³⁷, in the sense that justification is always to be related to faith – as one's self-abandonment to God (*sich-Gott-  berlassen*) – and never to love¹⁸³⁸. In K  ng's view, this entails not only that faith can also be qualified as trust (*Vertrauen*), but also that such qualification is precisely the one which comes into play in justification¹⁸³⁹. However, K  ng also contends that this is not the primary meaning of faith, which rather consists in one's acceptance of the *kerygma*¹⁸⁴⁰. Thus, in K  ng's account, the trusting dimension of faith (*fides fiducialis*) is neither rejected, nor given the centrality it has in Reformation theology. The trust of faith is for K  ng the beginning, foundation and root of all justification, in that it is the acceptance of the person of Jesus Christ, not of abstract

¹⁸³⁴ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 239. In my opinion, K  ng's account of the *simul* is utterly unconvincing. I do not only claim that his position – both when referring to the individual sinner and to the church – is deeply at odds with the corresponding Protestant doctrine. More radically, I would say that K  ng is not even discussing the same thing that the Reformation refers to with the doctrine of the *simul*. The *simul* semantics are not simply an interpretation of the persisting sin of the justified in spite of them having been declared and made righteous. The question which the *simul* intercepts is not why the Christian person sins. Such a question is indeed a serious one, and K  ng rightly addresses it. But this, in my opinion, has little to do with the *simul* semantics. Much more radically, the question which is answered within the doctrine of the *simul* is *who the Christian person is* in the light of faith. The *simul* illustrates that the person is one and whole. In faith, this one, whole person becomes manifest as a *whole* person who is both a justified person and a sinner, both *totus iustus* and *totus peccator*. Justification is not the growing transformation of human being from one condition to another. Precisely because God's justifying act is to be taken seriously, it cannot be claimed, with K  ng, that justification truly changes human being in part, in light of a completion which still somehow lies ahead of them. In the *dynamis* of the Gospel, God changes human being here and now, wholly and completely, because this human being is transposed into Christ, in whom they are wholly and completely righteous. In themselves and in abstraction from Christ, instead, this same human being is wholly and completely a sinner, one who has not found their true qualification, their true being. The *simul* doctrine has nothing to do with a splitting of human being in two persons, nor does it explain why a believer or the church still sin. What is twofold is not human being, but their qualification, which depends on the point of observation from where human being's overall relationality with themselves, God and the world is considered. If this point of observation is Jesus Christ, human being is wholly righteous outside of themselves. If the point of observation is human being themselves, they are wholly a sinner. K  ng's account, on its part, risks changing God's justifying act into a matter of a growing *quantum* in human being. But if justification is found *there*, what is found in Jesus Christ? In conclusion, I would say that K  ng's account fails to identify even a positional compatibility between Protestant and Roman Catholic views of the *simul*. As a matter of fact, the two confessional understandings of the *simul* remain conflictual even in a text like the JDDJ (see KRISTANTO, B., "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", in: MELLONI, A. [ed.], *Martin Luther: A Christian Between Reforms and Modernity (1517-2017)*, vol. 2, De Gruyter, Berlin 2017, pp. 827-842, here p. 830).

¹⁸³⁵ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 244.

¹⁸³⁶ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 245.

¹⁸³⁷ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 244.

¹⁸³⁸ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 246.

¹⁸³⁹ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 247.

¹⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

truths¹⁸⁴¹. According to Küng, Roman Catholic theology holds that the sinner is justified only by faith, provided that this faith is not in contrast to good deeds. In fact, good deeds, as acts of love, always accompany faith. Correspondingly, for Küng, it needs to be said that love does not justify, and yet it is not absent from justification¹⁸⁴². In this view, human being is justified by a *faith which is active in love*¹⁸⁴³. In Küng's perspective, faith constitutively wants to become visible in signs, and eminently in baptism, which does belong to justification and needs to be thought with reference to it¹⁸⁴⁴. Ultimately, for Küng, neither the objectivity nor the subjectivity of faith can be considered a condition for justification¹⁸⁴⁵. Rather, faith is to be regarded as one's submitting to God's judgment and thereby endorsing it.

Moving on to consider how the righteousness of the justified relates to their being, Küng's concern is to exclude that one's righteousness may consist in mere promise (*Verheißung*)¹⁸⁴⁶. Rather, righteousness truly happens, in the sense that a concrete, ontic event takes place in the justified. For Küng, in faith a new being becomes reality, a new Christian subject is truly (*realiter*) constituted, so that the righteous person and the sinner are different with regards to the qualification of their *being* (*seinshaft verschieden*)¹⁸⁴⁷. This new qualification is brought about by faith as that which creates a new condition in the believer, who is thus made righteous¹⁸⁴⁸. Since faith, to a certain degree, is also

¹⁸⁴¹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 249.

¹⁸⁴² KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 250.

¹⁸⁴³ Ibid. While no Protestant theologian would ever dispute that justifying faith does entail good deeds, a certain ambiguity can still be reproached to Küng's account from a Protestant perspective. Specifically, it all depends on how the activity of faith is coordinated with its passivity. For Küng, both dimensions are there, and yet it is not clear how they relate when it comes to justification. A further interesting question – which unfortunately cannot be tackled in the present work due to lack of space – would be how Küng's view of faith which is active in love relates to *fides caritate formata*. This question could be one of many points of observation to study the question of how Küng's theology of justification is positioned with regards to other Roman Catholic understandings of the matter.

¹⁸⁴⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 251.

¹⁸⁴⁵ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 252f.

¹⁸⁴⁶ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 254. In my judgment, Küng's concern on this point uncovers one core difference between Roman Catholic theology and the Reformation. Küng fears that insisting on God's justifying promise to the detriment of human being's real change endangers the reality of justification altogether. I would say that this concern stems from the very core of Roman Catholic understanding of reality, which is (traditionally) expressed through Aristotelian categories. For said understanding, the flaw of the Reformation approach is that potency is given primacy over act, or at least the process of actualization of potency remains obscure. Applied to justification doctrine, the concern seems to be that Reformation theology does not adequately insist on how God's decree of righteousness becomes actual in the new constitution of being of the justified and their ensuing Christian life. Conversely, Reformation theology does not (necessarily) understand reality along Aristotelian lines (see e.g. JÜNGEL "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit. Zum ontologischen Ansatz der Rechtfertigungslehre", *Evangelische Theologie* 29 [1969], pp. 417-442). In my view, the Protestant insistence on God's declaration of righteousness depends on the fact that it is *there* that Protestants see the most concrete reality of all. In justification, the highest degree of reality, its most sound determination, is *not* human being's endorsement of God's decree, but the decree itself. For the Reformation, God's promissory Word (*verbum promissionis*) is the fundamental qualification of reality, because only God's Word is utterly deprived of ambiguity and therefore creative of unambiguous, reconciled reality. Human being's endorsement of the Word, in all its importance, can never truly be separated from ambiguity and exists at best as the tentative and discontinuous attestation of God's declaration of righteousness. Moreover, it is precisely as such, in all its limitation, that human being's endorsement has its unquestionable relevance in the Protestant account.

¹⁸⁴⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 255.

¹⁸⁴⁸ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 256.

a human deed, K  ng moves to face the question of one’s collaboration in their justification. While said collaboration is to be excluded at the level of objective justification, it is instead to be affirmed concerning subjective justification¹⁸⁴⁹. Faith receives human being’s justification, which is fully accomplished (*vollbracht*) in God’s judgment pronounced on Christ’s cross¹⁸⁵⁰. However, this judgment takes place precisely because God wants to have a real, active and responsible partner in human being, one whose passive reception of righteousness is brought to perfection as it becomes awoken activity¹⁸⁵¹. Thus, K  ng views faith, in its passivity, as one’s *active readiness* to receive God throughout their whole life¹⁸⁵². This active readiness of faith in the life of the justified entails that the moral dimension of human being’s sanctification (*Heiligung*) necessarily follows the objective holiness (*Heiligkeit*) which God’s decree carries out for and in human being as His covenantal partner. As a matter of fact, K  ng understands the moral dimension of sanctification as the unfolding (*Auswirkung*) of God’s work on human being, and not as the latter completing the former’s work¹⁸⁵³. Here, K  ng’s concern is twofold. Firstly, all dilution of justification in human being’s ethical efforts is to be avoided. Secondly, the necessary difference between God and human being’s agency is to be maintained. This means that, whereas the objectivity of justification excludes the semantics of repetition and growth, the subjective dimension of (moral) sanctification includes them¹⁸⁵⁴. In order to interpret these semantics with reference to human being’s sanctification, K  ng employs the traditional Roman Catholic category of *merit* and rephrases it in his doctrine of reward¹⁸⁵⁵. Specifically, K  ng maintains that the Biblical semantics of reward need to be understood eschatologically. Accordingly, it is not the work itself to be rewarded, but the intention (*Gesinnung*) with which the work is performed. For K  ng, this avoids viewing reward as the result of human being’s good performance and considering it the guiding principle (*Hauptmotiv*) of ethics. The aim of K  ng’s doctrine of reward is to avoid all moral passivity on the part of human being, who is rather called out to active obedience¹⁸⁵⁶.

In conclusion, K  ng’s work shows that *positional compatibility*¹⁸⁵⁷ is possible between Roman Catholic theology and the Reformation¹⁸⁵⁸. To outline the foundations of this compatibility, K  ng develops his doctrine of justification within Christology and in close contact with creation theology and hamartiology. For K  ng, justification issues from the reality of God’s sovereignty, which

¹⁸⁴⁹ See note 1802 for terminological clarification.

¹⁸⁵⁰ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 258.

¹⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵² K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 259.

¹⁸⁵³ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 261.

¹⁸⁵⁴ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 262.

¹⁸⁵⁵ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 263.

¹⁸⁵⁶ K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 265.

¹⁸⁵⁷ For terminological clarification, see here, p. 246.

¹⁸⁵⁸ See note 1761.

becomes revealed as *grace* in the incarnated Christ¹⁸⁵⁹. The doctrine of justification bases on the *mysterion* of Christ as the fundamental ontological constitution (*Bestand*) of reality. In light of the incarnation, the christological mystery becomes anthropologically relevant, so that human being as a sinner is constituted anew as the active partner of God, who both declares them righteous and constitutes them as renewed subjects in light of eschatological consummation.

4.2.2. Structural Incompatibility on Justification: D. M. Hampson

In Hampson's account, the confessional differences on justification doctrine are not simply a question of positions. Rather, they are expressions of mutually conflicting *universes of presuppositions* or *structures*, which center around specific understandings of the self and its relationship with God¹⁸⁶⁰. In particular, the Protestant¹⁸⁶¹ structure is exemplified first and foremost by extrinsic righteousness, which identifies Reformation thinking as a *dialectic*¹⁸⁶². Just like Mostert (and Ebeling), Hampson interprets the Reformation justification doctrine as the question of the *point of observation* from where the relationship between human being, God and the world is considered¹⁸⁶³. Correspondingly, she claims that a specific *relational anthropology* is inseparable

¹⁸⁵⁹ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 267f.

¹⁸⁶⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 9.

¹⁸⁶¹ In my opinion, Hampson's account is characterized by two major weaknesses, which are related to each other. The first is her referring to *the* Protestant structure (see also note 1752). As a matter of fact, it is by no means possible to apply Hampson's understanding of Protestantism and the Reformation to all forms of Protestant theology. The second weakness is the terminological unclarity surrounding her use of the word "Protestant". Attempting a semantic clarification is no simple task. In general, it can be observed that, in Hampson's account, "Protestant" is used as a synonym of "Lutheran" (which appears in the title of her work "Christian Contradictions", the main object of study of the present paragraph), and given a theological interpretation which is mostly dependent on 20th century existential Lutheranism, the *Lutherrenaissance*, Bultmann's school and motif research. Even though Hampson does try to include different expressions of Protestantism (like Barth's theology or some impulses of the Finnish school of Lutherology), it must be observed that this inclusion is selective, as the author seems to downplay those features of these theologies which do not fit her view of *the* Protestant structure. From now on (like elsewhere in the present study), for the sake of terminological clarity, I am going to employ the term "Reformation" (in its adjectival use) instead of "Protestant" or "Lutheran" when analyzing Hampson's work. By doing so, I do not intend to ignore the aforementioned weaknesses. On the contrary, both of them are to be taken seriously, as they point to the structural plurality of Protestant theology, which cannot be reduced to any structure defined once and for all. At the same time, I would argue that these weaknesses do not jeopardize the theological significance of Hampson's account. In fact, her analysis shows that, whenever certain key theological concerns of the Reformation are stressed and coordinated together, the resulting discourse breaks *categorically* with alternative theological accounts, both within and outside of Protestant theology. According to Hampson, it is precisely by looking at these theological concerns (such as the relational understanding of self and the extrinsicality of personhood) that one understands the specificity of the Protestant structure. To sum it up, her generalization of certain theological concerns of the Reformation, which is meant to outline *the* Protestant structure, might be problematic and difficult to uphold. However, in my opinion, her insistence on these theological concerns and not on others does account for the irreducible specificity of the Reformation and illustrates what makes its theology qualitatively different from alternatives, which is also Mostert's concern. For this reason, I have considered it particularly appropriate to include Hampson's account in the present study. For a critical analysis of her work which draws conclusions opposite to those presented in my account, see SAGOVSKY, N., "Christian Contradictions? Hampson, Jüngel and Lane on Justification and the Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 4/1 (2004), pp. 91-101.

¹⁸⁶² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 10. As will be shown, Hampson understands "dialectical" as the opposite of "linear". Therefore, she is not referring specifically to Dialectical Theology.

¹⁸⁶³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 11.

from the Reformation justification doctrine. Following W. Joest¹⁸⁶⁴, Hampson understands the Reformation breakthrough as a question of *personal ontology*. Breaking away from the Aristotelian framework, the Reformation views the person as one who is carried by another¹⁸⁶⁵. In explicit theological terms, this extrinsicality means that one's center of personhood is *not* in oneself but transposed into Christ by faith. Justification doctrine is the explanation of this transposition. The Reformation understanding entails that the person's full unity with themselves is given outside of themselves (*extra se*). From this core anthropological tenet follows the specific Reformation hamartiology, which, next to anthropology, makes Reformation thought at odds with alternative theological accounts. Specifically, sin comes to encapsulate, first and foremost, all attempts to achieve one's self-integration, seeking to establish one's unity by oneself and not by God. Thus, Hampson explains that the Reformation structure regards sin as human being's willing obliteration that, in Christ, the self is *already* fully and perfectly integrated¹⁸⁶⁶. The christological integration of the self is described by justification doctrine, which interprets relational anthropology by stressing that the justified is righteous not in themselves, but in their relationship with God. Therefore, the person is constituted *before* their works, not through them, so that the quality of the works depends on that of the person¹⁸⁶⁷. Justification doctrine explains that the prior constitution of the person is actualized by God's promissory Word (*verbum promissionis*). It is God who constitutes the person by addressing His promise to them. Since this promise is *good* and since it is *God's* promise, human being's appropriate response to it is *trust* (*fides fiducialis*). Accordingly, for Hampson, Reformation categories also entail a new understanding of the religious person: this is not the saint, but the one who trusts¹⁸⁶⁸, who is hidden with Christ in God¹⁸⁶⁹. In her words, this means that the justified sinner has a double sense of self¹⁸⁷⁰, since they are fully and unconditionally righteous outside of themselves, and wholly a sinner in themselves.

¹⁸⁶⁴ JOEST, W., *Ontologie der Person bei Luther*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1967.

¹⁸⁶⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 11.

¹⁸⁶⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 12.

¹⁸⁶⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 14.

¹⁸⁶⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 15.

¹⁸⁶⁹ Col 3,3.

¹⁸⁷⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 16. In my opinion, Hampson's use of the adjective "double" with reference to the *simul* semantics is theologically problematic. Instead, I would argue that the justified sinner has a *twofold* sense of self. The point is not a reduplication of the self, as if two persons coexisted in one and the same individual. Rather, the one and undivided person of the justified sinner is qualified in a twofold manner when met with God's twofold Word(s): as a sinner before the Law, and as a righteous person in Christ. In my view, Hampson's language risks representing the Christian as a torn person, one whose center of personhood is a battlefield between sin and righteousness, with both determining the self equally. Now, this is precisely what the Reformation doctrine of justification overcomes. Instead, saying that the Christian's sense of self is twofold is true to the concern of the *simul* while at the same time maintaining the undivided character of the self. Accordingly, being addressed by the Word of justification means that one has found peace in the form of a solution to their quest for an integrated self, so that their center of personhood is *no longer* what it was, namely a battlefield. Clearly, the solution to the quest depends on the self-revelation of the One who is *already* a merciful God, which founds the reality of justification as such. As a consequence, I deem it important to interpret the twofold character of the self (as expressed by the *simul*) forensically, namely as the question of how one

For Hampson, the core of the Reformation structure is that the justified sinner's complete reliance on God works *against* their concern for their internal goodness, and not as its ultimate endorsement¹⁸⁷¹. Thus, the Reformation fundamentally breaks with all religious views whereby God is the ultimate warrant, keeper and goal of one's *inner* modification. Since one's righteousness remains always *God's*, all complementary focus on the sinner's growth in righteousness is excluded. As a matter of fact, Hampson considers it constitutive of Reformation justification that an autonomous righteousness of the sinner cannot be affirmed. This is because any autonomous righteousness does not truly function as an endorsement of God's righteousness, but actually entails its rejection. By wanting to secure the reality of justification in themselves, the sinner neglects that God is the One who truly changes them. Regarded as a process, justification is indeed a question of one's modification: the justified sinner *is* truly changed. However, for Hampson, the Reformation structure vindicates that this modification is carried out exclusively by faith as the act of trust whereby one extrinsically participates in the reality of Christ, receiving their ultimate determination only in him¹⁸⁷². Considered as a result, justification is the coincidence between one's understanding of self and one's sense of God¹⁸⁷³, provided that the distinction between the two is strictly maintained¹⁸⁷⁴. For Hampson, Reformation anthropology and hamartiology culminate in justification doctrine to express the core truth that the Christian is one who continuously ceases to be an independent center of power alongside God, thereby affirming His lordship¹⁸⁷⁵. Thus, justification doctrine fundamentally changes the way in which human being and God are understood. From justification ensues a specific *existential epistemology*. The latter affects theological semantics in such a way that these are given a meaning in light of justification which they do not inherently possess in abstraction from it¹⁸⁷⁶. This epistemology describes human being, God and the world as they are related from the point of view of justification doctrine. Basically, the realities signified by the words "human being", "God" and "world" cannot be fully and satisfactorily understood in their theological significance apart from their overall relationality, which is normatively interpreted by justification doctrine. To express this core Reformation insight – which is also central to Mostert's account – Hampson says that theology ceases to be *sapientia doctrinalis* and becomes *sapientia experimentalis*¹⁸⁷⁷. The point of *sapientia*

becomes qualified when confronted with the Law (a sinner, in themselves) and the Gospel (a righteous person, in Christ). This forensic interpretation, in my judgment, requires maintaining the unity of the self: it is all about one and the same person. Now, this unitary and forensic sense of self does not emerge clearly enough from Hampson's talk of a "double sense of self" of the Christian.

¹⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 18.

¹⁸⁷³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 19.

¹⁸⁷⁴ See here, pp. 45f.

¹⁸⁷⁵ In my opinion, this continuous cessation of one's lordship over their personality functions as a fruitful existential interpretation of Gal 2,20.

¹⁸⁷⁶ For instance, in philosophical theology.

¹⁸⁷⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 22.

experimentalis is the concern with the promissory character of Christ's reality and presence for the believer (*pro nobis*). Thus, in justification, specific realities – the preached Word, the sacrament and the church – simply *are* Christ in relation to the believer¹⁸⁷⁸. Hampson's account of *sapientia experimentalis* clarifies that to speak of Jesus Christ theologically means to speak of the way in which God is God to the justified sinner. This entails that the Reformation structure never understands Jesus Christ as an object within a doctrinal system, but always and exclusively as an object-for-faith¹⁸⁷⁹.

In his article *Forerunners of the Reformation*, McGrath identifies forensic-declaratory justification and extrinsic righteousness as the two specific elements of the Reformation justification doctrine¹⁸⁸⁰. To these elements, Hampson adds the doctrine of the *simul*¹⁸⁸¹, the articulation of faith and love along the tree-fruit pattern¹⁸⁸² and the conceptualization of one's relationship to their neighbor¹⁸⁸³. For her, the *simul* is central to the Reformation structure of thought because it illustrates the relational character of both righteousness and sin. As Hampson contends, neither term refers to the inward state of the person. In other words, both function as *qualifications*, not qualities. Within the Reformation structure, saying that one is wholly a sinner means that the life that they lead in themselves is not their true life¹⁸⁸⁴. Under the untrue¹⁸⁸⁵ life of the self (their sin) lives another, namely Jesus Christ, who is one's true life (their righteousness), invisible but audible¹⁸⁸⁶. In close connection with the *simul* is Hampson's discussion of faith and love. Faith is the reality within which the personal core of the justified sinner becomes linked to their future and disentangled from bondage to their past (sin). Within faith, the justified sinner is the one who *now* lives *from* the future. Accordingly, Hampson aptly stresses that Reformation faith is both present and eschatological¹⁸⁸⁷. Thus, in the Reformation view, the Christian is not one proceeding on the *via* leading them from present, imperfect righteousness towards eschatological perfection. Rather, the Christian knows to be accepted by God's

¹⁸⁷⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 23.

¹⁸⁷⁹ 2 Cor 16,17.

¹⁸⁸⁰ McGRATH, A., "Forerunners of the Reformation?" (see note 755), p. 223.

¹⁸⁸¹ Since one core element of Hampson's understanding of the *simul* has already been discussed in note 1870, in what follows I will refer to the *simul* only briefly, to then focus on her account of the faith-love articulation and one's relationship to the neighbor.

¹⁸⁸² See e.g. Luke 6,43ff.

¹⁸⁸³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 24.

¹⁸⁸⁴ In light of justification, one's true life is that which determines them with ultimate and irrevocable significance, before God (*coram Deo*). Accordingly, saying that one's qualification as a sinner does not express their true life does not mean that it is false. Here, the opposite of "true" is not "false", but "penultimate" or "non-ultimate". Thus, one's qualification as a sinner is indeed true, one is truly a sinner. However, their sinfulness is not equally ultimate as their being a righteous person, because the last word about the justified sinner is the Gospel, not the Law. Thus, both sin and righteousness express true qualifications of human being. Nevertheless, within the dynamics of Christ's cross (death-resurrection), righteousness expresses a dimension of truth which is ultimate, while sin does not. It is on this basis that – within Reformation theology – justification doctrine invariably mouths into one's certitude of salvation.

¹⁸⁸⁵ Non-ultimate (see note 1884).

¹⁸⁸⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 26.

¹⁸⁸⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 27. On this point, Hampson's account of Reformation justification doctrine differs sharply from Mostert's and rather goes in the direction of my proposed integration of his theology (see for instance 1.3.6., 2.3.3.).

Word, thus already *now* performatively placed within the eschatological future, which is coming to fulfill them. This entails that the Reformation *fides Christo formata* necessarily conflicts with the Scholastic *fides caritate formata*. While the latter qualifies human being as a *viator*, the former views them as the addressee of God's trustworthy promise. In their relationship with God, this addressee is not an independent entity which can gradually learn to hold their ground as they strengthen their faith through love. Even though faith as trust does include love, in the Reformation structure this does not mean that human being ever becomes inherently qualified in such a way that they can stand before God *in themselves*¹⁸⁸⁸. Therefore, Hampson continues, love is *not* the becoming concrete of the faith of the justified, but the dimension in which they are free to turn to their neighbor¹⁸⁸⁹. This turning is enabled only by justification. In particular, the latter gives the subject existential security as peace with God, so that their neighbor is no longer perceived by them as a rival in the competition for self-affirmation. Thus, in the Reformation structure, one's love for the neighbor necessarily implies that one has *already* been liberated from their turbulent strive to self-affirmation, as they have received themselves before God (*coram Deo*)¹⁸⁹⁰. Accordingly, the justified no longer exists under the urge to establish themselves ethically and religiously. What is more, this urge is actually uncovered as the very essence of sin. Thus, Hampson interprets the Reformation correctly when she describes sin first and foremost as one's refusal to be made dependent upon God¹⁸⁹¹. This refusal – which echoes Luther's being bent in upon oneself (*incurvatus in se*) – eminently includes religious and ethical attempts at asserting oneself before God. Consequently, Hampson aptly emphasizes that the Reformation structure implies a critical stance on religion and religiosity which is completely absent in the Roman Catholic structure¹⁸⁹². Following Bultmann, she interprets the relationship between the self and the surrounding, available (*vorhanden*) reality as one in which the former necessarily misuses the latter to assert itself¹⁸⁹³. From a Reformation perspective, this misuse results from the self being existentially insecure, thus continuously seeking assertion without ever finding it¹⁸⁹⁴. The only solution to the continuous fight for self-assertion can be the appearance into the self's own world of

¹⁸⁸⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 29f.

¹⁸⁸⁹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 32.

¹⁸⁹⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 35.

¹⁸⁹¹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 36.

¹⁸⁹² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 37.

¹⁸⁹³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 38f.; Cf. BULTMANN, R., *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, Edinburgh University Press 1957, p. 99: "Sin is [one's] striving to stand before God in one's own strength [...], the desire to secure himself and therefore the clinging to that which is at his disposal, be it earthly goods or be it works performed according to the commandments of the law." For Hampson's interesting analysis of Bultmann's theology as a prime expression of the Reformation structure, see HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 223-248.

¹⁸⁹⁴ The impossibility of finding assertion depends on the old, legal qualification of reality, within which no new (qualitatively different) structures ever emerge which address the sinner in a radically new manner, so as to make them free to welcome their true, God-given assertion. Within reality, the sinner is always addressed in a way which ultimately prevents them from breaking free of the Law and receiving their true qualification in the Gospel.

a new, qualitatively different (non-legal) reality. In other word, a *novum* is needed which puts an end to existential insecurity and prevents the ensuing misuse of available (*vorhanden*) reality. Hampson correctly claims that, for the Reformation structure, justification doctrine describes precisely this new reality (the Gospel) in its coming to disqualify all attempts at self-assertion (the Law)¹⁸⁹⁵. As peace with the gracious God, justification uproots one's coercion to misuse surrounding reality as a means to self-assertion and creates space and time for a responsible, free and loving interaction with it.

Hampson maintains that the Reformation structure interprets justification as a *fundamental discontinuity* of the historicity of the self¹⁸⁹⁶. It is only out of this discontinuity that a reconciled relationship with God can and does arise. In my opinion, she is right in pointing out that this discontinuity identifies the Reformation structure as “deeply unnatural”¹⁸⁹⁷ in comparison to alternative expressions of religious thinking. God gives sinners a new sense of self, an unprecedented determination which comes from the unexpected future of His promise and *breaks with* the self-asserted past of the self. Thus, the justified sinner is a reality which can in no way be conceptualized as the fulfillment of a previously given self. In Hampson's analysis, the unexpected and unprecedented character of the justified self is interpreted by the category of *revelation*. In the Reformation structure, this category enables justified sinners to apprehend that *all* the knowledge and experience of the realities of self, God and the world possibly gathered from (manifestations of) the Law are *not* ultimately true. Instead, they are met and overcome by revelation, as the dynamic within which justified sinners access a new, non-legal understanding of these realities. This new understanding has a deeper and truly ultimate significance for the justified, so that their previous universe of presuppositions is overturned¹⁸⁹⁸. This occurs through the hearing of the preached Word, which performatively communicates to justified sinners a hope not based in themselves, but in God's promise. Within the Reformation structure, this performative communication truly changes sinners as it modifies *their relationship* to themselves, God and the world.

Coming to the Roman Catholic structure, Hampson, just like Küng, takes Trent's decree on justification as her point of reference. However, unlike him, she considers the confessional divergence on justification doctrine as the manifestation of profoundly different theological sensibilities¹⁸⁹⁹. In Hampson's view, this divergence can only be overcome if both confessional structures are ultimately interpreted as two versions of Augustine's theology of grace. Now, it is precisely this interpretation that she rejects. As a matter of fact, she strives to demonstrate the impossibility to defend extrinsic

¹⁸⁹⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 39.

¹⁸⁹⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 40. Hampson's category of *discontinuity* is very close to Jüngel's *interruption* (*Unterbrechung*), which is also used to describe justification (see JÜNGEL, E., *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung* [see note 149], pp. 67f.). See also note 680.

¹⁸⁹⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 41.

¹⁸⁹⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 47.

¹⁸⁹⁹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 56.

righteousness within Augustinianism, therefore drawing the conclusion that the Reformation structure is necessarily at odds with Trent's Augustinian theology of grace¹⁹⁰⁰. For Hampson, the Roman Catholic structure conceptualizes justification as the gradual *iustum facere* of human being, who moves linearly *from* being a sinner *to* becoming a righteous person. What follows is a transformationalist conception of salvation which necessarily downplays the forensic-declaratory dimension of justification, rejects extrinsicality and defends inherent righteousness (*iustitia inhærens*) instead¹⁹⁰¹. Hampson does not deny that the Roman Catholic structure can be articulated in terms which are close to the Reformation one, so that it has been possible to reach positional agreement on core features of justification doctrine¹⁹⁰². However, she maintains that such an agreement does not express real theological consensus¹⁹⁰³, because it is wholly formulated within the Augustinian and Medieval theological-philosophical framework. As long as this remains the case – with a transformationalist stance being taken for granted as shared by both structures –, the resulting positional agreement can only be feeble¹⁹⁰⁴. Thus, in Hampson's account, even though the Roman Catholic structure can express justification doctrine in terms which integrate key concerns of the Reformation, it also invariably isolates it from other *loci theologici*, which therefore remain untouched by justification¹⁹⁰⁵. This implies, at least indirectly, the Roman Catholic rejection of the criteriological role of justification, which is pivotal to the Reformation structure. From a Roman Catholic perspective, justification doctrine is integrated within a broader theology of grace that Hampson considers linear in structure¹⁹⁰⁶. She summarizes it as follows: the righteous person, aided by grace, acquires merits through acts of love (*caritas*), thus progressing towards their salvation and growing in their ability to fulfill the Law¹⁹⁰⁷. Of course, Hampson is aware that, also in the Roman Catholic structure, all grace comes from God alone. However, she notes that the concept of *movement*, which does not fit within the Reformation view, is essential to the Roman Catholic understanding of justification. For Hampson, Roman Catholicism understands justification as one's moving along the

¹⁹⁰⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 59.

¹⁹⁰¹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 62.

¹⁹⁰² In the present study, "positional agreement" means an agreement on individual doctrines or parts thereof. In my interpretation, the "theologies of positional compatibility" (see here, p. 246) are those who infer confessional theological compatibility from the possibility of reaching positional agreement on doctrines. That has been the case of well-known attempts at consensus on justification doctrine, from the Regensburg talks (1541) to 20th century ecumenical documents such as "Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VII" (1983), "Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?" (1986), and obviously the JDDJ (1999).

¹⁹⁰³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 63.

¹⁹⁰⁴ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 66ff. An unavoidable critical question to Hampson's perspective, however, is to what degree a real (not only positional) agreement on justification exists *within* Protestant theology and life of faith. As long as this question remains unanswered, it is difficult to imagine how ecumenical dialogues on justification doctrine might be conducted otherwise than within the Augustinian and Medieval framework embodied by Roman Catholic theology.

¹⁹⁰⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 67.

¹⁹⁰⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 75.

¹⁹⁰⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 72.

way (*via*) from a *state* of sin to one of grace¹⁹⁰⁸. Thus, the righteous person is made able to finally stand before God at the end of their life, after having been transformed by grace, which is truly communicated by the sacraments¹⁹⁰⁹. In a nutshell, justification becomes ultimately equated with sanctification and interpreted as one's translation from a sinful to a righteous state.

Against K  ng¹⁹¹⁰, Hampson maintains that the Roman Catholic structure understands faith as belief, *not* as trust. Following her, I would argue that it is precisely this view of faith as belief which undergirds the Roman Catholic transformationalist position on justification. Since faith is the intellectual deed of accepting the *kerygma*, it cannot be justifying *per se*, but only after having been transformed by *agapic* love (*fides caritate formata*)¹⁹¹¹. Because of its account of faith, Trent can only reject the Reformation insistence on the certainty of salvation, that the Council misinterprets as one's false confidence of being in the *state* of grace based on one's own righteousness. To the contrary, the Reformation salvation assurance founds exclusively in faith as one's extrinsic trust in Christ's righteousness *as opposed to* one's own. Since it ignores the dimension of extrinsicality, the Roman Catholic structure fails to interpret the relationship between faith and love in analogy with the tree-fruit image. Instead, good deeds are regarded as the *cause* of one's increase in justification. As such, they are enabled by grace, which is conceptualized as God's aid in one's fight against sin¹⁹¹². For Hampson, an immediate consequence of the Roman Catholic theology of grace is that righteousness can only be regarded as a *qualitas* which inheres in the self. Without its inhering dimension, justification would not be *real*¹⁹¹³. Correspondingly, the Roman Catholic structure simultaneously contends that one's righteousness is rooted in Christ's and also truly becomes one's own righteousness. This is because what is rooted in him is *real* righteousness. As Hampson aptly remarks, the possibility of an appropriation of Christ's righteousness by the justified person is supported by the *anthropological optimism* that she attributes to the Roman Catholic structure. Accordingly, human being is conceptualized as a free and worthy creature, who is consistently and faithfully aided by the church-mediated grace, so as to eventually (eschatologically) become able to fully satisfy God's Law¹⁹¹⁴. Thus, within the Roman Catholic structure, justification as a movement is understood as God offering constant aid to human being in their gradual transformation from a sinner to a righteous person. This aiding power of God is grace, particularly when considered as *gratia infusa*. This

¹⁹⁰⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 75.

¹⁹⁰⁹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 76.

¹⁹¹⁰ See K  NG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 247

¹⁹¹¹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 77.

¹⁹¹² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 80.

¹⁹¹³ As I already argued in note 1846, I am convinced that Reformation and Roman Catholic theology hold sharply different understandings of what reality means from a theological point of view. The debate on imputative or inherent righteousness is one exemplary consequence of this difference.

¹⁹¹⁴ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 80.

determination of grace, for Hampson, is the core theological category upholding the Roman Catholic sacramental understanding of the church¹⁹¹⁵. Whether or not her claim on the centrality of *gratia infusa* to the Roman Catholic structure is upheld¹⁹¹⁶, I agree with her that the Reformation justification doctrine, at least in its more consistent versions, does undermine Roman Catholic sacramental ecclesiology¹⁹¹⁷.

According to Hampson, the central role played by the doctrine of the *simul* within the Reformation structure finds its Roman Catholic counterpart in the notion that grace fulfills nature (*gratia perficit naturam*)¹⁹¹⁸. Developing her claim, she argues that the Roman Catholic structure essentially regards the relationship between God and human being as the dialogical illustration of how the second comes to their own fulfillment with the aid of the first¹⁹¹⁹. In particular, this relationship finds in a metaphysical-ontological understanding in which the natures of human being and God analogously partake in the category of being (*analogia entis*)¹⁹²⁰. According to Hampson, the Roman Catholic structure finds in *analogia entis* the core conceptualization of how God can meaningfully work with human being as the power enabling and aiding their lifelong transformation, thus bringing them from their sinful past towards their righteous future. Consequently, throughout the phases of their transformation, human being is regarded as one who has reached a certain stage in detaching themselves from their sinful past and into their righteous future. This transformative movement is due to grace, that the Roman Catholic structure understands as the beginning of glory in human being¹⁹²¹.

¹⁹¹⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 81. On this point, I think that Hampson's account is too simplistic. While I agree with her that *gratia infusa* is a key concept to understand the traditional Roman Catholic teaching on justification as it was formulated at Trent, I disagree that this concept can be made into *the* touchstone of Roman Catholic sacramental ecclesiology. Actually, I would argue that it is pointless to try and identify one theological concept or doctrine within Roman Catholicism which may be regarded as foundational of ecclesiology, somewhat along the lines of Reformation justification doctrine. The reason behind my skepticism is that, in my opinion, Roman Catholic theology does not *need* such a concept or doctrine on which to base ecclesiology, because the criterion on which the church stands or falls simply *is* the church itself, understood pneumatically as the reality within which the presence of the risen Christ is actualized historically.

¹⁹¹⁶ See note 1915.

¹⁹¹⁷ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 82.

¹⁹¹⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 83.

¹⁹¹⁹ Put otherwise, it could be said that God, in the Roman Catholic structure, is the supreme warrant of human being's entelechy, the personal principle of their fulfillment. Accordingly, I believe that justification doctrine functions within the Roman Catholic structure as the theological explanation of how human being can and does attain their fulfillment. Instead, in the Reformation structure, justification is *itself* human being's attained fulfillment.

¹⁹²⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 84.

¹⁹²¹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 85. Interestingly enough, here Hampson employs the word "divinization" to refer to the result of justification within the Roman Catholic theology of grace. Similarly, I am convinced that the Roman Catholic traditional (Tridentine) account of justification doctrine brings Roman Catholic soteriology much closer to Eastern Orthodoxy and its core category of *theosis* than to Reformation extrinsicity. However, it needs to be added that Eastern Orthodox theology, also in recent years, has actually denied a similar proximity between *theosis* and Roman Catholic justification doctrine (see for instance VIDOVIĆ, J., "An Orthodox Perspective on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", *The Ecumenical Review* 71/3 [2019], pp. 280-295). Due to lack of space, it is not possible to include in the present study an analysis of the Finnish school of Lutherology and their attempts at interpreting the Reformer's soteriology through the prism of divinization (see e.g. KÄRKKÄINEN, V.-M., "The Holy Spirit and Justification" [see note 528], or the analysis provided by CAVANAUGH, W. T., "A Joint Declaration? Justification as Theosis in Aquinas and Luther", *The Heythrop Journal* 41/3 [2000], pp. 265-280). At any

Clearly, justification as one's transformative movement presupposes an anthropology centered around the *continuity of the self*, as against the Reformation focus on discontinuity (Hampson) or interruption (Jüngel). Furthermore, Hampson points out that the Roman Catholic structure regards one's gradual transformation as the development of one's structures of selfhood overtime. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to qualify Roman Catholic justification as the healing (*sanans*) process which constitutes human being anew in such a way that salvation *becomes* their merit, even though always out of grace¹⁹²². As Hampson has it, the Roman Catholic transformationalist view of justification and its anthropological presupposition of a continuity of the self find their hamartiological *pendant* in a view whereby sin is essentially the *act* which breaks the good order of reality. This entails that sin is understood *metaphysically* as the opposite of righteousness, not *relationally* as the opposite of faith. Correspondingly, within the Roman Catholic structure, its overcoming is regarded as the restitution of the good moral order¹⁹²³, whereby being and goodness are considered interchangeable, and a specific reality is in a relationship to God because it is good¹⁹²⁴. As a consequence, Hampson claims that the Reformation message of *utter forgiveness* – whereby conversely a reality is good because it is in a relationship with God – is incompatible with the Roman Catholic structure. In particular, from a Roman Catholic perspective, the Reformation understanding seems to imply a denial of the good order, thus defying God's own conformity to goodness¹⁹²⁵. In contrast to the Reformation, Hampson continues, the Roman Catholic structure conceptualizes forgiveness as superabundant to justice, not to sin. By forgiving the sinner, God does *more* than what could be expected, not something *qualitatively different*. Accordingly, forgiveness is regarded as a reality which goes *beyond* righteousness, not as a fundamental new qualification thereof¹⁹²⁶. This allows Roman Catholic theology to operate with a philosophical concept of justice, which is then unproblematically extended to the theological discourse on justification. Therefore, the Roman Catholic structure is at odds with

rate, I personally do not find the thesis of a theological compatibility between Reformation soteriology and Eastern Orthodox *theosis* convincing.

¹⁹²² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 86. For a glimpse of the interesting and intricate debate on the category of merit within traditional Roman Catholic justification doctrine, see e.g. McGRATH, A., *Iustitia Dei* (see note 1), especially pp. 110-115, 194-201 and 341-348. Concerning the compatibility between the Roman Catholic concept of merit and Reformation theology, see also McSORLEY, H., "The Doctrine of Justification and Merit in Roman Catholic Dialogues with Anglicans and Lutherans in the Light of Luther's 'Theological Grammar' of 'Incarnate Faith'", *Toronto Journal of Theology* 2/1 (1987). An apologetic defense of the Roman Catholic traditional teaching on merit is provided for instance by WALZ, A., "La giustificazione tridentina. Note sul dibattito e sul decreto conciliare", *Angelicum* 28/2 (1951), pp. 97-138.

¹⁹²³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 86. To a certain extent, also the Reformation views the overcoming of sin as the restoration of the good order of reality. This is precisely Mostert's thesis (see here, pp. 178ff. and 226f.). However, the key difference with the Roman Catholic view is that the Reformation does not understand the good order first and foremost in moral terms. The overcoming of sin is not the ultimate triumph of the Law, but the coming to pass of its intrinsic ambiguity.

¹⁹²⁴ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 91.

¹⁹²⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 87.

¹⁹²⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 88.

the Reformation understanding of the conflictual interaction between Law and Gospel, let alone the ensuing view of the Law as a cursed reality which is invariably intertwined with sin and will be overcome eschatologically¹⁹²⁷. Ultimately, for Hampson, the Roman Catholic structure entails a doctrine of justification within which God's relationship with sinners is conceptualized *in analogy with* human relationships, and not, as in the Reformation structure, *in contrast to* them¹⁹²⁸. Coherently, it follows that, for Roman Catholicism, the sinner's relationship with God is enabled by (the beginning of) their ceasing to be a sinner. Hampson sums this up by saying that, in the Roman Catholic structure, the sinner's relationship with God is imagined dialogically¹⁹²⁹ and not relationally¹⁹³⁰. As a matter of fact, this entails that the core of the Reformation understanding of the Gospel – namely that being a sinner does not keep human being away from God – remains unheard within the Roman Catholic structure¹⁹³¹. According to Hampson, the sharp structural-confessional difference as it emerges within justification doctrine has an ecclesiological aspect. In particular, the Roman Catholic transformationalist view corresponds to an interpretation of the church as the historical continuation of the incarnation. Instead, the Reformation forensic-declaratory doctrine paves the way to a theoretical framework in which the church is the place for the proclamation of God's forgiveness¹⁹³².

After acrimoniously discussing both structures, Hampson broaches the question of their compatibility. According to her, whenever the theologies emerging from the two structures engage in dialogue within ecumenical settings, their fundamental difference becomes manifest¹⁹³³. In particular, the crucial contrast between the two structures emerges with the question of the criteriological value of justification. As Hampson aptly notes, the Reformation structure does not simply consider justification as one doctrine among several others. Instead, justification is the *interpretandum* the correct description of which indicates the presence of sound theology. This is because justification identifies the church of Christ, which is present wherever the *kerygma* is duly preached and orderly celebrated¹⁹³⁴. Accordingly, every doctrine needs to be normatively confronted with justification, as the latter clearly outlines the fundamental dialectic undergirding the Reformation structure. This

¹⁹²⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹²⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 89f.

¹⁹²⁹ From God to human being and vice versa. See note 1930 for terminological clarification.

¹⁹³⁰ From God to human being only. Even though I think that Hampson's analysis of this point is overall correct, I believe that her terminology is unsuitable. As a matter of fact, I see no reason why the Roman Catholic dialogical understanding of the relationship between human being and God could not also be considered relational. Similarly, the Reformation understanding of justification does include the moment of human being's responsiveness to God's agency, thus it can also be considered somehow dialogical. Personally, I would rather say that the Roman Catholic structure views the relationship between human being and God *analogously*, while the Reformation structure views it *dissimilarly*.

¹⁹³¹ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 92.

¹⁹³² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 90.

¹⁹³³ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 176. In order to map out this difference, Hampson summarizes the core theological tenets emerging from both confessional structures, to then advocate for their incompatibility. To avoid repetition, I will not repeat what has already been said about the specifics of both structures. Rather, I will focus on the illustration of how these structures relate to each other.

¹⁹³⁴ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 177.

dialectic illustrates that human being, regardless of their stage in their spiritual life, is never justified by anything inherent in them, but always externally, by God's grace through faith. For Hampson, the Reformation understanding entails that justification doctrine necessarily carries within itself a decisive "No". This can be generally described as the rejection of human being's attempts at self-assertion, whether it be with or without the help of God¹⁹³⁵. As Hampson correctly maintains, this is what makes the Reformation understanding of justification unique and unacceptable to the Roman Catholic structure. According to the latter, human being's justification does entail one's self-assertion, of course in the form of one's willful and cooperative acceptance of God's grace. Now, for the Reformation structure, the impassable problem with the Roman Catholic understanding of justification is precisely this moment of reverting to the self, that Reformation categories interpret as one's sinful self-incurvation. As such, one's reverting to the self is the opposite of the self-forgetfulness enabled by justification as one's peace with God¹⁹³⁶. To the contrary, for the Roman Catholic structure, this reverting to the self essentially marks the fulfillment of human being's nature, and therefore accounts for the seriousness and concreteness of justification, which otherwise risks ending up in a mere *flatus vocis*¹⁹³⁷.

In Hampson's analysis, a pervasive, thorough agreement between the two confessional structures is met with two major obstacles. The first is that the Reformation view of justification seems to imply the *rejection of core features* of Roman Catholic anthropology and hamartiology. Similarly, seeking a theological agreement based on the upholding of these features ends up obscuring the "No" that the Reformation perspective on justification necessarily carries with itself¹⁹³⁸. The second obstacle to a pervasive ecumenical consensus on justification is the *asymmetrical value* that the two confessional structures attribute to justification doctrine¹⁹³⁹. For Hampson, the asymmetry clearly depends on the fact that the Reformation structure conceptualizes justification as *the* orientating criterion of faith and Biblical hermeneutics. Instead, for Roman Catholicism, it is an important component of the much broader *depositum fidei*. Hampson claims that, based on this asymmetry, even a remarkable and important theological text like the JDDJ fails to extend the agreement on the doctrine to its *implications*¹⁹⁴⁰. Thus, her thesis on consensus documents about justification¹⁹⁴¹ is that these are

¹⁹³⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 178.

¹⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹³⁷ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 112.

¹⁹³⁸ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), pp. 179f.

¹⁹³⁹ For a clear-cut and poignant presentation of this asymmetry, consider JÜNGEL, E., "Um Gottes willen – Klarheit!" (see note 524).

¹⁹⁴⁰ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 180. In contrast to Hampson, I have argued against considering theological *loci* like ecclesiology and the relationship between justification and ethics as implications of justification (see here, pp. 245f.). Rather, with Mostert, I regard those *loci* as *expressions* of justification doctrine, viewed from the perspective of what this doctrine excludes (ethics) and includes (the church).

¹⁹⁴¹ In her analysis, Hampson carries out a systematic study of the documents mentioned in note 1902.

hermeneutically and methodologically problematic, as they ignore that doctrinal positions derive their meaning from the underlying theological structures¹⁹⁴². As long as the very existence of those structures is minimized, ignored or even denied¹⁹⁴³, any positional agreement which might be formulated entails a costly price, namely theological incongruence, ambiguity and utter contradiction¹⁹⁴⁴. Thus, Hampson argues that the successive steps taken towards a positional agreement on justification doctrine have simply integrated Protestant vocabulary within the Roman Catholic structure, which has become receptive of some core Reformation concerns¹⁹⁴⁵. Ultimately, Hampson interprets the positional agreement on justification – especially as formulated by the JDDJ – as a linguistic *aggiornamento* (therefore a reiteration) of the Roman Catholic structure. With that, positional agreement covers up the persisting structural incompatibility between the two confessional thought-maps and renounces theological understanding for the sake of a *drive to convergence*¹⁹⁴⁶.

In conclusion, Hampson sees a *structural incompatibility* between the Reformation and the Roman Catholic structures. Positional agreement¹⁹⁴⁷ is not indicative of real consensus, as theological positions coherently emerge from underlying structures. Looking at justification in both structures, Hampson uncovers the *dialectic* of the Reformation approach and the *linearity* of the Roman Catholic one. Following the former, justification introduces a *discontinuity* of the self, while the latter presupposes its *continuity*. The fundamental divergence on justification illustrates the persisting anthropological and hamartiological confessional cleavage. The historical formulations of an ecumenical consensus on justification ultimately turn out to be an *aggiornamento* of the Roman Catholic structure.

4.3. A Critical Assessment of W. Mostert's Ecclesiology

Part 4 has been devoted to Mostert's understanding of the relationship between the church and justification. Firstly, his view was outlined in the wake of Ebeling's, then theological alternatives

¹⁹⁴² HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 185.

¹⁹⁴³ See e.g. SAGOVSKY, N., "Christian Contradictions?" (see note 1860).

¹⁹⁴⁴ It is quite surprising that even theologians who clearly acknowledge the ambiguity brought about by the current positional agreement on justification end up defending it for the sake of theological "tolerance". Consider the following quote: "The price paid on the Protestant side has consisted mainly in the willingness to be more tolerant of a range of views and to accept an element of ambiguity. The dialogue documents have not required Protestants to go back on any of their traditional doctrines. In this respect the situation is much the same as at Regensburg where Protestant substance was accepted in exchange for the acceptance of a measure of ambiguity" (LANE, A. N. S., *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London 2006, p. 226).

¹⁹⁴⁵ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 194.

¹⁹⁴⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 196.

¹⁹⁴⁷ An agreement on individual doctrines (see note 1902).

were discussed. Once again, the choice of the alternatives was neither necessary, nor arbitrary. As a matter of fact, Mostert does not develop his ecclesiology in critical dialogue with other theologians. Therefore, the juxtaposition of his *ecclesiology as justification* to alternative accounts can function only implicitly. It was my analysis of Mostert's account which led me to ask once again whether his position can help shed light on questions which are relevant to Protestant theology today. In order to tackle this question responsibly, it became necessary to explicitly place it within a broader context, one in which alternative perspectives needed to be considered. Juxtaposing the study of the alternatives to the analysis of Mostert's account was obviously not an end in itself. Rather, it was an operation aimed at theological clarification for the sake of further study. The clarification goes both ways: the alternatives can provide useful impulses to overcome some weaknesses in Mostert's theology and vice versa. All in all, in Part 4, I have intended to map out the value and merit of Mostert's ecclesiology and integrate it with different perspectives so as to assess its fruitfulness for today's Protestant theology. Perhaps even more than his positions discussed in previous Parts, Mostert's ecclesiology cannot be regarded as a *via media* between the options embodied by the alternatives, and this for two reasons. First of all, because I have deliberately chosen a different topic breakdown for Mostert and Ebeling on one side and for the alternatives on the other¹⁹⁴⁸. Secondly, because Mostert's ecclesiological conclusions are not located half-way between the alternatives, but much closer to Hampson's than to Küng's perspective on justification. However, this does not obscure the *proprium* of Mostert's ecclesiology. To the contrary, it is precisely the question about the church which brings his theology of justification to its ultimate consequences. Mostert's theological discourse is deeply intertwined with a specific ecclesiology. For him more than for the other theologians whose thought is studied in this Part, the church tends to *coincide with* justification. In my interpretation, it even needs to be said that he regards ecclesiology as justification itself, and *not* as its consequence. In other words, for Mostert, the church does not derive from justification, it *is* justification. While its relationship with ethics qualifies justification by way of exclusion, ecclesiology determines it inclusively¹⁹⁴⁹. Specifically, according to him, the reality of justification is the sinner's transposition into Jesus Christ, who becomes the true qualification of their personhood. When this sinner who has become the addressee of God's justifying Word is considered together with other sinners who have also been addressed by the same Word, justification doctrine is approached in the form of ecclesiology. In the church, Jesus Christ becomes present not only as the solution to human being's fundamental problem, but also as the overcoming of the religious quest for truth. According to Mostert, this quest seeks the pure relationship of human beings with God and finds it

¹⁹⁴⁸ For the reason behind this methodological choice, see here, pp. 247 and 275f.

¹⁹⁴⁹ For clarification, see here, pp. 215 and 245.

primarily in Jesus Christ, secondarily in the community gathered in his name. Therefore, ecclesiology is tasked with showing how justification overcomes the ambiguity of religion by actualizing a community in which several individuals receive Christ's pure relationship with God by faith.

My research has found that Mostert's theology never truly leaves the realm of justification. Therefore, the present study cannot leave justification behind, either. Rather, my analysis has pushed me to follow the inner coherence of Mostert's discourse and move with him from the question of the Prolegomena (Part 1) to the ontology of justification (Part 2), its relationship with ethics (Part 3) and, finally, ecclesiology (Part 4). The four Parts need to be understood as four points of observation which together continuously enrich one and the same theological endeavor, namely the analysis of the overall relationship between human being, God and the world. Mostert's theological effort is *one*. Therefore, in his view, moving *from* the article of justification *to* something else would entail the impossible abandonment of the theological domain as such. This is because theology, in its essence, is the intensive reflection on the relationship between human being, God and the world as this relationship is qualified by the justifying Word graciously addressed to sinners.

In Part 4, I began by studying the relationship between justification doctrine and the church in Ebeling and Mostert. In so doing, I followed their methodology, asking first of all what the church is, and then how it relates to justification. Ebeling and Mostert's answers indicate a strong proximity between their respective ecclesiological accounts. In spite of some divergences¹⁹⁵⁰, for both theologians, ecclesiology clearly founds in justification doctrine. On a formal level, both strive to distinguish between a theological (Ebeling) or original (Mostert) and an empirical (Ebeling) or institutional (Mostert) understanding of the church. While the former is essential to identify the essence of the church, the latter focuses on its non-essential features. On a material level, Ebeling and Mostert regard the church as the *soma* of Christ which is made present whenever the Word of justification is duly preached and orderly celebrated. As Christ's body and the creation of God's Word (*creatura verbi divini*), the church is viewed by both theologians as clearly distinguished from Christ, who is its head and lord. At the same time, the church is the plurality of those who, in Christ and not in themselves, share in the pure relationship between human being and God. Thus, the main task of ecclesiology is to articulate the relationship between justified sinners and Christ in such a way that two fundamental truths are equally affirmed. Firstly, that before God (*coram Deo*) and in the power of His justifying Word, individual sinners are truly changed, so that by faith their centers of personhood are transposed into Jesus Christ. Secondly, that in themselves and before the world

¹⁹⁵⁰ Significant divergences have to do with the question of an eschatological consummation of the church and with the manner in which the diaconal ministry is conceptualized. Unlike Ebeling, Mostert rejects the idea that the church will attain its fulfillment eschatologically (see note 1582). Also, he claims that the diaconal ministry of the church belongs to its secondary institutions, while for Ebeling it belongs to its very essence (see here, p. 252).

(*coram hominibus*) these individuals are wholly sinners, and outside of faith they remain bent in upon themselves (*incurvati in se*) and separated from God. Thus, both theologians clearly refer to justification doctrine as the hermeneutical instrument to discuss ecclesiology. Nevertheless, in my view, only Mostert draws the ultimate consequences of the theological proximity between justification and the church, to the point that, for him, the latter is an expression of the former.

After covering Ebeling and Mostert's accounts, I turned to Küng and Hampson's perspectives on the topic of an ecumenical consensus on justification. Even though it might be objected that this topic and the doctrine of the church belong to two different theological *loci* (soteriology and ecclesiology respectively), I have argued that this is not the case in Mostert's theology. On the contrary, in a study devoted to his work, it seems not only justified, but even necessary to avoid all sharp separation between ecclesiology and justification doctrine. Therefore, I have included Küng and Hampson's accounts on ecumenism and justification doctrine in the present study precisely because I have found them relevant to Mostert's understanding of ecclesiology. At the same time, I have tried to respect as much as possible the specificity of Küng and Hampson's concerns, which cannot be wholly assimilated to the questions raised within Mostert's discourse. Since the alternative accounts diverge not only from Mostert and Ebeling's but also from each other, I have been compelled to reflect this divergence in my study. This has further impacted the topic breakdown of Part 4¹⁹⁵¹.

Using categories of my own device, I have described the first alternative (Küng) as "positional theology". I thereby understand a theology conceptualized as a set of doctrines which in principle can be separated from one another. In this approach, a doctrine expresses a self-contained position on a specific *locus*. As such, doctrines are juxtaposed to one another, to build up the overall *depositum fidei* on which the church is founded. In the context of ecumenical dialogue, the confessional differences are interpreted as conflictual positions on the shared *depositum fidei*. Accordingly, ecumenical consensus is understood as the agreement which is attained whenever previously incompatible positions on the *depositum* are rephrased as compatible formulations thereof. In my analysis, Küng's treatment of justification doctrine is a prime example of this alternative, which however is by no means limited to his work. To mention only dialogues on justification doctrine, Küng's positional approach is unambiguously expressed by the most important ecumenical documents¹⁹⁵². Additionally, as I am going to show at a later point, I consider positional theology to be inherently close to a Roman Catholic theological sensibility¹⁹⁵³.

Instead, I have called the second alternative (Hampson) "structural theology". By this designation I mean a theology in which doctrines cannot be separated from one another. In this approach, a

¹⁹⁵¹ See here, pp. 275f.

¹⁹⁵² See note 1902.

¹⁹⁵³ See 4.3.5.

doctrine is a specification of an underlying theological structure, which emerges coherently in every *locus*. Accordingly, doctrines function as situation-specific repetitions of the one theological structure, and the *depositum fidei* is understood as the sum of these repetitions. Thus, it is the underlying structure which founds the church and keeps the *depositum* together. In the ecumenical context, this approach regards confessional differences as coherent expressions of incompatible underlying structures or thought-maps. As a consequence, ecumenical consensus can only result from a primary compatibility between theological structures, with positional agreement on doctrines being only a secondary consequence thereof. In the present work, Hampson's account on justification is regarded as a prime example of structural theologies. As a matter of fact, for her, justification doctrine is the expression of the underlying structure of Reformation theology.

The analysis of Mostert's ecclesiology carried out in Part 4 has detected some weaknesses, which is now necessary to discuss. In what follows, his position will therefore be criticized, and impulses coming from the theological alternatives will be integrated when necessary. In particular, the following points will be studied: the relationship between the diaconal ministry and the essence of the church (4.3.1.); Mostert's thesis that church discipline does not belong to the Gospel (4.3.2.); the question of God's absence in Mostert's theology (4.3.3.); universality of sin and universality of Christ (4.4.4.); minimal and maximal ecumenical consensus (4.4.5.); the criteriological value of justification (4.4.6.).

4.3.1. The Diaconal Ministry and Ecclesiology

According to Mostert, the essence of the church is expressed by its primary institutions in the context of worship (*Gottesdienst*)¹⁹⁵⁴. Preaching, the Lord's supper, baptism and prayer qualify worship as the *localization* of the pure relationship between sinners and the justifying God. Thus, the *proprium* of the primary institutions is that they actualize justification directly. Through them, salvation is communicated *kerygmatically* in the context of worship, and this is the primary aspect of justification in Mostert's ecclesiology. Next to this primary aspect and as its consequence, justification operates the *relativization* of all those features of the church which are not primary¹⁹⁵⁵. These are the secondary institutions, which relate to the primary ones precisely by being relativized by them. This relativization is inseparable from justification and has to do with the articulation of Law and Gospel in Mostert's theology. Within ecclesiology, the primary institutions of the church correspond to the Gospel, as they carry God's justifying Word and qualify sinners as its receivers. The secondary

¹⁹⁵⁴ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 125.

¹⁹⁵⁵ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 19.

institutions, instead, correspond to the Law, which is deprived of all absolute claims over reality whenever it is placed in critical contact with the Gospel. Since they are ultimately legal realities, the secondary institutions do not immediately express the church as the pure relationship between sinners and the justifying God. Nevertheless, this relationship is never given without them¹⁹⁵⁶, just like the Gospel is never proclaimed in abstraction from the Law. Thus, the secondary institutions necessarily issue from the essence of the church and concur to define its image, in that they serve as instruments for the actualization of the primary institutions¹⁹⁵⁷. Mostert's point is that the church as justification does not become manifest in the secondary institutions, but only in the primary ones. His doctrine of the church institutions has a clear consequence when it comes to diaconal ministry. In particular, Mostert argues that this service does *not* belong to the essence of the church, but to its secondary institutions¹⁹⁵⁸. In my judgment, two aspects of his ecclesiology specifically undergird his position. The first is that he always and only conceptualizes the primary institutions within the context of worship. The second is his conviction that the primary institutions necessarily relate to the secondary ones by relativizing them. As was already pointed out, the paradigm within which Mostert broaches this topic is the Law-Gospel fundamental differentiation.

In my opinion, the exclusion of diaconal ministry from the essence of the church is highly problematic and needs to be criticized. While I agree with Mostert that the essence of the church should be understood from its primary institutions, this should not lead to relegating diaconal ministry to the secondary ones. My critique is twofold. First of all, I consider it an arbitrary limitation to restrict primary institutions to liturgical worship only¹⁹⁵⁹. While it is unquestionable that the church liturgy is central, worship needs to be conceptualized as a broader category, which finds its fundamental intensification in liturgy but cannot be constrained within it¹⁹⁶⁰. Thus, the liturgical dimension of worship is to be understood as an open-ended catalyst for the dynamism of faith and love. In worship, the reality of justification finds its most intense and immediate actualization and comes into focus, it is explicitly thematized. This, however, is not to be understood as an end in itself, but *vicariously*. With Ebeling¹⁹⁶¹, it can be argued that the church of Jesus Christ is constitutively oriented to the world. Liturgical worship is localized in time and space in order to function as the celebration of the present reality of salvation (*Zuspruch*) and the proclamation that this same reality is promised to the world and comes to it as its future (*Verheißung*). Thus, against Mostert, I would argue that the church liturgical worship has its eschatological entelechy in a *greater worship* which will eventually concern

¹⁹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵⁷ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 23.

¹⁹⁵⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 57.

¹⁹⁵⁹ This concerns the first aspect of Mostert's position on the diaconal ministry and the church.

¹⁹⁶⁰ Cf. Rom 12,1; James 1,27.

¹⁹⁶¹ EBELING, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (see note 529), pp. 362f.

the world *as world*¹⁹⁶². Secondly, I would argue that Mostert's exclusion of the diaconal ministry from the essence of the church can be criticized also based on his own view of primary institutions¹⁹⁶³. As I have explained, he defines the primary institutions as those which immediately express justification as the pure relationship between human being as a sinner and the justifying God. The expression of this relationship is the *proprium* of preaching, the Lord's supper, baptism and prayer, and it is what makes them primary institutions. This relationship, however, is observed from different angles depending on which institutions are considered. In particular, Mostert argues that preaching and the supper illustrate justification from God's perspective, whereas baptism and prayer outline it from human being's point of view¹⁹⁶⁴. Against Mostert, I would argue that the diaconal ministry can be regarded as an *expansion of prayer*, therefore not in clear separation from the primary institutions. While I agree that the diaconal ministry should not be confused with justification¹⁹⁶⁵, I contend that it fully belongs to prayer and does not simply follow from it, provided that prayer is regarded as the believer's overall life before God (*coram Deo*). The ensuing perspective on prayer, that I defend, has both an intensive and an extensive element. Intensively, prayer expresses human being's *trusting dependence* on God. Accordingly, it can be illustrated as a primary institution of the church in Mostert's sense, namely as an expression of the pure relationship between God and human being. Extensively, prayer embodies human being's *self-forgetfulness*, which in turn points to prayer as the overall dynamic imprinted onto the life of believers by their trust in God. This dynamic, extensive aspect of prayer transposes its fundamental, intensive aspect¹⁹⁶⁶ into human being's overall relationality with the world. If my twofold (intensive and extensive) regard on prayer is justified, it follows that the diaconal ministry – understood as the specifically Christian qualification of human being's relationality with the world – belongs to it, therefore to the essence of the church¹⁹⁶⁷. At the same time, a weakness can be reproached to my extensive integration of Mostert's view on prayer. In particular, I am aware that my position risks making his sharp distinction between faith and works less effective and more unstable. As a matter of fact, only what I have called the intensive aspect of prayer can be clearly interpreted as justification. This is because it does illustrate (from human being's perspective) the pure relationship between the sinner *and the justifying God*. Instead, the extensive

¹⁹⁶² Rev 21,22-27.

¹⁹⁶³ This refers to the second aspect of Mostert's ecclesiological position on the diaconal ministry.

¹⁹⁶⁴ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 57.

¹⁹⁶⁵ Luke 10,38-42.

¹⁹⁶⁶ The sinner's dependence on God.

¹⁹⁶⁷ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Protestantische Perspektiven einer Sozialethik in Europa am Beispiel der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)", in: SCHOENAUER, H. (ed.), Sozialethische Dimensionen in Europa. Von einer Wirtschaftsunion zu einer Wertegemeinschaft (Dynamisch Leben gestalten 6), Stuttgart 2013, pp. 13-32; s.a., "„Suchet der Stadt Bestes!“. Diakonie und Öffentliche Theologie in der Diaspora", in: DOMSGEN, M., FOSS, T. (eds.), Diakonie im Miteinander. Zur Gestaltung eines diakonischen Profils in einer mehrheitlich konfessionslosen Gesellschaft, Leipzig 2021, pp. 65-78.

aspect of prayer cannot be immediately included in justification. This aspect actually illustrates prayer as the dynamic of the believer's overall relationality *with the world*, which is not limited to the intensive moment where their dependence on God becomes manifest. In spite of this weakness, I still claim that my view on prayer can be defended theologically. To do so, it is necessary to insist on the diaconal ministry as the expansion of prayer in order to thereby problematize its immediate annexation to the dimension of the works of the Law. The diaconal ministry is for sure the fruit of faith, this is its constitutive feature, and I do not intend to minimize it at all. However, I would argue that, at least to a certain extent, the diaconal ministry also belongs to the very dynamic of faith and not only to its consequences. Regarded as the *expansion* of prayer, the responsive-*agapic* dimension of the diaconal ministry, its qualification as the fruit of faith, is fully acknowledged and safeguarded. At the same time, as the expansion *of prayer*, the diaconal ministry remains so strictly intertwined with justification that it becomes impossible to identify the essence of the church without including its service to the world. After all, this service *responds* to the justifying Word because and as long as this Word has found *faith*. According to Mostert, the two primary institutions which illustrate justification from the point of view of human being (baptism and prayer) differ from the other two (preaching and the Lord's supper) precisely because of their *responsive* character. However, this distinction seems rather questionable. As a matter of fact, against him, it is possible to argue that responsiveness constitutively belongs to all four primary institutions, not only to baptism and prayer. For instance, Körtner qualifies both preaching and the Lord's supper as responsive events which include human beings as *receptive* addressees¹⁹⁶⁸. If one follows Körtner, then my interpretation of the diaconal ministry as the expansion of prayer can be legitimately extended to the other primary institutions as well. Not only baptism and prayer, but all the primary institutions illustrate how the grace of justification is received by human being so that the latter can and must immediately become its *vehicle*. Not only does grace pass through its receiver like the free-blowing wind¹⁹⁶⁹. More radically, this passing through is the *only* dimension in which grace interacts with its receiver. Performatively addressed by grace, the receiver becomes self-forgetful, they are *allowed* to stop worrying about themselves and immediately turn to their neighbor and the whole world in service. This passing of grace, not only its consequences in the form of acts of love, finds responsive historicity in the diaconal ministry.

¹⁹⁶⁸ Concerning preaching, the hearer's *receptive understanding* of the preached text participates in the process whereby the *kerygma* becomes God's Word for its hearers. This means that the text is brought to its intended completion as soon as it is received by its hearers in accordance with its intention (KÖRTNER, U.H.J., Dogmatik [Lehrwerk Evangelische Theologie 5], Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig 2020², pp. 541-547). As for the Lord's supper, Körtner explicitly maintains that the sacrament can be interpreted, both exegetically and systematically, as a liturgical *locus* for the diaconal ministry, even though its core significance is indeed the forgiveness of sin (KÖRTNER, U.H.J., Dogmatik, pp. 558-561).

¹⁹⁶⁹ John 3,8.

4.3.2. Does Church Discipline Belong to the Gospel?

In the present paragraph, Mostert's distinction between primary and secondary church institutions is going to be tackled once again. According to him, *discipline* is not a primary institution of the church because it is not unique to it but shared with the State¹⁹⁷⁰. Thus, church discipline pertains to the Law, not to the Gospel, as it does not express the reality of justification, but determines and maintains the space (the ecclesial community) in which this reality is to be communicated. In Mostert's categories, regarding discipline as an essential feature of the church would ultimately endanger the theological endeavor as such, since it would introduce confusion between Law and Gospel and obscure their fundamental differentiation. Based on what I would consider his formal or functional understanding, Mostert insists that discipline is shared by both church and State. Accordingly, for him, discipline is essentially and sufficiently defined as the order (*Ordnung*), functioning and regulation of church life. From this merely formal perspective, I think that he is correct in interpreting discipline as a legal reality. As a matter of fact, the church having regulations aimed at its orderly functioning does not yet say anything about the Gospel of justification. As Mostert points out, other institutions also need discipline in order to function properly. Therefore, discipline cannot be identified as something specific to the church and expressive of its essence, the Gospel.

However, in my judgement, Mostert's formal criterion is insufficient and his exclusion of church discipline from the primary church institutions is problematic. In particular, the decisive element is not whether the church shares its essential features with other institutions¹⁹⁷¹, but what happens to those features and how they become qualified when they are effectively incorporated within the reality of the church and its theological discourse. In my opinion, justification doctrine shows that, whenever a reality is brought in critical proximity to the Gospel, it is qualitatively modified. It is this critical proximity between a specific reality (like preaching or church discipline) and the Gospel, not that reality *per se*, which is exclusive to the Christian church. In that situation of critical proximity, which happens in church life and discourse, something is said of a reality which *cannot* be said elsewhere. Correspondingly, in this situation of critical proximity, this same reality illustrates the Gospel under a specific light, from an angle which would remain obscure if the situation of critical proximity between this reality and the Gospel would not come to be. Thus, Mostert's exclusively formal and static criterion does not yet sufficiently clarify whether or not a specific reality belongs to the essential features of the church. With him, I think that it is a valid starting point to first consider

¹⁹⁷⁰ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), p. 57

¹⁹⁷¹ As a matter of fact, Mostert's exclusively formal criterion is insufficient not only with regard to church discipline, but also to other institutions, such as preaching. Indeed, preaching – and even reference to Jesus in it – is *not* exclusive to the Christian church. For example, Islam also has preaching, and the prophet Jesus can be a part thereof.

whether a reality is exclusive of the church or shared with other institutions. However, against him, I believe that it is necessary to move beyond this starting point and raise the crucial question whether this reality, once brought into contact with the Gospel, is qualified anew by it and in turn sheds a new light on it. If this is the case, then that specific reality relates to the Gospel in a theologically meaningful way and expands the understanding of justification doctrine. In other words, said reality belongs to the essential features of the church. If this is *not* the case, then that reality does not have immediate theological value, therefore not belonging to the essence of the church.

In the specific case of church discipline, the unilateral application of Mostert's formal criterion leads him to conclude that discipline does not belong to the essence of the church. Following my proposed material integration of his criterion, I deem it necessary to at least relativize his conclusion. Formally speaking, Mostert's rejection of discipline as a primary church institution holds and cannot be simply disregarded. Indeed, claiming that church discipline simply belongs to the essence of the church would create confusion between Law and Gospel and ultimately reintroduce legalism in justification doctrine. This clearly needs to be avoided. However, from a material perspective, the question is whether church discipline is qualified anew by the Gospel and contributes to illustrate it when in critical proximity to it. In my opinion, this question cannot be answered abstractly, but only in concrete situations, which also means every time anew. For sure, a negative answer is possible: there can very easily be cases in which disciplinary matters are not qualified anew by the Gospel when in contact with it and do not open up a new, situation-specific understanding of it in the concrete context of proclamation. When this is the case, Mostert's thesis is to be accepted, and church discipline is to be excluded from the essential features of the church¹⁹⁷². Instead, his position is to be rejected whenever a situation arises in which the question finds a positive answer and church discipline *does* become intertwined with the Gospel in a way which is theologically relevant¹⁹⁷³. Therefore, I would argue that the question whether or not church discipline belongs to the essence of the church cannot be answered statically once and for all. Rather, it needs a dynamic answer which tries to integrate Mostert's formal criterion with material considerations. The application of the Law-

¹⁹⁷² As an example, consider the difference between bishops and other pastors in Lutheranism. In the case of those Lutherans for whom this difference is a question without immediate theological relevance and no real difference in the exercise of church ministry is posited between bishops and other pastors, Mostert's thesis on church discipline is confirmed. For a minority of Lutherans, instead, a real difference exists, and bishops embody a qualitatively different ministry compared to other pastors. Regardless of which position is preferred, in this second case Mostert's thesis on church discipline is rejected, since a disciplinary matter is interpreted by these Lutherans as being immediately relevant from a theological point of view, therefore essential to the correct understanding of the church.

¹⁹⁷³ For example, the vast support given to Apartheid by parishes of the local Reformed Church to the South African regime until its fall in 1994 led to disciplinary matters clearly affecting the essence of the church. As is well known, church discipline became immediately (and negatively) intertwined with the Gospel as soon as racial discrimination was introduced in church life and even employed to regulate access to the Lord's supper. The utter rejection of the Gospel implied by racial segregation in the celebration of the supper was the main reason why the World Alliance of Reformed Churches suspended two major South African Reformed denominations in 1982.

Gospel fundamental differentiation encourages an interpretation whereby church discipline does *not* normally play an essential role in illustrating the Gospel. However, it would be theologically irresponsible to absolutize the fundamental differentiation to exclude the very possibility of situations in which, on the contrary, church discipline does become illustrative of the Gospel of justification. Whenever this happens, disciplinary matters do become essential features of the church. Thus, in these specific cases, discipline must be understood as a primary institution. To enable this understanding, the Law-Gospel differentiation must be interpreted dynamically as an effective instrument to illustrate the Gospel of justification, and not statically as a dangerous shortcut to predetermined and overly simplistic answers to highly complicated and situation-specific questions.

4.3.3. God's Absence and the Category of Hiddenness

When covering worship, and especially the question of the acting subject in it, Mostert claims that the church does *not* act in Christ's stead (*in persona Christi*). For him, the acting (*handeln*) of the church is not to be understood vicariously, as if the church were to function as a warrant of God's presence or a surrogate for His absence. Rather, Mostert argues that the acting of the church *corresponds to* God's acting in Christ, which is immediately present. The presence of God is not actualized by the church, but the other way around. The church acts in worship because there it experiences that God is being made present, but the subject of this making present is not the church. In order to clearly express this thought, Mostert contends that presence is a predicate of God's being¹⁹⁷⁴. Thus, God is made present in worship not because of the church acting, but only because He is God in that He is present. Correspondingly, no vicarious role pertains to the church, even though all acts performed by it have the making present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of God as their essence¹⁹⁷⁵. Mostert's rejection of a vicarious understanding of church acting strictly depends on his soteriology. Specifically, salvation is truly and fully present only wherever Jesus Christ is present. Now, for Mostert, a vicarious understanding of Christ's presence would obscure and ultimately deny the *reality* of it in church worship. If Christ is not really present in worship, the concreteness of salvation goes lost. Salvation is the reality performatively communicated by God's promissory Word (*Zuspruch*) wherever the justification of the sinner is faithfully preached and celebrated. Based on the above, it can be argued that Mostert's rejection of the vicarious church acting follows the same logic as his dismissal of the futurity of salvation¹⁹⁷⁶. In his categories, it is imperative to avoid diluting the reality of salvation, which depends on the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Word of the Gospel. Thus, both

¹⁹⁷⁴ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 131.

¹⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷⁶ See 1.3.6., 2.3.3. and 3.3.4.

the futurity of salvation and the vicarious dimension of church acting are interpreted as *de facto* misconceptions of salvation. For Mostert, since Jesus Christ is truly (*kerygmatically*) there, where the Gospel is faithfully preached, all images of a futurity of salvation and all forms of a vicarious presence of God in the church acting end up obscuring salvation and endangering its effective communication. As stated above, Mostert's rejection of the vicarious acting of the church entails his focusing on God's presence, which in my opinion is justified and theologically sound. However, his thesis that presence is an attribute of God's being opens up the question of how to interpret His *absence*. Mostert is aware of this question and answers it within hamartiology. In particular, he claims that the absence of God is experienced by sinners as a reflection of their not being by Him¹⁹⁷⁷. In this sense, he regards sin as human being's existence outside of God's presence. By making salvation christologically present, worship fundamentally contradicts sin and overcomes the sinner's not being by God¹⁹⁷⁸. This view necessarily entails that absence, unlike presence, cannot be regarded as an attribute of God's being. In Mostert's understanding, a theological discourse on God's absence is therefore a contradiction. In other words, God's absence is considered incompatible with salvation, as it seems to oppose His very being.

In my opinion, Mostert's view on God's presence as opposed to His absence is shortsighted and needs to be criticized. Specifically, I have found that his treatment of God's absence mirrors his interpretation of God's wrath¹⁹⁷⁹. In both cases, hamartiology is employed unilaterally to fully account for theological categories, which can create ambiguities and entail problematic conclusions. In the case of God's wrath, the problem was Mostert considering it a *false* determination of God's Word. In criticizing his position, I showed why I consider his claim to be problematic, and rather suggested to interpret God's wrath as a true, albeit indirect, non-ultimate qualification of His Word¹⁹⁸⁰. Also, my analysis pointed out that Mostert's annexation of God's wrath to hamartiology places an excessive emphasis on sinners, with the ensuing risk of a subjectivistic interpretation of *God's* wrath as a reality completely determined by them, and not at all by Him. At this juncture, my claim is that Mostert's view on God's absence needs to be criticized in a similar way. In particular, unlike him, I consider it theologically problematic to annex the theological treatment of God's absence to hamartiology. Correspondingly, I reject his conclusion that absence does not belong to God's being and that He *is made* absent by sinners not being by Him. Instead, I argue that God's absence cannot be fully understood in negative terms, as a *problem*, and then interpreted hamartologically with exclusive reference to sinners. Rather, I propose to positively integrate the negative determination of God's

¹⁹⁷⁷ See note 1959.

¹⁹⁷⁸ MOSTERT, W., *Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche* (see note 134), pp. 131f.

¹⁹⁷⁹ See 2.3.2.

¹⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.

absence with the category of *hiddenness* (*Verborgenheit*). After all, Mostert himself provides at times impulses in the direction of a positive, salvation-oriented qualification of God's hiddenness. Nevertheless, throughout his discourse, the dominant accent remains one in which God's hiddenness is essentially a consequence of sin and the product of *hybris*¹⁹⁸¹. In my perspective, Mostert's own impulses towards a positive understanding of God's hiddenness need to be systematically underpinned. In particular, I am convinced that the category of God's hiddenness helps interpret His absence *not only* as the sinner's false perception that He is not present as the justifying One. Rather, God's hiddenness plays also a positive role within the *œconomia salutis*, one which has to do with His own positive self-determination and is therefore oriented to the salvation of sinners. In my perspective, this salvific intent of God's hiddenness explicitly connects His absence to His eternal decree and avoids a view whereby human being's sin is given the power to wholly determine their relationship with Him. Similar to what was already maintained concerning His wrath, God's absence needs to be tackled theologically without ever losing sight of Him as the fundamental determining subject of reality. This means that, against Mostert, God's hiddenness cannot be understood as exclusively dependent on the identity of sinners. Instead, it is also (and mainly) a matter of *God's* identity¹⁹⁸². Even though, with Mostert, it needs to be said that sin truly clouds and obscures the immediacy of God's saving presence, this clouding and obscuring should not be considered in abstraction from the joyful confession that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more"¹⁹⁸³. In what follows, I am going to articulate my plea for a positive understanding of God's absence as hiddenness.

Firstly, I would argue that God's absence does not deny His presence but qualifies it as *in becoming*¹⁹⁸⁴. As indicated by the semantics of Christ's Ascension, the qualification of God as the future of the world inherently belongs to the salvation dynamism opened up by Christ's resurrection in light of final and tendentially universal consummation¹⁹⁸⁵. In this sense, the category of God's absence can be negatively interpreted as the hiddenness of the Gospel, which is not at home in this

¹⁹⁸¹ "Hybris hat also den zwielichtigen Doppelaspekt, daß sie einerseits zwar Aufstand gegen das Göttliche ist, zugleich aber doch nicht schlechthin antigöttlich, sofern sie ja göttliches Wesen, Wissen, Können dem Menschen nutzbar machen will. [...] Andererseits ist die Hybris auch da, wo sie das Göttliche durchaus bewahrt, es nur eben als Tiefe oder Potenz des Geistes interpretiert, Grund für das Entschwinden des Göttlichen in die Verborgenheit" (MOSTERT, W., "Glaube" [see note 100], pp. 222f.).

¹⁹⁸² The exact relationship between the category of hiddenness and God's identity, however, can be understood in different ways. Analyzing the semantics of *Verborgenheit* in Luther, for instance, U.H.J. Körtner finds that the understanding based on the theology of the cross, in all its centrality, is only *one* possibility and does not exhaust the richness of the Reformer's insight on the matter (U. H. J. Körtner, *Der verborgene Gott. Zur Gottesfrage*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2000, pp. 1-15). At any rate, this understanding is precisely the one that I employ in my treatment of Mostert's view on God's absence.

¹⁹⁸³ Rom 5,20.

¹⁹⁸⁴ Cf. Exod 3,14. See also JÜNGEL, E. "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit" (see note 109), p. 432.

¹⁹⁸⁵ See 3.3.4.

world of sin¹⁹⁸⁶, as it does not originate from its (legal) structure. With that, God's hiddenness gives theological clarity to the claim that the reality of salvation simply *cannot* be derived from the world nor reasonably expected from it. Secondly, I contend that God's hiddenness acquires its full, positive theological meaning when understood within a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). This point also allows me to finally illustrate how, in my view, the categories of God's absence and hiddenness relate. In light of Christ's cross, God's absence becomes manifest as the *present intensification* of His hiddenness. God has truly abandoned Jesus on the cross, thereby carrying out His own self-emptying to the very end, and not being simply "found in appearance as a man"¹⁹⁸⁷. Thus, God's kenotic absence on Christ's cross qualifies His hiddenness as the positive *presupposition* of His salvific presence. God can be present for sinners because He was in Christ¹⁹⁸⁸ and, in abandoning him on the cross without becoming other from him, has become absent to Himself without ceasing to be One with Himself. Thus, it is by becoming absent to Himself as the Son-abandoning Father that God becomes present to sinners as the justifying One. In the Son's abandonment by the Father on Good Friday, the effective communication of the coming presence of God as the justifying One becomes a concrete possibility for the preaching of the church. Correspondingly, God's hiddenness can be regarded as His *presence-enabling absence* which lets the church come to be as the community of justified sinners.

4.3.4. Universality of Sin and Universality of Christ

Mostert understands ecclesiology as the collective solution given to human being's fundamental problem whenever the latter is experienced within the domain of religion. The church of justified sinners is the new determination of the religious phenomenon having come into critical contact with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The religious phenomenon as such is constitutively ambiguous and does not fundamentally break with the overall legal structure of reality. Religion contains elements which simply reproduce the imperative of the Law and, in the ensuing interaction with sinners, produce an imperative anthropology¹⁹⁸⁹. Without the proclamation of the Gospel indicative, these elements prevail and pervert religion into what Mostert calls "dysreligion" (*Dysreligion*)¹⁹⁹⁰. Instead, the proclamation of the Gospel enables the overcoming of the legalistic elements of religion and creates the church, which, formally speaking, is religion purified of legalism. Clearly, Mostert's view presupposes (a.) that religion should be understood as an overarching category within which the

¹⁹⁸⁶ Cf. Luke 9,58.

¹⁹⁸⁷ Cf. Phil 2,8.

¹⁹⁸⁸ 2 Cor 5,19.

¹⁹⁸⁹ See here, p. 223.

¹⁹⁹⁰ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 42.

Christian church is one instance among others¹⁹⁹¹, and (b.) that the religious phenomenon is universal. The two presuppositions depend on Mostert's interpretation of religion as a legal phenomenon under the conditions of existence. Like all legal phenomena, religion has to do directly with human being's fundamental problem, which is universal. In explicit theological terms, Mostert connects the universality of the religious phenomenon to the universality of sin. Under the conditions of existence – which functions according to the Law – human beings are universally met with their fundamental problem. This problem both depends on and further reiterates their being sinners. In this context, religion emerges ambiguously as both a manifestation of the problem and an attempt at its solution¹⁹⁹². Religion concerns all human beings because it is a consequence of their fundamental problem and a thematization of their soteriological attempts at a solution. Both the problem and the attempts, albeit in different (legal) forms, are shared by all, as they are constitutive of human thinking as such¹⁹⁹³.

While Mostert can easily connect the universality of religion to the universality of sin, he struggles to support the ensuing claim that Jesus Christ is human being's true relationship with God not only for purified religion (the church), but for all humanity¹⁹⁹⁴. As a matter of fact, saying that Jesus Christ, as the Reformer of all religions¹⁹⁹⁵, is the solution to human being's universal problem, does not necessarily mean that this solution is itself universal. On the contrary, it could also be maintained that the problem (sin) is universal, but the solution (Christ) is only valid for the church¹⁹⁹⁶. In my opinion, Mostert's ecclesiology does not articulate this point with due clarity. As a consequence, in his discourse, the connection between the universality of sin and that of Christ is expressed in a thetical manner and almost functions as a *petitio principii*. Saying, with Mostert, that the two are related within religion and ultimately reflect its universality is too weak. In my judgment, the connection between the universality of sin and that of Christ is *not* found in a formal reflection on religion. On the one hand, Mostert correctly argues that human being as a sinner necessarily and universally perverts their own relationship with God. In religion, this perversion becomes explicit, even though with ambiguous (legalistic) features. As Mostert maintains, justification doctrine indicates that the church, the plurality of justified sinners, is the religious solution that God, in Jesus Christ, brings to *dysreligion*. Thus, this doctrine identifies the church as the collective manifestation of a religion purified of legalistic ambiguities. If dysreligion emerges because of sin, pure religion emerges because of justification. On the other hand, between sin and justification there is an imbalance, to which Mostert intends to react. However, I would say that his attempted solution remains quite

¹⁹⁹¹ This presupposition is active throughout Mostert's work and does not need detailed illustration here. See, at large, MOSTERT, W., "Glaube" (see note 100) and MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre (see note 105).

¹⁹⁹² In Mostert's account, the same is true of (ideological) ethics (see here, pp. 173-180).

¹⁹⁹³ See, for instance, MOSTERT, W., Rechtfertigungslehre, (see note 105), p. 43.

¹⁹⁹⁴ See note 1962.

¹⁹⁹⁵ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 41.

¹⁹⁹⁶ Concerning the Prolegomena, this problem was already tackled in 1.3.5.

insufficient. While, in his categories, the universality of sin can be defended within theological anthropology¹⁹⁹⁷, the same does not apply to the universality of Christ and his church. Mostert manages to connect the universality of the church to that of Christ and convincingly argues that the former depends on the latter. Nevertheless, he fails to show where the universality of Christ ultimately founds. By trying to express it hamartiologically within his doctrine of religion, Mostert is concerned with articulating the universality of Christ without turning grace into some sort of supernatural, inherent qualification of human being or some abstract anthropological principle. In my view, this concern is valid. At the same time, the fact that Mostert connects the universality of Christ to that of sin via a *petitio principii* shows that his account on the matter is unsuccessful.

In my opinion, Mostert's hamartiological concern needs to be acknowledged as legitimate, but also fundamentally rephrased and expanded. Specifically, I would argue that hamartiology can and does provide the foundation for a *negative* illustration of the universality of Christ, but not alongside Mostert's thetical reasoning. Thus, the point is not to deduce the universality of Christ from that of sin, but to reflect on the latter within a broader christological account. Accordingly, I would argue that the universality of sin must be understood *within* the semantics of Christ's universal lordship¹⁹⁹⁸. Since he is confessed to be the one, true Lord of the world, sin cannot be conceived as a force having a greater scope than Christ's saving lordship. This means that, with Mostert, a connection is indeed to be acknowledged between the universality of sin and that of Christ. However, the articulation of this connection is not the one posited by him, namely *from* the first *to* the second. Instead, I believe that the correct articulation locates the universality of sin *under* (*subjected to*) the universality of Christ. If Christ is the Lord, sin is not. Additionally, I contend that the universality of Christ must also be illustrated *positively*. In this regard, the point is to understand it as the implication of the dynamic of the Easter event, the public proclamation and conquering movement of God's justifying grace into the whole world, that He has so dearly loved¹⁹⁹⁹. As Pannenberg convincingly argues²⁰⁰⁰, by His

¹⁹⁹⁷ However, this does not mean that sin is to be interpreted factually. Strictly speaking, sin is a reality of faith, so much that it remains obscure outside of it. It is not human being's observation of evil in the world which brings out what sin essentially is. Rather, it is the theological reflection on the experienced conflictual interaction of Law and Gospel in the context of preaching.

¹⁹⁹⁸ Traditionally, an alternative possibility has notably been to found the universality of Christ on his assumption of human nature. According to this position, Christ is universal because, in the incarnation, the Son has taken on the nature of all human beings. In my opinion, this position is problematic for two reasons. From the perspective of *explicit theology* (see 1.3.2.), this thought is developed in complete abstraction from justification doctrine. As the latter shows, the whole theological discourse is centered around the core truth that human beings are not saved simply because of their humanity, but because their center of personhood, their core self, is effectively transposed into Christ by grace and through faith. Coming to *implicit theology* (see 1.3.2.), this alternative possibility highly rests on two previous questions, namely (a.) what human nature is and, even more radically, (b.) whether something as "human nature" exists at all. Within 20th century theology, the answers to both questions are far from unanimous (consider for instance Barth and Brunner!). Given these significant challenges, that I consider substantial, I have chosen not to include this traditional position on Christ's universality in my critique of Mostert's account.

¹⁹⁹⁹ John 3,16f.

²⁰⁰⁰ PANNENBERG, W., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, (see note 762), p. 420.

radical self-abandonment on Christ's cross²⁰⁰¹, God has made space for others next to Himself by way of their inclusive representation in Christ. In so doing, He has enabled them to truly become the Son's brothers and sisters and the Father's adopted children. Also, in light of Christ's resurrection, his universality is expressed by the dynamic whereby the Easter event undergoes a tendential universalization as it continuously encounters the still unredeemed world loved by God²⁰⁰². From the point of view of justification doctrine, this means that the very reality of salvation experienced by the believing sinner at the level of their individuality is only an immensely small manifestation of the overarching, all-encompassing and undivided will of God, which is oriented to salvation and to the universal overcoming of sin²⁰⁰³. Thus, I would say that the universality of Christ is to be regarded as the *positive foundation* of justification, therefore also of the church. At the same time, this universality cannot be theologically affirmed in abstract, but only on the basis of justification doctrine. To try and illustrate what I mean, I am going to refer to the Medieval philosophical distinction between *ratio essendi* and *ratio cognoscendi*. At the level of the *ratio essendi*, the truth of justification derives from the universality of Christ. This means that the individual sinner and the community of sinners become aware of their justification because, in it, the resurrected Christ becomes *also* for them what he always already is for the whole world. Instead, at the level of the *ratio cognoscendi*, it is the truth of the universality of Christ which derives from justification. Thus, both the individual sinner and the church can only meaningfully confess the universality of Christ, namely what he is for the whole world, because they first and foremost acknowledge him as *their* justification.

4.3.5. Minimal and Maximal Ecumenical Consensus

According to Mostert, minimal ecumenical consensus²⁰⁰⁴ is insufficient to achieve the unity of the churches. Further, since true unity can only be based on faith, real ecumenical consensus needs first and foremost to agree on faith. The latter, for Mostert, is not to be essentially regarded as the *depositum* of the ecclesial knowledge about Jesus Christ. Rather, faith needs to be interpreted as the reality through which the church receives Jesus Christ as God-for-sinners. Since this view of faith

²⁰⁰¹ See 4.3.3.

²⁰⁰² See 3.3.4., and especially pp. 232f.

²⁰⁰³ However, as was pointed out in note 1527, this does not entail accepting the doctrine of *apokatastasis*.

²⁰⁰⁴ In the present work, *minimal ecumenical consensus* is defined as the claim that a basic agreement on a given doctrine has been reached between different confessional partners in spite of remaining differences, which are considered as complementary rather than contradictory (McGRATH, A., *Iustitia Dei* [see note 1], p. 417), or reduced to variations in language and formulations (DIECKMANN, E., "Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre", *Evangelische Theologie* 60/5 [2000], pp. 398-402, here p. 400). Clearly, since Mostert died in 1995, his discussion of minimal consensus does not involve the JDDJ. Nevertheless, the document is clearly a prime example of what he describes as minimal consensus. Accordingly, in what follows, I am going to apply his discussion of minimal and maximal consensus also to features of the JDDJ and its theological reception.

immediately involves the entirety of the believer's relationship with God in Christ, Mostert argues against the possibility of a minimal consensus on faith. Instead, the only possible consensus, which founds real ecumenical communion, is maximal. In a word, Mostert has in mind a consensus on faith which immediately becomes one on Jesus Christ as God's being-for-sinners²⁰⁰⁵. Clearly, this is meant as a maximal consensus on justification. Mostert's concern is arguably to show the theological insufficiency of minimal consensus. This insufficiency was also pointed out by others, in particular when it comes to the JDDJ²⁰⁰⁶.

It is noteworthy that Mostert's skepticism on minimal consensus shows a proximity between his position and *structural theologies*²⁰⁰⁷. This proximity and its implications are going to be expounded at a later stage, when possible theological integrations of Mostert's position will be discussed²⁰⁰⁸. However, already at this point, it can be said that, for him, justification is the underlying structure of Protestantism²⁰⁰⁹, and this precisely in the same sense as structural theologies suggest. I believe that Mostert's (and Hampson's) perspective on the centrality of justification to the Reformation structure is theologically sound. However, I am also convinced that his understanding of the semantics of consensus is problematic.

Specifically, my twofold claim is that (a.) Mostert remains entangled in the dichotomy between minimal and maximal consensus, and (b.) this dichotomy can be detrimental to sound theological discussion on the matter. In my opinion, his understanding of ecumenical consensus needs therefore to be criticized. In particular, while his concern is close to structural theologies, his reasoning remains within the alternative between minimal and maximal consensus, which brings him close to *positional theologies* instead²⁰¹⁰. The consequence is that Mostert expresses a structural concern within a positional framework, and this makes his perspective on ecumenical consensus quite unfruitful and

²⁰⁰⁵ MOSTERT, W., Jesus Christus – Anfänger und Vollender der Kirche (see note 134), p. 80.

²⁰⁰⁶ Amongst the critics of the JDDJ and its minimal consensus, see e.g.: KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Gut gedacht – schlecht gemacht. Zum Desiderat einer ökumenischen Rechtfertigungshermeneutik", in: BEUTEL, A., KAUFMANN, T., TIMM, H., "Wider den Augsburger Rechtfertigungsvertrag. Voten evangelisch-protestantischer Hochschullehrer", epd-Dokumentation 43/99, pp. 50-54; NICHOLS, A., "The Lutheran-Catholic Agreement on Justification - Botch or Breakthrough?", New Blackfriars 82/967 (2001), pp. 375-386; KALINNA, H.E.J., "Einig in der Rechtfertigungslehre?", Evangelische Theologie 58/2 (1998), pp. 156-161, especially p. 158. Instead, a more favorable outlook on minimal consensus concerning justification is expressed, for instance, by: ELLINGSEN, M., "The Use of Luther in the 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification': Reflections on Hermeneutical Directions for the Future", Journal of Ecumenical Studies 53/4 (2018), pp. 484-498; HUOVINIEN, E., "How do we continue? The Ecumenical Commitments and Possibilities of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", Pro Ecclesia 11/2 (2002), pp. 167-183; MARTENSEN, H. L., "The Joint Declaration on Justification, A Nordic Catholic Perspective", The Ecumenical Review 52/2 (2000), pp. 204-210.

²⁰⁰⁷ For my definition of this term, see here, p. 246.

²⁰⁰⁸ See 4.3.7.

²⁰⁰⁹ Nevertheless, to my knowledge, Mostert never uses German phrases with the meaning of "Protestant structure", so his language remains different from that of structural theologies.

²⁰¹⁰ See here, p. 246. Additionally, I would argue that the positional approach expressed by the alternative between minimal and maximal consensus is largely predominant in nowadays ecumenical context. A question worthy of further exploration would be whether this approach is really ecumenical, or perhaps rather Roman Catholic in nature (see also notes 1752 and 1760, which provide impulses in this direction).

even contradictory. Therefore, precisely if his structural concern is accepted, it is necessary to go beyond the alternative (that he maintains) between minimal and maximal consensus. In my judgement, ecumenical consensus should be rephrased as *structural consensus*. By that I mean a common theological definition, by ecumenical partners, of the soteriological truth which underpins Christianity as such. To be clearly expounded, this soteriological truth requires a precise qualification of what the Gospel is. If it needs to be acknowledged as *the* foundational truth, the Gospel cannot be a general reference to Jesus Christ, with no sharply outlined content. Without a precise qualification, the Gospel fails to become really foundational because it remains ill-defined, and other realities (for example the institutional features of the church) fill the void and become foundational. Correspondingly, the Gospel needs to be conceptualized clearly and unambiguously, as that reference to Jesus Christ which immediately clarifies what he means for the sinner. In other words, the Gospel needs to be understood in existential terms, from the perspective of what it means to confess as one's God the God who has fully and unambiguously revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and no other. From this existential definition of the Gospel a *concrete* knowledge of Christ ensues, which is no longer according to the flesh²⁰¹¹, but to the Spirit. A purely theoretical knowledge of Christ, conversely, would remain one according to the flesh, therefore ultimately oblivious to the Easter event and theologically insufficient.

I agree with Mostert that the true qualification of the Gospel is expressed with utmost clarity by the *doctrine* of justification. At a closer look, however, I deem it necessary to distinguish between this doctrine and the *article* of justification²⁰¹². This distinction – which can prove especially helpful in ecumenical settings – will be expanded in the following paragraph²⁰¹³, so it is not necessary to elaborate on it here. However, it is appropriate to briefly mention it, because said distinction can help overcome the alternative between minimal and maximal consensus. As will be shown in what follows, the overcoming of this alternative can be achieved by reflecting on the plurality of *loci theologici* and on how these interact with one another within confessional thought-maps or structures. In my view, this reflection can be fruitfully fostered precisely by maintaining the distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification. Correspondingly, I propose to imagine the aforementioned structural consensus *distributively*, as a moving and dynamic theological concept. In this view, the possibility for ecumenical consensus is not located within the limits of each individual theological *locus*. Incidentally, this is shown by the fact that all *loci*, if taken in isolation from the others, have been considered by many insufficient to attain real and unambiguous structural consensus. Thus, my claim

²⁰¹¹ Cf. 2 Cor 5,16.

²⁰¹² From a systematic point of view, the distinction is clearly and effectively illustrated by KÖRTNER, U.H.J., “Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums” (see note 74).

²⁰¹³ See 4.3.6.

is that real ecumenical consensus *cannot* emerge by statically comparing the diverging interpretations of the same theological *locus* provided within different confessional thought-maps. Instead, the possibility for real consensus is found *in the structure* underlying all theological *loci*, which, to a certain degree, also means beyond each one of them taken individually. When a given *locus* is isolated from other *loci* within a specific confessional thought-map, it is only possible to establish the extent to which said *locus* is formulated in accordance with the fundamental structure underlying that thought-map. Instead, under those same conditions of isolation, it is not possible to also establish whether or not the formulation of this *locus* within a specific confessional thought-map is indeed compatible with its counterpart within a different one. Therefore, my thesis is that structural consensus truly emerges only when theological *loci* are not taken in isolation from one another and simply compared one to one across different confessional thought-maps. Instead, ecumenical dialogue should aim at *distributing* the different *loci* within a dynamic system where they never stop interacting with one another. In this system, dialogue should not primarily focus on comparing the formulation of a specific *locus* across confessions. Instead, the primary concern should be to let the *locus* interact with the other *loci* within one and the same confession, so as to bring to expression the fundamental soteriological structure (the Gospel) as conceptualized by that confession. The presupposition, clearly, is that all confessions participating in dialogue should agree on the aforementioned existential and concrete definition of what the Gospel is. *Then*, only after all the *loci* have been arranged in accordance with the Gospel within each confessional thought-map, ecumenical dialogue should become concerned with cross-confessional discussions. The system that I have in mind is clearly governed by a view whereby the Gospel is God's good news for the salvation of sinners. This understanding is what substantiates the article of justification, that I therefore regard as the supporting foundation of all theological *loci* and the core of theological discourse as such. However, this core does not acquire theological clarity and visibility within one and the same *locus*²⁰¹⁴ in all confessions. Therefore, structural-distributive consensus does not result from measuring the *degree* of consensus amongst different confessions on a quantitative scale ranging from "minimal" to

²⁰¹⁴ It is for this reason that Roman Catholicism tends to reject the Protestant view on the criteriological value of justification. In my interpretation, the usual Roman Catholic position depends on the fact that, within its confessional thought-map, the soteriological core of Christianity is not expressed within the *locus* of justification doctrine. However, I would still argue that this core belongs to the *article* of justification. From a Protestant perspective, therefore, the search for structural consensus with Roman Catholicism would require first of all a comparison of all Roman Catholic theological *loci* within the Roman Catholic thought-map aimed at letting the soteriological core emerge there. Secondly, the successive step would be to compare the resulting interpretation of the soteriological core with the one ensuing from the same comparison performed within the Protestant thought-map. In my opinion, ecumenical consensus on justification should be sought at this structural level, and not simply at the level of the specific *locus de iustificatione*. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that a different Roman Catholic position, which actually regards justification as *the* criterion for the interpretation of the *depositum fidei*, is defended by THEOBALD, M., "Rechtfertigung und Ekklesiologie nach Paulus: Anmerkungen zur „Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 95/1 (1998), pp. 103-117.

“maximal”. In my judgement, this quantitative approach clearly fails, as shown by the highly conflictual reception of ecumenical documents. As the churches are faced with the stall of ecumenical dialogue²⁰¹⁵, theologians need to draw the necessary consequences. As a matter of fact, an ecumenism entangled within the alternative between minimal and maximal consensus often leaves the dialogue partners with the impression that the confessional thought-maps are *not* in real, satisfactory agreement with one another.

My proposed modification of Mostert’s perspective has attempted to face this unsatisfactory and stalling situation by theorizing a view whereby the *loci* are imagined as constantly moving within confessional thought-maps. If theological *loci* move, it becomes clear that the static comparison of one given *locus* across different confessions does *not* necessarily compare the same theological reality. In my opinion, this explains why the dialogue partners are often under the impression that they are speaking different languages. As a consequence, consensus documents are often unclear, convoluted and theologically ambiguous. In this context, it is necessary to try and possibly eliminate these ambiguities, rather than considering them unavoidable or even acceptable²⁰¹⁶. Specifically, I argue that theological ambiguities originate when the two partners wrongly assume that they are discussing the same theological reality just because they are covering the same theological *locus*. Now, my hypothesis of the moving *loci* and my defense of structural consensus aim to show that precisely this assumption is often false. The theological reality that one confession expresses while covering a specific *locus* may very well be expressed by another by discussing a different *locus*. As long as the need for structural consensus is ignored, theological confusion and the ensuing stalling of ecumenical dialogue will not be overcome. Indeed, settling for minimal consensus will continue to prove insufficient, as it will not acknowledge the seriousness of the theological enterprise. At the same time, striving for maximal consensus will be theologically irresponsible, as it will necessarily appear as the demand that one confessional partner simply surrenders to the other, which of course is unacceptable²⁰¹⁷. The approach that I have defended can be articulated more or less along the following lines: “The thing I say here, you say there. Therefore, we cannot reach positional consensus. However, if we both say *that thing* somewhere and recognize it as the core of the Gospel, we can possibly attain structural consensus.”

²⁰¹⁵ At least, and very clearly, in its doctrinal dimension. At any rate, in my opinion, the diagnosis is not really different when it comes to ethics, either.

²⁰¹⁶ Cf. LANE, A. N. S., *Justification by Faith* (see note 1944), p. 226.

²⁰¹⁷ Ultimately, this is why Mostert’s argument in favor of maximal consensus proves unsatisfactory. However, at one point, he seems to move closer to my doctrines of structural consensus and the moving *loci*. In particular, when covering Christology in the Early Church, he argues that the fundamental soteriological event is articulated outside of justification doctrine, yet the fundamental concern of that doctrine is maintained in its centrality, which is phrased christologically (see note 646).

4.3.6. Is Justification Criteriological?

For Mostert, justification doctrine is the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*²⁰¹⁸. As a matter of fact, the present study has shown that *the whole* of his theology needs to be interpreted as an intensive reflection on justification carried out from various perspectives. In Part 1, the criteriological value of justification was illustrated with respect to Mostert's theology of the *Prolegomena*. There, it emerged that he regards justification as the solution to human being's fundamental soteriological problem. Further, Part 2 showed how Mostert understands justification as the existential-relational truth about human being, God and the world as it concretely appears from the point of observation of their overarching relationality. In Part 3, justification was illustrated from the point of view of what it polemically excludes, namely ideological ethics as a false attempt at solving human being's soteriological problem. Finally, Part 4 has tackled justification from the perspective of what it includes, namely the church as its plurality. As was previously discussed²⁰¹⁹, Mostert's ecclesiology can also be illustrated by claiming that the ecclesial community is the Gospel of justification becoming historicized²⁰²⁰. However, as the previous paragraph already partially showed, Mostert's view on the church as justification can prove quite problematic in an ecumenical context. In particular, its main weakness is his defense of maximal consensus as the only consistent form of real ecumenical agreement²⁰²¹. As I already argued, the overcoming of this weakness requires, in my opinion, a clear distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification. Hopefully, this distinction will allow Mostert's view of justification as *the* criterion to be expressed and developed in an ecumenically fruitful manner. Therefore, the aim of the present paragraph is the illustration of how justification can be conceptualized *ecumenically* as the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*.

I understand the distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification in the wake of Körtner²⁰²². Studying the criteriological value of justification in the Leuenberg Agreement (LA, 1973), Körtner points out that the document distinguishes between the justification *message* (*Rechtfertigungsbotschaft*) and its doctrine (*Rechtfertigungslehre*). In Körtner's interpretation, the integration of this distinction in the LA is the concretization of the underlying differentiation between the church witness (*Zeugnis*) and its historically conditioned expressions (*Denkformen*)²⁰²³. This underlying differentiation ultimately goes back to Schleiermacher's theology²⁰²⁴. However, as

²⁰¹⁸ That this is Mostert's thesis has been made clear throughout my study, so there is no need to quote a specific passage here. In particular, the role of justification doctrine in his theology emerges throughout Part 2.

²⁰¹⁹ See 4.1.2.

²⁰²⁰ See here, p. 245.

²⁰²¹ See 4.3.5.

²⁰²² KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74).

²⁰²³ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), pp. 9f.

²⁰²⁴ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 7.

Körtner points out, the distinction between message and doctrine needs to be expanded. Not only is this distinction historically and exegetically far from obvious, but it is also theologically insufficient. Specifically, Körtner's analysis shows that even what the LA qualifies as the *message* of justification cannot be simply equated to the Gospel. Rather, the formulation of the Gospel in juridical language, which allows interpreting it as the message of justification, is *itself* an interpretation²⁰²⁵. Therefore, the distinction between the *kerygmatic* event of justification (the message) and its theological interpretation (the doctrine) is only the first layer. At a second, deeper layer, the distinction between justification terminology as a whole (message *and* doctrine) and the christological salvation event (*Heilsgeschehen*) is in order, because salvation can also be expressed in a different terminology²⁰²⁶. At any rate, the aim of Körtner's twofold distinction is *not* the relativization of justification next to the other possible formulations of the Gospel²⁰²⁷. The full acknowledgment of the plurality of semantics expressing the Gospel does not imply the relativization of the criteriological value of justification doctrine. Conversely, Körtner illustrates the twofold distinction in order to clarify that the event of justification is not limited to the instances in which it is explicitly described within the doctrine of justification. Rather, justification happens wherever one believes in Jesus Christ *in the sense of justification doctrine*. Thus, the message of justification is indeed *one* specific semantics to interpret the salvation event. However, this event is not an abstract concept. To the contrary, it is always concretely outlined in the form of theological interpretations, which are also essentially intertwined with ecclesiological questions²⁰²⁸. Körtner clarifies that the criteriological (normative) character of justification does *not* result from the denial or forceful harmonization of the plurality of interpretations of the salvation event. Rather, it emerges because a *structural correspondence* exists between the forensic *terminology* of justification and the performative-promissory *reality* of the Gospel (*Zuspruch*)²⁰²⁹. Since salvation *is* a performative promise, its theological elaboration acquires utmost clarity within the semantics of justification, which mirror the same performative structure. The understanding of the performative character of salvation, which is central to the Gospel, *needs* the terminology of justification. Within the fully acknowledged plurality of the images of salvation in Scripture, the forensic *terminology* of justification is thus *the* one image which clearly expresses the linguistic, performative and promissory qualification of the salvation event, its *reality* and essence²⁰³⁰. For Körtner, the point is therefore the centrality of this qualification of the Gospel: from

²⁰²⁵ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 11.

²⁰²⁶ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 12.

²⁰²⁷ To the contrary, this would be a typical Roman Catholic conclusion. See, for instance, Kasper's position as discussed in: JÜNGEL, E. "Um Gottes willen – Klarheit!" (see note 524).

²⁰²⁸ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 6.

²⁰²⁹ Ibid.

²⁰³⁰ KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 13.

a Protestant perspective, ecumenical dialogue must focus on the question whether and how other confessions express this same qualification²⁰³¹.

In my view, Körtner's impulses can provide fruitful insight to go with and beyond Mostert concerning the criteriological value of justification. In particular, they can be employed to expand on Mostert's own intuitions in the same direction²⁰³². In my terminology, I use *justification doctrine* to refer to *both* the message (*Botschaft*) and its theological formulation (*Lehre*)²⁰³³, and *justification article* to define the underlying fundamental structure of the Gospel, which is to be interpreted as a performative and essentially promissory linguistic event. The distinction is not clearly made by Mostert, hence the need to criticize his position on the matter while clearly sharing his position on the criteriological value of justification. Based on the distinction, my view is that the *doctrine* (message *and* interpretation) is *one* formulation of the article. Ecumenically speaking, the distinction becomes meaningful with reference to the aforementioned doctrines of the moving *loci* and distributive-structural consensus²⁰³⁴. While justification doctrine is expressed within the *locus de iustificatione* and should not be forcefully extended to occupy the specific space of other *loci*, justification article is the underlying truth of all theological *loci* and is effectively present in them. Correspondingly, the relationship between the doctrine and the article becomes clearer: the *article* of justification is larger than the corresponding doctrine. However, since it is the article *of justification*, it does not complement the doctrine but reiterates its core truth across the several *loci theologici* while respecting their specificity. This reiterated truth is the justifying relationship between God and the sinner as it is described by the Reformation *sola*²⁰³⁵. It is this reiteration of the truth of justification which makes theology truly *theological*, because the effective presence of the article of justification is precisely what indicates the theological nature of a particular *locus*. The article of justification *forces* theology to come to its own. In other words, it helps theology outline the Gospel not abstractly, but concretely, as the performative language which expresses the relationship between human being, God and the world in such a way that God's Word is properly understood. This proper understanding focuses on the primary qualification of the Word as a promise effecting salvation (*Zuspruch*) and remaining opened to the future (*Verheißung*). The article of justification gives theological meaning to

²⁰³¹ Ibid.

²⁰³² See notes 646 and 2017. However, I am still reasoning on the level of my own interpretation of Mostert's theology. As far as I know, he never correlates his remarks on justification and the focus of the Early Church on the sole agency of God in the incarnation with the need for a theological distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification. This correlation is precisely what I intend to introduce.

²⁰³³ I agree with Körtner's first-layer distinction between the message (*Botschaft*) and its theological interpretation (*Lehre*). The reason why, in my terminology, I nevertheless include both under *justification doctrine* is that my analysis rather focuses on his second-layer distinction, the one between the performative-promissory linguistic structure of the salvation event and its theological interpretations (in Körtner's vocabulary: message and doctrine).

²⁰³⁴ See 4.3.5.

²⁰³⁵ See KÖRTNER, U.H.J., "Das gemeinsame Verständnis des Evangeliums" (see note 74), p. 12.

theology as a whole; *therefore*, justification is criteriological. Thus, only that which illustrates the coming to speech of the relationship between human being, God and the world in the form of the overcoming of sin in Jesus Christ is theologically normative. Negatively, it follows that the interpretation of a *locus* which is not nourished by the article of justification is not truly theological, it is like a fig tree which does not bear fruit²⁰³⁶ or those branches which do not remain in the vine²⁰³⁷. As such, said interpretation needs to be disregarded as non-theological. Positively, the criteriological character of justification requires the acknowledgment that its article is broader than its doctrine. Properly speaking, the church, the plurality of justified sinners, stands only on the *reality* of justification as God's *Zuspruch*, not on its interpretation²⁰³⁸. However, this interpretation, which historically and exegetically is one amongst many, is to be recognized as theologically normative, as it gives a clear and concrete outline to the promissory qualification of the Gospel. This means that the doctrine of justification is *the* ideal *locus* to normatively express the Gospel. As *one* formulation of the article, the doctrine gives theology its theological nerve. Within justification doctrine, the closest possible critical proximity between human being and God is found. Moreover, this proximity is described by justification in a way which illustrates God's Word not just as any word, but as the promise of salvation which performatively addresses human being as a sinner and overcomes the ambiguity of their relationship with themselves, God and the world.

4.3.7. Theological Integrations

In 4.3.1.-4.3.6., I criticized some aspects of Mostert's position on justification and the church. Similar to previous Parts, in Part 4 I first of all analyzed Mostert's doctrine in the wake of Ebeling's. Then, relevant alternatives were considered, namely positional theologies (exemplified by Küng) and structural theologies (embodied by Hampson). In Part 4, the study of the theological alternatives was conducted following a partially different methodology compared to other Parts²⁰³⁹. However, the choice of the alternatives was not arbitrary. Rather, it once again resulted from the intensive study of Mostert's theology. As a matter of fact, his ecclesiology contains theological impulses which, in my view, can prove fruitful if analyzed in critical juxtaposition with Küng and Hampson's accounts. At

²⁰³⁶ Cf. Luke 13,6-9.

²⁰³⁷ John 15,6.

²⁰³⁸ However, this statement of mine is *not* to be misunderstood on the basis of a realist (e.g. Aristotelian) philosophy. I certainly do not intend to posit a clear separation between reality as a given datum and language as the external tool which simply describes it. To the contrary, I do believe that Christian theology finds more convergences with philosophical perspectives whereby language participates in the constitution of reality. Simply, my statement contends that the truth of the article of justification always precedes and outweighs the corresponding doctrine as its normative interpretation.

²⁰³⁹ For a detailed illustration of the methodology followed in Part 4, see here, pp. 245ff.

the same time, even though he never explicitly deals with them²⁰⁴⁰, the theological alternatives are faced with critical questions which are in line with Mostert's own concerns. Additionally, in my opinion, the alternatives show theological weaknesses which could be helpfully tackled by nowadays theology thanks to Mostert's contribution. In Part 4, the critical juxtaposition of his position with the alternatives has required what might appear to be a topic cross-over: the two ecclesiological positions presented in 4.1.1. (Ebeling) and 4.1.2. (Mostert) are followed by the two ecumenical accounts on justification doctrine in 4.2.1. (Küng) and 4.2.2. (Hampson). The reason behind what might appear as methodological incongruence is that, for Mostert, ecclesiology belongs to justification doctrine and illustrates it inclusively²⁰⁴¹. Thus, separating ecclesiology and justification doctrine in a study of Mostert's theology makes no sense. Correspondingly, the theological comparison in this Part does not merely concern different ecclesiological accounts, but the intersections between ecclesiology and justification doctrine²⁰⁴². Once again, I have selected these alternatives because they shed light on my research question, which asks whether a possible integration of Mostert's positions can prove a valid instrument for theology today. In order to avoid repetition, I am not going to reiterate on his understanding of how ecclesiology and justification doctrine relate. At this juncture, it is enough to point out one last time that, for him, the church *belongs to* justification and does not follow from it²⁰⁴³. Just like the relationship between justification and ethics, the church, too, is immediately implied by justification. Therefore, Mostert's ontology of justification²⁰⁴⁴ is the key theological category to understand his ecclesiology. That being said, it is now time to briefly go back to each aspect of his doctrine criticized in 4.3.1.-4.3.6. Clearly, the aim is to assess the research question one last time: is it possible and theologically fruitful to integrate Mostert's ecclesiology as justification with the studied alternatives?

In 4.3.1., I criticized Mostert's claim that the diaconal ministry does not belong to the essence of the church. In particular, I found his position problematic in light of some impulses which his own theology contains. Specifically, I argued that the diaconal ministry shares in the responsive character that Mostert attributes to preaching and baptism, two of the four primary institutions of the church. Correspondingly, I proposed to expand the interpretation of the diaconal ministry beyond the traditional perspective (shared by Mostert) of the acts of love resulting from faith. As I have pointed out, the diaconal ministry can also be regarded in more immediate theological terms, as one dimension within which the passing of grace finds human being's responsive historicity²⁰⁴⁵. Hence, the diaconal

²⁰⁴⁰ See note 2004.

²⁰⁴¹ See here, pp. 215f., 267, 276.

²⁰⁴² See here, pp. 247, 275f.

²⁰⁴³ See here, p. 267.

²⁰⁴⁴ See 2.1.2.

²⁰⁴⁵ See here, p. 309.

ministry is not simply identical with the acts of love resulting from grace²⁰⁴⁶. Rather, it also traces the historical passing of grace itself. On this point, I therefore consider an integration of Mostert's perspective necessary and possibly fruitful. On the one hand, it would be useful to strengthen his account on the diaconal ministry by reference to Küng's understanding of the relationship between faith and works²⁰⁴⁷, provided that the resulting integration does not depart from the *sola fide*. On the other hand, though, the fundamental aspect of the proposed integration would be the further theological development of Mostert's own reflections on the responsive character of preaching and baptism. The point would ultimately be to elaborate on these reflections within a broader theology of the historical passing of grace.

Further, 4.3.2. was devoted to the relationship between church discipline and the Gospel. Unlike Mostert, who vehemently denies that discipline belongs to the Gospel, I argued for a more nuanced position on the matter. Specifically, I judged his approach to be insufficient and proposed to integrate its unilaterally intensive and formal character with extensive and material considerations²⁰⁴⁸. Additionally, I argued that his position on church discipline is too static, in that he deems it possible to settle the question of its relationship with the Gospel once and for all. Unlike him, I tried to outline a dynamic view instead, whereby the relationship between church discipline and the Gospel varies situationally. Thus, against Mostert, I claimed that the Law-Gospel differentiation is *not* a sufficient criterion to discern the whole scope of said relationship. While the unilateral application of the fundamental differentiation would simply imply that discipline does not belong to the Gospel, there are situations in which the two interact in a theologically meaningful way. Put otherwise, there are instances in which discipline belongs to the Gospel because it fundamentally contributes to the illustration of its pure understanding and orderly celebration. When this is the case, it is necessary to regard church discipline as belonging to the Gospel. On this matter, Mostert's position has not been integrated with impulses coming from the alternatives²⁰⁴⁹, but simply criticized in itself.

In 4.3.3., I turned to his interpretation of God's absence. In particular, I challenged his notion that the latter is solely a negative consequence of human being's sin and proposed to overcome his unilateral approach by reference to the category of hiddenness. Thus, I claimed that sin is indeed *one* cause of God's absence, but by no means the defining one. Rather, understood as hiddenness, God's absence is also to be regarded as a consequence of His own positive self-determination towards the

²⁰⁴⁶ What theology traditionally refers to as "good deeds" or "good works".

²⁰⁴⁷ See KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 308-314.

²⁰⁴⁸ For clarification concerning my use of the adjectives "intensive", "formal", "extensive" and "material" in the present work, see 1.3.5., 1.3.6., 2.3.3., 2.3.5., 3.3.4. In general, when discussing Mostert's theology, I have called "intensive" and "formal" the core of justification, namely its qualification as the *kerygmatic* event. Instead, I have named "extensive" and "material" those dimensions of justification which illustrate its historicity.

²⁰⁴⁹ To my knowledge, neither Küng nor Hampson ever tackle the question of the relationship between church discipline and the Gospel.

salvation of sinners. Further, this salvific orientation of God's hiddenness connects it to His eternal decree. This emphasizes God as the fundamental determining subject of reality. God's absence can therefore be regarded both as the consequence of sin and, more directly, as a determination of His own identity. In its defining dimension as hiddenness, God's absence does not negate His presence. Rather, it qualifies it as presence in becoming. In my critique of Mostert's position, I tried to illustrate the theological value of God's hiddenness negatively by means of the semantics of Christ's Ascension and positively within a theology of the cross. My conclusion was that God's hiddenness is a qualified form of His absence which enables His salvific presence for the community of justified sinners. On this point, the proposed theological integration of Mostert's perspective emerges once again from my direct critique. However, fruitful insight in this direction can be also drawn from positional theologies. As a matter of fact, Küng's distinction between the overwhelming power (*letztere Macht*) and the ultimate powerlessness of sin in the face of God's overarching sovereignty (*allerletzte Macht*)²⁰⁵⁰ can help illustrate the insufficiency of a unilateral concentration on hamartiology to interpret theological categories, especially when it comes to the illustration of how God relates to sinners²⁰⁵¹.

Coming to 4.3.4., I criticized Mostert's exclusively hamartiological foundation of Christ's universality. Within his doctrine of religion and dysreligion, he points out that justification doctrine is the solution given, within the religious domain, to the sinful perversions of religion (dysreligion). Since these perversions are obviously an expression of sin, they share its universality. Now, since Mostert claims that this universal dysreligion is overcome by justification doctrine as pure religion, the question arises whether universality, which is claimed for dysreligion as the problem, can also be claimed for justification as the corresponding solution. As was shown, Mostert's affirmative answer is rather thetical and unsatisfactory. In contrast to him, I consider it insufficient to only illustrate the universality of Christ (as the event of justification) negatively from the universality of sin (as human being's universal problem). In my view, a positive illustration thereof is also in order. While hamartiology can establish the basis for the negative illustration, this should not be done thetically, like Mostert does. To avoid this, it is necessary to examine sin's universality within a broader christological framework, in light of Christ's universal lordship. The aim of a christological integration of Mostert's hamartiology is to show that sin cannot have a greater determining power than Christ's saving lordship²⁰⁵². Therefore, in its universality, sin needs to be thought as subjected to Christ's lordship, which is universal. Coming to the positive illustration, Christ's universality should be understood as the implication of the dynamic Easter event and the passing movement of God's

²⁰⁵⁰ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), pp. 175-178.

²⁰⁵¹ Concerning the risks of unilaterally hamartiological approaches in Mostert's theology, see also 3.3.4.

²⁰⁵² In my opinion, the absence of a broad reflection on Christ's lordship is one of the most apparent weaknesses of Mostert's theology as a whole (see also 1.3.6., 2.3.2., 2.3.5., 4.3.3.).

grace into the entire world. This understanding emphasizes both Christ's inclusive representation of human beings and the Easter event striving towards universalization in its encountering the still unredeemed world. From the standpoint of justification doctrine, the Easter dynamic points to the individual's salvation as a mere fraction of God's overarching will oriented towards the universal overcoming of sin. Hence, it is justification itself as one's experience of Christ as Christ which becomes a pointer towards his universality. As far as possible theological integrations are concerned, Mostert's account can be meaningfully complemented by Küng's view of Christ as the fundamental ontological constitution (*Bestand*) of all things²⁰⁵³. In particular, Küng's position is that the ontological status of existence has been established in anticipation of sin. Consequently, in a reality ultimately determined by Christ, sin is ontologically overruled by God's grace²⁰⁵⁴. However, the proposed theological integration within Mostert's theology can only function partially. As a matter of fact, Küng's perspective on Christ as the *ontological* determination of reality is not developed relationally, hence it ultimately leads theology in a metaphysical direction which is at odds with Mostert's existential ontology of justification as the relationship between human being, God and the world²⁰⁵⁵.

In 4.3.5., I criticized Mostert's position on ecumenical consensus as contradictory. On the one hand, his concern on what founds real agreement is in line with structural theologies. On the other, the fact that he thinks within the alternative between minimal and maximal consensus brings him closer to the positional approach. Put otherwise, his position on ecumenical consensus is materially aligned with structural theologies, but formally with positional theologies. In my critique, I maintained that Mostert's material concern is to be upheld, namely his thesis that church unity unambiguously stands on the Gospel of justification. Instead, his formal preference for maximal consensus needs to be rejected, because the foundation of the church on justification is not satisfactorily illustrated within a quantitative understanding of ecumenical consensus on a range from "minimal" to "maximal". In contrast to Mostert, I tried to situate the very question of ecumenical consensus within a different framework. In particular, I conceptualized theological *loci* within their confessional thought-maps as constantly moving and not static. Further, I assumed that cross-confessional agreement is effectively possible at least at the level underlying all the *loci*, namely on the fundamental soteriological qualification of the Gospel. Then, I argued that consensus does not satisfactorily emerge by the direct comparison of a specific *locus* across the dialogue partners' confessional systems. Rather, I proposed that, as a first step, each partner should let all the theological

²⁰⁵³ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 163.

²⁰⁵⁴ KÜNG, H., *Rechtfertigung* (see note 886), p. 172.

²⁰⁵⁵ At times, Mostert himself seems to work with metaphysical rather than relational categories. As was shown, this generates a certain contradiction in his theology (see 1.3.1.). Therefore, one could assume that an unrestricted integration of Küng's doctrine of Christ as the *Bestand* of reality within Mostert's theology would ultimately prove contradictory.

loci within *their* confession interact in such a way that the cross-confessional, soteriological qualification of the Gospel can emerge within that specific confession. Only then, as a second step, the different positions should be compared across confessions. Here, the proposed integration is with Hampson's structural theology. Specifically, I embraced her view of confessional thought-maps as resulting from underlying universes of presuppositions²⁰⁵⁶ and coordinated it with Mostert's ecclesiology as justification. At the same time, I challenged Hampson's conclusion on the structural incompatibility of confessions²⁰⁵⁷ as too static and corrected it by the proposed doctrine of the moving *loci*. Clearly, the integration that I defend has itself a decisive weakness, namely the assumption that a soteriological understanding of the Gospel can effectively be considered as shared across confessions and equally foundational for all dialogue partners. Should this not be the case, then the proposed integration would fail, and, in my opinion, Hampson's view would have to be preferred.

Finally, coming to 4.3.6., I argued in favor of Mostert's position on the criteriological value of justification doctrine²⁰⁵⁸. At the same time, I considered his lacking distinction between the article and the doctrine of justification as problematic. Thus, I strived to integrate his view on the criteriological value of justification with the aforementioned distinction between the article and the doctrine. Specifically, I claimed that the two are interconnected, with the former being a formulation of the latter. While the doctrine finds expression in the *locus de iustificatione* and should not arbitrarily annex other *loci*, the article underpins the truth shared by all *loci* and permeates them all. As such, the article of justification is what enables theology to identify and focus on the properly theological character of a given *locus*. Correspondingly, the more a specific *locus* is interpreted in abstraction from the article of justification, the more speculative and theologically unfruitful the resulting interpretation becomes. The proposed integration goes beyond Mostert, as it explicitly acknowledges that the article of justification surpasses the corresponding doctrine. However, in contrast to positions which do not regard it as criteriological, I contend that justification doctrine serves as *the* optimal *locus* for expressing the article. Correspondingly, it represents one formulation of the article, clearly distinguished from others. However, *this* one formulation, unlike others, immediately intercepts the performative and promissory character of the article, thus providing a theological frame of reference which linguistically corresponds to the reality of the Gospel as God's promise (*Zuspruch*) for the salvation of sinners. In other words, justification doctrine is criteriological because it has a special relationship with the corresponding article, in that it interprets it more directly and unambiguously than other formulations of the salvation event. On this point, Mostert's position can be fruitfully integrated with Hampson's account. In particular, the value of her contribution is

²⁰⁵⁶ HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 9.

²⁰⁵⁷ See HAMPSON, D., *Christian Contradictions* (see note 1562), p. 196.

²⁰⁵⁸ By now, it is safe to claim that Mostert continuously and coherently upholds this position throughout his theology.

precisely that she connects justification doctrine to the underlying structure of thought which nourishes theology as a whole. Within such framework, theological positions are understood in their relativity, but at the same time the question of their normativity is taken seriously by reference to the underlying structure. Thus, through this proposed integration, Mostert's concern for the criteriological value of justification is given theological depth and a more systematic character, as his focus on justification appears now as resulting from the very structure of the Gospel and not from the arbitrary overemphasizing of one doctrine amongst many.

The critical analysis of Mostert's ecclesiology was nourished by the study of the alternatives in order to assess its theological productivity today. In particular, his understanding of the church as justification was expounded and found theologically sound from a Protestant point of view. The theological value of Mostert's ecclesiology consists in the immediate christological concentration with which the church is understood. The ecclesial community *is* the correct relationship between human being, God and the world in its religious dimension. In the church, the constitutive ambiguity of religion is overcome, and justification acquires a dimension which is not limited to the individual but extended to all those who are effectively transposed into Christ by faith. Mostert contributes to show that this transposition, both in its individual and collective dimensions, is concrete only as a creation of God's promissory Word. This is because only in this Word do sinners receive themselves in a way which is categorically not derivable from the legal structure of reality. Thus, Mostert's ecclesiology has the vital merit of showing that justification doctrine and ecclesiology cannot be responsibly separated and treated in isolation from each other. By contending that the church belongs to the core of theology as such, Mostert's lesson can potentially help Christianity recover a properly *theological* understanding of the ecclesial community, without which it might be difficult to articulate the presence and relevance of the churches in a post-Christian context. What is more, his ecclesiology can be helpful also in contexts which are not post-Christian at all, but in which the fundamental Law-Gospel differentiation is not reflected upon, and the risk of rampant legalism is therefore alarmingly high.

For sure, as my analysis has shown, Mostert's perspective runs the risk of being considered ecumenically unfruitful, especially within a theological context where the need for an immediately *theological* understanding of the church is far from unanimously shared. Within such a context, it is easy to regard Mostert's ecclesiology as confessionalist or even abstract. Although I consider these assumptions utterly wrong, I took up their legitimate concerns and tried to integrate them in my critique of Mostert. Particularly from an ecumenical perspective, I defended the need to overcome the weaknesses of his ecclesiology, in the hope that the core of his doctrine can prove valid and fruitful both within and outside of Protestant theology. In so doing, I found that Mostert's ecclesiology can

indeed be put in critical dialogue with both positional and structural theologies without losing sight of its core. Specifically, the integration with positional theologies could help overcome Mostert's unilaterally intensive focus on certain ecclesiological features. Similarly, structural theologies could provide a broader, more systematic qualification to some elements of his position. In general, I acknowledged some concerns of both alternatives as valid and included them within a rephrased version of Mostert's ecclesiology. At the same time, I pointed out the weaknesses of the alternatives and identified Mostert's position as preferable. With that, I believe that the research question has found a positive answer one last time. Indeed, in spite of its weaknesses and upon integration with the alternatives, Mostert's ecclesiology can fruitfully contribute to theological reflection today. Fundamentally, his contribution points out that the theological reality of the church is *not* derivative, but essential, since it immediately expresses justification. As such, ecumenical dialogue cannot expect to successfully reach real consensus unless it stops regarding ecclesiology as a second step *after* the first one.

General Conclusion

In the present work, I have focused my study of Mostert's theology of justification on four theological macro-areas: The Prolegomena (Part 1), the ontology of justification (Part 2), ethics and justification (Part 3), and ecclesiology (Part 4). Throughout the study, Mostert's perspective was initially presented against the backdrop of Ebeling's theology, then compared with the selected theological alternatives, and finally criticized. Since detailed conclusions (called "theological integrations") concerning the contents of Mostert's theology were provided at the end of each Part²⁰⁵⁹, this final section of my study will avoid unnecessary repetition and rather provide a brief, general conclusion.

The aim of the present study has been to evaluate, for each theological macro-area, whether it is possible to give the research question a positive answer: Can Mostert's theology – upon integration with the alternatives – provide valid impulses for theology today?

Throughout the four Parts of this work, the research question has found a positive answer, so it is possible to assert that (a.) Mostert's discourse can be meaningfully integrated with the selected alternatives and (b.) this integration does provide valid impulses for the reformulation of central questions for theology today.

At this point, however, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "valid impulses" (or by the equivalent formulations found elsewhere in this study). Without this clarification, the answer provided to the research question risks remaining vague. This clarification can only be formulated now because it results from the *answers* successively given to the research question throughout the study. By stating that an integrated version of Mostert's theology can provide valid impulses today, I mean that it is theologically responsible, in the sense already mentioned in the Introduction²⁰⁶⁰. There, I defined *responsible theology* as one which is first of all oriented towards *Scripture* and finds in it its *norma normans* (first level of responsibility). In other words, theology must find in Scripture the normative factor regulating the self-understanding of the church in relation to its Lord as well as its mission in the world. Secondly, I maintained that responsible theology engages in open, frank and critical dialogue with both other disciplines within contemporary culture and the socio-political *context* (second level of responsibility). Thirdly, responsible theology engages fruitfully with the Christian *tradition* prior and contemporary to it, with deep gratitude and without servility (third level of responsibility). According to my definition, the impulses provided by responsible theology are therefore considered valid whenever they are meaningful at all three levels of responsibility: in

²⁰⁵⁹ See 1.3.7., 2.3.6., 3.3.6. and 4.3.7.

²⁰⁶⁰ See here, p. viii.

relation to Scripture, to the context, and finally to the tradition of the church. Accordingly, it is now possible and appropriate to reformulate the answer to the research question as follows: Mostert's theology, once properly integrated with the theological alternatives, can be conceived as responsible theology. This means that, if properly understood, it appears meaningful before Scripture, in its context, and within the tradition of the church.

In this work, the study of Mostert's theology has been conducted starting from the *fundamental concern* which runs through his entire work: the reality of justification as the core, the essential qualification of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The point of the present analysis, therefore, is not to celebrate Mostert's endeavor, but to critically engage with it in order to pave the way for further study which may contribute to outline, with and beyond him, a responsible theology for changing contexts. Such an approach is only possible on the condition that Mostert's theology is not taken statically, embraced as a whole and considered as the final word on the matters that it covers, both within and outside of the four macro-areas which structure and sustain it in the present study. As a matter of fact, a similar take could hardly be responsible in the sense outlined here, as it would arbitrarily limit the critical potential of theology, therefore also the thinking witness to Jesus Christ. Rather, Mostert's theology is to be understood *dynamically*, as a reflection which is no less open to further developments than its core concern is. Specifically, the further task which results from this study is to interpret Mostert's doctrine so as to compel theology as a whole to focus on its core without ever abstracting from it. This task is both a chance and a challenge. Bringing Mostert's theology beyond its own weaknesses and ambiguities in fundamental alignment with its concern cannot mean the simple reiteration of his view in contexts in which his questions and answers are susceptible to be misunderstood or considered no longer relevant. Simple repetition is never responsible theology, as repeating an answer given in the past occupies the space which should be actually devoted to new answers to present questions. Mostert is clearly no exception to the rule. Thus, interpreting the present study as a consecration of his answers would be completely off track. For sure, I have studied his account out of interest in and appreciation for his intensive focus on the Gospel of justification. My concern is and remains the same as his. However, I have not devoted time and energy to the study of Mostert's theology in order to simply repeat it, let alone to invite others to do so. Instead, I have conceived the present study as a critical analysis of what I consider to be the concrete message of the Gospel of justification. Precisely because it is concrete, this message does not need to be repeated in any specific form, in the delusion that identical repetition could preserve it from an otherwise inevitable decline into oblivion and abstractness. *This* concrete message, which emerges from the overcoming of fear, knows also no fear of being forgotten. Therefore, it will seek dialogue, conversation and even confrontation with alternative messages in all changing contexts, not

essentially limiting its expression to any specific forms in which it was formulated in the past. Once again, I regard Mostert's fundamental insight as correct and normative: justification is the *criterium stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*. Nevertheless, for this insight to be found lively and relevant today, a simple reiteration of Mostert's concern would be all but useful. Instead, the aim is to follow it to the very end, joyfully, critically, frankly and fearlessly. If the present work is to have any purpose, I wish it to serve as an attempt amongst many to point to the need to listen to Scripture, the changing contexts and the theological tradition in order to find words to express every time anew the Gospel of justification as that which truly opens up a liberating, audacious and truly ultimate way of living and thinking. To all our fundamental questions, the gracious God has *already* answered in Jesus Christ: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life"²⁰⁶¹.

²⁰⁶¹ John 4,13f.

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