

WHAT GOD ORDAINS:
THE IMPACT OF LATE MEDIEVAL NOMINALISM ON THE THEOLOGY
OF MARTIN LUTHER

by

Joshua M. Zarling

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Professor James F. Korthals, Advisor

Abstract

There is a host of different avenues one can travel when studying the Reformation period. The following paper focuses on one of the avenues that the author feels receives comparatively little in-depth study in WELS circles: the connection between the theology of Martin Luther and the Scholastic period that preceded him. Many connections have been made between Luther and William of Occam, as well as Gabriel Biel. Since both Occam and Biel were nominalists—and Luther was trained as a nominalist at Erfurt—some contend that Luther’s theology was simply heretical nominalism. Implicit in this argument is the assertion that Luther never truly knew or understood the *orthodox* Catholic teaching of the pre-nominalist Scholastics. If this is true, can the theology of Luther (and consequently Lutheranism) honestly be characterized as *sola Scriptura*? This paper will attempt to examine this question by surveying the nominalist positions on epistemology and justification and then comparing them with Luther’s later teachings. This will be done by focusing especially on the works of Heiko Oberman, Steven Ozment, and Heinrich Denifle. The relationship between nominalism and the earlier realism of Scholasticism—especially of Aquinas—will also be touched upon.

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I. Introduction

“Bonum erat ecclesiae, si theologis natus non fuisset Porphyrius cum suis universalibus.”¹ It is highly unlikely that Martin Luther realized the full impact of this statement when he wrote it. Certainly he did realize its immediate implications. He knew the temporary shock it would cause. By the time he said it his listeners would already have been divided into two camps: those excited by his daring appraisal of a “dead” system, or those incensed by his audacity to reject one of the greatest questions in a cherished theological structure. No doubt the latter would be in the majority (which he was probably prepared for), and in that majority many would claim that his aggression *contra omnes Scholasticum* was due to his misunderstanding of their statements (which he was probably also prepared for).

Even a cursory reading of Luther’s disputation against the Scholastics (1517) reveals the reformer’s desire to shock, to turn things on their head. In it he enumerates ninety-seven theses² for debate, and most of them are purposely stated in such a manner as to evoke brow creasing from the audience. The young Augustinian wanted to shock his hearers. However he did not do so out of malice, or even out of boldness. It was after all the dialectical method of medieval disputation to seek wording that shocked or confused the spectators. The reconciliation of disparate statements was considered the highest art of ecclesiastical logomachy; through this gauntlet of ‘point—counter point’ questions were answered and doctrines clarified. In this disputation, therefore, Luther wasn’t doing anything that no one else had ever dared to do. In fact, he was doing exactly what everyone else did.

And yet history has borne out the fact that this monk was not doing what everyone else did; in truth, by this time he had begun to tread a different path. It was not boldness, it was not malice, it was not reputational pride that lay behind Thesis 52. Instead it was curiosity. It was a spiritual curiosity that had begun to reverberate in his mind, and yet also a terrifying curiosity that was gnawing at his heart. This curiosity found concrete expression in the question that plagued Luther throughout his formative years: do I truly love God? It was this very question that lay behind the statements he hurled against the Scholastics. It was this question that he found

¹ “It would have been better for the Church if Porphyrius, along with his universals, had not been born for the theologians.” from “Disputatio contra Scholasticum Theologiam,” in *D. Martin Luthers Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Band 1, ed. Hermann Bohlau, (Weimar, 1883), 226.

² Cf. Appendix.

muddled and confused by Thomas, Scotus, and Occam.³ It was this question that he wanted answered. All of the ninety-seven theses in 1517, all of these statements meant to philosophically and theologically shock the ecclesiastical *status quo* can be boiled down to this one personally agonizing question that was at the center of Luther's heart: have I truly committed an act of love for God?

The reaction of those first hearers must have been varied. In the five hundred years since that time, not much has changed. Indeed, the reaction is still varied. Much scholarship has been committed to nailing down precisely the relationship of the great reformer to the scholastic period that preceded him. Much has been written trying to determine the nature of the theological tradition Luther came out of, and against which he consequently rebelled. However, among all of these varied opinions one fact is beyond question. Martin Luther was trained as a nominalist. He came out of this theological school of thought and it was against this school that he reacted with the strongest vehemence.

This is borne out by a number of factors which will be dealt with in this paper. But already here it is worth mentioning that when one reads the disputation against the Scholastics it is immediately noticeable that Luther singles one of them out for special treatment. It is Gabriel Biel. He is commonly called the last of the Schoolmen, and he receives the brunt of Luther's criticism both directly and indirectly.⁴ Since Biel, along with William of Occam⁵, can safely be classified as an ardent nominalist in the late medieval tradition, the question remains as to the influence he exerted on Luther. If indeed the influence is great, then consequently the theology

³ At the time of the Reformation there were three competing schools of thought in the Church: **Thomism**, which was based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274); **Scotism**, which followed the teachings of Duns Scotus (1266-1308); and **Occamism**, the school of thought begun by William of Occam (1288-1348). In the following pages some of the main differences between Thomism and Occamism will be pointed at. Unfortunately, because of space a treatment of the theology of Scotus will be mainly overlooked. This is unfortunate because Duns Scotus exercised a heavy influence on Occam, and much of Occam's thought was a reaction to the views of Scotus (cf. footnotes 28 and 32). However, below are a few points to give the reader a basic background for this period in church history: 1) all three schools took place in the later middle ages, after the break from Neo-Platonic/Augustinian epistemology (cf. p5-8 below). 2) Much of the rivalry between these schools was due to rivalries between the monastic orders. This is especially true of Thomism and Scotism—Aquinas was a Dominican, Scotus was a Franciscan. This Dominicans vs. Franciscans rivalry continued up to the time of Luther. 3) By the time of the Reformation all three schools were still battling—and none of them had gained complete ascendancy. Occamism had gained a strong foothold and had the momentum, but all three systems had representatives throughout the various universities of Europe. The preeminence of Thomism didn't come until later.

⁴ He is specifically named by Luther 13 times.

⁵ Occamism, Nominalism (the medieval variety), and the *via moderna* are all synonymous terms and refer to the same movement started by William of Occam. In fact, Luther often referred to the nominalists as *Moderni*, i.e. "the Moderns." (Cf. p 34)

of the German reformation is nothing more than a re-hashing of nominalism. And if this is the case, isn't Luther's own characterization of his theology as *sola scriptura* a bit of an oversimplification?

It is these questions which modern medieval scholarship has attempted to answer, and the results have been varied. Some have affirmed the exact line of thinking taken above; claiming that in Luther is found a radical and somewhat erroneous interpretation of Biel's theology. They say Luther was a nominalist; he simply took nominalism to an extreme, unorthodox position. Others place the unorthodoxy squarely on nominalism itself. As will become clear from what follows, this opinion is based on some of the semi-pelagian aspects of the nominalist doctrine of justification. It is asserted that in nominalism we find the disintegration of the Thomistic system.⁶ From an historical perspective nominalism was the natural decay that resulted from the apex of Aquinas, and Luther's subsequent break was due to his being trained in this "decaying" system of thought.

A third option is the one that will be taken by this paper. There can be no doubt as to the historical validity of Luther's nominalist training. He was well acquainted with Biel and Occam, a fact brought out by the disputation of 1517. There can also be no doubt that certain questions, expressions, and statements made by Luther even in his later years have a distinctly nominalist flavor. However, on the basis of this the *sola scriptura* character of Luther's theology should not be done away with. Luther's theology was indeed drawn from Scripture, but this was done in a nominalist context.

It will be the purpose of this paper to trace and explain this context, as well as its applications to both Luther and his adherents. First, the theology of late medieval nominalism will be shown in its scholastic setting. This will be done by paying special attention to the doctrine of justification as well as the closely related doctrines of original sin and the sacraments. Having done this, it will be easier to establish the relationship between the scholastic schools of

⁶ "There is...what one may call the Thomistic school of interpretation which holds that in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, the middle ages reached its apex. It states that the thought of the succeeding period, beginning with Duns Scotus and culminating in nominalism—the work of Occam, Biel, and their disciples—is characterized by the disintegration and rapid collapse of the Thomistic synthesis." Heiko A. Oberman, introduction to *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, by Heiko A. Oberman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1963), p.1. Cf. also the article "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," in *The Dawn of the Reformation*, by Heiko A. Oberman (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark LTD, 1986), 104-106.

thought and their impact on Luther. Afterwards we will examine this impact in the light of the disputation of 1517.

“Bonum erat ecclesiae, si theologis natus non fuisset Porphirius cum suis universalibus.” It is not only highly likely, but almost certain that Luther could not have known the full impact of this statement when he wrote it. For how could he have known that he would be the very one to tear down the structure the realists and nominalists had been building for over four hundred years?

II. Nominalism – the *Via Moderna*

In the seventeenth and eighteenth theses of the disputation of 1517 one can hear the crash of a hammer. Though they may not stand out against the other 95 statements at first glance, there can be no doubt that Luther was driving a dialectical spear straight at the heart and core of the nominalist system of justification. When the Augustinian monk stated that man is not able to ‘will that God be God’ from purely natural powers he was directly and knowingly contradicting the position of Biel and Occam.

But what did Biel and Occam themselves mean by this phrase? What connection is there between the *velle deum esse deum*⁷ and the *diligere deum super omnia naturaliter*⁸ of the following thesis? It is obvious from the juxtaposition of these statements that Luther considered them as logically and intrinsically connected. Taken in line with Thesis 16 it becomes apparent that Luther is defining the *diligere deum* as *velle deum esse deum*. It is this definition down to its very foundation that Luther describes as a ‘fictitious term’, something man is ‘not able’ to do by nature. For if he cannot do the lesser (16), then he certainly cannot do the greater (17-18).

But again, since this is the position of the nominalists, what reason do they give as to its validity? In order to understand *velle deum esse deum* as the heart and core of nominalist theology, attention must first be given to the distinction between *de potentia absoluta* and *de potentia ordinate*. This distinction, characteristic of late medieval nominalism, provides the necessary framework for understanding the basic positions of Biel and Occam.

⁷ *Velle deum esse deum* = “to will that God be God”

⁸ *Diligere deum super omnia naturaliter* = “to love God above all things naturally”

1. Epistemology⁹

A. Preceding theories

What is not immediately known to a beginning student of medieval church history is that Thomas Aquinas was not universally revered during his own lifetime. It was only later that he was given preeminence among the Scholastics, a preeminence characterized by placing his theology as the highest exposition of Catholic teaching.¹⁰ During and after his lifetime he had many detractors, from respected individuals to honored institutions.¹¹ This was due to the fact that his attempt to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy with theological tradition was founded on a changed epistemology. His position, based on Aristotle, was that the quiddity¹² of things is the natural object of the intellect, which strives to know their essences by viewing their particular attributes. He referred to this as the ‘intelligible species’¹³ which the mind extracted and grasped from the attributes of an individual thing. His dictum that nothing was in the intellect that was not formerly in the senses yielded an optimistic view of human observation and logic.¹⁴ This in turn gave way to an optimistic view of human knowledge.

⁹ ‘Epistemology’ refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with the acquisition of knowledge. Basic epistemological questions include ‘how does the mind form concepts and ideas?’ ‘Is this done innately or drawn from experience?’

¹⁰In 1567 Pope Pius V declared Thomas the “Universal Doctor of the Church.” Then, in 1880 Pope Leo XIII declared Aquinas to be the patron saint of Catholic schools and universities. Aquinas’ preeminence was solidified by Vatican II. From the decree on Priestly Formation (*Optatum Totius*): “Then, by way of making the mysteries of salvation known as thoroughly as they can be, students should learn to penetrate them more deeply with the help of speculative reason exercised under the tutelage of St. Thomas.” (452) Also, later in the declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*): “The Church pursues such a goal after the manner of her most illustrious teachers, especially St. Thomas Aquinas.” (648) From *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

¹¹ He was opposed especially by the Franciscans, such as John Peckham. Then in 1277 several of his theses were condemned at the Universities of Paris and Oxford—the two most prestigious universities in Europe at the time. Cf. Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 2 (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), 280-281.

¹² That is, the “whatness.”

¹³ “I claim likewise that whatever pertains to the definition of any species of material reality, for instance stone or man or horse, can be considered without individuating conditions which are no part of the definition of the species. And this is what I mean by abstracting the universal from the particular (*abstrahere universal a particulari*), the idea from the sense images, to consider the nature of a species without considering individuating conditions represented by sense images.” Taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 12, trans. Paul T. Durbin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book company, 1968), 53.

¹⁴ “*Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu.*” This is what became known as the peripatetic axiom. Aquinas stated it in his *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, argument 19.

This Thomistic epistemology was questioned by what was known as the Augustinian position. This Augustinian/Neo-Platonist theory of knowledge had held sway in the church from Gregory the Great up to the thirteenth century. Briefly stated, this position maintained that true knowledge is dependent on inner illumination, apart from the experience of the senses. With Henry of Ghent¹⁵ this position was also taken to its logical conclusion: the proper and natural object of the intellect is God himself, the supreme being.¹⁶ This emphasis on internal illumination had placed little value on sense experience, or the probability of theological statements drawn from sense experience.¹⁷

It was in contrast to this that Thomism, with its emphasis on the senses as the starting point of knowledge, began to assert its influence. With this influence came an optimism that sought to unite philosophy and theology. Logical inquiry and sense experience were brought into the realm of Catholic theology and harmonized with it. Answers to theological questions could be found in Scripture and the fathers, but also in Aristotle and sense experience. In this new epistemological outlook *a priori* arguments fell out of favor and were replaced with conclusions reached *a posteriori* from investigations of the natural, finite world.¹⁸

It was in response to the rational optimism of Thomism that William of Occam revived an old and discarded philosophical position. It was a position that had been thrown into the trash heap of the Church's history: an array of intellectual garbage that included the unsatisfactory phraseology and rejected doctrinal theories of times past. Christian men had worked through them when they sprang up at this time or that. Some they had to wrestle with before rejecting; others were unacceptable right from the get go. But all had been labeled 'unorthodox' or

¹⁵ Henry of Ghent (c. 1217-1293) was a neo-platonist/Augustinian Scholastic. As such, he was an opponent of Aquinas and in fact was the regent master of the University of Paris when the condemnations of 1277 came out (cf. footnote 11).

¹⁶ "Henry of Ghent, who was at the time the most influential representative of the Augustinian school, taught that the first and proper object of the human intellect is God, or the supreme being. This thesis is implicitly contained in every theory of intellectual illumination, such as that prevalent, with very few exceptions, among the Augustinians of the thirteenth century. Henry of Ghent is to be credited with having stated explicitly what had been preciously said in a confused manner." Efreem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, trans. Bernardine Bonansea (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1961), 27.

¹⁷ "One of the differences between Platonism and Aristotelianism is precisely this: Platonism tends to base its philosophical inquiry on internal experience; Aristotelianism prefers to begin it with external experience." Bonansea, *Duns Scotus*, 26.

¹⁸ Cf. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform: 1250-1550*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 50-51, where he illustrates this difference in approach by noting that Anselm and Aquinas tried to prove the existence of God from completely different starting points. Anselm's proof was *a priori*; whereas Aquinas proceeded *a posteriori*.

‘unusable’ and consigned to the trashbin. Yet one of these ‘unusable’ ways of speaking appealed to the practical mind of Occam, so he decided to dust it off and make it usable again. To put it simply, he brought back nominalism.

B. “*Porphirius cum suis universalibus*”

When Boethius¹⁹ translated Porphyry’s²⁰ Introduction to Aristotle’s categories the question of universals reached medieval Europe. In doing so it left an indelible mark on Christian history. For as soon as Boethius himself admitted that he was unable to answer the question,²¹ naturally everyone tried to do just that. Much scholastic energy was spent on the problem.

The question itself goes all the way back to the philosopher Plato. When Plato observed the world, he noticed that certain similarities existed between different things. Being the philosopher that he was he then asked the seemingly simple question of ‘why?’ But once the question was asked, it couldn’t be taken back. The subsequent two and a half thousand years of human history have tried to find a definitive solution. But instead of only one answer, they settled on two.

These two solutions are what came to be known as realism and nominalism. When two objects are compared, for instance a piece of wood and an eye, the human mind understands that they share something in common: the color brown. But then, how is this “brownness” accounted for? Does it exist apart from the particular attributes of wood and flesh, and they simply share it? Or, is it merely a concept the mind posits to account for the similarity between two things? Does the universal ‘brownness’ have real existence apart from particular things, or is it only a name the mind uses when it looks at particular things?

These two answers, realism and nominalism, entered the medieval European intellect through Porphyry. They then naturally transitioned into the arena of medieval theology.

¹⁹ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480-525) was a Roman philosopher and Christian, he tried improving the relationship between the church of Rome and the church of Constantinople. He was later executed for conspiring with the Eastern Empire against the barbarian-controlled Rome.

²⁰ Porphyry of Tyre (234-c.305) was a neoplatonic philosopher who frequently clashed with Christians (one of his most famous works is *Adversus Christianos*, “Against the Christians”). His ‘Introduction’ is commonly referred to as the *Isagoge*.

²¹ “At present, he says, I shall refuse to say concerning genera and species whether they subsist or whether they are placed in the naked understanding alone; or whether subsisting they are corporeal or incorporeal; and whether they are separated from sensibles or placed in sensibles and in accord with them. Questions of this sort are a most exalted business and require very great diligency of inquiry.” Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham Vol. 1*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 5.

However, the transition was not a smooth one. When these two competing philosophical theories were placed in the context of Christian doctrine, the result was disastrous for nominalism.²²

Because of this, two things should be noted about the philosophy of universals throughout the subsequent period of Scholasticism. First, due to the polytheism that resulted from applying nominalist philosophy to the doctrine of the Trinity, realism held sway for the next two centuries. Realism was accepted and adapted by every major Christian thinker from Anselm to Aquinas. This was made considerably easier by the fact that both the Augustinian and Thomist epistemologies drew from realist philosophers.²³

Second, for the rest of the medieval period realist and the later nominalist viewpoints were discussed in the sphere of epistemology, which was where they naturally belonged. They were not applied directly to theological doctrines. The position of Roscellinus made it apparent that a strict application of nominalism or realism to the mysteries of faith eventually yielded heretical results.

C. Occam's Razor: "No plurality without necessity"

Occam has often been called the father of medieval skepticism,²⁴ but not in the sense that he doubted the conclusions of reason, or the ability of the senses to derive true knowledge from experience. Instead, he was skeptical of the validity of a knowledge derived from a universal concept abstracted from particulars.

²² This 'disaster' was occasioned by Roscellinus, canon of Compiègne. Roscellinus had been a teacher of Peter Abelard and an advocate of nominalism. He ended up applying the philosophical principles of nominalism directly to the doctrine of the Trinity, and therefore was accused of tritheism. He apparently asserted that the three persons of the Trinity were three distinct substances, and therefore three separate and distinct beings. There was not one divine essence, but three divine essences. He was led to this position by his nominalistic viewpoint: universals are just names and not things. Therefore, the universal in this case—the one divine essence which the three persons share—is not real. He was opposed by both Anselm and Abelard, and ended up being forced to recant his position at the synod of Soissons in 1092. Cf. Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, *The Middle Ages: 1049-1294*, vol. 5 of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 596-597.

²³ Both Plato and Aristotle were realists; but with a slight difference. Plato held that universals had a real existence apart from individual things (*universalia ante res*). Aristotle, however, disagreed with his teacher. He held that universals are real entities with a real existence, but this existence is dependent upon the particulars which instantiate them (*universalia in rebus*). These differences are really the main divide between the Neo-Platonic and the Aristotelian/Thomist epistemologies. Cf. above, 5.

²⁴ Many refer to Occam as the "chief of the medieval skeptics." (Adams, *William Ockham*, 552) And he is still considered "revolutionary" in the history of medieval thought. (Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 54)

Occam based his epistemological position on the belief that universal concepts do not exist, only individual things exist. One does not need to assume that a universal substance or essence is extracted by the mind from individual things that the senses perceive. He rejected the concept that ‘intelligible species’ was the natural object of the mind. To put it another way, Occam rejected the idea that the human mind needed a ‘bridge’ to know the individual particulars of this world. Instead, the mind can have knowledge of them directly. And since this is the case, there is no need to posit the real existence of universal concepts and common natures which the mind abstracts in order to know individual things.

This was due to his principle which has become famously known as ‘Occam’s razor.’²⁵ Universal concepts do not really exist, for the mind does not need an additional plurality of entities and assumptions to know particulars. Occam, in a sense, streamlined his epistemology and thereby freed it from what he considered to be the unnecessary logical shackles of realism.

D. The “two powers” of nominalism

Based on his new epistemology, Occam asserted that the mind arrives at two forms of knowledge concerning things: intuitive and abstractive. Intuitive knowledge is based on observation and common acclamation: the mind beholds that a thing exists and common opinion confirms it. Abstractive knowledge is based on intuitive knowledge, but with a twist. Abstractive knowledge does not deal with existence or non-existence, it is knowledge that we have despite the fact that the object may or may not exist.²⁶ Therefore, universal concepts, such as man, are abstractions that the mind has arrived at by intuitively knowing many individual people.²⁷

²⁵ *“Numquam ponenda est pluralitas sine necessitate.”* Occam wrote this phrase in his commentary on Lombard’s sentences, I, distinction 27. Basically, it means that whenever you have two competing propositions which are equal in all other respects, the one that posits fewer entities and assumptions is the one to be preferred.

²⁶ “According to Occam, an intuitive cognition of a thing is that by virtue of which one can have evident knowledge of whether or not a thing exists...by contrast, abstractive cognition in this sense is a noncomplex apprehension of terms by virtue of which it is not possible to have evident knowledge of whether or not a thing exists.” Adams, *William Ockham*, 503.

²⁷ On Occam’s abstractive process: “Here were all the objects and events of past experience, things that one once beheld and now retained and could retrieve in memory, whether or not they presently existed outside the mind. The mind, however, could also construct new objects and relationships, truly “mental beings,” which never had nor ever would exist literally outside the mind...Here, according to Occam, were all the imaginative fictions and formulas of purely abstract thought, and along with them universal concepts. By the same process by which the mind created a unicorn by imaginatively grafting a spirelike horn onto the forehead of a horse, it legislated universals. From its intuitive and simple abstractive knowledge of many individuals of the same species, the mind generalized a universal concept and term that stood for all members of that species...This concept also becomes a

By doing this, Occam dramatically shifted the way that theology and the natural world related to each other. When looking at Occam's view of knowledge one is struck by the idea of contingency. Abstractive knowledge naturally arrives at contingent possibilities. When one thinks of a tree, the concept does not necessarily refer to a tree one has just observed existing. Occam took this approach based on his view of contingency and applied it to theology. The world itself is contingent. After all, God in his absolute power could have created any number of worlds instead of the one we currently inhabit. The world we live in does not exist of necessity; to claim thus would be to limit God's power and freedom.

In Occam's nominalist outlook, the realization is made that we need to allow for the freedom of God's absolute will. Taking his cue from Duns Scotus,²⁸ Occam emphasized the absolute freedom of the will of God. In Occam a line of demarcation is drawn between *what is* and what *could be*. It is useless to argue from contingency concerning the things that God could do in an absolute sense. It has no bearing on what he actually did do.

It is this very distinction that became an essential characteristic of nominalist theology. *De potentia absoluta*²⁹ God is free to do anything he wishes to do and can do anything he does not wish to do (without violating the law of contradiction). *De potentia ordinata*³⁰ God has decided to do specific things in the specific ways he wanted to do them. So for instance, God *de potentia absoluta* could have created any world he chose to, he also could have designed any method of the salvation he wished to, however the ones that do exist he has ordained as true (*de potentia ordinata*).³¹

term I can use to designate this species in conversation with others who have had the same experience of (the individual of the species)." Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 58.

²⁸ This is one of the areas where Duns Scotus had a profound impact on nominalism. In contrast to Aquinas, who emphasized the intellect, Scotus gave primacy to the will. This emphasis on the will (over against the intellect) was a development by Scotus which was later termed *voluntarism*. For a brief discussion on the relation between the will and the intellect according to Scotus cf. Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 81-86.

²⁹ *De potentia absoluta* = God's "absolute power"

³⁰ *De potentia ordinata* = God's "ordained power"

³¹ "This distinction should be understood to mean that God can—and, in fact, has chosen to—do certain things according to the laws he freely established, that is, *de potentia ordinata*. On the other hand, God can do everything that does not imply contradiction, whether God has decided to do these things [*de potentia ordinata*] or not, as there are many things God can do which he does not want to do. The latter is called God's power *de potentia absoluta*." Dr. Oberman also cites Biel: "...*posse aliquid aliquando accipitur secundum leges ordinatas et institutas a deo. Et illam sic deus dicitur posse facere de potentia ordinata. Aliter accipitur posse pro posse facere omne illud quod non includit contradictionem fieri, sive deus ordinavit se hoc facturum sive non, quia deus multa facere potest quod non vult facere secundum magistrum. Et illa dicitur posse de potentia absoluta.*" (I Sentences, dist. 43) Taken from Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 37.

The impact of this distinction on theology can be seen from the following example. An often used question in Scholasticism was the question *de odio dei*; that is, concerning the hatred of God. The question was ‘can God command someone to hate him?’ Which was immediately followed by corollary question ‘would such a work be meritorious?’ It is clear from both Scripture and reason that the hatred of God is a sin. For to hate God means to despise all of his words and works and trample underfoot his commands and promises. Yet what if God commanded someone to do this? Since it is a command of God, it must be obeyed. Yet to obey the commands of God one must love God. Therefore one must first love God in order to fulfill the command to hate him. But if one then hates him, he despises all of his commands (etc...).

The Schoolmen puzzled over this question, since any answer seemed to spiral into a series of contradictions *ad nauseam*. A nominalist, however, would answer according to the distinction between the two powers of God. He would state that a) *de potentia absoluta* God could decree this command, and **accept it as meritorious**. For God’s will is absolutely free to do whatever he chooses. However, *de potentia ordinata* God has not decreed this command, and therefore would not accept it as meritorious because he has ordained a chosen way of salvation. Plus he has wished to establish and make known that the hatred of God is a sin.

This logical division into the two powers of God was the context in which the rest of nominalist theology was discussed. Such a discussion had a heavy and multi-faceted impact on theology in the later middle ages. One aspect of this impact is the primacy of the will over reason. In the case of theological speculation concerning the acts of God, what God wished to do is important, not the reason he did so. To speculate on ontological causes or theological inquiries is just that—speculation. Only what God has wished to ordain for salvation is important, since it is the method which he freely, in his own kindness, has established for man to be saved.³²

Another aspect of this distinction is the narrowing of the field of theological inquiry. Any theological question which is not answered by the authority which God ordained can only be given a *probable* answer; Scripture and church authority are placed as the only important sources

³² Again, this entire distinction can be traced back to Scotus: “In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it (the distinction between *de potentia ordinata* and *absoluta*) became a constant guiding principle for men who had been trained in an exaggerated version of Scotus’ voluntarism. For these men...the distinction was a means of safeguarding the absolute primacy of will over reason in God, and they applied it to the totality of their theology. Scotus had said that God did not have to accept Christ’s merits as infinite, but simply wished to do so; the nominalists of the late middle ages took this type of theological distinction—which was rather exceptional in Scotus—and made it the rule rather than the exception.” Gonzalez, *Christian Thought*, 317.

theological knowledge, since God has decided to declare them as such *de potentia ordinata*.³³ This was a direct break with the Thomism position on epistemology, where the reason and logical investigation could be brought in to aid theology. This had been due to the realism of Thomism—if universal concepts were real then a real relation between God and man, theology and philosophy could take place.

Already one can start to see nominalist connections to the thought of Martin Luther—and not just the early Luther, but the **mature** Luther as well. By relegating the doctrines of the church under God's *potentia ordinata* nominalism has successfully de-emphasized the position that human reason should take in the sphere of theology. The teachings of the Christian faith don't need to be proven or explained by rational inquiry or *a posteriori* demonstrations—they are true because God has expressly desired them to be. Even the mysteries of the faith should be left as just that: mysteries. For instance, the mystery of how God and man can be united in the Person of Christ can only be given probable answers (and not *definitive* ones). Therefore, any further questions can be answered by stating that *de potentia ordinata* God desired the personal union and accomplished it.

Also, the nominalist emphasis on the order *de potentia ordinata* as an aspect of God's will directly influenced Luther's concept of the means of grace. This will be discussed in detail later on. However even here it's worth considering how Luther spoke of the power of the means of grace: they are efficacious because God has 'bound himself' to them. This concept of the Reformer was certainly inspired by his nominalist background.

In order to get a better handle on this logical distinction, the nominalist doctrine of justification will now be examined. By doing this, we can see how this distinction between the orders *de potentia ordinata* and *absoluta* plays out in the doctrines of theology proper.

2. Justification

As the young Luther struggled to understand how he could be saved, he was plagued by doubts concerning the love of God. Did he possess it? Did he truly love God above all things?

³³ "The circle of faith in the Occamistic tradition has been narrowed considerably." And later, "All those questions which from Occam onward fall outside the field of theology proper, God's *potentia ordinata*, are now filed under God's *potentia absoluta*, where logic can become the guide." Oberman, *Harvest*, 51.

The problem was that whenever he asked this question his conscience always gave him the same reply—an emphatic ‘No!’ This tore at Luther, it brought him to despair.

It is important for believers to see how God swings the fury of his Law at us. With his Law he convicts sinful man of his sinfulness; he breaks him of all hope in himself and drives him to despair. It is only after he has broken the heart of man like this that he then applies the saving balm of the Gospel. But first, the Law must crush. And as believers of all times know, the Law of God is eternal and immutable. It does not change. However, the manner in which God levies it against us in our daily lives does. To someone who abandoned his children, the Law convicts him of this abandonment. To someone who has committed murder, the Law convicts him of killing another human being. The Law convicts us of lust, and then convicts us of carnal pride an hour later.

Another thing that changes is the psychological context in which man crystallizes the message of God’s wrath that has been brought against him. David, Isaiah, and Paul were all brought to the realization that they were condemned sinners by the Law. But this condemnation was distilled into one sentence of horror for each one of them. To remind David of the comprehensive damnation he deserved, one merely needed to say to him, “you are the man!” Isaiah only had to think “Unclean lips!” and the terror of sin would have brought him to his knees. Paul never forgot that he had been a persecutor of the church of God. God swings his eternal Law, but he swings it in different ways and at different times at each one of us.

For Luther, the phrase was “do I truly love God?” And the answer of his conscience was relentlessly negative. The fact that Luther’s fear of God and recognition of his own sinfulness was psychologically crystallized into this one sentence was not accidental. It was not chance that made him wrestle over this particular question. Rather, it was the context and time in which God had placed him. God had placed him at the end of the Middle Ages, and brought him up in the context of Occam and Biel.

A. *“Ex Puris Naturalibus”*

Luther’s position that the human will is completely under the servitude of sin and totally incapable of producing any kind of spiritual goodness or merit is well known. The topic is most

comprehensively treated by the Reformer in his *De Servo Arbitrio* written against Erasmus in 1525.

However, by returning to the disputation against the Scholastics one can quickly see that the relation between the will of fallen man and spiritual merit was not a new problem for Luther. In Theses 5 and 6 he addresses the will of man and asserts that it is incapable of doing two things. First (Thesis 5) it cannot apply itself to opposite directions, for it is captive. And second: “It is false that the will is able *by nature to conform itself to the dictates of right reason.*” Luther then expressly adds that this last thesis is directed against Scotus and Gabriel.

In Gabriel Biel, who died in 1495, we can view nominalism in its most mature phase, as well as the aspects of it that most directly confronted young Luther. But what did Biel mean by the phrase “the dictates of right reason?” What does he mean when he asserts that man can follow these dictates naturally? Biel’s position on original sin and the state of man after the fall first needs to be looked at in order to understand what he means by man’s ‘pure natural powers’ (*ex puris naturalibus*).

To start out with, he sees original sin primarily as the absence of original righteousness, and only as concupiscence in a very secondary sense. In this respect he follows both Occam and Scotus, in contrast to Lombard and Aquinas.³⁴ Concupiscence does exist in fallen man and hinders his spiritual powers after the fall. However, strictly speaking it is not a result of the fall. For Biel, as well as Occam, this *fomes peccati*³⁵ is a natural part of man’s make-up since creation. His mind and his body desire different things, and after Adam’s fall the lusts of the flesh have grown more powerful. This is because they no longer have the restraint of original righteousness. This is an important aspect of the nominalist view on original sin. The state of righteousness that Adam and Eve enjoyed at creation was not merely perfection. It was a stabilizer, a restraint that held the *natural* lusts of man’s flesh in check.

³⁴ For a fuller discussion on the three medieval positions on original sin, cf. Oberman, *Harvest*, 121-126. The following is a brief summary: A) the position that original sin can be mainly identified as concupiscence. This position was advanced by Peter Lombard (Biel calls it the Augustinian position). B) Original sin is mainly the absence of original righteousness. This position is followed by Anselm, Duns Scotus, Occam, and Gregory of Rimini. C) The third position can be called the mediating position. The absence of original righteousness is the form, and concupiscence is the matter of original sin. This was endorsed by Thomas Aquinas, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventura. Biel considers himself closest to the third position.

³⁵ *Fomes peccati* = “tinder of sin”. This *fomes peccati* is the classic scholastic definition of concupiscence. The fact that by nominalism the *fomes peccati* was viewed as a natural part of man’s make up is shown by Biel’s equating it with the *lex carne*, that is, the “law of the flesh.” But “flesh” here is mainly being used according to its philosophical meaning: part of the essential substance of man.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from Biel's position on original sin and original righteousness. First, when God created man as soul and body he created him with disparate parts. These parts had to be 'held together' in perfection. Therefore God gave man the gift of original righteousness. Second, and more importantly, the *fomes peccati* is not *sin per se*. The concupiscence of man after the fall can really be characterized as a debilitating discomfort rather than a lethal condition. For Biel, when man lost original righteousness he was doomed to live life in a constant, disordered state. The passions and lusts of his body facilitate and lead to sin, but should not be regarded as sin themselves.

This leads to the third outcome of nominalism's view on original sin: negatively speaking it can be defined as a loss of original righteousness; positively it is the rule of bodily passions that pulls man towards what is wrong. Therefore, this *fomes peccati* is a condition of man's body. Man's mind is still in a certain sense capable of those things which it was capable of before the fall. This is what Biel is referring to by 'right reason.'

This means that when Biel uses the term 'right reason' he is intimating those laws and actions which man is capable of discerning *from nature* and putting into action *by nature*. Man's will has indeed been hindered after the fall, however it is still capable of producing good actions. These good actions and virtues are presented and understood by man from the world around him and from logical reflection. It is important to note here how Biel characterizes the exact effect of the fall on man's will and man's ability to apply his will to the dictates of right reason: "Original sin...destroys the pleasure of eliciting a good act and causes unhappiness and fear, thus changing the direction of the will. This does not, however, interfere with the freedom of the will as such."³⁶

In Biel's nominalist doctrine of original sin then, the problem with fallen man is not that original sin has alienated him from God or that he is unable to bridge that gap. The problem is that the tinder of sin has darkened his ability to put into practice the dictates of right reason, that is, the moral and ethical good that God expects.³⁷

³⁶ Oberman, *Harvest*, 129.

³⁷ There is not enough space to discuss the importance and meaning of the term "natural law" in nominalism. However, one thing that should be noted here in the discussion of man's natural powers is that for Biel the terms "natural law" and "moral law" are in many ways synonymous. They both are ultimately derived from and identical to "eternal law", that is, God's eternal will. Therefore, man's conscience (which for Biel is identified with the 'dictates of right reason') is identical to both the natural law and eternal law. He states, "*Dictamen igitur recte rationis manifestatio est legis divine.*" (Oberman, *Harvest*, 105) From this it is clear that in the nominalist scheme of

He needs help to do this. In other words, he needs God to grant him grace. But how can he convince God to do so? What separates him from any other human being?

B. “*Facere Quod In Te Est*”

The phrase ‘do what is in you’ is well known and has garnered much attention. In many Protestant circles (especially ours) it has become a catch phrase—an umbrella under which is grouped any teaching that presents justification before God as the result of a person’s good works. In this sense *opinio legis* and *facere quod in te est* are often conversationally used by us as synonyms.

Although this is certainly an acceptable use for the phrase, it does however betray a lack of acquaintance with those who originally used it. While it is true that in all its forms ‘do what is in you’ is based on a good work-oriented view of salvation, it is not true that the entire age of Scholasticism wholeheartedly subscribed to a strictly *facere quod in te est*³⁸ paradigm—or that those who did adopt it agreed on what it meant and what its implications were. As will be shown below, this fabled phrase—especially as Luther understood it—was really a peculiarity of late medieval nominalism. And it is a peculiarity for which nominalism is still infamous.

i. Grace: its nature and effects according to Aquinas

The phrase *facere quod in te est* is usually traced back to Ambrosiaster.³⁹ It later became accepted by the Franciscan school, most notably Alexander of Hales.⁴⁰ Afterwards, Thomas

anthropology man doesn’t need the Law as presented in the Scriptures. He has all that he needs from the inner dictates of reason and knowledge derived from nature to know the Law of God and *fulfill it*. One can’t but notice how radically different this is from the later position of Luther. The Reformer agreed that man derives the natural knowledge of God and his law from two sources: nature and conscience. However, for Luther these two sources are completely inadequate—not necessarily because of themselves, but because of man’s reason. Whatever conclusions man draws from them will eventually lead to error concerning God and his Law. Therefore, Luther’s teaching on both man’s natural powers and the natural knowledge derived from the “natural law” is in direct opposition to Biel.

³⁸ *Facere quod in te est* = “to do what is in you”

³⁹ Cf. Oberman, *Harvest*, 132. ‘Ambrosiaster’ was the name coined by Erasmus of Rotterdam for the author of a commentary on Paul’s epistles, which was written sometime between 366-384. It had erroneously been attributed to Ambrose of Milan for many years.

⁴⁰ Oberman, *Harvest*, 132. Alexander of Hales (1185-1245) was a scholastic theologian. He was the first Franciscan to hold a chair at the University of Paris.

Aquinas also adopted it in his commentary on Lombard's Sentences. What is noteworthy here is that some claim that Thomas modified this position by the time he wrote his *Summa*.⁴¹ This claim is important to the purposes of this paper for two reasons. First, despite the fact that Biel was well acquainted with Thomas' theology and discusses it often, many have asserted that in late nominalism the Thomistic system is corrupted. Because of this the argument is made that Luther's rejection of Scholasticism is due to his ignorance of Aquinas' teaching. This is the second important reason. Did Luther equate Biels' *facere quod* with the rest of Scholasticism? And if so, was he ignorant of what he was rejecting? To examine this further, Aquinas' position of justification will be briefly sketched out.

To begin a discussion of the position of *facere quod in te ist* in the theology of any given Scholastic, their stance on original sin must first be ascertained. It has already been mentioned above that Aquinas took a middling stance concerning original sin's impact on mankind. Man has indeed lost original righteousness. In addition to this he is afflicted with concupiscence. But because of the fall has man's nature been inhibited to the point where it can do nothing good without the aid of divine grace? Aquinas answers in Article 2 of Question 109 that man indeed can still will and perform that which is naturally good, but this ability is limited.⁴² However, in the case of *spiritual* good, he cannot carry anything out without divine grace.⁴³ But what needs to be solidified here is this: just what divine grace is Aquinas speaking of?

According to the common Scholastic definition there two types of grace:⁴⁴ *gratia gratis data*⁴⁵ and *gratia gratum faciens*.⁴⁶ The first refers to grace given for the benefit others. In this sense the Apostles were said to be 'full of grace.' This grace is said to be created grace, as it can exist in someone who is not yet come to faith. *Gratia gratis data* can also be characterized as more general in scope, since it can even refer to a good act that a heathen does for his neighbor.

⁴¹ Ibid., 142-143, also cf. John Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988), 158.

⁴² "Yet since human nature is not wholly spoiled by sin so as to be deprived of the whole good proper to nature, man can indeed, even in the state of spoiled nature (i.e. after the fall), perform some particular good actions by his natural powers, such as building houses, planting vines and the like." Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. 30, 75.

⁴³ "But in the state of spoiled nature he needs it (a gratuitous capacity) in two respects, namely, in order to be healed, and further, that he may perform the good proper to supernatural capacity, which is meritorious." Ibid, 75-77.

⁴⁴ They also listed a third kind of grace, which is grace in the broadest sense. This is "such various gifts as physical strength and capacity of speech...in this form grace is undistinguishable from the natural gifts of creation." Oberman, *Harvest*, 136

⁴⁵ *Gratia gratis data* = "the grace given graciously"

⁴⁶ *Gratia gratum faciens* = "the grace making one pleasing/acceptable"

On the other hand, *gratia gratum faciens* refers to the special habit of grace that God gives to those who do their very best. It is the special, uncreated grace of God himself that makes one a Christian in the truest sense, for it places him in a state of grace.⁴⁷ It also inclines him to perform meritorious actions. In this sense, the Virgin Mary is said to be ‘full of grace.’⁴⁸

But which one is Aquinas referring to in Article 2? It should be realized that every Scholastic, whether Thomist, Scotist, or Occamist, would maintain that *gratia gratum faciens* is necessary for salvation. Without it one is not in a state of grace and cannot be saved. It is therefore obvious that Thomas is affirming the fact that after the fall man cannot will or do anything that is *meritoriously* good without the *gratia faciens*.

However, that is not the real issue here. The real issue is if, according to Aquinas, one can merit this habit of grace from purely natural powers. In other words, can fallen man merit the saving gift of *gratia faciens* (by which he can merit salvation) without the aid of preparatory grace (*gratia gratis data*)?

It is precisely here that *facere quod in te est* is brought into play in its strictest sense. This is extremely important to realize, especially for Protestant students of medieval theology. Generally speaking, the scholastic debate about *facere quod in te est* wasn’t really concerned with the merits a Christian does **after** one has received the *gratia faciens*. Instead, it centered around what one needed to do in order to merit this gift of grace.

In Article 3 Thomas gives his answer. He asserts that man cannot merit the habit of grace without the aid of divine grace.⁴⁹ God must aid man with preparatory grace if man is to merit the habit of grace. The Thomist position therefore, is that man needs *gratia gratis data* if he is to receive *gratia gratum faciens*.

⁴⁷ Therefore, *gratia gratum faciens*, *gratia infusa*, and the “habit of grace” are synonyms.

⁴⁸ “Mary and the Apostles were all full of grace. But the Mother of God was full as well of the *gratia gratum faciens*, that is, holy, in the sense of personal sanctity. The Apostles, however, were full of the *gratia gratis data*, that is, the status of grace conferred upon them to execute properly their apostolic office, without necessarily implying a set degree of personal piety.” Oberman, *Harvest*, 137

⁴⁹ “Thus in the state of intact nature (before the fall) man referred his love of himself, and likewise his love of all other things, to the love of God. And so he loved God more than himself and above all things. *But in the state of spoiled nature man falls short of this* in the desire of his rational will, which because of the spoiling of nature pursues a private good unless it is healed by God’s grace. Hence our conclusion must be that in the state of intact nature man did not need a gift of grace supplementing his natural endowments in order to love God naturally above all things, although he needed the assistance of God for moving him to do this. But in the state of spoiled nature man also needs for this the assistance of grace healing nature.” Aquinas, *Summa*, vol. 30, 79-81. (emphasis mine)

ii. The love of God *super omnia*

In this discussion concerning the *facere quod* in scholastic theology, the question still remains as to what exactly it is. What constitutes this work? What act can man elicit that will merit the bestowal of the habit of grace?

Thomas answers this question indirectly in Article 3, where he asks whether man can love God above all things by purely natural powers. This, at its most basic, is what the Scholastics meant by doing what is in you: to love God above all things for God's own sake. This was the act that man needed to perform in order to merit the *gratia gratum faciens*. He needed to wish that God be God (*velle deum esse deum*).

Scholasticism came to this conclusion through Aristotelian ethics: Man naturally begins by loving himself. Then, through the use of reason he begins to love everything which brings him profit; everything that is advantageous to him and brings him good. He will then come to love God as the highest good, that is, the highest good for him. He can then come to the realization that God is simply the highest good for all.⁵⁰ He therefore wishes that God be God and subsequently loves him above all things.

This was the act by which man merited the *gratia infusa*. Once he purely loved God above all things he would be given the habit of grace and transferred into the state of grace. Once in this state, he could now merit eternal life through the performance of good works that God would accept as meritorious.

We have already seen that according to Aquinas man cannot merit the habit of grace, that is, he cannot love God from purely natural powers without the assistance of the *gratia gratis data*. However, was this also Biel's position?

iii. The Role of grace according to Gabriel Biel

Gabriel Biel, like Aquinas, granted that since the fall into sin man's will and reason have been darkened. He is in a diseased condition and original sin has hampered his ability to follow

⁵⁰ "In a natural culmination man ascends from self-love—*amor amicitie sui*—to a love of everything that is to his advantage—*amor concupiscentie*—which includes God as the highest good. From the fact that God is good *for him*, man concludes that God is good *as such*, and man thus ascends from possessive love, *amor concupiscentie*, to pure love, *amor amicitie*, for God." Oberman, *Harvest*, 134.

the dictates of right reason. Also like Aquinas, Biel places the gift of the habit of grace as the centerpiece of his doctrine of justification. However, it remains to be seen in what way Biel's teaching differed from that of Aquinas.

Concerning Biel's position on justification Oberman observes that "a mere acceptance or non-imputation is not sufficient for man's beatification. Man's wounded nature also has to be healed...so that it elicit the meritorious acts required for his acceptance by God."⁵¹ From this observation of Oberman it is clear that Biel is working off of the same scholastic framework as Aquinas. In his fallen state man must strive to produce an act of pure love for God, so that he can in turn merit the *gratia gratum faciens*. This habit of grace then 'heals' his wounded nature and allows him to merit his own salvation through God-pleasing works.

However, in Biel there is an emphasis that we don't find in Aquinas. It is this very emphasis that has caused the charge of semi-pelagianism to be levied against late medieval nominalism's doctrine of justification. The issue is this: Biel's view of fallen man's natural capacities is much higher than Aquinas. This is true especially of spiritual matters. Whereas Aquinas very definitively maintained that man cannot merit the habit of grace on his own, Biel seems to posit this very thing. In order to fully understand this, Biel's use of the term *concursum generalis dei* needs to be made clear.

As used by Aquinas, this word was a general label that referred to the overall cooperation of God as the first cause. It basically means that any action or movement done by the individuals of this world (secondary causes) only happens because God (the first cause) cooperates with that action or movement. This concept is also often termed the *influentia generalis*—the general influence or general concurrence of God. It is therefore evident that in the Thomistic system the *concursum generalis* is nothing more than a blanket term that covers all the actions of this world, regardless of whether the action is a good act or not. It is the scholastic ways of speaking about God's preservation of the laws he set in place at creation.

The difference in Biel is that he places this as the *preparatory grace* which aids man in producing an act of love for God. Whereas Aquinas specifically denied that fallen man can produce this act without the aid of special preparatory grace,⁵² Biel simply identifies this preparatory grace as the *concursum generalis*.

⁵¹ Ibid., 128.

⁵² Cf. footnote 45, p 18.

This is not immediately evident from his writings. In fact Biel specifically states that the *gratia gratis data* is the necessary component of the man's *facere quod in te est*.⁵³ Without it man is not able to merit the habit of grace. However, when Biel then identifies the *gratia gratis data* it becomes apparent that he's really talking about the *concursum dei*.⁵⁴

This is therefore the major difference between Aquinas and Biel when it comes to the doctrine of justification: both of them agree that man must do his very best, that is, produce an act of pure love for God in order to merit the gift of infused grace (*gratia gratum faciens*). Both of them also agree that in order for man to do his very best he must be aided by a gift of preparatory grace (*gratia gratis data*). However, Aquinas is referring to a special gift of created grace that God gives to help man complete the act of pure love. Biel, on the other hand is merely has in mind the *concursum generalis*—something which is true of every action man produces.

This is why the charge of semi-pelagianism has been levied against the teaching of justification in nominalism. While Biel is certainly working within the *facere quod in se est* paradigm of Aquinas, it is evident that he is only paying lip service to the concept of preparatory grace.⁵⁵ The natural capabilities of fallen man to cooperate in his salvation are expanded in nominalism far more than they were in Thomism.⁵⁶ If man strives to act according to the dictates of right reason, he is able to produce the act of love for God and merit the infusion of grace that he needs to be saved.⁵⁷

Before concluding the discussion on justification in the nominalist system, Biel's teachings on the sacraments will be briefly outlined. This will help clarify Biel's position on man's natural capacities, since the sacraments are by nature practically applied to the Christian.

⁵³ "*Faciendo quod in se est non meretur primam gratiam que est gratia iustificans peccatorem de condigno, licet mereatur de congruo...nullum enim domun gratie gratis date commensurabile est gratie gratum facienti.*" Oberman, *Harvest*, 138.

⁵⁴ "One thing is clear: when the term *gratia gratis data* is used, it is thoroughly naturalized and barely indistinguishable from man's natural endowments." *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "So Biel's error (in interpreting Aquinas)...is to claim that, according to Thomas, the sinner can prepare himself for grace without any divine assistance beyond the *concursum generalis*." Farthing, *Aquinas and Biel*, 158.

⁵⁶ Farthing gives the following summary of Biel's treatment of Aquinas's doctrine of justification: "Even when Thomas's language is not ambiguous or obscure, Biel consistently exaggerates his claim for the competence of the unaided free will, and he consistently minimizes (or omits) Thomas's sense of the sinner's utter dependence on God's gracious initiative as a precondition for even the most minimal human movement toward God. What we must recognize here is something very close to a systematic distortion." Farthing, *Aquinas and Biel*, 159.

⁵⁷ "*Hoc tamen non est propter impotentiam liberi arbitrii absolute; posset enim actum dilectionis dei super Omnia elicere ex suis naturalibus etiam si gratia non infunderetur.*" Oberman, *Harvest*, 153.

C. *Meritum de congruo* and *de condigno*

In view of what has been said above concerning justification, it is not surprising that Biel also places human capabilities as the basis for the sacrament of penance. His stance is that even though man cannot perfectly fulfill the Law, he can sincerely repent of his shortcomings. For Biel, a true love of God *super omnia* is what leads to satisfactory contrition. Once one has this satisfactory contrition the sacrament of penance becomes efficacious for him.

But what does “efficacious” mean for Biel? In the discussion concerning justification so far, we have not mentioned the terms *meritum de congruo*⁵⁸ and *meritum de condigno*.⁵⁹ These terms are extremely important for the scholastic teaching on the process of salvation, especially in nominalism.

Briefly stated, every meritorious act which a human being produces is either meritorious *de congruo* or *de condigno*. What separates the two is exactly what separates *facere quod in te est* from works done with the habit of grace. Basically, *meritum de congruo* are those works which are not good enough to be meritorious but still merit divine grace. *Mertium de condigno* are those works which are good enough to be meritorious because of divine grace.

It is easier to make the difference between the two clear by once again looking at *facere quod in te est*. It has been shown that when Biel states that man must do his very best he means that man must produce an act of pure love for God. He must love God above all things for his own sake, that is, to wish that God be God. By doing this man merits the habit of grace. Then, once he is in this state of grace he can produce works that are meritorious for salvation. This is exactly the distinction between merit *de congruo* and *de condigno*. The thing that starts the whole process—the act of loving God above all things—is a good work *de congruo*: it is not good enough to be accepted by God towards salvation. However, it is good enough to move God to bestow the gift of infused grace. Once man has been infused with grace the good works he does are *de condigno*—they are now acceptable to God as meritorious for salvation.

It should be noted that Biel would emphasize both kinds of merit as only receiving their value because of the grace of God. On its own, no work of man is worthy of being divinely accepted. This goes back to Duns Scotus, who held that no finite work (no matter how virtuous)

⁵⁸ *Meritum de congruo* = “half merit”

⁵⁹ *Meritum de condigno* = “full merit”

can merit acceptance before the infinite God. Therefore, God must meet man half way. In his grace God has decided to accept works done *de congruo* as worthy of receiving the habit of grace. Also in his grace God has decided to accept works done in the habit of grace as *de condigno*, even though on their own they would be *de congruo*.

According to nominalism therefore, what is important in the sacrament of penance is not so much the terror of punishment for sin. This would be self-serving. What is important is that one is sorry for one's sins because he loves God purely and does not wish to do him injustice. By producing this love-based act of contrition the sacrament becomes efficacious: namely the absolution of the priest changes the *de congruo* act of contrition into a *meritum de condigno*. His previous sins are therefore off balanced by the act of penance which God has graciously accepted as meritorious towards salvation.

D. Summary of the nominalist system

The following is a brief summary of the steps of justification in nominalism. Breaking it down in this way will aid the reader in gaining a clear, overall picture of the process of salvation for the individual in nominalism.

1. Man's beginning state after the fall: he suffers from the effects of original sin. That is, he has lost original righteousness and his natural desire to choose good has been darkened (*fomes peccati*).
2. However, though they have been weakened, man's natural powers are still strong enough to follow the dictates of right reason to a certain point.
3. The highest dictate of right reason is to love that which is good for yourself and others.
4. The highest good for yourself and others is God.
5. Therefore, if one strives hard enough he can produce an act of pure love for God. This pure love consists of:
 - a. Loving God above all other things (*super omnia*)
 - b. Loving God because he is God (*velle deum esse d.eum*)
6. This act can be done by natural powers (*ex puris naturalibus*).

7. This act is a synonym for ‘doing what is in you’ (*facere quod in te est*). Once man has met the parameters of *facere quod in te est*; he has done enough to merit God’s grace (*gratia gratum faciens* or *gratia infusa*).
8. Now that he is in this ‘habit of grace’ his works—which on their own only have merit *de congruo*—are now accepted by God as having *meritum de condigno*.
9. If he commits venial sin the sacraments of penance and the Mass are able to again confer grace to him. That is, his performance of them are *de condigno* merits—provided he performs them with an act of pure love for God in his heart (*meritum de congruo*).
10. If he falls into mortal sin, then the entire process must be repeated. However, he now has the psychological aid of the sacraments to again produce his *facere quod in te est*.

E. The process of Justification according to the ‘two powers’

In expounding his doctrine of justification a nominalist such as Gabriel Biel could easily make two seemingly contradictory claims: First, he believes in salvation by grace alone. And second, he believes in salvation by works alone. This certainly does not make sense to the mind of a modern day confessional Lutheran. It would also not make sense to a fourteenth century Thomist—in Thomism good works and divine grace play cooperative roles in justification.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Mention has already been made of Roscellinus and his tritheistic view of the Trinity. Because of this, nominalism was always viewed with skepticism by the church authorities. Later, when Occam did come onto the scene he was excommunicated by Pope John XXII (though this was due more to political factors than theological ones). In any case, nominalism did not become academically viable during Occam’s lifetime; it was left to his followers to slowly bring the *via moderna* into the mainstream of later medieval theological thought. The following quote from Steven Ozment illustrates the differing points of emphasis between realism and nominalism when it came to the doctrine of justification. It also shows the different world view that nominalism held in relation to the church—which helps explain why it took so long for nominalism to gain an established position: “Such a point of view (realism) was more congenial to a high theological frame of mind than nominalism. It far better served the desire to make church doctrine rationally respectable and universally acceptable...A realist could understand how a universal could be in many places at one and the same time and better appreciate the doctrine of the Trinity—how three could be one and one could be three. Trinitarian speculation with nominalist presuppositions, on the other hand, ran the apparent danger of tritheism...A realist who assumed universality to be individual things could better appreciate the way “humanity” was incarnate, crucified, and resurrected in the one man Jesus. Nominalist presuppositions, by contrast, left one to view the universal significance of Christ’s life death and resurrection as simply the result of God’s decision to value it so highly.

The medieval church had an even more profound political stake in realism. Fourteenth-century church authority perceived in Occam’s thought a threat to the exclusive mediatorial role of the church. In a world where real relations existed between God and man, the church, as intermediary, held the dominant position. If nature and

The reason a nominalist could say this is because he's referring to the logical division between *de potentia ordinata* and *de potentia absoluta*. By using this distinction, the cause of salvation can be neatly divided into two categories.

First, salvation is by works alone. In a certain sense man is under a compulsion to be saved. This compulsion is the dictates of right reason. To ignore this dictate is to live a bestial life of pleasuring the senses. However, to the extent that man follows true reason he is more and more logically forced to love things that are good. Once he loves the highest good simply because it is the highest good he has officially done what is in him. Without these acts of natural man justification before God is impossible. In a sense then, justification is by works alone: man must perform an act of pure love for God. He has no excuse for not accomplishing this, since by nature he still has all the tools to do so.

But salvation can also be classified by grace alone. *De potentia absoluta* God does need to accept any of man's works—even works that have *de condigno* merit. In his absolute will God was free to choose any method of salvation he desired. In fact, he could have chosen to damn the entire human race. The reason that a method of salvation exists at all is due solely to the gracious will of God. The fact that God accepts man's *facere quod in te est* attempts and rewards him with infused grace, the fact that he accepts as meritorious works done in infused grace—all this happens simply because *de potentia ordinata* God has bound himself to do so. He has wished to do this. Therefore, when a nominalist asserts that his doctrine of justification can be characterized as “by grace alone” theology he is not being untruthful. He is simply speaking from a *de potentia absoluta* standpoint.

III. Nominalism and Luther

A. Analysis of the Disputation Against Scholasticism

supernature were bound together in such a way that nature's end was necessarily a supernatural end, and if the church's sacraments and revelation were the indispensable links between nature and supernature, then the medieval church, standing between man and God, nature and nature's end, had a very basic claim on the people and the temporal world. It was precisely such an assumption that underlay papal claims to temporal power.” Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 62.

As stated before, there can be no doubt that Luther began his theological career as a nominalist. He himself admitted as much.⁶¹ When Luther began at the University of Erfurt in 1501, he was entering a university that had produced a decidedly nominalist outlook. While there, Luther came under the influence of two prominent nominalists: Bartholomaeus Arnoldi von Usingen and Jodokus Trutfetter. These two men had taken steps to bring nominalism into a unified system and a “cohesive core.”⁶²

It is interesting to note that right before the Disputation of 1517 Luther had one of his friends deliver a letter to Trutfetter. Luther was letting his old professor know that he was about to break away from the nominalist system. But what was he breaking from? Nominalism as a whole; or just parts of its teachings?

We now turn to the disputation itself. Since we have gone through the nominalist system of justification, the wording of some of Luther’s theses becomes much clearer. By listing some of the theses themselves we can see precisely what part of the nominalist program Luther was rejecting.

Thesis 5: “It is false to state that man’s inclination (of the will) is freely capable in opposite directions. Indeed, it is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.”

Thesis 6: “It is false to state that the will is able by nature to conform itself to the dictates of right reason. Against Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel.”

Thesis 7: “But by necessity, without the grace of God, it elicits a deformed and evil act.”

Thesis 10: “It must be conceded that the will is not free to strive itself toward whatever is good according to reason. Against Scotus and Gabriel.”

Thesis 11: “Nor is it able to will or not to will what is prescribed.”

Luther wasn’t just naming Biel; he was calling him out and directly attacking his notion of fallen man’s natural powers. The first major issue that Luther deals with is the power of the human will in fallen man.

⁶¹ He called Occam “my master” (*magister meus Occam*). (WA 39, Band 1, 420)

⁶² Both were members of the Arts faculty and had held a disputation in 1497. Cf. Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Yale: Yale University Press, 1989), 118.

We can see that Luther is consciously breaking with nominalism for a number of reasons. First, his attack begins in Thesis 5 with an explicit negative: the will cannot go both ways. When the nominalist position on original sin was discussed above, it was noted that the concupiscence of the will was mainly due to the disparate constitution of man. When man fell into sin he lost the ‘stabilizer’ of original righteousness. Because of this, concupiscence does hinder the will, however the will is still capable of choosing what is good and acting on it. Luther completely rejects this opinion. The will cannot choose one of two opposites, that is, either good or evil. It is captive to evil. What Luther then chooses to call false in thesis 6 is also very telling: he uses the exact phraseology of Biel. The will cannot conform to what is good (5 and 10), that is, it cannot conform to the *dictamini recto naturaliter* (6).

It is therefore evident that already in 1517 Luther rejected the nominalist position on original sin and man’s condition after the fall. Luther then continues by addressing the particular aspects of the nominalist *facere quod in te est*.

Thesis 13: “It is absurd to conclude that erring man can love the creature above all things, therefore also God. Against Scotus and Gabriel.”

Thesis 14: “Nor is it surprising that the will can conform itself to erroneous and to not to correct precept.”

Thesis 15: “Indeed, it is peculiar to it that it can only conform to erroneous and not to correct precept.”

Thesis 16: “One ought rather to conclude: since erring man is able to love the creature it is impossible for him to love God.”

Thesis 17: “Man is unable by nature to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.”

Thesis 18: “To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were. Against common opinion.”

Thesis 33: “And this is false, that doing all that one is able to do can remove the obstacles to grace. Against several.”

In these theses Luther was really overturning the entire nominalist system of how a sinner is justified before God. His earlier denial of fallen man’s natural capabilities now leads him to a

denial of man's ability to love God *super omnia*. For nominalism, this is the one capability that natural man **must have**. Their entire system of justification depends on it. If it falls, so does everything else.

The fact that already in 1517 Luther was willing to reject the proposition *velle deum esse deum* as the centerpiece of justification shows how far he had come since Erfurt. It also sheds massive light on the state of his mind when he stood with a hammer in his hand on October 31, 1517. The historical reality is that by the time Luther wrote the 95 theses he had already rejected the *facere quod in te est* of Scholasticism—and he was fully **conscious** of this fact.

What had brought him to this point was his own inner struggles. The question of whether or not he truly loved God had deeply disturbed him. It is easy to see why, given the nominalist context he had been in at the University of Erfurt. It is not mere coincidence that Luther speaks of his inner struggles as starting in his university years. It was here that he was taught *velle deum esse deum* as the heart and core of *facere quod in te est*. For young Martin the question of whether he truly loved God was not some abstract measuring stick for personal Christian ethics. Failing this question was not just another sin. It was *the* sin. The salvation of his soul depended on the answer. The entire cathedral of the nominalist view of salvation was built upon this crux: do I love God? Have I truly produced a pure act of love for my God?

What brought Luther to reject this love of God *super omnia* was the personal realization that not only had he not done it, but he couldn't do it. On top of this, no one else could do it. It was completely beyond man's natural powers. This is borne out by thesis 16. Luther's statement here is a complete reversal of the Aristotelian based argument that man could, by natural means, arrive at a pure love God. Luther takes that argument and turns it on its head: since man loves the creature, that is, the created things of this world including himself, he unable to sever himself from this kind of love and ascend to a love of God. Man's love is naturally selfish and brings self-based results. Luther shows this in Thesis 17: man wants to be God himself, for he reasons that this would bring himself the most benefit.

Luther had already rejected the *facere quod in te est*. He was also questioning the validity of merits done with the habit of grace—the habit that *facere quod in te est* merited.

Thesis 90: “The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the will, lest it err even in loving God. Against Gabriel.”

Thesis 91: “It is not given so that good deed might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed. Against Gabriel.”

Thesis 95: To love God is at the same time to hate oneself and to know nothing but God.”

At his point Luther was still struggling with the concept of divine grace. But he was already doubting the *gratia infusa* as it had been taught to him. Thesis 90 and 91 are important because of what they are implying. The nominalist position that a true act of love is what begins the process of justification was completely erroneous from Luther’s standpoint. The will needs the grace of God otherwise it cannot love him as it should.

When thesis 95 is taken in conjunction with thesis 90 Luther’s line of argument becomes clear: the true love of God means to despise the love of oneself. It must be assumed that those who have the habit of grace have a true love of God. If they have a true love of God, then they despise the love of themselves. According to Biel however, in order to merit the habit of grace in the first place they must have committed an act of love for God. The problem with this is that without the aid of divine grace, their only starting point for loving God was their love of themselves. This is self-contradictory. All of this is erroneous to Luther, to him it is a classic case of someone putting ‘the cart before the horse.’

This is admittedly a very brief analysis of the disputation of 1517. Still, one can see that throughout the 97 theses one thing is abundantly clear: Luther was very consciously breaking with the nominalist doctrine of justification. He rejects the nominalist positions on original sin, the natural abilities of man, and the effects of divine grace. He completely parts company with the *velle deum esse deum* and the *facere quod in te est*; both of which lay at the heart of scholastic nominalism.

B. A new understanding of grace

By 1520 Luther had arrived at his position of how man is justified before God—a position he maintained the rest of his life. By searching the Scriptures he came to a new understanding of what the grace of God is. It is not a grace which justifies man through himself, but rather a grace which justifies man outside of himself. To Luther it was no longer a habit, a *gratia gratum faciens* that God bestows upon the worthy and thereby they can earn salvation. No, the grace of God is his love for us. It was the grace of God that caused him to send his one

and only Son to die for the sins of the world. It is the grace of God which pours the blood of Christ onto us at Baptism; it is the grace of God which washes us in that blood and cleanses us from every sin. For Luther, the grace of God shows itself in the merit of Christ: the merit of Christ is always and perfectly *meritum de condigno*, and it is mine.

Through faith we lay hold of this merit of Christ. Luther's position on salvation through grace by faith—as well as his rejection of the nominalist system and its notions of grace—can best be shown from his own words:

Here you have the true meaning of justification described, together with an example of the certainty of faith. “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”—anyone who could say these words with Paul in a certain and constant faith would be truly blessed. With these very words Paul completely abrogates and removes the righteousness of the Law and of works; as we shall point out later. Therefore these words must be diligently pondered: ‘The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me.’ It was not I who loved the Son of God and gave myself for Him, as the sophists pretend that they love the Son of God and give themselves for him. For they teach that purely by his natural endowments a man is able to perform the ‘merit of congruity’ and to love God and Christ above all things. They anticipate the love of God and of Christ by doing what lies within them... thus they dream that they give themselves for Christ. They turn the words of Paul upside down and read them this way: ‘We have loved Christ and given ourselves for him.’ But while these wicked men, inflated with the mind of their own flesh, dream and imagine that they are doing what lies within them, loving God and giving themselves for Christ, they actually abolish the Gospel, ridicule, deny, blaspheme, spit upon, and tread Christ underfoot. In words they confess that He is the Justifier and the Savior; but in fact they deprive him of the power either to justify or to save, and they attribute this to their self-chosen acts of worship. This is not living by faith in the Son of God; it is living by one's own righteousness and works.

Therefore the true way of being justified is not that you begin ‘to do what lies within you’; that is the phraseology they use. ‘If a man,’ they say, ‘does what lies within him, God infallibly gives him grace.’ That proposition is extremely important. In fact, it is an article of faith among the sophists... In other words, it is enough that someone acts, fasts, etc., in a way that would be said to be good according to the judgment of a good man. Then grace would certainly follow, not by the merit of congruity itself but by the infallibility of God, who is so good and just that He cannot help granting grace in exchange for something good. And this was the origin of the little verse:

***Gott fordert nicht von einem Man,
Das er mehr thun soll denn er kann.***

This is actually a good statement, but in its proper place, that is, in political, domestic, and natural affairs... For this realm has boundaries, and to this realm

these statements like ‘to do what lies within one’ or ‘to do as much as I can’ properly apply. But the sophists drag these statements into the spiritual realm, where a man cannot do anything but sin...

(But) These words, ‘the Son of God,’ ‘he loved me,’ and ‘he gave himself for me,’ are sheer thunder and heavenly fire against the righteousness of the Law and the doctrine of works.⁶³

C. The means of grace

Faith lays hold of Christ’s perfect merit: salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. But how does one come to faith? How does one receive this grace of God that freely justifies? For Luther, the answer was just this: God grants his gifts of saving grace and justifying faith through the means of grace. Through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament God creates and sustains saving faith in human beings.

This view on the means of grace (how God imparts grace) is a major aspect that separated Luther from the other figures of the Reformation.⁶⁴ This is especially true of his theological relationship with Ulrich Zwingli, John Oecolampadius, and Martin Bucer. The controversy concerning the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper exposed some of the fundamental principles that divided Luther from the Sacramentarians.

Zwingli and his adherents maintained that the bread and wine merely represented Christ’s body and blood. In truth, his body and blood were absent from the Supper because he now sits at the right hand of God. One of the main reasons for this position was Zwingli’s belief that God’s grace (his saving activity) is not found in outward things. He based this assumption on the omnipotence of God. According to Zwingli, since God is almighty he has no need to work through outward, visible signs and forms. He gives his grace to people immediately—the Word and Sacraments are mere symbols of divine grace which is already immediately present among God’s people.

⁶³ LW, 26, 173-175.

⁶⁴ “And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants his Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may thus be protected against the enthusiasts...who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure.” F. Bente ed., *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 495.

Luther rejected this teaching. He believed, according to the words of institution, that Christ's body and blood were truly, essentially present in and with the bread and wine. One of his main reasons for doing this was his emphasis on the efficacy of the means of grace: they impart the very divine grace that they signify. God is indeed omnipotent; he could easily work immediately and without material means. However, what God could do is irrelevant; the fact is that he has freely chosen to bind himself to the outward means.⁶⁵ The prime example of this is the Word and the Sacraments.

This is an extremely interesting point when trying to establish a connection between the mature theology of Luther and nominalism. We have already seen that Luther completely rejected the doctrine of justification as it had been presented in the nominalist system. However, that doesn't mean that he abandoned everything he learned at Erfurt.

The distinction between the two powers of God—*absoluta* and *ordinata*—was the foundational principle for the entire nominalist system of theology. Its impact on Biel's doctrine of justification has already been shown. But this logical distinction served a very important function in nominalism—a function that the previous era of scholastic realism was without. Simply stated, the distinction between the 'two powers' was meant to be a safeguard: it was supposed to place theological questions in the arena of the Scriptures and Church tradition and keep them out of the arena of first article speculation.⁶⁶ When finite man tries to discuss infinite concepts, such as divine omnipotence, he is at the immediate disadvantage of having no idea what he's talking about. It is simply impossible for human beings to have firsthand knowledge of concepts like omnipotence or infinity. Therefore, the nominalist distinction was meant to drive such discussions

⁶⁵ "Of course, on the subject that outward things are of no avail, I wrote carefully against Dr. Carlstadt to explain the proper distinction: outward things apart from God's Word are of no avail, such as the pope's laws. But outward things connected with God's Word are salvation and blessedness, because they inhere in the Word and bind our faith...the devil along with his fanatics, however, so hates the Word that he always seeks to sever it from outward things, but God seeks to keep these unsevered, and connects them to each other. What we say, that here we have something not merely outward but connected with the word, 'this is my body,' they do not hear, but rage past it like madmen, crying, 'outward things are of no avail, outward things are of no avail!'"

I should like to know, however, where they get the idea that there is a God, that God's Son is man, that one must believe, and all the other articles of our faith, which of course have never occurred to reason. Did they get these things from the Spirit before they physically and outwardly hear or read them? Here they must say No, I know full well, for they got them through the material, outward Word and Scripture. Then how can this outward Word, through which the Holy Spirit is given with all his gifts, be of no avail?" (LW, 37, 136-137)

⁶⁶ That is, God's absolute omnipotence and freedom considered abstractly.

toward the certainty of what God *has done* (*potentia ordinata*), instead of what he *could* do (*potentia absoluta*).

In Luther, this distinction has matured into a decidedly biblical view of theology. There is only one source for certain and true knowledge of God. This is only one place to go for definite answers about God—His Word. In a general way, one could equate the distinction between the two powers with Luther’s later distinction between God *hidden* and God *revealed*. But it is even more than this. For Luther, **the Scriptures are the one true *potentia ordinata*** that man has whereby he can seek certain knowledge about his creator. Even the world and the natural knowledge man derives from the world cannot give him what Scripture gives.⁶⁷

Luther’s emphasis on the means of grace is therefore twofold: they are the only source of completely true and always certain knowledge about God, and they are the only means through which God imparts saving grace to fallen mankind. Only the Gospel can create saving faith, only the Gospel can impart grace. Only the Gospel, given through the outward means of Word and Sacrament, can give man true knowledge about how much God loves him and what God has done for him. Whereas in nominalism the emphasis of *de potentia ordinata* was that God had bound himself to give grace to those who do their very best, in Luther the main point is that God has bound himself to the means of grace.⁶⁸

D. Luther: radical nominalist or star crossed heretic?

As the historical record shows, Luther continued his break with Scholasticism. The spark of the disputation turned into the flame of the 95 theses. That flame in turn became a raging fire

⁶⁷ For without the Word, human reason will always yield incorrect conclusions concerning God and his grace toward man. “From the fact that all men hold this major premise, ‘There is a God,’ all idolatry is born. Without a knowledge of God there would have been no idolatry in the world.” Again, “so reason plays the part of a blind cow with God and makes nothing but mistakes. It always misses the mark and gives the name of God to that which is not God.” As quoted in Seibert Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), 53.

⁶⁸ “Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through the material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly, he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. *God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward*. For he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him, as he says in Luke 16.” (LW, 40, 146, emphasis mine)

after Worms; a fire that couldn't be put out. Some claimed (and still claim) that this fire was a spiritual necessity. This fire purged the church of her errors. Others claim that this fire was accidental; nominalism taken to the extreme. Still others claim that this fire was inevitable—the excesses of the nominalist view of man made Luther a historical necessity.

In his introduction to the *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, Dr. Oberman summarizes the current state of affairs in medieval scholarship concerning Luther. He lists three different opinions as to how the connection between Luther and Scholasticism is viewed:

- 1) Luther broke with the whole scholastic tradition, and went straight back to the “tradition of St. Paul and St. Augustine.”
- 2) Thomas Aquinas was the apex of medieval thought, and after him Scholasticism went into decay. Luther, therefore, was not a heretic by choice—he just had the misfortune of being trained in nominalism.
- 3) Nominalism was in fact orthodox according to the Catholic tradition; Luther just took it to an unorthodox position because he interpreted it the wrong way.⁶⁹

Therefore, with regard to these last two views, either the cause of the Lutheran “heresy” should be placed between Thomas and Scotus, or somewhere between Biel and Luther.⁷⁰

The second view is what interests us here. Historically, the strongest advocate of this position was Henry Denifle⁷¹ (1844-1905).⁷² He placed Luther solidly as a heretic brought up in a heretical system. Nominalism represents the decay of medieval thought, and in Luther this decay flowered into flow blown apostasy.

It's important to realize that Denifle's entire position rests on one very important assumption: Luther had to be *ignorant of pure Thomism*. He must have only ever been able to view Thomism through the lens of nominalism. Therefore, when Luther mentions *omnes Scholasticum* in the disputation of 1517, he really only means the nominalists—because those were the only Scholastics he knew. If he would have had access to pure Thomism he wouldn't have become a heretic, because what he really reacted against was the semi-pelagianism of the nominalists.

⁶⁹ Cf. Oberman, *Harvest*, intro, p. 1-2.

⁷⁰ “While the Thomistic school locates the break in the medieval catholic tradition somewhere between Aquinas and Scotus, this third school searches for the decisive rupture somewhere between Biel and Luther.” Ibid, 2.

⁷¹ His major work on this subject was “Luther and Lutherdom, from Original Sources.” The entire text can be found online at the Cornell University Library //archive.org/stream.

⁷² Other advocates of this position include Louis Bouyer, Joseph Lortz, and Willem van de Pol.

i. Luther and Aquinas

It is obvious that this entire position is based on the assertion of Luther's 'Thomistic ignorance', and that therefore Luther's theology was and remained a nominalist theology (that reacted to mainline nominalist theology).⁷³ If it is proven that this is not the case, then the entire argument of Denifle is overthrown.

First of all, the insistence of naming Luther's theology as intrinsically nominalist, despite the fact that it broke from mainline nominalism, is problematic. Not only does it seemingly ignore the Reformer's mature positions on justification, the sacraments, the Person of Christ, natural knowledge, et al., but it ignores what Luther himself clearly stated. It has already been pointed out that Luther specifically named Biel thirteen times in his disputation of 1517. In addition to this, he also called out Occam and Peter D'ailly⁷⁴. It seems odd to claim that Luther was inherently nominalist when already in 1517 he's ready to blatantly reject the three most famous nominalists of his time.⁷⁵

In the second place, the claim that Luther's heretical theology on justification resulted from an ignorance of Thomism is based on certain historical presuppositions. First, it presupposes that Aquinas 'got it right.' Second (and more importantly) it assumes that Luther's major problem with the nominalist *facere quod in te est* was merely a matter of emphasis. In their presentation of 'do what is in you' Occam and Biel stressed the ability of man to the point of leaving out the importance of divine grace. Aquinas did the opposite, and placed the beginnings of the *facere quod in te est* in God's gift of grace. The argument goes that if Luther would have had access to this Thomist position on justification he would have been satisfied and subsequently remained a loyal Catholic the rest of his life.

But was Luther completely ignorant of Aquinas? Was his ignorance of not only Thomism, but the entire early medieval tradition so great that he knew only nominalism, attacked only nominalism and broke from only nominalism? It does not seem so.

⁷³ Cf. Leif Grane's dissertation "*Contra Gabrielem*." Dr. Oberman summarizes Grane's opinion on this point: "If Grane's procedure is justified, we have here another indication that, whereas Luther thought he opposed the medieval tradition, he actually attacked only the nominalistic tradition." (Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 104)

⁷⁴ Peter D'ailly was (1351-1420) was a French theologian who later became the Cardinal of Cambrai.

⁷⁵ Karl Holl draws attention to this fact: "While Luther expressly indicated that he was alluding to Occam in this thesis (57), he was still unable to prevent Denifle and others from maintaining that his doctrine of justification was Occamist." Cited by Paul Vignaux, "On Luther and Ockham," in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 108.

For starters, Dr. Oberman points to a passage found in the Preface to the second Disputation against the Antinomians. Here it is very obvious that Luther places the early Scholastics and the later Occamists into two different groups. He says: “Thus, under the name of the church and of Christ, they themselves became Pelagians, to say nothing of the fact that immediately afterwards they became even worse. For Occam and the Moderns, as they are called, infamously teach that reason without the Holy Spirit is able to love God above all things, and that Christ has merited only the first grace.”⁷⁶ Luther considers the followers of Occam to be worse than the ones that came before them, i.e. the Scholastics from Lombard to Aquinas.

However, there is an even clearer passage in Luther’s great work *On the Bondage of the Will*. He states, “For it is well known that even the Schoolmen, with the exception of the Scotists and the Moderns, affirm that man cannot love God with all his heart.”⁷⁷ By looking at the context of this statement, it becomes certain what Luther meant.

Erasmus had defined free choice as “a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.”⁷⁸ He then lists an abundance of imperatives from Scripture, reasoning that God would not give man a command he has no hope of fulfilling. Luther answers with a twofold response. First, he maintains that an imperative is not an indicative (just because we are told to do something doesn’t mean that we can) and second, God specifically gave us these commands to show us that we can’t fulfill them on our own. To say that the human will can start to fulfill the commandments of God on its own is tantamount to saying that it can please God without divine grace. What Luther means to do with the statement quoted above about the Scholastics is to give Erasmus a direct jab: even the Scholastics didn’t go as far in their statements about free will as Erasmus is going—except for the Scotists and the Moderns.

This statement is incredibly important because it conclusively proves that Denifle’s assertion of ‘Thomistic ignorance’ is completely unfounded. Luther was fully aware of the differences between Aquinas and Biel when it came to the role of divine grace in the *facere quod in te est*. He knew that the nominalists had placed a greater emphasis on man’s natural powers than the earlier Scholastics.

⁷⁶ “*Ita sub nomine Ecclesiae et Christi ipsissimi Pelagiani fuereunt, ut taceam, quod postea subinde peiores facti sunt. Occam enim et moderni, ut vocantur, sceleste docent, quod ratiosine Spiritu sancto possit Deum super omnia diligere, et quod Christus tantum meruerit primam gratiam.*” (WA, 39 p. 419-420; translation mine)

⁷⁷ LW 33, 134.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

The objection may be raised that Luther doesn't specifically name Aquinas in the two passages listed above. This is true. It must also be admitted that in general Luther's contact with the writings of Aquinas was sparse. He certainly was nowhere near as familiar with Thomas as he was with Biel and Occam. However, this isn't the issue. Denifle wasn't trying to prove a *general* ignorance of Aquinas on Luther's part. He had a very specific goal: Luther was ignorant of Aquinas' views on grace and merit and therefore mistakenly assumed the nominalist position represented all of Scholasticism. That's why he broke with Rome. If only Luther had met 'Apex Aquinas'⁷⁹ he would've been fine.

The two statements quoted above (especially the one from *The Bondage of the Will*) demonstrably prove that this is false. Luther knew full well that the nominalists differed from the earlier Scholastics in general—and therefore he never equated nominalism as representative of all of Scholasticism. He also knew that the nominalists differed from the early Scholastics *specifically* in the area of grace's role in man striving to do what is in him. Men like Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Peter Lombard had stressed the role of grace in man's salvation more than Occam and Biel did.

Luther knew this full well—and that didn't stop him from rejecting both parties.

IV. Conclusion

The debate between realism and nominalism left an indelible mark on medieval church history. It occupied and divided the greatest thinkers of the age for centuries. Each of the great "systems" of the Scholastics had either a realist or a nominalist epistemological presupposition as its foundation.

By the time of the Reformation, nominalism was 'in vogue' throughout many of the universities of Europe. This included the university of Erfurt, where a young Martin Luther began his studies. There Luther became a nominalist, as he himself later admitted. But what was his connection to nominalism? Did he just re-hash it? Was it misleading for him to claim that his theology was *sola Scriptura*?

⁷⁹ It has already been pointed out (cf. footnote 7) that Aquinas didn't become the preeminent theologian of the Roman Catholic Church overnight. It was a steady process, and Thomism first had to overcome Scotism and Occamism. But in light of what has been discussed in this paper, one wonders: Why did Thomism win out? Why, already in 1567, was Aquinas elevated while Scotus and Occam were relegated to the sidelines? What was the catalyst that suddenly drove Thomas to the front after 200 years? This question definitely needs more research. But even here one wonders: **was it because Luther showed up** and demonstrated how grossly Pelagian the Catholic Church had become?

A strict dividing line can be drawn between the areas where Luther was, and where he wasn't influenced by the nominalist system. As shown above, Luther (already as early as 1517) completely rejected the nominalist views on divine grace, good works, the *facere quod in te est*, the grace conferred by the Sacraments, the *ex opere operato* nature of the Sacraments, and the distinction between merits *de congruo* and *de condigno*. In short, Luther rejected the entire nominalist system of salvation, among other things.⁸⁰

However, in many ways nominalism did have a profound effect on Luther's thought. The distinction between the 'two powers' of God was particularly important. In the realist outlook, the entire world was an interconnected web of real relationships that naturally led upward to God. This showed the omniscient intellect of the creator, and also allowed man's intellect to draw valid theological conclusions from the world around him. It was a nice, tight intellectual system. When nominalism came along, it did away with this system and replaced it with one of its own: the distinction between God's ordained power and his absolute power. Now the will took primacy, not the intellect. What God wills to do is important, not how or why he does it. The nominalists directed people away from logical deductions taken from the natural world and instead directed them to sources of knowledge God has ordained for theology: the Authority of the Church and the Sacred Scriptures.

When Luther did break with Rome, he did so because the only source ordained by God for certainty in theology—His Word—was being opposed by the rest of the world. For the rest of his life, Luther maintained that the Scriptures were the only authority for Christian doctrine and life. These Scriptures were God's true "ordained power". Here man could find God's true Word. The Bible and the Sacraments of Lord's Supper and Baptism were the only 'means of grace'—the only means of salvation, the only means of the certainty of salvation, the only means through which God freely gave his saving grace to mankind.

Again, Luther maintained this because he realized that God willed it to be so. God wants man to seek him in his Word. God has freely and graciously "bound himself" to the outward Word and Sacrament. Luther placed his whole confidence in the Word, for there he found God's true saving grace: his one and only Son. Once Luther realized that the blood of Jesus is all a Christian will ever need, he saw the whole of the *facere quod in te est* system as a complete fable

⁸⁰ Such as the relationship between the two natures of Christ, the worship of the Virgin Mary and the authority of the Pope and Council decrees.

and totally rejected it. And this, by the way, is exactly why the idea of a “Thomistic ignorance” in relation to man’s salvation has no validity whatsoever. Luther knew that Aquinas had placed divine grace as the starting point of man’s process of salvation, just as he knew that Biel thought man could get the ball rolling from ‘purely natural powers.’ He was fully aware that grace played a bigger role in the Thomistic doctrine of justification than in nominalism—he just didn’t care. Arguing about where and when God gives grace to assist man in performing good works for his own justification is pointless. Man doesn’t merit salvation **at all**. Instead, God bestows salvation on him as a free gift for the sake of Jesus Christ.

So, in conclusion, was it fair for Luther to characterize his theology as a *sola Scriptura* theology? Yes it was. Luther certainly did benefit from the concepts and terms used by the nominalist distinction between speaking *de potentia ordinata* and *de potentia absoluta* concerning God’s acts. Nominalism’s emphasis on the will over the intellect shows up in Luther’s treatment of the means of grace again and again. His emphasis on human reason’s inability to come to correct conclusions concerning God, as well as his division between God hidden and God revealed all point back to the distinction between the two powers of nominalism. However, for Luther the fact that Scripture alone was the one, true ‘ordained power’ governed his entire theological outlook.

Our God is a God of history. He guides all things and events for the good of his church. For over five centuries the cathedral of the scholastic system was constructed; with realism, nominalism, Augustinianism, Aristotelianism and other movements incorporated here and there on its huge edifice. Then, towards the end of its construction, one development was produced: the distinction between *de potentia absoluta* and *de potentia ordinata*. It is a special case of Divine irony that God took this seed and, using the circumstance and context of the time, planted it in the mind of a young monk. God then made that monk his own through his Word and turned him into his instrument—an instrument he used to bring the whole thing crashing down.

Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death and pains of hell which are his bride’s. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died,

and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, his life stronger than death, his salvation more invincible than hell. Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life and salvation of Christ its bridegroom... In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice.

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, "If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his."⁸¹

⁸¹ LW, 31, 351-352.

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Appendix

Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517)⁸²

1. To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere. This is contrary to common knowledge.
2. This is the same as permitting Pelagians and all heretics to triumph, indeed, the same as conceding victory to them.
3. It is the same as making sport of the authority of all doctors of theology.
4. It is therefore true that man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil (cf. Matt 7,17-18).
5. It is false to state that man's inclination is free to choose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.
6. It is false to state that the will can by nature conform to correct precept. This is said in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.
7. As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil.
8. It does not, however, follow that the will is by nature evil, that is, essentially evil, as the Manicheans maintain.
9. It is nevertheless innately and inevitably evil and corrupt.
10. One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.
11. Nor is it able to will or not to will whatever is prescribed.
12. Nor does one contradict St. Augustine when one says that nothing is so much in the power of the will as the will itself.
13. It is absurd to conclude that erring man can love the creature above all things, therefore also God. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.
14. Nor is it surprising that the will can conform to erroneous and not to correct precept.
15. Indeed, it is peculiar to it that it can only conform to erroneous and not to correct precept.
16. One ought rather to conclude: since erring man is able to love the creature it is impossible for him to love God.
17. Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.

⁸² LW, 31, 9-16.

18. To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were. This is contrary to common teaching.
19. Nor can we apply the reasoning of Scotus concerning the brave citizen who loves his country more than himself.
20. An act of friendship is done, not according to nature, but according to prevenient grace. This is in opposition to Gabriel.
21. No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.
22. Every act of concupiscence against God is evil and a fornication of the spirit.
23. Nor is it true that an act of concupiscence can be set aright by the virtue of hope. This is in opposition to Gabriel.
24. For hope is not contrary to charity, which seeks and desires only that which is of God.
25. Hope does not grow out of merits, but out of suffering which destroys merits. This is in opposition to the opinion of many.
26. An act of friendship is not the most perfect means for accomplishing that which is in one. Nor is it the most perfect means for obtaining the grace of God or turning toward and approaching God.
27. But it is an act of conversion already perfected, following grace both in time and by nature.
28. If it is said of the Scripture passages, "Return to me, . . . and I will return to you" (Zech. 1,3), "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (Jas 4,8), "Seek and you will find" (Matt. 7,7), "You will seek me and find me" (Jer. 29,13), and the like, that one is by nature, the other by grace, this is no different from asserting what the Pelagians have said.
29. The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole disposition toward grace is the eternal election and predestination of God.
30. On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except indisposition and even rebellion against grace.
31. It is said with the idlest demonstrations that the predestined can be damned individually but not collectively. This is in opposition to the scholastics.
32. Moreover, nothing is achieved by the following saying: Predestination is necessary by virtue of the consequence of God's willing, but not of what actually followed, namely, that God had to elect a certain person.
33. And this is false, that doing all that one is able to do can remove the obstacles to grace. This is in opposition to several authorities.
34. In brief, man by nature has neither correct precept nor good will.

35. It is not true that an invincible ignorance excuses one completely (all scholastics notwithstanding);
36. For ignorance of God and oneself and good works is by nature always invincible.
37. Nature, moreover, inwardly and necessarily glories and takes pride in every work which is apparently and outwardly good.
38. There is no moral virtue without either pride or sorrow, that is, without sin.
39. We are never lords of our actions, but servants. This is in opposition to the philosophers.
40. We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds. This in opposition to the philosophers.
41. Virtually the entire Ethics of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This is in opposition to the scholastics.
42. It is an error to maintain that Aristotle's statement concerning happiness does not contradict Catholic doctrine. This is in opposition to the doctrine on morals.
43. It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle. This is in opposition to common opinion.
44. Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle.
45. To state that a theologian who is not a logician is a monstrous heretic—this is a monstrous and heretical statement. This is in opposition to common opinion.
46. In vain does one fashion a logic of faith, a substitution brought about without regard for limit and measure. This is in opposition to the new dialecticians.
47. No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms. This is in opposition to the Cardinal (Pierre d'Ailly).
48. Nevertheless it does not for that reason follow that the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts syllogistic forms. This is in opposition to the same new dialecticians and to the Cardinal.
49. If a syllogistic form of reasoning holds in divine matters, then a doctrine of the trinity is demonstrable and not the object of faith.
50. Briefly, the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light. This is in opposition to the scholastics.
51. It is very doubtful whether the Latins comprehended the correct meaning of Aristotle.
52. It would have been better for the church if Porphyry with his universals had not been born for the use of theologians.
53. Even the more useful definitions of Aristotle seem to beg the question.

54. For an act to be meritorious, either the presence of grace is sufficient, or its presence means nothing. This is in opposition to Gabriel.
55. The grace of God is never present in such a way that it is inactive, but it is a living, active and operative spirit; nor can it happen that through the absolute power of God an act of friendship may be present without the presence of the grace of God. This is in opposition to Gabriel.
56. It is not true that God can accept man without his justifying grace. This is in opposition to Ockham.
57. It is dangerous to say that the law commands that an act of obeying the commandment be done in the grace of God. This in opposition to the Cardinal and Gabriel.
58. From this it would follow that “to have the grace of God” is actually a new demand going beyond the law.
59. It would also follow that fulfilling the law can take place without the grace of God.
60. Likewise it follows that the grace of God would be more hateful than the law itself.
61. It does not follow that the law should be complied with and fulfilled in the grace of God. This is in opposition to Gabriel.
62. And that therefore he who is outside the grace of God sins incessantly, even when he does not kill, commit adultery, or become angry.
63. But it follows that he sins because he does not spiritually fulfill the law.
64. Spiritually that person does not kill, does not do evil, does not become enraged when he neither becomes angry nor lusts.
65. Outside the grace of God it is indeed impossible not to become angry or lust, so that not even in grace is it possible to fulfill the law perfectly.
66. It is the righteousness of the hypocrite actually and outwardly not to kill, do evil, etc.
67. It is by the grace of God that one does not lust or become enraged.
68. Therefore it is impossible to fulfill the law in any way without the grace of God.
69. As a matter of fact, it is more accurate to say that the law is destroyed by nature without the grace of God.
70. A good law will of necessity be bad for the natural will.
71. Law and will are two implacable foes without the grace of God.
72. What the law wants, the will never wants, unless it pretends to want it out of fear or love.
73. The law, as taskmaster of the will, will not be overcome except by the “child, who has been born to us” (Isa. 9,6).

74. The law makes sin abound because it irritates and repels the will (Rom 7,13).
75. The grace of God, however, makes justice abound through Jesus Christ because it causes one to be pleased with the law.
76. Every deed of the law without the grace of God appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin. This is in opposition to the scholastics.
77. The will is always averse to, and the hands inclined toward, the law of the Lord without the grace of God.
78. The will which is inclined toward the law without the grace of God is so inclined by reason of its own advantage.
79. Condemned are all those who do the works of the law.
80. Blessed are all those who do the works of the grace of God.
81. Chapter Falsas concerning penance, dist. 5, confirms the fact that works outside the realm of grace are not good, if this is not understood falsely.
82. Not only are the religious ceremonials not the good law and the precepts in which one does not live (in opposition to many teachers);
83. But even the Decalogue itself and all that can be taught and prescribed inwardly and outwardly is not good law either.
84. The good law and that in which one lives is the love of God, spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
85. Anyone's will would prefer, if it were possible, that there would be no law and to be entirely free.
86. Anyone's will hates it that the law should be imposed upon it; if, however, the will desires the imposition of the law it does so out of love of self.
87. Since law is good, the will, which is hostile to it, cannot be good.
88. And from this it is clear that everyone's natural will is iniquitous and bad.
89. Grace as a mediator is necessary to reconcile the law with the will.
90. The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the will, lest it err even in loving God. In opposition to Gabriel.
91. It is not given so that good deeds might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed. In opposition to Gabriel.
92. It cannot be denied love is superfluous if man is by nature able to do an act of friendship. In opposition to Gabriel.

93. There is a kind of subtle evil in the argument that an act is at the same time the fruit and the use of the fruit. In opposition to Ockham, the Cardinal, Gabriel.

94. This holds true also of the saying that the love of God may continue alongside an intense love of the creature.

95. To love God is at the same time to hate oneself and to know nothing but God.

96. We must make our will conform in every respect to the will of God (in opposition to the Cardinal).

97. So that we not only will what God wills, but also ought to will whatever God wills.

In all we wanted to say, we believe we have said nothing that is not in agreement with the Catholic church and the teachers of the church.