1. Love for "What Is" and Love for "What Is Not"

On April 26, 1518, a disputation was held in Heidelberg. In the aftermath of the turmoil caused by Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses, Luther had been called to present his ideas in front of his peers, the Augustinian monks. For this occasion, Luther presented his theological arguments in the so-called Heidelberg Disputation, in which he outlined the basic structure of his new theology in twenty-eight theses. The content of these theses, according to Luther himself, can be called a "theology of paradoxes" (*theologia paradoxa*).[1] The very last of the theses, the twenty-eighth, holds the key to unlock the main idea presented in this disputation as a whole; as the climax of the theses, thesis 28 holds the key to unfold the essential and consistent meaning of the preceding theses.

According to Luther's arguments in the Heidelberg Disputation, there are two kinds of love: God's Love, that is, the love with which God loves, and Human Love, the love with which human beings love.[2] Luther formulates the difference between these two as follows: "God's Love does not find, but creates, that which is lovable (*diligibile*) to it. Human Love comes into being through that which is lovable to it."[3] In other words, God's Love is directed toward that which is empty and nothing, in order to create something of it and to make it exist in the first place. God's Love does not find in its object what makes it lovable but rather creates it. Human Love, by contrast, turns itself or is oriented toward that which already "is" something in itself and as such is good and beautiful. Indeed, Human Love comes into being on the basis of the prestige and glory of the one that is loved.

When defending his argument that Human Love comes into existence on the basis of the object of love, that is, from the object that is worth loving, Luther reminds his readers of the argument held by (in his opinion) "all" philosophers and theologians that the cause of love is always in its object. The faculties of human beings' mind and soul are always necessarily oriented and inclined toward external reality as their goal. For the intellect, the dimension of reality that one is aspiring to is real (*verum*), and for the will, or love, that dimension is good (*bonum*) and beautiful (*pulchrum*). The object for both human intellect and love is always something that already is, as something real. On this basis, Luther states that Human Love always finds its objects rather than creates them. Neither human knowledge nor human love can, by their nature, have as their objects something that is nothing, or that is empty, or that is evil or bad. The object of human knowledge and will, that is, the object of Human Love can only be something that already "is" and that as such is true, good, and beautiful. Therefore, human beings can neither love nor comprehend that which is not "something," nor that which is worthless or evil or "what is not." In Luther's view, this insight can be drawn from Psalm 41:1: "Blessed is the one who considers the poor and needy."[4] Because Human Love comes into existence from its object, it receives goodness from its object rather than giving goodness to its object. In other words, human beings always seek their own, that is, their own good, in the objects of their love. At the same time this Human Love, by its nature, values that which "is" and is "something" and thus is precious and prestigious, both in the eyes of the one who loves and in the eyes of other human beings. This means that Human Love makes judgments from the face value regarding whom and what to love, rejecting some objects while accepting others.

By its very nature, Human Love cannot orient or turn itself toward that which is empty or evil, whereas God's Love by its very nature is just the contrary. God's Love is not oriented toward "what is" but rather toward "what is not." That is why God's Love does not desire to gain something good from its object but rather pours out good and shares its own goodness with its object. The cause for

God's Love thus is not outside the loving subject or something valuable in the object itself, but the cause of God's Love is the pure, creating, and giving goodness of the love itself. God's being, or essence,[5] itself is the incessant extroverted bubbling love that springs forth. Just as God has created everything out of nothingness and caused what is not or what does not exist to come into existence—to be—in the same fashion God's Love calls its beloved out of nothingness and surrounds its object with its own goodness and good things. These goods consist of all the gifts of God's creation given for the benefit of humankind. God's creating love is especially manifest when God—and those human beings in whom God's Love dwells—loves the sinners who are wicked, foolish, and weak, in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Luther crystallizes his idea of the love that creates as follows: "Therefore sinners are beautiful because they are loved; they are not loved because they are beautiful."[6] Furthermore, God's Love and Human Love result in two different ways of relating to the inequality among people. Because God's Love does not find but creates that which is lovable to it, it is not determined by the attributes of its object. It does not choose its object on the basis of these attributes, nor does it depend on human opinions, according to which the object of love always should be something. In principle, it turns or directs itself toward everything and everybody, paying equal attention to all. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. 5:45).

The movements of God's Love and Human Love are polar opposites. The direction of Human Love is upwards, that is, it turns toward what is grand, wise, alive, beautiful, and good. God's Love, in turn, turns itself or is oriented downward, that is, toward what is lowly, disgraceful, weak, foolish, wicked, and dead. Therefore, God's Love irresistibly involves emptying oneself, suffering, and loving the cross. Even while dwelling in human beings, this kind of love knows the cross and is born of the cross. Luther says, "This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person."[7]

Luther characterizes these two basic types of love by commenting on their two opposite directions. In *The Magnificat* Luther

begins with the idea that it is in God's essence or being to always create something out of nothing. We could visualize this as follows: God always looks down into the abyss.

> Just as God in the beginning of creation made the world out of nothing, whence God is called the Creator and the Almighty, so God's manner of working continues unchanged. Even now and to the end of the world, all God's works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, God makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living. On the other hand, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living, God makes to be nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dying. In this manner no creature can work; no creature can produce anything out of nothing. Therefore God's eyes look only into the depths, not to the heights; as it is said in Daniel 3:55 (Vulgate): "Thou sittest upon the cherubim and beholdest the depths."[8]

Similarly, Luther characterizes Human Love from its normal direction: Human beings look only upward and to the opposite of the abyss where poverty, anguish, and death prevail:

> The eyes of the world and men, on the contrary, look only above them and are lifted up with pride, as it is said in Proverbs 30:13: "There is a people whose eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up on high." This we experience every day. Everyone strives after that which is above him, after honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great. And where such people are, there are many hangers-on; all the world gathers round them, gladly yields them service, and would be at their side and share in their exaltation. Therefore it is not without reason that the Scriptures describe so few kings and rulers who were godly men. On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths where is poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery, and anguish. From these all turn away their eyes. Where there are such people, everyone takes to his heels, forsakes and shuns and leaves them to themselves; no one dreams of helping them or of making something out of

> them. And so they must remain in the depths and in their low and despised condition. There is among men no creator who would make something out of nothing, although that is what St. Paul teaches in Romans 12:16 when he says, "Dear brethren, set not your mind on high things, but go along with the lowly."[9]

This radical difference between the descending God's Love and the ascending Human Love, something Luther insists on, raises the question if these two forms of love are totally mutually exclusive. At the same time, we need to ask whether Human Love, as opposite to God's Love, is evil, and whether its objects then are forbidden. Is Luther rejecting all kinds of Human Love and the values that can kindle it?

First, with this question in mind, we must pay attention to the "prefix" or a descriptive that Luther sets for his thesis about the different kinds of love. Luther uses a poignantly paradoxical manner of expression. "Paradox" is a rhetorical device or boost to increase the effect of a statement by expressing the idea in a way "contrary to what it seems" (Greek: *paradoxos*), or contrary to a generally held view, or contrary to the rules of logic. The meaning of "paradox" comes actually close to that of a "miracle." The purpose is to make the presented idea absolutely clear to the listeners through the use of the most sharply used opposites.

Second, it should be noted that Luther also uses another rhetorical device familiar to him, namely, synecdoche. This mode of expression means that of the mutually related things at stake one is chosen to represent another, or that one aspect or part is chosen to represent the whole. Luther sees this rhetorical device being frequently used in Scripture.[10] In the same fashion, then, when speaking of Human Love, Luther uses one of its fundamental qualities in order to describe all human love (that is, he takes a part to present the whole). The quality he lifts up is the self-seeking orientation of Human Love toward that which exists, "what is," and that which is precious. Luther is not saying that a human being could never love with God's Love—after all, that is the very goal of all Christian faith—or that all human loving is the kind of Human Love he describes as opposite to God's Love. The thesis that "human beings

seek their own good in all human loving that has as its object that which is something and that which is great" is not a synecdoche, whereas it is a synecdoche to say that all human love is always and exclusively this kind of self-seeking love. When speaking of Human Love, Luther uses one of the attributes to describe the whole. In so doing, he wants to emphasize, as strongly as possible, the significance of self-interested seeking for one's own in any form of human love, and especially so in the relationship between God and the human being.

Third, Luther neither denies the goodness of love nor implies that the objects of love would not be also God's good gifts for which human beings should give God praise. Luther does not belittle the love between a man and a woman. Quite the contrary, he speaks also of the physical side of such love as a gift of God more poignantly than any other theologian before him.[11] Nor does Luther deny the value of friendship love; after all, human beings are "naturally suited for a civilized and social existence."[12] Last but not least, Luther does not deny the importance and value of the love between parents and children, or people's love for animals, etc. The precious things that human beings love naturally are really and truly good gifts of God: only their evil or wicked use is what is wicked and evil or bad. With the concept Human Love, as in contrast to God's Love, Luther describes how a distorted seeking of one's own benefit is at work in the human loving that in itself is good. Human beings seek their own good both in their love for God and in their love for others. God's Love, however, opens the hearts of human beings, so that they can begin to love God without self-interest. At the same time, God's Love opens their eyes to see the real needs of their neighbors and to seek the good and the benefit of their fellow human beings. In other words, God's Love helps human beings, first of all, to love God as God and not only the goodness received from God, and, second, to love other human beings for themselves and as persons, instead of loving only their precious qualities and for what could be gained from them for the benefit of the one who loves.

This paradoxically presented distinction between two kinds of love constitutes the basic structure for the content of the Heidelberg Disputation. Even if the distinction between the two loves is

actually explicated only in the very last of the theological theses, the differentiation between the two is at least implicitly present in the other theses as well. In fact, what is said (above) about the Heidelberg Disputation applies actually to all of Luther's works. The perspective of two kinds of love offers a most fruitful approach to the reformer's entire theology.