

# Latomus and Luther

The Debate:  
Is every Good Deed a Sin?



Academic Studies

26



# Refo500 Academic Studies

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Volume 26

Anna Vind

# **Latomus and Luther**

The Debate: Is every Good Deed a Sin?

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

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Typesetting: 3w+p, Rimpär  
Printed and bound: Hubert & Co. BuchPartner, Göttingen  
Printed in the EU

**Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | [www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com](http://www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com)**

ISSN 2197-0165  
ISBN 978-3-647-55251-4

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## 1. Preface

This book was defended as a PhD dissertation in 2002 at the Department for Church History, University of Copenhagen. In that year it was published in Danish and it was reprinted in 2007. Some years ago international colleagues encouraged me to have the work translated into English in order to make it accessible to a wider readership, since the topic might be of interest beyond the borders of Denmark. Shortly thereafter it was accepted for publication in the *Refo500 Academic Series* by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

I have elected to publish the book in the original version, since an update of it to the present time would result in a quite different piece of work. What is offered to the reader here is therefore a slightly revised 2002 edition rendered into English. Only a few changes have been made, correcting the more evident errors which found their way into the first edition.

All translations from Latin here are my own. The existing translations of Erasmus, Augustine and Luther are of various standards, and no translation of Latomus exists. To cut my way short it seems best to present my own version of all of them. Thereby I also allow my own interpretations of the texts cited to become apparent. With few exceptions no extensive Latin quotations are allowed in the running text, all longer quotations being relegated to the footnotes. German, however, is accepted.

I want to thank the former dean at The Faculty of Theology in Copenhagen, Professor Dr.theol. Steffen Kjeldgaard-Pedersen, for encouraging and supporting the translation of my work. I also want to express thanks to my supervisor Professor Dr.theol. Lauge Olaf Nielsen, who took over after the death of my first mentor Professor Dr.theol. Leif Grane in the year 2000 and helped me get things back on track. Finally I would like to thank David Robert Seton and Jan Masorsky for their indispensable help with the editing and proofreading of the present book.

Copenhagen 2019,  
Anna Vind



## 2. Introduction

Luther's work *Rationis Latomianae pro incendiariis Louaniensis Scholae sophistis redditae, Lutheriana Confutatio* ("The Lutheran Refutation of Latomus' Exposition in Defence of the Arsonist-sophists at the University in Leuven") (1521) has often been interpreted in researches devoted to Luther. In 1930 Rudolf Hermann made a careful analysis of the text in his book *Luthers These "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich". Eine systematische Untersuchung*, and this reading influenced a number of scholars after him. Notable among these are the Dane Regin Prenter and his book *Spiritus Creator* (1944) and the article "Luthers Lehre von der Heiligung" (1958), and also the articles written by Heinrich Bornkamm (1979), Erwin Iserloh (1970), Erik Kyndal (1961), Walter Matthias (1957) and Joachim Rogge (1970). Rudolf Hermann's own later article "Zur Kontroverse zwischen Luther und Latomus" (1961) also deserves mention here. In the 1980s and 1990s Luther's text was explicitly commented by Knut Alfsvåg (1987), Jörg Baur (1989), Pierre Bühler (1981), Gerhard Ebeling (1995), Asger Chr. Højlund (1992), Tuomo Mannermaa (1990), Ernstpeter Maurer (1996), Simo Peura (1994), Joachim Ringleben (1997), and Hellmut Zschoch (1993). At the international Congress for Luther Research held at Lund in 1977, Leif Grane and others held a seminar on Latomus and Luther. The intention was to publish the results of the seminar, a project which unfortunately was never realized.

Latomus' work against Luther, the *Articulorum doctrinae fratris Martini Lutheri per theologos lovanienses damnatorum ratio ex sacris literis et veteribus tractatoribus* ("Exposition on the basis of the Holy Scripture and the ancient authorities of the articles in brother Martin Luther's doctrine which have been condemned by the theologians of Leuven"), was however not the object of much profound scholarly investigation before 2002. Joseph E. Vercruyssen wrote three shorter articles about Latomus, one introductory and two thematic articles treating respectively of his relation to Augustine and his ecclesiology. Latomus is also mentioned in books on Leuven at the time of the Reformation, and in works dealing with Erasmus' doings in the same period.

Instead of giving here a general survey of the secondary literature relevant to

the present study, the important material – except for the examples of three core interpretations on *gratia* and *donum* (Hermann, Prenter and Mannermaa) – is referred to in the text or the notes where appropriate. The reason for this is that in relation to Latomus so little had been written before 2002 that no real scholarly discussion existed, whereas the contrary is the case when it comes to Luther.

In the case of Luther, when his Antilatimus has been referred to explicitly in the secondary literary contexts, his text has often been split up and used for the purpose of more thematic discussions, such as that of the use of metaphor in his theology, or the understanding of grace and the gift as the basis of forensic and/or effective justification. These thematic articles are drawn in and commented along the road whenever relevant. Furthermore the present interpretation of Luther's text has in many cases necessitated reference to, or recourse to, other relevant interpretations of Luther, which do not deal explicitly with the text treated here, but with themes and questions raised by the text.

In the case of Latomus the need to relate his thinking to the world of scholastic theology and the different schools represented there is evident. Here I have been forced to choose between, and draw in, a limited number of studies on such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. The present investigation cannot pretend to be able to contribute to the scholarly discussion concerning those great theologians. On the contrary the need to simplify and minimize the shelves of literature, and not be overwhelmed by the possibilities and questions raised by the source material, is clearly displayed in these pages. Much more could be done in this respect, and the attempt made here to point out Latomus' relationship to the tradition should be seen for what it is: a provisional attempt.

Two major works of secondary literature concerning the discussion between Latomus and Luther have appeared since 2002. The first one is Ragnar Skottene's work *Grace and Gift. An Analysis of a Central Motif in Martin Luther's Rationis Latomianae Confutatio* (2008). Skottene refers to and is in many ways dependant upon my work. Rather than giving a full description of the Latomus-Luther discussion, he focuses on Luther's contribution and on the central motif 'grace and gift'. Thus he in some ways expands the scope of my investigation, and in other ways limits himself to a more narrow topic.

The second book I want to mention is Hannegreth Grundmann's *Gratia Christi. Die theologische Begründung des Ablasses durch Jacobus Latomus in der Kontroverse mit Martin Luther* (2012). Grundmann treats the historical setting of the discussion and gives a detailed analysis of Latomus' tract against Luther. Her reading of Latomus is in many ways different from mine, and the differences between the two readings thus deserve a brief mention. I will not comment more explicitly on her results directly, but the following are in my opinion the major divergences:

- 1) Hannegreth Grundmann says that she is the first to deal with Latomus' 'Ratio' in its full length and she says of my book, that it "stellt hauptsächlich den Antilatomo Luthers hervor und interpretiert ihn. Die Ratio behandelt sie nur punktuell" (6). It naturally follows that "Über die Theologie des Latomus gibt es bisher keine Untersuchungen" (6). The English edition of my book will give the reader a second chance to form a judgement as to the justice of that claim.
- 2) This being said, the fact that Grundmann works her way more minutely through the second part of Latomus' treatise gives the reader a different and more literal picture of this part of his 'Ratio'. In this way she clearly amplifies my work by unfolding in greater detail and accuracy how Latomus understood the sacrament of penance, purgatory and indulgences.
- 3) Grundmann does not set out Latomus' prehistory (the time in Leuven and his Dialogue) before the reader: instead she chooses to go through the events and writings connected to the dispute with Luther on indulgences of 1517–1521. Each account, hers and mine, gives a completely different opening, and thus prepares and informs the reader in a very different way.
- 4) Her overall interpretation makes Latomus a scotist and not a thomist. On this point we have come to opposing results. In my interpretation I see him as primarily a thomistically inspired scholastic. There is no doubt that it is a delicate question to answer what kind of a theologian he was, since it can be difficult to analyse the dependency of 16th century scholastics on one or another theological school. Not infrequently they were rather eclectic than strictly thomist, scotist or nominalist. Furthermore the ability to point out exactly what influenced Latomus demands a very broad and fundamental knowledge of scholastic theology and tradition, a breadth and depth of which I cannot boast. So my attempt to define the scholarly lines along which he structured his thinking in the greater context is no more than what I call it: an attempt, which can and doubtless will be adjusted.
- 5) In her book Grundmann does not seem to investigate Latomus' use of the church fathers in depth, nor yet his employment of Augustine, by comparing Latomus' use of them with the original context of the texts that he quotes.
- 6) And finally concerning Luther, who is present in her book but whose answer to Latomus is not treated, Grundmann finally seems to subscribe to a plainly forensic interpretation of Luther's teaching of justification and to refuse all talk of an effective aspect. With this I can only disagree, as will be evident from the reading of my work, and this point of divergence also has a remarkable influence upon the overall conclusion concerning the fundamental differences between Latomus and Luther.

Methodologically the present study may seem quite simple, since it does not employ any specific explicitly theoretical approaches. The bases of this work

build upon the reading of the selected texts in their historical context, and with a strong focus on their theological content. This entails a classical hermeneutical and historical-genetic reflection, which nevertheless is only implicitly present in these pages. This study seeks a balance between the necessary account of the historical context, and striking similarities of thought in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on the one hand, and the attempt to understand and account for the theological content of the texts as accurately as possible on the other. This balancing act does not indicate a struggle between these lines of direction, but shows awareness of the inherent alienation of the historical material as well as alertness to the contemporaneity in the meeting between the text and the reader.

A second remark on methodology is in order. The present work descends from the Danish tradition of Luther research as represented by scholars such as my teachers, the Copenhagen church historians Leif Grane and Steffen Kjeldgaard-Pedersen. My awareness of this dependency was somewhat less acute 17 years ago than it is today, and was therefore not as explicitly acknowledged in the Danish introduction as I feel it necessary to formulate it now.

## Précis

Who was Jacob Latomus? What did he write in the series of lectures to which Luther penned an answer in 1521, an answer which is now so central to many interpretations of the great reformer? And how is the reading of that answer affected when it is preceded by an interpretation of what Latomus wrote? These are the fundamental questions asked in the present study. The task I have undertaken is to give a theological and historical account of the dispute between the two men in 1521, with the emphasis on Luther. Some of the historical preconditions for the dispute, and especially a reading of Latomus' work, forms the background for an interpretation of Luther's Antilatomus.

The first part of the book gives a survey of a series of events in Leuven between 1514 and 1521. The aim here is to point to some of the factors of fundamental importance for the anti-lutheran reaction at the University of Leuven.

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century a tension grew in Leuven – as in many other places – between the conservative scholastic theologians and the strong advocates of humanistic learning. The “old-school” theologians feared that the humanists were threatening the traditional subjects and schools.

Not the least cause of tension was Erasmus' presence in Leuven between 1517 and 1521. For a long time he had spoken out for reform of learned studies and the situation of the clergy, and was therefore far from popular among the conservative scholastics. As soon as he gave them occasion, they attacked him with a view to discrediting his ideas. One example of this was the *De Trium Linguarum*

*et Studii Theologici ratione Dialogus* (“Dialogue concerning the Background for the three Languages and the Study of Theology”) written by Jacob Latomus.

When the first edition of Luther’s works came to town in 1518, the Leuven theologians saw a chance to rid themselves of their humanist opponents. If they could stigmatize Luther, who had already been suspected of heresy in Rome, as a heretic and at the same time link Erasmus’ and Luther’s cause, they would kill two birds with one stone.

In 1520 Luther wrote an answer to the doctrinal condemnations issued in 1519 at Leuven and Cologne. This answer, which chastised the two universities for not giving reasons for their condemnations, and thus for exercising unfounded authority, was the occasion of Latomus’ efforts on behalf of his university. During the summer of 1520 he lectured on the questions raised by the condemnations: and it was against this background that he issued a manuscript, which was printed the following year. This rounds off the narrative of events.

The second part of our study goes through the most important parts of Latomus’ treatise against Luther. The aim here is to identify Latomus’ theological convictions and thus to pin down who and what Luther was up against.

It is possible already, on the strength of the treatment of Latomus’ Dialogue in the first part, to make some general remarks about his theology. It is based on aristotelian-augustinian semantics, where things are always the same and always appear to the human intellect, that is to the soul, in the same way, in the shape of inner and eternal concepts, *conceptus*. The words are outer, temporal expressions of these inner eternal concepts, and thus the importance of language and languages is relative. Languages are not necessary as means of cognition, only as remedies for the expression and communication of the cognition of the soul.

Latomus works with a hierarchy of cognition, moving from the practical sciences via the lower speculative sciences to the similarly speculative theological science. Whereas the practical and the lower sciences rest upon a natural, that is empirically-founded bodily as well as mental cognition by virtue of a *lumen naturale*, theology rests on a cognition in need of divine light from a *lumen supernaturale* worked by the Holy Spirit. This theory of cognition seems to be inspired in a higher degree by Thomist than by Augustinian thinking, since the divine light is necessary only for theology.

Latomus calls this supernatural theological cognition variously *lex Christi mentalis*, *veritas evangelica*, *evangelium scriptum in corde*, *fides divinitus inspirata* and *depositum fidei*. It is the truth revealed to faith, which was announced to the prophets as well as to the first disciples, and which continues to be given to chosen Christians. It is not a mystical feeling or emotion, but is a concrete content of faith, which builds upon and supplies reason. It is concretized as verbal expressions in Scripture as well as in the ecclesiastical tradition, but is



passed down independently thereof since it shares the nature of *conceptus* and is mental, eternal and superior to all linguistic utterance.

This does not mean that Latomus espouses a spiritualistic notion of authority. The inner authority, the gospel in the heart, is closely connected to the outer authority, the ecclesiastical office. Only here, in the spiritual teaching office of the church discharged by those chosen Christians who have received the divinely inspired faith, can we be sure that the inner authority is to be found, preserved and handed down. This happens when the performer of the office in his attempt to maintain the true doctrine lets the living faith, Scripture and the ecclesiastical tradition mutually test and rectify each other.

In the treatise against Luther, which for convenience we shall call the “Exposition”, these general principles in Latomus’ theology, which came to the surface in the Dialogue, recur for example in the letter of dedication to Rodolphus of Monckedam, the theological licenciate and vice pastor in Gouda. And at the end of the interpretation of the Exposition it becomes clear how important the visible church, with the Episcopal (meaning Papal) office at its head, is to Latomus. Again his words on faith, especially the ecclesiologial sermon in article 6 of the Exposition, place Latomus’ theology squarely under the key signature of the Roman Church.

Even though the disposition of the treatise is determined by the argumentation in Luther’s writings, so that the Exposition has a somewhat un-systematic character, it is possible to find and sketch out the fundamental features of Latomus’ theology on the basis of it. He refers in the Exposition to Augustine as his principal theological authority, and a comparison between Augustine’s words and his use of them brings his own theology into the light.

It appears, then, that Latomus’ anthropology has a rationalistic or intellectualistic rather than a voluntarist character; that his concept of original sin is determined by the notion of the loss of *iustitia originalis*; that he understands the struggle between flesh and spirit not as something which comes into being at the Fall of man, but as a part of man’s creation, which by the loss of the original justice is resuscitated with flesh as the dominant force; that he has a notion of a fundamental goodness in man, the law in the heart, and speaks about a secondary good deed (the *opus indifferens*, in his terminology) as well as a primary good deed in a hierarchy of virtues, and goes on to grade the grace of God in agreement with this, so that it constitutes God’s help for man before, in and after justification; that his view of the relationship between man and God, between nature and grace can be compared with the Thomist view of the relation between nature and supernature; and finally that his talk of human freedom and *facere quod in se est* corresponds more closely to a Thomist world of ideas than to a Scotist or a nominalist.

The result is – and this is in accord with the reading of the Dialogue – that

Latomus for the most part can be said to be inspired by Thomism. Even though he treats topics which belong to a later period of time, such as is the case in the question of *opus indifferens/actus medius*, he treats them in a way which is still compatible with Thomist thinking.

The comparison between Latomus and Augustine shows that at times Latomus refers justly to Augustine and at other times he does not. As far as can be concluded on the basis of the texts from Augustine cited in the Exposition, Augustine's theology contains no notion of a neutrally good deed with indirect importance for the relationship to God such as we find in Latomus. This is so because the concept of original sin is much more radical in Augustine than in Latomus. According to Augustine no man can do any good in relation to God without that divine grace which leads him to God. Desire, *concupiscentia*, inherent in the fallen man, is for Augustine identical with original sin and an absolute hindrance to the proper good.

On the other hand Augustine thinks that through baptism a change happens to concupiscence, that its depth is removed. After baptism *concupiscentia* is no longer identical to original sin, but is reduced to being only a result of, or a punishment for, the Fall of Man. Now this is something with which Latomus can go along. Both he and Augustine promote a horizontal doctrine of justification with a sanative mark. After the infusion of baptismal grace man is sanctified and from here – unless he slips and commits unforgivable deadly sin – his righteousness grows, to be completed in death, when he is translated from an incomplete righteous life in faith to a complete righteous life in full view. The more he struggles against and resists the temptations of desire in this life, the more he advances on his way towards completion. And thus great importance is attached to his deeds.

Through the comparison between Augustine and Latomus we sense some of the differences between Latomus and Luther. Those things in Augustine which do not attract Latomus, are exactly the things to which Luther connects: the idea of concupiscence as identical with original sin, and the notion of fallen man's incapacity to do good in relation to God. Conversely the things which Latomus likes in Augustine are what Luther rejects: concupiscence in the justified understood as punishment alone, and the importance of the deeds of the righteous for his way towards salvation.

The third part of the book is a reading of Luther's pamphlet against Latomus, with the historical context and inner coherence of the text taken into account. Parallels are drawn with Latomus' theology in order to facilitate as much as possible an appreciation of the differences between the two.

Luther first and foremost sticks to the fact that concupiscence in the justified is entirely sinful, and that the justified can do nothing of importance for his salvation. This is the pivotal point in the discussion with Latomus. The question

is then how he sees the reality of justification, when he does not, like Latomus, mean, that by the infusion of grace a change happens in the fallen man, which obviates original sin and leaves only inconsequential desire behind.

Luther disagrees with Latomus in his fundamental point of departure. To him, Latomus' Aristotle-Augustine-inspired semantics, and his Thomist epistemology, are false when applied to theology. They are both results of logical-philosophical speculations on the relation between language, reality and human cognition, and thus they miss the object of theology, which cannot be adapted to systems of this kind. Instead, Luther refers to the ability of God's word to "create what it names": the word of God institutes its own semantics and epistemology. What the word mentions, exists as it is spoken, and what is said, is heard by him to whom the Spirit grants ears to hear. Literally God's word is autonomous and can never be caught in a logical-philosophical system. Not even he, who has heard it, can judge and control it: on the contrary, the word always and repeatedly judges and controls him, who hears it. The word calls man out of his own reality, away from himself and into a new reality, turned towards something different and alien. The word destroys everything old belonging to man, and reinstates him in his original determination as God's creature.

In comparison to Latomus, Luther thus reverses the relation between words and concepts in theology. The word of God comes first and determines the human conception of it. The theological philosopher must therefore always refer to and be determined by the word of God, not vice versa.

This may be the reason for Luther's greater fascination with rhetoric as an auxiliary science to theology than with philosophy. This can clearly be seen in the *Antilatimus*, where references to classical rhetoric play a crucial role in Luther's interpretation of Scripture, and where we find an outspoken critique of the prevalent use of philosophy in theology. What fascinates Luther in rhetoric is that here language is treated as the human access to reality, so that the words themselves and their context must be studied in order to fathom the meaning. The rhetorician leaves the words as they are. He lets them say what they say without trying to master and control them by fitting them into an overall conceptual philosophical system.

But great as Luther's enthusiasm for classical rhetoric may be, this text also shows that his own point of view differs substantially from it. In rhetoric, language – and especially figurative language – is regarded as an innovatory discourse about reality revealing its meaning in an ever-renewed perspective on the given: a fulfilment. Luther goes on to distinguish between human words and the word of God, and God's word – also primarily understood as figurative speech – is, as Luther understands it in the setting of the testimony of Scripture, not just an immanent fulfilment like human figural speech, but is a transcendent irruption into and alteration of the given: a new creation.

The word of God, which Luther calls *Verbum* – as distinct from *verba*, human words – is Christ, God who became man. The incarnation is the coming of God’s word to man. The key to the divine use of language is thus what characterizes the person and deed of Christ: *communicatio idiomatum* in a christological and soteriological perspective. This means the exchange of properties between the divine and the human nature of Christ (the person of Christ, the christological perspective) and between Christ and the human being (the deed of Christ, the soteriological perspective). Everything which can and must be said theologically about God and the relationship between God and man, must take its point of departure in the person and deed of Christ. In this sense Christology is the centre of Luther’s theology. How important this is, and altogether what Christ is, is unknown to Latomus and his kindred spirits, says Luther.

The proclamation of Christ (the person of Christ) through the spirit leads to the new creation just mentioned (the deed of Christ) of the human being who hears the word. This is what Luther tries to explain to Latomus when going through the three scriptural passages Isaiah 64:6, Ecclesiastes 7:21 and Romans 7:14ff. Especially in relation to the Epistle to the Romans does Luther’s understanding of this become clear, and thus how differently from Latomus he sees the reality of justification.

Luther’s thought on justification may at first seem similar to that of Latomus. Luther maintains that a change occurs in baptism by infusion of *virtus dei infusa*, where the power of sin is broken so that it can no longer rule. Sin is still real sin (and here Latomus disagrees), but it is now a ruled sin, which is no longer *damnabilis*. Seemingly this is very similar to Latomus’ words on the love of God as a *virtus infusa* causing the forgiveness of guilt so that *concupiscentia* after baptism is no longer real sin, but only a punishment for original sin and an occasion of forgivable sin.

Luther like Latomus also talks about an effective justification, which means that in a progressive perspective – or to put it with a formulation like the one used in relation to Latomus and Augustine – in a horizontal sanative perspective, a change happens to man in baptism, by which sin (by Latomus called the “insignificant desire”) is swept out more and more before death, until it is quite removed in death.

Finally Luther says that man himself is active in this sweeping-out of sin, by not consenting to it and by expelling it with his own fist. This may seem very similar to Latomus’ discourse on the *liberum arbitrium* of man, which enables him to select – or refuse – cooperation with God.

But after all Luther’s talk of the justification of man is of a quite different nature from that of Latomus. In Luther the effective side of justification is indissolubly connected to the forensic side. Not in a harmonious relationship, where the forensic, that is the instant forgiveness and removal of sin when it

comes to ruling, comes first, to be followed by the effective perspective, that is the progressive removal of sin according to its existence. When the human being hears and receives Christ, the word of God, and thus is made righteous, he or she is confronted by one divine reality with two sides present at the same time in a paradoxical relationship. And this paradoxical quality is totally incomprehensible and unacceptable to Latomus. According to Luther, man is at a stroke wholly righteous when God regards him so, even though at the same time he is wholly a sinner (the forensic perspective) and at the same time he becomes more and more righteous, when he is more and more free from sin in a sweeping-out movement towards death (the effective perspective). In other words we are looking at 1) an instant and total new creation of the whole human being when he receives Christ in faith, 2) a simultaneous maintenance of the existence of sin and thus of the whole character of being a sinner until death, and 3) finally a progressive partial growth in righteousness which is parallel to the sweeping-out of sin fulfilled in death. This means that the divine reality given to man in Christ is characterized by a “typological” structure: the timeless eternal (the total, forensic perspective) simultaneously and continually comes into existence in a forward-looking temporal movement (the partial, effective perspective). This is a structure which, seen logically and philosophically, is not in the least transparent: on the contrary, it represents a logical-philosophical absurdity. It is a proclaimed fact which does not satisfy the natural human intellect, but only makes sense or – in other words – becomes real in faith to him who hears the sermon of Christ. Therefore, Luther also calls this the divine reality of the *mysterium Christi*.

Luther emphasizes that when man hears the sermon of Christ, the word of God, and receives faith, Christ and man are united in the sense that Christ inhabits man and man is transformed into Christ, is “raptured into Him”. This happens when Christ in faith gives his own righteousness to man and takes man’s sin upon Himself. And this takes place in an instant total as well as a progressive partial perspective.

This being united is the same as when the properties of Christ become one in His person, so that the same thing can be said about Christ’s human and his divine nature. Christ is one person, but two natures. Thus in the union there is both a unity and an essential difference. This means that in the *unio* between God and man in Christ, we are not to suppose that man becomes God or God becomes man, but that man in Christ belongs to God and God belongs to man.

In this *unio*, says Luther, Christ is the only acting figure. He is the one who gives and takes and thus the one who works everything. He is the *virtus infusa*, who is given to man in baptism, breaking down the power of sin so that it will no longer condemn him. His is the righteousness accounted to man under which man can hide like a chicken under the wings of the hen. He is the one who

occasions the sweeping-out of sin towards death. The only thing man does in relation to Him is to confess his sin and receive faith in Him given by the Spirit. When Luther speaks of man's cooperation in the removal of sin – of how man must sweep out sin with his own fist – he is speaking about the true service to God in the shape of the confession of sin and reception of Christ as God's word of forgiveness. Every other plain thing done by the man who does this, is good, and counts as good deeds. Luther finishes his pamphlet by declaring everything Latomus stands for to be harmful for theology.

The comparison between the two theologians shows that they speak completely different languages and that their viewpoints do not square at all. Even though their thoughts may seem similar on the surface, the difference between them is in fact insuperable. Basically their ways depart in their understanding of God's word and how it is communicated to man. This generates two ways of perceiving the matter of theology, and of speaking theologically – and prevents mutual understanding.

Latomus cannot understand, let alone accept, Luther's view of the autonomy of God's word and the special character of proclamation, and hence a theology which is incompatible with natural reason. Even though he accepts a division between a natural and a supernatural rationality, and thus admits that natural reason has a limit, he grants the very same natural reason an important role in the ascent of cognition towards revelation. Everything else – such as Luther's theology – is a dehumanization of the human being.

Luther, on the other hand, regards Latomus' theology as a result of the impulse in sinful man towards ruling and controlling the word of God with his own inadequate natural abilities. In Luther's eyes that proclamation of Christ, which in the shape of a human being comes to man in contradiction of everything human, here disappears in the twinkling of an eye.

Even though Latomus replied to Luther at a later date, nothing more happened. Luther never again dealt comprehensively with his opponent from Leuven except in a few table-talks. In his table-talks he declared his respect for Jacobus Latomus, but he still criticized him fundamentally for not having understood "the nature of sin and grace". Doubtless he meant that he had said enough on this matter, so that after writing the Antilatomo he had turned towards other and more urgent affairs.



### 3. Historical Introduction

The dispute between Jacob Latomus and Martin Luther may be said to have begun in the autumn of 1518, when the first printed edition of Luther's works came to Leuven. However, in the previous years several things had happened of decisive importance for the reception of Luther's works.<sup>1</sup>

Humanism, in Boehm's definition a "Bildungsbewegung im Sinne einer neuen reflektierten anthropozentrischen Kulturhaltung, als literarisch-ästhetische Rückwendung zu den Autoren der Antike und deren Sprachlichkeit mit darin vermittelten sittlichen Normen – in bewusster Absetzung gegen das 'gotische', 'barbarische' *Medium aevum*, sein 'Küchenlatein' und sein scholastisches Lehrsystem" (Boehm: 1978, 317), had gradually found a foothold in Leuven in the course of the last half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, first and foremost at the faculty of arts. In 1444, a chair in rhetoric had been established, and 34 years later a chair in poetics (connected to the Faculty of Law), and in 1474 the art of printing had come to the town, making it easier to get hold of both ancient and contemporary humanist texts. Gradually the teaching of *artes* was both changed and improved, which was clearly manifest from 1500. In that period Johannes Depaeterius succeeded in gathering together a series of previous attempts at writing a new and humanistically improved version of Alexander de Villa's Medieval Latin grammar, the *Doctrinale*. Joost Vroye, in his work of systematizing Greek grammar, prepared the way well for his pupil Adrian Amerot, who in 1520 had his *Compendium graecae grammatices* published by the Leuven printer Dirk Martens. Maarten Dorp improved the teaching of Latin literature by following the Italian humanist model of going through classical dramas and performing them with his pupils, and Adrian Barlandus initiated the production of serviceable text editions of classical and contemporary humanist authors.

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1 In the following I have chosen to deal with the Leuven background of the event instead of the Roman process against Luther, since the latter has been described in depth before, see for example Müller: 1903, and Selge's more recent extensive production, cf. Selge: 1968; 1969; 1971; 1973; 1975; 1976.



From the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Leuven, as in many other places in Northern Europe, tension was growing between conservative scholastic theologians and those who supported humanistic learning. The theologians feared that humanism's attempt to renew the old values of learning would threaten the traditional subjects and schools. This was the smouldering disagreement which was to initiate the dispute between Latomus and Luther, a dispute which in the beginning was centred on Maarten Dorp, student and later professor of theology.

### 3.1 The debate between Maarten Dorp and Erasmus and Erasmus' first years in Leuven

In the beginning of his studies, Maarten Dorp had been deeply interested in the development of the artes-studies in a humanist direction. Between 1504 and 1509 he taught Latin and philosophy at the arts faculty, and in that period put so much energy into improving the teaching of Latin that about 1509 he was regarded as one of the leading humanists at Leuven. At that time he was offered the chair of poetics after the Frisian Balthasar Hockema, but although it fitted perfectly with what he had hitherto worked on, he refused the post. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that some of the leading scholastic theologians in town, among them Jan Briard, urged Dorp to dampen his interest in the new tenets and seriously lend himself to his theological studies, either because they regarded it as important to have the gifted young man trained as a theologian, or, more likely, because they were unhappy that a coming theologian was famed for being a poet and humanist and might end up cultivating humanism in favour of theology (Bietenholz: 1985, 399; De Vocht: 1934, 133–134). The pressure they exerted on him consisted not only in the offer of their favour, but also in an offer of economic advantages, upon which Dorp, having accepted them, came to depend until he had finished his studies and became a doctor and professor in 1515.

Maarten Dorp was a good friend of Erasmus. They had met in 1502–1504, when Erasmus first stayed at Leuven, and again in July–August 1514 when he passed through Leuven on his way from England to Basel. During this latter visit, although it was brief, Erasmus had expressly asked to see Dorp. His sympathy for and trust in the young theologian was expressed in his asking Dorp to see to it that Dirk Martens printed a book he had just prepared for publication, a number of ethical writings by Cato and Mimus Publilianus, his revision of *Septem Sapientes*, as well as his own *Institutum Christiani Hominis* (De Vocht: 1934, 138).

It was therefore not to be expected that Dorp would write a letter to Erasmus such as he wrote in 1514. Dorp introduces the letter by stressing his veneration

for Erasmus, referring to it as his very reason for writing to him. His purpose is to warn Erasmus against the animosity that has risen against him in Leuven. The work *Encomium Moriae* ("The Praise of Folly"), of 1511, has not been well received in the town as have so many other of Erasmus' works. It has aroused animosity because it contains a severe criticism of the scholastic theologians (Augustijn: 1991, 62ff). Dorp writes:

What good has it done, so vigorously to attack this row of theologians for whom it is so important not to be despised by the people, or, indeed, how much harm will it truly cause? [...] Sharp witticisms – especially where much truth is found in them – leave a bitter memory. Everyone used to admire you, read you eagerly, and the most outstanding theologians and jurists longed to have you near, but see, suddenly this unfortunate "Folly" like Davus disturbs everything. The style, the composition and the sharpness they approve of, but the insults they do not approve of, not even the cultivated among them.<sup>2</sup>

Dorp therefore exhorts Erasmus to write a praise of wisdom which can counterbalance the book under attack. It does not pay to fall out with people in this way.

He then thanks Erasmus for his work with publishing Saint Jerome, but then questions his coming work on a critical edition of the New Testament. Dorp does not understand Erasmus' wish to revise the Vulgate with the help of Greek manuscripts. In his eyes this can only sow doubt as to the truth of the Vulgate text, for which there is no call, since it has been the authorized text of the Church for so long that traditional usage guarantees its content. It will be outrageous to suppose that for so long the Church could have used a flawed text, and it is dangerous for the faith if people begin discussing and doubting the integrity of Scripture. One may work critically with the text, but only to clarify the meaning which is already there, not to correct it. Dorp finally calls on Erasmus to consider the criticism and answer it.

It is evident that Maarten Dorp does not here write on his own behalf. He may partly agree in the matter, but he explicitly writes on behalf of "the others" around him who have expressed disapprobation of parts of Erasmus' work. What is behind it is probably that for the second time he is under pressure from

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2 Ep. 304,24–27.50–55, in Erasmus: 1910, 12; 13: "Iam vero theologorum ordinem, quem tan-topere expedit non contemni a plebe, quid profuit, immo vero quantum oberit, tam acriter suggilasse? [...] Aspere facetiae, eciam ubi multum est veri admixtum, acrem sui relinquunt memoriam. Pridem mirabantur te omnes, tua legebant auide, praesentem expetebant summi theologorum ac iureconsultorum, et ecce repente infausta Moria quasi Dauus inturbat omnia. Stilem quidem et inuentionem acumenque probant, irrisiones non probant, ne litterati quidem."