

Aulén's Multiple Characterizations of the «Classical» and «Latin» Theories of Reconciliation

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Aulén's three-fold classification of theologies of the reconciliation of Christ in terms of the «Classical» (or «Dramatic»), «Latin» and «Subjective» theories, has proved to be one of the more influential and widely appreciated aspects of his book *Christus Victor* (1930).¹ Aulén's attribution of one or the other of these theories to specific theologians and movements in the history of the Church has been much more controversial, however. In this paper I argue that there is not one but *several distinct characterizations* of the Classical and Latin theories of the reconciliation of Christ in *Christus Victor*.² By recognizing this, and by clarifying the content of the various distinct characterizations, I will seek to show that one can assess some of the controversial points surrounding *Christus Victor* with greater clarity and facility than otherwise.

¹ In A.G. Herbert's English translation of Aulén's book the Swedish word «försöning» is translated «atonement». It seems to me that a better translation would be «reconciliation», however, since «atonement» has strong connotations to the Latin theory. Accordingly, I will throughout this paper speak of «the act of reconciliation», «the reconciliation of Christ», and suchlike, instead of «the act of atonement», «the atonement of Christ», and so on.

² I will leave aside the Subjective theory in the present paper. It is the least discussed theory in Aulén's book, the main focus of the book being the Classical and Latin theories.

The Lutheran Context

In spite of the fact that Aulén disclaims having «an apologetic aim» with his book,³ there can be little doubt that *Christus Victor* is rooted in a distinctively Lutheran theological context.⁴ This is evident from the facts that Luther is taken by Aulén to be the unsurpassed (*av ööverträffade mått*)⁵ representative of the Classical theory and that the circumstance that Luther endorsed the Classical theory is taken to show that «the main line in Christian thought» goes via Luther and the Reformation rather than via Roman Catholic thought.⁶ A passing dismissive reference to «the proud claim of Roman theology to represent the continuity of Christian doctrine» reinforces the impression that it is primarily to Lutherans that Aulén was originally addressing himself in *Christus Victor*.⁷

Christus Victor is in part a reaction to certain developments in Nineteenth-century liberal Lu-

³ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1965), 158.

⁴ Cf. Lars Lindberg, «Från konfessionell till ekumenisk teologi», 290-324 in *Modern svensk teologi*, (Stockholm: Verbum, 1999), 312-313.

⁵ Aulén, *Den kristna försöningstanken* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1930), 210.

⁶ Aulén, *Den kristna försöningstanken*, 37.

⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 14.

theran theology, which developments were in turn in part a reaction to remnants of Seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy. In his influential *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (1870-74), the pre-eminent liberal theologian Albrecht Ritschl maintained that Luther failed to rid his theology of the anselmian doctrine of reconciliation, a doctrine that subsequently passed on into Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁸ Ritschl argued that this anselmian remnant conflicts with the true Christian doctrine of justification, the key Reformation discovery. In rejecting Lutheran Orthodoxy, therefore, Ritschl thought it best to reject Luther's doctrine of reconciliation also.

In *Christus Victor* Aulén issues a forceful protest against Ritschl's treatment of Luther's doctrine of reconciliation. According to Aulén, Ritschl fails to perceive in Luther's theology a theory of reconciliation that is distinct from the anselmian theory.⁹ This neglected theory Aulén calls the «Classical» (or «Dramatic») theory, and the anselmian theory from which it is taken to differ is called the «Latin» theory.

On at least one important point Aulén agreed with Ritschl, however. This concerned the claim that the Latin theory is endorsed in Lutheran Orthodoxy. In line with this Aulén thinks it important to drive a theological wedge between Luther on the one hand and Lutheran Orthodoxy on the other, at least with respect to the doctrine of reconciliation.

Fundamental Characterizations

In the introductory chapter of *Christus Victor* we find what could be called Aulén's «fundamental characterizations» of the Classical and Latin theories. The characterizations can be seen to be regarded as «fundamental» by Aulén inasmuch as he explicitly says that they depict «[t]he most marked difference» (*[d]en mest markerade olikheten*) between the Classical and Latin theories.¹⁰

⁸ See e.g. Aulén's review of Ritschl's position in *Christus Victor*, 1-6, 101-102.

⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 1-6

¹⁰ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 5; Aulén, *Den kristna försöningstanken*, 11.

The fundamental characterization of the Latin theory is given in terms of its contrast with the Classical theory, and so the most important characterization is really the one given of the Classical theory, the characterization of the Latin theory being derivative from that characterization.

The Classical theory is said by Aulén to take as its «central theme» [*huvudtemat*] the Biblical drama in which

Christ – Christus Victor – fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the «tyrants» under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.¹¹

The above «central theme» is not itself equivalent to the Classical theory, as has often been assumed in the literature.¹² If it *were* thus equivalent, then there would be no real conflict between the Classical and Latin theories, since adherents of the Latin theory are also prepared to subscribe to the above description of Christ's triumph.¹³ Rather, the above central theme functions as Aulén's *paradigmatic description* from which the main characteristics of the Classical theory are to be extracted.

From the above Biblical drama Aulén extracts the following main characteristic of the Classical theory, and by negation also the main difference between the Classical and Latin theories:

The most marked difference between the «dramatic» type [i.e. the Classical theory] and the

¹¹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4; Aulén, *Den kristna försöningstanken*, 10.

¹² See e.g. Anders Jeffner, «Teologin inför vetenskapens utmaningar», 136-186, in *Modern svensk teologi* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1999), 166; and Carl-Reinhold Bråkenhielm «Frälsningsmotiv i nutida film» 141-156, in *Mänsklig frälsning: Soteriologi i samtidsperspektiv*, ed. M. Martinson (Uppsala: Working Papers in Theology, 2002), 147-148, and Sofia Camnerin, *Försoningens mellanrum – en analys av Daphne Hampsons och Rita Nakashima Brocks teologiska tolkningar* (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Faith and Ideologies, 2008), 27.

¹³ For an example of such an advocate, see Sigfrid von Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp. Med särskild hänsyn till försanthållandets betydelse* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1933), 95-105.

so-called 'objective' type [i.e. the Latin theory] lies in the fact that it represents the work of Atonement or reconciliation as from first to last a work of God Himself, a *continuous* Divine work [*obruten gudshandling*]; while according to the other view, the act of Atonement has indeed its origin in God's will, but is, in its carrying-out, an offering made to God by Christ as man and on man's behalf, and may therefore be called a discontinuous Divine work [*bruten gudshandling*].¹⁴

In the above passage we see that Aulén characterizes the Classical theory and the Latin theory and the difference between them in terms of different claims pertaining to the «continuity» or «discontinuity» of Divine action in the act of reconciliation. I interpret this to mean that the Classical theory takes the act of reconciliation to be *entirely* God's work, whereas the Latin theory takes the act of reconciliation to be *partly* God's work and *partly* the work of man. This interpretation is supported by Aulén's dogmatics textbook *Den allmänliga kristna tron*, in which it is said that the doctrine of reconciliation is distorted if the reconciliation is thought of as being in part a divine work and in part a work of Christ qua man.¹⁵

We could perhaps make the differences between the Classical theory and the Latin theory a bit clearer by means of the following formulations:

- CT-1: The act of reconciliation was effected by God without any interference by non-divine agency.
- LT-1: The act of reconciliation was effected partly by God and partly by human agency.

¹⁴ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 5; Aulén, *Den kristna försönningstanken*, 11-12.

¹⁵ This understanding accords also with Aulén's position in his dogmatics textbook *Den allmänliga kristna tron* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1931), 252: «Den kristna försönningstanken fördunklas, försåvitt som försönningen tänkes vara till en del ett gudomligt verk och till en del en av Kristus såsom människa givna kompensation åt den gudomliga rättfärdigheten...».

In various passages of *Christus Victor* Aulén takes the Classical theory and the Latin theory to have certain implications and/or characteristics in addition to those specified in CT-1 and LT-1 (as we shall see further on). Nevertheless, the above characteristics specified in CT-1 and LT-1 are comprised by Aulén's fundamental characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories.

Amplified Characterizations

In addition to the fundamental characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories encapsulated in CT-1 and LT-1, Aulén also makes various claims which in effect expand on these characterizations. In what follows I will call the resultant expanded characterizations for "amplified characterizations" of the Classical and Latin theories.

A first amplified characterization is given via reference to «the legal order». The Classical Theory is said to comprise an idea according to which the act of reconciliation involves «a discontinuity of the legal order» [*den genombrutna rättsordningen*], whereas the Latin Theory is said to endorse the opposing idea that «the legal order is unbroken» [*den obrutna rättsordningen*].¹⁶ Aulén explains:

[T]he classic type shows a continuity of Divine operation, and a discontinuity in the order of merit and of justice, while the Latin type is opposite to it in both respects. In the classic type the work of Atonement [...] necessitates a discontinuity of the legal order: there is no satisfaction of God's justice, for the relation of man to God is viewed in the light, not of merit and justice, but of grace. In the Latin type the legal order is unbroken.¹⁷

The above passage makes it clear that in speaking of «the legal order» as broken or unbroken, Aulén is seeking to articulate a difference as regards whether the demands of retributive justice are thought of as met or not met in the act of reconciliation. If one holds that the demands of retributive justice are not met, one is in Aulén's

¹⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146; Aulén, *Den kristna försönningstanken*, 243.

¹⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 145-146.

terminology saying that the act of reconciliation involves a violation of the legal order; but if one says the opposite, then one is saying that the act of reconciliation leaves the legal order unbroken.

In view of the above characteristics we could expand on the fundamental characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories in CT-1 and LT-1 so as to obtain the following amplified characterizations:

CT-2: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated by God without any interference by non-divine agency, and (ii) is such that the requirements of retributive justice are left unmet.

LT-2: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated partly by God and partly by human agency, and (ii) is such that the requirements of retributive justice are met.

A further expansion of the characterization of the Classical and Latin theories is offered by Aulén in terms of their relation to human rationality. With regard to the Latin theory endorsed by Lutheran Orthodoxy, Aulén says:

Nothing was less to the taste of the Orthodoxy of the eighteenth century than Luther's *contra legem*; and the whole theological structure was intended to show that there was nothing irrational, nothing contrary to strict justice, in the forgiveness bestowed by God.¹⁸

And with regard to the Latin theory endorsed by Luther it is said:

The structure of the Latin theory is rational throughout; Luther, if he is sure of anything, is sure that God's work in Christ of atonement, forgiveness, justification, bears the signature of *contra rationem et legem*. In his view, Law and Reason belong inseparably together; they represent the way of the natural man, not God's way manifested in Christ.¹⁹

These passages suggest that the Latin theory is taken by Aulén to accord with human rationality whereas the Classical Theory is not taken this way. The close relation between «Law» and «Reason» in the above quotation moreover suggests that the «requirements» of human rationality here spoken of are equivalent to the execution of retributive justice on account of committed transgressions. If this is right, then we could state a further pair of amplified characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories as follows:

CT-3: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated by God without any interference by non-divine agency, (ii) is such that the retributive requirements of divine justice are left unmet, and (iii) runs counter to human rationality in leaving the requirements of retributive justice unmet.

LT-3: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated partly by God and partly by human agency, (ii) is such that the requirements of retributive justice are met, and (iii) accords with human rationality in meeting the requirements of retributive justice.

A still further amplification of the characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories is provided by Aulén via reference to the respective conceptions of God that they are taken to be associated with. The Classical theory is taken to endorse a conception of God [*gudsbild*] in which

[...] the Divine Love prevails over the Wrath, the Blessing overcomes the Curse, by way of Divine self-oblation and sacrifice.²⁰

The Latin theory, by contrast, is said to countenance a «rational compromise» in which God's wrath is satisfied in such a way as to make room for a manifestation of God's mercy:

[In the Latin Theory] the abstract «retributive justice» [...] takes the place of the personal «wrath», so that, as it were, God is felt to be more remote.

¹⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 131.

¹⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 212.

²⁰ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 153; Aulén, *Den kristna försoningstanken*, 257.

But the solution of the antinomy can fairly be called a rational compromise; for the Justice of God receives a compensation for man's default, so that His mercy may now be free to act.²¹

The above passages suggest that the Classical theory is taken to countenance a conception of God in which God's love must somehow *overcome* God's wrath in relation to human beings, whereas the Latin theory is taken to countenance a conception of God in which God's love and wrath or justice co-exist in a more coherent or economical manner. This suggests the following further pair of amplified characterizations:

CT-4: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated by God without any interference by non-divine agency, (ii) is such that the retributive requirements of divine justice are left unmet, (iii) runs counter to human rationality in leaving the requirements of retributive justice unmet, and (iv) countenances a conception of God in which divine love must somehow overcome divine wrath with regard to God's dealings with human beings.

LT-4: The act of reconciliation (i) was effectuated partly by God and partly by human agency, (ii) is such that the requirements of retributive justice are met, (iii) accords with human rationality in meeting the requirements of retributive justice, and (iv) countenances a conception of God in which divine love and divine wrath or justice co-exist in a coherent or economical manner.

We have now surveyed three pairs of amplified characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories found in Aulén's *Christus Victor*. It can easily be seen that various further versions of the theories can be obtained by subtracting one or the other additional characterization from these amplified characterizations. For example, we could subtract feature (i) from LT-4 but at the same time keep (ii)-(iv), or we could subtract (ii)

but keep (i), (iii) and (iv). It will be unnecessary to our present purposes to set out all the possible characterizations thus obtained in explicit terms, however.

In the next few sections I will seek to show that by recognizing and applying the multiplicity of distinct characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories in Aulén's work to various controversial claims surrounding this work, we are able to bring a considerable degree of clarity to these discussions and are also able to arrive at more satisfactory assessments than otherwise.

First Application: Luther's Alleged Endorsement of the Classical Theory

A central claim in Aulén's *Christus Victor* is that Luther endorsed the Classical theory. As was mentioned above, this claim should in part be seen as having been developed in response to Ritschl's claim that Luther endorsed a Latin theory in line with that of Lutheran Orthodoxy. In what follows I will seek to show that by recognizing the multiplicity of distinct characterizations of the Classical theory in Aulén's work, we can make some progress in assessing the adequacy of Aulén's Luther-interpretation.

Aulén recognizes that there are statements in Luther's vast corpus that could be used to support either the Classical theory or the Latin theory, but he believes that there are at least three considerations that make it plain that Luther sided with the Classical theory.

The first such consideration is that in those places in Luther's corpus where it is necessary for Luther to express himself with the greatest possible care and precision, as in the *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism*, Luther favors the position of the Classical theory.²² Thus in explicating the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed in the *Small Catechism*, Luther describes the work of Christ with the words: «He has delivered, purchased, and won me, a lost and doomed man, from all sins, from death and the devil's power». And in the *Large Catechism* he says similarly that for Jesus Christ to be «Lord» means that «He has redeemed me from sin, from

²¹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 154.

²² Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 105.

the devil, from death and from all woe...» (*das er mich erlöset hat von sünde, vom Teuffel, vom tode und allem unglück*).²³ Aulén says that it is “plain as daylight” (*det ligger i öppen dag*) that these explications accord with the Classical theory rather than with the Latin theory.²⁴

The second consideration is that Luther expressly says – for example in his commentaries to the Epistle to the Galatians – that Christianity’s essence (*capitalia nostrae theologiae*) is that Christ “overcomes and carries away these monsters, sin, death, and the curse.”²⁵

The third consideration is that the Classical theory is said to stand in «organic relation» (*organiskt sammanhang*) with Luther’s theological outlook as a whole. Aulén does not offer any independent argument for this third consideration, but seems to regard it as being supported by the textual evidence cited in support of the second consideration.

Aulén takes the thrust of the above considerations to amount to an endorsement by Luther of the Classical theory. He says:

Luther’s interpretation of Christ’s work has all the typical characteristics of the classical idea of the Atonement. [...] [T]here is here a continuity of Divine operation. Time after time Luther returns to this theme and emphasises it with all his might: the one power which is able to overcome the tyrants is God’s omnipotence.²⁶

Do Aulén’s above considerations succeed in showing that Luther endorsed the Classical theory? As can be seen, this depends on what

²³ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 104. The quotation from Luther is left untranslated in the Swedish version; see Aulén, *Den kristna försoningstanken*, 179.

²⁴ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 104; Aulén, *Den kristna försoningstanken*, 178.

²⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 106. Luther’s remark about Christ’s conquering monsters occurs in the *Longer Commentary on Galatians* in connection with an explication of Gal 3:13. The claim that we here have a statement of «*capitalia nostrae theologiae*» occurs in the *Shorter Commentary on Galatians*, however. Since the latter statement is concerned with the same theme in the Epistle to the Galatians as the former statement, Aulén apparently thinks it justified to transfer it also to the explication in the *Longer Commentary on Galatians*.

²⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 107.

characterization of the Classical theory we have in view.

If we have the Classical theory as characterized in CT-1 in view, then I believe Aulén has done a good job of supporting his case. For CT-1 claims simply that the act of reconciliation was brought about entirely by God, and this seems to accord well with, say, Luther’s explication of the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed in the *Small Catechism*, where Christ’s triumph over death, sin and hell is clearly assumed by Luther to be a work done by God alone.

Things are not as plain when it comes to CT-2, CT-3 or CT-4, however. According to CT-2, the act of reconciliation is brought about by God alone in such a way as to leave the requirements of retributive justice unmet. None of Aulén’s considerations suffice to support this further claim, however. Indeed, the considerations make no mention at all of whether the requirements of retributive justice are met in the act of reconciliation or not. Similar remarks pertain with regard to CT-3 and CT-4. CT-3 and CT-4 add to the Classical theory claims about the relation between the met or unmet requirements of distributive justice and human rationality, and the relation between divine love and divine wrath in God, but neither of these issues are commented on in Aulén’s above considerations.

My conclusion, then, will be that Luther’s alleged endorsement of the Classical theory is correct insofar as we have CT-1 in mind, but is unsubstantiated insofar as we have CT-2, CT-3 or CT-4 in mind.

Second Application: Engeström’s Objection to Aulén’s Claim that Luther Rejected the Latin Theory

A famous objection to Aulén’s *Christus Victor* was adduced by the Luther-scholar Sigfrid von Engeström in his book *Luthers trosbegrepp* (1933).²⁷ The target of Engeström’s objection is

²⁷ Sigfrid von Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 95–105. Essentially the same objection is urged by Jaroslav Pelikan in his *The Christian Tradition 4, Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 163.

Aulén's claim that Luther rejected the Latin theory. According to Engeström, Aulén erroneously assumes that the Classical and Latin theories are incompatible with each other, such that if one accepts the Classical Theory then one must reject the Latin theory, and vice versa. On Engeström's view, Luther coherently endorses *both* theories. He says:

It is obvious that Luther without sensing any opposition uses anselmian expressions in connection with the idea of Christ's struggle and victory [...] Anselmian thoughts are interwoven with claims about Christ as victor.²⁸

And again:

Since a survey of Luther's sermons [...] makes it clear that Luther knows no opposition at all between these two theories, one does not have sufficient ground to conclude from Luther's words about God's act in Christ that Luther did not endorse a doctrine of the atonement colored by anselmianism, which is furthermore reinforced by the fact that already in Anselm one finds *both* the idea that the work of Christ is given as satisfaction to God *and* that it is a work of God's mercy.²⁹

The main feature of the Latin theory that Engeström has in mind in claiming that this theory is compatible with the Classical theory, is that Christ «has brought about reconciliation with

God and satisfied God's wrath»³⁰ or «has made satisfaction for the sins of mankind through his suffering and death»,³¹ or that «Christ's sacrifice [...] is necessary for the satisfaction of the wrath of God».³² Engeström provides thorough documentation for the presence of these sorts of claims in Luther's writings.³³ For example, he points out that in the very passage in the *Large Catechism* which Aulén cites to show that Luther endorses the Classical theory, it is expressly said that Christ's suffering and death brought about satisfaction for man's sin.³⁴ I will not here assess Engeström's attempted documentation of these sorts of claims in Luther's writings. Instead I will raise the question whether the alleged presence of these claims in Luther's thought would suffice to show that Luther endorses the Latin theory.

As can be seen, this depends entirely on what characterization of the Latin theory one has in mind. If one understands the Latin theory in accordance with LT-1, then Engeström's claim will not hold, for LT-1 comprises the idea that the act of reconciliation is in part the result of human agency, and none of the passages adduced by Engeström from Luther support this idea. Since LT-2, LT-3 and LT-4 all comprise this same claim, the same will go for them.

We could, however, imagine a version of the Latin theory which rejects the claim made in (i) in LT-2, but maintains the claim made in (ii), i.e. a theory that comprises the idea that the act of reconciliation is such that the requirements of retributive justice are met in it. We can call this theory LT-2*. It is plain that LT-2* would be a version of the Latin theory that *is* supported by the Luther-passages Engeström adduces.

²⁸ Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 96-97 (my translation). The original Swedish is: «Det är uppenbart, att Luther själv utan känsla av någon motsats använder anselmska uttryck i omedelbart samband med tankarna på Kristi kamp och seger», «Anselmskt präglade tankar äro sammanflätade med ord om Kristus såsom frihetskämpen», «Det är uppenbart, att Luther själv utan känsla av någon motsats använder anselmska uttryck i omedelbart samband med tankarna på Kristi kamp och seger».

²⁹ Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 103 (my translation). The original Swedish is: «Då en genomläsning av Luthers predikningar [...] visar, att Luther icke alls känner någon motsats mellan dessa två betraktelsesätt, har man knappast tillräcklig grund att av Luthers ord om Guds gärning i Kristus dra slutsatsen, att han icke kan ha omfattat en anselmskt färgad försoningslära, så mycket mindre som redan hos Anselm finnes *både* tanken, att Kristi gärning är en åt Gud given satisfaktion *och* att Kristi gärning är ett verk av Guds barmhärtighet».

³⁰ Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 94 (my translation). The original Swedish is: «vilken försonat Gud och blickat hans vrede».

³¹ Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 97 (my translation). The original Swedish is: «tillfyllestgjort för människornas synd genom sitt lidande och sin död».

³² Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 103 (my translation). The original Swedish is: «[att] Kristi offer är [...] [en] nödvändighet för blickande[t] av Guds vrede».

³³ See Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 95-105.

³⁴ Engeström, *Luthers trosbegrepp*, 97.

Given that Engeström has succeeded in showing that Luther endorses a version of the Latin theory along lines of LT-2*, the next question that arises is whether LT-2* is compatible with the Classical Theory; that is, whether it is such that it could be taken to co-exist with the Classical theory in Luther's thought.

Once again, the answer to this question depends entirely on what characterization of the Classical theory one has in mind. If one understands the Classical theory along lines of CT-1, then it will be compatible with LT-2*, for there does not appear to be any inconsistency between the two claims «the act of reconciliation was brought about entirely by God» and «the act of reconciliation is such that the requirements of retributive justice are met in it». If, however, we were to understand the Classical theory as articulated in CT-2, then Engeström's claim as to a mutual consistency between the two theories would have to be rejected, for CT-2 involves the claim that the act of reconciliation is such that the requirements of retributive justice are *not* met in it, which of course is inconsistent with LT-2*.

So we see then that the adequacy of Engeström's objection to Aulén's Lutheran interpretation is entirely dependent on which of the possible characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories one has in mind. On some characterizations Engeström's objection will be warranted; on others it will not.

Third Application: The Alleged Lutheran/Lutheran Orthodoxy Dichotomy

As was mentioned earlier, an important aspect of Aulén's response to Ritschl consists in driving a wedge between Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy with regard to the doctrine of reconciliation.

According to Aulén, Luther's contemporaries largely failed to understand Luther's doctrine of reconciliation. Aulén says: «Perhaps there is no single point at which the men of that age showed such complete incapacity to grasp his meaning»,³⁵ «Luther's contemporaries failed to understand his teaching on this subject, and they never

grasped his deeper thoughts»,³⁶ and «in so far as they had some inkling of it [i.e. Luther's doctrine], they did their best to cover it up».³⁷

Luther's contemporaries are instead represented as having endorsed the Latin Theory, which was then passed on to the Lutheran Orthodoxy of the Seventeenth century. Lutheran Orthodoxy is treated at some length by Aulén, although no specific theologians are mentioned or referenced. Lutheran Orthodoxy is said to «follow» Anselm «closely» on the doctrine of reconciliation, but at the same time to have worked out the doctrine in greater detail, and laid stronger emphasis on the claim that Jesus Christ endured the punishment of sin «in the place of» sinners.³⁸ Lutheran Orthodoxy is indeed taken by Aulén as comprising the most elaborate version of the Latin theory in the Christian tradition.³⁹

In arguing that Lutheran Orthodoxy endorses the Latin theory, Aulén seeks to show that it comprises the idea that the act of reconciliation is effectuated in part by human agency, and hence is not entirely the work of God. Aulén argues for this point as follows:

[I]t is clear that God's work in the Atonement is to be represented, not by a continuous line [...] but [...] by a broken line; for the compensation is paid by Christ as man, from man's side, in man's stead. [...] [T]he Atonement is regarded [...] as having its origin in God's will, springing, as was so often said, out of the Divine mercy as well as of the Divine justice. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Divine operation in the Atonement was regarded as interrupted by the compensation paid from the human side, from below. [...] [T]he work [was] effected by the human nature as the «agent».⁴⁰

As the above passage makes clear, crucial to Aulén's attempt to show that Lutheran Orthodoxy endorses the Latin theory is the claim that Christ effectuated the act of reconciliation *qua* man, not *qua* God. Given this, Aulén thinks it plain that Lutheran Orthodoxy sides with the

³⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 123.

³⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 123.

³⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 124.

³⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 129.

³⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 84-85.

⁴⁰ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 131-132.

Latin theory rather than with the Classical theory. Moreover, given Aulén's earlier contention that Luther endorses the Classical theory (which we have in part conceded), Aulén's Luther/Lutheran Orthodoxy dichotomy would seem justified.

Is Aulén's argument convincing? This depends on at least three things. First, it depends on what characterization of the Latin theory one has in mind in saying that Lutheran Orthodoxy endorses this theory. Second, it depends on the just mentioned characterization being incompatible with the version of the Classical theory that one is justified in attributing to Luther. And third, it depends on the cogency of Aulén's above quoted argument in support of the claim that Lutheran Orthodoxy took Christ to effectuate the act of reconciliation qua human being.

As regards the first and second factors, it seems proper to settle on the characterization of the Latin theory that is known to be incompatible with the version of the Classical Theory that one is justified in ascribing to Luther. As we saw earlier, the only version of the Classical theory that Aulén can be said to have shown to be endorsed by Luther is CT-1, i.e. the version according to which the act of reconciliation is effectuated by God alone without the interference of human agency. Accordingly, the version of the Latin theory that we should have in view is the one that conflicts with CT-1, and the simplest such version is of course LT-1, according to which the act of reconciliation is brought about partly by God and partly by human agency.

The question that remains to be answered, then, concerns the cogency of Aulén's above quoted argument in support of the idea that Lutheran Orthodoxy took Christ to effectuate the act of reconciliation qua human being. This question can of course not be settled via a consideration of the various characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories found in Aulén's work; but these various characterizations have nevertheless helped us to locate the main question to be discussed. That question is whether it is true that Lutheran Orthodoxy took Christ to effectuate the act of reconciliation qua human being.

I am unable to see that Aulén is right on this point. An obvious objection to him is that Lutheran Orthodoxy endorsed a Christology – put forth in great detail in the *Formula of Concord's* Article VIII – according to which the divine and human natures of Christ participate in each others' respective essential properties such that one can properly say that Jesus suffered on the cross and brought about reconciliation as both God and man.⁴¹ This Orthodox Lutheran Christology seems to militate against Aulén's claim that Lutheran Orthodoxy takes the act of reconciliation to be effectuated by the human nature of Christ to the exclusion of the divine nature.

Aulén is well aware of this objection. He responds to it as follows:

The Lutheran theologians did indeed hold that the satisfaction was made by «both natures» of Christ, and pointed to this difference between their doctrine and that of «the papists». But in reality this was little more than a verbal difference [*detta får i själva verket icke någon större betydelse*], a theological refinement: the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which was elaborated in opposition to the Calvinists, demanded that both natures should co-operate in the work of atonement.⁴²

Aulén's point is that the Orthodox Lutherans' doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* was merely the logical outcome of a Christology they had adopted in the context of polemics with Calvinists; it had no deeper effect on the Orthodox Lutheran understanding of the nature of the act of reconciliation. To reinforce this point, Aulén goes on to say:

It was argued [within Lutheran Orthodoxy] that the human nature is the «agent» [in the act of reconciliation] – the divine nature has only a part in it on account of the hypostatic union. As regards

⁴¹ See the *Formula of Concord*, Epitome, Article VIII, Negative Theses 8-9 (they can be found e.g. in *Svenska kyrkans bekännelseskriter* [Stockholm: Verbum, 1985], 526-527). For extensive comments on these theses, see Hjalmar Lindroth's notes in *Konkordieformeln i svensk översättning med inledning och kommentar* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistrelses Förlag, 1953), 342-332.

⁴² Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 131; Aulén, *Den kristna försoningstanken*, 221.

the question of what the divine nature contributed to the act, the standard answer was that it confers an infinite value on the work that the human nature effectuates.⁴³

Aulén adduces no textual evidence in support of the above claim. And indeed, such evidence would be hard to find, for what the Orthodox Lutherans actually held was something quite different. They typically held, in line with the Christology of the *Formula of Concord*, that the act of reconciliation was effectuated by the person Christ according to *both* natures, *not* that it was effectuated by the human nature of Christ as primary or sole agent.

To support this claim I will provide some quotations from Leonard Hutter's classic dogmatics textbook *Compendium Locorum Theologicorum* (1609). In his study of Lutheran Orthodoxy Robert Preus describes Hutter as «most effective in establishing confessional Lutheran orthodoxy», and says that Hutter's *Compendium* «became popular in all quarters of the church and was used for generations in Germany».⁴⁴ There is thus good reason to take what Hutter says in his *Compendium* as representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy at large.

Hutter offers the following concise explication of the Christological doctrine of Lutheran Orthodoxy in his *Compendium*:

The divine and human natures of Christ are united in an intimate union so as to participate in one another; and from this union and communion

proceeds all that we say and believe concerning God as man and the man Christ as God.⁴⁵

That the Christological doctrine endorsed in this passage had a real effect on the Orthodox Lutheran understanding of the act of reconciliation is made clear by Hutter further on in his compendium, where he in the context of discourse on the reconciliation of Christ says:

Christ's human nature alone, without the divine nature, could not by its obedience or suffering have made satisfaction to an eternal and almighty God for the transgressions of the whole world, and therewith have appeased the infinite wrath of God. Nor could the divine nature alone, without the human nature, have fulfilled the office of a mediator between man and God.⁴⁶

In this passage it is clear that Lutheran Orthodoxy took the act of reconciliation to be effectuated by Christ according to both his divine and his human natures. There is no hint here that the act of reconciliation is effectuated by a human agency distinct from the divine agency. If we take this passage seriously, then, we are led to think that Aulén is wrong in claiming that Lutheran Orthodoxy holds the act of reconciliation to be effectuated in part by God and in part by a human agency distinct from God.

⁴³ Aulén, *Den kristna försöningstanken*, 221 (my translation). The English translation of this passage is very free (see *Christus Victor*, 132), and so I have translated it anew. The original Swedish text is: «Bevisföringen [i den lutherska ortodoxin] går ut på att det är den mänskliga naturen, som är 'agens' [i försöningssakten] – den gudomliga har del i detta verk tack vare unio hypostatica. På frågan om den gudomliga naturens insats svarar man regelbundet på det gamla välkända viset: denna ger ett oändligt värde åt det verk, som närmast utföres av den mänskliga naturen».

⁴⁴ Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 51.

⁴⁵ Leonard Hutter, *Compendium Locorum Theologicorum*, ed. W. Trillhaas (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1961), 11 (my translation). The original Latin text is: «Est summa communio, qua divina et humana naturae, in una persona Christi, ita sunt unitae, ut veram inter se communicationem habeant: ex qua totum illud promanat, quicquid humani de DEO, et quicquid divini de homine Christo dicitur et creditur».

⁴⁶ Leonard Hutter, *Compendium Locorum Theologicorum*, 54 (my translation). The original Latin is: «Humana enim natura sola, sine divinitate aeterno et omnipotenti DEO, neque obedientia, neque passione, pro TOTIUS MUNDI peccatis satisfacere, et infinitam iram DEI placare valuisset. Divinitas vero sola, sine humanitate, inter DEUM et nos, Mediatore partes implere non potuisset».

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Aulén's *Christus Victor* contains several distinct characterizations of the Classical and Latin theories of reconciliation. By heeding this fact, I have sought to show that considerable clarity and facility can be brought to some of the controversial topics surrounding Aulén's book. The controversial topics I have taken up for discussion concern whether Luther endorses the Classical Theory, whether Luther rejects the Latin Theory, and whether

Luther's doctrine of reconciliation differs in any essential way from that of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

The outcome of our study has not been that Aulén is either right or wrong, but rather that this question is ill put if we are not first clear as to which of his multiple characterizations we have in mind. If I am right in this, then it seems that there can be no such thing as a one-size-fits-all response to the question of the cogency of Aulén's *Christus Victor*. Instead one must offer specific responses to specific claims.