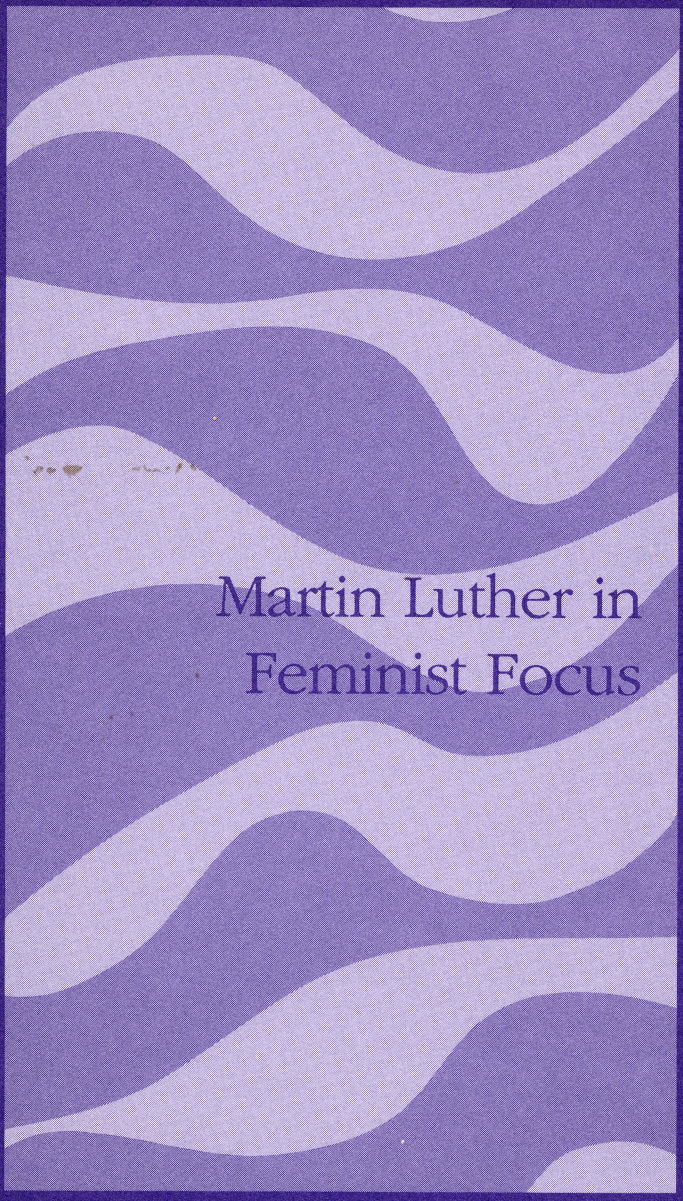
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Martin Luther in Feminist Focus

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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
(Email: rwklein @ mcs.com)

Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Assistant Editor: **Peggy B. Eldredge**
Chicago, Illinois

Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Editors of Book Reviews:
Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)
Kathleen Billman
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0778)
Craig Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary (319/589-0200)

Editorial Board: **Mary R. Bischoff, Reinhard Hütter, Connie Kleingartner, Robert Klonowski, Randall R. Lee, Ruth Manz, Richard L. Ramirez, Mark Reshan, Vicki Watkins, Mary Vance-Welsh, Fritz Wehrenberg.**

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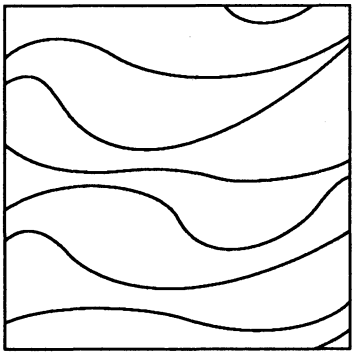
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Martin Luther in Feminist Focus

This year is the 480th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and a good time to hail a quiet reformation that has been going on in our own graduate programs and on the faculties of our colleges and seminaries: the presence of women scholars in significant numbers. When Ann Pederson and Mary Solberg approached me, more than a year ago, with a proposal to dedicate an issue of *Currents* to reading Luther through women's eyes, I jumped at the opportunity because I wanted to encourage this scholarship, to share it with our subscribers, and to recognize its considerable accomplishments. These essays were presented at a special conference for Lutheran women, preceding the AAR-SBL Annual Meeting in New Orleans, in November, 1996. Unfortunately, there was no room in this issue for two additional fine essays, but they will be published by *Currents* subsequently.

Ann Pederson sees feminist theology as an intrinsically valuable dialogical partner for Lutheran theology. Feminism calls for a re-visioning of theological categories by looking through the multiple lenses of women's eyes, and it honors the multiplicity of experiences that inform the doing of theology. Lutheran and feminist theologies are embedded in the contextualities of life's particulars. Feminists seek a way to lift up the human element in the doctrine of justification so that it does not diminish, but even enhances, God's primary role. God's way of working in our world is not to intervene from above, but to work within us, for humanity and for all of creation. Lutheran and feminist theology can embrace together the unfinished nature of what it means to be Christian as well as to be Lutheran. All the following articles provide avenues toward opening the conversation about ways of being in the world, of thinking about who we are, and of doing theology.

Mary M. Solberg holds that Luther's theology of the cross deconstructs "official" theology and announces God's solidarity with humankind and the value of embodied experience. An epistemology of the cross harbors an intrinsic suspicion of power. It insists on the partialness of what can be known, and it lives, often uncomfortably, with ambiguity and doubt. Knowledge that ignores our experiences of the cross is of little value and even less use in a world that testifies daily to the reality of such experiences. An epistemology of the cross sides with the world's victims. It is not the poor who are a problem to the rich, but the rich who are a problem to the poor. We are not to justify or bless the wretched state of the world, but to change it. God's transformative solidarity with the world is the basis for any view of the world that wants to live in the shadow of the cross.

Beverly J. Stratton defines for us feminist methods of interpretation, and Lutheran feminist understandings of Scripture. While the biblical text focuses on men's experiences from men's perspectives, we need to read the Bible in ways that promote the full humanity of women. Interpretation must be linked to praxis—credible interpretation requires credible action. Can proper listening to the Scripture include suspicion of its male bias or ethical concerns about some of its positions? Even Luther insisted that where the text does not preach grace alone it must be reinterpreted, preached against, or even omitted. We must make sure that our preaching from and teaching about the Scriptures do not obstruct its proclamation as law and gospel. A wide variety of methods make up the tapestry of feminist interpretation, and a wonderful bibliography is cited and reviewed in this essay.

Sherry Jordon reviews Luther's lectures on Genesis, from late in his life, where he discusses "women who preach." Eve's *preaching* led Cain and Abel to sacrifice, even though Luther has much to say about women as housewives, mothers, and obedient wives. In 1521 Luther wrote that women may preach only in extraordinary circumstances, when no men are available to do so. But there were no extraordinary circumstances in the contexts where Eve and Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, preached, according to the older Luther. Women preachers today follow in the tradition of the ancient matriarchs, for they too are inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret and proclaim the Word of God.

Kristen E. Kvam also draws on Luther's Genesis lectures and notes that for Luther ruling over others is a punishment God assigned to Adam and his descendants (Gen 3:17-19). Patriarchy, therefore, is God's postlapsarian design. Luther held that the hard work in connection with a household is great, greater is that connected with the state, and greatest is that in connection with rulership in the church. If Eve had persisted in the truth, she would not have been subjected to the rule of her husband. Rather, she would have been a partner in the role of ruler, which was in Luther's day entirely the concern of males.

Caryn Riswold believes that Martin Luther and Mary Daly are theologically connected by a sense of spiritual and physical exile and a related desire for return to a homeland. Luther felt that tyrannical papal laws led to spiritual enslavement, in which Christians became forgetful of their own baptism. The greatest sin of the Roman church is that it leads people into believing that particular works and specific sacraments lead one down the right path to salvation. Luther's charges against the Roman church parallel post-Christian feminist charges against patriarchy. Daly believes that women have been separated from their own native characteristics and influence. As Luther challenges Christians to recall the power of their baptism and challenge the Roman pontificate, Daly challenges women to remember themselves, to put memory back into their being, thus rejecting the tyrannical laws imposed on them. Through extremist rhetoric, Luther and Daly effectively name, charge, and deconstruct the system-in-question.

New names, new ideas. New voices, old themes. Luther would surely recognize himself in these articles, and I suspect he would cheer for both the Protestant principle enshrined in feminism in general and the gospel-centeredness woven throughout these articles. In our world weariness and clerical discouragements, we need to hear the excitement of discovery, renewal, challenge, faithfulness, and freedom that comes from these sisters in the faith.

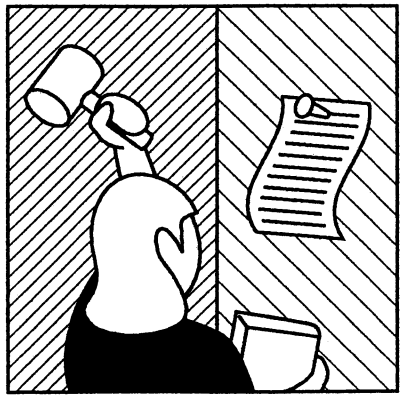
Your brother,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Conversations Toward an Ongoing Lutheran Reformation

Ann Pederson
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

This issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* grows out of continuing conversations among Lutheran women involved in theological education. For about 13 years, Lutheran women in theological education and graduate studies have met for two days prior to the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature. The early meetings were spent discussing the "climate" of the Lutheran church, finding jobs, and talking with other women about theological ideas and issues. Over the years, ideas have developed and theological conver-



Feminist theology is not simply an inclusion of women's voices, but is a complementary perspective.

sations have matured into papers and publications. These women have become an evolving and growing voice within the Lutheran church.

1996 marks the 450th anniversary of Luther's death and provides another opportunity to reflect upon our theological heritage. In the spirit of the Reformation, the voices of women in this volume contribute to the conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology. Do the two have anything to say to one another? Some would say no. Some would even say they are anathema to each other. However, we feel that our voices as "Lutheran feminists" are integral to the ongoing reformation of Lutheran theology for the context and times in which we live. The conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology has not always been easy. What are the problems and possibilities of the theological conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology? What happens to both partners in the exchange? There are several key issues and concerns.

First, it is important to establish why this conversation has been so problematic. Who would be threatened by such a conversation? Are we afraid that our Lutheran heritage will be altered unrecognizably? Are the two conversation partners by nature incompatible? The method and content of Lutheran theology are inextricably related to one another: how we do theology is related to the content of our theology. One key issue that must be raised is the way in which Lutheran theology and the Lutheran church have both embraced and rejected feminist theology. What impact has feminist theology had on Lutheran theological trends, on the institution of the ELCA, or on the parish?

In a 1985 article published in a Lutheran theological journal, Mary Pellauer, a feminist Lutheran theologian-ethicist, wrote,

> Though the women's movement in the churches has been around for nearly fifteen years, Lutheran theology shows little impact from this trend. As I speak with pastors and laypeople in our churches, I hear them saying, 'It's so new—I wish I'd heard about this before.'[1]

Times have changed somewhat, but Mary Pellauer's insights, eleven years later, are still painfully disposed. While feminist theology has had some impact, it has not found a home, or even a collegial reception, in most Lutheran theological circles. This issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* wrestles with the problems and possibilities facing feminist theologians and their contribution to Lutheran theology. It seems ridiculous to ask the question: Can one be both feminist and Lutheran? The dissonance between Lutheran and feminist theology experienced by some members of the Lutheran church argue that one cannot be both. Perhaps, however, these feminist voices can add new harmonies and new melodies to the ongoing reformation chorale of Lutheran theology. The authors in

[1] Mary Pellauer, "Feminist Theology: Challenges and Consolations for Lutherans." *dialog* 24/1 (Winter 1985): 19-24.

this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* invite reconsideration of feminist theology as an intrinsically valuable and worthwhile dialogical partner for Lutheran theology.

The conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology raises concerns that are features of a larger cultural problem. We live in a culture that wages war with its ideological opposites. "Conservatives" lash out at "Liberals" and "Relativists" take stabs at "Absolutists." How we know our world and discover the truths within it is one of the epistemological concerns and religious problems of our modern/post-modern landscape. In a recent article in *dialog*, Marty Stortz notes:

> The conversation strikes me as a crucial one, because I see a familiar polarization of positions, which precludes constructive exchange. The 'Relativists' have as little to say to the 'Absolutists' as the 'Liberals' have to say to the 'Conservatives'—and vice versa. I run into this polarization in the classroom, at church gatherings, in professional meetings. How are we theologians to respond?[2]

These familiar polarizations also preclude constructive dialogue between Lutheran and feminist theologies. We are faced with an epistemological concern and a religious problem of viewpoint, truth, and perspective. Whose knowledge counts as "truth"? Who counts as a "real" theologian? As more foundations seem to crack, we fear losing "ground" that was once held as sure and sacred. It is easier to carry on a conversation with those who are like-minded than to risk dialogue with those whose ideas may threaten our safe ground.

Theology, as the study of God, has often assumed a posture that is dogmatic in the worst sense of the word. Stortz correctly notes that theology has often "imposed an omniscient subject, a comprehensive view of truth, a systematic knowledge, and a unified field of vision."[3] Furthermore, this "view from everywhere" has generally been seen through the lens of the dominant perspective. Feminist theology challenges this dominant perspective. Feminist theology is not simply an inclusion of women's voices, but is a complementary perspective. Feminist theology calls for a re-visioning of theological categories by looking through multiple lenses of women's eyes. The process by which we go about the work of theology is intimately connected to the content of theology. When certain voices are systematically ignored and rejected as participants, the content of the conversation reflects the silence. When those voices become active in the theological conversation, will the content change as well as the method? I hope so. I believe that this is one of the "fears" of those who view the conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology as a threat. What is so threatening? Will the nature of the gospel itself be different? Will it turn into law? Will it no longer be Christian? Such questions are at the heart of any theological struggle with truth that engages voices that are challenging. However, merely labeling feminist theology as "heretical" or "gnostic" both patronizes feminists and denigrates the opportunities for further dialogue.

If Lutherans still claim with Luther that *ecclesia semper reformanda* [the church must always be reformed], we will find in our own tradition a model for how both the content and method of theology are always in the process of transition. Elizabeth A. Johnson's phrase, "living tradition," fits

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[2] Martha Ellen Stortz, "Truths of Vision and Visions of Truth," *dialog* 34/2 (Spring 1995): 93.

[3] Stortz, "Truths of Vision," 93.

well with the notion that Christian theology is always growing, reforming, and adapting to the lives of the participants in the tradition. Women's views and voices are living participants in the ongoing reform of the church and its theology. Luther was well aware of the threat that his theology posed to others—the very center of the gospel was on the line. If our theological conversation does not engage that center, we risk developing and sustaining a theology that has no heart and no life. The heart and center of Lutheran theology has always been justification by grace through faith alone. This soteriological metaphor is the means by which Lutherans understand the church to stand or fall. We are freed by this metaphor never to idolize any certain form of the gospel but allow always it to stand in tension with the community in which it is preached and taught. We have much to gain from this conversation. So, what do we do with the tensions? With the fears?

The work of Sandra Harding, a feminist philosopher of science, is provocative and challenges contemporary modes of scientific inquiry. Her model of "strong objectivity" provides insight into how we might deal with the tensions in the conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology. Harding argues that conflicting categories of thought can provoke a kind of dissonance forcing us to discover and rediscover how we know the world around us:

> We need to be able to cherish certain kinds of intellectual, political, and psychic discomforts, to see as inappropriate and even self-defeating certain kinds of clear solutions to the problems we have been posing."[4]

We can apply this to the tensions we experience in theological circles. Lutherans have often equated "correct doctrine" with an understanding of "faithfulness" or "loyalty." As Lutherans, we should not be compelled to be loyal to the categories themselves but to the analysis of the political and psychic discomforts that the categories may cause. This seems to be precisely part of our problem in the ELCA, both as an institution and as its individual members. We are afraid of the tensions, of the conflicts, of the edges. How ironic in the light of our Reformation history! Feminist philosophers of science argue that *what* we know is as important as *how* the knowledge is used. Harding's comments indicate that the outcome of living in the tension of the categories produces a dynamic, fruitful conversation which addresses the concerns but may not produce an immediate solution. My hope is that we can call to mind the "tensions" between Lutheran and feminist theology to see where productive and creative conversations can occur. That task is not an easy one; it requires careful thinking and a willingness to be open to transformation by both parties.

Both Lutheran and feminist theologies are embedded in the contextualities of life's particulars.

To live in the tension of opposing and differing voices requires a new piety and a new ear. Many in the church seek peace at

[4] Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory." *Signs* II,4 (Summer 1986): 650.

all costs. We often speak about the "family" of God as the metaphor for our life together. And yet, as many theologians like Parker Palmer note, this image conjures up an intimate group of people who "keep the peace." We have not learned how to disagree with each other. In fact, we often take disagreement as a sign of betrayal or lack of unity. We need a new way of dealing with the tension that this "new conversation" raises. David Tracy in *Plurality and Ambiguity* addresses this issue:

> ...the voices of the other multiply—all those considered 'non-persons' by the powerful but declared by the great prophets to be God's own privileged ones.... Their voices can seem strident and uncivil—in a word, other. We have all just begun to sense the terror of that otherness. But only by beginning to listen to those other voices may we also begin to hear the otherness within our own discourse and within ourselves. What we then might begin to hear, above our chatter, are possibilities that we have never dared to dream.[5]

There are possibilities we "have never dared to dream" because we are so afraid of what we might hear within ourselves, within our own discourse. The challenge of these "strident and uncivil" voices is to realize that deep inside ourselves we all have a voice that is "other." The challenge is to let those voices speak and to see where the conversation heads.

So, how do we speak with those we often consider as threat or as opposite? The work of Ian Barbour, scientist and theologian, is helpful because he has devoted years of research trying to understand the relationship of perceived opposites: religion and science. In *Religion in an Age of Science*, Barbour offers four models for how religion and science relate to one another.[6] The first model Barbour discusses is that of conflict in which religion and science are seen as opposites. The most popular form of this "battle" has been evolution vs. creationism. However, as Barbour notes, religion and science have not historically always been at odds. Both presume to know the "absolute" truth and perceive their worldview as one that crosses all knowledge claims. For example, both biblical literalism and scientific materialism claim to have a corner on the market of "absolute" truth. The second model is one of independence. Religion and science can ignore each other for they are not really working with the same questions or reality. Third, religion and science can engage in dialogue around certain boundary issues like the origin of the universe, etc. Fourth, religion and science can engage in a mutual partnership to learn from each other because they are both speaking about the one world in which we live and call creation. This typology speaks to the issues between feminist and Lutheran theology and thus seems to offer the greatest possibilities for ongoing theological fruitfulness. However, a mutual partnership also poses problems. What would this conversation mean for those involved?

First, risk always occurs in conversations: One can neither predict what the other party will say nor control the outcome. Second, simple answers are not usually available for complex issues and problems. In fact, the conversation would hopefully reflect life's ambiguity and complexity. Third, no universal answers can be pronounced upon the participants. I believe this points to one of the greatest fears about such conversation. Many people want the "truth" to be announced, to be proclaimed.

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[5] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (New York: Harper, 1987), 79.

[6] Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), chapter 1.

Just consider the majority of sermons preached and lectures given. Perhaps, however, truth is more like a process of discovery and exploration than a "packaged tour of the absolute."[7] Fourth, we might need to accept our differences as just that—differences in how we relate to one another. Deborah Tannen notes:

> Sometimes strains in a conversation reflect real differences between people: they are angry at each other; they really are at cross purposes.... A perfectly tuned conversation is a vision of sanity—a ratification of one's way of being human and one's place in the world."[8]

Finally, we need to learn not only our own "tradition" and "language" but we must risk listening and learning from the voices of those who are "other." Theology becomes exploration, a process of "living in the questions" to which theology addresses itself. Theology engages the context of the world in which we live. The Word is always addressed to a world.[9] What is the context of Lutheran and feminist theology? Do they share common ground? If so, how might this change and expand the central metaphor of Lutheran theology, justification by grace through faith alone?

Feminist and Lutheran theology are both committed to the concrete, contextual life experience of the world around us. For Lutherans, this concept is most aptly summarized by the phrase *finitum capax infiniti* [the finite is the bearer of the infinite]. This was Luther's argument against Aristotle and those in the Reformed movement who claimed the opposite, that the finite is *not* the bearer of the infinite. Luther presented both a christological and sacramental argument against Zwingli: it is in Jesus the human one and in this created, earthly world where God is found. God is found in, with, and under the created order. Luther set forth his notion of "ubiquity" to claim that Christ is both present at the right hand of God and in the elements of the Lord's Supper. This argument is important for the present conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology because here the two voices can find common ground as both claim to critique those who value a "disembodied," abstract God who is detached from this world. Both Lutheran and feminist theologies are embedded in the contextualities of life's particulars. This is important to correct the "abstractness" that occurs when theology turns away from the particularities and problems of daily living. A reformulation of Lutheran categories is needed to express clearly what the gospel says to us in our particular time and place, particularly to the lives of women. Lutheran theology has often disregarded the positive role of experience, in particular women's experience, as a source for theological thinking. One difficult question raised is that of the role of experience in theology, for both Lutheran and feminist theology.

The use of experience as a source for feminist theology has been "agreed upon by virtually everyone" until recently.[10] While most feminists agree that experience is a norm and source for theological reflection, there has been considerable discussion and disagreement about *whose* experience is normative. It can be assumed with Mary

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[7] Annie Dillard, *Teaching A Stone To Speak* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 40.

[8] Deborah Tannen, *That's Not What I Meant!* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1986), 5.

[9] For this connection between word and world, I am indebted to Paul Sponheim. His theology is always concerned with the power of the word in the world. Theological language never merely serves the community but is always addressed to the public.

[10] Pellauer, "Feminist Theology," 23.

Pellauer that "many of us would agree that wherever the experiential base of *any* theological statement is obscured or mystified, something patriarchal is occurring." (p. 23). Feminists can no longer speak about women's experience as a single, monolithic essence. Experience is a category that must embrace the diversity that is inherent within feminism and among women in general, linking to Pellauer's concern that

> in its best forms feminist theology aims to oppose interlocking injustices, not only sexism, but also racism, classism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ecological devastation, war and imperialism. A feminist theology which is sheerly a white middle class theology cannot be adequate (p. 23).

Diversity of experience must be taken into account for theological formulations. If Lutheran theology is to be appropriate to the world in which we live, if the Word is to address the world, then the multiplicity of experiences must be taken into account as rich sources for theological reflection. Harding's warning about simple solutions and loyalty to old categories is one worth heeding.

Luther's approach from the perspective of the *finitum capax infiniti* may be a close ally to Harding's notion of expanded objectivity. Both begin from the ground up, reflecting on the details and then moving to the abstract. Theology becomes an art of reflection upon the particular, the concrete, the detailed. Out of this fertile ground, we can raise theological questions and concerns. Too often we have begun with "answers" for which there were no questions. A theological method grounded in the *finitum capax infiniti* provides a platform from which to address the heart and center of Lutheran theology, justification by grace through faith alone. The intimate relational categories of Luther can connect to those same emphases in feminist theology for an ongoing revision of this central metaphor of Lutheranism.

Theology is the art of raising questions about God and the world. Theology is also the practice of reflecting on the concrete data of our lives for the purpose of interpreting the world in which we live and which we call creation. Martin Luther claimed that theology "...is not only about speculation or reading, but about living and dying, and being damned."[11] Theology's responses to life's experiences and questions should not be about offering simple solutions; instead it should be about searching for meaning in the concrete particulars of our lives. The created, earthly finite world is the *place* where we encounter God, where we can find God present for us in Jesus Christ. Theology's task is to raise questions and to reflect concretely about the world in which we live. The speculative theological questions and issues must be grounded in the stubborn facts, contradictions, and problems of the world and of its relationship to God. This method of beginning with the particulars of life relates intimately to the center of Lutheran theology. The idea of justification by grace through faith alone was hardly an "abstract" doctrine of Luther; rather it grew out of his experience *coram deo* [in the presence of God].

Another area of conversation between Lutheran and feminist theology that must be addressed is the controlling soteriological metaphor for Lutheran theology, *justification by grace through faith alone.* Lutheran theology has often concerned itself with the roles that human freedom and responsibility play in the process of salvation—as if positive valuation of human

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[11] *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weiman: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1938), 163.

responsibility and freedom diminishes the ontological status of God and the soteriological function of Jesus Christ. Certain thinkers, like Philip Hefner and Paul Sponheim, have made a valuable contribution to lifting up the "human" element in the process of justification in such a way that it does not diminish but even enhances God's primary role. Models of God and the world offered by Hefner and Sponheim redress the typical "objective" understandings of justification by grace that are "penal" and "judicial" in their formulations. A reformulation of justification by grace must locate justification "internally," within the relationship between God and the world. All creatures then become participants in the ongoing grace of God's changing and evolving universe. Justification must be located in categories of communities and must point to an interdependence among all of creation. Such a reversal of the typical patriarchal, hierarchical attributes of the classical theistic deity will lift up the qualities of contingency, mutuality, reciprocity, and vulnerability between God and the world.

Luther's theological axiom is a methodological strategy for discovering God's gracious presence in the finite particulars of this world. The earthly "stuff" of this life is where we find God in the world present "for us." *Finitum capax infiniti* expresses the gracious promise of God's presence in the world amidst pain and suffering. The incarnation is a divine embodiment of the physical world—both its human and non-human nature. Philip Hefner notes that

> the understanding of Christ through the image of the incarnation has worked throughout Christian history, as a hermeneutic for understanding nature as such. The incarnation demonstrates, as the Chalcedonian documents attest, that nature is fit to be a vessel for the presence and power of God. Martin Luther insisted that 'the finite is capable of the infinite'—a maxim that undergirded his sacramental theology and derived from reflection on Christ.[12]

Our created world is the place from which we must address the tough problems of evil and suffering and God's relationship to them.

This incarnational model of God and the world lifts up God's gracious power and presence, accentuating the response and responsibility of the created order. As Wendy Farley states:

> The way in which compassion responds to suffering should not be construed on the model of physical intervention. The power of compassion is incarnational and interactive. It is present to sufferers as the power to resist their suffering in whatever ways are possible within the confines of a particular situation.[13]

The "confines of a particular situation" correspond to the notion of incarnation and to the idea that the finite is bearer of the infinite. God's way of working in our world is not to "intervene" from "above" but to work within us for humanity and for all of creation. We are given the opportunity to hold God accountable, even to protest God's role in this ambiguous world. We are freed by God's grace, to be free "before" God. Faith has often been God's apologist. We are often afraid to raise our fist in the face of God. However, this incarnational model frees us to carry our protests, questions, and struggles to God.

What we do in this world does make a difference: disengagement and detachment are tantamount to losing the struggle. We cannot afford to sit and wait for eternal life

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[12] Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 283.

[13] Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 116.

to come, to hope to pass quickly from this temporal space to our "real home." We are pilgrims, we are people who dwell in this time and place. God's salvation is here and now. Our responsibility is to speak up for all creation in its struggle against death and with life. It is in the detail, in the specific, in the concrete where we discover God's grace for us. The struggle and the pilgrimage with those who suffer is the locus of God's grace. Somehow, in the midst of bits and pieces, we find glimpses of God's grace for us. Only then can theology attend to the framework, to the construction of world views—only after it has listened carefully to the voices of those who cry out in silence. Theology becomes a process of listening to voices, of attending to the details, of voicing and raising questions.

Recently, at Blue Cloud Abbey, a Benedictine retreat center in South Dakota, I found in their small bookstore a framed saying attributed to Luther. The quotation is appropriate for this forward movement of faith that grapples with the particularities of life. Luther said:

> This life therefore is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

We as Lutherans are not a "finished product." Our movement of faith is forward, looking to what we can yet become. Our goal is not merely to stay the way we have always been, nor to preserve some pure form of Luther, nor to understand our unity as based on some kind of doctrinal purity. We are in the process of being transformed, of growing, of moving forward. This kind of growth demands openness, creativity, receptivity, and a certain sense of humor. This kind of posture seems appropriate as we approach an understanding of ourselves as Lutheran and as feminist. We have much to learn and much to grow into.

What we do in this world does make a difference: disengagement and detachment are tantamount to losing the struggle.

Lutheran and feminist theology can embrace together the "unfinished" nature of what it means to be Christian as well as to be Lutheran as we approach the next millennium. If we take Luther's advice, we will realize that our diverse communities of faith must risk the conversation about our identity in a way that values openness, receptivity, plurality, creativity, and a vision about our future that is hopeful. If we see our diversity as a threat, we risk shoring up the walls and understanding our "loyalty" to being Lutheran in narrow and defensive ways. The following articles provide avenues toward opening the conversation about ways of being in the world, of thinking about who we are, of doing theology. The opportunities are possibly "more than we have dared to dream."

Notes Toward an Epistemology of the Cross[1]

Mary M. Solberg
Gustavus Adolphus College

The question is, What sorts and sources of knowing should we consider compelling as we seek to live morally responsible lives? In other words: Where do we need to look to learn what we need to know to do what we ought to do?

Traditional theories of knowledge, or epistemologies, have focused mainly on whether we can know anything and if so, on what grounds we can say we do. In the process, little significance has been attached to questions like, Who qualifies as a "knower," and who doesn't, and why? What is "real" knowledge—and who decides? What is knowledge *for*? These pesky questions point to the *ethical* dimensions of knowing.

Feminists who have written about theories of knowing argue that such epistemologies cannot avoid functioning in ethical ways. They act as lenses, drawing our attention to some things and excluding others from view. Knowing and not-knowing affect what we do and don't do, and how we justify what we do or do not do. Ethics is as integral to epistemology as science is.

Of all the people one might expect feminist epistemologists to seek out for conversation about all of this, Martin Luther might be one of the last. Remarkably, however, Luther's theology of the cross offers a solid basis for a surprisingly congenial conversation between them in three important ways: (1) it deconstructs and critiques "official" theology—what Luther calls the "theology of glory"—and human pretension; (2) it announces God's solidarity with humankind, and the value of embodied experience; and (3) it aims to equip humans to live in the real world, not least of all by "call[ing] the thing what it actually is," to use Luther's words.[2]

What I will call an "epistemology of the cross" emerges from this new conversa-

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[1] This article draws on material found in the author's book, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross*, forthcoming from SUNY Press in June, 1997.

[2] *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-), 31:40-41.

tion between feminist epistemologies and Luther's theology of the cross. Its task is to help focus our attention as late-20th-century North American Christians on what should govern our knowing and where we must look to learn it as we seek to live morally responsible lives.

Beginning with Luther

At the heart of Luther's theology of the cross is a profoundly epistemological question: the question about knowledge of God. For Luther, knowledge of God emerges at what is by all human standards the unlikeliest place: the cross of Christ. At the same time, Luther insists on God's epistemological "friendliness" to humans. For him, theological reflection occurs *only* in the light of what transpires between God and humans, between humans and God.

However, salvation is not an epistemological question: justification, or coming to trust God utterly, does not depend on what a person knows theologically—or nontheologically. Luther knew that even good theology was and is an imperfect, human attempt to describe and interpret what God revealed to/through faith in the daily living of it. What "made" theologians was their daily, creaturely living, not intense study of the "things of God."

Faith, too, is existential: it pervades the dailiness of life, makes the living of it possible. In this sense, the "knowledge of God" born of and borne by faith is for Luther intimately related to knowledge of the world—call it "ordinary knowledge"—and theology that tries to describe faith's knowledge of God is also intimately related to all other kinds of knowing: of things, persons, or what we might call "truths." For Luther these realms of knowledge are related in several ways and for several reasons.

1. In one sense, "knowledge of God" and "ordinary knowledge" (including theological knowledge)—admittedly clumsy but, I hope, useful concepts—are related because they set each other off: they help define one another by spelling out what each is *not*.

2. They make each other possible, in the sense that each has its proper bailiwick. Faith's knowledge of God both "frames" other knowledge and "frees" the justified sinner/knower to know all kinds of "ordinary" things.

3. Finally, faith's knowledge requires and enables epistemological accountability: human knowers must and can act responsibly in the world, in relation to others.

Once we know, with Luther, what we cannot and do not know—for example, God, directly; anything that contributes to our own justification or salvation—then what *must* we know to live our lives as faithful people? The answer to this question is not defined by its content, but by a series of what I would call "epistemological" questions that have to do with the sources and purposes of our knowledge.

An epistemology of the cross

According to one useful understanding of epistemology, it provides a "frame of reference" for adjudicating questions about the conditions, legitimacy, and adequacy of knowers, knowing, and knowledge. To whom is *this* epistemological project directed? I believe my task as a theologian is to theologize responsibly—not for the marginalized, but rather for ones like me: white, relatively privileged North American Christians who want to know what the "signs of the times" are and what they imply for faithful living.

I am co-responsible—morally, politically, and intellectually—for causing and tolerating the oppressive consequences of



systems and ideologies from which I benefit much more, and much more often, than I suffer. As a theologian, I am bound to take seriously the ways in which the religious tradition I am part of has fomented, exacerbated, and then walked past much of the suffering caused by people and institutions that have claimed to be God's very messengers.

I do not plead innocence.

And yet the cause of liberation deserves more than a guilty plea by those conscious of their relative privilege. It is better served by the sort of *metanoia* that also involves self-examination leading to course corrections. This process requires collaboration from "others like me"—whether these are professionals, women, whites, Christians, North Americans, theologians, or any combination of these or other groupings. I must carry the matter into the midst of those who are or should be so engaged.

With this proposal, I carry the conversation about a contemporary theology of the cross—rooted in, but not the same as, Luther's 16th-century version—into the hall where secular feminist philosophers have gathered to shake up and sort out and stitch together terms of reference that serve all of us by

> ...offer[ing] a more adequate, richer, better account of the world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions.[3]

Here an epistemology of the cross may be jointly forged.

Elements of an epistemology of the cross

Considerations of power, experience, objectivity, and accountability are central to any self-respecting epistemology. A description of how an epistemology of the cross would respond to them suggests the intellectual and theo-ethical "disposition" one would expect such an epistemology to foster.

1. Power

Power in epistemological garb grants itself many of the same luxuries it indulges in elsewhere: insulated by the wealth of possibilities the privilege of power confers, power-epistemology can ignore limits and resolve ambiguities. When limits and ambiguity are experienced, the framework of a doubt-less "epistemologia gloriae" reads them as humiliations rather than as features of the daily human landscape that should require of us creatures only sobriety, not courage, to acknowledge.

An epistemology of glory has all the answers, or thinks it can get them—if not now, then eventually. If necessary, it takes

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[3] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 188.

the liberty of re-framing the most difficult questions themselves in more manageable terms. The neat partnership between epistemological hubris and the quasi-religious belief in human progress determines to banish even the thought of human limits.

An epistemology of the cross, by contrast, harbors an intrinsic suspicion of power, imaged and experienced in its most common format—domination, or power-over. This suspicion continuously questions the legitimacy of the powerful as knowers and their right to add to or subtract from their ranks, by individual or by group; it also casts its beam on how knowledge is produced under conditions shaped and maintained by power-over. Finally, it scrutinizes whose interests and what causes are served, and what happens to designated "non-knowers," when knowledge is generated and used under the power-differentiated circumstances that usually obtain in real life. When Sandra Harding calls attention to "the relationship between accepted definitions of 'reality' and socially legitimated power," she could also be describing the stance suggested by an epistemology of the cross.[4]

An epistemology of the cross does not issue its critique from a neutral space—say, somewhere to the left of right and to the right of left. It identifies itself as an epistemological alternative challenging domination, refusing to be caught up in the terms domination dictates. An epistemology of the cross issues from a perspective learned with and from those relegated to the margins or backwoods of what Elizabeth Minnich calls the "dominant meaning system."[5] Eschewing global claims, an epistemology oriented to the cross insists on the partialness of what can be known by any of us knowers, and/or by all of us together. It lives, often uncomfortably, with ambiguity and doubt.

Power is played out in "politics"—in individual relationships, institutionally, in formally defined polities, internationally. Donna Haraway asks, "What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective...?"[6] An epistemology of the cross could inform the "kind of politics" Haraway writes of.

If an epistemology of the cross were about no other task, its contribution to the critique of power-as-domination would be sufficient.

2. Experience

For an epistemology of the cross, lived experience is the locale and the medium of all knowing. This means a number of things:

1. Knowing about people, propositions, even God, occurs in, with, and under the *material* realities of knowers' everyday lives. These realities' concreteness, incarnateness, embodied-ness must never be lost sight of, as it tends to when "experience" is understood conceptually, not existentially.

Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung writes eloquently of a framework for knowing inscribed by Asian women's experience of suffering:

> The power of [the women's] storytelling lies in its *embodied truth.* [They] talked about their concrete, historical life experience and not about abstract, metaphysical concepts. Women's truth was generated by their *epistemology of the broken body.* Women's bodies...

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[4] Sandra Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 11, no. 4 (1986): 647.

[5] Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 5.

[6] Haraway, 157.

> remember what it is like to be *no-body* and what it is like to be a *some-body*.[7]

The material realities of lived experience affect how knowing occurs—just as knowing affects what knowers do in, with, and about these realities.

2. An epistemology of the cross also emphasizes the "given-ness" of the creaturely life that lived experience articulates. Such recognition does not imply acceptance of the political or economic status quo, as if it reflected orders of nature; rather, it acknowledges that limits, in knowing as elsewhere, accompany us as human beings.

3. Such an epistemology recognizes that experience is always interpreted, and that any interpretation is likely to be partial and contested. For example, knowing based simply on "having had X experience," can be problematic. Harding observes that while we

> preserve the integrity and wisdom inherent in . . . specific experiences, especially in previously ignored and devalued ones, [we must also come] to terms with the fact that experience in many respects hides the realities of our lives: experience "lies."[8]

There are no guarantees that unreflected experiences, whether from the center or from the margins, will yield up insights that serve liberatory aims. The epistemological authority of lived experience must be subscribed to carefully, as well as constantly.

4. Experiences are lived by particular knowers and in that sense have a "tailor-made" quality that, according to an epistemology of the cross, invites attentiveness and resists generalization. To "collect" experiences into any sort of general category may mean to lose explanatory power and moral value.

At the same time, an epistemology of the cross grants *prima facie* value to the sort of knowing that comes from the lived experience of struggle at the margins: these are "limit-experiences," places that usually test the integrity and purpose of knowers, and the durability and responsiveness of their knowing. Luther interpreted his many personal experiences of suffering in terms as existential as they were theological. He called them evidence of God's "alien work," which brought Luther the human being to his limits; he believed that only there, having experienced those limits, could he be convinced to throw himself into the arms of the One he otherwise refused. Only then, he believed, could and did he experience God's "proper work": the grace that *was* life and made his experience of every day possible. This could happen, Luther said, because of the realized mystery of sinners' participation in the cross of Jesus Christ, which was itself the participation of the self-revealing God in the cross of human brokenness: the "state of the art" of human existence.

What is the epistemological point? Knowing that ignores or papers over our individual and corporate human experiences of the cross is of little value and even less use in a world that testifies daily to the reality of such experiences. Even to cover "just the facts," any epistemology would have to account for these experiences. An epistemology of the cross takes them as its "permanent standing ground... [and the cross as] a symbol of the reality in which [we] participate... and into which [we] must again and again be initiated."[9] For an epistemology of the cross, then, to know truly on the

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[7] Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 104.

[8] Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 311.

basis of lived experience is to know from the margins: of life, of sanity, of dignity, of power. Coming to know in this way is possible because and by means of the incarnated mystery of solidarity.

This dimension of an epistemology of the cross shares with feminists a conviction that special value—both what might loosely be called "scientific" and what is surely "ethical"—attaches to knowing that emerges from those personal and collective quarters where resistance to injustice and suffering begins with the "knowing" of them.[10]

3. Objectivity

Traditional science prizes a metaphorical "Archimedean point" as the place from which one achieves "objectivity," that perspective from which (it seems to those who prize it) what one sees ("perception") and what is there ("reality") coincide. The objectivity this point promises can be "had"; and those who "have" it are displaced only with great difficulty.

Feminist epistemologists claim, in contrast, that the mythical Archimedean point is located where prevailing cultural (including political) winds set it down, and that objectivity is a problematic, context-dependent notion.

An epistemology of the cross, while it shares feminists' skepticism about traditional science's "objectivity," has a distinctive epistemological starting point: the foot of the cross. To stand there is not to claim or even to seek the objectivity positive science treasures; nor is it to content itself with the necessary relativization of objectivity as science has defined it. Instead, an epistemology of the cross seeks "to be *with* the victims . . . [where it becomes possible to come to know, as William Rankin wryly observes] . . . that it is not the poor who are a problem to the rich, but the rich who are a problem to the poor."[11]

"To come to know" in this way, in this sense, is to experience what liberation theologians call an "epistemological break."[12] By means of a process or an event (it is difficult to define it precisely), one who could by all odds claim epistemological privilege becomes aware of a complete reversal of the notion of "privilege," finds that an extraordinary kind of truthfulness (not "objectivity") attaches to the "partial" perspective glimpsed from the vantage of the struggle of the poor, the discriminated-against, the forgotten-about, the thrown-away.

> Experience is always interpreted, and any interpretation is likely to be partial and contested.

From the vantage of his San Salvador parish Jon Sobrino describes this "phenom-

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[9] Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 116.

[10] As Haraway points out, here we may gain "perspective from those points of view which... promise... knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (p. 192).

[11] William Rankin, "The Moral Use of Knowledge: Part II," *Plumbline* 11, no. 1 (April 1983): 10-11.

[12] Tomás Hanks, in his article "El testimonio evangélico a los pobres y opimidos" (*Vida y Pensamiento* 4, nos. 1-2,

An epistemology of the cross draws our attention and concern toward unexpected places and moments of coming to know.

enon," which he has both experienced and witnessed:

> From the poor [we] receive, in a way hardly expected, new eyes for seeing the ultimate truth of things and new energies for exploring unknown and dangerous paths.... At the very moment of giving [we] find [ourselves] expressing gratitude for something new and better that [we] have been given....[13]

Such an "epistemological break" means that the power of objectivity, and the "objectivity" of the powerful, must be judged according to new, somehow more stringent standards.

Whether the subjugated have a epistemological prior claim on "truth" is no more at issue than whether they are closer to God or spiritually more developed than those who are not subjugated. But an epistemology of the cross shares with feminist epistemologies the conviction that, to the degree that relatively undistorted and ethically defensible knowing matter, the place of the least favored—at the foot of the cross, in all its contemporary forms—is a better place to start than any place of domination could be.

An epistemology of the cross draws our attention and concern toward unexpected places and moments of coming to know. Generally, they are those in which what Hall calls "the experience of negation" occurs—

> [i]n human suffering and degradation, in poverty and hunger, among the two thirds who starve, in races that are brought low, in exposure to the icy winds of the nihil, in the midst of hell....[14]

We may even discover such places as we look in the mirror at our individual, stitched-together selves: the physically healthy lesbian woman; the undocumented Salvadoran man; the well-paid health care professional disabled by AIDS; the much-decorated African-American general; the white welfare mother.

We may discover them in our ambivalences about the "categories" of persons with which we are willing to or others insist that we associate ourselves: those with whom we share, happily or unhappily, race, nation, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, and so forth. We may also discover them in the interstices among these individual and corporate identities, where we must often come to existential terms with dilemmas that seem to pit us against ourselves and one another.

So: Is there any point to discussing objectivity in the context of an epistemol-

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1984), observes that Latin American theologian Hugo Assmann was apparently the first one to speak of the "epistemological privilege of the poor" (p. 40). Assmann's discussion can be found in *Theology in the Americas*, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), especially pp. 299-300.

[13] Jon Sobrino, *Theology of Christian Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 11. I have taken the liberty of changing third-person to first-person plural pronouns. I am confident Sobrino would not mind.

[14] Hall, 151.

ogy of the cross? If objectivity is defined as what gives the "one true story" of science, or theology, epistemological pride of place, the answer is No. It is a truism, not often honored in science or theology, that there is always more than one version of any story. While the speaker with the most expensive sound truck may have something worthwhile to say, one must always consider the source.

An epistemology of the cross would be more comfortable with Sandra Harding's "strong objectivity," whose peculiar strength rests on the participation of many knowers, beginning with the least favored, and a commitment to critical examination of the causes of beliefs, especially those that pass for "objective truths."[15] Or with Haraway's understanding of objectivity, which (she argues) is not about transcendence, but about answerability:

> not about dis-engagement, but about mutual *and* usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where 'we' are permanently mortal, that is, not in 'final' control....[16]

4. Accountability

The theology of the cross on which this epistemological proposal relies in part, was and is profoundly relational. For Luther the relationship of God and humans was the basic framework of meaning: for theology, for humans' ultimate destiny, and for every dimension of daily living, as individuals and in company with one another. We are, Luther believed, always living "before" or "in the presence of" God (*coram Deo*). Simultaneously, we also live "before" or "in the presence of" the world of nature and other humans (*coram mundo*), a state of things made possible by and encompassed within our relationship with God. Our living is never just a private matter.

Accountability within an epistemology of the cross emerges from this background. I will describe briefly the several roles it plays.

1. "A human being who is content with the world," theologian Juan Luis Segundo declares, "will not have the least interest in unmasking the mechanisms that conceal the authentic reality."[17] An epistemology may be one way to maintain contentment with the world, insofar as it functions to conceal realities of exclusion and injustice. An epistemology of the cross insists that accountability entails taking steps to become aware of such realities. In this sense, it is itself a demand for accountability.

Among the most important dimensions of this critique is its insistence that knower and "knowee" are, in relation to one another and before God, *both* subjects and objects. To envision the knowing relationship as a nonreciprocal, "subject over against object" one is not only scientifically faulty but morally irresponsible.[18] An epistemology of the cross exercises a critique that is in the first instance a call for this sort of accountability.

2. By the same token, this critique announces that an epistemology of the cross also requires accountability of itself. This is understood as acknowledgment of *implication in and co-responsibility for* the reality that privilege-based epistemologies, by design or not, conspire to conceal. Repeat-

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[15] See Harding, *Whose Science?*, 149ff.

[16] Haraway, 201.

[17] Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 10.

[18] See in this connection Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 212. Her criteria for an Afrocentric feminist epistemology include the use of dialogue, not adversarial debate, in assessing knowledge claims.

edly, feminist epistemologies remind us that accountability is the epistemological value we must most passionately uphold—and (nearly in the same breath) that neither we as knowers, nor descriptions (as knowledge), nor the "practices" of knowledge-producing or -acquiring, are "innocent."

To acknowledge our individual and collective, and collaborative, lack of "innocence" means to confess: at the very least, that we *have* seen/that we *do* know; at the very most, that we have *done* something. Of course the object—*what* we have seen/*what* we do know/*what* we have done—makes an enormous difference, ethically; among other things, it may matter in terms of what we or others judge we must then do. But at the core of the matter is the plain fact that to name and recognize our lack of innocence is to describe ourselves as accountable for who we are and for what we know.

3. "...[T]he liberating function of theological understanding," Jon Sobrino observes,

> does not consist in explaining or giving meaning to an existing reality or to the faith as threatened by a particular situation, but in transforming a reality so that it may take on meaning and the lost or threatened meaning of the faith may thereby also be recovered....[19]

Theology, in other words, cannot be separated from the ethical and the practical—not only in its implications but also in its sources and resources. If Sobrino is right (as he alludes to Marx's criticism of Feuerbach), then those who do theology are accountable: not to justify or bless what he calls "the wretched state of the real world,"[20] but to change it.

An epistemology of the cross plays a key role in facilitating this transformational accountability: not only theologians' but also that of others committed to human dignity. Feminist epistemologists began their critical work in response to insults and injustices generated—to paraphrase Sobrino—by scientific and philosophical understandings that "explained" and "gave meaning to existing realities" of exclusion, especially of women. The tasks of "contestation" to and "deconstruction" of these understandings continue; but they have been augmented by what Haraway calls "passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing."[21] Accountability involves both critical *and* creative, transformational work.

An epistemology of the cross owes its view of the created world to faith's conviction of the transformative solidarity of God with the world. In enabling a clearer view of reality, in helping us recognize our implication in that reality, and in equipping us to participate, within and through God's transformative solidarity, to affirm human dignity within that reality, an epistemology of the cross both expresses and sustains its essential accountability.

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[19] Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 15.

[20] Sobrino, 18.

[21] Haraway, 191.

Here We Stand: Lutheran and Feminist Issues in Biblical Interpretation

Beverly J. Stratton
Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

"Here We Stand"—the title does not quite fit. This essay is not a confessional document with the signatures of several leading Lutheran feminist biblical scholars or even local pastors. No one has called Lutheran or feminist interpreters to a meeting where either group (or those who consider ourselves to be part of both groups) is expected to defend the theological positions we have promulgated. Some readers may wonder why anyone should bother paying attention to feminist interpreters at all. Feminists are not working at what many leading Lutheran theologians consider to be the heart of matters vital to the church. Feminists may be missing the mark according to some ecclesial and scholarly leaders and derailing students from important work, but we are not challenging authority enough to warrant getting ourselves kidnapped and spending time locked in a castle.

While some are eager to dismiss or ignore feminist theologians, others see them as initiating a needed reformation of the church similar to that ushered in by the sixteenth century reformers. One key aspect of any new reform of Christianity, as with the earlier reformation, will be the role of Scripture. In this essay I describe feminist methods of interpretation and Lutheran and feminist understandings of Scripture, outlining agreements, disagreements, and areas for further reflection.

The Bible and the Word of God

> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels....—2 Cor 4:7 RSV
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> All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.—2 Tim 3:16 NRSV
>
> Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies.
> —Martin Luther[1]

> We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged.
>
> —Epitome 1, Formula of Concord[2]

> This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.
>
> —ELCA Constitution, 2.03

The nature of the Bible is one area where Lutheran and feminist interpreters may differ. The premodern understanding of Scripture as divine revelation, authored by the Holy Spirit, and the very Word of God, gave way in the modern period to a view that acknowledges the results of historical criticism: Scripture was written by fallible humans who witness to God's revelation. In this view, the Bible is not revelation and Word of God itself; instead, it is an occasion for revelation and a vehicle for the Word of God to be heard once again. Rather than being a "transubstantiated" text,[3] modern scholars affirm the Scriptures as another instance of the finite being capable of the infinite. We have the "treasure" of the Word of God in the "earthen vessels" of the human documents of Scripture, used by God as they are. The texts themselves are the swaddling cloths and manger for God's law and gospel. The qualitative difference between Scripture and other literature is not its divine authorship but the role it has held in the Christian church by mediating God's Word.

What once was recognized as "good news for modern man" is now seen, by many feminist biblical scholars, as bad news for modern women. Feminists may have a harder time than others finding the Christ child among the other manger trappings. Feminists observe that most biblical characters are men, that God is imaged primarily in masculine terms, that women in the Bible are usually portrayed in stereotypically feminine roles, and that some women are literally torn limb from limb to serve the interests of male characters or editors (Judges 19). We know that the cultures that lie behind biblical texts are patriarchal, being ruled by male heads of household. Feminists note that not only have translations and interpretations over the centuries reinforced male interests, but the biblical text itself is androcentric, focusing on men's experiences from men's perspectives and expecting readers to read as men. Feminist biblical interpreters accuse some portions of Scripture of "textual harassment"[4] and find others "irredeemably oppressive."[5] At the same time, we also find ourselves drawn to the Scriptures, shaped by them, renewed and liberated by the Word of God we hear

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[1] Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960): 236.

[2] "Formula of Concord" in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 464.

[3] Harold H. Ditmanson, "Perspectives on the Hermeneutics Debate," 82, and David L. Tiede, "Methods of Historical Inquiry and the Faithful Interpretation of the Christian Scriptures," 285, in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann, in collaboration with Samuel H. Nafzger and Harold H. Ditmanson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

[4] Mary Ann Tolbert, "Protestant Feminists and the Bible: On the Horns of a Dilemma," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 12.

[5] Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 39.

through them. So, Scripture for feminists is both enslaver and liberator.[6]

Because of the centrality of Scripture for Protestants, Lutheran feminists may find this assessment of the biblical writings particularly troubling. But Luther faced problem passages, and so do we: "precisely because he took Scripture seriously and in its literal sense, he [Luther] faced the fact that there were problem passages. We, as his spiritual and intellectual heirs, are called upon to do the same."[7] The ways in which we treat such passages are related to our understanding of biblical authority.

Sola Scriptura, was Christum treibet, and the authority of Scripture

> all theologies... in fact never consider all parts of the Bible equally authoritative.—Rosemary Radford Ruether[8]

> It seems clear that the principle of *sola scriptura* has never actually worked.... [It] is still an important principle, since there have clearly been times when Scripture has judged tradition and found it inadequate.—Harold H. Ditmanson[9]

> either *sola scriptura* will be *iudex* [judge] or else critical human reason and scholarship, but not both.
>
> —Kurt E. Marquardt[10]

Sola Scriptura refers to the priority of the Bible over reason, tradition, and the magisterium. Luther and the other reformers refused to be persuaded on the basis of rational thinking, past church practices, or the declarations or teachings of ecclesiastical authorities if these were not supported by Scripture itself. Luther insisted, "I want to be and must be defeated with Scripture, not with the uncertain teachings and lives of men, no matter how holy they may be."[11] The normative center, canon within the canon, or ultimate Christian authority was the gospel of Christ.[12] What drives to Christ, *was Christum treibet*, is the key for understanding the rest of Scripture.

Given the biblical text's androcentrism and oppression of women, feminists have trouble acknowledging the authority of the Bible. While we appreciate the opportunity to challenge church hierarchy that the *Sola Scriptura* principle provided for Luther and the reformers, Protestant feminists are much less willing to embrace the exclusiveness of *Sola Scriptura* as appropriate for our time. In order to accommodate their concerns for justice, some feminists, like Rosemary Radford Ruether, argue for a new center, the prophetic-liberating tradition, as one that is most able to support the critical principle of feminist theology: "the promotion of the full humanity of women."[13] Rather than attempting to derive her similar goal from Scripture itself, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza simply insists that a "Feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot take as its

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[6] Tolbert, "Protestant Feminists," 12.

[7] Joseph A. Burgess, "Confessional Propria in Relation to New Testament Texts," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 254.

[8] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 23.

[9] Ditmanson, "Perspectives," 104.

[10] Kurt E. Marquardt, "The Incompatibility between Historical-Critical Theology and the Lutheran Confessions," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 319.

[11] Martin Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit" from "Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig—Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner," LW 39: 193.

[12] Carl E. Braaten, "The Holy Scriptures," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984): 64.

[13] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18.

point of departure the normative authority of the biblical archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their struggle for liberation."[14]

Clarity of Scripture, "Scripture interprets itself," and interpretive principles

> That Scripture interprets itself is simply the hermeneutical correlate of justification by faith alone. The word finds us, finds us out, kills, and gives us life. Therein lies its authority.
>
> —Gerhard O. Forde[15]

> Scripture never has—nor ever could—interpret itself. Claims of that kind have been used to mask the institutional biases of authorized interpretations.
>
> —Mary Ann Tolbert[16]

> It was axiomatic for the confessional fathers that there is no human standard which can be used to sit in judgment on the Scriptures and call them wrong.
>
> —Ralph A. Bohlmann[17]

The reformers distinguish the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture from their claim that Scripture interprets itself. Augustine explained that the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture means that unclear biblical passages could be understood through those that are clear.[18] "Scripture interprets itself," by contrast, means that "Scripture as divine word is active in establishing itself over against the interpreter."[19] Scripture is the subject which interprets the reader or listener as object. In other words, the text is effective on its own, with no outside standards or magisterium. Scripture does not need a scholar to make sense out of it; rather, the scholar should get out of Scripture's way.[20] The interpreter's proper role, in this view, is to listen; her posture in relation to the text should be one of submission.

Listening to the text is a role that feminists are willing to assume—submitting to it unquestioningly is not. Like other believers, Christian feminists approach the scriptural text to encounter God. "We listen for a Word from God in which the text that once was God's Word to people in a different time and place might again become God's Word for us."[21] With historical critics generally, Christian feminists regularly hear the Lord speaking "in, with, and under the rich diversity of voices in the Scripture."[22] But because biblical texts were written by and for men, feminists may have to listen harder to hear God's word.

Feminists disagree with those Lutherans and other Christians who insist that interpreters should not sit in judgment on the biblical text. Instead, feminists insist on "confronting irredeemable texts and readings."[23] Feminist biblical interpreters have shaped and continue to affirm Elisabeth

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[14] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 13.

[15] Gerhard O. Forde, "The Normative Character of Scripture for Matters of Faith and Life: Human Sexuality in Light of Romans 1:16-32," *Word & World* 14 (1994):307.

[16] Tolbert, "Protestant Feminists," 16.

[17] Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation: Some Basic Principles," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 200.

[18] Karlfried Froehlich, "Problems of Lutheran Hermeneutics," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 134.

[19] Forde, "Normative," 306 n. 2.

[20] Forde, "Normative," 307.

[21] Duane A. Priebe, "Theology and Hermeneutics," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 296.

[22] Tiede, "Methods of Historical Inquiry," 292.

[23] The title for a 1992 session of the Society of Biblical Literature's Feminist Theological Hermeneutics of the Bible Group.

Schüssler Fiorenza's call for an ethics of biblical interpretation.[24]

Christian feminist interpretation arises because feminists take the Bible seriously, because we know that Scripture speaks to us, and because we find that the messages we hear in the Bible are often contrary to the Word of God and the gospel of Christ that we have also heard through the Scripture. Christian feminists are willing to read as Luther read: *coram Deo*, face to face with God.[25] Feminists take seriously in relation to the whole Bible what Luther advised Christians to consider when reading the Old Testament: "It is all God's word. But let God's word be what it may, I must pay attention and know to whom God's word is addressed."[26] We ask, as Luther did, whether the message or the biblical text fits us, and find that often it does not.

Luther acknowledged "no fixed rules for the interpretation of the Word of God, since the Word of God, which teaches freedom in all other matters, must not be bound [2 Tim 2:9]."[27] Feminists take advantage of Luther's unwillingness to set fixed rules for the interpretation of Scripture and ask, along lines that Luther's concern for service to the neighbor would support, Whose needs are served by this text?[28] Luther's concern for the common people led him to oppose Rome and to make Scripture available to the laity.[29] Similarly, many feminists come to our views of Scripture through observing the ways that official interpretations and ecclesiastical structures often ignore or crush women and other marginalized groups.

Feminist interpretation is not limited to understanding or explaining a text. Our aim is not simply to discern "what the biblical author conveyed to his readers in the text that he wrote."[30] Instead, interpretation must be linked to praxis—credible interpretation requires credible action. "In reclaiming the authority of women from all walks of life to shape and determine biblical religions, feminist theology attempts to reconceptualize the act of scriptural interpretation as a moment in the global praxis for liberation."[31] Feminists insist that Christians come to terms with the evils that biblical texts and our interpretations of Scripture have allowed and encouraged. We must respond to challenges of the kind that Katie Geneva Cannon poses:

> Where was the Church and the Christian believers when Black women and Black men, Black boys and Black girls, were being raped, sexually abused, lynched, assassinated, castrated and physically oppressed? What kind of Christianity

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[24] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 107 (1988): 3-17.

[25] Darrell Jodock, *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 22.

[26] Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," *LW* 35:170.

[27] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:341.

[28] Luther's second pole in "The Freedom of a Christian" is that "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." *LW* 31:344.

[29] Timothy F. Lull observes that Luther's theology passionately emerges in concrete struggles that link life and theology. See "Luther's Challenge to Theology Today" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 1-2.

[30] Raymond E. Brown, "The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 24.

[31] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman's Bible*," in *Searching the Scriptures Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 21.

> allowed white Christians to deny basic human rights and simple dignity to Blacks, these same rights which had been given to others without question?[32]

Feminist biblical interpretation is a work of advocacy, an active project with a pastoral purpose of healing.[33]

Feminist methods of biblical interpretation

Feminist biblical interpreters have employed a variety of methods to accomplish this task of healing.[34] Remedial and revisionist work lifts up texts about women, reinterpreting prominent texts from a feminist perspective and reading relatively unknown "texts of terror" *in memoriam.*[35] Feminist biblical interpreters sometimes approach texts creatively, personally identifying and imagining with biblical characters and contexts. Feminists engage in careful textual criticism and translation; they seek out female voices in biblical texts and in the history of interpretation. Feminist scholars investigate the socio-historical situation of women's lives behind the text, recognizing that the Bible's interest in primarily official public matters often left women's activities marginalized.[36] They reconstruct women's history by using a hermeneutics of suspicion which recognizes that Scripture both describes and reinscribes men's views of women.[37]

Some feminists have attempted to redeem what others consider potentially "irredeemable" texts. My own attempts at

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[32] Katie Geneva Cannon, "A Theological Analysis of Imperialistic Christianity, " in *An Ocean with Many Shores: Asian Women Making Connections in Theology and Ministry*, ed. Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis (New York: Asian Women Theologians, Northeast U.S. Group, 1987), 25, as cited in Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 12.

[33] Sharon A. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992), 9.

[34] The summary of methods included in this section comes from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's taxonomy in pages 20-50 of *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992). Other key texts about feminist biblical interpretation not cited elsewhere include: Janice Capel Anderson, "Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism: The American Scene, 1983-1990," *Critical Review of Books in Religion* (1991): 21-44; Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); Mary Ann Tolbert, ed., *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics* (Semeia 28; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (SBLBSNA, no. 10; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985). More recent reviews and examples of feminist biblical scholarship include: Janice Capel Anderson, "Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, 103-34 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Bible and Culture Collective, "Feminist and Womanist Criticism," in *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 225-71; and Mary Ann Tolbert, "Reading for Liberation," in *Reading from this Place: Volume 1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, 263-76 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

[35] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) and *Texts of Terror* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[36] Carol L. Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 244-45.

[37] J. Cheryl Exum, "Whose Interests Are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 67.

redeeming such texts grow out of an acknowledgment of the Bible's authority for me and my faith community, a yearning to make sense out of and wrestle some positive value from the texts, and a conviction that even in these most troublesome texts God speaks.[38] I refuse to leave aside my feminist awareness and principles in these encounters with the "word of God" in the texts, but I also expect to meet God—perhaps only on the sidelines, weeping with me about the realities described in the biblical texts or the positions to which they are trying to persuade their hearers.

Feminists have become "resisting readers," who avoid becoming "immasculated" by the text.[39] We ask what assumptions lie behind the text, who has power, and whose interests are being served. We read from clearly articulated social locations or subject positions, often as multiply oppressed. We acknowledge that what we see depends upon where we stand,[40] and we often use the critical lenses of our various struggles for liberation.[41] Feminists read ethically, considering the effects of texts and their interpretations. A critical test for interpretation might be what one feminist proposes that all theologians could use for assessing theological construction: "how much it contributes to lessening human suffering; to building communities that resist oppression within the church, academy, and the society; and to furthering the liberation of those among us who are most disadvantaged, primarily the women and the children."[42]

Lutheran and feminist biblical interpreters—standing together or apart?

Following Luther's example in the Smalcald Articles, this section outlines areas of agreement among Lutherans and feminists,

> The Bible's interest in primarily official public matters often left women's activities marginalized.

matters central to feminists, and "matters which we may discuss with learned and sensible men, or even among ourselves."[43]

Lutherans and feminists both take the Bible seriously and agree that the canonical biblical text of the Old and New Testaments has functioned authoritatively in the church. We acknowledge that commitments affect our interpretations and recognize that some principles, text(s), or definitive theological center will shape our reading of scripture and may authorize some texts or interpretations while judging others. Feminists and Lutherans participate in the world and are concerned that our listeners hear the gospel

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[38] Beverly J. Stratton, "Eve Through Several Lenses: Truth in 1 Timothy 2.8-15," in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament*, ed. Athalya Brenner, 258-73 (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, no. 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

[39] The terms come from Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[40] Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible*, 3.

[41] Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "The Word of God in Us," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 87.

[42] Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible*, 31.

[43] "Formula of Concord," *Book of Concord*, 302.

when we proclaim it. Hence we affirm some principle of correlation; we read with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper or World Wide Web in the other. Additional feminist agreements with Lutherans depend on whether Lutherans allow modern historical consciousness to affect their understanding of Scripture.

> Scriptural texts and interpretations that oppress or demean women must be challenged....

Feminists agree with some Lutherans but not with others that the Bible describes and allows God's revelation but is not itself divinely authored. We recognize that the Bible's unity arises through the uniform love and justice of God that suffuse its pages rather than because of inerrant, inspired transmission of the text. We affirm that the finite is capable of the infinite—that God has spoken and continues to speak through the Scripture as a human product.

While Luther insisted on condemning certain church practices and refused to give up or compromise articles that pertain to justification by faith, feminists hold central the full humanity of all women.[44] Scriptural texts and interpretations that oppress or demean women must be challenged in terms of how the Word of God is revealed in or through them.

There are several matters that would benefit from further discussion among Lutherans and feminists.

1. Historical consciousness, Scripture as norm, and right conduct. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America proclaims the Bible to be "the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life."[45] Noting the androcentric nature of the majority of Scripture and the patriarchal cultures which biblical texts reflect and within which they were developed, feminists may reasonably ask with regard to this claim: "What does this mean"?

Given the decisions of predecessor Lutheran bodies to ordain women, it seems clear that mirroring the cultural values and practices of the early church is not the way in which the ELCA understands the Scripture to be its source and norm. We do not simply want "to play 'First-Century Bible Land.'"[46] In this case, the church interprets, rather than simply hearing and obeying, the injunction in 1 Tim 2:12 against women teaching or having authority over men. Yet when supporting the committed relationships or ordained leadership of gay and lesbian Christians is the issue, the ELCA chooses to adopt the cultural norms of Scripture writers and read with the killing and condemning letter of a few biblical passages. These differences in approach speak to a larger question that Lutherans and feminists should discuss: proper interpretive stance.

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[44] Through the prodding of women of color, feminists have come to see that the term "women" is often used as a false generalization. See Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2–3* (JSOTSupp no. 208; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 185-98.

[45] ELCA Constitution, 2.03.

[46] Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 40.

2. *Interpreter's stance and goal: proper listening and proclamation.* What should be the interpreter's stance and goal in relation to Scripture? Can proper listening include suspicion and ethical concerns? Is the theological interpreter's role simply to mediate God's revelation, to insure that what the biblical author conveyed in the text to his original readers is rendered for modern audiences so that the text has the same effect today on its hearers?[47] Is interpretation itself the problem—is the interpreter's job simply to stand aside so that the text may kill and transform us,[48] or may contemporary interpreters, as Luther did, insist that where the text does not preach grace alone it must be reinterpreted, preached against, or omitted?[49] May we "read against the grain"?[50] Should we? Are there times or ethical reasons when we must evaluate and critique a biblical text instead of simply assenting or submitting to it?[51] In making sure that texts work properly so that contemporary readers and listeners hear a word from God, may interpreters perform biblical texts like a musical score?[52]

3. *Scripture interprets itself, audience, church, and multiple meanings.* Lutherans and feminists both acknowledge that interpretation and exegesis are communal enterprises. If interpretation is for proclamation, then it must challenge or serve the needs of the church. When exegesis is done among a community of scholars, readings are reviewed and corrected by others. Part of the communal nature of the biblical interpretation involves acknowledging that texts do not have single, permanent, eternal meanings but that once an author pens a text, meaning subsequently emerges in the encounters between text and readers. After the linguistic turn, we can no longer maintain that understanding precedes significance. Rather understanding and interpretation happen together as words and texts are read.[53] The different histories and social locations of interpreters, then, shape the

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[47] Darrell Jodock argues that an interpretation producing a similar effect on a contemporary audience constitutes a successful recontextualization of a biblical text. See *The Church's Bible*, 133.

[48] Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Int* 37 (1983):240-52.

[49] Joseph A. Burgess argues that "Where the text, after being carefully examined, does not stand for *sola gratia*, something radical must take place. The text must be either reinterpreted or preached against or omitted." See his "Confessional Propria," 265.

[50] Reading "against the grain" is David J. A. Clines' term for interpreting a text through a lens different than that which the text would like us to assume. Clines contends that such reading need not be seen as a sign of disrespect. See "Images of Yahweh: God in the Pentateuch," in *Studies in Old Testament Theology*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Robert K. Johnston, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 82, or the more recent version of this essay in David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSupp no. 205; Gender, Culture, Theory, no. 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 187-211.

[51] David J. A. Clines asks whether "the almost unchallenged assumption that the task of biblical scholars is essentially to *interpret* the text represents a systematic repression of our ethical instincts." See "Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993):87.

[52] Schneiders, *Beyond Patching*, 56; for this analogy, see also Patrick R. Keifert, "Mind Reader and Maestro: Models for Biblical Interpreters," *Word & World* 1 (1981):153-68.

[53] David Tracy, "Theological Method," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982; rev. 1994), 53.

meanings that emerge as interpreters encounter texts.

As theologians shaped by biblical texts and seeking biblical counsel regarding contemporary concerns, we must acknowledge not only various relevant biblical texts but also multiple legitimate interpretations of a single text. Multiple meanings do not mean that a text can mean anything one wants it to mean, as some new students of the Bible sometimes assert, nor does it mean that all interpretations are equally valid. Rather, communities of scholars in the academy and theologians within the church weigh and evaluate interpretations.[54]

A question for the church is whether we see multiple interpretations as a problem or threat to the clear voice of the Spirit or whether we will acknowledge the possibility that God, through the same text, might speak law to one individual or community while speaking gospel to another. Are multiple meanings of Scripture a resource of the many valued parts of the body of Christ, or are they a sign of disorder in the community that needs stern chastisement? And if we decide to affirm the value of multiple meanings, how would such a stand affect the ecclesiological and ethical use of the Scripture as source and norm for faith and life?

Conclusion

The Lutheran Confessions were able to presume the authority of Scripture without explicitly stating it as dogma. For Scripture to continue to function authoritatively in the twenty-first century for a church informed by feminist scholarship, Lutheran Christians will need to clarify our understandings of the nature of Scripture and the role of interpretation. We should consider whether *Sola Scriptura* can be maintained in view of the Enlightenment's insistence on reason. We may acknowledge that the Holy Spirit guided authors, editors, text critics, translators, and interpreters of Scripture for the church, but we must also observe and consider the implications of their fallible human and often androcentric or misogynist work. We may reiterate the reformers' insistence that Scripture interprets itself, but we must be able to explain what this means in a context where people from different social locations hear and understand the text differently from one another. We should clarify how Scripture is our authoritative source and norm, articulating general principles consistent with (or reasonably against) modern or postmodern consciousness, and explaining the relationship among interpretation, advocacy, and praxis. Finally, we need to develop an ethics of interpretation, so that our preaching from and teaching about the Scripture do not obstruct its proclamation as law and gospel. We engage this work boldly, confident in the power of the Holy Spirit that God's Word forever shall prevail.

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[54] For cogent discussion of communal constraints on multiple meanings, see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) and *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989). For a summary of Fish's key points as applied to biblical scholarship, see Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 179-83.

Women as Proclaimers and Interpreters of the Word

Sherry Jordon
University of St. Thomas

Late twentieth-century Protestants may need to be reminded that Martin Luther did not permit the ordination of women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, in his "Lectures on Genesis," he offers several examples of women preaching and proclaiming the Word. Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, even Rebekah's nurse Deborah, all play crucial roles in proclaiming and interpreting the Word. This article will explore these examples of preaching women and set them in the context of Luther's more general discussion of women preachers in "The Misuse of the Mass."

Women's roles in the lectures on Genesis

The lectures on Genesis have been relatively neglected by Luther scholars, in part because of problems associated with the history and transmission of the text. Luther lectured on Genesis during the last ten years of his life, from 1535 to 1545. The published editions of these lectures were not based on Luther's written text but on the lecture notes of his students. The editors compiled these notes with a great deal of editorial liberty, and scholars differ on the extent to which these redactions have compromised the integrity of this material.[1] While these lectures must be used with caution and with an understanding of their complex history, they do provide valuable insights into Luther's mature theology and particularly into his understanding of women and their roles.

For the most part, Luther's view of women was quite traditional. Like the medieval theologians who preceded him, Luther regarded the wife's subordination to her husband as God's curse on women for the sin of Eve. Luther expresses this conviction most clearly in his exegesis of Gen 2:18:

> Hence it follows that if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects. For the

[1] Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936) and Erich Seeberg, *Studien zu Luthers Genesisvorlesung* (Gütersloh, 1932).

> punishment, that she is now subjected to the man, was imposed on her after sin and because of sin, just as the other hardships and dangers were: travail, pain, and countless other vexations.[2]

As a consequence of the Fall, women were made subject to the authority of men, and they lost both the right and the ability to govern. Luther states that women can no longer perform the functions of men, and he specifically mentions teaching and ruling as two of the roles now reserved for males. Women have retained only the capacities needed for their vocation in the home: "In procreation and in feeding and nurturing their offspring they are masters."[3]

In confining wives to the domestic arena and the rearing of children, Luther is hardly unique. The Catechism of the Council of Trent states that the proper duties of the good wife are the raising of children and attending to domestic concerns. It adds that she should willingly stay at home and never dare to leave home without her husband's permission.[4] Luther differs with the Catholic Church, however, in his conviction that virtually all women are called to be wives and mothers, and in his attack on the notion that the celibate life of a nun is a higher vocation before God than the life of a housewife and mother.

Luther defends this view by arguing that it is faithful to Scripture in general and the book of Genesis in particular. He points out that Genesis has numerous references to marriage and childbirth, and he contrasts these to the book's negative evaluation of celibacy and barrenness. Luther repeatedly praises the matriarchs for their ardent desire to bear children, as well as their efficient management of the household and their unquestioning obedience to their husbands. In Luther's exegesis of Genesis, the matriarchs become exemplary housewives, mothers, and obedient wives.

The matriarchs as Christians and members of the church

The focus of this article, however, will be on Luther's description of the matriarchs as interpreters and proclaimers of the Word. Throughout these lectures, Luther not only argues that the matriarchs managed the household but he points to instances where they interpreted and preached the Word of God. The Word they proclaimed was the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where does he find these promises of Christ in the Old Testament?

The word "seed" often appears in the Old Testament, meaning "descendants." Luther follows an ancient exegetical tradition by identifying Christ with references to "the seed." Thus the gospel is proclaimed immediately after the Fall with the promise of the seed who will strike the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This promise is renewed when God promises "seed" to Abraham, a reference not only to many descendants but to Christ. The patriarchs and matriarchs respond to the promise of Christ in faith, and Luther therefore describes them as believers in Christ or Christians.

As believers in Christ, the matriarchs and patriarchs are also members of the church. Luther maintains that the church, *not* a type or figure of the church, was actually present among the people of Israel.

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[2] WA 42,87 (LW 1:115). See also WA 42,103-104 (LW 1:137-38). At other places in these lectures, Luther suggests that women were created inherently weaker and inferior to men: WA 42,51-52 (LW 1:68-69); WA 42,114 (LW 1:151).

[3] WA 42,151 (LW 1:203).

[4] *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Buckley (London: George Routledge and Co., 1852), pt. 2, ch. 8, question 27.

He believes that the church has always existed as a historical reality, and its uninterrupted continuity through the centuries has depended on the presence of Word and Sacrament. In his exegesis of Genesis, Luther demonstrates that the patriarchs and matriarchs are members of the church by showing that they preached the Word and administered the sacraments.[5]

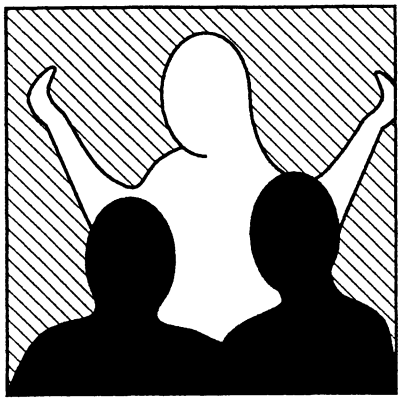
Luther describes this exegesis as "historical," and he contrasts it with the allegorical method that preceded him.[6] Luther's "historical" exegesis, however, looks a great deal like allegorical interpretation to modern readers. This is because Luther uses the term "historical" to refer to the history of the church as the people of God.[7] Luther interprets the Genesis narratives as an early history of the church and as such it is the history of a community which preaches the Word of God and responds to it in faith.

Eve as preacher

Having established that the Christian Church was already present with the patriarchs and matriarchs, Luther points to specific instances, beginning with Eve, where the matriarchs interpreted and proclaimed the Word. At times he chooses rather unexpected biblical passages to illustrate this. For example, Gen 4:3-4 refers to the offerings Cain and Abel made to God. In his exegesis of this text, Luther uses these offerings to argue that Adam and Eve must have preached to their children:

> Perhaps the pious parents delivered these discourses before their children in a definite place and particularly on the Sabbath. By these sermons, accordingly, the children were prompted to bring sacrifices and to worship God.[8]

One might object that Luther is using the word "sermons" simply to refer to the



instruction that all Christian parents should offer their children. Although this is certainly part of Luther's intention, it ignores the fact that the household of the patriarchs and the matriarchs is also the church. It is the place where the Word of God is preached and the office of the priesthood is exercised. Luther makes this explicit in his further comments on this passage:

> But in connection with this passage let the reader ponder the following, above all: Adam and Eve are not only parents, nor do they merely provide for their children and educate them for this present life; but they also perform the office of priests.[9]

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[5] WA 42,184 (LW 1:248) and WA 42,401 (LW 2:197). These sacraments include the rainbow, circumcision, and the garments given to Adam and Eve after the Fall. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, companion volume, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 106-107.

[6] WA 42,15-16 (LW 1:19)

[7] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 89-90, 107.

[8] WA 42,183 (LW 1:247).

[9] WA 42,183 (LW 1:247).

Deborah as prophet

Luther offers another example of a woman who proclaims the Word in his discussion of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse. Once again, the passage he interprets to do so is rather surprising: "And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Oak of Weeping" (Gen 35:8). In his commentary on this text, Luther wonders why the death of this old woman was considered sufficiently important to warrant comment. He begins by describing her in fairly traditional terms as "a wise and godly matron" and "grandmother" who nursed and cared for the children.[10]

This nurse and grandmother becomes a prophet and proclaimer of the Word when Luther exegetes the passage that immediately follows her death: "God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Mesopotamia in Syria, and blessed him" (Gen 35:9). Luther interprets the phrase "God appeared to Jacob again" to mean that God took Deborah's place and appeared to Jacob after her death to proclaim the Word.[11] As he does so often in these lectures, Luther uses this text to demonstrate that the Word of God is usually mediated through the ministry of human beings. He states that God often spoke to Jacob through his father Isaac or through the nurse Deborah. He describes Deborah as "a very wise matron and a prophetess full of the Holy Spirit" and concludes that Jacob must have depended on her advice and counsel in ruling the household.[12] Luther argues that her words should be regarded as spoken by God himself, and he compares them to the words spoken in the church of his day:

> When, for example, we teach the Gospel, baptize, call men to the ministry of the Word, and ordain ministers, we ourselves do not preach, we do not baptize, we do not ordain, but God is speaking through us.[13]

Luther often relates the revelations given to the patriarchs and matriarchs to the ministry of the church in order to underscore the importance of the latter.[14] He points out, for example, that there is no need to envy the matriarchs and patriarchs for their revelations from God, for those revelations continue in the ministry of the church.[15] In this example, Luther relates Deborah's words as a prophet of God to the ministry of the church.[16]

The true vs. the false church

According to Luther, the Word which is proclaimed through the ministry of the church is received either in faith or in unbelief. This basic decision to believe or not to believe remains the same throughout history and confronts every human being in every time and place. Throughout history,

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[10] WA 44,189 (LW 6:255).
[11] WA 44,191 (LW 6:257).
[12] WA 44,190 (LW 6:257).
[13] WA 44,190 (LW 6:257).
[14] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 103.
[15] WA 42,667 (LW 3:166); WA 43,347 (LW 4:295); WA 44,806 (LW 8:309).
[16] Merry Wiesner points out that female prophets were much less threatening than female preachers, for the former had biblical parallels, while the latter were disobeying Paul's command to keep silent in church. The extraordinary, charismatic role of a prophet did not offer the same challenge as the more official, institutional status of preacher. Merry Wiesner, "Women's Response to the Reformation," in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 162. Although this is undoubtedly the case, it is noteworthy that here Luther closely links Deborah's words as a prophet to the ministry of the church.

therefore, there have always been two classes of humans, distinguished by their response to the Word of God. These two kinds of hearers are also found within the church, and thus the true church has always existed in conjunction with the false church. The true church has the promises of God and believes them:

> And here is the beginning of the two churches that are utterly opposed to each other: the one, the church of Adam and the godly, which has the hope and promise of the blessed Seed; the other, the church of Cain, which has lost this hope and promise through its sin and cannot regain it.[17]

Luther's division of humanity into two classes or peoples reflects an essentially Augustinian view. Luther also imitates Augustine in drawing a parallel between the individual and the whole race. Just as Augustine identifies Cain with the city of man and Abel with the city of God, so Luther identifies Cain with the false church and Abel with the true church.[18]

In his exegesis Luther sees all the conflicts in Genesis as representative of the continuing conflict between the true and the false church. Luther therefore refers to "the hatred between Cain and Abel, between Ishmael and Isaac, between Esau and Jacob, and between the church of God and that of the devil."[19] Luther sees his own conflict with the Catholic church as another instance of this continual struggle within the church, a struggle which could be traced back to Cain and Abel.[20]

In the midst of this struggle, the matriarchs play the crucial role of distinguishing between the true and the false church. They do this by realizing time and again that the promise has not been given to the first born son but to the younger sibling. In recognizing the true succession of the promise, the matriarchs also discern the true church.

Luther sees all the conflicts in Genesis as representative of the continuing conflict between the true and the false church.

Eve and Seth. This ability to recognize the true succession of the promise can be seen in Luther's interpretation of Gen 4:25: "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, saying: 'God has appointed for me another seed in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'" According to Luther, Eve's name for her son indicates her recognition that the Word of promise has been given to Seth. The name Seth, Luther points out, is from the verb which denotes "He has placed" or "He has made firm," and Eve chooses this name to indicate that Seth is the foundation on which the promise concerning Christ rests.[21] Luther assumes that Eve must have received a special prom-

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[17] WA 42,215 (LW 1:291). See also WA 43,157 (LW 4:30).

[18] Luther acknowledges his debt to Augustine in WA 42,187 (LW 1:252). See Augustine, *City of God*, Book XV, and John M. Headley's discussion of the differences between Luther and Augustine in *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 67-69.

[19] WA 43,384 (LW 4:344). See also WA 43,38 (LW 3:227-28).

[20] WA 42,187 (LW 1:252-53); WA 42,192 (LW 1:260); WA 42,229 (LW 1:311-12). See also Pelikan, 95-99.

[21] WA 42,239 (LW 1:325).

ise to this effect and in naming her son she is preaching this Word from God. He therefore characterizes her words as a "sort of little sermon."[22]

If Seth represents the true church, then Cain and his descendants are the false church.

If Seth represents the true church, then Cain and his descendants are the false church. Luther claims that Eve recognizes this struggle between the true and the false church in her own family and correctly distinguishes between the two. In obedience to God's Word, Eve denies her affection for her older son and "she herself also excommunicates the excommunicated Cain."[23] Eve's words are therefore not merely an exclamation of joy at the birth of a son, but a recognition of the true church:

> And Eve, the mother of us all, is deservedly praised as a most holy woman, full of faith and love, because she so gloriously extols the true church in the person of Seth without paying any attention to the Cainites.[24]

Sarah and Isaac. Eve recognizes that the promise belongs to Seth, even though Cain is the first-born. Sarah continues in this tradition when she realizes that the promise belongs to Isaac and not to Ishmael. In Sarah's case, obedience to the Word of God leads her to cast out Hagar and Ishmael against the wishes of her husband Abraham.

Luther interprets the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael as Sarah's attempt to secure the inheritance and promise for her son Isaac. In doing so, Sarah is relying on God's promise that the covenant has been established with Isaac and not Ishmael.[25] Luther interprets this to mean that Isaac has the promise of Christ, the Blessed Seed.[26] The conflict between Isaac and Ishmael is therefore understood as the struggle between the true church which has the Word and the false church which does not. Ishmael is not the innocent victim of Sarah's wrath but the false church seeking to assert its power illegitimately:

> Accordingly, just as the sons of Abraham are of two kinds, so the church is of two kinds. One is killed and suffers persecutions; the other kills and persecutes the brethren, just as Cain and Ishmael did.[27]

Sarah is able to distinguish between the true church and the false because she believes the promise given to her son Isaac. Luther makes it clear that Sarah is not motivated by emotion when she expels Hagar and Ishmael, but by her understanding of God's Word:

> Sarah, on the other hand, makes fundamental distinctions between the son of the slave woman and her own, and, as Augustine says, she is not excited like a woman; but she is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and she relies on the sure promise which she had heard concerning her son.[28]

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[22] WA 42,239 (LW 1:324).
[23] WA 42,239 (LW 1:325).
[24] WA 42,239 (LW 1:325).
[25] WA 43,149 (LW 4:20).
[26] WA 43,154 (LW 4:27).
[27] WA 43,159 (LW 4:33).
[28] WA 43,149 (LW 4:19). See also WA 43,150 (LW 4:21).

In this description of Sarah, Luther accepts the traditional assumption that women are generally more emotional than men. Obedience to the Word may take precedence over "womanly affection," however, as it did in Eve's excommunication of Cain. In fact, Luther reverses the common expectation by arguing that Abraham is the one carried away by emotion, not Sarah. The text in Genesis states that Sarah's plan to cast out Hagar and Ishmael was displeasing to Abraham because of his son (Gen 21:11). Luther defends Abraham's natural reluctance to expel Ishmael, but concludes that Sarah understood the Word more clearly than her husband:

> For he, like any human being, was preoccupied with love for his first offspring. Nor did he consider the promise as carefully as Sarah did. His fatherly affection evidently prevented him from doing so.[29]

Abraham is finally commanded by God to obey Sarah, for she has correctly heard and understood the Word of God. Ordinarily, it was the woman's duty to obey her husband, and yet here God commands Abraham to obey his wife. Luther describes this command as a test and a mortification for Abraham, for he is forced to learn the true understanding of the promise from his wife.[30]

Although Luther asserts that Abraham was required to obey his wife, he argues that Sarah continued to respect her husband and his authority. Luther admits that Sarah's words in Gen 21:10 sound "rather dictatorial," and this apparent lack of obedience troubles him much more than her cruel treatment of Hagar and Ishmael.[31] He maintains Sarah's identity as a dutiful wife by contending that she did not command her husband in a haughty manner, but begged him humbly and reverently. Sarah's obedience to her husband is only exceeded by her obedience to God:

> The entire account bears witness that Sarah treated her husband with reverence. But at this point she is compelled by God's command to undertake something contrary to her husband's will.[32]

Rebekah and Jacob. Rebekah is also called to put the Word of the promise ahead of her duty toward her husband. Luther understands Gen 25:23, with its declaration that "the elder shall serve the younger," as a word of promise proclaimed to Rebekah. Luther attempts to determine whether Rebekah shared this Word with her husband or not. This question is significant, for if Isaac knew of the promise that the elder must serve the younger, "then he clearly sinned deliberately, wittingly, and perversely against God's plain promise" by preferring Esau to Jacob.[33] On the other hand, if Isaac did not know this Word of promise, then Rebekah must have kept it from him. Luther explicitly rejects the exegetical tradition that sought to exonerate Isaac by claiming that Rebekah concealed this promise from her husband.[34] Luther proposes "a middle course," one that will excuse both Isaac and Rebekah. Luther suggests that Rebekah told Isaac of the promise, but he did not accept her interpretation of its meaning. While Rebekah understood the prophecy to mean that Jacob

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[29] WA 43,149 (LW 4:19). See Luther's defense of Abraham in WA 43,150 (LW 4:21), and his interpretation of Gen 21:13: "Sara autem perrumpit et impetrat, quod instituerat, propius enim inspexit promissionem, intellexitque purius quam Abraham." WA 43,161 (LW 4:36).

[30] WA 43,151-53 (LW 4:22-24); WA 43,167 (LW 4:44-45).

[31] WA 43,148 (LW 4:18).

[32] WA 43,152 (LW 4:23). See also WA 43,149 (LW 4:18-19).

[33] WA 43,414-15 (LW 4:387).

[34] WA 43,415 (LW 4:388).

Luther describes Rebekah's deception of Isaac as a necessary stratagem, intended to realize the Word of promise.

would supplant Esau as the first-born, Isaac believed that the prophecy had already been fulfilled by Esau overcoming Jacob in the womb.[35]

Luther defines the true theologian as one who is able to distinguish between Law and Gospel correctly. Rebekah was the better theologian in this instance, for she recognized the Word as promise, while Isaac interpreted it as Law. Luther argues that Isaac interpreted the Word in terms of the law of primogeniture, and wrongfully concluded that Esau should still receive the rights of the first-born.[36] Rebekah, on the other hand, interpreted the Word as a promise that abrogated the law of primogeniture and therefore she recognized that the inheritance and the blessing belonged to Jacob.[37]

Luther argues that Rebekah was enlightened by the Holy Spirit in her interpretation of the Word and received confirmation of her inspiration by experience.[38] He describes Esau as a wicked hypocrite who wrongly sought the rule and the priesthood for himself and his children. Jacob, on the other hand, is portrayed as a pious and saintly man who earnestly sought the kingdom of God. Experience therefore confirms Rebekah's revelation:

> In this case there is added the example and the experience, for Esau is irreligious and becomes worse. Jacob, on the other hand, seeks the kingdom of heaven and grows in the fear of God and in other virtues. That inspiration is also good and sure.[39]

Luther's description of a pious, saintly Jacob hardly accords with the scoundrel described in the Bible. It does accord, however, with his hermeneutical method of identifying the conflict between brothers with the struggle between the true and false church. As the false church, Esau is proud, seeks righteousness by works, and persecutes his brother. As the true church, Jacob is humble, believes in the Word, and suffers persecution.

Luther can therefore conclude that Rebekah is compelled to disobey, even deceive, her husband in order to secure the primogeniture for the younger son Jacob. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, and covers his hands and neck with lambskin so that blind Isaac will assume he is the older son Esau. Luther describes this deception as a necessary stratagem, intended to realize the Word of promise:

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[35] WA 43,415 (LW 4:388) and WA 43,498 (LW 5:101).

[36] WA 43,414 (LW 4:387), WA 43,499 (LW 5:102) and WA 43,517 (LW 5:129). See also Luther's comments on Gen 48:17,18, where he states that Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph rely on the law of God, and therefore conclude that Ishmael, Esau, and Manasseh are entitled to the inheritance because they are the first-born. WA 44,702-703 (LW 8:169).

[37] WA 43,505-506 (LW 5:112-13).

[38] WA 43,416 (LW 4:389); WA 43,500 (LW 5:104) and WA 43,517 (LW 5:129).

[39] WA 43,416 (LW 4:390). See also WA 43,414 (LW 4:387), WA 43,499 (LW 5:102), and WA 43,502-503 (LW 5:107-108). Sarah received the same confirmation with respect to Ishmael: WA 43,416 (LW 4:390).

> And just as Abraham was compelled to listen to the voice of Sarah, so Isaac is compelled to obey Rebekah even against his will; and this she brings about by means of a sinless and pious deception, in order that the inheritance may be taken away from the false first-born and may be restored to Jacob, the true first-born.[40]

Luther thus defends the apparently "immoral" acts of the matriarchs, especially their disobedience and even deception of their husbands, by appealing to the Word.[41] This "sinless and pious deception" succeeds only because it has the Word and promise of God.

"The Misuse of the Mass": women as preachers

What conclusions may we draw from Luther's discussion of the matriarchs as proclaimers and interpreters of the Word? Might their examples serve as a model and warrant for women preachers in general?

To answer this question, it will be helpful to examine a treatise Luther wrote several decades earlier. In "The Misuse of the Mass" (1521), Luther discusses his view of women preachers in relation to his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Luther argues that all believers are priests by virtue of their baptism into Christ, the one true priest.[42] As priests, all Christians have the right to preach and teach the Word.[43] Good order, however, requires that not all Christians exercise these rights publicly and therefore the community appoints persons to exercise the office of priesthood as representatives of the others.[44] There is thus no essential difference between priests and laypeople; Luther explicitly rejects the idea that the sacrament of ordination confers an "indelible character" on the priest.[45] The difference between priests and laypeople is merely one of office, and in an emergency, any Christian may preach or teach.[46]

What does this say about women preachers? Women are baptized into Christ and are priests by virtue of this baptism. They therefore have the right common to all priests to teach and preach. In "The Misuse of the Mass," Luther mentions that "the papists" have used the logical possibility of women priests to attack his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Luther answers this attack by appealing to discipline and order. Although all Christians have the right to preach, only those most suited for the task should do so. Women, by definition, are not suited for this:

> They argue from this that preaching cannot be common to all Christians because women are excluded. My answer to this is that one also does not permit the dumb to preach, or those who are otherwise handicapped or incompetent.[47]

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[40] WA 43, 495 (LW 5:95-96). See also WA 43,416 (LW 4:390).

[41] See Roland Bainton, "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs According to the Exegesis of the Late Middle Ages and the Reformation," *Harvard Theological Review* 23 (1930): 39-49.

[42] WA 8,486 (LW 36:138). See also WA 7,56-57 (LW 31:354); WA 7,628 (LW 39:152); WA 6,407 (LW 44:127).

[43] WA 8,487 (LW 36:139); WA 8,494-96 (LW 36:148-50).

[44] WA 8,495 (LW 36:149). See also WA 7,58 (LW 31:356); WA 6,564 (LW 36:112-13); WA 7,631 (LW 39:155); WA 6,407-408 (LW 44:128-29).

[45] WA 8,491 (LW 36:144); WA 8,503 (LW 36:159). See also WA 6,567 (LW 36:117); WA 7,634 (LW 39:159); WA 6,408 (LW 44:129-130).

[46] WA 11,412-13 (LW 39:310); WA 6,407 (LW 44:127); WA 6,412-14 (LW 44:135-37).

[47] WA 8,497 (LW 36:151).

Luther then specifies the qualities that a good preacher needs, qualities that women evidently lack: "a good voice, good eloquence, a good memory and other naturalgifts."[48] It is not suitable for women to preach because they lack the necessary skills. He then brings the argument full circle: "because it is much more fitting and proper for a man to speak, a man is also more skilled at it."[49]

It is noteworthy that the work of the Holy Spirit and the biblical verses Luther cites support the right of women to preach.

Why is it not fitting for women to preach? The "papists" point to Paul's admonition that women should be silent in church (1 Cor 14:34), and Luther adds that Paul appeals to the law which states that women are to be subject to men (Gen 3:16). Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, however, does allow for emergency situations when any Christian may publicly exercise his or her rights as a priest. If no ordained minister is preaching the Word of God, then God may call a layperson to preach. For women this means that if no man is preaching the Word, then they must do so.[50]

To support his claim that women may preach in extraordinary circumstances, Luther notes that Paul himself tells women to pray and prophesy with covered heads in 1 Cor 11:5.[51] He also points to biblical examples of women prophets: Philip's unmarried daughters, Miriam, Huldah, Deborah, even the Virgin Mary. All these women were inspired to speak by the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the words spoken by the prophet Joel: "And your daughters shall prophesy."[52]

It is noteworthy that the work of the Holy Spirit and the biblical verses Luther cites support the right of women to preach. He must appeal to the law (Gen 3:16) and the need for "order, discipline, and respect" to deny women the right to publicly exercise the preaching office under ordinary circumstances.[53]

Comparison of "Misuse of the Mass" and "Lectures on Genesis"

At times, Luther's discussion of the matriarchs in his Lectures on Genesis appears to accord well with his earlier comments in The Misuse of the Mass. One could argue, for example, that Sarah and Rebekah preach (or at least interpret) the Word because no man is present to do so. Abraham is blinded by affection for his son Ishmael, and Isaac incorrectly applies the promise to his son Esau. Under these circumstances, the women must take extraordinary measures—including disobeying and even deceiving their husbands—to ensure the proper succession of the promise and establish the true church. Their disobedience of their hus-

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[48] WA 8,497 (LW 36:152).

[49] WA 8,497 (LW 36:152).

[50] WA 8,498 (LW 36:152).

[51] WA 8,498 (LW 36:152).

[52] WA 8,498 (LW 36:152). See Acts 21:8-9; Exod 15:20; 2 Kgs 22:14-20; Judg 4:4-7; Lk 1:46-55.

[53] "die ordnung, tzucht unnd eher," WA 8,498 (LW 36:152).

bands is justified by their obedience to the Word.

In Luther's discussion of Eve and Deborah, however, there is no mention of extraordinary circumstances that would make it necessary for these women to preach. When Eve exercises the office of priesthood and preaches to Cain and Abel, Adam is there beside her. When she preaches "a little sermon" in naming Seth, there is no indication that Adam is unable to do so. When Deborah communicates the Word of God and serves as advisor and prophetess to a patriarch, she does not do so because Jacob is incapable of preaching or proclaiming the Word himself. In all of these instances, women are exercising their rights as priests and believers in Christ.

Conclusion

Luther continues to maintain that the public office of ministry is only open to men, despite the examples of preaching women he cites both in "The Misuse of the Mass" and in his "Lectures on Genesis." Women are not called to preach under ordinary circumstances because this violates "good order." This order is divinely ordained and includes the subordination of women to men and the limitation of women's vocations to the domestic sphere.

Luther's assumptions about women and their role in society led him to limit their preaching role to unusual and extraordinary circumstances. Is this necessary? A number of biblical scholars and theologians have persuasively argued that the restrictions placed on women reflect the demands of a patriarchal society and not God's will or intentions for women. If one does not accept Luther's assumptions about the divine order, then his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and biblical examples of women as proclaimers and interpreters of the Word would serve to support the right of women to preach and teach.[54] This right should not only be exercised under extraordinary circumstances, when no man is able or willing to preach, but as part of the ongoing life and mission of the church. Women preachers are following in the tradition of the matriarchs, for they too are inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret and proclaim the Word of God.

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[54] David Steinmetz indicates this in his article, "Theological Reflections on the Reformation and the Status of Women": "The Reformation did not sanction the ordination of women to the public ministry of Word and sacrament. Nevertheless, the fundamental arguments which sanction that act are already articulated in the Reformation era. Women share in the common priesthood committed to all the faithful by baptism." *Duke Divinity Review* 41 (Fall 1976): 206. See also Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Women and the Continental Reformation," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 297 and 309.

"The Sweat of the Brow is of Many Kinds": Luther on the Duties of Adam and His Sons

Kristen E. Kvam
Saint Paul School of Theology
Kansas City, Missouri

While Martin Luther's criticisms of monastic celibacy are commonly known, his concern to reframe the ways that Christian theology portrayed the nature of gender and gender relations has received scant attention. This essay explores how Luther configured the meaning of masculinity. In particular it investigates Luther's 1535 lecture remarks on the so-called "sentencing of Adam" in Gen 3:17-19. Luther's discussion of this passage offers important insights into his understandings of the work God assigned to Adam and thereby to all men, especially the work of ruling over other persons.

Luther's "Great Lectures on Genesis"

Before turning to Luther's remarks on the particular passage in Genesis 3, it is important to recognize that this discussion occurs within Luther's so-called "Great Lectures on Genesis." Because Luther spent nearly the last decade of his life lecturing on the book of Genesis at the University of Wittenberg, these lectures have been described as his "swan song."[1] At least three reasons underlie the decision to use these lectures as a significant resource for discerning Luther's understanding of men and masculinity.

One reason for focusing on Luther's Genesis lectures is because this approach coheres with Luther's understanding of himself as a biblical professor. Luther undertook a wide variety of tasks—as preacher, pastor, counselor, biblical translator, and

[1] John N. Lenker uses the phrase "swan song" in an introduction to a translation of Luther's Genesis lectures entitled *A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis*, volume 2 of *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands, 1904), 16.

reformer. Yet underlying this diversity was his identity as Doctor of Holy Scripture. Investigating his exegetical lectures respects his understanding of his responsibility as a biblical professor charged with interpreting the Bible for the sake of the Christian church.

A second reason for choosing this resource revolves around the quality of this particular text as a series of exegetical lectures for an academic audience. As *academic* lectures, the context provided Luther with opportunities for sustained reflection. The length and depth of his discussions provide a sharp contrast to the occasional character of his remarks collected in the *Table Talk*.[2] Further, as *exegetical* lectures on *Genesis*, Luther was encouraged by the biblical text to discuss issues such as God's original intentions for Adam and the consequences of the Fall. Hence a close reading of Luther's lectures allows both for observing how he repeats certain motifs as well as for noticing tensions—and even contradictions—that exist between his various statements.

A third reason for focusing on the Genesis lectures arises from the fact that there is something fundamental to Adam's position for Christian understandings of masculinity. Adam's impact arises in part because of his particular place in the Christian story. He is not simply one biblical man among others; he is the first man. Furthermore, Christians have tended to view Adam not simply as an individual man but as representative of manhood in general. Hence Christians have posited analogies between Adam's character and duties with the character and duties of all his "sons" who have lived after him. Thus notions of God's will for Adam and for Adam's relationship with Eve frequently are correlated with understandings of God's intentions for Adam's sons and their relationships with the daughters of Eve.

The duties of Adam and his sons

In turning from general observations about Luther's Genesis lectures to the lectures themselves, we will proceed in two steps. Examining Luther's discussion of God's statement to Adam in Gen 3:17-19 will be the second step. But first, we ought to set his lecture remarks on these particular verses into their context in the narrative of the opening chapters of Genesis.

Genesis 3:17-19 occurs when God returns to walk in the Garden after Eve and Adam have eaten of the forbidden fruit. Luther interprets this scene as depicting a courtroom where God first tries the case of each of the disobedient parties and then pronounces sentence upon each of them. Luther tells his audience:

> After the trial and the inquiry into the case has been carefully carried out, there now follows the execution of the sentence, as they say, by which there is rendered to each according to his deed, and yet not exactly alike, as we shall hear.[3]

In keeping with this view, Luther interprets God's statement to Adam in Gen 3:17-19 as portraying God's sentence upon Adam.

And yet Luther does not see Adam's sentence as restricted to only Adam. Rather, Luther maintains that the sentence God announced in Eden affects all the descendants of Eve and Adam. Living outside of

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[2] Further, given the academic context, the main body of the text is in Latin; thus it offers opportunities to observe Luther's use of terms, which may not be conveyed by translation.

[3] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, trans. George V. Schick, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958): 182. Hereafter cited as LW.

Luther presents rulership as part of God's sentence upon Adam and his sons.

Eden, these descendants live in the aftermath of the Fall into sin; they also live in the aftermath of the sentence God pronounced. Thus Luther views God's sentencing of Eve as continuing in its consequences for the daughters of Eve and God's sentencing of Adam as continuing in its consequences for Adam's sons.

The particular verses of Gen 3:17-19 primarily employ language of food and toil; indeed they use imagery of agricultural work. They speak of the ground being cursed and of it bringing forth thorns and thistles (Gen 3:17,18). They also present Adam's lot as changed because he now must work this desolate land so that it would yield food. God says to Adam in verse 17, "in toil you shall eat of [the ground] all the days of your life." Moreover, God's sentencing of Adam culminates in verse 19 when God says, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground...."

In keeping with the passage's agricultural imagery, Luther speaks frequently about Adam's punishment as one concerned with the hard work of food production. But more important for observing Luther's views on the duties of men is the way Luther also links Adam's punishment with a different kind of work, namely, the work of ruling over other people. Luther's view that God has set men in the position of ruler merits examination.

A perusal of Luther's discussion of God's sentencing of Adam might overlook Luther's understanding that ruling over others is a punishment God assigned to Adam and his sons. A careful reading of Luther's text, however, reveals that he indeed presents rulership as part of God's sentence upon Adam and his sons. Time and again in these lecture remarks, Luther underscores the extraordinary difficulties men face because they were given the task of ruling over others. Moreover, his frequent use of punishment imagery in relation to men's rulership indicates that Luther portrays ruling over other persons as God's punishment and penalty on men.

Luther begins his discussion of the sentencing of Adam by commenting on Gen 3:17-18. His comments demonstrate that he sees ruling over the household as part of God's punishment of Adam and his sons. Luther first notes that Adam's punishment differs from Eve's in that it does not concern procreation. Luther then goes on to contend:

> But his position is burdened with a definite punishment, since it is the [man's] [*Viri*] duty to support his family, to rule, to direct, and to instruct; and these things cannot be done without extraordinary trouble and very great effort.[4]

Alluding to a post-Fall institution of a gender hierarchy in which husbands rule over wives, he continues:

> On the woman obedience to her husband was imposed, but how difficult it is to bring this very condition about! I say

[4] LW 1.203; WA 42.152.11f. LW translates *viri* as "husband's" rather than as "man's."

> nothing about the rule over others, who do not belong to the household.[5]

These statements indicate that Luther assesses ruling over the household as a punishment God imposed upon men after the Fall. They show that this patriarchal rule involves regulating the actions of wives as well as of the entire household.[6]

These opening remarks on the sentencing of Adam highlight men's rule over their households; they only allude to men ruling "over others, who do not belong to the household." Yet forms of rulership other than the domestic kind receive more extensive discussion in later portions of Luther's discussion of Adam's penalty. Two of these discussions merit our attention.

One extended treatment occurs when Luther discusses God's statement in Gen 3:19: "In the sweat of your face you will eat your bread." In discussing this verse, Luther argues against persons who interpret the passage as mandating that men work with their hands. In Luther's view the verse is misinterpreted and misused when it is restricted to farming and other forms of manual labor. He cites Carlstadt as a representative of this position. Against this view, Luther contends: "the sweat of the face is of *many kinds*."[7] He continues:

> The first is that of the farmers and householders; the second is that of the officers of the state; and the third is that of the teachers in the church.[8]

After asserting this threefold division of labor, Luther elaborates on the burdens that each form of work involves. He pays particular attention to what he terms the "daily dangers and countless burdens" incurred by men involved in the affairs of state and church. Indeed, insisting on the need to "differentiate between degrees of hard work," he ranks the labors of each, contending: "The hard work in connection with a household is great; greater is that connected with the state; and greatest is that in connection with the church."[9]

A second discussion showing Luther's sense that Adam's punishment involved multiple forms of male rule involves Luther's understanding of "how the situation of Adam, as the initiator of sin, was worse than ours." In Luther's view, Adam's post-Fall situation was more difficult because Adam lived before the responsibilities for the various social institutions were divided among different men. Adam, according to Luther, was "father, king, and priest." Thus Luther maintains:

> Where we work hard, each one in his own station, Adam was compelled to exert himself in the hard work of the household, of the state, and of the church all by himself. As long as he lived, he alone held all these positions among his descendants. He supported his family, ruled it, and trained it in godliness; he was father, king, and priest. And experience teaches how each one of these positions abounds in grief and dangers.[10]

Clearly Luther considers Adam to be the first ruler and hence the original patriarch. Moreover, he sees Adam's patriarchy as having a threefold nature. Not only did it consist of Adam's rule over the two pre-Fall institutions of church and household; but inserted between them was Adam's rule

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[5] LW 1.203.

[6] A later discussion also makes this point. Here, speaking of how both man and woman bear the penalty of sin, he contends: "the husband bears his penalty in the management of the household, when with difficulty and hard work he exercises authority in the home and supports his family." LW 1.205.

[7] LW 1.212; emphasis added.

[8] LW 1.212.

[9] LW 1.213.

[10] LW 1.213-14.

over the post-Fall institution of the state.[11]

As these discussions illustrate, Luther time and again portrays ruling over other human beings as a *punishment* rather than a privilege. He views ruling over others as a punishment because he assesses rulership as a difficult activity. The one who rules incurs resistance. As Luther remarks in his opening comments on Gen 3:19, God's sentence upon Adam depicts "In what various ways God increases the hardship of the husband's labor, so that he is engrossed by the worrisome task of supporting, defending, and ruling over his own."[12] In Luther's view, rulership also involves grief; Luther notes concerning Adam:

> Although he presided over his household in the most saintly manner, nevertheless he lived to see the murder which Cain committed, to say nothing about the other griefs which a long life compelled him to see and bear among his descendants.[13]

Remarks such as these—with their emphasis on the difficulties of ruling—indicate that Luther perceives rulership not only as a duty God assigned to Adam and his sons but also as their punishment.

Whence the rule by men?

There can be no doubt that Luther interprets rulership as a particular responsibility that God assigned to men and not to women. Yet our investigation raises the need to ask not only, "Did God intend for men to rule over women?" but also, "When did God institute this hierarchical design?" Did God's *original* design for human life involve men ruling over wives and households? Could Luther be portraying patriarchy as God's constant intention for gender relations so that men were created to be patriarchs?

Such questions are addressed in part by considering the location of Luther's discussions of the rule by men. These discussions occur in the context of Luther lecturing on God's post-Fall sentencing of Adam. Thus these remarks occur when Luther is describing the state of affairs after the Fall; they do not occur amid his depictions of God's original design for human relationships. This location encourages us to view Luther as describing patriarchy as God's postlapsarian design.

Some could object, however, that neither this location nor Luther's frequent use of punishment imagery indicate that Luther assesses patriarchy as only a post-Fall design. Could not Luther be upholding the dominant Christian tradition, which maintains that God always intended for men to rule over women? Perhaps Luther merely refines the traditional view by stressing that after the Fall men's rule becomes a strenuous work, whereas it would have been easy in Eden.

Luther's lecture remarks on Adam's naming the woman "Eve" in Gen 3:20 aid in responding to this objection. Indeed, Luther's understanding of men's rule over women as a postlapsarian development comes into clear view when Luther interprets Adam's naming of Eve. Luther begins his discussion of Gen 3:20 by reminding his audience that earlier, when lecturing on God's sentence of Eve in Gen 3:16, he had spoken of how the punishment "of being under the [man's] power was inflicted on the woman."[14] After this reminder, he de-

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[11] For Luther's discussion of these three institutions in terms of when they were established, see LW 1.103-4.

[12] LW 1.210.

[13] LW 1.211.

[14] LW 1.219; here LW translates *viri* as "husband's" rather than as "man's." See LW 1.202-3 for Luther's discussion of Gen 3:16.

scribes Adam's naming of Eve as "an indication of that power."[15] He then continues: "It is not God who gives her a name; it is Adam, as the lord of Eve [*Dominus Heuae*], just as he had previously given names to the animals as creatures put under him." These remarks show Luther's stress that Adam's naming of Eve demonstrate that she has been "put under him."[16] They thereby indicate Luther's interpretation that patriarchy has come into effect with the naming of Eve.

Luther concludes his discussion of Eve's naming by correlating the gender relations depicted in the biblical verse to those of his own setting. He contends:

> Similarly even today, when a woman marries a man, she loses the name of her family and is called by the name of her husband. It would be unnatural [*monstri*] if a husband wanted to be called by his wife's name. This is an indication and a confirmation of the punishment or subjection which the woman incurred through her sin. Likewise, if the husband changes his place of residence, the woman is compelled to follow him as her lord. So manifold are the traces in nature which reminds us of sin and of our misfortune.[17]

Significant here is how Luther portrays hierarchical gender relations—such as wives taking their husbands' names—as postlapsarian developments. Indeed, his assessment that the gender relationship of lord and subject "reminds us of sin and our misfortune" indicates how Luther presents the institution of patriarchy as inaugurating an order different from the original equality of creation.

Conclusion

Luther is in line with the bulk of Christian tradition when he presents male dominance and female subservience as an order established by God.[18] What is unusual is the way Luther depicts this hierarchical ordering of male and female relationships as an order that God instituted *after* the Fall. When the question posed is not simply, "Did God intend for men to rule over women?" but "When did God institute this hierarchical design?", the answer Luther provides when discussing God's sentencing of Adam offers a minority opinion in the history of Christian commentary on male and female relations. Luther's discussion indicates that he could portray the gender hierarchy of men ruling over women as a postlapsarian development rather than as God's original intention.

Luther's desire to reframe the way that Christian theology portrays the nature of gender relations finds expression in his Genesis lectures. Moreover, by presenting gender hierarchy as a postlapsarian institution, Luther endorses the view that God did not originally intend for Adam and his sons to rule over Eve and her daughters. Instead, as Luther says, " If Eve had persisted in the truth, she would not only not have been subjected to the rule of her husband, but she herself would also have been a partner in the rule which is now entirely the concern of males."[19]

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[15] LW 1.219.

[16] LW 1.219; WA 42.163.41f.

[17] LW 1.219.

[18] For examples, see *Genesis and Gender: An Anthology of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Eve and Adam*, ed. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, forthcoming by Indiana University Press.

[19] LW 1.203.

From a Babylonian Captivity to the Otherworld: Martin Luther and Mary Daly

Caryn Riswold
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Critique of established ways-of-doing and ways-of-being forms the basis for re-constructing social, political, and religious institutions. Voices that bring charges against tradition and normative institutions become voices that lead re-visionary reformations. Two particular voices have participated in two very different and yet strikingly similar re-formations of the socio-religious worldview. Martin Luther and Mary Daly are historically separated by five centuries of human existence. However, their theoretical writings are theologically connected by a sense of spiritual and physical exile and a related desire for return to a homeland.

Each details the sins of a particular social institution. Each proposes that those sins have disallowed natural connections to a sense of community. For Luther, the papacy fills the minds and hearts of Christians with false concerns for ritual and ceremony, thus distancing the Christian from the memory of baptism. For Daly, patriarchy controls women and their minds through a series of dominating, self-serving activities, thus separating women from their sense of Self and connection to authentic community. Luther declares the true church to be living in a "Babylonian Captivity." Daly spins a universe "Otherworldly."

Both employ the constructive ideal of a homeland whose traditions and customs have been forcibly excised, leaving the community of persons in question living in a state of spiritual exile. Why has this analogical connection to homeland been so important to those searching for a community from which they sense a dis-connection? A detailed analysis of Luther's 1525 piece, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," leads me to draw connections to Daly's critique of patriarchy.

Luther's task

Martin Luther's essay, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," provides meta-

phors and a paradigm similar to constructive post-Christian feminist theology. Throughout his polemics against the power of the pontificate over the Christian church in the Middle Ages, Luther invokes the natural sense within the Christian community of their personal connection to God and the divine promises of salvation. He demonstrates how the powers of popes, priests, and bishops, aside from being limited to the temporal realm of authority, have no basis in scriptural writing and therefore cannot be used to create laws leveled against spiritually liberated Christians. Focusing on the sacraments, Luther shows how particular activities and beliefs have been transformed out of their original spiritual meanings.

According to Luther, Christians are saved by faith alone; they are justified by the grace of God for the sake of Christ. No works, rituals, or philosophical disagreements can keep a Christian from or lead a Christian to her/his salvation. The irredeemable sin of the Roman church in his day was its violation of these sensibilities and its institutional insistence that Christians focus on ceremony and trivial philosophy instead of remembering who they are and how they are actually saved. "Captivity" should be recognized for what it is, and rejected as a temporal, earthly state of being. God remains the ultimate spiritual authority.

Analysis of Luther

In criticizing the activity and power concepts of the Roman church in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther focused on the seven sacraments proposed and enforced by the pope(s). The sacraments serve as concrete examples of the spiritual enslavement of true Christianity under the power of the papacy. Luther denied that there are seven sacraments, and had his own criticism of the three he held to be authentic: "All three [eucharist, baptism, and absolution] have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty."[1]

These sacraments concretely demonstrate how tyrannical papal laws hold captive true Christian consciousness. This captivity serves interests of papal power and eventually destroys personal Christian faith. Under papal control, Christians become concerned with obeying the laws of the church rather than the laws of God. Through a series of created concerns, leading to spiritual enslavement, Christians become forgetful of their own baptism which formed a connection to the grace of God.

Luther points to two specific errors of the papacy: The pope acts "as if he alone of all Christians possessed this authority" and "the pope decrees" contrary to what "God commands" (p. 79). Finding no scriptural basis for its claim to power over the church, Luther charges the papacy with disloyalty and blasphemous tyranny. Its laws run contrary to the will of God. Luther concludes: "For Christ has not ordained authorities or powers or lordships in his church..." (p. 82) because he (Christ) is the ultimate authority of God. Scripture proves that the power claimed by the papacy was not sanctioned by Christ.

Luther laments the current meaninglessness of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and blames its demise on the Roman church. "[T]he promise of the bread and the cup has been destroyed and made subservient to greed" (p. 83). The spiritual

[1] Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Luther's Works*, American edition, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament*, II, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, general editor Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 18.

significance of this sign from God has been lost amidst the selfish, power-mongering political pontiffs. Since the sign itself has become captive to the tyranny, Christians who rely on it as a means for participation in their church have also become captives. Luther declares that he must dis-connect himself from these laws in order to re-connect himself to his original sense of being a Christian, with liberties that surpass the world of papal bulls and declarations of heresy. This concept of liberty is discussed more extensively in his "The Freedom of a Christian," and "The Bondage of the Will."

Luther speaks of Babylon as the prime metaphor for explaining Christian socio-spiritual captivity: "...the papacy is truly the kingdom of Babylon, and of the very Antichrist" (p. 72). Description of the Pope as the antichrist and Satan abound in Luther's rhetoric. Referring to the exile of the Jews in the kingdom of Babylon, Luther shows how Christians are deprived of their natural spiritualities: "[M]arvelous is God [who] could keep Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael holy at the court of the king of Babylon (that is, in the midst of godlessness)" (p. 77). The court of the pope in Rome functions as did the court of the king of Babylon, the king of exile. As this king/pope attempted to deprive the captives of their sense of holiness, God helped them retain their spiritual connection to divine grace.

The Christians captive in this new Babylon are deprived of their personal ability to discern the will of God. Luther calls them to their natural senses: "I instruct men's consciences so that they may [know] they have been forcibly deprived of their rightful share in the sacraments..." (p. 28). Rejecting their captivity in the papal Babylon involves abhorring practices taught for participation in the mass. Christians must call up their own strengths in order to survive this spiritual enslavement: "this Babylon of ours has so completely extinguished faith..." (p. 83).

Because of the captivity of the sacraments and the disconnectedness from the true Christian community, Luther draws upon the natural connections that Christians have to God through personal faith. These connections are spiritual and mythic, strengthened by true sacraments as institutions of sign and word of God. These connections bring memories of authentic community/communion with God. These connections are built on the faith of the Christian and on the promises of God. These connections, Luther insists, are the true markings of being Christian; markings which cannot be smothered by the tyrants of Rome, the modern counterparts of the Babylonian kings. Though they may try to distract Christian concerns from spiritual to worldly matters, innate communion with God remains central to self-identity.

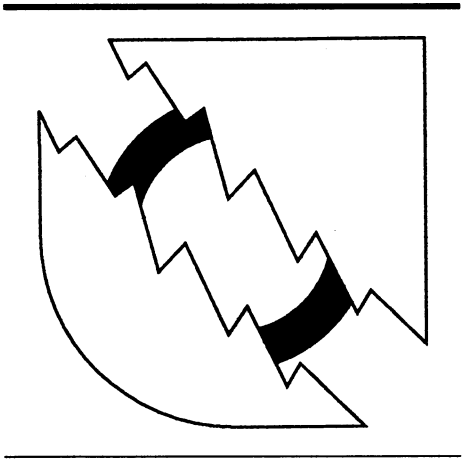
Luther asserts that Christians possess memories of their baptism and other spiritual connections that can be dimmed to a point of forgetfulness. Satan (the pope) "succeeded in quenching it in all adults, so that now there are scarcely any who call to mind their own baptism, and still fewer who glory in it" (p. 58). By reducing the power of the memory of a Christian's baptism, the tyranny fills the mind of that Christian with other concerns that have little to do with worship, salvation, or true faith. Luther continues to say that the pontiffs have actually led Christians so far away from their baptism that there is often little sense of the true power of that connection with God. They deny Christians the contentment that comes with the sense of full participation in God's glory. Luther issues a warning for Christians: "[B]eware of those who have reduced the power of baptism to such small and slender dimensions..." (p. 69).

Not only is the power of baptism reduced and even taken from Christian memory, but so also is the sense of inherent freedom that comes with being Christian. "[T]hey seek to deprive us of this consciousness of our liberty, and would have us believe that what they do is well done..." (p. 72). Calling the pope and his subjects wolves in shepherd's clothing, Luther denies any authority they claim to have over true Christian spirits. Luther denies the authority of these tyrannical laws.

> No law, whether of men or of angels, may rightfully be imposed upon Christians without their consent, for we are free of all laws. And if any laws are imposed upon us, we must bear them in such a way as to preserve that sense of freedom which knows and affirms with certainty that an *injustice* is being done to it... (p. 72).

Through creating trivial concerns regarding mass and the sacraments, the tyranny of the papacy effectively distracted Christians from consciously remembering their baptism and their traditions. Whether dealing with pomp and ceremony or doctrinal philosophy, Christians have had their energies turned from serious issues to virtually meaningless ones. Mass deals more with pageantry than with effecting divine grace. Who should wear the vestments? When should incense be used? Through these and other questions, Christians are distracted and effectively deprived of their liberty to glory in the promise of God through individual faith and communal celebrations.

Faith, not works, generates salvation in a Christian heart. The greatest sin of the Roman church is that it leads people into believing that particular works and specific sacraments show the right path to salvation. "However, faith is not a work, but the lord and life of all works" (p. 47). God's Word has primacy in Christian belief, not the



words of self-appointed church authorities. Luther proposes a whole new understanding of the mass as a reminder instituted by God of the promises made to our ancestors. Luther tries to revive the power of memory and community. Promise and faith mutually require each other, and signs (sacraments) are added as physical means for participation in that divine relationship. The Roman Church, on the other hand, falsely focuses on the sign.

> They cling only to the sign and the use of the sign, and draw us away from faith to work, away from the word to the sign. (p. 67)

This drawing away results in the spiritual enslavement Luther compares to a Babylonian captivity.

Connections

Luther's charges against the Roman church parallel post-Christian feminist charges against patriarchy, thus making Luther one effective resource in creating and examining feminist theological models. Drawing these parallels shows how each critical theological model relies on some basic concepts

that create foundations for constructive work. Emphasizing the points of continuity between Martin Luther and Mary Daly illuminates the strengths of each. As long as these models act as springboards and not infallible artworks, they can function effectively in contemporary contexts. In comparing the theologies of two persons reacting to the institutional Catholic church, a sense of common criticism and goals can emerge.

Luther's concepts of power, community, memory, and imposed laws are consistent with post-Christian feminist criticisms of the patriarchal status quo. Both sixteenth-century Luther and twentieth-century feminist theologians attempt to re-claim their sense of self and community, which has been relocated within a false world. Compare these two statements:

> By them we have been carried away out of our own land, as into a Babylonian captivity, and despoiled of all our precious possessions.

> Their goal is our deracination, which is 'detachment from one's background (as from homeland, customs, traditions).' Thus women and other Elemental creatures on this planet are rendered homeless....

The former issues from the pen of Luther, the sixteenth-century radical. The latter spins from the web of Mary Daly, the twentieth-century radical.[2] Both function as resources for theological examination in terms of space/place and its contribution to a sense of self/community. Both focus on the concept of a connection to a place and a community, a connection that has now been severed. Place, possessions, customs, and mythic community play a vital role in human becoming. They did in the sixteenth century Reformation, and they do at the end of the century, as Daly suggests:

> Many women sense that we have been physically, mentally, and emotionally separated from our Original, Elemental Race, made 'free'—that is purified—of our own native characteristics and influence.[3]

Feminist critical response

Daly goes so far as to say that women comprise a race of beings with their own set of spiritual traditions and acceptable norms. Instead of remaining in the world that has separated women from their community, Daly suggests the following:

> It must be, then, that it is in some other dimension that 'the whole world' is the country, the homeland of the Race of Women. (p. 6)

As Luther bemoans the state of the church in this world of papal tyranny, Daly bespeaks the Otherworldly reality, the homeland within another dimension, into being through her attention to the problems of living in this world imbibed with patriarchal libations.

Women searching for heritage and a home, for their sense of Self, find themselves lost amidst testosterone and penis-missiles of the patriarchal worldview. The struggle to find a land/a place/a space yields no fruit or dead fruit. Daly calls women "to re-call the Elemental potency asleep in our ancestral Memory" (p. 7). Covered by years of socialization into the patriarchal system, our potency sleeps soundly, so soundly that it must be rattled awake. As Luther issues the challenge for Christians to recall the power of their baptism and challenge the

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[2] Martin Luther, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 47; Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 6.

[3] Daly, *Pure Lust*, 6.

Roman pontificate, Daly challenges women to re-member themselves, to put memory back into their being, thus rejecting the tyrannical laws imposed upon them.

While Luther speaks of Christians deprived of their connection to God, Daly speaks of women deprived of their sense of Self-in-This-World. Each has been stolen from the place which is rightfully home. Luther uses a metaphor of geographic captivity. Daly uses a metaphor of mythic captivity. A question posed to each is this: Is the state from which we have been carried away a reality of the past or a hope for the future?

By devoting primary attentions to the subjective experience of being woman in the world, and often in the land of the patriarchs, feminist women refuse the objectification inherent in their system. In viewing the world from her own eyes, woman can reach Back to discover her own traditions and truths—prime examples being the potential sacrality of mother-child relations, and biophilic power in Sisterhood. Women must claim their own connectedness to relational living in the world as means to discovering themselves. Renaming herself as subject of experience, a creative respondent to all surrounding her, she re-claims the value and power in being a female human being.

The process of centering knowledge in women's experience has not flourished due to its "captivity" under the persuasion of patriarchal ideals. The necrophilic fatherland feeds this fragmentation. The genesis for breakthrough feminist construction occurs as follows: "They [women] become aware of the depths of the system that has entrapped them and discover a hidden community of women of the past."[4] The power of the past functions both to re-enforce the destructive, and to re-introduce lost memory of self. "The Presence of the creative telos, then, keeps a woman fiercely focused.... Yet the forces of fragmentation lie in ambush."[5]

In comparing the theologies of two persons re-acting to the institutional Catholic church, a sense of common criticism and goals can emerge.

Whether it be a teleological principle or an historical community, something lies in the memory of women that provides space for their affirmation. This sense of memory calls us back to Luther's concept of Christian memory of baptism. Luther believed in ritual access to this memorable connection. Feminists working within a religious tradition differ in their use of ritual to connect. Ruether constructs liturgies for a WomanChurch. Rachel Adler and Marcia Falk transform traditional Jewish symbolism and ritual in terms of contemporary Jewish feminism. Starhawk embraces Wiccan ritual as an access to womanspace.

Feminists have no one sense of a ritual everyone can participate in, in order to connect with their community and themSelves. Rather than be a point of discord with Luther and disunity among feminists, I see this

[4] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 187.

[5] Daly, *Pure Lust*, 344.

phenomenon as indicative of the multivalency of feminist spiritual experience. Women do not necessarily have some pure communal ritual every woman connects with. On the contrary, to assume this would be to violate a feminist ethic of individual integrity necessarily precluding authentic community.

A sense of memory and spiritual connection is present in modern feminist literature as well:

> How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.
> —Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 1899

Edna Pontellier's experienced tension between the familiar and the unknown is honored within feminist calls for re-claiming womanspace. Coming from intuitive experience, it may be inexplicable in terms of theological constructive language.

"To return Home: to learn the harmony, the peace, the justice of body, bodies in right relation to each other."[6] The empowering matrix that Ruether speaks of originates in and is eternally connected to a physical/psychic space in which all life finds sanctity/safety. Safe, public expression of the value, sacrality, and motivating power of human relatedness on its most basic levels is the task of feminist constructive theology. With the decidedly post-Christian move that Daly makes throughout the course of her work, she may not serve to be the most effective model for theologians seeking reconciliation within the church and within the Christian tradition. Her value lies in the challenges that she presents to us as theologians, not necessarily the answers she offers. Through the course of his ministry, Luther posed similar challenges to the authorities of his era, and was able to resolve theological issues within the larger Christian tradition. It is our task to accept the contemporary challenge of Daly and work within our contexts to create a viable Christian future.

Relations/future connections

Luther brings charges against the Roman church, and Daly brings charges against the patriarchal establishment. Luther invokes personal connection with God through faith to encourage Christians to endure this exiled existence in Babylon; Daly calls for reclaiming a sense of Self and community to revolutionize social stagnation. That which has been deprived or stolen from women under patriarchy is a personal sense of self, a definition of independent individuality. A lack of communal support eventually fragments individuals, and patriarchy effectively divides and conquers female power. Claiming, re-naming, and engaging this sense of power-with-others challenges the continuance of domination and oppression under male-identified systems of existence.

Luther illustrates his points through the concrete example of sacramental power. The lost memory of one's own baptism exemplifies the power of the tyranny to erase the very thing that connected the individual to Christian communion with God originally. Daly's use of Memory takes on a more metaphorical spin, calling women back to "an intuition of be-ing."[7] Unable to say that there is a specific event that connects a woman to her community, feminist theologians suggest that there are specific events and practices within societies and Christianity that keep women from discovering this particular source of power: for-

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[6] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 266.
[7] Daly, *Pure Lust*, 29.

Daly's value lies in the challenges that she presents to us as theologians, not necessarily the answers she offers.

biddance of the ordination of women priests, male-identified God-talk, Lord language, devaluation of women's experience within church walls. All of these things combine in the attempt to prevent female-identified women from coming into a sense of their own power, their own intuition of Being. Various women's ways of connecting to oneself and others spiritually parallel Luther's need for participating in the sacraments.

Luther and Daly use examples of "created concerns," or trivialities with which people have become increasingly concerned. These trivialities function to distract and dis-empower the individual facing a system of domination. Debate over vestments functions like the debate over women's ordination. Why are these even questions we must confront? Luther counsels Christians to reject papal tyranny and focus on their own spiritual experiences and personal faith. Feminist theologians concerned with reforming the Christian community ask, at some level, Why is women's ordination even a topic for debate? Why *not* women? The sheer simplicity of these challenges gives power to feminists of the twentieth century and Luther of the Protestant Reformation.

Naming the oppressor simply challenges its existence. Luther likens the pope to wickedness and Satan; Daly likens certain persons and systems to destroyers:

> With such bombast wicked men by their inventions puff up human opinion and human works in order to lure on the unthinking masses who are almost always led by the glitter of works to make shipwreck of their faith, to forget their baptism and to injure their Christian liberty.[8]

> e-racer: 1: a hacker who attempts to sever women from our Elemental roots, to arrest and destroy the Race of Women. 2: any genocidal snool."[9]

> priest: a member of any of the hierarchicies/ liararchies of patriarchy, charged with Holy Orders to perform the necrophilic rites of the sadosociety."[10]

Within the context of their works, these definitions connect in their rhetoric and purpose. Both Luther and Daly speak very passionately and metaphorically in order to define the reality they see operating to destroy human beings. Both reformers have a specific system to whom they address their scathing critiques. Both of these oppressive systems are institutionalized forces within the culture. Each writer anticipates his/her critics who will accuse them of overreacting and reversing the problem. Through extremist rhetoric, Luther and Daly effectively name, charge, and deconstruct the system-in-question.

Following a de-constructive element, Luther and Daly move toward the important level of re-connection to a place/space. The

[8] Luther, "Babylonian Captivity," 75.

[9] Mary Daly, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 197.

[10] Daly, *Intergalactic Wickedary*, 220.

Through extremist rhetoric, Luther and Daly effectively name, charge, and deconstruct the system-in-question.

de-construction contains another naming, that of the place of captivity. Luther names it Babylon. Daly names it "maledom/staledom: society crumbling in the patriarchal mold: Stag-nation."[11] Having dis-connected from locative captivity, individuals need somewhere to go. Daly spins Otherworldly and emphasizes the importance of remembering for women's sense of their individual and collective past. Luther faithfully remembers God through the reclamation of sacraments in the church. Each reconnection contains a mythic/mystic quality about it.

Bringing these two theologians to this point exposes points of criticism. Where Luther's vision of Christians living in pure communion with God is supposedly a possible state-of-being, though one devoid of all other types of religious peoples, Daly's vision of Wild Women Be-ing in community with each other and the animals could bring about the end of the human race. At a base level, women without men means eggs without sperm. Where is the future of Daly's Race?

On the other hand, Luther and Daly, sharing the experience of maturing within a Catholic tradition, call to mind the monasteries and convents common to their tradition. I see this as a point of redemption for the radicality of separative community. Women living within a minor community of women-only can foster a feminist ethic and create a space for responsible education and spiritualization of others. Lutheran Christians can participate in their sacraments of connection to the divine and from there go out into the world to share their experiences with others in hopes of achieving social justice. A community informed by these models, consisting of women and men committed to each other and the prosperity of the earth, would function for justice for the whole society.

While criticisms are vital to treating the fullness of Luther's and Daly's logic, the fact remains that humans are currently living in a state of dis-ease that can be attributed to a system of people and policies. Injustice reigns in lives that deserve salvation. Oppression lives in communities that deserve respect. Both cry together: "We are in exile!" Both lead marches out of exile toward a homeland that grounds a sense of self and fosters a creation of community.

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[11] Daly, *Intergalactic Wickedary*, 209.

Book Reviews

Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532. By Martin Brecht. Translated by James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. xvi and 543 pages. Paper. $42.00.

Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546. By Martin Brecht. Translated by James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. xvi and 511 pages. Cloth. $42.00.

These two volumes complete the translation of Brecht's recent three-part study of Luther's life and work. Both the work itself and Schaaf's translation of it continue to fill the high standards set by the first volume, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521* (Fortress, 1985).

Brecht has done a great service for those who wish to know Luther and his work. Building on fresh data and understandings uncovered in recent years—and there was a "mini-renaissance" of Luther studies to the 1983 quincentennial celebration of his birth, that opened a variety of perspectives upon Luther in the context of his times—Brecht has woven together a multifaceted study of the man, his work, and his era.

All too often biographies (and hagiographies) of Luther devote the lion's share of their bulk to the years that Brecht covers in his first volume. This is "Luther" that everyone knows and loves: tales of childhood and university; thunderstorm, vow and entry into the monastery; *Anfechtungen* and "Tower experience"; the 95 Theses in 1517 and the 1521 standoff with Charles V and Worms, which culminated in Luther's dramatic assertion, "Here I stand." This is the stuff of popular biography.

In volume 2 Brecht undertook to go beyond the "popular" Luther to the Luther who shaped the inchoate protest of 1517/1521 into the orderly and well-thought-out system of theology described in the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530. Then in the third volume he went on to deal with the sometimes too-mundane or impolitic Luther of the 1530s and 1540s, who seems to many eyes to have become embarrassingly rigid and even distressingly virulent in his treatment of any who crossed him—from his friends to the Jews.

None of these is a "popular" or exciting topic; yet each rewards careful study and consideration. Even Luther's ugliest side, revealed in his regrettable writings on the Jews, deserves analysis. The scandal of his tirades cannot be mitigated simply by expressions of regret and attempts to ignore them. Brecht deals with all these issues in a rewarding and frequently enlightening way.

Instead of reporting the complex events in Luther's life in a straight serial or chronological sequence, Brecht presents the biography topically. He covers a general topic (e.g., the Sacramental controversies of 1525-1529) over a span of years and then goes back as many years as necessary to pick up the development of another topic (e.g., political issues from 1525 to 1530). Although this means that the reader occasionally misses the sense of overlap, it allows for a more thorough examination of the issues at hand and a better sense of developments within them.

This more thorough examination is one of the strengths of Brecht's work. When Brecht discusses a theme or an issue he also discusses and reports on the relevant texts. Readers will find thumbnail and more-than-thumbnail sketches of numerous of Luther's treatises (with references to both the Weimar and the American editions, where possible), showing how the reformer's mind was working at various points in the conflicts. This makes the three volumes a study of both the man *and* his work (or "Works").

There are cavils, of course. Endnotes are used, rather than footnotes. One would appreciate page headers telling which pages of text the notes are related to, especially since their numbering restarts with each *sub*section of a chapter. Occasionally in the second volume the reader is told that a topic will be discussed more thoroughly "later" or "below," but no hint is given as to where (in 5 pages or 50?) this will take place.

At a few places in the third volume an occasional odd snippet of data seems loosely appended to a paragraph—as if the author had a note card he hated to discard but had no really appropriate place to put the information.

Still, these are minor issues, and do not detract significantly from the overall quality of Brecht's biography. Certainly it ought to be read and kept on any Lutheran pastor's shelf, and it will reward the serious lay person who wants to delve more deeply into the life and theology of Luther. Highly recommended; read it.

Keith Killinger
Golgotha Lutheran Church
Chicago, Illinois

True Faith in the True God. An Introduction to Luther's Life and Thought. By Hans Schwarz. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996. 158 pages. Paper. $11.99.

Hans Schwarz, former Trinity Seminary professor and now Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Regensburg, has written a book that is very good if its purpose is correctly understood. This little book is meant to be an *introduction* to what Schwarz believes are the central tenets of Martin Luther's theology. I believe he has picked the right topics and succeeded in his presentation. The purpose of this presentation is twofold: (1) to challenge the reader with Luther's insights and ask whether or not those insights are relevant for Christian faith today, and (2) to stimulate the interest of the reader in the further study of Luther himself.

Chapter 1 is an all too brief introduction to Luther's life that assumes some historical knowledge on the part of the reader. While Luther's controversial dealings with the peasants are mentioned, nothing is said of the Jews or Turks. This section could have been omitted.

Following the short biographical chapter, Schwarz presents Luther's theology under the following headings: the correct knowledge of God; faith and reason; the divinity of God; humanity between God and Satan; the two kingdoms; scripture alone; law and gospel; church and sacrament; love, marriage, and parenthood; vocation. Discussion questions for each chapter follow together with a brief English bibliography and endnotes.

Particularly good are the chapters on the knowledge of God, faith and reason, and the concluding chapters on love, marriage, parenthood, and vocation. Indeed, the final two chapters address issues of concern to all parish pastors and to all people of the church.

The "questions for reflection and discussion" at the end of the book are, for the most part, very good and to the point. They attempt to get the reader to be sure he/she has first understood Luther correctly and also to use Luther's theological insights in the present context. Sometimes this "connecting" is easy; at other times, more helpful direction should have been offered. For instance, Schwarz centers his presentation of Luther's thought on Luther's quest to find a gracious God. Luther found such a God revealed in Jesus Christ and through trust in Christ. Although the author asks the good and relevant questions, "How would you describe the spiritual quest of people in the Western world today? What fuels it?" (p. 142), little is offered to help the reader answer or connect those questions to Luther in light of today's "religious agenda." For instance, how does the search for a gracious God (and Luther's insights into that search) provide an answer to those people who turn to New Age thinkers with their questions today?

Schwarz is quick and right to point out the vast differences that exist between Luther's day and our own. Such differences are easily seen when we look at Luther's view of economics or family life. But few bridges are offered to get over those differences. It may be expecting too much from such a small book, but it is this issue which is at the heart of religious struggles today. How—other than by changing the verb tenses—will a theology presented 450+ years ago still find adherents today, particularly from those who have had no prior grounding in it?

This book will find good use in parish adult study groups and college religion introduction courses. It will require a creative teacher to make the connections not explicitly addressed by the author.

Olaf Roynesdal
Baltic Lutheran Parish
Baltic, South Dakota

Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—The Day of Pentecost, Series B

Risen in Deed... and Word... and...

Gerd Luedemann, Professor of New Testament at Goettingen University in Germany, is a member of the Jesus Seminar and author of two recent books on the resurrection of Jesus. Like other members of the Jesus Seminar, and in fact like many modern interpreters, Luedemann goes to great pains to explain why he thinks that the report of the empty tomb is an early fiction and that originally it had nothing to do with Easter faith. Instead, Easter faith was founded on the vision which Peter had of Jesus alive after his crucifixion.

Luedemann, like Willi Marxsen and John Dominic Crossan and others, places enormous emphasis on the experience of Peter and the "infectious" character of that experience as the other disciples were caught up along with Peter in a whirlwind of "eschatological enthusiasm."

They uniformly reject the stories of the gospels about Jesus' burial by his friends in a tomb provided by his followers, women coming with spices to complete the last rites, stones rolled away, angelic messengers inside or outside the tomb, a meeting between Jesus and Mary Magdalene or any other women, a walk to Emmaus and a meal at table in that village, an appearance of the resurrected Jesus to 10 or 11 or 500, the offer of hands and side to Thomas, the great commission at the mysterious mountain in Galilee.

Luedemann is critical of the stories and yet at the end declares that "traditional faith is not really robbed of any of its content" (*The Resurrection of Jesus,* 182). Of course knowledge of the facts of the life of Jesus is the kind of thing Luther called historical faith. Even the devils know all

the facts, and they tremble! said Luther. Christian faith means knowing that Jesus lived his life and died his death for you and for me.

We are all smart enough to know that our gospels do not agree in every last detail of the stories they tell about Jesus' sayings and travels and actions and sufferings. And the details of the hours and days after Good Friday are also reported differently by our evangelists and Paul. We can all see variations and contradictions. But those reports are infinitely more interesting than the "historical reconstructions" of the biblical scholars. More interesting, more intriguing, and far richer. They are narratives full of astonishing detail, told by people attempting not simply to "set the record straight" but to share their fundamental convictions about God and the world and Jesus. And they desire to provoke hearers and readers to a like faith.

The reconstructions of the exegetes look the same every time I see them, but the narratives of the first Easter in our gospels somehow manage to speak to me afresh in each passing year.

We are blessed to have three fellow preachers sharing with us their impressions of the Easter texts. The author of First Readings is **John P. Rossing**, pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Dalton, Georgia. John has been serving Christ the King (the only Lutheran church in all of northwest Georgia) since 1994. He previously served four other congregations, in the Atlanta area and in Texas. He graduated from Saint Olaf College and Luther Seminary (St. Paul), and he earned his Ph.D. in American religious and cultural history from Emory University.

Writer of the Pastoral Reflections is **Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath**. She and her husband Tim are co-pastors of two churches in the Oregon Synod: Hope Lutheran in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and Trinity in Tulelake, California. They have been at Hope and Trinity for about two years and previously served together for ten years in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Donna and Tim are not only co-pastors but are co-parents of four children. For personal refreshment Donna enjoys doing counted cross stitch, reading, walking, and dance.

Our third contributor in this issue is **Matthew Ernst**, pastor of Living Savior Lutheran Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Matt writes that

"The most terrifying and gratifying thing" he does each week is preach, and he gathers weekly with a friend, Jim Bartos, to help with that task. I first heard from him some time ago when I sent out a call for writers. Matt wrote to me volunteering not himself but his friend John Rossing. Matt described John to me as a good preacher and scholar (we hope many of us qualify for those labels) and as a solid second baseman, talented carpenter and terrific cook!

That reminds me that Tim Kamprath approached me at a bishop's convocation in Oregon telling me that I should invite his spouse Donna to produce some material. So willing or not, Donna and John both have agents and admirers. I let Tim off the hook for now, but I prevailed on Matt Ernst to go dig out some brief quotations that struck him and that he would share with fellow preachers. I have called them Interventions.

All those comings and goings in the Easter narratives, with all the names of individual people (and sometimes anonymous crowds of 120 or 500), testify to the fact that Easter is both a personal and a community event. Easter is new life for individuals and fresh life for families and congregations and cities and nations. This issue of Preaching Helps, even more than ordinarily, is the product of friends and spouses and strangers speaking up for one another and laboring together on behalf of the deed of Easter and the word of Easter and the ongoing power of Easter.

Yours in deed and in word...

Robert H. Smith
Editor of *Preaching Helps*
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
2770 Marin Avenue
Berkeley, California 94708

The Resurrection of Our Lord March 30, 1997

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43 *or* Isaiah 25:6-9
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 *or* Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18 *or* Mark 16:1-8

First Reading

The two Marys and Salome were amazed by what they saw and heard at the tomb on Easter morning; readers of today's gospel may be amazed by what we *don't* see and hear. No appearance of the risen Lord, no celebration of his victory over death, no rush to tell the good news. Mark simply shows us the empty tomb and repeats the white-robed young man's unembroidered announcement: "He has been raised; he is not here."

The three women approach the tomb unprepared for the shock that awaits them, which heightens the drama of the reversal. Their uneasiness at finding the tomb empty except for a stranger in white gives way to "shuddering awe" (D. E. Nineham) when they hear his news. Our challenge is to recapture the drama, the shock, the awe of the Easter news in our preaching of a now familiar story. "He has been raised; he is not here." Mark's Easter story is pure kerygma—not proved, not defended, not explained, just proclaimed. It can only be received by faith, with shuddering awe at its unexpectedness and the enormity of its implications.

But what are its implications? Isaiah suggests the significance of Mark's succinct news. The empty tomb is a sign of salvation, a preview of that day when God "will swallow up death forever" and wipe away all tears. Jesus is not simply *gone* from the tomb, he has been raised to prepare the messianic banquet.

Yet Isaiah's vision is eschatological. It leaves a gap between the announcement and the fulfillment, just as Mark's Gospel seems to leave a gap. There is unfinished business in both the first lesson and the gospel, and that unfinished business—discovering and proclaiming the empty tomb while we wait for our God to complete our salvation—is the mission of the church. Mark's stunning news continues to be news because we continue to proclaim it. Paul writes in the second lesson that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the good news that he has both received and proclaimed, "so you have come to believe" and "through which also you are being saved." The shocking discovery, the dramatic reversal, and the bold announcement of the resurrection awaken faith and produce salvation, and these gifts will continue to unfold as we proclaim the resurrection until the day of the Lord.

During the coming Sundays of the Easter season, the lessons (especially the gospels and second lessons) will continue to show that the resurrection remains current in the witness and life of the Christian community. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

In the first parish I served, I became acquainted with a woman who worked for many years as a home care nurse with dying patients. During that time she wrote a poetic book reflecting on her relationships with the people she served. She called her book *Notes from an Honoured Guest* (by Lois Sorgen, published by Hoglen, 1988).

"Many people have wondered aloud how hopeless and depressing my work must be. It's ironic, for it's only been within the context of palliative care that I have begun to consider and understand the joyful liberation of hope," she writes.

Think for a minute about all the people you have sat with in the time of dying. At

times the work of dying or helping the one who is dying takes all your focus and attention. There is a certain comfort in the "doing." But then the "doing" ceases and it is time to wait and to watch, to listen and to hope. The person dying makes the final passage into the new life. The family and friends make a return to an everyday reality with an empty place at their table, in their bed, at the desk, in the pew.

Our sisters Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome did the only thing they knew to do in the face of death. They took up their spices and cloths and approached the place of death. This was something, at least, "to do."

They did not feel completely helpless until they considered that stone. That "very large" stone would keep them from the body of the one they loved. They could not move that stone; they could not remove that hideous death.

But Someone else had done something! The stone was rolled away. There was no stink of decay. The place was empty of death. In its place was a messenger from God.

The messenger acknowledged that the death was real. Jesus of Nazareth had died on the cross. But hope has been liberated! He is not here in this place of death! You had to come here first, but his message is to keep going! He is going ahead of you! You will see him!

Jesus' message is clear: keep going! I'm going ahead of you. Follow me through the hopelessness and depression, through the reality of the separation, through the terror and amazement, through your worst fears. You will see me, I promise. You will know the joyful liberation of hope—hope fulfilled because I live.

The empty tomb compels us to pay attention to the dying which is happening around us all the time: not just the end of a person's life, but the dying of relationships and careers, changes which are unexpected and unwelcome, the devastation of war and famine. We are Christ's messengers in every place of death, pointing ahead. He has gone before us through every death. We will live and see him and worship him in joy and liberation! Alleluia! DH-K

Interventions

"You have doubtless heard scores of Easter sermons telling you, my dear friends, that Easter is all about spring, about annual cycles and rhythms of rebirth and re-awakening. Birds are back. Sleeping plants revive. Life returns where there had been apparent death. So it is with Jesus and Easter.

"Not at all. Forget the springtime pictures and comparisons. Believers in the Southern Hemisphere have it better. They have to think about the resurrection amid images of dying and death. The sweetness of autumn—and Easter there always occurs in autumn—is a sweetness of decaying fallen leaves. Natural life is irretrievably lost. No one there is tempted to speak about cycles and rhythms at Easter. They can listen, then, to what the Bible says this event means."

—Martin E. Marty, "Easter Sermon"

Second Sunday of Easter
April 6, 1997

Psalm 133
Acts 4:32-35
1 John 1:1–2:2
John 20:19-31

First Reading

The Christology of John's Gospel reaches its climax in Thomas' dramatic confession, "My Lord and my God!" But the full disclosure of what Jesus' earlier signs pointed toward is not the end of the story. *Continuity* is as important in this story as *completion*; Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples and to Thomas extend the story beyond Easter into the life of the church.

Jesus' display of his wounds to Thomas serves not so much to prove the resurrection (John, after all, commends faith without proof) as to prove that it is the same Jesus who was crucified who now appears to his followers. There is continuity of *mission* as well as continuity of person: Jesus tells his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," and he breathes the Holy Spirit on them to insure the divine presence in their work.

There is continuity of *message*, too: Jesus declares peace to the gathered disciples, they announce his appearance to Thomas, and the gospel writer tells the whole story to his readers. The writer of 1 John, too, points out the continuous message that "we have heard from him and proclaim to you."

The proclamation has a threefold purpose:

1. It brings *joy* to those who tell it and those who hear it (John 20:20, 1 John 1:4).

2. It awakens the hearers' *faith* (John 20:31, "so that you may come to believe"—cf. 1 Cor 15:11 in last week's second lesson).

3. It creates *community*. The writer of 1 John says, "We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship (κοινωνία) with us" (v. 3), and the first lesson says that the apostles' testimony to the resurrection laid the foundation for a community of faith whose members were of "one heart and soul." The presence of a believing and worshiping community underlies the gospel story, too. In fact, the structure of the appearance story (gathering, appearance of Jesus, peace, absolution, confession of faith) suggests a liturgy.

The resurrected Christ appears to his disciples to bring them joy and peace, to commission and empower them as witnesses, and to establish them as a community that will extend his message and its effects to the whole world. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

My friend Joan has a way of coming into my house and making me feel more comfortable than before! I'm particularly grateful for the time she came into my home the day after I returned from the hospital with my second child.

I had many doubts! My experience with nursing my first-born had begun traumatically. I was full of anxiety about going through that again. Joan's presence was active and strengthening. She brought her own experience and struggles, as well as the stories of other women.

Peace and confidence came into my home with Joan. She enabled me to be able to do what I had to do not only to survive, but to thrive and grow in confidence and strength. She came into my home and made me feel more "at home."

Jesus is the Hospitable One. He came into the locked-up, anxiety-driven home of the disciples and brought a new peace. The presence of the risen Lord created a safe space where the disciples could touch and be

touched in love, and grow in confidence and joy.

Jesus received people just as they were, full of fear and doubts. He did not threaten them or manipulate them to believe and follow. In his presence they were confronted with the truth about him and about themselves. Because of his love, people could change and accept him freely. Their commitment could grow and deepen.

When Jesus greeted the disciples with the words, "Peace be with you," along with his open, wounded hands and side, he built a bridge for them between the experience of the cross and the new life of the resurrection. With this sharing of peace, Jesus shared himself.

In the middle of our worship services, Jesus speaks to us in the words of the pastor: "The peace of Christ be with you all." Those words come as a bridge between the gift of the words of Jesus Christ (in the Service of the Word), and the gift of the action of Jesus Christ (in the Service of Holy Communion).

We are invited to touch one another in his name. It is a sign that the Hospitable One lives with us! It is a sign that in his name and by his peace we are willing to be reconciled to one another—not necessarily all at once, but a little more each week.

In the sharing of the peace Jesus sends us first of all to one another. Some people recoil, feeling this is a shallow or even hypocritical action. And it certainly is hypocritical if we don't intend to live together in a spirit of peace and forgiveness!

But the action of sharing the peace is not saying "we've got it all together." Rather, in doing it week after week, we humbly recognize we need to know one another better, we need to seek out forgiveness, we need constantly to be creating a place where strangers and friends can meet again the risen Lord Jesus. We greet one another in the name and by the sending authority of Jesus Christ!

Easter is about bodies. Jesus' wounded and risen body. Disciples' bodies touching Jesus and one another. Our bodies—hands held out for bread and wine, body and blood; hands reaching out to shake the hand of a sister or brother. Peace, confidence, and joy spring alive in Easter. DH-K

Interventions

"'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe' (John 20:29). Even though he said the greater blessing is for those who can believe without seeing, it's hard to imagine that there's a believer anywhere who wouldn't have traded places with Thomas, given the chance, and seen that face and heard that voice and touched those ruined hands."

—Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who*

Third Sunday of Easter
April 13, 1997

Psalm 4
Acts 3:12-19
1 John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

First Reading

Déjà vu? Today's gospel certainly contains strong echoes of last week's post-resurrection appearance story in John 20. Again, Jesus appears to his gathered disciples and offers them peace. Again, he invites an examination of his wounds to dispel doubt. Again, his appearance brings joy to the disciples. And, most important, again Jesus commissions his disciples as witnesses. (In Luke, John, and Matthew, stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance serve also as commissioning stories.)

But Luke gives the story his own distinctive touches. In this text, Jesus' appearance startles and terrifies the disciples. (Their reaction is similar to the women's reaction to the empty tomb in Mark 16.) *All* the disciples have doubts, not just Thomas, and Jesus eats fish to prove to them that he is not a ghost. In keeping with the major themes of Luke's Gospel, Jesus reveals himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures and names Jerusalem as the starting point for the church's mission to all nations. Luke summarizes his gospel in Jesus' words in verses 46-48: The church's proclamation is based on Jesus' reinterpretation of the scriptures; the content of the proclamation is the death and resurrection of Jesus; and its goal is to effect repentance and forgiveness among people of all nations. In today's first lesson, Luke shows the church actively pursuing its mission as he described it in the gospel: Peter connects Jesus' death and resurrection to God's earlier promises, invites his hearers to believe in Jesus' name, and calls them to repent and receive forgiveness.

In John's gospel, Jesus' appearance and display of his wounds to Thomas dispel all doubt. In Luke, however, doubt persists, mingled with joy and wonder (verse 46). Perhaps Luke's account rings more true to us and our congregations: While the resurrection fills us with joy it always eludes our full comprehension, and we worship and proclaim what still mystifies and astonishes us. In John, where belief and unbelief are sharply contrasted, the apostles' testimony requires an unequivocal profession of faith. But in Luke, Jesus commissions as witnesses disciples who are struggling to believe and only beginning to understand what he has told them. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

The TV story told of a community in Hawaii preparing for a *tsunnami*: a phenomenon where the water is drained from the shore only to be returned by the ocean in a huge, tremendous, powerful wave with great destructive capabilities.

In the midst of the chaos, as people heard the warnings and headed for safe places, a young boy went with his father to an evacuation center at a school. He felt safe there with his father and the others until his father had to leave. Two teenagers in their family were out on a beach where they couldn't hear the warnings. The father felt he had to go and try to rescue them.

His leaving left the young son struggling. The boy knew the place his father was going was dangerous. He was afraid of something happening to his father. That fear awoke inside of him feelings of loneliness and pain that came from the death of his mother. Would his father die, too? Would he be left all alone? How could his father do this to him? It made him feel angry.

When the father did return at the end of

the story, coming to give the boy a hug, the boy first came at his dad punching him with all his might. He felt angry and afraid and happy and relieved all at the same time. The father did not pull back, but reached around, absorbing all those punches, that anger, that love. The boy was fully embraced in his father's love and presence.

"Peace be with you." Jesus appears out of nowhere. The disciples are trying to make sense of reports that people have seen Jesus—alive and well—when they knew he died on the cross and was buried. The reports are amazing and overwhelming as they roll in one after another.

"Peace be with you." Suddenly Jesus is with them. He invites their thoughts and feelings: "Why are you frightened? Why are you questioning and doubting? Come to me. Touch me. It is I myself."

Just like the boy in the story, the followers of Jesus had to come at him with all their strong and true feelings of what his death and absence had meant to them. They had to let out their fear and despair, their anger and frustration, their questions and doubts. Jesus did not pull back from their punches. He reached out to them, offering them himself, absorbing all those punches. The disciples were fully embraced in the love and presence of Jesus.

On many days we may feel overwhelmed with a tidal wave of conflict and questions and strong feelings. In our world there is much unrest and injustice which threatens to destroy God's people and God's earth. Jesus may seem very absent as those "Why?" questions and laments echo through the world.

"Peace be with you." Jesus comes to us with open arms and the desire to open hearts and minds to his gift of peace. Jesus is clothing us with his peace and the power of his resurrection. No wave will overpower us, no feeling destroy us, no conflict consume us. That is his promise, now and for everlasting. DH-K

Interventions

"God was executed by people painfully like us, in a society very similar to our own—in the over-ripeness of the most splendid and sophisticated Empire the world has ever seen. In a nation famous for its religious genius and under a government renowned for its efficiency, He was executed by a corrupt church, a timid politician, and a fickle proletariat led by professional agitators. His executioners made vulgar jokes about him, called him filthy names, taunted him, smacked him in the face, flogged him with the cat, and hanged him on the common gibbet—a bloody, dusty, sweaty, and sordid business. If you show people that, they are shocked. So they should be. If that does not shock them, nothing can."

—Dorothy Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King*

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 20, 1997

Psalm 23
Acts 4:5-12
1 John 3:16-24
John 10:11-18

First Reading
John 10:11-16 is Jesus' commentary on the brief parable in 10:3b-5, where he introduced the figure of a shepherd. In the earlier verses he contrasted the shepherd (himself) with a thief (the Pharisees). In the comments in 10:11-16, Jesus moves away from his criticism of the Pharisees and elaborates on the relationship between the shepherd and the flock. In 11-13, Jesus says he is the good shepherd because he is willing to die for his sheep; in 14-16, he says he is the good shepherd because he knows his own sheep intimately. The unity of shepherd and sheep rests on love and knowledge.

The themes of continuity and community that appeared two Sundays ago in John 20 and 1 John 1 reappear in today's lessons. The Father loves the shepherd, the shepherd loves the sheep, and the sheep love one another (Jn 10:17, 1 Jn 3:16-18); the Father commands the Son and the Son commands his followers (10:18, 3:24); the Father knows the Son/shepherd, who knows his sheep, who know the truth (10:14-15, 3:19). As Jesus called attention to his wounds in 20:27 to show the physical continuity between his death and resurrection, here he declares a continuity of intention: "I lay down my life in order to take it up again" (10:17), Thus the resurrection is neither afterthought nor epilogue; it is the reason for Jesus' self-sacrifice.

Sacrificial love leads the shepherd to give his life for his flock. Jesus' love also sets the example for the church, both in its internal relationships ("we should...love one another," 1 Jn 3:23), and in its mission to extend love and forgiveness to those outside the flock (Jn 10:16). JPR

Pastoral Reflections
Choirs and singing groups can be wonderful witnesses to God's gift of unity and harmony in life. It's not just in the words they sing, but the fact that they are singing together.

Singing together is not easy! It takes practice. In rehearsals, the choir works hard at listening—listening to the voice of the director, and listening to each others' voices. Each individual in the choir must sing with her or his best voice, but the choir must also sing with one voice.

Our experience of God's gift of peace in the risen Christ is much like this choir experience. We constantly have to sharpen our skills of living in that peace. One skill that is named in the gospel reading is the skill of listening. "Listen to my voice... so there will be one flock, one shepherd."

Listening is both an individual and group experience. The Good Shepherd calls each sheep by name. We are touched individually in baptism and called by name. Throughout life, a believer practices listening to God's voice through prayer, worship, and Scripture.

God also calls us as a group, as a congregation, as a whole Christian Church. We must exercise our ability to listen to one another and to the One Shepherd. In a formal way, we are working on that in the extensive work of interdenominational dialogues. In less formal settings, we do that in ministerials and congregational fellowships. As we work at it, we discover the wonderful and unexpected harmonies God is creating out of our lives. Our ability to express faith out loud together becomes an important witness to our God.

Every day the will of God for harmony

and peace is put to the test in our personal and public relationships: every time we reach out to strike one another physically or verbally, instead of offering the handshake of peace; every time cease-fires and peace talks are betrayed by renewed warfare instead of confirmed by signatures on covenants of peace. The call to live in peace seems impossible.

Jesus never acknowledged the neat divisions and separations humans make between peoples. He lived as though there were one world for all people. He acted to create a new peace-filled reality.

Jesus did acknowledge that this vision of a peaceful reality could only be accomplished through the pain of his death. "I lay down my life for the sheep." Somehow it is only through his death and resurrection that his voice could be amplified and translated so that people of all languages and in all countries could hear, listen, and follow this Shepherd.

Listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd is more than a good communication tool. Listening with our whole hearts and minds and souls is being present with Christ, and ever more present with the other sheep in the fold. As he takes care of us and protects us and guides us, we commit ourselves to listening to one another and receiving one another in his name. DH-K

Interventions

"When God pardons, therefore, he does not say he understands our weakness or makes allowances for our errors; rather he disposes of, he finishes with, the whole of our dead life and raises us up with a new one. He does not so much deal with our derelictions as he does drop them down the black hole of Jesus' death. He forgets our sins in the darkness of the tomb. He remembers our iniquities no more in the oblivion of Jesus' expiration. He finds us, in short, in the desert of death, not in the garden of improvement; and in the power of Jesus' resurrection, he puts us on his shoulders rejoicing and brings us home."

—Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of Grace*

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 27, 1997

Psalm 22:24-30 (Psalm 22:25-31 NRSV)
Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8

First Reading

Last week's lessons introduced some of the most memorable words in the Johannine vocabulary, and this week's gospel and second lesson continue to string relational terms together like gems in a necklace: abide, love, know; command, obey; life. While the specific connections among the terms are sometimes hard to define, together they present a rich picture of the relationship between Jesus and his followers.

Last week's lessons described a relationship of intimate fellowship, love, and forgiveness. Now the image is extended to include life itself. Jesus gives us life just as surely as a vine gives life to its branches. Branches have no existence apart from the vine, and we have no true life apart from Jesus. "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9). Branches and vine are more intimately connected than sheep and shepherd or disciples and master. The relationship is one of belonging. The first lesson, too, is about membership, as the Ethiopian eunuch is grafted into the body of Christ through baptism.

The life Jesus imparts to believers has a strong ethical force. Branches that abide in the vine are expected to bear fruit, and the fruit is love. Those who live in Christ live Christlike lives. "As he is, so are we in this world," says the second lesson (v. 17).

The vine-branches relationship, like the shepherd-sheep relationship in John 10, is an extension of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father is the vine-grower (v. 1). In 15:8, Jesus says, "My Father is glorified," in the aorist tense (ἐδοξάσθη). The aorist may reflect the evangelist's post-resurrection point of view. Yet in this verse, the Father is not glorified by Jesus' death and resurrection but by the fruitful discipleship of his followers. The aorist, therefore, suggests that the Father is glorified once-for-all in the ongoing mission of love initiated by the Son and continued by his branches, the disciples. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

A coin is made up of two sides. Technically you could probably split them, but then the coin would be worthless. Together they make a whole coin with purchasing power.

A branch grows from a vine. A branch broken off from the vine withers and dies. Together they make a whole plant, with the power to produce fruit. Together they are whole.

The Christian life can be viewed as having two sides or parts, as well. God's action in Holy Baptism plants the seed of faith, pours out the cleansing waters, and nourishes growth. The other side is our living in faith and making daily choices. Together this creates a whole Christian life.

After hearing the word of God and feeling the seed planted deep in his heart, the Ethiopian minister asked Phillip, "What is to prevent my being baptized?" God's action had begun and was not to be stopped! The man rejoiced in being baptized!

What was there to prevent you from being baptized? Perhaps you were an infant with no ability to choose or to ask. Your parents could have said "no." The government could have said "no." The church could have said "no." Perhaps you were an adult and had to overcome a hardened heart, or embarrassment, or a million other excuses.

God overcame all obstacles and chose

you. God rooted the Vine before creation in order to have a place to graft you. Even though the Vine was chopped down time and time again, it continued to grow until it was even stronger than death. In Holy Baptism we were grafted onto the Vine, cared for by the Vinedresser, with the promise that we never need be separated.

The question the Ethiopian minister had to face as he returned home was, "What is to prevent me from living now in my baptismal faith?" This is the other side of the coin! This is the work of the branch to produce fruit—with the help of the Vine!

We have no further biblical record of this new Christian or the Christian church in Ethiopia, but we know from other witnesses that a rich tradition of Christian faith and witness has developed in that region, through much testing and persecution.

The question is ours, also. "What is to prevent me from living now in my baptismal faith?" We put many obstacles in the way that keep us from being committed to worship, study, prayer, and actions. As we make our home more and more in Christ, we naturally bear more and more fruit that witnesses to the life-giving power of the Vine.

Whatever else bearing fruit may mean, whatever other commands Jesus may give, this one stands out supreme: we are to love one another. We are to act for the good of the other, as Jesus acted for our good. Love is such action. Love is not only the kiss of peace, it is also the gift of food to the hungry sister. Love is not only the hearty handshake, it is also the time given in comfort of a grieving brother. Love is not only kind and supportive words, it is driving another on a necessary errand, or caring for another's children when an emergency arises, or giving time to comfort another who is in pain. With such actions we show love to the loving Savior who commands us to love one another. (source unknown)

DH-K

Interventions

Jesus the vine, we are the branches;
life in the Spirit the fruit of the tree;
heaven to earth, Christ to the people,
gift of the future now flowing to me.
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

—Herbert F. Brokering, "Alleluia! Jesus is Risen," *With One Voice* #674.

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Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 4, 1997

Psalm 22:24-30 (Psalm 22:25-31 NRSV)
Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8

First Reading

This week's gospel is a continuation of last week's, and elaborates on the terms "abide," "fruit," "know," and "love." Here John shows through a variety of sayings that the fruitfulness that the Father expects of the disciples and that brings glory to the Father (John 15:8) is obedience to Jesus' example and command of love. To abide in Jesus—to receive life from him and participate in the character of his life—means to love one another as he has loved us.

John adds detail to the image he is creating through his use of the tenses of the verb ἀγαπαω. In verse 9 the verb is aorist: "As the Father loved me, so I loved you." In verse 12 the disciples' love is present subjunctive—"that you continuously love one another"—while Jesus' love is aorist—"as I loved you." God's love for Jesus and Jesus' love for his disciples were made manifest in one great act, when Jesus "laid down his life for his friends." Now the disciples are to extend the relationship through lifelong love for one another.

To the terms "abide," "love," and "know," this lesson adds "joy" and "friends." Jesus tells the disciples that by loving as he loved they will experience joy as he experienced joy. He also tells them that the love and knowledge he shares with them elevate them from servants to friends. Yet however intimate the relationship might be, it is not egalitarian; immediately after Jesus calls the disciples his friends he reminds them the friendship is based on unilateral election, and he has appointed them to go and bear fruit.

"Go and bear fruit" is a mission directive. The Father's love caused the Son to be sent into the world to lay down his life; anyone who believes in the Son's gift of salvation is not only the Son's friend but a participant in the Son's own life; and those who participate in the life of the Son must continue his sacrifice of love in their own lives and must also proclaim his love to the world. In Acts 10 we see the community of believers—the friends of Jesus through faith, love, and baptism—widening to include even Gentiles. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

The passion and fervor of the Easter triumph come to a personal climax as we bring to remembrance Jesus' words from the Last Supper: "You are my friends." It is a friendship born of Jesus' own desire to love and be loved, to know and be known, and to share his living and dying completely with the people close to him.

These words can set us on top of the world! Jesus, the Holy Son of God, the Ruler of Wind and Sea, in his most vulnerable moment wants us to be his friends. He chose us and appointed us to live as friends in the world. The gift of love he has given us so freely and richly he desires us to give to one another. A friend like Jesus is one who knows all about you and still loves you!

There are many well-told tales of friendship in children's and adult fiction. A book that recently came to the shelves of our public library is *The Faithful Friend* by Robert D. San Souci. It is the retelling of a folk tale found in the French West Indies.

Two young men grow up to be close friends, even though one began as the son of a servant in the rich boy's home. They were as close as brothers.

As young adults, the rich man falls in

love with the picture of a beautiful young woman. He decides he will travel to meet her. His companion has his doubts about the wisdom of this—the young woman's guardian is a wizard—but agrees to accompany his friend on this journey. "They were so close that the happiness of one was the happiness of both."

On the way to the young woman's home, they come across the body of an old beggar who had died without family or home. They take the time to arrange a proper funeral and burial with the local priest. Then they continue their journey.

The meeting with the young woman is splendid. She and the rich young man agree to marry. Of course, the wizard guardian is angry and expels them from the house. On the way home the friend three times overhears evil plans being made to kill the young couple. Three times the friend uses his knowledge to stop the evil plan from working and saves the couple.

Because of the wizard's magic, if he tells what he has done he will turn into stone—first to his knees, then to his chest, and finally to the very top of his head. In the circumstance of the last saving act he is forced to tell and suffers the consequences. "Oh, my poor friend!" shouts the rich young man. "I would give anything to restore you to life!"

An old man steps from the crowd of wedding guests and says he can bring back his life if the rich young man is willing to take his friend's curse upon himself. This he is willing to do. "I already owe him my life three times over."

The old man acts to remove the stony curse. He makes as if he would transfer the stony condition to the young groom, but instead touches the wizard who caused the problem in the first place. The wicked wizard instantly becomes stone.

It is revealed that this old man was the beggar who was given a Christian burial by the young men. *Bon-Die*, the good Lord, gave him permission to come to earth and do this service in return. "Your willingness to sacrifice your life for your friend gave me the power to break the spell," the old man told them, "but a curse only ends when returned to its source."

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Thanks be to God for the gift of life given and laid down, and life restored in Christ! DH-K

Interventions

"Diogenes was standing at a street corner one day, laughing like a man out of his mind. "What are you laughing about?" a passerby asked. "Do you see that stone in the middle of the street? Since I got here this morning, ten people have stumbled on it and cursed it. But not one of them took the trouble to remove it so others wouldn't stumble."

—Anthony de Melly, S.J., *Taking Flight*

The Ascension of Our Lord May 8, 1997

Psalm 47 or Psalm 93
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:44-53

First Reading

The value of the ascension narratives (apart from the obvious fact that they explain why Jesus is no longer walking the earth if he was raised from the dead) may best be stated by the last verses of today's second lesson, which are not part of the ascension story at all: They tell us that Christ now rules all things "for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Luke alone of New Testament writers describes Christ's physical return to heaven (twice, in Luke 24 and Acts 1, with striking differences!), but the idea of his exaltation is common. His ministry that began with his incarnation, reached its climax in his crucifixion, and triumphed in his resurrection, is completed by his return to God's right hand. From there he is able to send God's power on the apostles and on the church.

The book of Acts is Luke's story of that power and its effect in the life of the church. Both the gospel and first lesson today set the stage for that story. The disciples, eyewitnesses to Christ's ministry, become eyewitnesses to his resurrection so that they can bear witness to the world. Luke's summary of the gospel has already appeared in the lessons for the Third Sunday of Easter: Jesus died and rose to fulfill the scriptures; and his appointed witnesses are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. Jesus commissions the disciples with authority and promises them power from on high to fulfill their mission. By describing his ascension, Luke shows that Christ has returned to his seat of power where he can prepare to send the Holy Spirit.

All Christ's words and the Old Testament scriptures that pointed to him become understandable in the community of witnesses to his resurrection. The Old Testament writings, the words of Christ, and the testimony of the apostles together become the "riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints" (Eph 1:18), through which the saving power of God is made known in the church. JPR

Interventions

"Paganism is the air we breathe, the water we drink. It captures us, it converts our young, it subverts the church.... So we must gather, on a regular basis, for worship. To speak about God in a world that lives as if there is no God. We must speak to one another as beloved brothers and sisters in a world which encourages us to live as strangers. We must pray to God to give us what we cannot have by our own efforts in a world which teaches us that we are self-sufficient and all-powerful. In such a world, what we do here on Sunday morning becomes a matter of life and death."

—Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 11, 1997

Psalm 1
Acts 1:6-14
1 John 5:9-13
John 17:6-19

First Reading

John 17 presents a kaleidoscope of descriptive phrases about the relationship of the Father, Jesus, his disciples, and the world. The love that binds Christ to both his Father and his disciples endures despite his physical absence from the world. God sent Jesus into the world, and now Jesus sends his disciples into the world; God gave his word to Jesus, Jesus spoke it to the disciples, and now they are to proclaim it to the world; the Father and the Son are one, the Son is one with the disciples, and Jesus prays that they will be one with each other.

Jesus' words in this passage clearly reflect the evangelist's post-resurrection, post-ascension setting, and describe the situation of the Christian community after the ascension. Jesus says, "I am no longer in the world," and "while I was with them." He says his followers know everything and have kept God's word, which would hardly seem like an accurate description of the disciples before the resurrection. While the retrospective point of view seems out of place in its context in the gospel, it makes this a timely reading for the Sunday after the Ascension.

Because Jesus' followers—in John's day and today—are the Good Shepherd's sheep and the branches of the true Vine, they belong to Jesus and not to the world. Yet God has sent them into the world as he sent Jesus, to reveal his word and to call the world to believe that Jesus was sent from God. Their mission is a risky one, and Jesus asks the Father to protect them and guard them. (The nature of the risk is left vague—is it apostasy? unbelief? disunity? lack of love? persecution?) The means of protection are as dazzling as the gifts Jesus shared with his disciples in person: God's word, God's name, the truth, sanctification, belief, scripture.

The passage rings with the sound of fulfillment. Jesus has been glorified in his disciples: in the twelve, in the evangelist's fellowship of believers, and in the community of all Christians who have believed through the testimony of the apostles. Through his words spoken to the church through time his joy is made complete in all believers. JPR

Pastoral Reflections

Joseph, Matthias, Mary, the women, the eleven, and the other brothers and sisters (who numbered about a hundred and twenty) shared together in a wondrous and peculiar unity. They wrestled with the truth about Jesus and the reality of evil in the world. They made decisions together with partial knowledge and the sense that more, much more, was about to come their way. They prayed as they had never prayed before, while they watched and waited.

Jesus' prayer for unity, even before his death, resurrection, and ascension, set into motion this new and unfolding experience of Christian unity: "That they may be one even as we are one." The mystery of Christian unity begins in the mystery of the unity within God.

We know and experience unity with one another and with God much as we know and experience unity in fighting for a common cause, or in holding citizenship in the same country, or in dealing with a community-wide crisis. We see the experience from our own peculiar viewpoint, yet the result is a wondrous involvement in something much grander than our individual imagination.

Walter Brueggemann brings out this

sense of unity in a description of Holy Communion:

> The Holy Communion is our supreme experience of all of God's people coming together, not on our terms but on God's terms. It is our vision of unity being actualized. But it is also the place of freedom, where every man, woman, and child comes face to face with the power of the risen Lord, celebrates baptism, and is set free to his or her own humanity. It is where we are intimately and powerfully together in freeing ways for the sake of the human spirit among us. So we say, "This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Come from the East and the West, and from the North and the South." It is the joyful feast. We come in joy because there we are valued with our peculiar dignity and worth. But it is joy for a people with a common identity. And at the table our joy and our commonness do not conflict. They are essential to each other. Thus when we are at that table, we are fully in the presence of what *shalom* is like. And perhaps it is characteristic that such joy and commonality, such freedom and unity, must always happen "on the night when he was betrayed."
>
> At that table and in all our *shalom*, We focus finally on him who is the embodiment of *shalom*. He is not only the one who frees and unites. He is the one who is free and united. (*Living Toward a Vision* [United Church Press, 1976])

Jesus is the only completely "united person," united in himself and with God in a singleness of vision, and united with all people in the joy and pain of the world. With that freedom and unity, Jesus could accomplish his mission, which we celebrate at the end of this Easter season, and could send out others with the possibility of continuing that mission.

With our sisters and brothers of so long ago, we, too, can pray, "Lord, you who know everyone's hearts, show us. . . ." Show us how to live in the peace you give to us. Show us how to make decisions together. Show us how to love one another as you have loved us. Show us how to live in this world, but not of the world. Show us how to eat and drink your body and blood, and rise from that meal strengthened in unity and courage to act now in your name. Amen. DH-K

Interventions

". . . I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice—"Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. . . ." Was not Martin Luther an extremist—"Here I stand; I can do none other so help me God. . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be? Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the cause of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill, three men were crucified. We must not forget that all three men were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. . . . So, after all, maybe the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists."

—Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*

The Day of Pentecost
May 18, 1997

Psalm 104:25-35, 37
(Psalm 104:24-34, 35b NRSV)
Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

First Reading

The theme of the Pentecost festival—the dramatic bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus fifty days after Easter—is drawn from Acts 2. But Jesus' sayings about the Advocate in John 15 and 16 add depth to our understanding of the identity and function of the Spirit. In both lessons the principal gift of the Spirit is the power to testify, to bear witness to Jesus.

The lesson in Acts begins with a spectacular theophany in wind and fire, reminiscent of 1 Kings 19:11-12. No sooner have the disciples been filled with the Holy Spirit than they begin speaking in other languages. They immediately use their new-found ability to proclaim their faith to the assembled representatives of the world community. This episode bears out both the unity and the universality of the church. Peter's speech to the startled crowd announces one of Luke's major themes: The events unfolding in the ministry of the church are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, a stage in the completion of God's plan of salvation.

John tells us more than Luke does about who the Holy Spirit is. According to today's gospel, the Advocate is the continuation of the divine presence in the lives of the disciples after Jesus returns to his Father. Thus Jesus says that he has to depart before the Spirit can come. Moreover, it is to the disciples' benefit that he departs and gives way to the Spirit. No matter how intimate the disciples' fellowship with Jesus might be, it is strictly external, mediated by words and loving deeds. Even the resurrected Jesus cannot live in the disciples nor absorb their lives into his. Jesus must depart physically and allow his place to be taken by the Paraclete before the perfect union of vine and branches (see 5 Easter and 6 Easter gospels) can be realized.

The Spirit is the internal presence and power of Jesus. The Spirit makes the truth immediate to the minds of the disciples so that their knowledge and understanding can become complete. John says the Spirit will prove the world wrong, meaning not that the Spirit will convict the world of sin but that it will convince the disciples of the truth of Jesus and the falsehood of the world in a way that even the words of Jesus did not do. In the disciples' new understanding and perfect fellowship with Jesus through the Spirit, his glory is completely revealed. (John 16:15)
JPR

Pastoral Reflections

Dust. Fine, windblown dust. Dust to seep inside of you and choke every breath, every pore. That's the kind of dust a woman in my parish in Alberta described when she told stories of the dust storms in the 1930s on the prairies.

She recalled for me one particular afternoon when she and her husband and another couple were driving home from town. They could see the darkness of the dust clouds gathering. Suddenly they were caught in the storm. The wind blew so much fine dust into the car's engine that it stalled. They had to pull over.

The interior of the car was no longer a refuge. Dust seeped in. The poor visibility made the car vulnerable to other vehicles on the road. The four of them got out of the car and headed for a light on a hill. They held hands to stay together, crawled through the fence, and made it to the house of friends.

Even in a house one could feel suffo-

cated by the blowing dust. It covered everything and everyone. The miracle was that it took only a few drops of rain (which was all they got) to settle the dust.

"Dust you are and to dust you shall return." God made human beings out of the dust of the earth. But we were not made to breathe dust! We live because God breathed into human lungs the warm, moist air of the Spirit. When that breath is removed we die and return to dust.

Through all ages, cries of dusty despair rise up to God. "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." How will we live when our emotions are dried out and our relationships are scattered around us like dry bones? How will we rise up when we are isolated from others by loneliness, sin, and guilt? When we are overwhelmed by death and choked by the dust of our own mortality and the fragility of life on this planet, who will cleanse us and grant us the breath of life?

"Come from the four winds, O Spirit, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." Wind and dust can be a dangerous combination. Wind has the power to scatter the dust to the ends of the earth, to destroy useful land. Purposeful and focused wind, breath, can lift up and fill the dust with life and courage. "Come, Holy Spirit, come."

The rush of holy and holying wind stirs up knowledge and vision, dreams and prophesies. As breath rushes across vocal cords, mouths open and sounds explode into the world: cries of joy, messages of warning and hope, the rattling of new language expressing a new gift of life.

Come, Holy Spirit, Giver of life and Lover of life. Keep moving in and through us. Whisper in our ears of Jesus. Gather and scatter us in God's name. Blow away the dirt that would weigh us down, that we might be borne on the wings of your wind to touch the lives of many. Echo and reverberate through our voices and lives that everywhere the praise and glory of our living God may be known.

Who is She, sparkle in the rapids,
coolness of the well,
living power of Jesus flowing from
the Scriptures?
She is Life,
water, wind and laughter, calm,
yet never still,
swiftly moving Spirit, singing
in the changes.

—Brian Wren, "Who is She?" in *What Language Shall I Borrow?* (Crossroad, 1989) DH-K

Interventions

"The vision of Jesus thus provides the content for three central images of the Christian life: life in the Spirit, the life of discipleship, and life in the Kingdom of God. Each image points to a life centered in God rather than in the lords and kingdoms of this world, in Spirit and not in culture, and yet seeking to transform those kingdoms through the power of the spirit."

—Marcus Borg in *Jesus: A New Vision* (Harper & Row, 1987)

Note to Our Readers

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

In the April, 1997, issue we will publish the Hein-Fry lectures for 1996, featuring Dr. Gabriel Fackre and Dr. Michael Root. These lectures, which will be delivered at all eight ELCA seminaries in the next months, address the theological issues facing the ELCA in its ecumenical decisions this summer, decisions that will affect our relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and three reformed churches. Both lecturers are well known in the ecumenical church and approach the questions with pastoral sensitivity and a dialogical spirit.

Specifically, these lectures will discuss: What is at stake for Lutherans and their partners in these decisions? What will be the impact of these 1997 decisions on ministry and mission of the whole church for the next millennium? What are the theological, confessional principles, and the pastoral hopes and concerns, that will help us approach these decisions in a God-pleasing way? What gifts for witness and mission can only be obtained by fuller expressions of *oikumene?* What dangers might arise from a "unity" which is premature or lacking foundation and depth?

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Because we believe these lectures will greatly assist pastors and lay people in considering the ecumenical proposals, we are making extra copies of the April issue available, at cost, for synods, conferences, or congregational discussions. These extra copies will be available for shipment by April 1.

To order copies for your group, please notify me by March 1 at the latest: (773)-256-0721, E-mail rklein@lstc.edu, or FAX (773)-256-0782, giving us a complete shipping address. We would appreciate receiving payment by April 1.

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