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Suffering and the Theology of the Cross from a Feminist Perspective

Anna Madsen

It is with great honor and great trepidation that I stand before you this afternoon [Fall Academy 2013]. When Kirsi Stjerna spoke to me on the phone about coming to this grand event, and informed me that she would like me to speak about Luther, and sex, and violence, and feminism, and then listed all of the other crazy-illustrious names with which my name would mingle, I gulped, and said, “Um, Kirsi, I’m not like them. That’s a whole different league. Might even be a whole different sport!” And then she said, “Anna, I’ve read your blog. I think you can do Luther, sex, violence, and feminism just fine.” Hmm. I decided not to ask exactly what she meant by that.

Just two weekends ago, I presented at the South Central Wisconsin Synod’s Bishop’s Convocation. My friend who accompanied me asked if I ever get nervous when I present. I said, “Nah . . . unless I have to present at an academic forum. Then I do, but only during the question and answer period. But I have developed a strategy for such occasions. If someone asks a question that either makes no sense, or addresses an area about which I am not exactly clear, or when it is obvious that the question is really posed more to garner a platform for the questioner than than it is about any possible answer I could provide, then I simply lean in, put my hand on my chin, and say, “Well, that is really interesting . . . Tell me more about what moved you to ask that.” Then either I get further clarity about the question, further time to get further clarity about what I could possibly say to the question, or further time for the questioner to offer the coveted clarification of his or her own agenda!

Now, let me be clear. This prelude to my presentation is no stereotypical female fare, no expression of an embedded cultural habit of self-deprecation.

This prelude is rather an expression of confidence about what I do, and about what I don't do; or, perhaps rather, what I don't do very often. In fact, it has been exactly seven years since I have had an offering at an academic feast hall such as this, and, not coincidentally, I couldn't even make it. The day that little Else and I were to fly off to the San Diego American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, where my co-authored paper was to be presented, she came down with a terrible strep throat, and my son had medical complications that simply needed a mama's presence. And so, a proxy had to be sent!

So rather than attempt to do what I have not done for years, and, frankly, no longer is my schtick anyway, I am going to do what I do do. I am going to tell a story that is mine, and yet that is not only mine.

My dissertation was completed in 2003. Prior to revving up, so to speak, my doctoral studies, I served in a tiny rural parish in South Dakota. It was tempting to spring right into Ph.D. work, but even in the waning days of seminary, I realized that any further academic work I would do had to be tethered to real life, to people's real experiences, real sufferings, real questions, real yearnings. My dissertation had to matter beyond my own thirst for intellectual inquiry. I had a personal hunch that if I really wanted to teach, pastoral experience would help me discern that, and shape it, and fasten it to something less ethereal than theory.

And who knows? Maybe I really was called to be a parish pastor.

And so Badger, South Dakota, hosted my late husband and me for three years. There I began to know a bit more of life than I had in my previous twenty-seven years. Sudden deaths by cardiac arrest, diabetic shock, drunken snowmobile accidents killing fiancés and fathers-to-be; I learned that sometimes talking about the weather is not just small talk, but is life and death for farmers and ranchers; in a small town, change might sound good on paper, but then it turns out it is not just a question of Sunday morning service times, liturgical rituals, and hymns, but is about communal and familial allegiances, political persuasions, and generational loyalties. I learned that baptisms always make me cry: a baby bundled up in blankets and future and grace.

And I discovered that I am not called to be a parish pastor.

So through a series of serendipitous connections and conversations and events, Bill, my late husband, and I ended up in Regensburg, Germany, where for four years I studied various and morphed forms of the theology of the cross. That was my settled topic, after I threw the net far and wide, asking mentors and colleagues and friends what they thought had not received enough theological wondering. So theologian Michael Root said to me, "Well, the term 'the theology of the cross' is used all the time, but there is

no real clear sense of what it means. Maybe you should check that out." And so I did.

For four years I poked around at this "thin tradition," nodding to Douglas John Hall, this thin tradition that surfaces by name only fleetingly in the first few pages of Luther's career. I sought to find the Big Bang of his thought in the writings of Paul, and learned that Paul tends to employ references to the cross in a variety of ways, depending on the recipients and intents of his letter. That was both enlightening and confounding and premonitory.

I looked at Luther, who, although he clearly bound the theology of the cross most intentionally to the forgiveness of sins, as well as to *Anfechtung*, summed up a somewhat broader vision for it in his explanation to the second article of the creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

I studied Von Loewenich, and Kitamori, and Moltmann, and learned that World War II changed everything in theology, that the theology of the cross has to speak to the oppressed as it does to the oppressors, and if you cannot say what you want to in Auschwitz with the ashes of Jews on your shoulders, then stop talking.

I studied feminist theologians and liberation theologians, the likes of Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, and Dorothee Sölle, and Mary Grey, and Elizabeth Johnson, and John Sobrino, and Gustavo Gutiérrez, and North American theologians like Douglas John Hall, and I learned that the theology of the cross speaks to abuse and poverty and loneliness and depression and consumptive wants that transform, that mutate, into needs.

And almost to a theologian, the theology of the cross declared that there, precisely there – wherever the "there" was for that specific theologian – God was at work.

And I looked up at my husband and I said, one day, "It sounds really good, but if something were to happen to you and to the children, would it be enough?"

And I presented my dissertation, and with a few tweaks here and there and here again, it was accepted, and I defended my understandings of process theology and Buddhism, and as the final culmination of my worthiness as a *systematische Theologin* from a German *Universität*, I proved that I could tap a keg.

And we stayed on for one more year in order to help with my doctoral advisor's *Geburstagsfest* (birthday celebration), and while at a gathering with my then still breastfeeding eight-month-old daughter, Else, in Neuendettlesau in the waning days of that event, one month before we were to return to the States where I was to begin teaching at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, a car screamed into my husband and my about-to-turn-three son. Bill died, and Karlchen suffered a traumatic brain injury, from which he is still and will ever more be recovering. As will Else, and will I.

And I discovered that sometimes, Easter – the core, frankly, of my theology – *isn't* enough. And alone, the cross tempts people to become like Boot Strap Bill Turner, the pirate who finally became part of the ship, settling into a moorless grief that promises no lighthouse, and only perpetual stormy seas.

I discovered, as the trajectory of that accident's event continued to shoot through my family, my planned vocation as an academic, my personal tangle with grief and hopelessness and loneliness and emptiness, and, for the first time, a visceral understanding of apocalyptic, that my experience, my story, was not just mine. Suddenly, all suffering was one. The whole creation *was* crying out. It really was. I hadn't heard it before. How could I not have heard it before?

And why isn't everyone hearing it with me now? And suddenly, the theology of the cross became real. It became tangibly, inescapably, incontrovertibly real.

Today, I stand before you as an academic, to be sure. I have the credentials. I know how to footnote. I know whom to quote. I know which theologians come out of which school and which theologians like which other theologians, and I know the litmus tests to determine the orthodoxy of any given school of thought or theological leaning. Und, ich kann sogar Deutsch sprechen, und Luther *auf Deutsch* lesen! And, let us not forget, I know how to tap a German Lutheran keg.

Before the accident, I did not know the theology of the cross in any way except from the safety of a desk and behind a pulpit. Even while I had been in Badger, I had certainly been present in other people's Good Fridays, but I always returned to my Easter life. Nothing bad had really happened to me, you see, short of the Minnesota Twins never picking it up after their World

Series streaks. My Grandmother died at 92, but she had lived a life filled with akvavit and butter.

But after June 19, 2004, that all changed. Suddenly, the theology of the cross was no theory. It was nothing to footnote, and God knew it was no footnote. It was, it is, daily life.

Still, confronted by Kirsi with this task of presenting about the theology of the cross from a feminist perspective, my first tendency, even after all of these years of not needing to live the life of academic pursuit, of having to "publish or perish" (a theme which itself could be addressed under the notion of the theology of the cross, by the way), of having to prove my theological worth by proving how many people I can reference, of living my topic day in and day out, what was my first tendency? Slog around dozens of books. And not just slog them around. But read them. And I tried to read them. Really, I did. I read a good bunch of them. Skimmed more of them. But while I tried to absorb them, highlight them, cull from them, I was preparing for a series of lectures with New Testament theologian, Ray Pickett, for a Bishop's Convocation in Wisconsin last weekend, my son's brain injury was causing him a spate of stomach uck, and my mother's pancreatic cancer was gaining in its fearfully strong cadence to hospice, just this past week, and death now, at any time.

Let me be clear: I am not complaining about the commitment to be here or the preparation it took to come. It is rather that the theology of the cross has become my daily existence, this trust that under the ick and ish and pain and grief and exhaustion of life, God must be there. In some ways, frankly, the theology of the cross seems to me to be more accurately named the theology of Holy Saturday.

You see, the accident put everything into a new perspective. For example, Kirsi asked me a few weeks ago whether, given Mom's illness, I could still come. I told her that after the accident, every and any commitment for *anything* in the future seemed an audacious thing, so, yes, insofar as I could promise to come, I would!

And another example: Little boy Karl, who, like his sister is about as perfect as can be, can, on occasion, make me positively insane with frustration and irritation and downright anger. And when those rare moments happen, I look at him, and my little spirit's lips, all pursed, say within myself, "I am so glad that you are alive to piss me off!"

Or another example: I understand that there are those who have these beautiful embroidered pictures in their kitchens, the ones that go something like, "I thank you, God, for all the dirty dishes in my sink and on my counter, for they signify that I have food to eat, and friends to eat it with," and

so on and so forth. As for me? I have a framed German postcard that says, simply, in bold red letters, “Abwaschen sucks!”

But more to the point of this presentation’s expected thrust: before the accident, I figured that the promise was enough. It would tide anyone over when death, in any of its forms, came around and paid a visit. The empty tomb was about hope and perseverance and faith. But after the accident, I learned that Easter can be an insult. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?,” I had so often retold at bedsides, over tears at coffee tables, and in funeral sermons. “He is not here, but is risen!” Isn’t that good news? Well ...

Is it good news to put an arm – with full sincerity and presence – around a mother holding a starving child and tell her that it is truly a travesty that there is nothing to feed her son or daughter in the moment ... but! ... soon and very soon, Jesus will come again, and let me tell you about the feast then!

Is it good news to say that God heals, and then say to those with no health insurance that on that day but not before, they will deserve it?

Is it good news to promise that God forgives sins, and preach and teach that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves, but not screw up the courage to preach and teach that the converse then is also true: there is nothing that we can do to damn ourselves either?

Is it good news to a wife and a mother who has lost a husband and a perfectly healthy son?

I learned, then, that sometimes promises are not enough, at least not in the moment of deep darkness, or in dark moments strung together that might last days, or months, or even years.

I have heard it said that if we just *believed*, though, just trusted in the news that Jesus is risen, then it would make all the difference in the world. That may well be a full crock when you are standing in the Ground Zero of shocking suffering.

Part of my motivation for beginning *OMG* was determining that people are yearning for relevance. They are yearning for authenticity. They want good theology, they really do, theology that makes a difference, that has a power to help them discern how to parent, how to be in relationship with a partner, how to comfort, how to advocate. But they don’t want platitudes, they don’t want clichés, they don’t want obscure theology that makes no intersection with real life, real suffering, real grief, real pain. Life cannot be lived without an acknowledgement of pain, nor can that pain be assuaged by theological maxims or promises of redemption that will *eventually* come to pass.

A year and a half or so after the accident, I was venting via email, and not just a bit, to a good friend and colleague down the hall about my sud-

den deeply tough situation, not least of all because of the logistics of being a single mother of a precocious then three-year-old and a special needs then five-year-old, also as a then tenure-track professor. I had recently moved to a new community, had no deep friendships, was suddenly a first-time home-buyer forced to undergo a remodel to make the house handicapped accessible and who was living therefore a nomadic life imposing on friend and foe alike for temporary housing for a period of seven weeks, and who was, in a few words, overwhelmed and exhausted in body, mind, and spirit, losing herself in the swirl of it all, with nary a moment even to sit and grieve. My friend had this to offer – with full sincerity and presence: “Just recall the scripture,” wrote he, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Oh, was I pissed. I pursed my lips and briskly typed back (I’m sure he heard the email down the hall before he received it), “I will be still, IF *God* preps for classes, grades papers, creates books and journal articles in my name, writes bills, fills out forms, ensures that I find worthy care-givers, transfers Karl to his countless therapies, brings and picks up Else-girl to school, pushes a wheelchair and a grocery cart to get food for my family, plays with both, does the dishes, laundry, and pick-up, and brings the car in for an oil change, and as an indulgent bonus, finds me time to sit with a cup of coffee to breathe! THEN I’ll be still!”

Tom Stoppard’s play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, helps explain why I was so bothered. It contains a marvelous passage, a heart-breaking passage, of actors who reconvene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Elsinore after the two snuck away during their impromptu performance in the woods. The lead actor said to them:

You don’t understand the humiliation of it – to be tricked out of a single assumption, which makes our existence viable – that somebody is watching The plot was two corpses gone before we caught sight of ourselves, stripped naked in the middle of nowhere and pouring ourselves down a bottomless well There we are – demented children mincing about in clothes that no one ever wore, speaking as no man ever spoke, swearing love in wigs and rhymed couplets, killing each other with wooden swords, hollow protestations of faith hurled after empty promises of vengeance – and every gesture, every pose, vanishing into the thin unpopulated air. We ransomed our dignity to the clouds, and the uncomprehending birds listened. Don’t you see?! We’re actors – we’re the opposite of people! We’re actors We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade; that someone would be watching. And then, gradually, no one was. We were caught, high and dry. It was not until the murder’s long soliloquy that we were

able to look around; frozen we were in the profile, our eyes searched you out, first confidently, then hesitantly, then desperately as each patch of turf, each log, each exposed corner in every direction proved uninhabited, and all the while the murderous King addressed the horizon with his dreary interminable guilt Our heads began to move, wary as lizards, the corpse of unsullied Rosalinda peeped through his fingers, and the King faltered. Even then, habit and a stubborn trust that our audience spied upon us from behind the nearest bush, forced our bodies to blunder on long after they had emptied of meaning, until like runaway carts they dragged to a halt. No one came forward. No one shouted at us. The silence was unbreakable, it imposed itself upon us; it was obscene. We took off our crowns and swords and cloth of gold and moved silent on the road to Elsinore.

The text has been used to get at the feelings of abandonment we would feel if we were to learn, or at the very least believe, that there is no God watching. It's a powerful tool in that way.

But it can also be used to demonstrate, I think, how people feel if the church, the incarnate presence of God, looks away. Doesn't notice the action in people's lives, the drama. Cares more about footnotes than washing the feet.

It is well to remember that Jesus came to offer salvation, which in the Greek is *soteria*, which, in the Greek, means health, healing, and wholeness. Note, by the way, that definition changes the meaning of the question: Are you saved? Instead of being a veiled inquiry about whether you think you are going to heaven or hell, the question really asks, "Are you well?"

But we can't ask the question if we aren't watching people's plays – not watching in the sense of popping corn to tune into a voyeuristic Big Brother, but in the sense, rather, of being in relation to and with another.

You see, that Jesus came to offer *soteria*, health, healing, and wholeness, suggests that the opposite is often more true: disease, decay, brokenness, and death. I am convinced that Jesus is risen from the dead. And I am convinced that in that event, he announced that death no longer has the last word – all evidence to the contrary. We might live as if it does, death might like to present itself in the form of fear, threat, intimidation, and hopelessness and in so doing try to convince us that it does. But the Christian confession, our *gospel*, is that Jesus is risen. And the gospel has meaning *now*. It is *news*. There must be a reason to listen: whatever that reason is, it must by definition have relevance. And I am convinced that relevance has everything to do with relationship. It is not fundamentally about the self, but it is about the self and its relationship to others and to God. *You cannot know what is relevant to someone if they are irrelevant to you.*

Sometimes the Church is called to point out the relevance – the on-the-ground-relevance – of one's theology where one might not ever have otherwise noticed it. That is, relevance has a prophetic element to it. The Word of God speaks to unique situations, calling awareness to matters that either were unseen or intentionally ignored. An Old Testament professor of mine, Lynn Nakamura, pointed out that the only commandment that we have ever gotten right was, "Be fruitful and multiply." But we've done that. We've had great fun doing that. We've done that exceedingly well. And now the world is overcome by our fruit, and there are those who cannot, for any number of reasons, multiply. "Would," she asked, "God still speak the same word to us today?"

So, what does the cross mean to us today? What are its implications? Does it affect only the sinners or the ones sinned upon? Does it have anything to do with love? hope? reconciliation? justice? mercy? grief? vocation? avocation? pain? loss? parenting? loneliness? alienation? connection? emotions? addictions? doubt? brokenness? health? relationships? renewal? rebirth? joy? *The flesh of life? Its essence?*

If not, we have spiritualized the incarnate. I can't think of much more that could be relevant than God incarnate, and to help figure out what that means to the rest of us incarnate folks. If we don't, we have made the supremely relevant not only irrelevant, but we have lost an opportunity for relationship.

My hope for purveyors of theology in these days is that we discover that theology must be relevant and that relevance has everything to do with relationship to wherever there is death or the promise of it. It has to do with *soteria*. God's word relates to us. Could we in the church, including the theological world – even, perhaps, the academic world of grades and pre-tenure and promotions and institutional politics – create a culture of *relationship* where the gospel, that is, news that is terribly salvatory, terribly relational, which heals, serves, feeds, binds up, forgives, encourages, aids, and offers hope uniquely, concretely, and contextually, defines our *esse*?

This is prolepsis-in-motion, this enacting out of the promise of the future, of bringing forth Easter into a presently persistent Holy Saturday, the union of Cross and Tomb.

Now. I understand that my topic is supposed to be about feminism and the theology of the cross. Thus far, perhaps, it has been so only obliquely. Let me make the connections more explicit. Feminist theology is born out of the experiences and perspectives of women. It has, thankfully, morphed from a movement of white women with privilege to a broader acknowledgement of and advocacy against oppression against all people, and against creation.

The objection to oppression is not only because it is wrong *an sich*, but also because feminism has emphasized and recognized the crucial and intrinsic nature of creature-to-creature/creation relationship.

We are not in this alone. Even our actual dying is not ours to have in isolation, for our physical death causes emotional and spiritual deaths within the spirits of those who must learn to love us *in absentia*.

Some years back, I began to punch around at the idea of the intersection of theology and psychology and neurology, particularly by way of sin. I found a new voice in ethicist Seyla Benhabib. In her book, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, she makes the obvious and yet oddly novel statement that "... the moral self is not a moral geometrician but an embodied, finite, suffering and emotive being."¹ She continues:

Current constructions of the 'moral point of view' ... exclude all familial and other personal relations of dependence from their purview. While to become an autonomous adult means asserting one's independence vis-à-vis these relations, the process of moral maturation need not be viewed along the fictive model of the nineteenth-century boy who leaves home to become "a self-made man" out "yonder" in the wide, wild world. Moral autonomy can also be understood as growth and change, sustained by a network of relationships.²

Benhabib goes on to formulate an ethical principle that is based on dialogue, fostering an appreciation of the context of moral decision-making, a complex method based on the supremely basic question of a parent to a child – "What if others threw sand in your face or pushed you into the pool, how would you feel then?"³ This question is not necessarily accusatory, but curious. Simple inquiry moves the questioner into an empathic role, one who recognizes the nuances – the messiness – of life and that decisions are made neither in a moral nor a relational vacuum.⁴

In other words, vis-à-vis sin, it takes no imagination at all blithely to name something sinful. That is low-hanging fruit. It is far more complex and far more nuanced and far more potentially humbling, to ask, not accusingly, but openly, and curiously, "How did this happen?"

That is a relational question. It is a cross-question. "Father, forgive them, because they have no clue what they are doing." Any simpleton could name the crucifiers sinners. But the factors that got Jesus on the cross were multi-layered, multi-flavored, multi-colored. They had no clue.

Or consider those who suffer oppression and injustice. If we as Christians are ambassadors of salvation, we realize that where there is death, we are called to steward life ... recognizing even that that might mean altering our status quo manners of living.

Or consider how "family values" in political parlance is clearly code for anything to do with sex: abortion, single mothers, anything-other-than-straight sexuality. Living in sin still means "shacking up!" As if we are not all living in sin.

Our synod is like any synod, legally and prudently obligated to send out a letter naming clergy who have been removed from the roster because of any inappropriate (even if consensual) sexual contact. We just had a round of two letters in the last two weeks. I understand the level of precaution necessary in the event that there is a pattern of boundary violations that harm vulnerable, vulnerable people. I cannot emphasize enough my awareness of this need to both free victims to come forward and support them once they do. These public letters are but one way to ensure that victims are protected and have institutional avenues for healing.

Still, these letters do conjure up another response in me, causing me to cock my head, wondering why, to be consistent, we do not also get a letter every time it becomes clear that rostered clergy are not tithing to the poor, or that they support politicians cutting food stamps from the tables of the poor, or that they fail to speak up forcefully for the hungry, thirsty, and naked – the very forms of service addressed in the one place in the Gospels where God sits on the heavenly throne (Matthew 25). Vulnerable, vulnerable victims exist also, you see, in the lack of advocacy and aid to the ones about whom Jesus called the Least of These.

I am more concerned, that is, on ensuring that everyone has a home with a bed in it upon which they can sin (and here I speak only of consensual sex), than that someone is (consensually) sinning on a bed! And yet even the notion of sending out letters makes me curious about the effect. How is this process lending itself toward reconciliation rather than shame? What are the effects of such letters on those who are yet still hiding in sin (be they sexual, or abuse of substances, gambling addictions, etc.), and yet need confession, forgiveness, and hope for a new path?

Or consider the way that Valerie Saiving Goldstein, a female graduate student in theology in 1960 (!) reframed sin. She observed that "feminine sins" are born precisely out of the exhorted antidote, humility, to a sort of sin that is uniquely masculine in experience and expression. Humility, she said, is the very thing which women are culturally instructed to embody anyway, yet o.d.-ing on it serves up a lack of self-worth, and a tendency toward pettiness and manipulation ... a very different understanding of the traditional definition of sin.

So. Perhaps the way to define a feminist take on the theology of the cross is to speak of relation: its presence, its lack, its incarnational prom-

ise. After the accident, I planted a garden – my first adult garden! – in the backyard of the house that my late husband Bill and Karl picked out when they flew to Sioux Falls, leaving my daughter and me in Germany, so that all would be ready when we all arrived just four months later. Except only three of us arrived, and a very broken three of us. So there I sat in the dirt of my garden. I had bags of shit – literally and figuratively – all around me. I had seeds of all sorts of good things – literally and figuratively – all around me. And I had water. Water from my hose and from my eyes, dripping down into the dirt. And it dawned on me that rich, fine rich soil is nothing more than composted once-alive-but-now-dead things. And that out of this compost, this swirl of stink that with tending, and watering, and turning, becomes hummus, comes new life. A composted banana does not grow a banana. But it does grow something else. And that is a promise to which I hope you can all relate.

Notes

- 1 Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992) 50.
- 2 Ibid., 51.
- 3 Ibid., 53. A critical facet of Benhabib's thesis is the moral framework of many women. She notes that women tend to think morally in terms of primary relationships by way of empathy; see idem, 149, and Carol Gilligan, "Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Late Adulthood: A Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg's Theory," *Human Development* 23 (1980) 77-104.
- 4 In this way, Carol Gilligan has been instrumental in reframing conversations of ethics. She states incisively: "Since everyone is vulnerable both to oppression and to abandonment, two moral visions – one of justice, and one of care – recur in human experience." (Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in *Woman and Moral Theory* [E. F. Kittay and Diane T. Meyers, eds; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987] 20). Referenced in Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 189.

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Luther on the Devil

Volker Leppin

Luther's memory in Germany is a difficult and somehow strange phenomenon.¹ There are so many places that are supposed to be genuine witnesses to the reformer's life and actions. A number of these will be the destinations of large numbers of tourists and pilgrims leading up to 2017, and perhaps after, but there are significant questions regarding their authenticity. We can start with the house in Eisleben, which has for a long time been regarded as Luther's birth house. Recent research, however, has shown that this house is far too young to have been the actual house, and as result the house is now referred to as the *Geburtsbaumuseum*² (the birth house museum) – a linguistic invention that might be possible in no other language except German. Even worse is another case in the very same town of Eisleben. The house that claims to be the place where Luther died is actually the wrong building. The real one lies one or two blocks away, and it is used as a restaurant and hotel rather than as a Luther memorial. And let me be quite frank about the famous *Thesenanschlagstür* (the Theses door) in Wittenberg. The legend has it that it was here that Luther nailed his 95 Theses against indulgences in 1517, but apparently this never happened.³

One of the most famous legends, albeit detected long ago, is one that deals with the devil. I am thinking here about the story of the ink stain at the Wartburg Castle. Generations of visitors were able to see it and hear the story of Luther mocking the devil by throwing his inkwell against the wall.⁴ Currently, the stain is dulled and no efforts are being made to renew it for the sake of curious tourists. Many Protestants may actually feel good about this fading of memory, happy with the knowledge that Luther's struggle with a real devil was only a matter of legend.

The devil is not so popular nowadays in Protestant theology. One of the most decisive theological disputes during the Enlightenment, however, was

concerned precisely with the devil. Many theologians were distressed about Luther's *Taufbüchlein* (baptism booklet), because the reformer had not abolished the practice of exorcism. For enlightened Protestants, it was simply an act of superstition to presuppose the reality of the devil in this way, and to regard a newborn child as a part of the realm or reign of the great enemy. As a result, they attacked the liturgical text of the reformer himself so as to create an up-to-date version of Protestant belief. At a remove of some centuries, however, I would like to suggest that it may now be possible to speak of Luther's more realistic, concrete conception of the devil, without simultaneously being accused of trying to rehabilitate a mere superstitious belief. Let me begin with the reality of the devil in Luther's life.

Luther was convinced of the devil's reality from a very young age. We do not know much about his father's piety, but one peculiar aspect seems to be quite clear. Hans Luder believed in the devil's willingness and ability to interfere into human life. When Luther argued with his father about his decision to enter the monastery in Erfurt, Hans at least pondered the possibility that it might have been the devil who had drawn his son in this direction.⁵ This sheds some light on the atmosphere in which the young Luther was raised. In large part, it was one of severe and anxious belief, as can be seen in the few remarks that Luther made about his parents.⁶

As critical as he was, Luther never lost his parental heritage totally. The devil remained a companion in his life, and he could describe with precision those moments when he encountered him. Those brief 'phases' between sleeping and being awake were the time when the devil would come. When Luther was dozing off to sleep, or when he was in the process of waking up, the devil would come to him: "For, it is like this with me. When I am awaking, the devil quickly comes and disputes against me, until I admonish him: Lick my ass!"⁷

Obviously, Luther was not overly shy about using uncouth words and phrases. Even more, as Heiko Oberman has shown, there is a strong connection between vulgar speech and the devil.⁸ Actually, far more important for the struggle against the devil was the word of God, and so Luther gave the following advice: "When the devil comes by night to bother me, my answer is: Devil, now I have to sleep, for this is God's command: working by day and sleeping by night."⁹ As situations like these show, the Stotternheim event¹⁰ that was argued about between Luther and his father was an exceptional example of the way that the devil enters human lives. But in reality it is at every second that we have to be aware of the devil's attacks. The entire life of the human being is, as Oberman has pointed out, a life between God and the devil.¹¹

Thus it is not only sadness and melancholy that derive from the devil's offences but also war,¹² disease,¹³ and even the great plague as well.¹⁴ This is

not merely a metaphorical way of speaking. Luther himself was convinced that the theologian, by recourse to the devil, can explain diseases better than a physician:

With respect to diseases, physicians only observe natural causes. They try to help with their own facilities, and they do quite well with this. But they don't think about Satan, the founder of the material causes in the illness itself. He can immediately change causes and diseases, warm to cold, and vice versa. So, you need a higher medicine, meaning faith and prayer.¹⁵

Even for himself, Luther stressed that his own diseases could never be cured by medicine alone, because their cause was not natural.¹⁶ His view of life took into account the possibility of God's directly curing a disease, as well as the devil's potency to interfere in any part of our life whenever he wanted to do so. He was convinced that the Bible forced him to see the world in this way. It was not only the book of Job that showed this, but also Jesus Christ himself: "And if Christ himself may say, this woman is possessed by Satan, or Peter is bound by Satan (Acts 10:38), why should the devil not be able to harm our eyes or anything else?"¹⁷

For the reformer, it is not only disease that is caused by the devil, but also bad weather.¹⁸ This is the point where witchcraft comes in. The devil uses sorceresses for causing tempests.¹⁹ His whole life long, Luther envisaged the existence of witches, even if his thoughts were somewhat transformed by Reformation ideas. In his early expositions of the Decalogue, he wrote much about witchcraft and sorcery as acts against God himself. Later on, it was mainly the wrong use of the name of God that he attacked in this. Even if he did not pick up the image of a *Teufelsbuhlschaft*, the marriage and intimate relationship of a woman with the devil himself, he was convinced: "They [i.e., the witches] do much harm, so they should be put to death, not only because they harm, but also because they are in contact with the devil."²⁰ Still during Luther's lifetime, in 1540, there was a process against a witch in Wittenberg. Luther himself was not involved in this particular process, but he also was not opposed it. Without being one of the worst haters and persecutors, Luther shared the common belief in witches and their contact with the devil in his times. In this complex, he also shared the animosities against the medical or philosophical explanations that we saw earlier in his attitude toward diseases and their causes. Regarding severe weather he said: "Philosophers and physicians ascribe it to nature, but I don't know by what reason."²¹ By this he meant that he himself knew the real reason for tempests and storms, namely, the devil. In this aspect of his

thinking, Luther's thoughts were obviously different from our contemporary conceptions. It is science and modernity that he sees as going wrong by removing human beings from insights into the real world, which is not the world of natural causes and effects but of the struggle between God and the devil. If Max Weber is right in describing modernity as somehow a disenchantment with the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*), Luther is not really disenchanted. His world might not be enchanted in a strict sense, but it is full of powers that transcend it and that move it in this or that direction. Mainly, it is a world in the hands of God – but at all times it is in danger of falling into the devil's reign or power.

This becomes even more obvious if we examine those situations where Luther speaks not only about the devil's effects but about encounters with Satan himself as a real, visible, and tangible person. It makes no difference if we think of Luther in his medieval youth or of the older one, the great reformer. In the summer of 1540, a table talk took place in Wittenberg.²² Andreas Osiander, the Nuremberg reformer, denied the existence of poltergeists, but Luther then began a long report of encounters with them, stressing his own experience in this. Both during his monastic period and later on, he had heard the devil clattering with something, he had seen him coming as a black sow, and in his time on the Wartburg as a black dog. This dog was bold enough to creep into Luther's bed, but he took him and threw him out of the window, happy to get rid of him.²³ This seems not to be the Luther of our confirmation classes or our seminary lessons – but it is a real Luther, one who sees the devil as more than an enlightened idea of evil. And it was not only his own experience that underlined this perception; he also could set forward easily the medieval tradition of the *Physiologus*, from which he learned that the devil could become incarnate in a monkey – possibly being happy that in middle Europe monkeys were not all that widespread. To be sure, the devil did not use foreign masks at all times. He could also appear in the classical image with his threatening stick in his hands, exactly as people had depicted him.²⁴ There are some tender modern souls who want Luther to be one of those who never used classical images like this for the devil²⁵ – but actually he did. He was not a modern rationalist, rather he shared numerous medieval perspectives on the world.

The devil's deeds could even become worse. He could come into our world in human form. Thus Luther knew and reported the story of a child who in reality was the devil himself and who tortured his parents all the time by his disobedience.²⁶ This may not be the best pedagogical counsel for our days, but it does show Luther's participation in the common convictions of his time. In another table talk, he referred to a story that the duke himself had reported in order to show the nastiness of the devil, how he uses human

countenance and even seemingly good advice to play his game with people. The story goes as follows. A buried woman came back alive to her widower, a nobleman. She promised to stay longer with him, if he would abandon his curses – a hint that did not make her seem to be the devil's playing piece. So, they were married anew and even produced three children – until the nobleman pronounced a curse again. At once his wife disappeared, and the man, now a widower for the second time, remained with his children who had been born by a ghost.²⁷ In conclusion, Luther sighed, saying: "What a shocking example of Satan deceiving human beings, such that he even procreates children. The sons are nothing else than devils, because they had the same body as their mother had had."²⁸ We might shake our heads about this superstitious story, but it is far more than superstitious, for the image sketched here shows the devil as the direct counterpart of the creating God, himself bringing human beings to life and making real what actually is not more than a mere semblance. A ghost in our understanding should not be able to bring forth real human beings with flesh and bones, but the devil's creature was able to do it. For pious believers this also means: Whatever you think to be real could in fact be the devil's mocking.

The threefold devil in the sons also reminds of the fact that the devil is not just one and unique. There are – as there were in the Middle Ages – numerous representations of the devil. Listen to Luther from a table talk:

But the devil goes with me to bed, and I myself do have one or two devils. They run to me and are quite pretty little devils. And when they cannot win in my heart, they grab my head and torture it. And if my head no longer suffices, I will show them my ass. That's where he [the devil] belongs.²⁹

Luther did not think of the devil(s) as being confined to his personal life, but he also thought of them as present in the forrests, in the waters, and in the marshes.³⁰ The whole of nature is the devil's playground in a way that strongly reminds of magical conceptions. Luther can even explain why there are so many devils. If a devil is defeated, he himself will not come back, but in his place many poltergeists will appear, about which we heard before.³¹

Why am I telling you all of these disconcerting stories? It is not just to show the strange and far away Luther. But within them you can perhaps see how important it was for Luther that in this world God's reign was always questioned by another destructive power, the devil's attacks. However strange he was, the devil was a danger for all piety. In his concrete manifestations Luther saw the realization of the eternal struggle between God and the devil.

This is why the devil had one special victim in this world: Luther himself. Insofar as Luther could see his own life as a way to reveal God's ultimate will for this world, he also could speak about the devil disturbing him, whenever he could. The stories mentioned before were only the outer side of this impatient fighting against the living prophet of God, Martin Luther. This provides the background for less anecdotal, more spiritual accounts of the devil in Luther's remembrances. This special prophetic role as the devil's target is what is meant when Luther reports that the devil visited him from his early youth on, and that he only interrupted these visits during the first year after his entrance into the order as well as in the first year after his ordination,³² which as we know took place within the medieval church. When Luther reports this he does not mean black sows or dogs visiting him, rather he means the one great tempter, whose aim is to destroy all faith and all hope, especially in the shape that Reformation theology gave to it.

What I say, I experienced myself at least partly. Since I know the devil's deceit and quick and malicious stratagem quite well. He does not only whisper to us the Law. With this, he wants to terrify us, making large beams out of little slivers, which means, out of things which are no, or only little, sins, he makes a real hell; since he is a real miraculous master who is able to make the sin large and heavy, even making sin where no sin is, just to frighten our conscience.³³

Remembrances like this were not only reports, but Luther used them to comfort others.³⁴ With them he spoke about the spiritually destructive power of the devil, which was far more important than the material manifestations. With this the devil obstructs Jesus Christ in a twofold, somehow contradictory manner. First, he brings human beings into security, moving them away from the right and good fear of God. Second, he brings human beings into temptation or *Anfechtung*.³⁵ The second is the decisive one for Luther's own experience. The distressing thing is that temptation itself can be good and important for the spiritual path of a Christian, so as to protect him/her from false security. But if it is not Christ but the devil who brings the temptation, it is distorted. Thus it does not prepare one to listen to the saving Gospel, but the devil instead leads from temptation to desperation, which means into absolute remoteness from the saving God. This ambivalence of temptation makes it possible for Luther to say that God himself allows the devil to attack human beings.³⁶ This shows in a very intricate way the limits of the devil. Precisely in his most mighty action, when he is bringing human beings into temptation, he is not a full-value counterpart of God himself. The power of the devil does not go further than God allows it.

Thus the nature of spiritual temptation leads to central questions of theology, and this brings us to the heart of Luther's own convictions. The temptation, the devil's pronouncing of the Law instead of the Gospel, is strongly connected to Luther's teaching on justification. The devil questions nothing less than exactly this delightful preaching of God, which endows us with salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. In the devil's temptations, the savior Christ is made into a judge,³⁷ and human beings, saved believers, are made into hated persons and objects of accusation. "This is the worst temptation of Satan, when he says: God hates the sinners. But you are a sinner. Ergo God hates you."³⁸ Perhaps you can see the devil arguing here like a scholastic theologian in syllogistic manner, starting with a general sentence, then subsuming a special sentence, and then drawing a conclusion. This conclusion obviously contradicts the central Reformation conviction of *simul iustus et peccator*, which means that the Christian is at the same time a real sinner and nevertheless righteous in the eyes of the saving God. God's actions overwhelm the boundaries of logic that the scholastics place upon him. Behind this background, Luther can use the famous word he used in 1545 to report on his Reformation breakthrough also to describe the devil's activities. "The devil does not want anything else in us than active justice. But we have the passive one and shall not have the active one."³⁹ Actually, the devil is the author of a false doctrine of justification, stressing the human being's own works instead of the mere passivity to receive God's grace.

Stated the other way around, this means: the decisive battle against the devil was precisely Luther's Reformation discovery. In the moment when he learned that God does not want any human deeds but rather endows us with his grace without any presuppositions, there was no more place for the devil's insinuations.

Since the new theology does not found a new world all at once, the devil remains active. But there is a weapon in our hands, or our hearts, against him: the true and pure doctrine of justification. Whenever the devil claims human beings such that they follow the Law as if they could gain salvation in this way, human beings are in danger of losing their trust in God's grace.⁴⁰ Thus Luther held against the devil that Christians are without the Law and above it.⁴¹ To make his position clear, in his Table Talks Luther distinguishes two so-called chanceries: God's and the devil's. In God's chancery, human beings are terrified first, only to be raised afterwards. But the devil makes the human being enjoy his/her sins so as then to bring him/her into desperation.⁴² Theologically, God's chancery and the devil's have different uses of the Law. While God uses it in the theologically correct way, the convicting use that shows us that we are sinners, the devil's use is the deadly one

that brings us to the end of all our means and makes us remote from God. The devil uses the Law to bring us into the “nowhere,” while Christ leads us to the real Christian liberty.⁴³ Thus in the opposition of the devil it is Jesus Christ who gives us the possibility of withstanding the devil’s persecutions and attacks:

But we do have Christ who came not to destroy us, but to save us. If one watches him, there is no other God in heaven or on earth than the God who is justifying and saving us; the other way around, if one loses sight of him, there is no help, comfort or peace. But when you come to the teaching: ‘God sent his son to us’, our heart receives peace.⁴⁴

In this text one can immediately see the consequences of Luther’s early conversations with his confessor, John of Staupitz. It was he who had said to the young Luther despairing over the question of predestination: “One has to watch him, who is called Christ.”⁴⁵ With this advice, Staupitz made Luther, as the reformer later said, “newborn in Christ.”⁴⁶ This can remind us that Luther not only derived his concrete imagination of a material devil from the Middle Ages, but also his hope in Jesus Christ.

Following this Christological centering, Jesus Christ is not only content but also example of the struggle against the devil.⁴⁷ This spiritual battle does not happen once but again and again in the life of a Christian. The starting point, however, is baptism. Into a line from the medieval liturgy, Luther integrated exorcism into the baptismal ritual:

I conjure you, impure ghost, by the name of the father † and of the son † and of the Holy Spirit: Get out of this minister of God N., since he is your Lord, you awful one, who walked over the sea on foot and who reached out his hand to Peter when he was sinking down.⁴⁸

After baptism the entire life of Christians should be devoted to dispelling the devil.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Luther still knew the rite of exorcism in Christian life.⁵⁰ This can be seen in the fate of Valerius Glockner from Nuremberg.⁵¹ He admitted to Luther that he had dedicated himself to the devil five years prior. But now, he confessed and renounced Satan: “I myself, Valerius, confess before God and all his holy angels and before the assembly of the church, that I had renounced my belief in God and devoted myself to the devil. This I regret from my heart. From now on, I will be the devil’s enemy and follow God my Lord voluntarily and amend myself. Amen.”⁵² As stated before, this example was exceptional. Luther’s primary aim was to renounce the devil

with one’s whole life, in all thoughts, words, and deeds. The only help here was to watch Christ himself and to hold oneself by the word of God.⁵³

From Christ himself the believer receives the power to resist the devil and even to mock him, just as the devil does with the Christians: “I said,” Luther reports, “Devil, I took a shit in my pants. Have you recorded that alongside my other sinful deeds?”⁵⁴ As Heiko Oberman pointed out, it is not by chance that Luther uses vulgarisms in this context. And it is not only defecation but also farting that can help against the devil,⁵⁵ or one can shout against him: “Lick my ass, or: shit in your pants and hang them around your neck.”⁵⁶

However the struggle with the devil appears, human beings do not fight for themselves but are rather soldiers of God. The real struggle happens between God himself and the devil.⁵⁷ “Here follows: Where God’s finger does not expel the devil, there is the devil’s reign; and where the devil’s reign is, is not the reign of God. So, it concludes strongly: As long as the Holy Spirit does not come into us, we are inept for good and are inevitably in the devil’s reign; but whenever we are in his reign, we cannot do any other than what he wants us to do.”⁵⁸ This also provides the background for what is perhaps Luther’s most famous dictum about the devil’s impact on us. In his debate with Erasmus of Rotterdam over free will, which was denied by Luther while Erasmus upheld it, Luther writes:

So, human will is set in the middle, like a pack animal. If God is situated on him or her, she or he wants and walks in the direction God wants, as the Psalm says: I am made a pack animal and I am with you forever [Pss 73:22f]. If Satan is situated on him or her, she or he wants and walks in the direction Satan wants. And it is not in his or her decision to run to one of those possessors or to ask for him, but they both are fighting to hold and possess her or him.⁵⁹

Even if this passage sounds like it, Luther never thought in terms of a strict dualism,⁶⁰ as if God and the devil were fighters on the same level. Luther does not speak about cosmic alternatives but only about the salvation or misery of human beings. Here, human beings are not able to decide on their own. Human beings on their pilgrimage do not see or feel the limits that God has set for the devil; they only feel the harsh and seemingly inevitable offence of the devil. Being under the devil means to be on the way to misery, and human beings themselves cannot find a way out. The situation becomes even worse, because in human afflictions the devil uses nothing less than the word of God, mainly the word of God as the ultimate judge. Thus

as in the story of the nobleman and his wife, the devil takes on godly appearance to bring human beings to perdition – and since human will is not free, he or she can do no other than follow the devil willingly.

But the point is this. The individual experience described here makes human beings part of a universal scenario, beginning with the creation of the world and then onward to its end. Actually, Luther is not heavily invested in the beginnings of this battle. He does not deny the traditional myth of the devil as a fallen angel,⁶¹ but this is not overly important for him. Rather, he stresses the devil's efforts to rule human beings from the beginning onward. The serpent in paradise, for Luther as for his forerunners, was no one else than the devil himself. "Satan ... seduced Eve from the word that God had spoken"⁶² – actually, from here we also find an explanation of why the devil, as said before, could be seen as the author of diseases. The consequence of his seduction, as is well known, was that death came to humankind, and all diseases are an aftermath of exactly this moral situation.⁶³ Thus from the beginning of the world, the devil is present and effects his own deeds, combining himself with sin and death.⁶⁴ This is "Luther's unholy triumvirate," as Scott Hendrix points out.⁶⁵

Moving from prehistory to history, in Luther's view, the devil is always at the side of those who are intent on the Law. It is from here that Luther's aggressive view of the Jews derives – insofar as it belongs to theological argumentation. Luther's central biblical authority for this was John 8:44: "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."⁶⁶ On the basis of this text, Luther regarded the Jews as worshippers of the devil.⁶⁷

The devil with all his angels has obsessed this people. So they do nothing else than boast of outer things, their own gifts, deeds and works before God.⁶⁸

Statements like this show that Luther's late anti-Jewish polemic is not just born by a peculiar situation or by the frustrations of an old man, but rather it has its theological foundations, as abstruse as they are. To be honest, it is the Reformation discovery itself that frames his anti-Judaism. Thus, for Luther the parallel between Jews and Catholics – as he saw them – is evident, and he can use inner-Christian terms to describe what he wanted to criticize in Jewish devotion:

The same [as with the Catholics; V.L.] happened with the people of Israel. They always highlighted circumcision as an *opus operatum*, their own work, against the word of God, and they persecuted the prophets, through whom God wanted to speak to them.⁶⁹

In this horizon, for Luther, the Jews were the representatives of the devil's power in history, perverted by trusting in their own deeds and the Law.

This leads to a deeper understanding of the cross, which constitutes the final victory of Christ over the devil and death. With this, it also opened a way for human beings to develop faith in a way that feels God's grace as being the center of all devotion. Luther knew how difficult it was to understand the cross – if not on his own, he could learn it from his dear wife, as can be seen in a table talk:

"Satan killed the son of God." To this, the doctor's wife responded: "Oh no, dear doctor, I do not believe this." So, the doctor answered: "Who would be able to love God, if he wants to kill us?"⁷⁰

The short dialogue gives a feeling for the deeper truth: Jesus' death, at least in the way in which it happened, cannot follow God's will – and nevertheless it is the foundation for the salvation of all human beings and the core of the Gospel.

Besides these somehow skeptical reflections, Luther wants us to know one thing: that the cross brings victory over death and the devil, while it cannot stop the devil's advances all at once. As a result, the devil changes his medium. After having fought against Christ from creation onward, he now gives birth to the Antichrist. Again we see how deeply rooted Luther's polemics are in his theology. This is the reason why he could denounce the papacy as the Antichrist, while he never referred to the Jews in this manner. Their place in history was before the birth of Christ; the Antichrist could only occur after this event.

Properly speaking, after Jesus' death there was a brief time when the Antichrist was not yet on Earth. Luther was not exactly sure when the Antichrist began to reign over the Church. For the most part, he regarded Gregory the Great as the last bishop of Rome, while his successors became Popes and, with this, the Antichrist.⁷¹ How perfidious the devil is, we can see from 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Antichrist rose precisely in the temple of God, which for Luther referred allegorically to the Church.⁷²

Astonishing as it may sound, the devil plays a similar game as in his individual encounters. In the same way in which he could adopt the

deceased wife's figure, he (meaning his creature, the Antichrist) can appear as the head of the terrestrial church, thus making the pope "the devil's mask."⁷³ Not surprisingly, and even as predicted in Matt 24:24, the Antichrist can even perform miracles and similar signs,⁷⁴ as one can see in the stories of the saints and others.

Thus there is no clear shelter against the devil in history. Satan can cheat and betray, not only by means of the Pope, but also by means of the so-called "fanatics," the "Schwärmer."⁷⁵ This again gives Luther himself an exceptional role in the story of salvation. Mocked from his youth onward by the devil, he was able to detect his malice. What he experienced individually was something like a mirror of the larger history: "If Satan had not agitated me, I would not have become his enemy and would not have been able to harm him in this way."⁷⁶ As a result, therefore, the new reformed church becomes a medium against the devil. The church and the ministry of preaching are determined by God as aides against the devil.⁷⁷ After what we have heard before, this is not surprising in any way. If the devil is the representative of the belief in the Law, it must be the proclamation of the Gospel – in the manner characteristic of the Reformation churches – that stands over against him.

Thus, and following the line of his battle with the devil, we come to the principal background of Luther's late polemics. It is not merely an expression of bitterness when Luther, in parallel to his anti-Jewish treatises, also writes against the papacy as a "donation of the devil."⁷⁸ It also shows that Luther found himself in an eschatological situation. The detection of the Antichrist by means of the Reformation message⁷⁹ had brought the last raging of the devil. In Reformation times, therefore, he becomes even worse than under the papacy,⁸⁰ notwithstanding that for Luther the papacy itself was "the last adversary on earth, and the most obvious thing that all devils with all their power could do."⁸¹

Luther saw himself, his personal existence and his message, as standing in the middle of God's last battle with the devil. "The old wicked enemy means it now in earnest"⁸² – this famous song lyric expresses both Luther's activity as well as his motivation. It was he, the reformer in Wittenberg, where all threads – individual, theological, historical – came together. It was in Luther himself where the devil found his target. Not surprisingly, when Luther ended the famous report of his life, which he wrote for the preface to his Latin works, he stated: "Vale, lector, in Domino et ora pro incremento verbi adversus satanam" ("Farewell in the Lord, my reader, and pray for the increase of the word against Satan").⁸³

Notes

- 1 With this paper, I am following the lines of my study, Volker Leppin, "Der alt böse Feind: Der Teufel in Martin Luthers Leben und Denken," *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 26 (2011) 291-321. I am deeply grateful to Brooks Schramm for correcting my English text.
- 2 See Annemarie Nesper, "Luthers Geburtshaus in Eisleben – Ursprünge, Wandlungen, Resultate," in *Martin Luther und Eisleben* (ed. Roesemarie Knappe; Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt 8; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007) 87-119.
- 3 For recent discussion see Joachim Ott and Martin Treu, eds, *Faszination Thesenanschlag: Faktum oder Fiktion* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008).
- 4 For this, see Johannes Luther, *Legenden um Luther* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1933).
- 5 WA Br 2:385,1-3 (No. 428). Luther citations are from the critical edition of his works: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906-61); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21). These are abbreviated as WA, WA DB, WA Br, and WA TR.
- 6 For this see Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (2nd ed; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010) 16-21.
- 7 WA TR 2:15,35-37 (No. 1263): "Leck mich in dem a."
- 8 Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1981) 164.
- 9 WA TR 2:132,4-7 (No. 1557); cf. 1:204,30f (No. 469); 4:409,20f (No. 4630); 6:215,39-216,2 (No. 6827). On the role of God's word in the struggle against the devil, see Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 113-121.
- 10 Slightly north of Erfurt, Stotternheim was where Luther had been caught in the terrible thunderstorm.
- 11 Oberman, *Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel*.
- 12 WA TR 2:79,3 (No. 1379); 6:208,5 (No. 6813).
- 13 WA TR 1:150,31 (No. 360); 1:347,14f (No. 722); 5:443,38f (No. 6023); 6:207,39-208,2 (No. 6813); 6:212,8-10 (No. 6819).
- 14 WA TR 1:347,30f (No. 722); cf 2:70,3 (No. 1379).
- 15 WA TR 4:501,20-24 (No. 4784).
- 16 WA TR 6:212,8-10 (No. 6819).
- 17 WA TR 1:274,15-17 (No. 588).
- 18 WA TR 4:620,17-24 (No. 5027).
- 19 WA TR 2:504,22f (No. 2529b); 4:31,26 (No. 3953).
- 20 WA 16:552,22f.
- 21 WA TR 23:10,9f (No. 2829).
- 22 Actually, the historical background of the Table Talks is not as certain as we normally assume. See now Katharina Bärenfänger, Volker Leppin, and Stefan Michel, eds, *Martin Luthers Tischreden: Neuansätze der Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

- 23 WA TR 5:87f (No. 5358b).
 24 WA TR 6:217,37f (No. 6830).
 25 See Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, Vol 2: *Disputatio de homine, Part 3: Die theologische Definition des Menschen: Kommentar zu These 20-40* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) 267, n. 182.
 26 WA TR 2:503-505 (No. 2528b, 2529a-b).
 27 WA TR 3:516,3-9 (No. 3676).
 28 WA TR 3:516,10-12 (No. 3676).
 29 WA TR 1:216,7-11 (No. 491).
 30 WA TR 1:608,21f (No. 1222); 3:10,7f (No. 2829); cf 5:105,1f (No. 5375e).
 31 WA TR 6:208,17-20 (No. 6814).
 32 WA 8:660,31f.
 33 WA.TR 6,88,36-41 (No. 6629).
 34 WA TR 2:13-3,5 (No. 1288); cf WA TR 2:29,11-14 (No. 1289).
 35 WA TR 3:174,11 (No. 3108). On the devil "Anfechtung," see Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 124-153.
 36 WA TR 2:172,23-25 (No. 1671); cf 2:430,4-6 (No. 2353); 2: 536,3-5 (No. 2597); and Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 153-183.
 37 WA TR 1:5 (No. 9); cf WA TR 6:88 (No. 6629).
 38 WA TR 1,61,19-21 (No. 141); cf WA TR 2:13,11f (No. 1263).
 39 WA TR 1:63,29f (No. 141); 2:15,18-20 (No. 1263).
 40 WA TR 2:429,26 (No. 2353).
 41 WA TR 1:204,32-205,1 (No. 470).
 42 WA TR 1:602f (No. 1210).
 43 WA TR 2:11-13 (No. 1353).
 44 WA TR 1:63,10-14 (No. 141).
 45 WA TR 1:245,11f (No. 526).
 46 WA Br 11:67,7f (No. 4088).
 47 WA TR 1:63,15-19 (No. 141); 2:15,5-7 (No. 1263).
 48 WA 12:44,25-28.
 49 WA TR 1:401,21-25 (No. 830).
 50 Cf WA Br 11:111f (No. 4120).
 51 WA TR 3:581f (No. 3739).
 52 WA TR 3:582,5-10 (No. 3739).
 53 WA TR 1:64,4 (No. 141); cf WA TR 1:458,4f (No. 907); and Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 82-123
 54 WA TR 1:392,3f (No. 812).
 55 WA TR 1:205,1 (No. 469).
 56 WA TR 2:306,13f (No. 2059).
 57 Cf Uwe Rieseke-Braun, *Duellum mirabile: Studien zum Kampfmotiv in Martin Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).
 58 WA TR 6:120,24-29 (No. 6685).
 59 WA 18:635,17-22.
 60 Cf Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 196-201.
 61 WA TR 2:429,12f (No. 2353); cf 2:28,10 (No. 1289).
 62 WA 42:111,18f; cf WA TR 1:24f (No. 991); 6:104,31-34 (No. 6662)
 63 WA TR 6:104,34-37 (No. 6662).
 64 See Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 68-69.
 65 Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A very short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 83.
 66 WA 53:420,26-31.
 67 WA 53:605,4-8.
 68 WA 53:447,20f; 580,1f; 587,10-15.
 69 WA 53:437,5-8.
 70 WA TR 2:78,24-26 (No. 1379).
 71 See Ernst Schäfer, *Luther als Kirchenhistoriker: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Wissenschaft* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1897) 327-329.
 72 WA 38:220,28-31; 251,27-36; 40/1:619,18-31.
 73 WA 54:229,31.
 74 WA TR 5:279 (No. 5622). See Hans Preuß, *Die Vorstellungen vom Antichrist im späten Mittelalter, bei Luther und in der konfessionellen Polemik: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie Luthers und zur Geschichte der christlichen Frömmigkeit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906); William R. Russell, "Martin Luther's Understanding of the Pope as Antichrist," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 85 (1994) 32-44; Volker Leppin, "Luthers Antichristverständnis vor dem Hintergrund der mittelalterlichen Konzeptionen," *Kerygma und Dogma* 45 (1999) 48-63.
 75 WA TR 2:385,27f (No. 2267a); cf 1:246,1-7 (No. 528).
 76 WA TR 1:62,5f (No. 141).
 77 WA TR 1:205,3-5 (No. 469).
 78 WA 54:206-299.
 79 WA DB 11/2:113,11f.
 80 WA TR 1:404,9-11 (No. 831).
 81 WA 54:299,6-8.
 82 AWA 4:247.
 83 WA 54:187,3f.

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Like a Sow Entering a Synagogue Kraft Chair of Biblical Studies Inaugural Lecture, September 4, 2013

Brooks Schramm

Luther in the Discussion

In the field of critical biblical studies, there was a time when it was considered off limits to refer to pre-critical – pre-modern – biblical commentators in any kind of positive or constructive way.¹ The field regarded itself as having moved beyond all biblical interpretation that had come before it. And, in certain respects, that is in fact true. As critical biblical studies took root in the wake of the European Enlightenment, two major – yet basic – methodological questions dominated the field. First: *The Question of Composition*. How did the Bible come to be? How, and when, and by whom, were the biblical texts actually written? Second: *The Question of Historicity*. Did things really happen in the way they are described as happening in the Bible, miracles and all? With this second question in particular the Bible came to be studied with all of the tools of modern critical historiography. Leopold von Ranke famously described the task of critical historiography as ascertaining “*wie es eigentlich gewesen?*” (“how it actually happened”).² The force of this new, nineteenth-century critical question can be felt when held up alongside the statement of the fifth-century BCE Greek historian, Hecataeus of Miletus, who stated: “Thus I write, as the truth seems to be to me . . . ”³ The distance between these two approaches to matters historical is wide indeed, and it corresponds to the distance between modernity and pre-modernity. Recognition of this distance is also what stands behind the refrain of one of my former teachers, Gösta Ahlström, who loved to remind his students in a strong Swedish accent: “[T]he modern idea of history did not exist in

ancient times.”⁴ It is to this new nineteenth-century historical approach to the Bible that we owe what are still the foundations of critical biblical study even today: the Documentary Hypothesis in Old Testament studies, with all of its consequences, and the Synoptic Problem and the related quest of the historical Jesus in New Testament studies, with all of their consequences.

When these new historical critics looked at their great predecessors, like Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Bernard, Thomas, Nicholas of Lyra, Luther, and Calvin – as intellectually brilliant as they were – they found their work to be based on assumptions about the text and about historicity that could no longer be sustained, barring a *sacrificium intellectus*. As a result, these great pre-critical interpreters dropped out of the scholarly conversation in biblical studies, for all practical purposes. If they were referred to, they functioned primarily as foils. But biblical criticism, not being a static phenomenon, continued to grow and evolve. Once there was broad agreement on the possible ways in which biblical texts were produced, and once there was broad agreement on the distinction between mythology and history, critical study began to turn again to biblical texts in their final forms. Given what we know about the possible ways in which these texts came to be, what then can we say about these texts as texts? What kinds of questions does it make sense to ask of them? What kinds of meaning – what kinds of truth – can be derived from them? Scholars began to critique their own assumptions about the final forms of the biblical texts. Without denying that our texts have a long and complex *pre-history*, far from it, they began to ask questions like: Were the final redactors/editors of the texts really as mechanical and wooden as the early critics had always assumed? Are the Pentateuch and the Gospel of Mark, for example, really as un-readable in their final forms as the source critics had always assumed? Is it possible, rather, that we need to learn *how* to read them? This latter question, one could say, is the primary question that drove redaction criticism and its successors in the twentieth century.

In many ways this question was already anticipated early in the century by the German Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, who argued that the traditional scholarly abbreviation ‘R’ for *Redaktor* (or Editor) really should be understood to stand for ‘*Rabbenu*’ (the Hebrew term meaning ‘our Teacher’ or ‘our Rabbi’).⁵ This was an aesthetic judgment by Rosenzweig, and it signaled a crucial shift in the evaluation of the final form of the biblical texts. Once this shift in focus became possible, then it also became possible for critical scholarship to retrieve the great commentators from the past and allow them to help us learn *how* to read these texts anew. And, *mutatis mutandis*, help us they can. Why? Because they knew the biblical

text so well, and they knew how to read very very closely. In addition, and not incidentally, they also believed in God.

In my own work on the Old Testament I find myself, a contemporary critical biblical scholar, in regular conversation with two different kinds of pre-critical commentators. The first are the eleventh-, twelfth-, and thirteenth-century medieval Jewish commentators (המפרשים), that is, those whose interpretations are collected in standard Rabbinic Bibles and who function as the touchstone of Jewish biblical interpretation, and the second is Martin Luther. It is the latter about whom I will speak today.

So why Luther? An undervalued and sometimes even little known aspect of Luther is the fact that the heart of his life's work was the Old Testament. Heinrich Bornkamm has stated that if Luther were on a theological faculty today, he would be in the Old Testament department.⁶ Heiko Oberman thought that Luther would be in Practical Theology, but Oberman is wrong.⁷ Throughout Luther's professorial career, no matter what else was demanding his time and attention, he was constantly at work lecturing on, writing commentaries on, preaching on, and being meticulously involved in translating the books of the Old Testament. The God whom he worshipped, the God whom he feared in the marrow of his bones, and the God whom he zealously struggled to love with all of his heart, soul and mind, was no other than the God of Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, and Isaiah. Martin Luther was as far from Marcion as it is possible to be.

Part of what makes Luther such a puzzle is that he was in many respects a liminal figure. Sometimes he sounds thoroughly medieval (e.g., he thought Copernicus should be executed as a heretic and witches should be burned), and sometimes he sounds virtually modern (e.g., it is better to have a wise pagan ruler than a stupid Christian ruler). There are even times when he can give a good post-modernist plenty to think about (e.g., when he speaks about the inextricable relationship between the existence of God and faith in God). Where the Bible is concerned, though, and chiefly the Old Testament, I find Luther to be endlessly fascinating. And one area of his thought here that most intrigues me is his relationship with the Jewish interpretive tradition. The sixteenth century was the age of the birth of *Christian Hebraism*, that intellectual movement within Christianity that sought – and eventually gained – expertise not only in biblical Hebrew but also in the Hebrew and Aramaic of classical rabbinic sources and in their systems of thought, as well as in the great medieval Jewish biblical commentators.⁸ The sixteenth century was the first time in history that Jewish scholarly material relevant to the study of the Old Testament became widely available to Gentile Christian scholars. Luther's career spanned the begin-

nings of this movement, and he himself benefited from it and, to a limited extent, contributed to it. But when it came to matters of theology, Luther adopted a rigidly antagonistic stance toward Jewish interpretation. Luther clearly loved the Old Testament, and he was a vocal advocate for the study of the Hebrew language, but he detested Jewish theological readings of the Old Testament. This fascinates me, and I am trying to understand it better. Kirsi Stjerna and I have made some preliminary claims in this area, but considerable work remains to be done.⁹ Needless to say, Luther's complex legacy regarding the Hebrew language and the Jewish interpretive tradition is still very much with us, albeit in subtle and often unconscious ways. The fact that Hebrew has never been a required language throughout the 187-year history of Gettysburg Seminary is an aspect of this complex legacy.

Eyn unterrichtung, wie sich die Christen yn Mosen sollen schicken

My current research is part of the new *Essential Luther* project from Fortress Press, six volumes of Luther's most essential writings, newly introduced, edited, annotated, and published by Reformation Day 2017. Kirsi Stjerna is one of the three general editors of the project, along with Tim Wengert and Hans Hillerbrand. The first writing of Luther's for which I am responsible is entitled *How Christians Should Regard Moses* ('Eyn unterrichtung, wie sich die Christen yn Mosen sollen schicken').¹⁰ This document originated as a sermon preached by Luther in Wittenberg on August 27, 1525. In 1523-1524 Luther had preached all the way through Genesis. Immediately upon completing that series, he began with Exodus in the fall of 1524, and by late summer of 1525 he had reached Exodus 19, Israel's arrival at Mt. Sinai and the preparations for receiving the divine law. This sermon, *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, served as Luther's introduction to Exodus 19-20, and thus to the Ten Commandments themselves.¹¹ It is an essential text for many reasons, certainly not least because here Luther takes up the ancient and perennial Christian problem of which Old Testament laws are binding on Christians. If anyone thinks that this issue is passé, just have a look at what the ELCA has been arguing about for the better part of twenty-five years: *Mirabile dictu*, Lutherans in public debate quoting the purity laws of Leviticus as binding!

1525 was a tumultuous year for the forty-one year old Martin Luther. Some brief highlights. In January he finishes the major treatise, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*. In February he finishes his commentary on Deuteronomy. In March the Peasants' War, which had been ebbing and flowing, finally explodes. In April he begins a series of

treatises against the Peasants. On May 5, Frederick the Wise, his protector, dies. Shortly thereafter he writes the notorious treatise, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Mobs of Peasants*. On May 15 the peasants are crushed at the Battle of Frankenhausen, and on May 27 Thomas Münzer is beheaded at Mühlhausen. Over the course of the long war, estimates are that something like 100,000 peasants have been killed. On June 13, less than a month after the war ended, Luther and Katarina von Bora are married. In July, he “kinda sorta” apologizes for the notorious treatise against the peasants. In the fall he writes the seminal treatise called *De servo arbitrio* (“On the Bondage of the Will”) against Erasmus. And throughout this entire time, he is preaching his way through Exodus at the town church, while at the university he is lecturing through Hosea. This would make for quite the annual faculty report to the Dean.

In *How Christians are to Regard Moses*, Luther concisely formulates his essential principles for distinguishing antithetically between Law and Gospel, Moses and Christ, the worldly external kingdom and the spiritual internal kingdom, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant; in other words those fundamental principles that will drive his theology for the remainder of his career. And all of this is being worked out in the midst of major real-life events, with the Peasants’ War being the most serious one.

The problem of biblical interpretation that Luther was facing in 1525 is as follows. Some Protestant preachers were beginning to quote Old Testament legal texts and claim that certain Old Testament laws were binding on Christians on the grounds that these laws were the word of God.¹² “Gott(i)s Wort, Gott(i)s Wort!,” they said.¹³ For example, in Exodus and Deuteronomy God through Moses commands the people to destroy its arch enemy, “Amalek”. Some Protestant preachers, in the context of the Peasants’ Revolt, argued that the lords and landowners of sixteenth-century Germany were the contemporary incarnation of Amalek. Therefore when we kill these lords and landowners, we are only obeying the word of God. This is of course a simplification of the position of his opponents, but Luther uses it and other real-life current examples to carve out essential principles on how Christians should relate to the Old Testament in general and to Mosaic law in particular. Luther’s answer to the question – “Which Mosaic laws are binding on Christians?” – may surprise you: None of them! “Not one little dot in Moses pertains to us.”¹⁴ Here is Luther’s categorical claim:

The law of Moses does not bind pagans but only Jews¹⁵ ... Moses was an intermediary for the Jewish people alone. It was to them that he gave the law. Therefore one must shut the yaps of the mob-spirits who say, “Thus says Moses,” etc. Here you simply reply: “Moses does not pertain to us.” If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I

would have to accept the entire Moses.¹⁶ Thus the consequence would be that if I accept Moses as master, then I must have myself circumcised, wash my clothes in the Jewish way, eat and drink and dress thus and so, and observe all that stuff. So, then, we will neither observe nor accept Moses. *Moses ist tod* (“Moses is dead”). His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further use.¹⁷

The principle here enunciated by Luther is that Mosaic law was temporally constrained. It was never intended for the pagan world in the first place but for the Jews alone,¹⁸ and, in addition, once the Christ comes, Mosaic law terminates in its entirety.¹⁹ Luther’s pregnant phrase, “Moses is dead”, means that Moses no longer has any claim, not even on the Jews.²⁰ But, though Moses is dead and not binding on us, we Christians who come from the pagan world are still free to learn from him.

I dismiss the commandments given to the people of Israel. They neither constrain nor compel me. The laws are dead and gone, *except insofar as* I gladly and willingly accept something from Moses, as if I said, “This is how Moses ruled, and it seems fine to me, so I will follow him in this or that part.”²¹

Thus, for Luther, Christians are in no sense bound by Mosaic law, any of it, but we are free to learn from it and to adopt and adapt it where appropriate; not by constraint but freely, willingly, and reasonably. Our contemporary religio-political public discourse could learn a great deal from Luther on this point.

This principle just discussed is part of a much larger one that Luther establishes: just because something is God’s word does not make it God’s word to me, that is, it does not make it applicable to me. How I wish I had known this when growing up in a sea of fundamentalists.

One must deal and proceed cleanly with the Scriptures. From the beginning the word has come in various ways. One must not simply consider whether it is God’s word, whether God has said it; rather much more [one must consider] *to whom* it has been spoken, whether it concerns you [or somebody else]²² ... In the Scriptures the word is of two kinds: the first does not pertain or apply to me, the second kind does apply to me.²³

As an example of this principle at work, Luther draws on the story of the binding of Isaac:

God commanded Abraham to strangle his son; but that does not make *me* Abraham such that I should strangle *my* son.²⁴

The claim that Luther is making is that no law is binding on us in a religious sense that is either temporally constrained, like the whole of the Mosaic legislation, or that was directed to a specific person or circumstance, like commands given to Abraham or to David or even to the lepers healed by Christ. Stated positively, the only commandments that are applicable to us in a religious sense are those that are universally applicable to all people, no more and no less.

What are these universally applicable laws, and where do we find them? This is precisely where things start to become interesting. Simply stated, the universally applicable laws are the Ten Commandments themselves.²⁵ But, for Luther, the Ten Commandments are not applicable to us because they are in the Bible, or because Moses gave them, but rather because they represent what Luther calls Natural Law. These are the laws that are written by nature on the conscience of all human beings since the creation of the world.²⁶ Strictly speaking, therefore, the Ten Commandments are not ‘Mosaic’ (or ‘Jewish’), it is just that Moses has written and arranged them in a particularly fine way.

Why does one then keep and teach the Ten Commandments? Answer: Because the natural laws were never so finely and orderly written as by Moses. Therefore one rightly follows the example of Moses.²⁷

Thus the Ten Commandments are binding on us, Gentile Christians, because they cohere with Natural Law, and Natural Law is what is binding on all human beings.²⁸

But there is a twist. For Luther, even the Ten Commandments themselves contain material that is temporally constrained and thus no longer binding. This is material that Luther referred to as “*zeitlicher Schmuck*,” normally rendered into English as “temporal adaptation,” but better is “temporal adornment.” Think back to Confirmation when you learned the Ten Commandments from Luther’s Catechism. If you had an accurate Catechism that rendered the commandments precisely as Luther did, and if you then compared Luther’s wording with the wording of the actual commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, you would find that a substantial amount of material is missing in the former. Luther was not trying to save

space, nor was he trying to make it easier to memorize the commandments. All of the material in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 that is missing in Luther’s Catechism is that which he regarded as temporal adornment, that is, material that was relevant and binding on the Jews in the biblical period but which is no longer binding on or applicable to us.

Two brief examples. In the Bible, the fourth commandment reads: “Honor your father and your mother, *that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*” The land referred to here is, of course, the land of Canaan. That portion of the commandment is regarded as a temporal adornment and is no longer applicable. Thus the commandment in Luther’s Catechism reads only: “You are to honor your father and your mother.”²⁹

The third commandment is even more illustrative. In Exodus: “Remember the Sabbath day, by sanctifying it.” In the Catechism: “You are to sanctify the day of celebration/holiday.”³⁰ In Luther’s translation of Exod 20:8 in his German Bible, he uses the word *Sabbattag*, but in the Catechism he changes *Sabbattag* to *Feiertag*. Why? Because, as his explanation makes clear, the Sabbath itself was a temporal adornment given to the Jews alone; it has been abrogated and is no longer applicable. What remains of this commandment is merely the setting apart of a regular time to worship God and to learn God’s word. Sunday is fine, because it is customary, but there is no necessity that Sunday be the day. The Sabbath itself, however, is gone. Thus when Luther speaks of *The Law* that is the counterpart and the antithesis to *The Gospel*, he means the Ten Commandments minus their temporal adornments. It is this that constitutes the universally applicable divine law, which in turn is identical to Natural Law.

‘... *wie eine saw jnn die Jueden Schule*’

We turn now finally to the heart of the matter, which is a particular aspect of Luther’s treatment of the First Commandment, and more specifically the Prologue to the First Commandment. “I, ADONAI, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” The entirety of Jewish tradition and the entirety of critical biblical interpreters are in agreement that this Prologue is the “because” of a “because-therefore” statement: “*Because* I, ADONAI, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, *therefore* you shall have no other gods but me.” ADONAI’s prevenient act of liberation constitutes the rationale for imposing on Israel its covenantal obligations: ‘*Because* I have done

this for you, *therefore* you are obligated to do this for me'.³¹ This is the language of a vassal treaty, with ADONAI in the role of suzerain and Israel in the role of vassal. Because of ADONAI's prior act of liberation, Israel now owes ADONAI its exclusive fidelity.

How does Luther deal with the strict Israel-specific logic of this language? In exactly the same way as in the other commandments. "I am the LORD your God" and "You shall have no other gods but me" apply to us; "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" is a temporal adornment that does not:

We and all pagans are just as duty-bound as the Jews to keep the first commandment, so that we have no other gods than the only God. But we pagans have no use and can have no use for the phrase with which he *adorns* this commandment and which applies only to the Jews, namely, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." For if I [a pagan] were to approach God and say, "O Lord God, who brought me out of Egypt, out of misery," etc., I would be just like a sow entering a synagogue, for God never performed such a work for me. God would [even] punish me as a liar; I would be making an imaginary god out of him. Yet I must recite and keep all the other words of the first commandment. I *may* also say, "You are my God, the God and also the Creator of us all, who, to be sure, led the children of Israel out of Egypt, but not me; however, you did lead me out of my Egypt and my misery." Thus the first commandment remains common to both Jews and Gentiles. It is especially *adorned and fitted* to the Jews with reference to the exodus from Egypt, just as everyone after their own exile can and should name and praise the common God as their own God and helper.³²

Like a sow entering a synagogue. So much to say, and so little time. Let it suffice for now, on the positive side, to voice agreement with Luther's main claim here: We Gentile Christians are not Jews, nor should we try to be. Circumcision, the Sabbath, the Passover, the Exodus, taking the land of Canaan, the Temple, the laws of *kashrut*, the Exile and return, are Israel's stories and practices and they address us only by analogy, not directly.

On the negative side, Luther's insistence that the words "I am the LORD your God" represent the direct address of the God of the whole world to the conscience of all human beings brings with it some problematic consequences. When Luther writes that Moses is dead, what he really means by that is that *Judaism is dead*. Thus the peculiar and particular

name of God used in the Prologue to the First Commandment morphs into generic terms available in any language: κύριος, dominus, Herr, lord, or simply God, and the particular "you" is swallowed up by the universal "you." Stated differently, the problem of the election of Israel is "solved" by viewing it as temporally constrained, and ADONAI's love for fleshly Israel is itself regarded as *zeitlicher Schmuck*, temporal adornment.³³ "ADONAI the God of Israel" recedes and "the God of the whole world" comes to the forefront.³⁴ One can even say that for Luther the Jewishness of Jesus itself is, finally, regarded as temporal adornment. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that the aspect of rabbinic Judaism, post-biblical Judaism, that most disturbs Luther and against which he writes most vehemently is precisely that of the eternal election of Israel, which in biblical language refers to God's love for Israel. In the final analysis, Luther's theology has no room for the ongoing existence of Judaism in any theologically positive sense. That aspect of his thought, deep and wide though it is, cannot be our way.

Christian theology, if it is to be true to the Old Testament itself and to the First Commandment, cannot speak of "the God of the whole world" if it is not willing simultaneously to speak of the "God of Israel," and to do so in the present tense.³⁵ The Old Testament itself and the First Commandment hold these two aspects of God's identity inextricably together. Holding these aspects together simultaneously, and in the present tense, does not solve the problem of Jew and Gentile, synagogue and church, but it does place the theological discussion on different footing, and changes the rules of the game. It is to that discourse that I have dedicated my life and my work. And it was Luther, after all, who said: "In the future life all commandments will cease – except the first."³⁶

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this lecture to Eric H. Crump and Nelson T. Strobert: friends in need, friends in deed.
- 2 "Man hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beigemessen: so hoher Aemter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: er will blos zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen." Leopold von Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 33/34 (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1885) 7.
- 3 Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1957) 7. See the programmatic use of this quote in Gösta W. Ahlström, *Ancient Palestine: A Historical Introduction* (JSOTS 146; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 1.
- 4 Ahlström, *Ancient Palestine*, 1.
- 5 See John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (rev. and en-

- larged; Louisville, KY: WJK, 1996) 46-47. For a critique of Rosenzweig on this issue, see Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (rev. ed; OTL; trans. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 40-42.
- 6 Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (ed. Victor I. Gruhn; trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch; Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1997) 7.
- 7 ☺.
- 8 See now especially Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500-1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012); Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean, eds., *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars, and their Readers in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), [esp. Stephen G. Burnett, "The Strange Career of the Biblia Rabbinica among Christian Hebraists, 1517-1620," 63-84].
- 9 See Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
- 10 WA 16:363-393; LW 35:161-174. Luther citations are from the critical edition of his works: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906-61); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21). These are abbreviated as WA, WA DB, WA Br, and WA TR. English translations are from *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. plus 20 vols in the New Edition (Philadelphia/St. Louis, 1955-). Abbreviated as LW.
- 11 The sermon would take on something of a life of its own, as it was subsequently printed separately, and then later as a companion-piece to other of Luther's writings, especially his 1528 "Exposition of the 10 Commandments".
- 12 Of particular relevance here is the polemic against Karlstadt in Part One of *Against the Heavenly Prophets*.
- 13 *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525), WA 18:73,30; 88,20; LW 40:91, 105; *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, WA 16:388,10; LW 35:171.
- 14 LW 35:166; WA 16:375,14 – "keyn puenctlin gehet uns an ym Mose."
- 15 In this, ironically, Luther is in complete agreement with the entirety of Jewish tradition.
- 16 Here Luther is drawing on Gal 5:3, where Paul states that the entire Torah is binding, and one cannot pick and choose. This is standard rabbinic teaching.
- 17 WA 16:371,13; 373,4-13; see LW 35:164-165. Italics mine.
- 18 It is in this context that Luther refers to Mosaic law as the *Sachsenspiegel* (the customary law) of the Jews.
- 19 Luther's interpretation of Rom 10:4.
- 20 For a similar expression, see the 1531 *Lectures on Galatians*, WA 40/2:18,13-14; LW 27:15 – "[W]e do not grant [Moses] any authority over our conscience. Let him remain where he lies dead and buried, and 'no man knows the place of his burial' (Deut 34:6)". Cf LW 26:151. Luther states many times that post-biblical Jews are unable to keep Mosaic law, because there is no temple, and because Jews now live outside of the land of Israel.
- 21 WA 16:376,8-12; see LW 35:166. Italics mine.
- 22 Reading with WA 24:12,17.
- 23 WA 16:384,19-385,9; 385,12-14; see LW 35:170. Italics mine.
- 24 WA 16:384,11-12; see LW 35:170. Italics mine.
- 25 On the distinctiveness of Luther's treatment of the Ten Commandments vis-à-vis the preceding church tradition, see Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms: The Ten Commandments* (ed. Charles P Schaum; trans. Holger K. Sonntag; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2009) 55-87.
- 26 Luther here as everywhere on this topic, sees himself as merely repeating what Paul writes in Rom 2:14-15. See also *Against the Sabbatarians*, LW 47:89-90. To be sure, however, this natural law written on the heart/conscience is well nigh illegible, due to the fall. This is why Luther regularly emphasized that the Gospel is required to clarify exactly what the Law is and demands.
- 27 *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, WA 18:81,18-20; LW 40:98. See also *Against the Sabbatarians*, WA 50:331,13-17; LW 47:90 – "He is the common God of all the pagans, who gives the common Ten Commandments – which prior to this had been implanted at creation in the hearts of all – to this particular people orally as well. In his day Moses fitted them nicely into his laws in a more orderly and excellent manner than could have been done by anyone else." One of Israel's perquisites is that it and it alone has the Natural Law *in writing*.
- 28 Whereas Luther's claim that the Mosaic legislation as a whole is not binding on pagans was in agreement with standard rabbinic teaching, here his claim for the Ten Commandments places him at odds with the rabbis, for whom only the "Noahide Laws" were binding on non-Jews. The Noahide Laws would be a rough rabbinic equivalent of what Luther's "Natural Law" means. It is noteworthy that Luther regards the first three commandments, the most Israel-specific commandments of all, as written on the human conscience by nature.
- 29 Elsewhere Luther is able to derive a general truth from the promise of the land of Canaan: "We also observe that countries and governments, yes, also families and estates, decline or survive so remarkably according to their obedience or disobedience; and it has never happened otherwise than that he fares badly and dies an evil death who dishonors father and mother." *Against the Sabbatarians*, LW 47:95; WA 50:335,1-5.
- 30 "Du solt den feyertag heiligen." WA 30/1:130,9.
- 31 This raises the difficult question of whether it was possible for Israel to reject God's "offer."
- 32 *Against the Sabbatarians*, WA 50:331,20-36; LW 47:90-91. Italics mine. This is a more extensive and colorful elaboration of the same point made in *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, WA 373,14-374,8; LW 35:165 – "That Moses does not bind the pagans can be demonstrated from the text in the Second Book of Moses in the 20th chapter, where God himself speaks, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us. For [God] never led us out of Egypt, but only the Jews. The mob-spirits want to saddle us with Moses and all the commandments. We will just skip that. We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver—unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law." In addition, see esp. the introduction to Luther's 1525 sermon on Exod 20:2, WA 16:424,11-32 – "Wir wollen die Zehen gepot kurtz uberlauffen. Zum Ersten ist zu mercken, das uns Heyden und Christen die Zehen gepot nicht betreffen, sondern alleine die Jueden, Das bezeuget und zwinget der Text, so er spricht: Ich byn der HERR dein Gott, der dich aus Egypten lande aus dem diensthauss gefurt habe. Das ist ja war und klar genug, das wir Heyden durch Gott nicht auss Egypten gefurt sind, sondern

allein das Juedisch volck Israel. Darumb deuttet Mose die zehen gepot allein auff das volck, welchs durch Gott auss Egypten ist gefurt. Das wir aber gleich auch den Gott, den die Jueden ehren, der sie auss Egypten gefurt hat, erkennen, anbeten und ehren, haben wir nicht durch Mosen oder aus dem geschriebenen gesetz, sondern auss andern schriffthen und auss dem gesetz der natur. Das rede ich abermal daruemb, das ich den falschen geistern were {wehre}, die uns Mosen auff den halss mit gewalt woellen legen, yhn zu halten mit allen seinen gepoten, das wollen wir aber lassen und yhn mit dem aller minsten titel nicht annehmen denn so ferne wo er mit dem natuerlichen gesetz uber einstymmet. Wir wollen yhn wol lesen wie einen andern lerer frey und ungezwungen, Aber fur unsern gesetzgeber wollen wir yhn nicht haben, den wir haben vorhyn yhm neuen Testament gesetz genug, daruemb wollen wir yhn nicht haben ynn unserm gewissen, sondern das Christo alleine rein behalten. Also ist es ja klar, das die zehen gepot allein den Jueden geben sind und nicht uns, trotz allen Rottengeistern, das sie mit warheit anders sagen.”

- 33 For an excellent study of the tension between monotheism and the election of Israel, see Joel Kaminsky and Anne Stewart, “God of All the World: Universalism and Developing Monotheism in Isaiah 40-66,” *Harvard Theological Review* 99/2 (2006) 139-163. See also R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2011).
- 34 On this, see H. Bornkamm, “The Father of Jesus Christ as God of the Entire Scripture,” in *Luther and the Old Testament*, 195-200.
- 35 On this issue, see esp. R. Kendall Soulen, “‘They are Israelites’: The Priority of the Present Tense in Jewish-Christian Relations,” in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9-11* (ed. Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 257; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 497-504.
- 36 “In futura vita omnia praecepta cessabunt excepto primo.” WA TR 1:159,31-32 (No. 369).

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Warrior Saints: Warfare and Violence in Martin Luther’s Readings of Some Old Testament Texts

Mickey L. Mattox

It is a story Lutherans love to tell. In early 1535, answering a request from his barber Peter Beskendorf, a man he had known since 1517 and considered a close friend, Martin Luther brought forth a sweet and practical booklet touchingly entitled *A Simple Way to Pray, Written for a Good Friend*.¹ Today this work is justly celebrated as a minor classic that both epitomizes Luther’s spirituality and powerfully suggests what a deep and lasting impact he would make on the lives of his many followers. The after story, however, is less well known. In late summer that same year a letter from Luther made its way to Prince-Elector John Frederick’s vice chancellor, the honorable Franz Burkhard, who was handling a criminal matter. In the letter Luther asked Burkhard to show clemency toward a convicted murderer: exile rather than execution. Ironically, this work too was written on behalf of Peter Beskendorf, who in late March, only weeks after the publication of *A Simple Way to Pray*, had stabbed to death his son-in-law, Dietrich von Freyenhagen. Luther’s appeal had the desired effect: Beskendorf – whose crime had apparently been committed while inebriated – was exiled. As Luther had recommended, the man kept his life and suffered no violent punishment, but lost his home and possessions.²

The after story of Luther’s *Simple Way to Pray* reminds us first of his conviction that the application of the law should always be tempered by the jurist’s sensitivity to the particulars of the case. He never tired of repeating the old adage that “the strictest law is the highest injustice” (*summum ius summa iniuriae*). The law should serve both the individual and the common good, and equity (ἐπιείκεια) demands that justice be ever tempered to

fit the facts. Dr. Luther clearly brought these convictions to the aid of Mr. Beskendorf.³ More importantly for present purposes, this story also reminds us that violence was not for Martin Luther merely a theoretical question. Indeed, Luther lived in an age characterized by a good deal of institutionalized violence, violence, that is, that was being carried out by civil and ecclesiastical rulers for a variety of purposes, including, e.g., the extension of kingdoms, the establishment of dynasties, the settling of border disputes, and, at least some of the time, the maintenance of social order. Indeed, wars of one kind or another proliferated in this period until they led at last to the Thirty Years War and related conflicts in the seventeenth century.⁴ For groups that rose up to challenge the existing social order the emerging early modern states of Luther's day were already beginning to amass standing armies, which could be used to put down rebellions of one kind or another.⁵

Against lawbreakers such as Beskendorf, moreover, the early modern civil authorities had ready to hand the tool of capital punishment, which could be administered in a number of horrific ways, and this tool was also used to punish religious dissenters. In Reformation times, for example, one might be burned as a Lutheran heretic in Belgium, as happened to two Augustinian friars who had become followers of Luther in 1522; for that matter, one could suffer the same fate as a Jewish *converso* (crypto-Jew) in an *auto-da-fé*, as were hundreds of Spanish Jews between 1481 and 1530. Or one could be drowned as an Anabaptist in Switzerland, as happened to Felix Manz in Zurich in 1527, or drawn and quartered as a Catholic priest in England, as happened to St. John Houghton in 1535, when he refused to recognize King Henry VIII as supreme head of the church. One of the most ironic markers of Christian Europe in the early modern period is the witness of martyrdom, which these religiously divided Christian peoples both gave and imposed, to and on one another.⁶

This is not to say that violent events such as the occasional war or the imposition of the death penalty were everyday occurrences in Luther's world. To the contrary, then as now, most men and women who were motivated to action by Christian faith and piety gave themselves over to quite different kinds of work, spending their lives teaching others about God's love, devoting themselves to daily prayer (as among the religious), feeding and housing the poor, or attempting to relieve the suffering of the sick or dying. Then as now, faith in the Good News of Jesus the Christ motivated many to lives of heroic service that left only faint traces in the historical records. These undeniable fruits of Christian faith typically receive much less attention today than do the acts of violence that marred early modern Christendom, for violence, after all, is much on *our* minds. Indeed, for increasing numbers of us today the fact of religiously motivated violence,

the apparent capacity of religion to make some people feel very good about behaving very badly, calls the entire enterprise of religion into question. What good is religion, some ask, if it produces the sorts of people who do such things?⁷

Today's worries about religion and violence, an unmistakable marker of post-9/11 existence, will surely not leave Martin Luther and his Reformation unexamined, even if his response to violence has been criticized many times before. In his own day, for example, many quite understandably found his reactions to the Peasant's uprising excessively harsh, legitimating the princes' excessively violent response.⁸ Going all the way back to Friedrich Engels this criticism was magnified in the Marxist literature on Luther and the Reformation, which somewhat implausibly made Thomas Müntzer the true hero of the age.⁹ More recently, all of us have fretted about the extent of Luther's responsibility for the sad fate of the Jews at the hands of the National Socialists.¹⁰ Did Luther's "Two Kingdoms" doctrine so compartmentalize Christian righteousness within the spiritual and hidden kingdom of God's right hand as to leave it no earthly good in the physical and tangible kingdom of the left hand?¹¹ Did Luther's political theology leave a legacy of ethical complacency? Thankfully, some of the shadows cast over Lutheran ethics by the last Great War have finally begun to fade. The urgency with which the latter question was once posed has been defused somewhat by a steadily developing recognition of Luther's joy, as one scholar recently put it, in the Law of God.¹² However fallibly he may have lived and acted in the events of his own time, Luther readily sang with the Psalmist, "Oh, how I love thy Law," and he did his best to hold Christian people accountable to it, as anyone familiar with his two great Catechisms, particularly their treatment of the Ten Commandments, can readily affirm. As a theorist, so to speak, of the Christian life, Luther seems to have left little room for ethical complacency.

The former question, however, abides. The status of Jews and Judaism in Luther's thought remains neuralgic, as a spate of recent works can well attest.¹³ We could add to it the difficulty of Luther's ill treatment of the "false brethren," so effectively showcased by Mark Edwards.¹⁴ Indeed, with abiding problems like this one in mind, Paul Hinlicky has urged that theological appropriation of Luther today must become a self-consciously *critical* enterprise, one that repeatedly endeavors to become aware of and excise the strategy of demonization he so often employed in controversy with his opponents, including not just the Jews, but Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims as well.¹⁵ Luther's rhetoric and invective were not infrequently violent and abusive, and for that reason must be handled today with great care.

Many of us remain convinced, nevertheless, that Luther is still a vital conversation partner, a man whose thought and history remain in many

ways yet to be discovered¹⁶ and whose potential contribution to theology and exegesis today therefore also remains at least somewhat unexplored. He was after all one of the greatest biblical expositors in the long Catholic tradition, and applied himself with energy and singular insight not only to the Scripture itself, but also to the events and controversies of his day. Scripture and life – no, Scripture and Luther’s life – informed and interpreted one another, and that dynamism made him a wondrously imaginative and exciting reader of the stories of the biblical saints, as we shall see below. Luther was contextual both as a theologian and as an exegete, which makes his exegetical writings, as Julius Köstlin observed long ago, an especially rich source of both Luther’s theology as well as his “practical wisdom of life.”¹⁷

Of course, we could bypass Luther’s exegesis and examine his theological evaluation of war and violence as found in occasional treatises that addressed the problem directly.¹⁸ For example, his important writing of 1523, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed*, lays out what has traditionally been understood as a “two kingdoms” approach to balancing the authority of the state with that of the church so that they mutually support one another. The treatise provides state authority over against that of the church with compelling biblical grounding, notably Romans 13.¹⁹ The fallen world, Luther concluded, cannot be ruled by the Gospel, so the civil authorities must rule through pre/proscription and as well as through violent coercion, through the law, that is, and the sword.²⁰ Far from offering rulers carte blanche, however, Luther moved to moderate official acts of violence, arguing, for example, against the execution of heretics (although he hedged on that one later), and admonishing Christian princes to preserve the peace and avoid war. In this advice, perhaps he had in mind the example of his own Christian prince, Frederick the Wise, whose reputation as a peacemaker had earned him, from the German *Friedrich*, the nickname *Friedensreiche*: “peace lover.”

Instead of limiting myself to important texts like this one, however, I want to turn now instead to some of Luther’s exegetical writings, where he did the biblical spadework out of which occasional treatises like *Temporal Authority* grew. As will be shown below, when we examine Luther’s understanding of warfare and violence in the Christian life from the vantage point of biblical interpretation, where his pastoral instincts are on high alert for biblical support for the Christian struggling for faith and holiness, we find him at his best, also regarding the question of war and violence. Here he attempts a balancing act, in which he recognizes first of all that violence itself is necessary only because the assertion of evil has rendered the creation itself a site of conflict. Importantly, this reminds us that violence does not belong to the original

condition of humankind in Luther’s thought. Indeed, in an unfallen world – which Luther often imaginatively sketches out, particularly in his work on Genesis – war and violence would have had no place.²¹

I. Peaceable Origins

The backdrop, then, to Luther’s conflicted view of life in this fallen world is an irenic vision of the original creation, where an unfallen Adam and Eve once feasted their eyes on the “garden of delights” and found their hearts and minds elevated by every created thing to the love and contemplation of their Creator. Adam’s imposition of names upon the animals, and perhaps later upon his wife as well, was therefore in no way arbitrary, as if what he called each of them lacked any connection to their being, their purpose, their inherent beauty or goodness. Instead, Adam called things what they really were, for he, and later Eve as well, was so utterly suffused with the knowledge of God as to see through created things to their created end, their *telos*, and to their uncreated Source as well, as their final cause.²² Eden, as the elder Martin Luther imagined it, was unambiguously good in every way, and this inherent goodness left no room for violence of any kind. No force, no coercion, no dominance or submission could obtain within the human family, especially not between our “first parents.”²³ Eve, he averred, was her husband’s equal, a conviction he expressed in predictably patriarchal terms when he described her as a woman “who does things like a man.”²⁴ These two, moreover, were created for a life, and a spiritual body, that lay beyond what was given in the garden. Indeed, death was somehow natural to them, but only as the last step before their “translation” into the “spiritual body.”²⁵ This eschatological vision of the original and definitively peaceable kingdom of Eden must be kept ever in view, because it renders violence and coercion – about which Luther can be sometimes almost shockingly blunt – alien to the realities and purposes of the original creation, and just to that extent entirely unnatural.

In this fallen world, however, Luther unhesitatingly affirms that if violence must be done – and again he has no doubt that it must – then it is best done by people of faith. There can be no avoidance of this sad necessity. Here as in so many other areas of his thought Luther leaves the Christian no pious option to check out and leave the difficult responsibilities incumbent on life in the world to the “seculars.” To the contrary, the world is God’s own creation, and the struggle for faith and faithfulness as Luther describes it takes place in the concrete spheres of Christian existence that God has established, including not only the church with its pastors and preachers,

the Christian home with its mothers and fathers and children, but also the state, where God grants to Christian rulers distinctive gifts for keeping the peace, including the application of violence through war and capital punishment.²⁶ One can find therefore an authentic Christian faithfulness not only in the preacher or the parent, but also in the Christian ruler, the Christian soldier, or even the Christian executioner.²⁷

To be sure, on Luther's account, the civil rule, including the maintenance of order by coercive means, is less glorious than that offered in either the domestic or the ecclesial spheres, but it is not for that reason un-Christian. Good work in the kingdom of the left hand can therefore be good, including the good work of upholding the social order and effecting a measure of social justice by means of violence, even if such acts are not proper, so to speak, in terms of God's original intentions for an unfallen humanity.²⁸ As with the preacher or the parent so too the ruler or soldier should turn to the Scripture itself for instruction and inspiration for faithfulness within his calling. When we recall that in his "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" of 1520 Luther had appealed to the civil rulers by virtue of their status as their society's first Christians (i.e., as both secular rulers and Christians baptized into the common priesthood) to take responsibility for the reform of the church, then it is perhaps somewhat less surprising to find him looking to the Scriptures for instruction for the good Christian prince or magistrate. In this way, the Bible is an imminently practical book, one that answers just the questions a good Christian prince or magistrate should ask: for what reasons should I wage war, and how should I do it? On whom, and for what crimes, must I impose the death penalty?²⁹

II. War and the Biblical Saints

To shed further light on the problem of war and violence in Luther's thought I turn now to a few of his readings of the Old Testament. It is true, as readers have often noted, that Luther took comfort in the failings of the biblical saints. God's gracious dealing with the fallible figures portrayed in the biblical narratives suggests hope for every struggling Christian. At the same time, however, it is equally true that his portrayal of the biblical saints was often saintly in a much more conventional way, which means that one regularly finds in his readings of the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Old Testament paradigmatic examples of men and women who epitomized the struggle for faith and faithfulness, including – mostly for the men – the Christian exercise of worldly authority, also by means of violence and coercion. Viewed through Luther's interpretive lens the heroes and heroines

of the Old Testament became, in effect, like Luther's own namesake, St. Martin of Tours, warrior saints, in both a literal and a figurative sense.

In the four brief exegetical vignettes set forth below, I examine some important aspects of Luther's approach to the question of war and violence. The first two are early exegeses of texts from the Pentateuch, which Luther had translated for the *Wittenberger Sonderausgabe des Pentateuchs*, published in August 1523, less than a year after the better known edition of the New Testament, the so-called "September Testament."³⁰ Turning first to his 1523-4 sermons on Genesis, we look in on his reading of the story of murderous Cain's exile, and the city he built. Next I examine the broad advice about war he offers in an interpretation of Deuteronomy 20 found in lectures from 1525. Afterwards we zoom out for a wider perspective offered in some of his lectures on Zechariah of 1527, which enable us to sketch out Luther's vision of violent conflict in the cosmos as a whole. Finally we leap ahead a decade or so to eavesdrop on the lectures of Genesis for a moment to see what Luther thought could be learned from one biblical example of warrior saint, father Abraham.

A. Luther on Cain: The origins of Arms and Defenses

In the sermons on Genesis of 1523-4 (published in Latin and German editions in 1527),³¹ Luther asks and answers the question of the origins of war. Examining the story of Cain's expulsion from Adam's household following his murder of Abel, Luther notes that Cain afterwards "built a city." Why, he wonders, does the Scripture first mention a city in association with this man? Why build a city? Luther's answer: fear.³² Cain had been expelled from the peaceable household of Adam (*die versammlung der gleubigen*),³³ an assembly of love and friendship that in Luther's understanding was *ecclesia* and *oeconomia* at the same time. Departing this community, the exiled Cain became a "citizen of the earth." Unlike the non-violent people he left behind, the murderous Cain figured he needed "arms and defenses" – that is, weapons and city walls – to protect his people. Arguing, as he is wont at times to do, from silence, Luther magnifies Cain's need by contrast to the situation in Adam's household, which he figures built neither weapons nor walls. Entering imaginatively into saintly Adam's psyche he explains that these good Christians [sic] did not even think about that, and their confident faith looked ahead to the promised Messiah, whom they expected to arrive soon.³⁴ They trusted in God and therefore had no need of arms or defenses.³⁵ Cain, on the other hand, had been exiled into a sad and

alien land, driven out from the “countenance of God” (*Gottes angesicht*), i.e., away from the household of faith in which, through the Word, God was present (*da ist Gott gegenwertig*).³⁶

So it is that the younger Luther locates the origins of the coercive rule of one human being over another, as well as the fear that motivates the building of a fortified city and the forging of swords, outside the first household of faith, in what immediately becomes the false church of the apostate Cain. Here the story of Cain’s exile functions, so to speak, as a second fall after the Fall. In this way, Luther rhetorically maximizes the distance between the fearful citizens of Cain’s city with the true Christians who remained in Adam’s fearless and therefore unfortified household, a sort of town versus country tension, if you will.³⁷ This early interpretation of Cain’s story suggests that in the young Luther’s understanding a properly Christian society would be, not to put too fine a point on it, *pacifistic*, that is, lacking arms or defenses. If the civil estate is understood as by its very nature as concerned with the coercive power that protects a people and punishes the wicked among them, then in the long ago history of the most ancient fallen human societies Luther positions *politia* on Cain’s side, in agonistic relationship to the original peaceable order, which remained intact despite the fall in the faith-filled household of Adam and Eve.

This retelling of the story contrasts markedly with what is found in Luther’s better known lectures on Genesis delivered about 10 years later, where he shifted the origins of coercive state power back a generation into fallen Adam’s rule over his wife,³⁸ a movement that seems to reflect his growing concern more effectively to validate sixteenth-century political authority, or at the very least not to make it seem as if true Christians should be without arms or defenses. In 1525, after all, the peasants had revolted against the established authorities in the name of “godly law,” and Luther in response had urged their violent suppression.³⁹ Ten years after the earlier Genesis sermons had been preached, moreover, Luther’s reform movement had come increasingly to rely not only on the political cover provided by his stalwart prince elector, John Frederick (1503-54; ruled, 1532-47), but also on the League of Smalcald, a defensive alliance of the Protestant princes formed in response to the Imperial Congress held at Speyer in 1529, which had called not only for a cessation of church reform but for the enforcement of the Edict of Worms as well. The fate of Luther’s movement rested, in short, upon the military might and political savvy of the princes who protested this edict

of Speyer. This is not the place to explore these questions further, but the difference between the younger and the older Luther on the emergence of coercive civil government as a means of preserving godly order – whether later with Cain’s exile, or earlier with Eve’s subjection to her husband – seems to reflect both the unsettling experience of the violent disorder occasioned by the Peasant’s uprising of 1525,⁴⁰ and the pressing need to validate duly established Protestant political authority after 1529.

B. *Luther on Deuteronomy 20: Making War the Right Way*

In May of 1526 Luther’s treatise “How Christians Should Regard Moses” was published by Hans Weisz in Wittenberg. There he argued that the Ten Commandments should be understood as the expression of a universally recognizable natural law, the Jewish version, as he put it, of what one could also find in ancient Roman law, as well as the German *Sachsenspiegel* (code of law).⁴¹ His commentary on Deuteronomy, published in 1525, evidences a similar spirit, where Luther attempts to identify which elements of the law belong solely to Israel’s history and which embody enduring principles. Among the latter, he includes the Mosaic prescriptions for the application of the death penalty and the proper conduct of war.

Luther’s task was not easy. Deuteronomy 20 presents the reader with difficult questions about God’s election of Israel and violence. The Lord God is giving Israel a promised land, but their taking possession of it depends on first violently dispossessing it from its current inhabitants, including in some cases killing all the males among them, and in other cases destroying those peoples entirely. Deuteronomy 19 introduces the topic of killing, where the law parses the differences between intentional and unintentional homicidal acts. Luther reads chapter 20 as a continuation of that topic. At this point, he surmises, Deuteronomy has completed its treatment of duties related to the First Table of the law, the duty to worship and obey God, and moves on to those related to the Second Table, the duties one owes to other people in one’s community. The overarching rule of the latter, he claims, is *the law of love*, which functions to bind people together in community with all the benefits appertaining thereunto, especially peace and security, because all the members of the community cast their lot together for mutual support and defense.

This communal law of love seems a curious contrast to the fear that Luther had found just a year earlier at the root of the commu-

nity gathered in the city of the exiled Cain. In this case, the city and its defenses are an expression of the law of love, and of one's service of the community's common good. The historical situation dictates this change, it seems, for the community of Israel finds itself threatened from within and without. The love that preserves the bond of community must be "severe and merciless," he insists, because it recognizes the necessity of strict law for the maintenance of order and the preservation of life. Though the principle of equity may at times call for moderation, in other cases the good of the community requires that the law should be applied severely and without mercy. For that reason, Luther here unequivocally endorses the death penalty for intentional murder – "because he who kills intentionally has sinned out of malice and has disturbed the public peace" – arguing that murderers cannot take sanctuary even in a holy place but ought rather to be "seized from the altar of the Lord and killed."⁴² Clearly Luther is reading this text not just as a story about the particular laws and practices of the people of ancient Israel, but as a reflection as well of the general principles by which societies of all times should be ordered and ruled.

This early reading of Deuteronomy is also punctuated by occasional excursions on the text's allegorical meaning. In later times, Luther would insist that the spiritual meaning of the text was to be sought in the letter,⁴³ but in this case he moves more conventionally from a literal exegesis to a figural one. Literally, so Luther, this text relates Israel's "law of war." This law is special and peculiar in so far as it depends first and foremost on Israel's abiding recognition that victory depends not upon strength of arms but upon faith in the Word of God. Armor and weapons are only the outer masks (*larvae dei*) under which the Lord, who fights for them, hides himself. Armor and weapons, therefore, were only necessary for Israel insofar as they prevented the people from tempting God by, for example, attempting to fight without any weapons at all. History, then, including all the vicissitudes of war, is a mask beneath which God works in a hidden way to achieve his own purposes.

Luther is also deeply impressed in this text by what we might call Moses' preferential option for peace. Even when foreign nations do not accept Israel's proffer of peace, moreover, the law demands moderation: a "civil and fine moderation should be observed in war," Luther writes. "He wants this people to be civil and not barbarous, and to wage war, not to devastate a land which has not sinned

but to sweep away the godless."⁴⁴ Israel should wage war, moreover, with self-control so that their soldiers will not "rage against women and girls in debauchery, lust, and other violence after conquering the enemy, as happens nowadays in our barbarity."⁴⁵ This line suggests that Luther recognizes a certain distance between the world of ancient Israel and his own. He does not, however, draw from that fact the implication that these rules of war were time bound, laid down only with Israel's invasion of the Promised Land in view. To the contrary, for Luther they express general principles applicable to war and the maintenance of the public peace. Deuteronomy 20 as Luther reads it prescribes the faith, humility, and moderation proper to the waging of war.

Luther then turns to allegory, where his reading of this text spiritualizes the honorable warfare described above so that it morphs into a vision of the militant Christian, who, like Luther himself, is engaged in the struggle for faith against the church's enemies. This reading ratchets down some of the tension inherent in any Christian reading of the text, insofar as it explains away some of the blood and gore. The wars in which Luther is interested here are not the ones fought between nations, but those that pit the true faith against heresy. The text provides him with a typology. Israel, he notes, had faced three kinds of enemies: first, the foreign nations that accepted Israel's offer of peace, then those that rejected it, and, finally, the enemies within, whom Luther likens to the Canaanites and Amorites, i.e., those who lived within the boundaries of Israel's own Promised Land. The first type symbolizes heretics or outsiders to the faith who hear the Word of God and right away give up their belief in works righteousness and make peace with the Gospel; their reception of the offer of peace epitomizes the surrender with which every Christian life begins. The second type represents those who employ the weapons of Scripture to oppose the Gospel. Of these only "the males are to be killed," which according to Luther means only that the leaders among them must be defeated and slain, that is, condemned and cast out of the church. Finally, there are those who are hardened and obstinate enough in their heresy that they must be anathematized and excluded from the community, cursed, in other words, and exiled.

The violent history of Israel's occupation of the Promised Land is thus made a figure of the violence which theologians must do as their contribution to the Christianization of their own lands and societies. Again, this is not physical violence. Indeed, Luther

insists here that the church conquers through the Word that smites consciences, not through the physical sword that ruins bodies. He rejects, in other words, the violent coercion of those who will not convert to the evangelical cause, or at least capital punishment for heresy, a fearsome prospect to which he himself was no stranger, and which he had argued against in his “Appeal to the Christian Nobility” in 1520.⁴⁶ The Christian, then, is a warrior in so far as he fights with the weapons of the Word of God to see the Gospel rightly preached and widely accepted. Thus Luther’s allegorical reading of this “hard text” from the Old Testament supports a significant curb on the state’s use of violent coercion in the case of religious conflict when he prescribes exile for heresy rather than the death penalty. Although Luther was not a forerunner of the early modern states’ religious toleration, then at least in this case he does argue for a lesser penalty for religious non-conformity. In later years Luther would endorse the death penalty against the Anabaptists on grounds that they were guilty of both blasphemy and sedition.⁴⁷ Once again, the trajectory of his development is toward identification and support for the secular authorities in their vocation of keeping order, especially in seeing to it that the Word of God is rightly taught and practiced.

C. *Cosmic Conflict: The Lectures on Zechariah*

In Luther’s understanding, as Heiko Oberman reminded us not so long ago, conflict is much more than a this-worldly matter.⁴⁸ Indeed, in a series of lectures on Zechariah published in 1527, we discover that this conflict extends, so to speak, from the top all the way down. Zech1:7ff recounts the prophet’s vision of angels riding horses.⁴⁹ Luther interprets the angelic discussion related there as an example of “how God rules the world through the angels.”⁵⁰ God has instituted, he claims, a four-fold government (*vierley regiment*) – which is actually, as we shall see, five-fold – at the highest level of which is the *regiment* of God, who works all in all without anyone’s help, as, for example, when he makes or multiplies his creatures “durch seine macht alleine.”⁵¹

Beneath the level of God’s own immediate government, however, he also rules over humankind through a series of four further governments (*Regimenten*). The first of these is the angelic government, in which the holy angels “do their part” (*das yhr dazu*) and watch over humankind “from the outside” (*von aussen*).⁵² They do so through “understanding and reason” (*verstand und vernunfft*), by

which Luther means that the angels’ knowledge of God, unlike that of fallen human beings, is unobscured by the fall.⁵³ The unfallen angels, who already perceive God face to face, are established as external caregivers for fallen humankind, mediators of his grace and providential care. Most fundamentally, they preserve people from the consequences of the fall, not only by preventing physical harm but also by inspiring “useful and helpful thoughts” and in that way preserving them spiritually.⁵⁴

The angels’ ministry also includes a mediating role in the present administration of human affairs.⁵⁵ Zechariah mentions the prophet’s encounter with a rider on a red horse, apparently an angel, who speaks of those who have been sent to “patrol the earth.” Riders on other horses – red, sorrel, and white – report to the first angel that “the earth remains at peace.” In an earlier version of this commentary Luther explains that the riders are the angels, “through whom God manages this visible world,”⁵⁶ while the horses are the nations over whom the angels rule. The peace the riders report, then, pertains to the very horses they sit astride.

Beneath the angelic rule Luther positions a third kind of government (*das dritte regiment*), namely, God’s rule over human beings through apostles and preachers, who exercise their divinely appointed office through the external (*eusserleich*) proclamation of the Word of God. Here God makes human beings his co-workers. Alongside their work of preaching and teaching the external Word, God once again does his own work, unseen and interior (*ynnwendig*),⁵⁷ instructing both the preachers and their hearers through the Holy Spirit. By God’s ordination, however, saving faith in the Gospel depends on the external human proclamation of the Word carried out by this “third government.”

The home and secular authority (*weltliche regiment*) constitute the fourth and fifth governments, with the secular authority ranked as the lowest (*das unerste*, which seems to support my surmise that Luther’s support for secular government grows as does the dependence of the Reformation upon it).⁵⁸ Parents, he notes, imitate God, for God also plays the role of parent, as in the case of Adam and Eve or even with orphan children. In this world God, however, has assigned his own parental role to human parents, who nurture and care for their young, and also exercise authority over them. Alongside this “home government” (*haus regiment*) one also finds the worldly government, which, Luther says, rules by “the sword and the fist,” violence and coercion.

He then makes clear the mutual interdependence of the orders. With the exception of the direct rule of God, each of these governments serves to reinforce all the others: “the sword serves the Gospel,” for example, because it demands respect and obedience, which creates a peaceful public space within which the Word of God can be preached and believed. The angelic regiment, in turn, is ordered to the working of both the Word and the sword, for the angels move people toward obedience to both. Likewise, as Luther puts it, “the Word and the sword are ordered to the angelic rule, for they make room and prepare people through peace, so that the angels may all the better approach them and promote their rule [*regiment*].”⁵⁹ The four governments thus lead believers into proper conformity with divine order and reason; in this way God’s appointed ends are achieved not just in the midst of conflict, but through and by means of it.

It is crucial to note that with the exception of God’s own immediate rule over all things, conflict characterizes Luther’s orders of government at every level. Against the four governments of angels, preachers, parents, and magistrates the devil ever rages, doing everything possible to destroy all God’s good creation.⁶⁰ The fourfold government thus constitutes a rule in the midst of opposition: the fallen angels oppose the good, heretics and false teachers oppose the apostles and prophets, disobedient children oppose their parents, and rebellious or lawless people oppose the worldly regiment. When such evils seem to gain the upper hand, the failure of divinely instituted government reflects nothing so much as a temporary but providential withdrawal of God’s own rule as a means of punishment. As God effects the good through external means, so the withdrawal of God’s internal power and effect allows evil to advance, through both the fallen angels and sinful human beings. In short, the divine order and rule are contested. Not this earth only, but the cosmos itself is an arena of conflict, of battle, of violence and war.

D. *The Genesis Lectures: Abraham’s Just and Moderate War*

We turn now to Abraham as an example of one who embodies much of what has been sketched out above. As Juhani Forsberg has observed, Luther praised Abraham highly, as a *pater fidei sanctissimus*, and made him a great hero and example of the Christian faith. More than that, Abraham was simultaneously *paterfamilias*, priest, and prince over his extended family. To that extent, he exercised a position of authority in all three spheres of this-worldly rule

identified in the Zechariah lectures: church, home, and state. As if those three offices were not enough, in both his *Supputatio annorum mundi* and in the *Enarrationes* on Genesis Luther also identified Abraham as an eschatological figure, the “*gubernator*” who introduced the world’s third age (*tertii millennarii gubernator*) following the destruction of the old world in the flood.

The *gubernatores* of the changing ages of world history were in Luther’s understanding heroes, that is, saints. Before Abraham they included Adam, who lived by faith in the promise of God after his tragic fall into sin, and was the *gubernator* of the first millennium,⁶¹ as well as holy Noah, a prophet of God through whose eyes the righteous God saw and judged the wickedness of the world.⁶² As *gubernator* of the world’s third age, holy Abraham symbolized the announcement of a new promise and with it the arrival of a new day in which it became clear that the Messiah would come from Abraham’s own flesh. He signals the Christian hope for a new and better world, and the fulfillment of that hope, Luther surmised, is coming very soon. Abraham, then, is not only for Luther a paradigm of the call to faith through the Word of God, but also a reminder that things do not always stay the way they have been. This point also has a particular poignancy for Luther, because he saw himself, too, as an eschatological figure, or at least as caught up in a great eschatological struggle. Biography and autobiography are ever a jumble in Luther’s exegesis.

Genesis 14 recounts the story of St. Abraham’s victory over Chedorloamer, when he restored Lot and his household from captivity. Luther finds much to praise in Abraham’s conduct of this war. It was only some 30 years or so after the great flood, he calculates, and already men were rushing headlong into sin, with a group of some nine tyrannous kings gathered here to wage war against one another for domination in the land. God “wants there to be government [*imperia*],” Luther assures us, for both the defense of the godly and the damnation of the wicked, “but Satan corrupts their hearts, and the magistrates degenerate into tyrants.”⁶³ Following the great battle between these tyrants, Lot and his clan were carried off into captivity, at which point they become for Luther a type of the Christian who faces adversity: life, that is, under the cross. It seems to Lot and his family that all is surely lost, but God has in mind a miraculous rescue, one that will confirm their trust in God. “This game, with its perpetual reversals, he [God] ever plays with his saints.”⁶⁴ Attending to the wondrous reversal about to come, Luther notes

that Abraham is called here for the first time a “Hebrew,” which he thinks identifies Abraham as one who had kept to the pure religion and the true church of the patriarchs. This great man had no concern for the fate of the five wicked kings and their peoples, but he determined to rescue his kinsman Lot and his family on account of their shared faith in the true God.

The military attack led by holy Abraham, Luther figures, was both brave and cunning, and this from a man who not long before had identified his wife as his sister out of fear of Egypt’s Pharaoh. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit in this case gave Abraham a courage and confidence greater than that of any Hannibal or Scipio. Adopting a brilliant strategy, he fell upon his enemy by night, and from many different directions, routing them from the field. He drew the sword, Luther notes, to protect his kinsman, that is, as a textbook example of the proper application of the coercive power of government to protect its citizens. The angel of the Lord, too, fought on Abraham’s side in this battle, joining forces, so to speak, with the civil government embodied in Abraham, in order to strike fear into the hearts of his enemies.⁶⁵ Afterwards, moreover, Abraham was magnanimous in victory, refusing to make it a pretext to claim the whole of the land of Canaan as his own. Inwardly, Luther surmises, Abraham interpreted the promise of that land as a blessing to be fulfilled in Christ, for as the Savior says in John 8:56, “Abraham saw my day and was glad.” Still, Luther wonders, how did Abraham know that God would be with him and give him the victory? His answer? Abraham acted at the command of the Holy Spirit. His action provides no example, Luther hastens to add, to be imitated in the present, as those like Thomas Müntzer and other “seditious rubes” would like to think.⁶⁶

From this remark we can better appreciate the fine line Luther is attempting to walk here. On the one hand, he wants to praise Abraham for the military action he took in defense of his kinsman, and to give God credit for the victory, just as he had insisted in his interpretation of Deuteronomy 20. Abraham used arms and violence, but he did not trust in them for the victory. On the other hand, however, Luther is well aware that conceding even to such a great man as Abraham the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to justify an obviously violent episode is a theological hot potato, for claims to the inspiration of the Spirit could be used to justify a wide variety of rash or rebellious deeds, like those he associates with Müntzer.

The deeds of an Abraham should therefore be wondered at, Luther insists, but not imitated.⁶⁷ In the end, then, Abraham is established in Luther’s reading of this text as a man of “distinguished faith and a truly heroic spirit.”⁶⁸ He was both a saint and, at just the right time and to just the right degree, a warrior. Moreover, the violent acts that were required in order to free his captive kinsman did not separate him from the Spirit of God. Indeed, the Spirit led him, and the angel of the Lord fought on his side.

Conclusions

We began with a series of questions regarding violence in Luther’s theology, perhaps most importantly whether Luther somehow promoted religious violence. As has been shown, his vision for the original creation leaves no room for violence and coercion, which become realities in this life only after the fall. Thereafter, however, violence is unmasked as a cosmic reality, one that antedates the peaceable kingdom of Eden, with the sounds of conflict echoing up and down the great chain of being so to speak, as reflected in his lectures on Zechariah. For this reason, violence is unavoidable. Though his early reading of the story of Cain seems to suggest a peaceable and even pacifistic Christian kingdom in this world after the fall, his later exegesis steps back from that conclusion and he more consistently grants the secular powers their place as good gifts from God. Still, Luther typically works very hard to restrain the application of violence even in this fallen world, developing a model of princely rule that is at once firm and threatening toward lawbreakers but gentle and even magnanimous toward those who accept correction, as seen in his lectures on Deuteronomy, and as witnessed to in his plea for clemency for Peter Beskendorf. Though he would later change his mind, in these early exegetical vignettes he also opposes the application of the death penalty, even for persistent theological error.

Though the reading of Abraham examined above was given many years later, still we find in it a textbook case of the application of Luther’s principles regarding war and violence. As a warrior saint, Abraham epitomizes simultaneously the faithfulness of the pastor, the practical wisdom of the *Hausvater*, and the steadfastness of the prince. When Abraham fought, God fought on his side. This image of the militant saint comports quite well with Luther’s broader conception of the Christian life, which is marked indelibly by a certain kind of spiritual violence. On Luther’s account it is the task of every Christian so to let Christ be born in her as to rise anew each day and begin the battle all over again. The terrible malady of sin,

however – the conflict and disorder that characterize human life this side of Eden – requires a severe mercy. The agent of grace must be merciless to sin in order to effect the mercy of renovation in the believer. The converse of the Christian’s daily rising in Christ, then, is the daily putting to death of the old Adam, living a life, in other words, in which sin is ruled over and conquered, through faith and the Holy Spirit. For this metaphorical battle Scripture and especially the stories of the biblical saints provide, on Luther’s account, a sure and certain guide.

Notes

- 1 Luther citations are from the critical edition of his works: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906-61); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21). These are abbreviated as WA, WA DB, WA Br, and WA TR. English translations are from *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. plus 20 vols in the New Edition (Philadelphia/St. Louis, 1955-). Abbreviated as LW.
- 2 The best English-language biographies of Martin Luther include: H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1978); Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart; New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989). The authoritative biography is Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther* (3 vols; trans. James L. Schaff; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985-93). For two more recent studies that challenge aspects of the long-settled conventional narrative of the young Luther’s development, see Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (2nd ed; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), and Franz Posset, *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt and Wittenberg* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011).
- 3 For Luther and ἐπιείκεια, see Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography*, 345-50. I acknowledge here as well a debt to my graduate student Jason Gehrke’s as-yet unpublished work on ἐπιείκεια in Luther’s thought.
- 4 For a withering attack on the secularist narrative that labels these the “wars of religion,” see William T. Cavanaugh’s provocative work, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford, 2009). Cavanaugh methodically deconstructs the notion that the Thirty Years War and related conflicts had primarily to do with religion, pointing instead to the rise of the modern nation state as the source of the violence.
- 5 For warfare and the development of arms in this period, see Michael E. Mallett, “The Art of War,” in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, Vol. 1: *Structures and Assertions* (ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 535-62.
- 6 On this topic, see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- 7 This criticism is frequently voiced by representatives of the “new atheism.” For a learned and insistent rejoinder, see David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 8 For a selection of Luther’s writings on some of these problems, see the new *Martin Luther on the Freedom of a Christian, with Related Texts* (trans. Tryntje Helfferich; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2013), which offers, inter alia, a translation of Thomas Müntzer’s “Highly Provoked Defense” alongside Luther’s “Against the Robbing, Murdering Hordes of Peasants.”
- 9 For an interesting study of the place of Luther in the thought of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, see Roland Boer, “Reformation and Revolution: Concerning the Interpretation of Luther in Marx and Engels,” *Sino-Christian Studies* 11 (2011) 45-72. The classic study of the problem is Abraham Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974). A perceptive analysis of Luther’s theology in relation to Marxist thought may be found in Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), ch. 9: “Passion and Action in Christ: Political Theology between the Times,” 301-57.
- 10 Assessments of Luther’s thought in this difficult area abound, but the considered judgment of Heiko A. Oberman, included in a last collection of his essays and published posthumously, stands out: “From Luther to Hitler,” chapter 5 in *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
- 11 On Luther’s “two kingdoms doctrine” and its long and problematic reception in Lutheran theology, see William J. Wright, *Martin Luther’s Understanding of God’s Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), esp. ch. 1.
- 12 See Andreas Wöhle, *Luthers Freude an Gottes Gesetz* (Frankfurt, Germany: Haag & Herchen, 1998).
- 13 See, e.g., Thomas Kaufmann, “Luther and the Jews,” in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (ed. Dean Philip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 69-104; Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). For a selection of original texts in translation, with helpful introductions, see Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
- 14 See Mark U. Edwards, Jr, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).
- 15 See Paul Hinlicky, “The Problem of Demonization in Luther’s Apocalyptic Theology,” in *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 379-85. For Luther’s approach to Islam, see Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Gregory J. Miller, “Luther on the Turks and Islam,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 79-97.
- 16 For support of my claim for a Luther yet to be discovered, a good starting point is Risto Saarinen, “Luther the Urban Legend,” in *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times* (ed. Christine Helmers; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 13-31. For a more programmatic attempt to destabilize the traditional Luther narrative, see *Transformations in Luther’s Theology: Historical and Contemporary Reflections* (ed. Christine Helmers and Bo Kristian Holm; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011).
- 17 See Julius Köstlin and Gustav Kawerau, *Martin Luther: sein Leben und seine Schriften*

- (vol. 2; Berlin, 1903) 425.
- 18 For a collection of Luther's political writings, see J. M. Porter, ed., *Luther: Selected Political Writings* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1974).
- 19 Interestingly, Luther advised Christians to be obedient citizens, even in the event of a Muslim conquest, which seemed a distinct possibility in his day. See Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam*.
- 20 Note well, however, Svend Anderson's argument that while Luther would not allow that the state could be ruled by the Gospel, he nevertheless recognized it as an arena for the concrete application of the law of Christian love, in which the Christian acts in service to the neighbor in need, extending the "happy exchange" given in justification so as to make Christ present in self-giving love in this world. See Svend Anderson, "Lutheran Political Theology in the Twenty-First Century," in *Transformations in Luther's Theology*, 245-63.
- 21 Recent works on Luther's Genesis lectures include: Juhani Forsberg, *Das Abraham-bild in der Theologie Luthers: Pater Fidei Sanctissimus* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984); John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Sixteenth Century Studies & Essays 80; Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008); Mickey Leland Mattox, "Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs:" *Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesis 1535-1545* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
- 22 For some further detail on this point, see Mickey L. Mattox, "Hearer of the Triune God: Martin Luther's Reading of Noah," in *Luther Digest: Volume 20 Supplement* (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2012) 49-70; esp 52-56.
- 23 See Mattox, *Defender*, chaps 1-2.
- 24 WA 42:103,12-13: "Heum autem dicit vocandam *Ischa*, perinde ac si dicas a Vir Vira, quod sit uxor, *heroica Mulier, quae virilia gerit.*" Italics mine.
- 25 WA 42:42,26-8: "Cessassent autem ista corporalia praefinito tempore post impletum numerum Sanctorum, et Adam cum posteritate sua esset translatus ad aeternam et spiritualem vitam." ("At a predetermined time, after the number of saints had been filled up, these bodily matters would have come to an end, and Adam with his posterity would have been carried up to an eternal and spiritual life.")
- 26 For Luther's "three estates doctrine," see Wilhelm Maurer, *Luthers Lehre von den drei Hierarchien und ihre mittelalterliche Hintergrund* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1970). Some ethical implications are examined in Risto Saarinen, "Ethics in Luther's Theology," in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity* (Dordrecht, Germany: Springer, 2005) 195-215.
- 27 See, e.g., Luther's 1526 writing *Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved*. LW 46:87-137; WA 19:623-62.
- 28 See, e.g., Luther's remarks in the confession of faith appended at the end of his "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528), LW 37:364: "But the holy orders and true religious institutions established by God are these three: the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government Moreover, princes and lords, judges, civil officers, state officials, notaries, male and female servants and all who serve such persons, and further, all their obedient subjects – all are engaged in pure holiness and leading a holy life before God. For these three religious institutions or orders are found in God's Word and commandment; and whatever is contained in God's Word must be holy, for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it."
- 29 Here we discover the rationale behind Luther's peculiar commentary on the *Song of Songs*, which he interpreted neither as a tribute to marital love, nor as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the soul or the church, but as a manual for the Christian prince. Luther seems to have thought that the reading of the *Song of Songs* as an allegory of the soul supported the dominance of the church over the state, and the superiority of monastic life to life in the world. On this topic, see Jarrett A. Carty, "Martin Luther's Political Interpretation of the *Song of Songs*," *The Review of Politics* 73/3 (2011) 449-67, with further bibliography.
- 30 See WA DB 8.
- 31 *Reihenpredigten über das erste Buch Mose // In Genesis Mosi librum sanctissimum D. Martini Lutheri Declamationes*, WA 24:1-710.
- 32 WA 24:143a,1-3, where the Latin version makes the division between the two households clear: "Hic sunt duo populi, facti separati a se: qui cum Adam sunt, non aedificant civitatem, sed qui cum Cain, qui timent: timuit Cain, ne ob homicidium occideretur, ideo constituit Rempublicam aedificata urbe."
- 33 WA 24:143b,11-12.
- 34 Maxfield argues persuasively that one of Luther's achievements in the later *Enarrationes in Genesis* was to recover a biblical and apostolic sense of the imminent *parousia*. See his *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, chap 5.
- 35 WA 24:143b,28-34: "Da beschreibet Moses Kains geschlecht bis ynns siebend gelied, Sonderlich sagt er, das Kain eine stad gebawet habe, Die stad hat er gebawet als ein buerger auff erden, Denn wenn es also stuende, das wir alle Christen weren, doerfft man nicht des weltlichen schwerds und schutzes. Die bey Adam blieben sind, haben keine stad gebawet noch sich gedacht zu schuetzen und weren. Dieser aber hat freylich daruemb gebawet, das er etwas sicher moechte sein, weil er sich furchtet und zaiget."
- 36 WA 24:143b,6-11: "Wie ist Kain von Gottes angesicht gangen, so yhm doch niemand entlauffen kan? Antwort: Es ist soviel gesagt: Er ist geflohen vom vater yns elende und ynn ein frembde land komen, da niemand gewonet hat, Das heist von Gottes angesicht geflohen, Denn wo Christen sind, die Gottes wort haben und predigen, da ist Gott gegenwertig, da sihet er hin, wie die schrifft viel mal sagt."
- 37 Further to Cain's relationship to the *ecclesial/oconomia* of Adam, one may consult Mickey L. Mattox, "Fortuita Misericordia: Martin Luther on the Salvation of Biblical Outsiders," *Pro Ecclesia* 17/4 (2006) 423-41.
- 38 See Mattox, *Defender*, 92-8.
- 39 For the treatise "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," see Porter, *Selected Political Writings*, 85-8.
- 40 Maurer sees a connection, too: "Der Bauernkrieg brachte eine revolutionäre Erschütterung dieses Ordnungsgefüges. Bald nach seiner Beendigung – um den 1. November 1525 herum – hat Luther in zwei Predigten die regierende Gewalt am Elternamt illustriert." *Luthers Lehre von den drei Hierarchien*, 21.
- 41 LW 35:161-174. This 'treatise' was originally a sermon that Luther preached as an introduction to Exodus 19-20 during his 1524-1525 sermon series on Exodus. The sermon was delivered on Aug. 27, 1525.
- 42 LW 9:195.
- 43 For the Reformation insistence on the spirituality of the letter as an extension of developments that marked later medieval exegesis, see Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation* (New York: Cambridge, 2002). For Luther's explicit rejection of allegory and his insistence that the spiritual meaning is to be found

- in the story level of the text, see, e.g., “Luther’s Preface to Justus Menius, *Commentary on the First Book of Samuel*,” LW 60:7-10.
- 44 LW 9:204.
- 45 LW 9:204.
- 46 Writing in 1520, Luther rejected capital punishment for heretics. Considering the burning of John Hus in the “Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,” he said: “The devil made the Romanists mad and foolish so that they did not know what they had said and done. God has commanded that a promise of safe-conduct shall be kept. We should keep such a commandment though the whole world collapses. How much more, then, when it is only a question of freeing a heretic! We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the ancient fathers did. If it were wisdom to vanquish heretics with fire, then the public hangmen would be the most learned scholars on earth. We would no longer need to study books, for he who overcomes another by force would have the right to bum him at the stake.” LW 44:196; cf WA 6:455,19-25.
- 47 Luther associated the Anabaptists with both Müntzer and the Sacramentarians. For an analysis, see John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon, and Menius, and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1964) 126ff.
- 48 Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*.
- 49 “Der Prophet Sacharja ausgelegt,” WA 23:485-664; LW 20:153-347.
- 50 WA 23:511,34; LW 20:169. On Zech 1:7.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 WA 23:512,5.
- 53 WA 23:513,39.
- 54 WA 23:512,6-7.
- 55 The earlier Latin version of the Zechariah lectures that derives from the original lectures of 1525-6 confirms as much. “In Zachariam Prophetam,” WA 13:546-669; LW 20:1-152.
- 56 WA 13:558,3-4: “Equites haud dubie sunt angeli, per quos administrat deus hunc mundum visibilem.” LW 20:15. On Zech 1:8.
- 57 WA 23:512,8-9.
- 58 WA 23:514,19.
- 59 WA 23:514,27-31; translation from LW 20:172, slightly amended.
- 60 WA 23:514,32-4: “Widder solche Gotts regimente tobet nu der Satan, des ampt nichts anders ist denn alles zuberechen und zurstoeren, was Gott durch diese regimente schafft und thut.”
- 61 WA 53:38.
- 62 WA 53:39. To this topic one may consult my “Hearer of the Triune God,” cited above.
- 63 WA 42:526,19-21.
- 64 WA 42:527,4. For these “reversals,” in which God sometimes appears as the devil and the devil as God, see Mattox, *Defender*, 227-31.
- 65 WA 42:531,28-30.
- 66 WA 42:531,7-10.
- 67 On this “narrative barrier” between the acts of the biblical saints and the lives of contemporary Christians, which Luther admits becomes permeable in the challenges to faith the believer faces in this life, see Mattox, *Defender*, 250-1.
- 68 WA 42:532,3-4.

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Luther on Marriage, for Gay and Straight

Kirsi Stjerna

Martin Luther knew all about marriage.¹ He wrote, “The estate of marriage and everything that goes with it in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God.”² Luther was also fully aware of how complicated marriage could be on the human front; he even used the word “bitterness” to discuss different marriage-related issues.³ Regardless of the Hollywood stories of happily-ever-after, and (thankfully) regardless of the reality shows exposing outrageously dysfunctional family systems, people continue to get married, our societies still respect marriage as a worthy institution and see it important to legalize and control it; the churches continue to be invested in the ceremonies celebrating marital unions, and in shaping people’s thinking about marriage.

In this presentation, 1) I will first reflect on the urgency of the Lutheran church to move theologically to a place where our church affirms the marriage of gay and lesbian persons on par with the marriage of heterosexual persons. 2) I propose that the issue of gay and lesbian persons’ “right to marry” and the church’s joyful blessing of such unions are a “priority reformation concern” today, similar to the sixteenth-century Reformations’ promotion of clergy marriage over the church’s celibacy rules. 3) I will engage Luther’s argumentation on marriage and sexuality and the nature of his reforms in order to build a foundation for continued constructive reforms regarding marriage matters today.

Human Sexuality and the Right to Marry – a Reformation Concern⁴

Today the Lutheran church has an important responsibility to take an active role in the conversations on marriage and human sexuality.⁵ These questions

have wide-ranging ramifications in the life of the church, in Lutheran ethics, and in the quality of life for people in all walks of life. These questions have a theological background and a contemporary impact. How we deal theologically with the issue of human relations, sexuality, and human rights, in implicit and explicit ways, “translates” or communicates to the world the church’s doctrine of God and grace. How we deal with these human issues is revealing and exposes the foundations of our faith and how we interpret the gospel of Jesus – and also how we chronically fail in this task.

The church and its theologians have important opportunities and challenges here with the current debates about marriage and sexuality. To name just a few: Informed by new theological hermeneutics as well as scientific advances, theologians can work towards a healthy and theologically sound contemporary Lutheran understanding of marriage and sexuality. The church and its theologians cannot stay apart from the conversations on what is considered “normal” and what is “biblical”; it is a tender, vital task to address the problems between the two considerations. The church has a stake in the hotly debated question of who has the right to marry. Theologians are called to task to reassess what exactly is the church’s role in marriage matters today and properly advise the church to do its “job,” with the support of theological and anthropological perspectives that employ both the Scriptures and the scientific wisdom of the day, and to do so with compassion for the people whose lives are affected by what the church and its theologians say. Most importantly, the church and its theologians have an ongoing responsibility to preach, teach, practice, and fight for the equality and inclusivity of all people, in the name of the gospel of Jesus that forms the core mission for both.

Of all the issues under debate today, if there is one painfully unresolved one that requires careful, critical, and compassionate attention on the one hand, and bold action on the other, the topic of human sexuality and the right to marry is it. This is a high-priority reformation concern today. Lutherans can hardly shy away from it or wish for it to go away. The necessity of becoming involved in this discussion that affects human lives on so many levels comes with the turf of being first of all Christian – Christians care – and second by being Lutheran – Lutherans protest and reform after Luther’s own model of personal involvement in action and fiery preaching on the issues that matter. Reformation in Luther’s model is more about the well-being of the people in their daily God-given lives, and realization of the liberating power of the gospel in every person’s life, rather than protecting the church’s traditional view points and hermeneutics. Luther models a way to re-read the Scriptures in a daring manner in new situations and in light of new information, and thus reshape the tradition and hermeneutics where changes are called for.

In the sixteenth-century Reformations the primary concern that set the wheels in motion was the spiritual well-being of people. The “right to marry” was on top of the list of “must issues” to tackle – right there with necessary reforms in education, welfare, and worship, small but crucial steps taken towards democracy and equality in many ways, we could say. As the Reformers saw it, the well-being of human beings was at stake with the mutilation of the gospel message, and their theological reforms prefaced and enforced societal changes in this regard. The right to marry and have children was considered an urgent gospel issue, a theologically pertinent matter to resolve. The reforms in these areas central to daily life reflected significant changes in theological foundation and scriptural hermeneutics. The same is true today: what we think and say about marriage reflect our fundamental theological outlooks on life and reveal how we read our Bibles.

Speaking from a Lutheran perspective and in light of the original motivations for the sixteenth-century Reformations, the bottom line is: if the theology we preach and teach ceases to promote the freedom and the integrity of every person’s life and no longer supports people’s lives in their varied Christian vocations, then it is time for serious institutional self-reflection and thesis nailing. We live in that kind of a moment.

While our views and policies regarding marriage could and should reflect a radically emancipatory “Lutheran liberation theology,” the opposite is often true. Listening to the arguments made back and forth about marriage, about pre- or post-marital sex, about sexual education in public schools, or about the marriage of gay and lesbian persons, it seems that Lutherans are at times in danger of slipping into a kind of medieval Catholic mindset, honoring celibacy over sexual happiness, confusing a human contract and a love affair between two individuals with the sacraments of the Catholic church, imposing the church’s authority in marriage matters in areas that belong to the jurisdiction of the state, and in general, expressing confused and ambivalent views of sexuality as inherently bad and sinful (especially so when outside marriage or heterosexual relations). In many ways and in many corners of the Lutheran world, attitudes – and education – about sexuality are plagued with taboos of all sorts.

At the same time we as a society are vulgarizing sexuality in many ways, making sexuality a vanity issue or a “common thing” stripped of privacy and sacredness. Our ambivalence toward sexuality manifests itself especially in how we teach – or fail to teach – our children, in schools and the church. It also shows in what we require from our rostered leaders: abstinence or marriage. The ELCA’s “Vision and Expectations” document in this regard has the flavor of a medieval Catholic document, and it unfortunately can be used in ways that violate our sense of integrity and rights as human beings,

and lead to lies when people are unable to meet the written or unwritten “higher” expectations. For the sake of comparison, the written and unwritten norms around the sexuality of unmarried rostered leaders in the USA – or in North American culture more generally – are not necessarily shared with other Lutheran constituencies and global communities, particularly in northern Europe and Scandinavia.

If the church continues to place an unreasonable burden on people and causes distress in their consciences by forcing people to live with lies, we will have something like a *deja vu* of the problems our Reformers addressed already centuries ago. They explicitly rejected the celibacy requirement, preached positively on sexuality and the gift of marriage, and condemned the church’s hurtful teachings that led people to live with shame in the dimension of life that was meant to be holy, enriching, and blessed by God.

*Luther on Marriage as an External, Worldly Matter*⁶

What can Luther teach us today? He wrote in 1530 in his *On Marriage Matters*:

No one can deny that marriage is an external, worldly matter, like clothing and food, house and property, subject to temporal authority, as the many imperial laws enacted on the subject prove. Neither do I find any example in the New Testament where Christ or the apostles concerned themselves with such matters, except where they touched upon consciences, as did St. Paul in I Corinthians 7 [:1-24], and especially where unbelievers or non-Christians are concerned, for it is easy to deal with these and all matters among Christians or believers. But with non-Christians, with which the world is filled, you cannot move forward or backward without the sharp edge of the temporal sword. And what use would it be if we Christians set up a lot of laws and decisions, as long as the world is not subject to us and we have no authority over it? Therefore I simply do not wish to become involved in such matters at all and beg everyone not to bother me with them ...

But since you persist so strongly in asking instruction of me, not only for yourselves and your office, but also for your rulers who desire advice from you in these matters, and ask me what I for my part would do if I were asked for advice – especially since your rulers complain that it is burdensome to their consciences to render decisions according to the spiritual or papal laws, which in such cases are unreliable and often run counter to all propriety, reason, and justice, and since

the imperial laws too are ineffective in these matters – I will not withhold my opinion from you. Yet I give it with this condition That I want to do this not as a judge, official, or regent, but by way of advice, such as I would in good conscience give as a special service to my good friends. So, if anyone wishes to follow this advice of mine, let him [her] do so on his [her] own responsibility; if he [she] does not know how to carry it out, let him [her] not seek shelter or refuge with me, or complain to me about it Let whoever is supposed to rule or wants to rule be the ruler; I want to instruct and console consciences, and advise them as much as I can.⁷

In sum, Luther addressed marriage as a “temporal realm” issue. He himself offered his advice specifically as a theologian and a pastor and a friend, with the concerns of conscience in mind. He considered this distinction important – only in this role would he get involved in discourse on an issue that belonged under the jurisdiction of the secular authority and law. He was also careful to make this point: he was offering his words on the matter because people had “dragged” him into the debates (and uttered opinions as if from his mouth and pen, which really infuriated Luther, every time it happened). For those who solicited his advice, they could have it here. For those who would ignore his first-hand arguments, they better not involve his name at all then.

It is curious that Luther wrote about marriage with significant force already before he was married himself (e.g., he preached on marriage in 1519). He was unusually knowledgeable for a bachelor, and he boldly thought outside of the box. This was mostly due to his observations in his pastoral role and in friendships, and his first-hand reading of the human stories in the Bible. He actually became the leading voice for Protestant theology on marriage, as well as a kind of “Dear Abby” or “Dr. Phil” in marriage matters in his little town of Wittenberg.⁸ He did it boldly, but with a healthy dose of holy terror as well.

“How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage!,” wrote Luther in his 1522 treatise, *The Estate of Marriage*. “I am reluctant to do it because I am afraid if I once get really involved in the subject it will make a lot of work for me and for others.” We know what he means! “But timidity is of no help in an emergency, I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly.”⁹

What was Martin Luther’s significant offering in the matter, then? In a nutshell, he proposed that marriage is a human contract and a matter of the state, and as such it serves the well-being of the polis/human community. Luther did not wish to abolish the tradition of marriage but rather to

uphold it as an essentially “good thing” that should be used, taught, and practiced with Christian integrity. He wished to purge the institution of marriage from false, onerous teachings that cast marriage and those who marry in an unwarranted negative light, and that prevented people from marrying regardless of their quite normal (i.e., created) human desires.

Most significantly, Luther argued 1) that the marriage contract and its recognition was an issue of the state, and 2) that it was a matter between two persons and – preferably – their families. Luther made it clear that the laws of the land are to be followed and that the church has no business in confusing things.

In his *Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*, Luther writes: “For this reason, because weddings and the marriage are worldly affairs, it behooves those of us who are ‘spirituals’ or ministers of the church in no way to order or direct anything regarding marriage, but instead to allow every city and land to continue their own customs that are now in use All these and similar things I leave to the prince and town council to create and arrange as they want. It is no concern of mine.”¹⁰ This is an example of how the two kingdoms doctrine plays out: the legitimacy of marriage and rules circumscribing it, the conditions for its validity, and rules about eligibility for it are affairs that the government decides (be it prince, duchess, city council, or president.) This is so because marriage is a human contract, a *coram hominibus* issue, and not a sacrament. If it was a sacrament, the church would decide. If marriage was a sacrament, Luther would not leave it up to the state or the ruler to decide about these matters.¹¹

Luther on Marriage as a Voluntary Union

In addition to declaring marriage as a contractual worldly issue, the other important point Luther made (in continuity with the Catholic church’s teaching) was to underscore the validity of marriage as a union between two people who join together with a promise to one another. That is where the marital bond is formed, between two persons willing to love and care for each other. This meant that Luther, reluctantly, accepted secret marriages and betrothals. Promises are to be honored! Ordinarily though, it is to everyone’s benefit that such promises are made in broad daylight and in the knowledge and with the approval of families, and with no force, of course.¹² This consideration was to the particular benefit of women who often lacked choices in the making of marriage contracts.

As we well know, as much as marriage is a matter between two individuals committing to one another, it is also a matter between families as

well as a public contract. Luther wrote, “marriage is a covenant of fidelity” and “the estate of marriage consists essentially in consent having been freely and previously given to another.”¹³ For the protection of the private intimate union, and for the sake of accountability, Luther considered it crucial that marriage promises be given in public and with the approval of families or guardians. The validity of the marriage rests on the laws, which are public, and by marrying in public, the couple enters the protective orbit of the common law. The marriage, being at its heart a covenant between two willing hearts, serves both the individuals and the society, in accordance with the laws set for the protection of everyone concerned.

Luther gave specific advice on the matter (based on his theology and in light of the laws of the land):

1. There should be no secret engagements; they lead to no good!¹⁴
2. If one does become engaged secretly, while being engaged to another in public, as a rule “public engagements take precedence over secret engagements.”¹⁵
3. If one has twice made a promise to marry, then of the two public engagements, the first one is valid, and a punishment should be imposed on account of the second.¹⁶
4. Once engaged, “Intercourse with another man or woman after engagement is adultery” and punishable. Thus monogamy begins from the promise to spend life together.¹⁷
5. Forced engagements are not valid; parents should be reasonable here with their children.¹⁸

What should the church’s role in these matters be? The church’s role is to pray, bless, and support people in this holy estate. It is the church’s role to teach and model to young people about marriage. The church’s role is also to offer a ritual of celebration to mark the union and to explicitly support people in their new life in this particular Christian estate. As it is today, so also in Luther’s time people wanted church ceremonies and found it meaningful to celebrate the beginning of the couple’s life together in the church and with its public blessing.

Luther wrote in the *Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*, “However, when people request of us to bless them in front of the church or in the

church, to pray over them, or even to marry them, we are obligated to do this.”¹⁹ We are obligated to do this, Luther said. That is an interesting statement – obligated why? Because that is what the church does; it walks with people. By its participation and with its rituals, the church both teaches and enforces the experience of the holy in marriage in particular, and also promises to support the couple’s holy living in their marriage.²⁰

Luther on the Holiness of Marriage and Sexuality

Marriage as a Christian estate according to Luther is serious business, and people need the church’s help and guidelines for living in that vocation honorably. Holier than the vocation of the monastics and ascetics, marriage is important not only for the society’s well-being; it entails God’s holy intent on a larger scale. Marriage provides a structured platform for holy living, and in marital love one can experience and express sacredness in a unique way. Christians are to excel and model for others this holy vocation. The starting point for this is the public mutual agreement between two persons, bound in accordance with the laws of the state.²¹

Using the Bible as his primary sourcebook, Luther taught that the marital holy union and the honorable estate is created and instituted for the benefit of both men and women. Reading the book of Genesis (particularly chapters 1-2), Luther argued that God deemed it not good for the human being to be alone, thus God created partners, made of the same flesh and bone.²² Men and women, created of the same flesh, by the same God, are commanded to love one another with the passion with which Christ loves the church, and to love their partner as they love their own bodies. Luther appreciated love, including physical love, as an essential force in human relations; he saw an explicit divine intent for human beings to love each other physically.²³

It is important to notice that Luther’s thinking about marriage does not start with sin. Marriage does not exist originally because of sin. Marriage continues regardless of sin. Post-fall, however, marriage involves sin just as is the case with other dimensions of life; the desire that was to unite lovers blissfully in paradise has now the potential to get out of whack and drag one with wrong impulses and in the wrong directions. Nevertheless, marriage is in God’s orbit.²⁴ Luther wrote, “Intercourse is not without sin; but God excuses it by his [God’s] grace because the estate of marriage is his [God’s] work, and he [God] preserves in and through the sin all that good which he [God] has implanted and blessed in marriage.” Sexuality and marriage, thus, should not be considered in any way more tainted than other dimensions in life.²⁵

More problematic is the temptation of human beings to make ill-advised decisions with their desire(s), and this makes them vulnerable. In addition, most devastating is the satanic awareness that comes to cloud human beings' sense of who they are, in themselves and in relation to others. What sin brought to human life, including intimate relations and sexual expression, was not primarily a disorderly "lust" (although that is part of the post-fall human experience as well) but the diabolically distorted awareness and sense of ugliness of what originally was created good, a diabolical false awareness that filled human beings with an ungodly shame about who they are as God's images.²⁶

The good news in the midst of the devastating alterations in post-fall human experience is this word about marriage: "...this is your comfort, that you know and believe how your estate is pleasing and blessed in God's eyes."²⁷ Also good news is this: that the fall and the sin that entered human life did not change God's original intent that people unite, love one another, and procreate. The fall did not change what was the beauty of the created design for the images of God as men and as women, as sexual beings: "And God saw all that God had made, and look, it was all very good."²⁸

This is an important point to keep in mind: in creation, everything was very good. When talking about human beings, regardless of age, sex, orientation, etc., we are talking about God's images whom God considered as Good. What would be the alternative? Surely there are not misfits or accidents in God's kingdom?

With his biblically based theological arguments, Luther continued to remind his listeners of the godly design of human beings, created in two sexes, and commanded to unite, in flesh. Luther concluded that God had seen a formal union between people as a good thing, an estate and an arrangement that God from the beginning of time desired for human beings' own good and protection. God had chosen such a union as a channel for an intimate blessing. The intimacy in such a union not only resembled divine love for human but also allowed for God to channel grace through the most intimate of human relations – the sexual relationship.²⁹

Marriage is about a particular reality and expression and experience of holiness in life, while it is not sacramental holiness or a blessing in the way baptism and the Lord's Supper convey grace. Marriage, to Luther, is in a different category as a unique channel for God's grace to support people and society *coram hominibus*. As said before, it is not the church's means of grace – only two rituals rise to that level with Luther, baptism and the supper – but God's grace can be understood to be channeled to people's lives through the holy intimacy of two people, "outside" the church and its means of grace.

Luther on Necessities with our Bodies

In marriage, even after sin, Luther saw a godly, blessed way to live out human relations, and thus sexuality. In defense of God's good creation plan and the gospel that was to liberate people to live fully in that plan again post-fall, Luther attacked the many rulings of the church and impediments that unnecessarily prevented people from marrying and thus hindered people from experiencing the God-created possibilities for men and women. When Luther talked about the right and need to marry, he made a point about all of this being in the same category with the necessity of bowel movements and eating and drinking.³⁰

Luther wrote, "It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*werck*] which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or a woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he [God] does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And whenever men [people] try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice."³¹

Luther talked about men and women and their natural desire to be with another human being in a physical way. He spoke of heterosexual unions. With our modern understanding of human nature and sexuality, we do not need to be hetero-normative; we can expand Luther's arguments to appreciate the nature of maleness and femaleness and sexuality more broadly, more inclusively based on the realities we know. We can apply Luther's arguments on 1) the natural desire in all human beings, and 2) his respect of the goodness of God's creation in every image of God, male or female, gay or straight, and 3) we can develop these arguments towards a contemporary Lutheran position that honors the natural desires and needs of gay and lesbian persons just as well as heterosexual persons, and protects their rights for love, for marriage, and for parenthood (when so desired).

Drawing from Gen 1:27, Luther reminded his listeners that God created humanity in two classes, men and women. God saw God's creation as pleasing and called the creation good. "Therefore, each one of us must have the kind of body God has created for us. I cannot make myself a woman nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power. But we are exactly as he [God] created us: I am a man and you a woman." Luther continued, "Moreover, he [God] wills to have his [God's] excellent handiwork honored as his [God's] divine creation, and not be despised. The man is not to despise or scoff at

the woman or her body, nor the woman the man. But *each should honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well-pleasing to God* himself [Godself] "Again, as it is not in your power not to be woman, so it is not your prerogative to be without a man. *For it is not a matter of free choice or decision but a natural and necessary thing.* Whatever is a man must have a woman and whatever is a woman must have a man."³²

What if we were to read these words without assuming that women always love men and vice versa, or that we are all always comfortable in our bodies and sex and gender notions, or that the only reason for our sex and sexuality is to generate babies? The words from Genesis and Luther's interpretation of them have been used to argue that only men and women can and should marry, and that they should do so mostly for the purpose of procreation. These words have been used to argue that there are clearly only men with men's bodies and women with women's bodies and that the two opposites – always, and only – are attracted to one another.

We know better than Luther in this regard. It is not so simple to define who is a woman and who is a man and what is meant by these concepts. Today we know that the physical features we are born with are really only one dimension of what constitutes our gender and sexuality. We know that we have ways to "adjust" our bodily existence to better match our identity. We know we cannot change natural forces of love and attraction. What comes to us naturally, comes to us naturally and inevitably, in terms of whom we love and how we experience ourselves as men and as women. We "know" certain things naturally, we feel on the basis of who we are. We can be attracted to the opposite sex, or we can be attracted to the same sex, and this is how it is from birth, in a most natural way.

Today we know too much to just keep holding on to the old assumptions of what Christian theology says about human sexuality and marriage. We can be Luthers of our day and dare to reinterpret our central concepts and experiences, such as maleness and femaleness, sexuality and sexual/gendered realities. Luther advanced his times' conceptions of these things; in his footsteps, so can we.

Once we acknowledge Luther's good efforts, and as long as we understand the words "man" and "woman," "maleness" and "femaleness" with fluidity and breathing room, we can in many ways appreciate the essentials of Luther's teaching on the beauty of gendered human experience and of the godliness and goodness of marriage, an institution resting on God's good intent, for the benefit of God's images, male and female, in heterosexual or homosexual relations – for those willing and suitable for the estate.

Luther's views are helpful already in terms of how to approach the topic, as well as what gravity to give to it in our most precious task: the

education of children. Luther was very clear on this. Because of the holiness aspect of marriage, on the one hand, and because it is an honorable estate with legal binding, on the other, people need to approach it with proper respect, earnestness, and right intent. For these same reasons, young people need to be educated on the meaning and proper respect of marriage. Luther wrote, "we honor this godly estate of marriage and bless it, pray for it, and adorn it in an even more glorious manner. For, although it is a worldly estate, nevertheless it has God's Word on its side and is not a human invention or institution, like the estate of monks and nuns. Therefore it should easily be reckoned a hundred times more spiritual than the monastic estate We must also do this in order that the young people may learn to take this estate seriously, to hold it in high esteem as a divine work and command."³³

We can appreciate with Luther what an important task we have in educating our children on these matters and in instilling in them faith in the tradition. For example, in his *Estate of Marriage* (1522), Luther gave advice on how to encourage young people to overlook the many mundane rational reasons to wait for marriage, and just go for it, trusting in God who provides.³⁴

Luther on the Right to Marry and Natural Necessities that Please God

In the *Estate of Marriage* (1522), Luther addressed the question that is very much on the table today: who has the right to marry, "which persons may enter into marriage with one another"? A second, related point that Luther addressed is the biblically founded incentive to "Be fruitful and multiply." The question for us is, what do we mean by "being fruitful and multiplying," does it refer to biological parenthood only, and does that define marriage?

We look at Luther's words (quoted above) again, and intentionally without the preconception that they refer only to heterosexual persons and relations: "It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [werck] which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to a man or a woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he [God] does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And whenever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way

through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice.”³⁵ Natural disposition, innate, as created by God – these are powerful, important words to consider. If we take these words to heart, and consider them applying to persons who are gays and lesbians just as well as to heterosexual persons, we can make progress in preparing a way for all persons who so wish to enjoy the blessings of marriage and parenthood.

The concepts of nature and the natural are complicated and come with baggage. The confusion about these terms shows in debates on whether gay and lesbian persons should have the right to marry and be parents, since they cannot procreate the ‘old fashioned’ and ‘natural’ ways. One could read Luther’s words to suggest that God created men and women only and exclusively for the purpose of multiplying, that therein lies the worth and purpose in this life as men and women; that marriage is only for men and women; or that only marriages that produce children are valid and blessed; or that sexuality is to be geared only for the purpose of producing children (meaning, no sex for fun, even in marriage); or that women’s worth is only in becoming mothers, biologically speaking, and within marriage, etc.

Where to start to say, “No, that’s not it”? Take the idea of procreation as being definitive for marriage. If we want to go that route, we should also take to heart Luther’s idea that in Paradise women gave birth to a litter at once – and repeatedly! That was his sixteenth-century male perspective of an ideal situation – hardly appealing to any woman in any era. In addition, as we know for a fact, many marriages are enjoyed without children, and persons can live perfectly happy lives “single.” And if we continue down this same road, no self-respecting woman would consider her primary purpose for existence to be in the role of “lust control” for men, even though Luther “sorrowed” for women for having to deal with this disorderly lust and the failed attempts to control it.³⁶

We do not need to like some of these statements from Luther, while we can appreciate his effort and interest. Here are some ideas on how we can make sense of things with Luther, and with the Genesis texts. 1) We understand marriage as a bond between two persons, out of which children may or may not result, and as an estate well suited for men and women to have off-spring if they so wish and are able – whether from conception or in parenthood through adoption, surrogacy, or foster parenting. Luther – a biological and a foster father himself – had no idea how many options we would have with parenting and procreation, no idea at all. In addition, with Luther and especially the Reformation mothers, we can think of parenthood beyond biology by reckoning with “family” as a much larger category. For example, Katharina Schütz Zell talked about the office of a “church mother,” a calling for those caring for the commonwealth and for their

neighbors. As a Christian estate, parenting is a broad category and involves all citizens.

2) We can understand Luther’s powerful words about the necessity of marital copulation and baby-making as his way of addressing the innate sexual drive and nesting instincts he observed in human beings; already before his own marriage he was looking for constructive ways to handle it. He talked about this yearning and necessity as something that God made and that we cannot undo even if we tried. He actually worried that there is physical harm as a result of the sex-drive not being fulfilled. He had the opinion of his time’s physicians to attest to this: use it or get foul!³⁷ We can attest that while not all of us have a burning desire and necessity to have children, we all know what sexual desire is about and appreciate Luther’s concern. We can swear by Luther’s main insights that we are born with our sexuality and sexual desires and need to love and be loved (such was his main argument against the medieval church’s celibacy rules). Unlike Luther, however, we can imagine the application of sexuality outside the marriage contract. Unlike Luther, we can imagine marriage and sexual intimacy between both heterosexual and homosexual persons; and not just imagine, we celebrate that reality.

3) We take Luther’s words on “men” and “women” with some grains of salt, when reading his interpretation of Genesis and words about marriage and gender. He considered human beings to have two sets of gender-specific gear that divides people in different “classes,” as he says, but we know that sexual and gendered experiences are much more complex than the “two or three classes” Luther imagines.

Related to these kinds of questions, in his *Estate of Marriage* Luther made a point about eunuchs, with an attempt to imagine a “third category” for human beings. He recognized three kinds of eunuchs: those who have been so from birth, those made so by others, and those who have made themselves so. Luther excused only these people from the expectation to multiply. “Apart from these groups, let no man presume to be without a spouse.”³⁸ He suggested that only eunuchs, castrated persons, can honestly live without sex. For the rest of the folks, sexless life is not an option, and even dreaming of such life is fooling oneself and leading into trouble and sins. These sins involve the church, in Luther’s wise opinion, as the culprit of setting impossible standards with which people are prone to fail.

We cannot underscore enough what a huge discovery sexuality was for Luther, the one-time monk, and then a father of six and a happy spouse of Katharina. Once tasting the apple, he did not see it reasonable at all to expect sexless life from people – other than eunuchs and those with a spe-

cial gift from God for God's purposes. Luther considered as a special group those people who "are equipped for marriage by nature and physical capacity and nevertheless voluntarily remain celibate." "Such persons are rare, not one in a thousand for they are a special miracle of God. No one should venture on such a life unless he [she] be especially called by God" (Jer 16:2).³⁹

From the beginning with his initial dismissal of celibacy, Luther's advice on sexual matters was radical and fresh in many ways: for one, as he recognized the needs for sexual intimacy, he made an explicit point of recognizing women's needs and rights in this area. He was crystal-clear about the spouses' mutual responsibility to meet the sexual needs of one another, and he showed incredible flexibility in imagining alternate scenarios when people struggled. Quite radically, for example, Luther could advise the husband to come to reasonable arrangements to make sure this aspect of marriage was fulfilled for his wife, with him or with someone else; the same was true for both spouses.⁴⁰ While he was considering only heterosexual relations, we can expand his reasoning to include gay and lesbian and transgendered persons in our creative solutions.

The bottom line we gather with Luther is that people are created out of love and for love and with the capacity to love, and that physical love is a crucially important dimension of an individual's life. To try to hinder, ignore, or suppress that created desire – without a special gift from God – would be devilish. It is the devil, Luther claimed, who creates spider webs out of human commands and vows that confuse people and make them try to abstain and live unmarried, when it is against their nature and God's desire for their happiness. Not to consider marriage as God-ordained and pleasing to God is to fall into the devil's lies and into various sins.⁴¹

Who, then, gets to marry? Here is an area where we can really learn from Luther's progressive vision and his way of adjusting hermeneutics in a new situation. On the basis of his Reformation insights and Reformation theology, Luther severely criticized the Catholic church and its regulations in these matters, considering marriage to be the right of everyone. One by one, he demolished the so-called impediments, showing their "silliness."

The impediments for marriage that Luther criticized were many: Reasons of consanguinity or affinity through marriage, legal kinship, or spiritual relationship – all these reasons Luther deemed foolishness. The same with other kind of impediments, such as unbelief, crime, episcopal prohibition, defective eyesight and hearing, limited mental capacities, etc. Luther's basic over-arching point was that it is important to marry, God wants us marry, thus the church should not stand in your way, so go ahead and take as your spouse whomever you wish, even a Turk, or a Jew, or a heretic (these are

major compromises from Luther who condemned both the Jews and the Turks for ungodliness and thus damned).⁴²

Most intriguingly, Luther demolished all kinds of impediments, even unbelief. His radical answer to a question that still has legs in our days, "May I marry a Turk?," was a firm "Yes!" He explained an important point: "Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, speak to, and deal with a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the precepts of those fools who forbid it."⁴³

While emphasizing the freedom to marry, Luther underscored that nobody should be coerced into marriage – neither by parents nor by the government. "That is to be sure no marriage in the sight of God."⁴⁴ Marriage is a union that must be voluntary. Without the will and "I do," there is no marriage. This is one of Luther's most basic arguments, as well as the central part of the wedding ritual he outlined in his *Marriage Booklet*. A choice and freedom are essential in establishing a marital union. This is one of the few areas in life where Luther underscored the factor of choice. It is also noteworthy that the choice would not work that well the other way around. Luther cherished the freedom to marry and to choose whom to marry, while he denied human beings' "own" freedom to stay celibate, that is, to abstain from sexual relations. With this conviction Luther ridiculed the futile vows of celibacy: "If you would like to take a wise vow, then vow not to bite off your own nose; you can keep that vow."⁴⁵

The one impediment for marriage Luther considered with extra care had to do with sexuality. If people are unfit for marital relations, they should not marry. Luther says explicitly that if a wife or a husband is unfit for marriage – meaning sex – they could divorce, or not get married in the first place. The inability to fulfill the natural sexual needs of one's spouse would be grounds for a divorce. Here again we have proof of how important Luther deemed sexual life and happiness.⁴⁶

Sins and crimes, on the other hand, should not be an impediment as sins and crimes do not change the person's natural being in this regard. Marriage should not be regarded as something only perfect, that is, non-sinning, persons would qualify for. Nor should church regulations put obstacles in people's way in this regard.⁴⁷ For example, regulations regarding times and episcopal prohibitions were, in Luther's opinion, plain rotten business: "It is a dirty rotten business that a bishop should forbid me a wife or specify the times when I marry, or that a blind and dumb person should not be allowed to enter into wedlock."⁴⁸ Marriage belongs to all, and the church should

teach it and support those who marry, with full gusto, with gospel ammunition, and with common sense. This was Luther's solemn argument.

Concluding Thoughts

We see what Luther did with the impediments invented by the church. We see how he broke traditions, with a new reading of his Scripture, enlightened by his time's understanding of human life, and by his own experiences and observations of life.⁴⁹ His passion to preach the gospel of liberation and his trust in God's tangible grace in human life guided his re-visioning of the "holy while worldly" institution of marriage and human sexuality, with the best of intents.

We end with Luther's precious words on children. As a father himself, and even before, he saw children as a gift from God, "an eternal treasure" from God. He could not imagine the world without children who were the embodiment of God's grace. Similarly, he understood the well-being of the world to depend on the care of the children and their souls.⁵⁰ Any attempts to erect obstacles for parenthood, this most important responsibility and a gift with a theological bearing, was against Luther's gut-knowledge and biblical knowledge. It would be diabolical to prevent people from entering the calling of parenthood he deemed as most holy and most difficult and a central piece in God's design for human life on this earth.

Luther had an uncanny appreciation of the fundamental experiences parenthood brings about, and he was revolutionary in how he both saw a theological meaning in parental experiences and drew important theological insights from the parental realities for his imagination of God and God's love, sin and grace, and salvation. With Luther, we can argue, and forcefully so, that excluding people from this gift and responsibility and foundational life experience because of their sexual orientation is not theologically warranted. Regardless of how we consider the ultimate reason for marriage, or whether we personally want or can have children, we get Luther's point: we cannot afford nor do we have the rights to exclude any people so willing from this holy calling and responsibility. Rather we do well to support one another in that holy task, in our personal lives, in our societal ways, and in the church.⁵¹

Luther gives us much food for thought and building blocks for arguments to not only support but promote the right to marry and the right for parenthood for all people who so desire. Luther gives us many fruitful arguments to continue to consider marriage as a gift, as a choice, and as an institution worth having faith in. Remembering Luther and the sixteenth-century Reformation stirs us to think again about our church's role in

marriage matters in the first place, and secondly, about the ways the church can support every person who wishes to enter that estate, which is noble, serious, and pleasing to God – Luther's words – while extremely complex.

Notes

- 1 Luther citations are from the critical edition of his works: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906-61); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21). These are abbreviated as WA, WA DB, WA Br, and WA TR. English translations are from *Luther's Works, American Edition*, 55 vols. plus 20 vols in the New Edition (Philadelphia/St. Louis, 1955-). Abbreviated as LW.
- 2 *Vom Ehelichen Leben // The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:38; WA 10/2:294,30.
- 3 LW 45:39, 42; WA 10/2:295,7-298,9.
- 4 The reflections here are my own, designed as an introduction to the main part of the presentation, our conversation with Luther. A substantial amount of outstanding literature is available on the matters of human sexuality, as well as Reformation history and theology, but due to space limitations and in order to preserve the focus, these references are omitted.
- 5 Soon after his installation Pope Francis made a comment about sexuality matters dominating public conversation while more important issues were being ignored, namely solidarity with the poor and the alleviation of human suffering caused by poverty and related tragedies. While the Pope's point is well taken, until there is equality for people in their sexual orientations as men and women, in their most fundamental way of being, the urgency to address sexuality matters continues, and one could actually hope for an amplification of the discussion until the desired results are achieved.
- 6 This presentation focuses solely on Luther's works, apart from explicit conversation with secondary sources on the topic, the rationale being to build an argument with Luther's own words concerning the specific questions at stake.

The primary sources are: *Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand // Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519), LW 44:(3)7-14; WA 2:(162) 166-171. *Vom Ehelichen Leben // The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:(13) 17-49; WA 10/2:275-304. *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae // On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:92-106 (= pp on marriage); WA 6:550,21-553,21. *Ein Traubüchlein für die einfältigen Pfarrherr // A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors* (1529), with Small Catechism, in *The Book of Concord* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000) 367-371; LW 53:110-115; WA 30/3:74-80. *Von den Ehesachen // On Marriage Matters* (1530), LW 46:(261) 265-320; WA 30/3:205-248. *De votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium // Judgment on Monastic Vows* (1521), LW 44:(243) 251-400; WA 8:(564) 573-669.

For treatments on the topic in English, from different angles, see: Christopher Boyd Brown, "The Reformation of Marriage in Lutheran Wedding-Preaching," *Seminary Ridge Review* 15/2 (2013) 1-25; Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," in *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Timothy Wengert, ed.;

- Lutheran Quarterly Books; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 169-189; John Witte, Jr., "The Mother of all Earthly Laws: The Lutheran Reformation of Marriage," *Seminary Ridge Review* 15/2 (2013) 26-43; John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1997).
- 7 LW 46:265-267; WA 30/3:205,12-32 (printed in Wittenberg in 1530, then again in 1541, and twice more). Luther then concludes his introduction: "Well then, let us in God's name get down to the business at hand and summarize these opinions and this advice of mine in several articles and points, so that they may be understood and retained that much the better." (LW 46:267; WA 30/3:206,35-37).
 - 8 See LW 46:(261) 265-320; WA 30/3: 205-248.
 - 9 LW 45:17; WA 10/2:275,2-4,8-9.
 - 10 *Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*, in *The Book of Concord*, 367-368.
 - 11 Luther explains that the Catholic view of marriage as a sacrament derives from confusion in understanding the word *mysterion* in the New Testament epistles (e.g., Eph 5:31-32; 1 Cor 4:1) as always meaning *sacramentum*. See his arguments in *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae // On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:92-106, esp 92-96; WA 6:550,21-553,21. The definition of sacraments and their proper use being one of the main reforms Luther preached, the re-definition of marriage was among the priority issues.
 - 12 LW 44:7-14; WA 2:(162) 166-171. Luther offers that parents should make it explicit to their children that they do wish to advise their offspring, and also, "My advice is that parents persuade their children not to be ashamed to ask their parents to find a marriage partner for them." (LW 44:11; WA 2:169,20-24).
 - 13 LW 44:10-11; WA 2:168,38; 169,11-13.
 - 14 LW 46:267, 268-280; WA 30/3:207,1-2 (30/3:207,15-217,32).
 - 15 LW 46:267, 281-289; WA 30/3:207,3-4 (30/3:217,33-224,6).
 - 16 LW 46:267, 289-297; WA 30/3:207,5-7 (30/3:224,7-230,15).
 - 17 LW 46:267, 297-304; WA 30/3:207,8-10 (30/3:230,16-236,6).
 - 18 LW 46:268, 303-310; WA 30/3:207:12-13 (30/3:236:7-240,9).
 - 19 *Marriage Booklet*, in *The Book of Concord*, 368,2-4.
 - 20 Considering Lutheran marriage traditions today: The church's role has little if anything to do with the validity of the marital union in the eyes of the law, unless an arrangement is in place with the state that gives that authority to the clergy/church on behalf of the state. In some contexts the clergy serves as the official whose "officiating" and signature actually does make the marriage legal; but the church functions in that capacity only as far as the state authorizes it. This has been the case, e.g., in Finland. In some other contexts, e.g., in Germany, couples visit the town hall or an equivalent for the binding of the union first, followed by a church ceremony.
 - 21 Luther considers marriage as fundamentally God's doing, something God instituted, since God "brought husband and wife together, and ordained that they should beget children and care for them." For this reason, it is notable, Luther interprets from Gen 1:28 that "The estate of marriage and everything that goes with it in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God." (LW 45:38; WA 10/2:294,27-30).
 - 22 LW 44:7-8; WA 2:166,15-26. LW 45:17-19; WA 10/2:275,11-277,10.
 - 23 See Luther's reflection on different forms of love: false love (that seeks for money and possession), natural love (parental), and married love (bride's love): "She says, 'It is you I want, not what is yours: I want neither your silver nor your gold; I want neither. I want only you. I want you in your entirety, or not at all.'" (LW 44:9; WA 2:166,29-30, cf WA 2:177,22-168,9).
 - 24 E.g., LW 44:7-8; WA 2:166,15-168,12.
 - 25 LW 45:49; WA 10/2:304,9-12.
 - 26 Luther explains this, e.g., when interpreting Genesis 3 and Adam and Eve's reactions post-fall: Adam and Eve became ashamed of their nudity – their created beautiful state – and their most glorious organs, and made girdles for themselves. They wished to hide from God and their mutual relationship became tainted with shame, and an ongoing struggle for power ensued. Luther grieves over this calamity when interpreting Gen 3:7: "Therefore this is an excellent description of the corruption which has taken the place of original righteousness and glory. It was glory for man not to realize that he was naked. Moreover, what can be a greater depravity than that the nakedness which formerly was a glory is now turned into the greatest disgrace? No one blushes because of healthy and sound eyes. Distorted or weak eyes are regarded as less becoming and bring on shame. So in the state of innocence it was most honorable to go about naked. Now, after sin, when Adam and Eve see that they are naked, they are made ashamed, and they look for girdles with which to cover their disgrace." (LW 1:165-166; WA 42:124). "Out of this corruption which followed because of sin there followed another evil. Adam and Eve not only were ashamed because of their nakedness, which previously was most honorable and the unique adornment of man, but they also made girdles for themselves for the purpose of covering, as though it were something most shameful, that part of the body which by its nature was most honorable and noble. What in all nature is nobler than the work of procreation? This work was assigned by God neither to the eyes nor to the mouth, which we regard as the more honorable parts of the body, but to that part which sin has taught us to call the pudendum and to cover, lest it be seen." (LW 1:167-168; WA 42:126).
 - 27 *Marriage Booklet*, in *The Book of Concord*, 371,15-16.
 - 28 Ibid. Also, with Gen 1:27 Luther writes: "So God created man ... male and female ... divided mankind into two classes, namely, male and female, or a he and a she. This was so pleasing to him [God] that he himself [God] called it a good creation [Gen 1:31]." (LW 45:17; WA 10/2:275,18).
 - 29 LW 44:7-8; WA 2:166,15-168,12. Also, LW 45:17-18; WA 10/2:275,11-276,31. The other area where people come as close to the experience of divine love is childbirth and parenthood, per Luther's observation.
 - 30 LW 45:17; WA 10/2:275,11-276,31.
 - 31 LW 45:18; WA 10/2:276,21-31.
 - 32 LW 45:17-18; WA 10/2:276,1-5; also WA 10/2:275,18-276,8. Italics mine.
 - 33 *Marriage Booklet*, *The Book of Concord*, 368,3-4.
 - 34 See LW 45(13) 17-49; WA 10/2:275-304. Luther advised boys to marry at 20, girls at 15-18, and not worry if they had enough funds to have children. "Let God worry about how they and their children are to be fed. God makes children; he [God] will surely also feed them." (LW 45:48; WA 10/2:304,2-5).
 - 35 LW 45:18; WA 10/2:276,21-31.
 - 36 For Luther's discussion on the effects of the fall on sex, gender, and gender relations, see his interpretation of Genesis 3, e.g., LW 1:163-169; WA 42:122-127.
 - 37 "It is certainly a fact that he who refuses to marry must fall into immorality." (LW 45:45; WA 10/2:300,23-24). This is so in light of what and why God created. Luther argues, referring to the physicians' observations: "If this natural function is forcibly

- restrained it necessarily strikes into the flesh and blood and becomes a poison, whence the body becomes unhealthy, enervated, sweaty and foul-smelling. That which should have issued in fruitfulness and propagation has to be absorbed within the body itself. Unless there is terrific hunger or immense labor or the supreme grace, the body cannot take it; it necessarily become unhealthy and sickly. Hence, we see how weak and sickly barren women are.” (LW 45:46-47; WA 10/2:301,5-12).
- 38 LW 45:18; WA 10/2:277,5. In the same context Luther talks about men who seek women’s company “and are quite effeminate.” (WA 10/2:279,10). He wrongly assumes that these men surround themselves with women because of their desire for them. Regarding eunuchs, see LW 45:19-22; WA 10/2:277,1-278,9; 279,7-14.
- 39 LW 45:45; WA 10/2:279,19-21.
- 40 Luther advised husbands unable to fulfill their conjugal duties towards their wives to let them have another arrangement to take care of this issue. He wrote, “if a woman who is fit for marriage has a husband who is not, and she is unable openly to take unto herself another ... she should say to her husband, ‘Look, my dear husband, you are unable to fulfill your conjugal duty toward me, you have cheated me out of my maidenhood and even imperiled my honor and my soul’s salvation; in the sight of God there is no real marriage between us Grant me the privilege of contracting a secret marriage with your brother or closest relative, and you retain the title of husband so that your property will not fall to strangers. Consent to being betrayed voluntarily by me, as you have betrayed me without my consent.” (LW 45:20; WA 10/2:278,19-28). Luther went as far as to declare that if the husband refuses this arrangement and that way fails to honor his conjugal duty, the wife should flee to another country and marry again. This advice Luther had given already when still timid; now he was standing on a firmer ground and wished to offer “sounder advice in the matter, and take a firmer grip on a man who thus makes a fool of his wife.” (LW 45:20-21; WA 10/2:278,29-31; cf WA 10/2:278,32-279,2).
- 41 “This is why the devil has contrived to have so much shouted and written in the world against the institution of marriage, to frighten men away from this godly life and entangle them in a web of fornication and secret sins” (LW 45:37; WA 10/2:294,8-11). The devils’ lies about marriage are in striking contrast to God’s word about marriage: God says that God is pleased with marriage, and God does not lie. (LW 45:38, 42; WA 10/2:294,29-30; 298,9-18). “And whenever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice.” (LW 45:18; WA 10/2:276,29-31).
- 42 LW 45:25; WA 10/2:283,1-7. On the various impediments dictated by the medieval Catholic church, see LW 45:22-30; WA 10/2:280,16-287,11. Impediments he attacked are: blood relationship, affinity through marriage, spiritual relationship, legal kinship, unbelief, crime, public decorum/respectability, solemn vows/monastic, error, servitude, holy orders, coercion, betrothal, episcopal prohibition, restricted times, defective eyesight or hearing, and spouse unfit for marriage and for conjugal duties – the last one constituting grounds for divorce. (LW 36:96-103; WA 6:553,22-558,7).
- 43 LW 45:25; WA 10/2:283,8-12.
- 44 LW 45:28; WA 10/2:285,19.
- 45 LW 45:27; WA 10/2:284,22-23.
- 46 LW 45:33-35; WA 10/2:290,5-292,5; on grounds for divorce, LW 45:30-35; WA 10/2:287,13-292,6. Also, *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae // On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:103-106; WA 6:558,8-560,18.
- 47 According to Luther, sex is good for any day for any condition. If one tries to regulate sexual activity with inane rules that lead to abstinence, which is impossible without God’s special help anyway, such foolishness can lead to fornication and other transgressions as people look for ways to release their sexual energy; abstinence can also make one sick. (LW 45:45-46; WA 10/2:301,5-15).
- 48 LW 45:30; WA 10/2:287,3-11.
- 49 “I base my remarks on Scripture, which to me is surer than all experience and cannot lie to me. He who finds still other good things in marriage profits all the more, and should give thanks to God. Whatever God calls good must of necessity always be good, unless men do not recognize it or perversely misuse it.” (LW 45:43; WA 10/2:299,10).
- 50 “God makes children.” “Got macht kinder.” (LW 45:48; WA 10/2:304,2). Quoting St. Cyprian, Luther wrote, “One should kiss the newborn infant, even before it is baptized, in honor of the hands of God here engaged in a brand new deed.” (LW 45:41; WA 10/2:297,5-7). In his criticism of monastic vows and in illustrating holiness in marriage and parenthood, Luther made a radical argument that tells of his respect for parenthood and also of the godliness of children: “Therefore, I say that all nuns and monks who lack faith, and who trust in their own chastity and in their order, are not worthy of rocking a baptized child or preparing its pap, even if it were the child of a harlot. This is because their order and manner of life has no word of God as its warrant. They cannot boast that what they do is pleasing in God’s sight, as can the woman in childbirth, even if her child is born out of wedlock.” (LW 45:41; WA 10/2:297,10-15).
- 51 E.g., Luther wrote, “A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works.” (LW 45:40; WA 10/2:296,12-15). “Likewise, when a father washes diapers, he may be ridiculed by some as an effeminate fool, but “God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling – not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.” (LW 45:40; WA 10/2:296,30-297,1; see also LW 44:12-14; WA 2:169,38-170,7 on the theological and spiritual importance of good parenting: for the eternal benefit of the parents themselves, for the good of society, and as a divine service for the child as a gift from God).

Kirsi Stjerna is Professor of Reformation Church History and Director of the Institute for Luther Studies at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and Docent/Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Theology at University of Helsinki. Her degrees are from University of Helsinki and Boston University. In anticipation of the 2017 Luther anniversary, Stjerna serves as one of the general editors for the forthcoming Essential Luther (6 volumes, Fortress Press).

BOOK REVIEWS

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder

Richard Louv (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books; updated and expanded edition, 2008)

Reviewed by Maria Erling

Important developments in the Seminary's life, particularly our new landscape initiatives that have accompanied our museum, have brought me again to the argument made in this book by Richard Louv about nature and childhood. He argues that the alienation that has occurred between American children and the outdoor world is a kind of broken relationship that does physical and spiritual damage to children. While we easily recognize our duty to teach visitors about our history – the important role that our seminary community played during the Civil War – we today must address another kind of war: our ongoing disordered relationship with the outdoors. And here on the ridge, we have been given this additional opportunity because the sculpting of the landscape, and the requirements to keep all our run-off on our own property, has created paths, pools, and swales of natural grasses and plantings that give us the chance also to bring visitors into an outdoor environment when they visit. Perhaps the Seminary has been given a call to help the church also to reconsider our relationship with the natural world.

When *Last Child in the Woods* came out in 2005, I still had teenagers at home, and this book made me look at the way our school schedule, and especially our fascination with sports, has affected the way we treat and teach our children. Childhood today is a very closely monitored phase of life, with very little room for error or experiment. Lessons, practices, workouts, and playdates keep children tightly programmed. Richard Louv tells stories about childhood memories from other generations that make us recognize the dramatic changes that affect childhood encounters especially

with the natural world. Most adults can remember long stretches of time, unscripted and without any adult supervision when they were outside, having obeyed the command: go outside and play. And being outside did not mean a play date under the supervision of an adult. For me it meant hanging out in the state mental hospital's pasture abutting our home, where a herd of cattle grazed among the old prairie rocks. It was a dairy herd, with only a couple of bulls. Or, my friends and I would wander down to the river bank, or climb trees, looking for vines to swing on. We found rattle snakes, garden snakes, groundhogs, and prairie dogs. I can recall the smell of river silt, dry grass, bitter bark, and the several stages of drying cow pies. We have extraordinary wonders around us, still, but children scarcely get the opportunity to explore these secrets. Louv says parents have succumbed to many fears, rarely letting children have time to themselves outside. And he cites important studies that show how natural surroundings improve the mental and physical health of children, helping them to focus, and eliciting a different kind of play.

Readers might also want to know why this review is appearing in the Seminary's journal, and how it relates to congregational ministry. On a recent trip to Minnesota, where I am able to visit my home congregation, I saw that the book group was discussing Louv's book. I decided to use the chance I have this spring during a Lenten series at my own congregation here in Gettysburg to talk about these themes with some of the families. I'll tie it into an art project that I've been experimenting with also for the past few years, collecting natural elements and bringing them indoors, where they provide imaginative springs for stories and intimate encounters. I've included the website that this author has created, because readers of this review will want to examine these claims I am making and think about the way that our experience of nature affects our spiritual lives and ministry. Please let me know what you think, and I'll report on how that experiment turns out in another issue of the journal. Louv has another book, *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age*, by the same publisher (2012). I'm ordering it to read how Louv is addressing newer movements in relation to food, health, and the lives of our overly wired generation of workers. Our experience of diminished attendance at our Sunday services cries out for some fresh thinking about how we are engaging in meaningful exchanges with members in our congregations, and the wider communities we serve."

I have always felt fortunate that the Seminary is surrounded by a natural habitat, and that I have the time and energy to explore the outdoor world. But I have used this gift as an indulgence, and have not taken on the responsibility to teach also about how we can become better observers of

ourselves and our opportunities, and more grateful practitioners of wonder, by going outside to play.

If the church also has a nature-deficit disorder, it may be affecting our ministry. A skewed relationship with time and the environment is doing damage to our ability to experience wonder, and to experience the release and joy of creation, and God's care for each and every one of us. Our ability to hear the gospel is affected by this inability to focus on God's gifts. Our over-scheduled, over-scripted, over-regulated ways of perceiving our place and calling as ministers, can get in the way of our ability to carry God's message of forgiveness and reconciliation to the world.

Visit <http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/>.

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The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society

Brad S. Gregory (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012)

Reviewed by Kirsi Stjerna

Of the reformation related books of recent history, Brad Gregory's is the most controversial and talked about. Even people who have not actually read it "yet" but have heard about it, recognize the importance of the daring book with an ambitious embrace. Yet the jury is still out, on several accounts, e.g., on the validity of some of the sweeping arguments offered in the book, or on the sustainability of the amalgamation of methods the author employs.

In a nutshell, Gregory blames Protestants for the loss of absolute truth claims. Or rather, he names in Protestant faith-based theologies the forces that led to the (apparent) demolishing of central truth principles, with a plethora of moral implications. At the same time he exposes Protestants for operating with "myriad truth claims," without necessarily admitting so. (13) With this premise, Gregory critiques the Protestant reformation's legacy from several fronts in six provocatively titled chapters: "1. Excluding God"; "2 Relativizing Doctrines"; "3 Controlling the Churches"; "4 Subjectivizing Morality"; "5 Manufacturing the Good Life"; and "6 Secularizing Knowledge." Arguing that "Reformation's influence on the eventual secularization of society was complex, largely indirect, far from immediate, and profoundly unintended," (365) Gregory diagnoses a need for a new reformation, this time "intended."

The author knows his subject. Professor of Early Modern European History at the University of Notre Dame, Brad S. Gregory is a first-rate historian with also two degrees in philosophy from Europe. "The Unintended Reformation" is a fruition of his research focus on the effects of the Reformations in the secularization of the West and exploration of the methodology in the study of religion. In his work Gregory breaks many of the unspoken rules about the method of writing about the reformation.

Using "a genealogical approach" Gregory sets out to "illuminate aspects of the reformation that continue to influence the present..." (6) He refuses to limit his discussion with the 16th century materials only or stay in the

special corner set for historians by theologians and social analysts. He defends philosophically and ethically his strategy – or responsibility – "to venture outside 'my field' as conventionally defined." (2) The material he engages gives a plenty of reasons for that: "What transpired five centuries ago [the Reformations] continues today profoundly to influence the lives of everyone not only in Europe and North America but all around the world, whether or not they are Christians or indeed religious believers of any kind." (1) He concludes, "if key aspects of the distant past remain importantly influential today, then archival research limited to late medieval or early modern sources obviously will not disclose them." (3)

Gregory is challenging historians and historical theologians to get out of their comfort zones and enter contemporary conversations on public issues and in the culture and to contribute with their expertise. He assumes, and wishes to demonstrate, the importance of the study of history for constructive theological work today, and even more, for the (this time) "intended reformation" of the foundations of the Western world and its regrettably secularized culture. This argument alone makes this book worth its praise. Given the current trends in academia, a convincing argument for the central value of historical research is most welcome.

Nimbly and ambitiously, Gregory incorporates a variety of perspectives: historical, theological, philosophical and ethical, and even metaphysical. The book offers no safe chronological constructions and but a meta-study that is unsettling and disorienting. Moving between the Middle Ages and this day, and tackling chunks of historical information, Gregory breaks free from the straight-jacket of historian's supposed neutrality to offer his acute observations and judgments on the current mores and culture in the Western world, in North America, to be specific. Gregory writes out of deep concern for religion and religious values – which is a welcome voice in today's climate.

A Catholic historian, Gregory is eager to pinpoint the protestant reformations as the culprit for many ills plaguing a secularized and, in his view, increasingly liberal society today. "I am concerned about the blithe and incoherent denial of the category of truth in the domains of human morality" (18) and "[D]enials of truth and of nonsubjective moral norms in the name of toleration and diversity are self-defeating and self-contradictory" (20) he writes. A reformation historian, he believes that we can diagnose the situation in the Western world today, be it politics or economics or cultural forces, by uncovering the roots in the 16th century reformations. Just as he traces an unintended process of secularization and loss of spiritual and ethical values from the fragmentation of the previously thoroughly Chris-

tian culture as a result of the 16th century reforms, he also points to liberal voices and democratic agendas in North America today as major factors in the continuing marginalization of religion. Without a value judgment, Gregory's political and theological viewpoints could be characterized as conservative, whereas in his historical scholarship the opposite is the case.

Gregory's perhaps most important theological observation pertains to the most sacred of reformation theologies – the doctrine of justification of faith and its implications. In Gregory's view, Protestant theologies' emphasis on "faith alone" happened at the expense of "charitas" and theology of love, which contributed to the deep freeze spiritually speaking. It is in this area where Gregory's arguments become vulnerable: it appears that his sources on the reformation theology do not benefit from a broader selection of international voices that would challenge this conclusion.

Namely, current scholarship on reformation theology increasingly recognizes the reformation of spirituality at the heart of the 16th century reforms. It was specifically a new reformed spiritual theology that led Protestants to critique their own Catholic church and to call under scrutiny its leadership (including the bishops and even the pope) and distortions with money and power. For the 16th reformers, the church's very failure with the spiritual concerns necessitated the difficult reforms that ended up dovetailing a manifold process towards secularization. It is true that the secular authorities came to play an indispensable role in implementing (or not) the reforms outlined in protestant reformers' church orders. It is also true that the protestant reforms with their renewed spiritual theology significantly shifted power structures in the church and society and that reformation theologies laid seeds for the principles on which modern societies depend on: equality, democracy and freedom. Beyond the North American context, we have evidence of the lasting transformative power of protestant theologies in "secularized" countries where "liberal" governments have successfully built on the principles of democracy, equality and freedom, with deep roots in the Reformation's new spiritual theologies (e.g. Finland). These comments are made simply to illuminate the complexity of the concepts "spirituality" and "secular" and of the difficulty in relating the stories in US and European soil. European perspectives on things are often quite different (an understatement).

Gregory sums up the book's argument: both medieval Christendom and the Reformation "failed," as did the confessionalized Europe and Western modernity. (365) Whether one agrees with Gregory or not, depends on how one understands the original goals in the first place, and how one measures the outcomes. Gregory's questions are meaningful and call the readers for self-reflection on the value of their theologies when push comes to shove.

I recommend the book for a serious reader for a stimulus for an ongoing critical assessment of the Reformation's original and lasting impact. I recommend the book for a reader who is concerned about the role of religion in public life and in people's lives and values. I recommend the book for a reader hungry for historical wisdom while concerned about contemporary issues.

Kirsi Stjerna is Professor of Reformation Church History and Director of the Institute for Luther Studies at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and Docent/Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Theology at University of Helsinki. Her degrees are from University of Helsinki and Boston University. In anticipation of the 2017 Luther anniversary, Stjerna serves as one of the general editors for the forthcoming Essential Luther (6 volumes, Fortress Press).

POETRY + THEOLOGY

Ezekiel at Ground Zero

Katy Giebenhain

Standing near a playground where the children speak a language you've never heard, close your eyes. You won't know you're in a different country or neighborhood. The background shrieks and surges of energy, laughter, bossy and lovely chatter sounds identical across languages. Any playground. Any children. Anywhere.

This October, the exhibit *Birds of Longing: Exile and Memory* is coming to Seminary Ridge. The works by internationally-recognized fiber artist Laurie Wohl integrate poetry and spiritual texts from the Convivencia and from contemporary Middle Eastern poets. Her use of languages of the Abrahamic faiths was prompted by a desire for interfaith dialog in the aftermath of the 9/11 World Trade Center bombings. *Birds of Longing* will bring a bit of that foreign [yet not at all foreign] playground experience to the Pioneer Room in Wentz Library. It will be a visual and audible reminder that the content, the sound and the physical shapes of our sacred texts are more alike than we think. The exhibit's concept includes a soundscape with texts read in English, Arabic and Hebrew, against a backdrop of music of the Convivencia period from Maya Beiser's album "Provenance" adapted by composer Daniel Wohl. iPods will be available at the exhibit! Wohl was awarded grants from the Center for the Arts, Religion and Education (CARE) at the Graduate Theological Union and the Surface Design Association for this project. As part of her research she traveled to Spain to view the El Transito Synagogue in Toledo, the synagogue and Mezquita in Cordoba, and the Alhambra in Granada.

Wohl's works have been shown extensively in group and solo exhibitions and in settings as varied as the United States Embassies in Beirut, Capetown, Pretoria, Vienna and Tunis, acupuncture clinics, churches, synagogues, museums and private homes. I had an opportunity to talk with

Laurie Wohl in her studio in New York this fall, shortly after the opening of *Birds of Longing* at the CARE Doug Adams Gallery in Berkeley, California. When she is on campus in October with the original pieces, we will learn more about her Unweavings® fiber art technique. Her visit will be a chance to have bigger conversations about interfaith themes and how art can help us clarify misunderstandings in our faith communities. Second and third-career students will appreciate that the artist's first career was in law. She has her own gradual and fascinating version of a call story.

The exhibit title comes from the poem "The Windmill in Yemin Moshe" (see page 113) by Yehuda Amichai which, in turn, references a famous bird poem by Hayim Nahman Bialik. [Bialik is widely considered Israel's "national poet." He died in 1934]. "...so he's talking about the windmills at Yemin Moshe and the birds of longing" said Wohl, "and I thought 'oh that's just the perfect image for the nostalgia that's so prevalent in all these contemporary and old poems – the role of memory in continuing exile and not being able to let go of exile. Mahmoud Darwish references Babylon in his poetry and he asks 'what will we do, what will we do without exile?' He didn't want to be categorized as a poet of exile and it seems he wondered if people could give up ancient animosities, and move beyond them. In essence, he's asking what will happen if we give up this self-definition – 'what are we, what are we without exile?'"¹

The foundation piece in this project is Wohl's "Ezekiel," (canvas, modeling paste, collaged papers, acrylic paints and beads). "Living in New York City, the shocking events of 9/11 particularly made vivid to me Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones ... I focused on the question of the text: 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And, ultimately, I came to its promise of redemption/resurrection."² In September of 2001 Wohl had just moved from Chicago to New York. "I was actually in Chicago on 9/11 for an exhibit; my husband was here in the city. It took me a couple of days to be able to get back to New York. That first six months was extremely intense. The air was full of ash, and the smells, and everywhere you went there were pictures of missing people. You were bearing witness all the time. You really had to stop and read and feel. And the imagery that came to me immediately was the imagery from Ezekiel 30:7. It was desolate. We went down to Ground Zero and the ash had gotten into everything. I remember there was a storefront where the ash had gotten inside the windows and it was like a still life of ash displayed in the windows. The whole thing was incredible ... So that was in my head. I wanted to do something with Ezekiel but I didn't know what."³

Not the Same, but not Scary Either

A Reform Jew herself, and the granddaughter of an Orthodox rabbi, Wohl had done many, many projects with Jewish-Christian themes. After 9/11 she knew Jewish-Christian dialogue was not enough. "I thought we really needed to incorporate Islam into our interfaith world and to understand the similarities and the differences among the religions and not have it be so 'other' and not be frightened about these things ... to appreciate – not to say that everything is the same, but differences don't have to be frightening. So I decided I wanted to do a project incorporating Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Of course I knew a little bit of history and I knew that the period of the Convivencia in Spain, which was from about 800 until the expulsion in 1492, was a time when the three religions had more or less peacefully existed. It was not the golden age that some portray it as, but there was a cross-fertilization in the cultures. Hebrew poetry took a lot from Arabic poetry of the time. I did a lot of research – for about a year and a half – extensive reading of poetry and spiritual texts of that time and contemporary Middle Eastern poetry. That was how I got into my project."⁴

"It is called *Birds of Longing: Exile and Memory* because the poets in the period of the Convivencia felt they were in exile even when they were within Spain – they were being pushed into different parts of Spain by different groups of people. Sometimes it was one Islamic sect after another, sometimes it was the Christians pushing against – so if the Jews or Muslims moved into northern Spain they felt exiled from Andalusia – it was very interesting that that imagery – the idea of exile – the reality of exile – came up even then. It wasn't just exile from the Holy Land, it was exile from Andalusia. And then of course you have contemporary Middle Eastern poetry, which talks about being exiled from Palestine. So, I found all of these congruencies."⁵ Wohl integrates text fragments from poets including Mahmoud Darwish, Ibn Gabirol, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Khafaja, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Leah Goldberg and others, and texts from the Qur'an, Old Testament and New Testament. In one piece, "Watchwords," she incorporates the Sh'ma, the Shahada and the Nicene Creed (using Arabic, Hebrew, English, Greek, and Latin).

Don't be concerned about not being able to read the languages associated with this exhibit. The good tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity is much of the point. It is a way to strengthen the way we become comfortable with interfaith dialog, not just talking about it but feeling more relaxed about it. Also, the texts are short excerpts, and they will be accompanied by translations. "I think the content and form of the work,

the narratives that are conveyed through the combination of the calligraphy and my own iconography, speak to the viewers, even if they can't read the languages ... There's something about the language itself. Even if it can't be read, there's something innate in it that's speaking to people."⁶

Why Textiles?

The textile media is intimate and grand. Both extremes. From burial shrouds to dish cloths to the flags of nations, from army banners to football jerseys, from bridal veils to tapestries to Torah mantles, textiles protect, announce, designate, warm, cool and form a boundary between public and private. They also tell stories. Wohl explains: "Historically, textiles have always been full of narratives. Ancient textiles have calligraphy on them for certain purposes, usually ritual purposes, and sometimes garments had text for particular reasons so it's always been there."⁷ While narrative is part of old traditions, it is also used in contemporary textiles. "I certainly found when I spent time in Kenya and South Africa that many of the textiles have narrative printing on them, which is very interesting, like the textiles over there hanging from the ladder [she points toward a wall in her studio] from South Africa. One was a commemorative, post-Apartheid textile from the African National Congress. [Text] was also found in beadwork – if you had a particular way of doing your beadwork. It was like you could send little love letters that way. And, of course, I use beads as embellishment in my work – so I found that I was in this other tradition as well."⁸

Unweaving is a beautiful metaphor for sermon writing, isn't it? It is not the same as disassembling or destroying or repurposing. It is a deliberate, transformative technique Wohl uses on raw canvas for her Unweavings[®] fiber art pieces. It stays with the substance but threshes it out and allows us to see it differently. Isn't that what a really fine poem or sermon does? Go back to the stuff of which it is made. Take apart the week's assigned texts. Examine them on the surface and beneath the surface. Build something arresting from them in the context of what's happening in the world. Something true and something that lets you see what is familiar in a different way. And, like fabric's ability to be both intimate and grand, is that not what we, as hearers, strive to find in poems and sermons? To make sense of something internally, up-close, as well as understanding God and the world?

This exhibit will offer a great visual, verbal and audible springboard into big themes of exile, prayer, spiritual love, enemies and reconciliation. There are rich things to discover about the idea and reality of exile today. Visit Laurie Wohl's website at www.lauriewohl.com/.

Notes

¹ Laurie Wohl, interview by author, New York, NY, November 2, 2013.

² Laurie Wohl, exhibit text notes from the artist for *Birds of Longing: Memory and Exile*.

³ Laurie Wohl, interview by author, New York, NY, November 2, 2013.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

We Welcome our Poets

Poets in this issue include Frank Dullaghan (United Arab Emirates), Robin Behn (Alabama), the late Yehuda Amichai (Israel), Gary Ciocco (Pennsylvania), Peter Makuck (North Carolina), Sarah Grigg (Florida) and Micheal O'Siadhail (Ireland). Book recommendations are for *Alternative Medicine* by Rafael Campo, *Gold* by Barbara Crooker, *99 Psalms* by SAID, *In the Custody of Words: Poems* by Philip Kolin and *Coaltown Jesus* by Ron Koertge.

Book Recommendations

Gold

“... will I be strong / enough to row across the ocean of loss / when my turn comes to take the oars?” (10) Barbara Crooker asks in “Late Prayer.” Her collection *Gold* includes reflections on her mother in the last phase of her life, and following her death. Not all of these poems are about her mother, but the book is shaped by her and by other kinds of loss and change. Through flashbacks as in “Monopoly, 1955” she contemplates a generation of women. Crooker’s observations manage to be both fresh and familiar. Her nostalgia is not quaint. Her writing is fearless, graceful and realistic. She brings us poems with the texture of ashes, the color of Sherwin Williams Dazzle paint, and the taste of balsamic vinegar and marshmallow peeps.

Change should be a four-letter word, shouldn’t it? These poems have something to do with changes big and small, through Crooker’s acknowledgement of changes in herself, her relationship to her mother and the environments she finds herself in as time passes. One of my favorites is “Judas Tree.”

Judas Tree

... the one destined to be lost,
so that the scripture might be fulfilled. John 17:12

Driving south to Virginia, what catches the eye, stays the heart, are the redbud trees, oddly named because they’re not red at all, but purple, the pluperfect of purple, their baubled beads lining the thin wands of their limbs in a winy haze. They’re also called Judas trees; according to legend, it’s the tree he hanged himself on, once strong enough to bear a man’s body, now weak and spindly in shame. The flowers, too, are abashed, blushing magenta instead of white. But I’ve never understood the bad rap on Judas; without him, the story’s not complete. Don’t we sing *Prepare the royal highway*? Don’t these trees line the roadsides waiving their psalms like palms? Wasn’t our favorite drink in college the purple Jesus, grape Kool-Aid and vodka? And doesn’t this tree wear its heart on its sleeve, flushing out each May in ventricular pale green leaves? (61)

From thoughts on Arshile Gorky before his last painting, to another ring on the Maple tree, to the smell of dandelion, or consistency of Karo syrup, the mix of elegies for her mother and the awareness of many transitions in aging, Crooker knows exactly what to lift up, and how to hold many kinds of gold. She shows us loss is not entirely without gain or gleam, writing her mother’s name in the night air with a lit sparkler “... in the sulphuric, smoky dark.” (39)

Gold is published by Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf & Stock (Eugene, OR 2013). It is part of the new Poema Poetry Series. Visit www.wipfandstock.com. Visit www.barbaracrooker.com/. “Judas Tree” is reprinted with permission of the author.

99 Psalms

An intentional, yet much more subtle grounding in the Abrahamic traditions than *Birds of Longing* can be found in SAID’s *99 Psalms*. Also for a wide audience, and one that is always learning to be aware of its siblings in faith, these brief poems ruminate: Who are we? What should we expect from God? How do we interact with each other? The spring 2013 issue of *Seminary Ridge Review* includes four poems from *99 Psalms*, translated by Mark Burrows (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013). The number 99 references the 99 names by which Allah is known. Jewish and Christian readers will feel at home here, but the translator emphasizes “These psalms voice a yearning for an embodied spirituality that is able to move us beyond the often narrowing boundaries of institutional religion. Simply put, SAID offers an authentic way of praying, one that is direct and unsentimental, both simple and demanding enough to voice a hope that can move us.” (7)

SAID’s book is one of searching, but this is no aimless searching. There is a type of balance in every one. By this I don’t mean average, or staid, or in-the-middle. Balance can also mean moving energetically in a space, more like electrons. I can’t think of anyone who manages this quite like SAID. There is a sense of a genuine, of a healthy relationship with God and the world and the self. This means it is neither passive nor hollowly challenging. Healthy is strong and sharp and able to spar or express thanks. Healthy involves seeking a sense of perspective. Healthy involves survival. Healthy involves not being isolated.

Some of these poems feel like prayers of intercession. In “33” SAID asks: “be shade for the one / who sees you / and sun for the one / who seeks you” (49) In “29” instead of a challenge to God we have faith in the unproven:

look lord
 i go to a tree and kiss its trunk
 out of respect for its age and accomplishment
 and i pray to you
 without seeking for proof of your existence (45)

What comes through in these brief poems? Justice, restrained cheekiness, curiosity, the desire to be seen and the desire to see. The poems show a willingness to develop. The speaker of the psalms has expectations. Here's the opening of "46."

lord
 i believe in the disorder of things
 and in a god
 who doesn't infect us with his reason
 who also endures the stillness
 without prayer or candle (62)

One of the things ringing most true today is the multi-faith thirst for finding "a" rather than "the" way to truth: "i only want to find my own path / that leads to you" (53)

SAID is an Iranian-born poet now at home in Germany. *99 Psalms* first appeared in German as *Psalmen* by C. H. Beck. Visit SAID at www.said.at. Visit Paraclete Press at www.paracletepress.com/. The translator is a Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of Applied Sciences in Bochum. Visit Mark S. Burrows at www.msburrows.com/.

Alternative Medicine

The title, *Alternative Medicine*, comes from a five-part poem with the epigraph "Wednesday afternoon HIV clinic." I'm not just recommending Rafael Campo's new collection for those of you working in pastoral care in hospitals and other health care settings, students in CPE programs or other jobs overlapping with medicine and faith.

These poems are thoughtful, grounded, elegant and free of B.S. If only more doctors, preachers and writers were willing to do this in the midst of teaching and healing: to listen, and to speak the truth even when that means admitting the truth is not fully to be had, at least not yet. I say this as one who receives sermons and poetry readings and results in labs and doctors' offices. Campo is a poet, physician and creative writing faculty member.

There is a vulnerability (the Brené-Brown-kind, not the "weak" kind of vulnerability) in these poems and an expert laying-out of details of our interior lives and of the world, moving back-and-forth in time, to let meaning show through. There's an aftertaste of exile, too. "Patriotic Anthem for a Lost Homeland" on the fiftieth anniversary of the Communist Revolution in Cuba begins: "It is the way of revolutions: worlds / turned upside down, but only until words / begin to redefine what was / as what went wrong..." (13) Zeroing in on a childhood memory from Pin the Tail on the Donkey he brings us into the room, into a 1969 birthday party "Piñata dangling, bulging with promised sweets / Flimsy cardboard gamepiece. My heart's loud beats / while I am blindfolded. A woman's hands / spin me in perfumed blackness ..." (24)

A master of tone and setting, Campo demonstrates "The Third Step in Obtaining an Arterial Blood Gas." He brings us into the impossible situation post-Katrina hospital staff faced in "After the Floods" and to his grandfather's huge dahlias in "New Jersey, the Garden State" where inside

my grandmother and my two great-aunts cooked
 a feast for the whole family, black pots
 releasing steam at intervals as if
 divulging the forbidden love affairs
 of those who stirred them ever warily,
 while God kept watch like in Calabria." (16)

"Without my White Coat" may touch a nerve for those of you who wear albs and stoles. These identifiers are worn in public in the midst of whatever you have going on in private.

Revealing very little of myself,
 my white coat holds my shape. Stands for something –
 a picture of the unseen soul, perhaps.
 Perhaps it is the ghost of who I was. (57)

The way he articulates experiences as a gay Cuban American taps a vein for all people in all subcultures of the great big melting pot. You should know about Campo. You should know about this book. "Poem Written at 5AM on the Sweetness of Life" ends with a great reminder of our spiritual and mortal longing "I trusted that wherever you / were taking me was someplace free of fear." (86)

Visit Duke University Press www.dukeupress.edu/. Visit Rafael Campo's webpage www.rafaelcampo.com/.

In the Custody of Words

In the Custody of Words (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press), Philip Kolin's new chapbook, opens with percussion, flashing images and God's voice "older than water." We like to think of it the other way around – words are in our custody, aren't they? We control words, we create words, we wield them. Kolin explores biblical stories with enthusiasm and affection. A sense of abundance is to be found here, with a multitude of stars, fish, words, blood and candlewax.

"Cathedral Antiphons" personifies sacred space. The building speaks. In this poem, stanzas are divided by purpose and identity: Narthex, Nave, Aisles, Chancel, Apse, High Altar, Sacristy. The plural voice of the aisles says "God's ushers, we ferry / creation's children from birth / to rebirth, fonts to palls, / servants of the sacraments." (28)

Kolin gives attention to faithful seekers past and present, from the Shepherd Boy from the Cova, to St. Joseph. In "Minnows" he compares the tiny fish to sojourners in ever-changing circumstances:

No matter how many
Fowlers drop their nets
Into the middle of summer
They still sail through fleshy
Toes, fingers, tourists' blue-veined legs. (27)

My favorite poem in this collection is "The Printers' Mass." Printers used to be the actual custodians of words. A few of them still are. Print is changed, but not dead! The word typesetter has become historical. It has taken on an exotic ring. "The Printers' Mass" opens:

2:30 a.m., 32nd St., Manhattan, 1934

The Mass for souls who cross
liminal boundaries of night
and dawn, work and revelry, ink and
space.

Typesetters printing tomorrow's
stories of loss and love, sky and sorrow,
their hands immersed in mutabilities ... (30)

Philip C. Kolin is the University Distinguished Professor in the College of Arts and Letters at The University of Southern Mississippi. Visit www.usm.edu/english/faculty/philip-kolin.

He is the editor of *Vineyards: A Journal of Christian Poetry* and *The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of Arts and Letters in the South*.

Coaltown Jesus

Ron Koertge is known for his poetry and young adult fiction. As a free-verse novel, *Coaltown Jesus* is both. The form works really, really well. It feels like a play, but much smoother and more accessible than is possible when reading a script. Enjambed "chapter" titles keep the pace moving while helping shape the story.

Walker, a young teenager in Coaltown, Illinois prays for God to help him and his grieving mother after his older brother Noah's suicide. He does not expect Jesus to show up and hang out with him, but that is what happens. Walker's mother operates a small nursing home called Bissell House. It is the kind of place we would wish to stay in, it is not institutional at all. And even though Walker, the remembered Noah, and Jesus in red high-tops are the central characters, the mom is the background heroine.

The Architect Louis Sullivan's principle "form follows function" means that the design of a building should follow its intended purpose. It has been shortened from his original "form ever follows function" and has been both embraced as a kind of architect's gospel and denounced as a cliché. I am not in the cliché camp. I think it's true. I also think writing, in any genre, involves matching a structure to the meaning and deciding *how* a story is asking to be told. I couldn't help but think of the Sullivan quote while reading *Coaltown Jesus*. Koertge's choice of form does fit the telling of this story perfectly. It carries the story and does not get in the way. We do not notice the form because it works.

Although the book is one of heavy circumstances, Koertge uses a light touch in its telling. The plot comes through the dialog. The poet's experience and attention to line breaks is apparent, as is the clearing away of unnecessary wording or description. Here's a brief excerpt, shortly after Jesus has appeared in Walker's life.

"You're not like I expected."

"What did you expect?"

"I don't know. In the Bible, you're always so serious."

Notice the question-asking? How very New Testament. After Jesus beats him with a card trick Walker responds:

“Will you stop screwing around
and help my mom now?”

Jesus glanced at the little clock
on the counter. “You know what?”
he said, “I’ve got a few things to take
care of.”

“Really? But I thought –”

“I’ll be back. Relax. Or as they
say in the Bible, ‘Fear not.’” (33)

This book is categorized as being for young adult readers, but it is just as interesting for adults. You know how sometimes the only part you remember from an hour-long worship service is the children’s sermon?

Coaltown Jesus was selected for The American Library Association’s 2014 list of Best Fiction for Young Adults. Ron Koertge is the author of 19 novels and 16 poetry collections. He teaches in the M.F.A. program at Hamline University. Visit <http://ronkoertge.com/>. *Coaltown Jesus* is published by Candlewick Press. Visit www.candlewick.com/.

Blue Beyond Black and White

Peter Makuck

East as usual
on Hooker Road
then west on Gilead
toward the end
of a three mile run
and the sun hit
my face
with needle wind
from the plowed field
all sea-gulled white,
those hidden hundreds
that suddenly rose,
broke the field
into fluttering
black scraps
like burning bits
of paper,
the air torn
with cries where
they churned
and flapped above
me puffing
to a stop, breath
a white delight
when they
settled deep
as snow again,
and the sky
was blue
beyond the help
of any words.

Just One

cardinal at our feeder can color a whole winter day.

Response

A mockingbird, loud
like hope, persistent outside
the study window,

trying to get my response
and finally succeeding.

Peter Makuck, twice a winner of the Brockman-Campbell Award for the best book of poems by a North Carolinian, lives on Bogue Banks, one of the coastal barrier islands. His Long Lens: New & Selected Poems was published in 2010 by BOA Editions, Ltd. and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Last year Syracuse University Press released his third collection of short stories, Allegiance and Betrayal. His poems and stories, essays and reviews have appeared in The Anglican Theological Review, Poetry, The Sewanee Review, The Gettysburg Review, Yale Review, and others. Makuck is Distinguished Professor Emeritus from East Carolina University where he founded and edited Tar River Poetry from 1978 to 2006.

Leaving Church

Robin Behn

With small steps or a limp or a list to be done,
I came here sleepy and groggy;
or I came from a night that savaged my heart
with its raw and particular story.

Who I sat next to, who sang off-key,
took my hand in both hands when they greeted me;
we all faced forward like rowers to the sea
looking back to many lives, but, together, we

prayed a single prayer, sang the same song,
as the light streamed through the saints and they whispered along.
Altar of rock, walls of stone,
may your light be with me when I am alone.

When I drifted from the sermon I heard the rafters talk
of a hundred weddings and funerals at once,
whites and blacks, coffins and lace –
for everything a season, and for all this sacred place.

Altar of rock, walls of stone,
your light will be with me when I am alone.
Those who built this place, those who came before,
go with me into daylight beyond these heavy doors.

Christmas at the Buddhists'

Christmas at the Buddhists'
we always play charades.

Call it a way
of getting through the day
converted souls still flicker at.

Call it a way
of converting into play
the workday, Top 40 lives they mislaid
somewhere on the path.

They'd call it the way
and stop there: just
the way.

Later, they bow heads and chant
their unison prayer so fast –
sounds like:
a conductor rattling off stations
commuters know.

My lips don't move
though each of my hands is held and held up
with theirs around the candlelight.
And who's to say the weak link
doesn't complete the chain

in the eyes of whatever
our circle of lifted hands
like neatly scalloped waves
practices breaking toward.

I qualify, like them, for admittance
by my emptiness.
I come to my sister's table
to be filled.

"Christmas at the Buddhists" first appeared in The Red Hour (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993). It is reprinted with permission of the author. Robin Behn's four books of poetry include, most recently, Horizon Note, winner of the Brittingham Prize (The University of Wisconsin Press), and The Yellow House (Spuyten Duyvil). She is co-editor of The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach (HarperCollins) and editor of a forthcoming guide for young writers high school age and up called Once Upon a Time in the Twenty-First Century: Unexpected Exercises in Creative Writing (GFTBooks/U. of Alabama Press). A recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, she is Professor of English in the M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing at The University of Alabama where she also directs the Creative Writing Club for high school writers. Behn is poetry editor of Hunger Mountain.

The Windmill in Yemin Moshe

Yehuda Amichai

This windmill never ground flour.
It ground holy air and Bialik's
birds of longing, it ground
words and ground time, it ground
rain and even shells
but it never ground flour.

Now it's discovered us,
and grinds our lives day by day
making out of us the flour of peace
making out of us the bread of peace
for the generation to come.

"The Windmill in Yemin Moshe" is printed with the permission of The Sheep Meadow Press from The Great Tranquillity: Questions and Answers, 1997, by Yehuda Amichai, translated from the Hebrew by Glenda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt. His poems have been translated from Hebrew into forty languages, and entire volumes of his work have been published in English, French, German, Swedish, Spanish, and Catalan. His papers are housed at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Yehuda Amichai died in Jerusalem in 2000. The Sheep Meadow Press is now in Rhinebeck, New York. Visit <http://sheepmeadowpress.com/>.

Historical Note for “Stairs” and “The Unbroken Line”

Seminary Ridge Review is pleased to include two poems from Frank Dullaghan’s unpublished manuscript of “Pope Joan” poems.

According to legends, a baby girl was born in the 9th century (some accounts place the date as late as the early 12th century) to English parents who were missionaries in Germany. She was named Agnes in some accounts. Rebelling against the medieval laws forbidding women to study and learn, she disguised herself as a boy and entered Fulda, a Benedictine monastery, under the name of John. This name may have been her brother’s name. He is said to have been brutally killed during a Viking attack or in an altercation of some sort.

She studied for a while in Greece before coming to the attention of the Vatican where she became a notary to the Curia, then cardinal and finally pope. She is said to have headed the church from 855 until 858. In the legends she was given the name Joan, the feminine form of John.

She is supposed to have had a lover and to have become pregnant by him, leading to her discovery as a woman. In some accounts, she is said to have given birth whilst in procession from St. Peter’s to the Lateran, somewhere between the Colosseum and St. Clement’s. She is supposed to have been either stoned to death by the crown or tied to a horse and dragged through the streets. In their processions, the popes always avoid this road. Many believe that they do this out of abhorrence of that event. Others say that it is simply because the road is very narrow.

In a few accounts she was quietly sent to a convent. Her child was said to have been a boy who later became Bishop of Ostia and then a cardinal. He is said to have had her bones moved to his cathedral and interred there.

Versions of the legend were only recorded during the Middle Ages. The most widely accepted version is by Martin of Troppau (Martinus Polonus), a Dominican friar in Poland, and was written in 1265. The Church has denied the existence of a female pope stating that it was Protestant propaganda and that there are no accounts from the supposed time of her reign. Other researchers, however, say that there are plenty of pre-Reformation Catholic texts which mention a female Pope and that it was orally passed down and accepted within the Catholic Church until it became an embar-

rassment during the Reformation. They claim that Church records were altered at the time, to hide the facts. Whatever the truth of the legend, it provides an intriguing story.

It is also interesting to consider the background to the story – the fact that women were not allowed to receive an education. This compares with the religious intolerance for the schooling of girls in many Muslim countries today. In many ways then, this is a contemporary story.

For the most part, the poems are written in the voice of Joan.

– Frank Dullaghan, March 2013

Stairs

Frank Dullaghan

It has always been my nature to chase ideas.
I nurture them the way another would a child.
They smile at me and keep me warm.
One idea leads to another like steps of a stairs.
I built them and ascended, pleased
to have the view from each new landing;
the greater knowledge that came
with each consolidation. Some of these landings
had names – Monk, Teacher, Cardinal.

It was never the name but the knowledge –
the birth of the next idea, the revelation
of the newly swaddled thought. Was it pride?
Perhaps. If so, God has had His joke.
I never thought to rise so high, to be Pope.
I never wanted it – the danger, the exposure.
But oh, there is so much more that shines
from this throne – a whole world of curiosities.
Perhaps God gives a different message
to the church of men. Here's a new idea:
a woman can be Pope. Have you the brain for it?

The Unbroken Line

An unbroken line, they say,
like the rope of a friar
circling Christendom, from Peter
to the days of the second coming;
from the agony of the crucifixion
to the coming horror of the anti-Christ,
all kept safe by this stout rope,
this line of Popes.
Or a ladder, if you like,
each rung a man, God's representative,
stretching from the earth onto heaven,
so that mankind can climb to glory.

But I see them standing
shoulder-to-shoulder like a wall,
to all that is new.
They are a wall holding back
the kingdom of God on earth.
Why else would He have allowed me
this position if not to show it?

Frank Dullaghan was born in Ireland. He studied economics at Dublin University and creative writing (MA) at the University of South Wales (Glamorgan). He lives in the United Arab Emirates where he works as a compliance and business consultant to financial service companies. Dullaghan is the author of On the Back of the Wind and Enough Light to See the Dark. Visit Cinnamon Press www.cinnamonpress.com/. His poems have appeared in journals and anthologies including The Iron Book of British Haiku, First Pressings, Poetry London, Poetry Review and The Honest Ulsterman.

Eyes to See

Sarah Grigg

Do you know from which pear tree
the moon disentangles itself and rises,
the reflection of a fallen fruit?
That all the fireflies come awake in answer?

Could you have guessed how many
frogs glove themselves in leaves
until the cool night air calls them
onto the warm, fatal road?

In winter, if startled even once
out of its warm one-footed feather puff,
the nuthatch will freeze. Have you killed
with just your booted, snowy presence?

What have the cluttered streets of Bombay,
Boston, New York, taught you?
What is it, exactly, that you know
about our wild, extravagant yard?

Sarah Grigg is a graduate of the University of Virginia with a degree in English. She is currently an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Florida.

We Were Cajoled

Gary Ciocco

We were cajoled
into sampling the purple asparagus raw.
We enjoyed it,
the asparagus and the cajoling.
The aftertaste was sweet,
unlike a vegetable. More
like a purple heart,
which might have to beat so
hard to unzip a silver lining —
or just leave the silver to the
dealers in Taxco, Mexico
who keep it polished like pros.
And where the sacred and psychedelic
are just different breaths of air
filtered by sunlight, no big deal.
Though it's a Saturday in Adams County
not Acapulco or Puerta del Sol
you know in your gut
you're not the first
to have your purple heart
beat your purple soul
into the shape of a resurrection.

Gary Ciocco teaches philosophy and political science at Gettysburg College, HACC, and McDaniel College. He has published poetry in several journals and travels near and far to hear and read the spoken word. He lives in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where he is a co-host of the First Friday poetry reading series at the Ragged Edge Coffee House.

Unsaid

Micheal O'Siadhail

Toute vérité n'est pas bonne à dire

Every truth is not the right thing to say

Something French and human here:
Thought first filtered through the head,
Gossip others shouldn't know
Things we'd better leave unsaid.
Poised, forgiving, shrewd, urbane,
Why a fuss when there's no gain?
Rise above it unconcerned,
Best not known, a blind-eye turned –
Almost careless *bonne à dire*.

Truth is truth. The truth alone.
Fraud unveiled, the trails we'd blaze,
World we'd change, a world our own,
Endless talking student days,
Hard-nosed, certain, fact's a fact,
Age has ripened years of tact.
Subtler now than our first flush,
Sometimes speak and sometimes hush.
Truth is also time and tone.

Friendship's silent idiom
Prudent as a diplomat
Knowing when the word's mum.
Much unsaid but hinted at,
Half in earnest, half jocose
Understood between the close,
All you know you'll never say,
Secrets brought alone to clay,
Songs best sung by singing dumb.

*Sanningen är bland det finaste vi har, den skal vi passa på att inte
bruka i otid*

Truth is one of the finest things we have, we need to watch out
not to use it at the wrong time

A slow rambling Swedish byword.
Someone in low October light
Repeats old prudence.

Who had blurted a confidence
Or some fact when the time was wrong
So all was misheard?

Precept of tact and etiquette:
Proverb's singsong drawl
Finest, nevertheless,

Truth's still truth if told with finesse,
Knowing what's both best to recall
And best to forget.

言わぬは言うにまさる

Iwanu wa iu ni masaru

Non-saying outdoes saying

Come day, go day, ebb and flow
Just that gaze and still we know

Deep within our unsaid zone
What's unuttered each has known,

One caressing look can glean
All the years of might-have-been

Time now noiselessly atones.
Still as Kyōto's garden stones

Passion's silent interplay,
Eyes that speak what tongues can't say.

Michaelmas at Glendalough

Twin-lake valley scattered with remnants
 Of praise and work and damp silence.
 A path between the upper and lower lake
 Greases with leaves. Is it the heartbreak
 Of a season or the still ghosts of prayer
 Hiding in birches? There's chill in the air,
 Soon these leaves will fossilize in frost.
 Something living stiffens and is lost.

Clusters of monks gathered in a first
 Burgeoning, that strange lyrical outburst
 Of separate worlds just newly spliced:
 The lush blackbird, the eastern Christ.
 I sense one watching from his beehive hut
 As the upper lake gleams its sudden cross-cut
 Of sunlight and epiphany and the lower lake
 Clouds with all that's ordinary and opaque.

He stares. He'll bring his gleam of sun
 To Europe after the Visigoth and Hun.
 Will it all go so wrong? The dominance,
 A loss of boundaries and shades of nuance.
 Somehow everhthing's distant and mediated
 The sacred blurs. Too veiled. Too weighted.
 He's staring at an ideal. Let his face
 Turn back to the shadows of the commonplace.

The lower lake darkens towards October.
 He gazes. The waters are deep and sober.
 Freedom and dignity, a love of the profane;
 Some Luther is hallowing the ordinary again.
 The best when spoilt will soon be worse:
 Roundhead and votary of sweet commerce,
 Then soiler and technocrat, a male caged
 By a reason too controlled and disengaged.

Old ghosts of desire stir the undergrowth;
 Two worlds and we crave the best of both
 On this greasy path between two cisterns.
 Michaelmas at Glendalough as a century turns.
 My feastday. The air fills with fragility,
 The choices and wounds of double polity.
 Now in the shadows, now in the sun;
 Can angels of this heart and mind be one?

"Unsaid" and "Michaelmas at Glendalough" are reprinted with permission from Collected Poems (Bloodaxe Books, 2013) which draws on thirteen previous collections. Visit www.bloodaxebooks.com/. Micheal O'Siadhail studied at Trinity College, Dublin and the University of Oslo. His academic works include Learning Irish (Yale University Press); his poetry books include Our Double Time, Hail! Madam Jazz, The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness of the Holocaust and Tongues. He was a founding member of Aosdána and the founding chairman of ILE (Ireland Literature Exchange). Collections of his work have been published in several languages, including Japanese and German. Visit <http://osiadhail.com/>.

GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

The Dancing Saints of St. Gregory's

Donald Wilcox

In preparation for my retirement, I spent some intentional time looking back over my life and ministry and discovered a surprising theme that jumped out at me. Many aspects of my ministry had come out of left field and led me on paths I never would have come up with by myself. I entered retirement figuring that similar surprises would come.

It didn't take long. A trip to Paris was the catalyst to open my eyes to a whole new world to me, the world of art. So now, as I travel I am visiting lots of museums and galleries and learning to keep my eyes up and open. On a trip to San Francisco I happened to read a fascinating article in *Tikkun* magazine about "The Dancing Saints," an extensive icon of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church. So off I went to find it for myself.

As I entered, I came into a large, octagonal room. It was empty save for a wooden table in the middle of the space. On its side is written, "this guy welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then I looked up and saw ninety life sized saints arrayed in two tiers all around. They are clasped hand to hand and everyone is dancing, even the iconic figure of Jesus. It was stunning. As you stand in the middle, it is like you are wrapped in a warm embrace. Richard Vosko writes "The Dancing Saints iconography illustrates the whole of humanity dancing in step, as if to signal a remarkable dream – the harmonization of all peoples on a fragile planet. What better sustenance than the imagery of a lively dancing congregation comprised of members from all walks of life and different faith traditions, glancing down and sustaining the hopes of a living church at worship."¹

This living congregation in its life together, its worship and in its mission outreach seeks to resonate with an image set forth by St. Gregory, "Once there was a time when the whole rational creation formed a single dancing chorus looking up to the one leader of this dance, and the harmony

of motion that they learned from his law found its way into their dancing.”² And so, at each liturgy, they dance, following the lead of the ‘Lord of the Dance.’ But I soon found out that the dancing is only a small part of the story. Much more profound is who these saints are.

The congregation’s mission statement is “St. Gregory’s invites people to see God’s image in all humankind, to sing and dance to Jesus’ lead and to become God’s friends.”³ The icon is part of their attempt to live out that mission and express its meaning to the community. Rather than piety or orthodoxy, “the icon proclaims a sweeping, universal vision of God shining through human life.”⁴ Members of the congregation originally nominated 365 persons whose lives, they believed, showed forth God’s presence and who best served as examples of how we can live out our human lives. A committee reduced this number to 90, which were chosen to surround the congregation with their dancing and their exemplary stories. Mark Dukes, the iconographer, notes, “There is a universal consensus of religious ideals, maybe not religious practice, but religious ideals. Like humility, like peace, like hope – these are what the mural is all about. It’s about love, God is love.”⁵ And it is about love experienced by a wide diversity of people crossing gender and age lines, religious lines, and cultural and international lines. Fr. Rick Fabian, who with Fr. Donald Schell served as founding priest of St. Gregory’s, spoke of some of the qualities for which these saints were chosen. “Christian or not, these men and women and children each show us some of God’s image, as Christ makes that image fully plain to us. Our list includes people who crossed boundaries in ways that ultimately unified humanity, often at their own cost. Some proved lifelong models of virtue; others changed direction dramatically from evil to good, even near the end of their life. Like Gregory himself, some were on the frontier of Christian thought and living and had gifts that were unrecognized or disparaged in their time; yet their gifts matter for what we do today. Others have been long revered among the world’s churches. Some overcame difficult circumstances; others moved toward God despite the distractions of worldly comfort and power. Many were mystics like Gregory, seeing God in all creation. Some taught and still teach, all learned to pursue goodness, even into the darkness where people must choose without seeing.”⁶ I highly recommend going to the website to read about this surprising group (www.stgregorys.org). Here is a small sample of saints chosen and why in the words of the congregation’s interpretive brochure.⁷

Alexandrian washerwoman – to the desert fathers, an anonymous ordinary woman praying ceaselessly at her work represents the holiness that is ordinary and routine. (These descriptions are taken from the congregation’s brochure “The Dancing Saints.”)

Hypathia – pagan mathematician of the 5th century – martyred at the hands of Christian monks. As Christians and humanists we honor Hypathia’s learning and courage, hold her as a witness to intellectual curiosity and honest inquiry, which are closer to God than angry certainty of fundamentalism.

Anne Frank, who expressed an unshakeable faith in the fundamental goodness of humanity.

Charles Darwin whose writings offered an evolutionary understanding of the development of life on earth, challenging conventional interpretations of creation and inviting whole new ways of thinking of living beings, humanity and God through process, system and change.

Thurgood Marshall advocated interpreting the law to realize more perfectly the Constitution’s vision of truly equal justice for all.

Chiune Sugihara – a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania during WWII who defied governmental policy and issued as many visas as he could to save thousands of Jews fleeing annihilation by the Nazis.

Malcom X – Mark Dukes writes, “the justification for having him here is powerful. Here is someone who was a gangster. A racist. So he went from that, and he grew. And I think that’s holy, to be on that spiritual quest. No one starts out perfect, and very many people don’t end up perfect either. It’s the quest.”

Norman Perrin – American scholar of the Gospels who argued that Jesus’ central, daring witness was the sacred meal he kept with ‘unprepared sinners.’ The sign we imitate at St. Gregory’s by welcoming everyone to share in the Eucharist.

Perrin’s scholarship and St. Gregory’s practice bring us back to that table, standing in the midst of those diverse, interfaith and very human dancers. It is at the table where St. Gregory’s mission of invitation, welcome and hospitality centers. It starts with “this guy welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Fabian continues “not former sinners, not repentant sinners, sinners. Despite some recent protests, gospel critics agree that such insults and scandalous charges, especially those embarrassing the church, are our most reliable evidence about Jesus. The Christian Eucharist must be the world’s only religious meal where all the diners are all officially declared unworthy to eat, every time they eat. Nor does Eucharistic sharing set Christians apart from and unlike others. The altar table pedestal facing our font quotes St. Isaac of Ninevah: “Did not the Lord share the table with tax collectors and harlots? So then – do not distinguish between the worthy and the unworthy. All must be equal in your eyes to love and serve.”⁸ Everyone who gathers at this table is welcomed to eat and drink. One who wandered into St.

Gregory's one day as an unbeliever is Sara Miles. She accepted the invitation to share the meal, and it transformed her life. She writes, "There was this immediacy of communion at St. Gregory's, unmediated by altar rails, the raw physicality that mystical meal. There was an invitation to jump in rather than official entrance requirements. There was the suggestion that God could be located in experience, sensed through bodies, tasted in food, that my body was connected literally and mysteriously to other bodies and loved without reason. The feast showed us how to re-member what has been dismembered by human attempts to separate and divide, judge and cast out, select or punish. At that table, sharing food, we were brought into the work of making creation whole."⁹

When joining St. Gregory's, you are asked to share in the congregation's outreach to the wider community. A list of more than one hundred agencies gives examples of where one's time and money may go in this ministry. Sara Miles had a vision of a more immediate and concrete way St. Gregory's could minister to their community by starting a food pantry. She had been inspired by the sayings on the table. Fr. Donald Schell, to whom Sara brought her idea remembers, "That altar was extravagant – six thousand dollars or something. And then you came and said, fine, now let's use the table to do what it says."¹⁰ And so, on Fridays the doors are opened again each week for the community to gather around the table, surrounded by the Dancing Saints.

Sara writes "the atmosphere of St. Gregory's drew people: they came looking for something to eat, but often, they really wanted far more. I'd be lifting a box, in the noise and bustle, and someone would come up to me – a grieving mom, a lonely immigrant, a sick man, many varieties of crazy people who hovered around the community. "Will you pray for me" they'd ask. This is what I'd told St. Gregory's after all: that the pantry would be church and not a social service program. It would be a community of prayer."¹¹

In *Tikkun* Philip Barcio quoted Sara speaking of the scene: "on Fridays, our sanctuary is a vision of God's ridiculous, over-the-top abundance, outside the pantry our people are gathering. A bunch of second graders chasing each other, screeching happily. A cluster of Moldavian refugees. A very sick prostitute and her faithful, exhausted friend, sitting together on the steps, sharing a cigarette. Some gossipy Salvadoran moms. A few tattered ex-cons. An old woman with her Bible. We set up a table outside with pitchers of water, and talk to everyone...A few have brought food – a couple of slices of birthday cake, a box of powdered milk, some extra cans of corn – to share. It takes so little to see God in this world. You just have to open the door."¹²

At St. Gregory's, the breadth and diversity and humanity of the saints

above is reflected around the table whether at Eucharist or coffee hour or food pantry. "The dancing saints call on each of us to be saint-like in our own way, to express ourselves honestly, to become participants in the movement toward love and unity, and to create our own definitions of what is possible in our emerging culture of peace."¹³

So once again, I was surprised. I went to St. Gregory's to see a work of art, albeit a religious one. What I found was a vision and a community living out that vision of what the church is and can be, and an affirmation of the myriad ways God shines through human beings. An icon, after all, is meant to be a vehicle through which we see God. In that place, at that table, I saw God spreading out a wide embrace of welcome and love to everyone.

Would that we could all join this dance.

Notes

- 1 Richard Vosko in congregational brochure on "The Dancing Saints."
- 2 Fr. Donald Schell, "The Blessed Company of All Faithful People, Part I," *All Saints Company: Drawing From Fresh and Ancient Springs*, January 23, 2012, www.allsaintscompany.org/blessed-company-all-faithful-people-part-i.
- 3 Congregational Brochure "The Dancing Saints."
- 4 "The Dancing Saints Icon Project" *All Saints Company: Drawing From Fresh and Ancient Springs*, 2012, www.allsaintscompany.org/dancing-saints-icon-project.
- 5 Philip Barcio, "The New Saints," *Tikkun* 24, no. 3 May/June 2009, www.tikkun.org/article.php/may_jun_09_barcio.
- 6 Richard Fabian "Who Are These Like Stars Appearing" *Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church*, www.saintgregorys.org/worship/art_section/245/
- 7 Donald Schell in the congregational brochure "The Dancing Saints."
- 8 Rick Fabian "The Scandalous Table," *All Saints Company: Drawing From Fresh and Ancient Springs*, December 23, 2011, www.allsaintscompany.org/scandalous-table
- 9 Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 64, 67.
- 10 Miles, *Ibid.*, 111.
- 11 Miles, *Ibid.* 130, 134. Miles is now Director of Ministry for the congregation.
- 12 Barcio, *Ibid.*
- 13 Barcio, *Ibid.*

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Artist and Iconographer Mark Duker at work on Hypatia, who dances next to Aelred of Rievaulx and near Thomas Merton and Martin Luther.



Hypatia (370-415) a Pagan mathematician and philosopher who drew pupils broadly from the Greek world. Photo by David Sanger.



The Dancing Saints of St. Gregory's in the round above the table where the congregation receives the sacrament of the table. Photo by David Sanger.

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