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Luther's Reformation of Suffering¹ Luther Colloquy 2016

Ronald K. Rittgers

For the past fifteen years or so, I have been studying the theme of suffering in the Reformation. The theme is ubiquitous in the sources that interest me, and I have wanted to understand these sources and thus the Reformation better. But I have also been studying suffering because I am a church historian who wishes to engage issues of enduring human significance, and suffering certainly qualifies. My interest in suffering is not purely academic – how could it be? I study the past not only to understand the past and how it has shaped the future, but also to gain wisdom for actually trying to live faithfully as a Christian in the present. Like you, I am trying to make sense of suffering in my own life and in the world, and I have been looking to the Reformation, in part, to help me do so. Today I would like to share with you something of what I learned. As my title suggests, I will be focusing on Luther.

Martin Luther wanted to reform the way his contemporaries understood and coped with suffering, and this “reformation of suffering” was an essential though understudied part of his overall Reformation agenda. In my talk today I would like to examine with you a crucial chapter in Luther's reformation of suffering, the Indulgence Controversy and the years that followed it. I want to explore how Luther's critique of the late medieval penitential system and the soteriology upon which it was based played a central role in his reformation of suffering, a reformation that was motivated by deeply pastoral concerns and that had profound implications for his pastoral theology. I hope to show how this reformation of suffering entailed both a summons to radical cross-bearing and the provision of a radical consolation. My presentation will be primarily historical in nature, but, as I have already

indicated, I am interested in the normative claims that my research raises. I believe that Lutheranism has a gift for the church catholic today owing to its honesty about suffering and its firm belief in the consolation of the gospel. The trick is to persuade Lutherans to share this gift with other Christians. Before we turn to Luther, a brief word about late medieval penitential theology and its view of suffering is in order.

Late Medieval Background

In the later Middle Ages there was widespread agreement among theologians about a distinction that was absolutely central to the church's understanding of penance and suffering: the guilt or debt of sin versus the penalty or punishment for sin.² The debt of sin – *culpa* – referred to the burden of guilt human beings incurred initially as a result of the fall (i.e., original guilt), and then subsequently as the result of each post-baptismal sin. The penalty for sin – *poena* – denoted divine punishment for both original sin (i.e., eternal damnation and the partial tainting of human nature) and for post-baptismal sin (i.e., suffering in this life and the next).³ The majority view on the eve of the Reformation was that Christ's death had atoned for original guilt and eternal damnation, the benefits of which were communicated via baptism, but the tendency toward sinning – the *fomes peccati* (tinders of sin) – remained for humanity to contend with until the resurrection of the dead. When late medieval Christians gave in to their dark side and sinned, they were instructed to turn to the Sacrament of Penance to relieve the new burden of debt and punishment they incurred. Not to seek divine grace for sin was to risk an eternity in hell, if the sin were mortal, or, more typically, to face an extended period of time in Purgatory, where one would suffer the remaining *poena* for one's venial sins, along with the yet unfulfilled works of satisfaction one had been assigned in this life, and thus be purified before one entered heaven. Only priestly absolution communicated through the Sacrament of Penance could forgive the debt of sin, but it was up to the penitent to deal with the penalty for sin, in cooperation with the Latin church's many forms of assistance, which included indulgences – indulgences were about penalty not guilt, at least in theory.⁴

By virtue of their possession of the keys, priests could transform the penalty one deserved to suffer in Purgatory – where the pains were unspeakable, if temporary – into a more bearable form of penance one could endure in the here and now. This penance, or work of satisfaction, typically took one of three forms: fasting, prayer, or works of mercy.⁵ These three were held to fulfill the definition of a work of satisfaction, which involved making amends for past sins (that is, compensating God for wrongs committed

against Him), providing healing for the effects of sins, and protecting against future sins.⁶ Late medieval penitential theology taught that whereas prayer restored proper order in the penitent's relationship to God, and works of mercy did the same with regard to neighbor, fasting brought order to the penitent's relationship with himself, primarily by battling concupiscence of the flesh. Suffering was viewed as a species of fasting; it was a work of satisfaction that atoned for the penalty of sin, healed the effects of sin, and helped to prevent further sin. Penitents were regularly instructed to ask their confessors to apply to them not only the merit of Christ and their own good works, but also any sickness or adversity they had endured, along with the daily toil they experienced in providing for their basic needs. One popular late medieval handbook for confession instructed penitents to make the following request of their confessors:

I ask you lastly [...] that you would now place on me a small and brief sacramental penance that I can perform already in this hour or on this day. I also ask that you would apply to me, counting it as a penance, the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ's suffering [...] along with all my good works, or those which others have done for me (be they prayers, fasts, alms-giving, pilgrimages), plus all the grace and indulgence I have obtained, *and also all the sickness and adversity I have suffered*, and, finally, all of the concern and work [...] by which I meet my material needs. Apply to me all of these things as a satisfaction for my sin.⁷

Thus, according to late medieval penitential thought, suffering, if humbly accepted and patiently endured, could be treated as a form of penance that would redound to one's eternal benefit. In this system, suffering could actually be seen as an expression of divine grace, because it provided one with an opportunity to shorten one's stay in purgatory and also to be conformed more closely to the image of Christ and the saints. Suffering was redemptive, even salvific. (The late medieval church held that suffering had other important roles to play in the Christian life; here I am focusing on just one of these roles – suffering as a species of penance.)

Luther's Critique

Luther engaged this view of suffering and the penitential theology behind it in the famous Indulgence Controversy, which catapulted him onto the public stage of early modern Christendom in a way that caught the monk-professor largely by surprise. In the midst of this conflict Luther continued to work out the implications of his increasingly radical soteriology, a process

that had begun even before his first Psalm lectures of 1513-1515. Most important among these implications was a decisive break with late medieval penitential theology, along with its consequences for how Christians were to view suffering.⁸ The reformation of soteriology and the reformation of suffering went hand-in-hand. Ironically, the road to this break began with a very traditional concern: to warn Christians about the dangers of spiritual laxity and to exhort them to take up the cross and follow Christ through tribulations of every kind. Many late medieval reformers and mystics shared this concern and Luther himself had voiced it since the beginning of his professorial career.⁹ But the theological conclusions he reached as he articulated this concern were anything but conventional.

In the *Ninety-Five Theses* (October 1517) Luther assumes the traditional distinction between the debt of sin and the penalty for sin, but he also makes an important differentiation within the latter category that proved to be quite radical: he distinguishes between divinely-imposed punishment for sin and its human (that is, papal or ecclesiastical) counterpart.¹⁰ He concedes that the pope has authority to forgive penalties, but only those that the pope himself imposes in the form of works of satisfaction.¹¹ According to Luther, the pope has no power to affect the divine penalty for sin that remains until human beings enter heaven. (This divine penalty consists of the true penitence that he references in thesis one, namely, life-long repentance and mortification of the flesh).¹² Neither can the pope affect the condition of souls in Purgatory: his ability to bind and loose sins ends when a person dies, a severe curtailment of papal authority.¹³ Departed souls are in God's hands. Thus, for Luther, indulgences are simply a human-made form of release from human-made penalties that in no way provide forgiveness for divinely-imposed penalties.

Luther argues that the problem with indulgences is that they produce in those who obtain them false confidence and spiritual laxity.¹⁴ People trust in indulgences rather than in divine mercy and ignore Christ's call to true repentance, believing that possession of an indulgence relieves them of the need to take up the cross.¹⁵ Echoing late medieval mystics and reformers such as Johannes Tauler and Jean Gerson, Luther insists that suffering under the cross is the Christian's lot and privilege. As he puts it in his final two theses, "Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; and thus be confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22]."¹⁶ According to Luther, divinely-ordained suffering is to be embraced and patiently endured, not avoided or rejected in favor of sacramental penances or indulgences. He maintains that there

is no release from the divine penalty for sin in this life and insists that it is both dangerous and unchristian to seek one.

Luther sounded much the same message in *A Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* (preached in October 1517; published in March 1518),¹⁷ a vernacular work that had a far wider lay readership than the Latin and rather complicated *Ninety-Five Theses*, whose impact, though significant, was limited to humanists, theologians, and other elites. (The *Theses* were translated into German but did not enjoy a wide circulation in this form.)¹⁸ In *A Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* Luther again makes a distinction between human and divine penalty for sin, insisting that indulgences have no impact on the latter, as only God can remit it.¹⁹ Luther also argues that God requires no penalty or satisfaction (*peynn adder gnugthuung*) for sin beyond sinners' "heart-felt and true repentance (*rew*) or conversion," along with their intention to take up the cross of Christ.²⁰ Nothing more is required to receive the free gift of divine forgiveness, and those who think differently, that is, those who think that they can atone for sin through works of satisfaction, are engaged in "a great error" (*eyn großer yrthum*).²¹ Luther teaches in his sermon that Christians should seek to endure the tribulations sent by God, not because they render satisfaction for sin but because they contribute to Christians' spiritual improvement, which he argues is God's purpose in sending them.²² This was a radical break with late medieval penitential theology and its teaching about suffering; this break had profound implications for how Luther understood the role of tribulation and adversity in the Christian life.²³ Here Luther makes it abundantly clear that he will not allow suffering to be placed on some kind of soteriological scales in order to tip them in the Christian's favor. In fact, Luther never allowed this, not even in his earliest Psalm lectures where suffering appears to have salvific value as a cause of self-accusation. From the beginning of his career as a Professor of Theology, Luther was silent on the issue of suffering as a work of satisfaction. This silence is no doubt owing to the fact that he was simply not interested in human merit and the role it might play in salvation; he was not interested in soteriological scales because in his mind sinful humanity had nothing to place on them, aside from its sin. This silence also created a rather significant pastoral problem for Luther, for it meant the rejection of one of the primary ways Christians had interpreted and coped with suffering in the Later Middle Ages. Luther sought to meet this pastoral problem head on.

In the *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* Luther criticizes certain "modern preachers" (*newen prediger*) who make a distinction between two kinds of penalties for sin: curative (*medicativas*) and satisfactory (*satisfactorias*). He

rejects the latter category and places all divine penalty in the former one. He insists that “all penalty, indeed, everything that God lays upon Christians is edifying (*besserlich*) for them and able to be born by them.”²⁴ Luther cites 1 Cor 10:13 in order to encourage his readers that God will not test them beyond what they can bear, arguing that they therefore have no need of indulgences to reduce punishment for sin.²⁵ As in the *Ninety-Five Theses*, he maintains that the great failing of indulgences is that they cater to the human desire to avoid suffering and therefore rob human beings of its benefits. Indulgences have only been allowed on account of “immature and lazy Christians” who want to persist in their spiritual laxity.²⁶

This critique of spiritual laxity was an important recurring theme in Luther’s teaching, preaching, and writing from the early 1510s through the end of the Indulgence Controversy. He felt that a good deal of the popular piety of his day was a merely external piety that shunned divinely-ordained suffering and its benefits. This critique was directly informed by Luther’s emerging Theology of the Cross, something that is abundantly clear in his *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* (draft February 1518; published August 1518).

In this work Luther accused his opponents of being theologians of glory who relied on reason and human moral effort to establish and achieve the good.²⁷ These *faux* theologians failed to understand how deeply flawed human intellectual and moral capacities had become after the fall and how strongly inclined the human will was toward self-deification. They also failed to understand how since the fall God had acted to humble human pride by choosing to reveal himself through the folly of the cross. Theologians of the cross, on the other hand, understood the need for God to reveal himself “under the contrary” (*sub contrario*) and for human beings to be humbled, even annihilated, if they were to become, as Luther put it in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, “Christ’s action and instrument.”²⁸ Theologians of the cross therefore embraced all manner of divinely-imposed suffering as God’s chosen means of reducing human beings to nothing so that they could receive everything, including justification, from God as sheer gift.

Luther did not reject traditional penitential piety in the *Explanations*, including the belief in purgatory,²⁹ but he did sharply criticize abuses of traditional devotion, especially the way it was used to avoid divinely-imposed suffering.³⁰ Luther wrote,

A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that [divine] punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed, not

alone by the embrace of his most holy flesh but also by the embrace of his exceedingly holy and divine will, and he has left these relics here to be kissed, sought after, and embraced. Indeed fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials.” [Jam 1:2]³¹

Luther went on to lament the fact that so many people who went on pilgrimages to view sacred relics did not recognize “the true relic, namely, the sufferings and crosses which have sanctified the bones and relics of the martyrs and made them worthy of such great veneration.”³² Such true relics were available to Christians every day, if only they had the faith to see and accept them, something the theology of glory rendered impossible.³³

Luther would eventually reject indulgences altogether, along with belief in relics and the cult of the saints, insisting that each was a superstitious means of escape from divinely-imposed purgation. They prevented people from taking up the cross, and Luther wanted people to face head on the adversity that the hidden God sent to them, not because adversity itself was good, but because God accomplished good through it. Luther would also argue that late medieval piety was a tragic means of escape from the divinely-ordained means of consolation that he sought to articulate in the Indulgence Controversy. Radical cross-bearing and radical consolation went hand-in-hand in Luther’s reformation of suffering, which as we have seen, went hand-in-hand with his reformation of soteriology.

This radical consolation took the form of relief from a guilty conscience on the basis of grace alone. In addition to separating divinely-imposed penalty for sin from its human counterpart, and urging his contemporaries to embrace the suffering that came from heaven for their spiritual improvement, Luther also sought to show during the Indulgence Controversy how the Latin church’s obsession with man-made penalties and their remission had obscured from view the central importance of forgiveness of guilt.³⁴ Because by this point he placed little stock in ecclesiastical punishments, and because he saw no way to escape divinely-imposed tribulation, Luther sought to focus his contemporaries’ attention on the remission of guilt. But there remained an important connection for him between divinely-imposed tribulation and the divine forgiveness of guilt: the only way to endure the tribulation was to have certainty that God had remitted the guilt through grace. As Luther argues in *For the Investigating of Truth and the Consoling of Fearful Consciences* (early summer 1518), “The remission of guilt calms the

heart and takes away the greatest of all punishments, namely, the consciousness of sin.”³⁵ Later in the same treatise Luther asserts, “Where guilt and conscience have been forgiven there is no pain in punishment (*nulla pena est in pena*), but there is joy in tribulations.”³⁶

In comments like these on the forgiveness of guilt there is a striking new emphasis on certainty of absolution. As Luther writes in the same treatise, “Therefore it is certain that sins are loosed if you believe they have been loosed, because the promise of Christ the Savior [Matt. 16: 19] is certain.”³⁷ Luther thus bases peace for the troubled conscience (including his own) firmly and exclusively on faith in the promises of the Word.³⁸ This new-found confidence had direct implications for Luther’s theology of suffering: armed with certainty of forgiveness and the peace it entailed, the believer could face tribulation joyfully, knowing that they were not really a divine punishment for sin – for Christ had taken this punishment in its entirety on himself. Nor were they a means of rendering satisfaction for sin to the divine Judge; rather, they were (and could only be) an opportunity to have one’s faith and love tested by one’s heavenly Father. One’s salvation was not at stake, one’s ongoing redemption from sin’s effects as a fruit of salvation was. This rejection of suffering as penance signaled a crucial break with late medieval penitential theology and much of the Latin Christian tradition.

This break also had direct implications for Luther’s attitude toward Purgatory. While he could assert in the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, “I am positive that there is a Purgatory [...]” (*Mihi certissimum est, purgatorium esse [...]*),³⁹ his understanding of what took place in Purgatory was quite different from much of the tradition that preceded him. As we have seen, Luther rejected the need for human beings to make satisfaction for sin, whether in this life or the next. Therefore, Purgatory could not be a *punitorium* where one suffered the remaining punishment for sin, rather it could only be a *purgatorium* where one was purged of self-love and caused to love the divine will.⁴⁰ This was the “perfect spiritual health” that Luther believed was required of all those who were to enter heaven.⁴¹ Luther retained this modified view of Purgatory for some time, and did not finally reject the idea of a post-mortem purification from sin until 1530.⁴² He was interested in purgation from sin.

Luther also believed in the reality and necessity of a pre-mortem Purgatory. In the *Explanations* Luther writes movingly of his experience of utter God-forsakenness, which he interprets as a foretaste of the pains of Purgatory and Hell.⁴³ He says of these most extreme of *Anfechtungen*, “In this instance the person is stretched out with Christ so that all his bones may be counted, and every corner of the soul is filled with the greatest bitterness, dread, trembling, and sorrow in such a manner that all these last forever.”

Luther goes on to praise the mystic Johannes Tauler as one who understands this experience, thus demonstrating his sympathy for certain mystics in the crucial years of his soteriological development.⁴⁴ In keeping with his emphasis on the necessity of enduring suffering sent by God, Luther argues that Christians should not flee such suffering, rather they should embrace it and trust God, thereby finding peace and repose for their consciences.⁴⁵ As with post-mortem suffering, the goal of such experiences is to test faith and prove love, not to render satisfaction for sin. Luther was not the first theologian to interpret suffering as a this-worldly Purgatory,⁴⁶ but his rejection of notions of merit and satisfaction in connection with such experiences was unique and radical. Suffering Christians could no longer view their tribulation as a penance, which, if patiently born, could reduce their time in Purgatory. Tribulation had now lost its place in the traditional economy of salvation. Suffering was no longer salvific, although it was redemptive.

The Indulgence Controversy thus marked a crucial chapter in the development of Luther’s theology of suffering. Central to this development was a thoroughgoing critique of the traditional understanding of the penalty for sin. As we have seen, Luther posited a distinction between the divine and human penalties for sin, and stressed the importance of the former while he disparaged the latter. He also argued for a vital connection between the assurance of forgiveness of guilt and the Christian’s ability to embrace and endure divinely-imposed suffering, a connection he underscored by insisting that believers could have certainty of forgiveness through faith in the promises of the Word, and also confidence that the tribulation they experienced was not punishment but purgation. These assertions, in turn, were directly influenced by Luther’s theology of salvation, which by the end of the Indulgence Controversy left no room for human agency, and thus no possibility (or need) of rendering satisfaction for sin. Luther had rejected the optimistic soteriology of the *via moderna* and had taken to a rather radical conclusion the emphasis on divine mercy and human passivity that is so apparent in the works of late medieval theologians such as Jean Gerson, Johann von Paltz, and Johann von Staupitz,⁴⁷ as well as in the late medieval *ars moriendi* literature; for Luther sinners were utterly dead before God and therefore were incapable of exercising agency of any kind in their spiritual resurrection.

Luther introduced a new doctrine of suffering into early modern Christianity and this new doctrine was central to his larger effort to reform the church of his day. As we have seen, he wanted Christians to embrace suffering as a divine gift that mortified their sinful nature, conformed them to Christ, and, especially, tested their faith – he also thought suffering created empathy for fellow sufferers.⁴⁸ Luther wished to strip Christians of the means they had traditionally employed to understand and cope with

suffering, largely because he thought these means were essentially pagan in origin, that is, he believed that they relied on human reason to make sense of suffering and on human moral strength to appease or barter with God in the midst of it.⁴⁹ The true Christian (*Christianus*) was what Luther later called in his Genesis Lectures a “Crosstian” (*Crucianus*), that is, a person who willingly took up the cross and suffered with Christ;⁵⁰ like Job, Crosstians obediently submitted to divinely-imposed suffering, even though it confounded their reason and threatened to shatter their faith. Crosstians did not regard their suffering as a kind of penance that they could perform to satisfy God’s justice and thus reduce their time in Purgatory. Neither did they see it as preparation for rapturous union with the divine essence. And they most certainly did not seek escape from suffering through “superstitious” means of protection or healing. Crosstians did not seek out suffering, but when it came, they accepted it and were content to stand before God on the basis of faith alone. Crosstians trusted what the Word said about God – that He was good – rather than what reason and emotion concluded in the midst of suffering, that He was not.⁵¹

Luther understood that this approach to suffering left Christians in a potentially vulnerable situation that many would find objectionable. He understood that faith alone could produce its own kind of anxiety – this is why he referred to it as an “art” (*kunst*). In order to combat this anxiety, Luther made a number of recommendations to suffering Christians in both private letters and public sermons and pamphlets. He regularly urged people enduring personal afflictions to forsake solitude and seek out the company of other Christians who could console them with the Word⁵² – and beer!⁵³ Luther thought that the devil was most lethal when left unchecked by the Word and allowed to tempt and assail a Christian who was isolated from others. Luther especially urged participation in the Lord’s Supper for those undergoing tribulation. In Communion one had visible signs of God’s favorable disposition toward believers. Luther also strongly recommended a reformed version of private confession to those burdened by trials and afflictions.⁵⁴ As we have seen, he emphasized again and again that the only way to escape despair and diabolical deception as one faced suffering was to be confident of the goodness of God *pro me* in the midst of the adversity.⁵⁵ Without this confidence one would always interpret suffering only as punishment for sin. The source of this confidence was faith in the divine promise of forgiveness offered to sinners as a gift of sheer grace. In other words, it was the power of the keys, the “treasure of the church,” as the Wittenberg professor had dubbed this power in the *Ninety-Five Theses*.⁵⁶ For Luther, the most effective means of applying the benefits of this treasure to the individual Christian was through private confession.⁵⁷ Indeed, this

was the primary reason he wished to retain a modified version of the traditional practice – to offer relief to consciences plagued by *Anfechtungen*.⁵⁸ For Luther, the most difficult tribulation to bear was the consciousness of sin and the concomitant fear of death and judgment.⁵⁹ Private confession provided both release from a guilty conscience and confidence of God’s goodness in the face of affliction.⁶⁰ It was essential to the strengthening of faith, which alone could perceive the goodness of the hidden God hidden under its opposite. Luther’s reformation of suffering assumes private confession and he could not imagine it working without private confession. Owing in large part to Luther’s strong support for the rite, a reformed version of private confession would become a defining mark of Lutheran pastoral care in the early modern period. As in pre-Reformation Christianity, private confession became an important occasion for a ministry of verbal consolation in Lutheranism, although the theological basis and actual content of the rite underwent significant change.

I would say that the exclusion of private confession from most modern forms of Protestant Christianity, including most modern forms of Lutheranism, despite it being part of the original Protestant birthright, is one of the most regrettable developments in the history of Protestant pastoral care. I think Luther was right about the importance of private confession in enabling the believer to master the art of faith in the face of tribulation. As an aside, I would say that Luther and the rest of the reformers were wrong by allowing no truly full-throated biblical lament and even protest in the midst of suffering. Luther’s God was not biblical enough to allow and even welcome the chutzpah that one finds in certain Psalms – 44, 80, 88 – and in portions of Job.⁶¹

Luther urged his new evangelical approach to suffering on his students and contemporaries because he thought it was true and because he thought it worked. Beyond simply functioning as a means of coping with adversity, or a way of making sense of suffering, something that Luther thought impossible for unaided human reason, Luther believed that this approach enabled believers to welcome the efforts of God to transform them into true Christians, that is, into those who were united with Christ by faith and thus animated by Christ’s being and will. It is important not to miss the strong emphasis in Luther’s work on the dynamic nature of the Christian life.⁶² The main reason he placed such a great emphasis on the necessity of suffering in the Christian life is that he saw it as the primary tool God used to promote growth in faith and Christ-likeness.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of such purified faith was that it was supposed to provide one with superior insight into the will of God. Central to Luther’s efforts to reform attitudes toward suffering was the conviction that

he, by faith, understood the purposes of divinely ordained tribulation far better than his adversaries. Luther argued that his theology was superior to that of his adversaries because it provided a better account of why suffering occurred and how one was to contend with it. Early on in his second Psalms lectures (*Operationes in psalmos*, 1519-21) Luther claims that in his day the wisdom of the cross has been “hidden in a deep mystery”. The reason for this mystery or confusion, he insists, is that most people are ignorant of God and the ways of God when it comes to suffering. Luther asserts that

they do not know, I say, what He does, what He wills, what He thinks, when He tempts us with tribulations. For they judge ‘just as horses or mules’ (Vulgate Ps. 31: 9; Ps. 32:9) according to that which is seen and sensed. But what is seen is nothing other than humiliation, helplessness, death, and all things that were manifest to us in the suffering of Christ. If you only look upon these things and do not discern the will of God in them, and bear [this will] and praise it, you will necessarily take offense at this cross, and seek refuge in yourself, where you will soon become an idolater and attribute to a creature the glory due to God.⁶³

“They do not know [...],” but Luther believed he did. In many ways, Luther saw himself as a prophet, who was divinely prepared and illumined to discern and declare the divine will to God’s wayward people. Suffering had been the primary means through which God had purged, cleansed, and expanded his own soul, thus making it a suitable conduit through which the divine message of grace and its implications for suffering could flow from God to Luther and from Luther to others. This claim of superior insight into the divine will and its purposes regarding suffering directly informed the reformation of Christianity that Luther proposed to his contemporaries and helps to account for why the reformation of suffering was so central to it.

Notes

- 1 I gave a version of this article as a talk at the Convocation Hour, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in December, 2014. The article both draws on and includes extended excerpts from my book, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially 25-26, 31, 104-109, and 121-124.
- 2 The following discussion draws on my *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

- University Press, 2004), ch. 2, and on my “Embracing the ‘True Relic’ of Christ: Suffering, Penance, and Private Confession in the Thought of Martin Luther,” in *The New History of Penance* (ed. Abigail Firey; Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2008) 377-393.
- 3 The distinction between the guilt of sin and the penalty for sin goes back at least as far as Anselm, who argued that humanity, owing to the gravity of its original sin, deserved not only to incur an infinite moral debt with God (original guilt), but also to receive a fitting penalty for having transgressed against its Maker in the first place. See Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, Book I:11 (pp. 84-5). Thomas Aquinas accepted and readily employed this distinction. See the *Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars et Supplementum*, 548-49 (Tertia pars, q. 86, art. 4). Here Aquinas maintains that the guilt of sin is forgiven by operating grace, the penalty for sin by cooperating grace, a distinction of graces that goes back to Augustine.
- 4 Peter Lombard makes it clear that the penitent’s works of satisfaction are only efficacious because Christ’s *poena* cooperates with them, thus enabling them to atone for new penalty for sin. See Liber III: Dist. 19, cap. 4 in *Magistri Petri Lombardi, Sententiae In IV Libris Distinctae*, vol. 3, p. 121.17-23. Thomas Aquinas argues that it is fitting for Christians to be conformed to Christ’s suffering when they commit post-baptismal sin, and that this punishment, which is much less than sins deserve, is only efficacious because Christ’s satisfaction works along with it. *Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars et Supplementum*, 282-83 (Tertia Pars, q. 49, art. 3).
- 5 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars et Supplementum*, 49-50 (*Supplementum*, q. 15, a. 3). (It should be noted that Thomas did not write the *Supplementum*, rather it is a later work gathered largely from his *Scriptum super sententiis*.) When commenting on the three standard forms or categories of penance Joseph Goering explains that prayer made reparations for sins against God, alms for sins against the neighbor, and fasting for sins against oneself. See “The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession,” in *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140-1234: From Gratian to the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX*. (ed. Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 401.
- 6 See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars et Supplementum*, 40-41 and 42-43 (*Supplementum*, q. 12, art. 3 and q. 13, art. 2). In addition to making atonement for sin and protecting against future transgressions, penance was also frequently held to provide healing for the destructive effects of sin.
- 7 *Peycht Spiegel der Sünder*, The Houghton Library, Harvard University, Typ 520.10.201. Nürnberg, Johann Stuchs, 1510, folios, L2-L2’.
- 8 For a fuller treatment of Luther’s break with late medieval penitential theology, see my *Reformation of the Keys*, 51-58, and “Embracing the ‘True Relic’ of Christ.”
- 9 See David Bagchi, “Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* and the Contemporary Criticism of Indulgences,” in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (ed. R.N. Swanson; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006) 332. Bagchi attributes Luther’s concern to protect against spiritual laxity in the Indulgence Controversy especially to the influence of Tauler. See 341 and 351.
- 10 Portions of the following section are taken from my article “Embracing the ‘True Relic’ of Christ.” It should be noted that Luther was not entirely satisfied with the way he had expressed himself in the *Ninety-Five Theses*. The theses do not necessarily represent his own theological convictions about indulgences and related topics at this stage in his development, at least not in every point. See Robert W. Schaffern, *The Penitents’*

- Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom, 1175-1375* (Scranton, PA and London, UK: University of Scranton Press, 2007) 5-6.
- 11 See thesis 5, WA 1:233,18-19; LW 31:26.
- 12 See WA 1:233,10-11; LW 31: 5. The argument of the *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* in a nutshell is that indulgences dissuade Christians from taking up a life of true penitence – that is, hatred of self and various mortifications of the flesh (see theses 3 and 4, WA 1:233,14-16; LW 31:25-26) – and therefore they have to be opposed. For an illuminating discussion of Tauler’s influence on Luther’s understanding of contrition in the opening thesis of the *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*, see Volker Leppin, “Omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit” – Zur Aufnahme mystischer Traditionen in Luthers erster Ablassthese,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 93 (2002) 7-25.
- 13 See Thesis 8, WA 1:233,25-6; LW 31:26. Bagchi notes that the theological faculty of the University of Paris remained silent on the issue of the pope’s jurisdiction over souls in Purgatory. He writes, “The silence of the Paris faculty over the role of the pope in this process, even *per modum suffragii*, is deafening.” See “Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* and the Contemporary Criticism of Indulgences,” 347. Thus Luther was by no means alone in placing limits to papal jurisdiction over departed Christian souls. Berndt Hamm argues for the radical nature of Luther’s curtailment of papal authority in the *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*. See “Die 95 Thesen – ein reformatorischer Text im Zusammenhang der frühen Bußtheologie Martin Luthers,” in *Der frühe Luther: Etappen reformatorischer Neuorientierung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 91.
- 14 Luther had made this argument several times between the *Dictata* (1513-1515) and the *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* (1517).
- 15 See thesis 40, WA 1:235,16-17; LW 31:29.
- 16 WA 1:238,18-21; LW 31:33.
- 17 WA 1:239.
- 18 See Mark U. Edwards, Jr. *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994) 163, 169. Martin Brecht calls *Ein Sermon von Ablass und Gnade* Luther’s “first great literary achievement.” See *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521* (trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985) 208.
- 19 See WA 1:244,25-30.
- 20 WA 1:244,15-19.
- 21 WA 1:245,21-23, quotation at line 21.
- 22 See WA 1:244,34-245,4.
- 23 Luther had already asserted in a sermon on February 24 (St. Matthias’s Day), 1517, that the penalty of sin was removed when the guilt of sin was forgiven. WA 1:141,18-19. Cited in Bagchi, “Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* and the Contemporary Criticism of Indulgences,” 332.
- 24 WA 1:244,40-245,4. In the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* (1518, IV) Luther writes against those who believe that their sins can be forgiven through their own sorrow for sins and works of satisfaction. WA 1:542,34-38; LW 31:103.
- 25 WA 1:245,5-12.
- 26 WA 1:245,26-20.
- 27 WA 1:613,21-614,27; LW 31:225-227.
- 28 WA 1:364,15-16; LW 31:56.
- 29 See Craig Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2000) 34-39. Koslofsky demonstrates that Luther did not finally condemn the doctrine of purgatory until 1530. But he also shows that already in the late 1510s and 1520s the reformer had transferred the sufferings of purgatory to this life. In other words, while Luther was slow to reject purgatory, from an early point on he made little use of the doctrine as traditionally conceived.
- 30 In *Auslegung deutsch des Vaterunsers für die einfältigen Laien* Luther compared Christians who sought to avoid trials to knights who sought to avoid attack or combat. Luther asserted, “But where all is as it should be, trials will not pass us by, and we do not seek to avoid them, but to overcome them like a true knight.” WA 2:124,1-12; LW 42:72-73.
- 31 WA 1:613,23-32; LW 31:226.
- 32 WA 1:613,35-37; LW 31:226.
- 33 Luther frequently referred to suffering and the cross as true relics. For example, see *Tessaradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus et onerantis* (1520), WA 6:118,38-119,6; LW 42:143.
- 34 See *Pro veritate inquirenda*, WA 1:630,5-6, thesis 1.
- 35 WA 1:630,7-8, thesis 2. (My translation.)
- 36 WA 1:630,13-14, thesis 5. (My translation.)
- 37 WA 1:631,17-18, thesis 15 (My translation.)
- 38 See Luther’s *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute*, WA 1:541,7 and 544,7-8. On Luther’s discovery of peace for his conscience in the *Resolutiones*, see Ernst Bizer, *Fides Ex Auditu: Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (3rd ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966) 113-114.
- 39 WA 1:555,36; LW 31:126.
- 40 See WA 1:560,26-30 (LW 31:133), 561,28-29 (LW 31:135), and 562,22 (LW 31:137). The fifteenth-century theologian Wessel of Gansfort held a similar view of Purgatory. See Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 29ff.
- 41 WA 1:560,9-11; LW 31:133.
- 42 See Luther’s *Widerruf vom Fegefeuer*, WA 30/2:360-390. See also Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 35.
- 43 See WA 1:557,33-558,8; LW 31:129.
- 44 WA 1:557,25-27; LW 31:128.
- 45 WA 1:557,7-10; LW 31:128.
- 46 Mechthild of Magdeburg, Margaret Ebner, and Thomas á Kempis could each treat suffering as a this-worldly Purgatory.
- 47 Hamm asserts, “[...] the Reformation brings a late-medieval dynamic to a conclusion: The minimization of human capability so common around 1500 becomes a total incapacity *coram deo*, while the late-medieval maximization of God’s mercy is radicalized to the doctrine of the soteriological efficacy of God alone.” Robert J. Bast, ed., *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 126.
- 48 Luther clearly saw a “horizontal” dimension to the purification that suffering achieves in the life of the Christian. See his comments to this effect in *Epistel Sancti Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt*, WA 12:374,13-14; LW 30:119.

- 49 For Luther's assault on the notion that God is a "huckster or journeyman" (*ein trewdler odder tagloner*) with whom human beings must barter through good works in order to obtain grace, see *Von den guten werckenn*, WA 6:210,19-22; CL I:235,17-20; LW 44:31.
- 50 See the *Genesisvorlesung* (1535-1545), WA 43:617,32-35; LW 5:274.
- 51 See *Tröstung für eine Person in hohen Anfechtungen*, WA 7:785,3-7; LW 42:183. See also Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003; originally published by Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1960) 69.
- 52 See Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 86, 91, 93, and 95. For a brief discussion of Luther's emphasis on God working through the instrumentality of others to console those suffering various *Anfechtungen*, see Ute Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989) 24.
- 53 One of the central arguments of Mennecke-Haustein's book, *Luthers Trostbriefe*, is that unlike the late medieval tradition of the cure of souls, Luther placed a strong emphasis on the goodness and importance of food, drink, music, joviality, the company of others – in short, externality in general – for those undergoing *Anfechtungen*. See esp. 268-275.
- 54 On the plight of private confession in the German Reformation, see my *Reformation of the Keys*.
- 55 See Luther's comments to this effect in *Von den guten werckenn*, WA 6:208,10-18; CL I:233.5-140; LW 44:28.
- 56 WA 1:236,16-19; LW 31:31.
- 57 See WA Br 6:454,22-27.
- 58 See Luther's comments to this effect in his famous *Invocavit Sermons*, WA 10/III:61d,32-62d,33; LW 51:98-99.
- 59 See *Pro veritate*, WA 1:630,7-8, and *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum*, WA 1:534,17; LW 31:89, paragraph 4.
- 60 See *Pro veritate*, WA 1:630,13-14.
- 61 See Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 258. See also Oswald Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament," in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg* (ed. David M. Whitford; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2002) 211-220. For a recent study of Luther and lament, see Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).
- 62 See Luther's discussion of grace and gift in *Rationis Latomianae Confutatio* where he maintains that faith, the gift, heals the corruption of the human body and soul by effecting repentance and the mortification of the flesh. Faith does not merit forgiveness of sins, which comes exclusively through grace. WA 8:105,36-108.18 and 111,33-34; LW 32:226-230 and 235. See also Luther's statement in the *Operationes* that Christians must become what God is – righteous. AWA 2:259,12-14.
- 63 AWA 2:179,22-180,3.

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The Lutheran Art of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Wittenberg: Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Celebrating Confessional Identity after 1592

Luther Colloquy 2016

Austra Reinis

“Just as we were about to rejoice in the contemplation of the great mystery of the holy and most blessed Trinity, God has gathered us together in a house of mourning [...] at the burial of one of the mighty in Israel, our dear, blessed [...] Superintendent,” laments Friedrich Balduin (1575-1627), Professor of Theology at the University of Wittenberg, as he begins his funeral sermon for his colleague Georg Mylius, also preacher and professor in Wittenberg. Quoting St. Paul, he continues, “How unsearchable are the judgments and ways of the Lord! For who has known the mind of the Lord?” Rom. 11[:33-34].”¹ Mylius’s death in 1607 was the fourth in a series of deaths of theology professors that had shaken the Wittenberg University Theological Faculty, beginning in 1603 with the passing away of Aegidius Hunnius, and continuing with the deaths of David Runge in 1604, and Salomon Gesner in 1605. After Mylius himself died in 1607, a fifth former Wittenberg professor, Polycarp Leyser passed away in Dresden in 1610. In the same year, the funeral sermons preached for these five professors, founders of the movement that later came to be known as Wittenberg Orthodoxy, prefaced with older materials published on the occasion of Martin Luther’s death, were published in Wittenberg in a

227-page commemorative volume bearing the lengthy title *Report of the Christian Departure of Dr. Martin Luther Along with Six Funeral Sermons Delivered at the Interments of Outstanding Theologians Having Served Christ’s Church: Dr. Martin Luther, Dr. Aegidius Hunnius, Dr. David Runge, Dr. Salomon Gesner, Dr. Georg Mylius, and Dr. Polycarp Leyser, All Formerly Doctors of Holy Scripture and Professors in Wittenberg, etc. Now [Gathered and] Printed Together in [Chronological] Order for the Benefit of All [and] in Thankful Remembrance of the Same.*² The volume enjoyed considerable popularity, as is evidenced by the fact that it was reprinted three times in Wittenberg, in 1611, 1613, and again in 1619.³

Who published this popular volume, and to what end? The collection does not bear the name of an editor; it is conceivable, however, that the editor was Balduin, the author of the funeral sermon for Mylius. He had studied under Hunnius, Gesner, and Leyser, had been appointed successor to Runge in 1604, and for the next three years had worked as a colleague with Mylius until the latter’s death.⁴ When the third of Balduin’s former teachers, Leyser, died in 1610, it may have seemed that the time had come to honor the five widely known and respected men who had so significantly contributed to the re-establishment of Lutheranism in Saxony after 1592.

In publishing this volume, its editor was building on, or rather, combining two already established genres of Lutheran literature: the funeral sermon and the commemorative work. He gathered together the funeral sermons preached for each of the five professors; these had already enjoyed a wide readership as individual editions. He prefaced them with two items gleaned from a well-known volume published in 1546 to commemorate Martin Luther: Justus Jonas and Michael Coelius’s account of Martin Luther’s death and John Bugenhagen’s sermon preached at Luther’s funeral. As initially written and delivered, each of these texts had informed the living that the deceased had died a Christian death, and they had offered comfort with the assurance that the deceased had fulfilled his purpose as a divinely ordained theologian of God’s church and had most certainly entered eternal life. The composite volume of 1610, I posit, additionally sought to persuade readers that the five recently deceased Wittenberg professors had been the true successors to Luther, and had faithfully carried on and preserved Luther’s legacy. Furthermore, it exhorted readers, among them preachers and princes, to persevere in the Lutheran faith that the deceased had taught, encouraging them to imitate both the exceptional lives and the exemplary deaths of the deceased. In pursuing the above ends, the volume served the function of confessional identity formation, and can be considered an important, heretofore unrecognized, contribution to the already established, specifically Lutheran, culture of memory in which not only one’s faith and

life, but also the manner in which one witnessed to one's faith on one's deathbed, was accorded significance.

Martin Luther's Last Days

The first document in this volume is the description of Martin Luther's (1483-1546) final days, hours, and death composed by his friends Justus Jonas (1493-1555), superintendent of the churches in Halle, and Michael Coelius (1492-1559), castle preacher to Count Albrecht of Mansfeld, both of whom were present at Luther's deathbed. Martin Luther did not die at home in Wittenberg, but in Eisleben, the town of his birth. The Counts of Mansfeld had asked him to come to Eisleben to mediate in a conflict between them. Although he was in ill-health, Luther had acquiesced. Luther's secretary, John Aurifaber, and his three sons, Hans, Martin, and Paul, accompanied him on this trip. The party set out from Wittenberg on January 23, 1546. On the following day, they arrived in Halle, where they stayed for several days because high water prevented them from crossing the Saale river. On Thursday, January 28, joined by Justus Jonas, the travelers crossed the river. Along the way, Luther's illness flared up, and led him to exclaim: "This is what the devil always does to me: Whenever I am planning to do something important, he assaults me ahead of time, and visits me with a temptation."⁵ The negotiations between the counts in Eisleben took several weeks. Between negotiation sessions, Luther preached at four worship services, two of which were communion services: "Once, in public (when Communion was offered at the altar), he received absolution from the priest, together with two communicants; during the second Communion, which took place on Sunday, Valentine's Day, he ordained and blessed two priests in the Apostolic tradition."⁶ During those days in Eisleben, Luther's companions heard him speak many comforting words, "discussing his advanced age and [expressing the hope] that when he returned home to Wittenberg he might come to rest."⁷ Every evening throughout these twenty-one days, when he retired to his room around eight o'clock, he stood by the window "and said his prayers ... seriously and fervently."⁸ On Wednesday, February 17, the day Luther was to die, the counts, along with his companions, urged Luther to stay away from the morning's negotiations until noon and rest. In the evening, however, he joined everyone for dinner and spoke "many words of grave importance, reflecting on death and on the future eternal life."⁹ Soon after that he returned to his room, followed by his younger sons Martin and Paul, and began to pray near the window. When his secretary, John Aurifaber, went up to his room, Luther told him: "I have a frightful pain in my chest, just as before."¹⁰ Aurifaber left to search for a

medication. When Jonas and Coelius came up, Luther again "complained bitterly of chest pains."¹¹ He was rubbed with warm blankets, and the medication was administered with a spoonful of wine. He slept between 9 and 10 pm, awoke, and slept again until 1 am. "Those who stayed with him in the chamber that night were Dr. Jonas, his two sons Martin and Paul, the servant Ambrose, and a second servant."¹² When he awoke, he once more complained of chest pain, saying: "My dear Doctor Jonas, I guess I shall have to remain here in Eisleben (where I was born and baptized)."¹³ He also spoke the Scripture verse, "Into your hands I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth" (Ps 31:5).¹⁴ When Coelius and Aurifaber re-entered the room, it was decided to awaken the master of the house and his wife. They came quickly, followed by "the physician, Master Simon Wild, and Dr. [Balthasar] Ludwig, a medical man, and soon after them, Count Albrecht and his Lady [Anna]."¹⁵ More medications were administered. Luther spoke a prayer:

O, Heavenly Father, God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, God of all consolation, I thank you that you have revealed your Son Jesus Christ to me, in whom I believe, of whom I have preached and whom I have confessed, whom I have loved and praised, and who is being abused, persecuted, and mocked by the insufferable pope and all godless people. I beg you, My Lord Jesus Christ, let me commend my little soul to you. O, Heavenly Father, though I shall have to leave this body and be torn from this life, I know for certain that I shall remain with you eternally, and that no one can tear me from your hands.¹⁶

Having taken another spoonful of medication, he again spoke the words of Ps 31:5, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Dr. Jonas and Master Coelius asked him in a loud voice: "Reverend Father, do you wish to die, standing up for Christ and for the teaching that you have preached?" He spoke, so one could hear it clearly, "Yes."¹⁷ Death now was very close. The account continues:

Just then Count Hans Heinrich von Schwartzenburg and his lady joined us. Now the Doctor's [Luther's] face had turned very pale, his feet and nose had grown cold. He drew a deep but soft breath, and with this he gave up his spirit, quietly and with great forbearance, without moving so much as a finger. No one observed (and we can testify to that, before God, in all conscience) any kind of disquiet, bodily suffering, or pain of death. Rather, as Simeon puts it in his hymn, he joined the Lord in peaceful sleep [Lk 2:29].¹⁸

Given that a fraudulent account of Luther's death had been published by Luther's enemies even *before* he had died, according to which Luther's death and burial had been accompanied by a hellish clamor, and his grave had been found empty on the following day, smelling of sulfur, it is significant to note how Jonas and Coelius shaped their account to set the record straight.¹⁹ In many small but significant ways, they portrayed Luther's death as the "good death" of the traditional medieval Christian.²⁰ Long before he "joined the Lord in peaceful sleep," even before he arrived in Eisleben, Luther spoke of being assaulted by the devil. The belief that demons assault dying persons, and that they need to be resisted with faith, was firmly anchored in tradition.²¹ Although Luther did not call for the deathbed sacraments, as would have been customary, a few days before his death, in church, Luther had been absolved of his sins and had received the Lord's Supper.²² The only traditional practice missing was that of extreme unction, or anointing of the sick; Luther had rejected unction as a sacrament on theological grounds.²³ Also in conformity with tradition, in the hours leading up to his death, and just before he died, Luther prayed and commended his soul to God with the words of Ps 31:5. In response to Jonas and Coelius's question, he confirmed his commitment to the faith he had taught and preached. It was common in the Middle Ages to loudly ask persons very near death to affirm their faith one last time.²⁴ The most significant breaks with traditional deathbed etiquette were, first, that it was his own teaching that Luther affirmed, not the teaching of the "holy church" of his day, as was the custom.²⁵ Indeed, he repudiated "the insufferable pope and all godless people," whom he regarded as enemies of the faith. Second, in the prayer quoted earlier, Luther confidently asserted his conviction that his salvation was assured: "O, Heavenly Father, [...] I know for certain that I shall remain with you eternally." This assertion was significant, because it represented the core of Luther's teaching of justification by faith. Medieval theologians had explicitly taught that ordinary Christians could not presume to be certain of eternal life.

About an hour after Luther had died, Justus Jonas dictated his account of Luther's death to the secretary of the Count of Mansfeld. A messenger delivered it to the Elector John Frederick of Saxony (b. 1503 - r. 1532-1554) in Torgau, who in turn forwarded it to Wittenberg. Philipp Melancthon, John Bugenhagen, and Caspar Cruciger broke the news to Luther's wife Katharina von Bora.²⁶ The initial function of Jonas and Coelius's account of Luther's death was thus to communicate the news to the persons immediately concerned. Under the circumstances, it would have been a comfort to each of them to learn that Luther had died peacefully and in a traditional Christian manner. After Luther's funeral, Jonas and Coelius

augmented their narrative with detailed descriptions of how Luther's body had been transported back to Wittenberg, how his colleagues Bugenhagen and Melancthon spoke at his funeral, and how he was buried near the pulpit of the Castle Church. The finished account concludes with a brief *votum* which lifts up Luther's faithful fulfillment of his divinely ordained vocation:

May the eternal Heavenly Father, who called Dr. Martin to his great task, and our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he loyally preached and to whom he confessed, and the Holy Spirit who strengthened him with godly power against the pope, and all the gates of hell, with such outstanding vigor, great courage, and heart during many fierce battles, help all of us toward a Christian departure from this wretched life and into the same eternal bliss.²⁷

By the end of 1546, this account had appeared in print in at least seven editions in Wittenberg, Erfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Magdeburg, and Zwickau.²⁸ The explicit function of the published report was to inform both friends and enemies that Luther had died the death of a Christian, not a heretic. Implicitly, it sought to exhort the living, among them Lutheran preachers and princes, to persevere in the faith that Luther had taught, and set up Luther as an example of Christian living and dying to be imitated.

John Bugenhagen's (1485-1558) funeral sermon, which is the second text in the 1610 commemorative volume, also serves these functions. Bugenhagen explicitly holds up Luther's divine vocation. Reflecting on the sermon text, 1 Thess 4:13-14, he states: "God has taken from us this great teacher and prophet and divinely sent reformer of the Church! Oh, how can we refrain from mourning and weeping? How can we obey dear Paul when he says: 'You are not to grieve for those who are sleeping?'"²⁹ He proceeds to comfort the congregation with the conviction that Christians know that those who have died will be reawakened, and that the living will be reunited with the deceased in eternal life. Furthermore, Luther's legacy will endure among the living: "The person has departed in Christ, but the tremendous, blessed, divine teaching of this dear man lives on most powerfully."³⁰ The very few details Bugenhagen supplies concerning the manner of Luther's death appear to be drawn from Jonas and Coelius's account. He cites Luther's last prayer expressing the reformer's certainty of his salvation; he mentions that Luther thrice recited the words of Psalm 31:5, "Into your hands", as well as John 3:16, "For God so loved the world", and he recounts, modifying his source ever so slightly, that the dying Luther "folded his hands, and in stillness gave up his spirit to Christ."³¹ Soon after it was

preached, Bugenhagen's sermon was published in an edition each in Nuremberg and Magdeburg, and in English translation in Wesel, in a small volume which also included Melancthon's funeral oration and Jonas and Coelius's account of Luther's death.³² Like the initial account of Luther's death, this augmented volume affirmed Luther's divine vocation, informed the living of the manner in which Luther had died, exhorted readers to persevere in the faith Luther had taught, and encouraged them to imitate Luther's exemplary life, in particular, his manner of dying. Both the initial account and this augmented volume contributed to forming an emerging Lutheran approach to dying, a Lutheran tradition of printed funeral sermons and orations, and, in a wider sense, to a Lutheran memorial culture upon which future Lutherans would continue to build.

The Christian Departures of Five Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy

While Luther's principal conflict had been with the Pope and those he called "papists," in the latter half of the sixteenth century, many Lutheran theologians, and the territorial rulers they served, were concerned with distancing themselves from the Calvinist churches that were on the rise in Switzerland, France, and increasingly in German territories as well. Under the terms of the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555), Lutherans had gained toleration in the territories of the empire ruled by Lutheran princes; Calvinists were excluded from such toleration. The massacre of Huguenots (Calvinist Christians) in France on St. Bartholomew's Day (1572) led many Lutheran rulers, along with their preachers, in the interests of self-preservation, to further distance themselves from Calvinism.³³ At the same time, many Lutherans were seeking to overcome doctrinal differences among themselves and to achieve confessional unity. In 1574, Elector August of Saxony (b. 1526, r. 1553-1586) commissioned the Tübingen theologian Jakob Andreae (1528-1590) to convene a meeting of theologians from Electoral Saxony, Württemberg, and Lower Saxony to pursue such unity; this set in motion the theological negotiations that led to the Formula of Concord in 1577.³⁴

The Formula of Concord became the foundational text for an emerging Lutheran confessional identity, or Lutheran Orthodoxy. At the urging of Andreae, Polycarp Leyser (1552-1610), a supporter of the Formula of Concord, was appointed professor at the Theological Faculty in Wittenberg in 1577; he was joined by Georg Mylius (1548-1607) some years later, in 1585. During the rule of August's son and successor, Duke Christian I (b. 1560; r. 1586-1591), Calvinists briefly gained a foothold in Saxony. Lutheran professors were dismissed in Wittenberg and Leipzig, and replaced with theologians with Calvinist leanings. Leyser left for a pastorate in Bruns-

wick (Braunschweig) in 1587 and Mylius assumed a professorate at the University of Jena in 1589. After Christian's early death in 1591, however, these policies were reversed. Duke Frederick William I of Saxony-Weimar-Altenburg (b. 1562, r. 1586-1601) assumed rule of Saxony as Administrator and regent for Christian's son, Christian II (b. 1583, r. 1601-1611), who was a minor. He required university professors to again subscribe to the Formula of Concord, dismissed Calvinists, and hired, or re-hired the Lutherans who would come to be known as the founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Among those he hired to reestablish confessional Lutheranism in Saxony was Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603), whom he appointed to a professorate in Wittenberg in 1592. Salomon Gesner (1559-1605) joined the Wittenberg Theological Faculty a year later, in 1593. In the same year, Leyser briefly returned. When he left Wittenberg in 1595 for a position as court preacher in Dresden, David Runge (1564-1604) joined the Theological Faculty. For the next eight years, Hunnius, Gesner, and Runge worked together as colleagues. When Hunnius died in 1603, Mylius returned to Wittenberg to take his place.³⁵ As professors, these men were required to lecture, to prepare and preside over academic disputations, and to preach on a regular basis at the two churches in town. Whereas during the time of Luther and Melancthon, the purpose of academic disputations had been to seek knowledge and understanding, by the time these men began their academic careers, the function of disputations had shifted to presenting correct doctrine. According to the university statutes (*Universitätsordnung*) drawn up by Jakob Andreae in 1580, twelve disputations were to be conducted each year. The presiding professor drafted the theses to be discussed. After these were screened by the dean and other professors for theological correctness, they were publicly posted. The professor also had to select opponents and respondents from among the students of the Theological Faculty. While it was the responsibility of the opponents to come up with compelling objections to the presiding professor's theses, it was clear to all that truth would be deemed to be on the side of the professor. Thus the disputations came to serve the rejection of heretical views and the establishment of theological orthodoxy.³⁶

In standardizing doctrine, academic disputations played a key role in the process that scholars have termed "confessionalization."³⁷ The impact of this standardization of doctrine reached far beyond the universities. In the churches, it led to distinctively Lutheran preaching and hymnody, and rituals for baptism, engagements, confession, the Lord's Supper, and finally, for preparing to die, burying, and remembering the dead.³⁸ In particular, it led to the development of the printed Lutheran funeral sermon, a genre which flourished for two centuries, and served a variety of functions: from comforting the bereaved, to honoring the deceased, to teaching Lutheran

doctrine and ethics, to shaping a Lutheran art of dying.³⁹ Like the historical writings of the period, the funeral sermons tended to situate the life and work of the deceased in the history of salvation.⁴⁰ In doing so, they conferred divine legitimation on the Lutheran sense of identity.

The first of the five remaining funeral sermons included in the commemorative volume of 1610 was preached for Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603). Hunnius earned his doctorate in theology at the University of Tübingen in 1576. He began his career as professor at the Theological Faculty in Marburg and as court preacher to Landgrave Ludwig IV of Hesse-Marburg (b. 1537, r. 1567-1604). While in Marburg, Hunnius labored – ultimately in vain – to convince the landgraves, professors, and pastors to adopt the newly drafted Formula of Concord. In 1592, Duke Frederick William I called Hunnius to the University of Wittenberg.⁴¹ When Hunnius died after eleven years of service on April 4, 1603, his colleague, Salomon Gesner preached his colleague's funeral sermon on 2 Tim 4:6-8: "For [...] the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight [...]"⁴² Applying the metaphor of knighthood to the Christian life, Gesner suggests that when a Christian dies, the living may take comfort in knowing that the deceased has "been a brave spiritual warrior and knight under the banner of Christ Jesus [...] and has become a child of eternal blessedness."⁴³ He proceeds to describe the reestablishment of Lutheranism, and Hunnius's role in it, as divinely ordained: "In the year of Christ 1592, when, through the special providence of our Lord God, the churches and schools of our territories were to be purified of the secretly introduced Calvinist sourdough," Duke Frederick William I "called him to this planned work of Christian Reformation."⁴⁴ Gesner goes on to praise his colleague's labors to define Lutheran doctrine over against other teaching: "D. Hunnius as a persevering [...] knight has led the Lord's war in the Holy Spirit against the world, the flesh, the Devil, the Jesuits, the Calvinists, and other sectarians."⁴⁵ Hunnius's death, too, as Gesner describes it, was a struggle. Hunnius was tormented by a sickness which Gesner refers to as the "stone" (*Stein*). Illness notwithstanding, Hunnius continued to work. He preached the Sunday and the midweek sermons. His illness progressed until his body refused to take nourishment, but he bore it with "great patience" (*grosse Gedult*). As he grew weaker, he asked for "sayings, psalms, stories, and sermons from the Bible" to be read to him.⁴⁶ On April 4, the day Hunnius was to die, Gesner visited him early in the morning and comforted him with biblical sayings. Hunnius asked for his confessor to come, and made his confession "in the presence of his colleagues and physicians, also of other good friends."⁴⁷ Asked whether, in the case that God should summon him away, he "intended to die in the teaching he had hitherto conducted, defended,

and written about, and confess it before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ," he answered "Yes", sat up in bed, lifted up his hands to God, repeated the psalms and other prayers spoken to him in his heart, and received the Lord's Supper.⁴⁸ That same evening, he "fell asleep quietly and calmly with great patience in the midst of the prayers, petitions and sighs of many high-ranking people present, after he had more than once commended his soul [...] into the gracious hands of the Heavenly Father."⁴⁹ Gesner concludes with the confident affirmation that his colleague's soul has most certainly left "this vale of tears" (*diesem Jammerthal*) and has ascended to Christ, where it has received "the unwilting crown of life" (*die unverwelckliche Krone deß Lebens*).⁵⁰

While there is no mention of demonic temptation at Hunnius's deathbed, it plays a considerable role in the next deathbed account. A little more than a year after Hunnius's death, Salomon Gesner found himself preaching at the funeral of another colleague, the much younger David Runge (1564-1604), who had died on July 7, 1604 at the age of 39 after eleven years of service to the Theological Faculty.⁵¹ Runge had studied ancient languages and philosophy in Greifswald and Tübingen, and in 1589 was appointed professor of poetry and Hebrew at the University of Greifswald. In 1593 he went to Wittenberg to seek a doctorate. Within a year's time, he both received the doctorate and was appointed professor of Scripture. Gesner chose his sermon text for Runge from the apocryphal book of the Wisdom of Solomon: "Then the righteous one will stand with great confidence in the presence of [...] those who make light of his labors [...]" (5:1-5).⁵² The theme of the sermon is Christian servanthood and its eternal reward. Gesner characterizes Runge as a righteous, patient, and steadfast servant of God. In particular, he lifts up Runge's steadfastness "in the confession of his faith, which he impressively evidenced by teaching, writing, and disputing against the various false and erroneous teachings of the papists, Calvinists, and other sectarians."⁵³ He also praises Runge's steadfastness in the face of imminent death. Like Hunnius, the dying Runge suffered great pain. He was also beset by fear of death, which Gesner interprets as having been caused by the devil:

All the saints of God must deal with such [demonic] assault. As our blessed [...] colleague in the midst of this fear of death and fearful sweat said: "They all must sweat, and drink from the cup of fear. Our Savior himself painfully complained of this, and sweated bloody sweat on the Mount of Olives, [and] fell into such sadness, that an angel from heaven had to comfort him. And on the cross he cried: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Psalm 22[:1].⁵⁴

Gesner writes that Runge dealt with his fear by comforting himself with verses of Scripture: “He took constant consolation in that God had cast all his sins into the depths of the sea, and would not remember them eternally, Micah 7[:19b].”⁵⁵ Runge also found consolation in reciting psalms and singing hymns, among them Luther’s “In the Midst of Life We Are,” as well as Luther’s hymns based on the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer.⁵⁶ Asked by his colleagues, who visited him at his deathbed, whether he wished to persevere in the doctrine he had preached, and to confess it “before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ” (*fu(e)r dem Richterstuel Jesu Christi*), Runge

confessed with a clear voice and with great earnestness the principal articles of the Christian faith [...] [A]nd with respect to the controversial articles [...] regarding eternal election of the faithful and beloved children of God, [and] the true presence of the essential body and blood of Jesus Christ in the most worthy Supper, and other similar [articles], he steadfastly and thoroughly shortly before he died explained how such articles are founded in God’s Word, repeated in the Augsburg Confession, and further explained and confirmed in the Christian Book of Concord.⁵⁷

In contrast to Hunnius, and Luther before him, Runge in his confession explicitly listed the theological writings adhered to by the Wittenberg theologians: the Apostles’ Creed (“the principal articles of the Christian faith”), the Articles of Visitation of 1593 (“the controversial articles”) to which professors and preachers were obliged to subscribe when Lutheranism was reintroduced in Saxony,⁵⁸ Scripture, the Augsburg Confession (1530), and the Book of Concord (1580). Thereupon Runge received the Lord’s Supper with “with great reverence” (*mit grosser andacht*) and took great comfort in it. He died with those around him singing and praying.⁵⁹ Gesner confidently concludes that his colleague was received into the “glorious assembly of all the chosen, faithful servants and beloved children of God” (*herrliche versammlung aller Außerwelten trewen Dienern vnd lieben Kinder Gottes*).⁶⁰ On a more sober note, Gesner notes that Runge is the second theologian whom Wittenberg has lost in the space of just over a year. The Universities of Leipzig, Rostock, and Greifswald have also lost Lutheran professors. He calls for repentance on the part of his listeners, and asks them to beseech God to be merciful.⁶¹

Less than a year later, it was Salomon Gesner’s (1559-1605) own turn to depart from this world. Having earned his Master’s Degree in Strasbourg in 1583, Gesner returned to Silesia (today in Poland) as a teacher. In 1589,

he became rector of the *Fürstliches Pädagogium* (lit. “princely school”) in Stettin. There he championed strict Lutheranism and subscription to the Formula of Concord, which led to conflict with the ministers of the city and Gesner’s departure. After a brief sojourn in Stralsund, Gesner was called to the University of Wittenberg in 1593. In the same year, a doctorate in theology was conferred on him, and he became professor of theology.⁶² When Gesner died on February 7, 1605, his colleague Georg Mylius, who had succeeded Aegidius Hunnius as professor and superintendent just two years earlier, preached at his funeral. He used the sermon text Gesner had asked him to use: “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself” (Rom 14:7-9).⁶³ In his sermon, Mylius asks what it means to live and to die as a Christian, and answers that Christians who live as persons redeemed by Christ, belong to Christ in death as well. For such persons, death will bring only gain.⁶⁴ In describing Gesner’s career, he highlights that Gesner served the university and church in Wittenberg for twelve years. During this time, he lectured on Psalms and on other Old Testament books, preached on the customary Sunday gospel texts, and disputed on topics such as the book of Genesis and the Formula of Concord.⁶⁵ Mylius proceeds to recount that Gesner’s decline began with an illness

of which he need not be ashamed. A few weeks ago, when he was preaching from this pulpit, he may have overdone things with raising his voice and other movements. For this reason, a disorder arose in his lungs, and an artery burst. In the next several days a great flow of blood ensued, which fully caused his deadly illness. However this may be, it is better to have preached to death than to have celebrated to death or to have indulged oneself to death. Many think preaching is an easy task. Those who have experience know better. For good reason Scripture says: “Much preaching wearies the flesh. Eccles. 12[:12].” Indeed, it [preaching] weakened him, and finally led to his death.⁶⁶

Suspecting he might be seriously ill, Gesner sent for his confessor, who heard his confession, absolved him, and administered the Lord’s Supper. Like his colleague Runge before him, Gesner in his public confession named the confessional texts explaining his faith:

He sat down with us, the colleagues he had invited, at the table, [and] began his confession with folded hands. He appealed first of all to God’s inerrant Word, next to the symbolic books of our church con-

tained in the Book of Christian Concord, then to his own sermons, lectures, and printed works. In which confession of faith he declared [he intended] to persevere until his blessed end⁶⁷

After seeming to stabilize for a few days, Gesner's health took a turn for the worse. He again summoned his colleagues to his side. He reaffirmed his faith, and recited many Scripture passages to the effect that he was not afraid to die. Together they sang several hymns. His colleagues exhorted him to "fight the good fight ... and not to fear any enemy, whether sin, death, the devil, or hell."⁶⁸ To this exhortation Gesner responded that "[he] didn't know of any remaining enemies, [and] he didn't have any dealings at all with the devil, and even if [the devil] or other enemies were to come to him and attack him, he would refer them to the one of whom it is said that he is [our] advocate before God [1 Jn 2:1]."⁶⁹ In other words, he would send the devil to Jesus. At this point, his eyes began to dim and his eyelids to close. Those around him fell on their knees to pray. While they were praying, Mylius writes, the dying man "inclined his head, and gave up his spirit, almost before we noticed it, with two soft and gentle breaths [...]" He continues: "A calmer death I have not seen anyone die in my lifetime, I who have seen more than few dying persons."⁷⁰ Mylius ends his sermon with the observation that with Gesner's death the Lord has dealt the congregation a hard blow. He exhorts the congregation to patience and faith, and prays that God not permit the angel of death to attack any more of "our teachers" (*unsern Lehrern*).⁷¹

Mylius's prayer was not answered. Two years later, in 1607, he himself died. By all accounts, Georg Mylius (1548-1607) had been a colorful figure. He was born in Augsburg, and studied at the Universities of Tübingen, Marburg, and Strasbourg. Having completed his studies in 1572, he returned to Augsburg as deacon at the Church of the Holy Cross (*Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz*). In 1579, the University of Tübingen awarded him a doctorate in theology, and Mylius again returned to Augsburg, this time as pastor at St. Anne's Church and superintendent. Augsburg was a confessionally divided city, and the majority of the members of the city council were Catholics. When, in 1584, the city council summarily introduced the Gregorian calendar, Mylius, and many of the Lutherans in Augsburg, publicly and vocally objected, apparently not about the new calendar itself, but to the way in which it had been introduced.⁷² Under dramatic circumstances, the city council kidnapped Mylius and forced him to leave the city. He travelled to Ulm, where he expected his wife to join him. Tragically, he waited in vain, because his wife had died giving birth to a premature infant shortly after his arrest. In Ulm, however, Mylius soon remarried, and in 1585 he

was called to Wittenberg as professor of theology. When Elector August of Saxony died in 1586, and Calvinist theologians came to power in Wittenberg, Mylius left town to take up a professorship at the University of Jena; he remained there until Wittenberg called him back in 1603. When Mylius died four years later on May 28, 1607, his colleague Friedrich Balduin re-told the story in his funeral sermon.⁷³ Balduin based the sermon on Ps 84:4-7: "Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise [...]"⁷⁴ Applying this verse to the Wittenberg congregation, he writes:

In the end times of this world, God has made this city a spiritual Jerusalem for himself, and has built himself a house in it [...] and has granted that it become the first place in Germany to conduct his pure and unadulterated worship after the Papist abominations were abolished. Therefore we can truly say of this place what our patriarch Jacob said of Bethel in Genesis 28[17]: "How holy is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the place of heaven."⁷⁵

Not only has God chosen Wittenberg to be his dwelling place; he has also graced the congregation with faithful teachers like Georg Mylius. "His zealous spirit in preaching, [and] his dexterity and skill in lecturing and disputation is well known to you," Balduin reminds his listeners.⁷⁶ Death appears to have come upon Mylius unexpectedly. On the day of the Ascension of Christ, Balduin writes, he preached a lengthy sermon, and on the following day he held his customary lectures. In the night however, he was "greatly afflicted by the stone" (*grosse beschwernuß am Stein empfunden*); from that time, he became weaker by the day. On the Monday after Pentecost, he called all his colleagues to himself, "both the preachers and those in the department of theology."⁷⁷ He shared with them his thoughts regarding a blessed death, and others read to him passages about the same topic. On the next day he again asked them to come to him. He thanked God for his gracious providence, confessed his sins, and asked to be forgiven. He also reverently received the "Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ" (*Sacrament des Leibs vnnd Bluts Jesu Christi*). Asked whether he firmly believed "that the absolution given by the servant was [indeed] God's absolution, according to the Words of Christ, 'Whoever listens to you listens to me' [Lk 10:16], he answered with a joyful voice, '[H]ow can I do otherwise? The words are too mighty and too divine: "Whoever listens to you listens to me." Therefore I entirely believe that God himself has forgiven my sins."⁷⁸ After that he asked to rest. On the following Thursday, early in the morning, Balduin writes that "God summoned his dear soul very quietly and gently out of his body, and took it to himself into his eternal kingdom."⁷⁹

He concludes with a prayer that God provide the people with a new leader, and “a God-fearing, righteous and loyal, hard-working and persevering teacher.”⁸⁰

The fifth and final strict Lutheran to be commemorated in this volume was Polycarp Leyser (1552-1610). Leyser earned his Master’s Degree in theology at the University of Tübingen in 1570. His first pastorate was in Gellersdorf in Austria. In 1576, together with his friend Hunnius, he was awarded a doctorate in theology at Tübingen. In the same year, Leyser moved to Wittenberg, where he became general superintendent and professor of theology, and took part in the theological consultations that culminated in the Book of Concord. When the Lutherans in Wittenberg came under pressure from Calvinists in 1586, Leyser moved to Brunswick to serve as pastor at Saint Aegidius’s Church. There he succeeded in integrating subscription to the Formula of Concord into the Brunswick Church Order. In 1593, when the strict Lutherans regained power in Wittenberg, Leyser returned for a short while as professor and dean of the Theological Faculty. Two years later, however, he was summoned to Dresden as court preacher, where he served until his death.⁸¹ It was his colleague, Paul Jenisch (1551/52-1612), also court preacher, who conducted his funeral at Sophia Church (*Sophienkirche*).⁸² Jenisch preached on 1 Sam 25:1: “Now Samuel died; and all Israel assembled and mourned for him. They buried him at his home in Ramah.”⁸³ In the exegetical section of his sermon, Jenisch characterizes the Old Testament prophet’s early years, his vocation as preacher, prophet, and judge, and his manner of approaching death. Proceeding to the biographical section of the sermon, he draws comparisons between the prophet and his own deceased colleague. In characterizing Leyser’s work as court preacher in Dresden, Jenisch describes him as a hard worker, who, among other things, “preached, consoled, warned, opposed false, erroneous teaching, headed the church council, accomplished good things in the Consistory, participated in visitations of the churches, schools, and universities, [...] [and] served widows, orphans, and the poor.”⁸⁴ Jenisch recounts that Leyser began feeling ill about a year before he died, but illness notwithstanding, kept up a heavy preaching schedule which involved a great deal of traveling. He told his friends that he “would rather work himself to death than lie sick in bed for a long time.”⁸⁵ With the dawning of the year 1610, however, his sickness began to overwhelm him. On January 9, he confessed his sins, and his faith, “with such reverence, that one could not listen to him without shedding a tear,” and was absolved.⁸⁶ Thereupon, kneeling, he reverently received the Lord’s Supper in “a beautiful Christian ceremony with reading, prayer, singing, exhortation, speaking, responding to common confession of faith,

and blessing, [all] conducted in a Christian and honorable manner in the presence of many people.”⁸⁷ After this, he took to bed, where he prayed, meditated, and lent his ear and counsel to “persons of high rank” (*fu(e)rnehmen Personen*) who visited him. He exhorted his colleagues and others to diligence and perseverance, and his family to fear of God, honor, virtue, and Christian unity. He lifted up in prayer his church, as well as the Christian governing authorities who visited him at his sickbed, asking that God would bless them in this life and in the next.⁸⁸ On February 22, a colleague who visited him early in the morning found that Leyser had difficulty speaking. Nevertheless, he joyfully listened to what his visitor shared from God’s word, prayed, and commended himself into the hands of God. On the evening of the same day, when he was visited again, much was shared with him from God’s word and many prayers were said. The dying man not only listened, but lifted his heart and hands, repeated the prayers, “and commended his soul confidently into the trustworthy hands of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thereupon he fell asleep, rested well, and while he rested, without a single gesture or movement, quietly and softly gave up his spirit shortly after eight o’clock in the evening.”⁸⁹ Jenisch concludes that no one is to think that a similar man, endowed by God with such spirit and gifts, will follow in Leyser’s footsteps. God is good and wise and almighty, and still has people he can use, but there is also great “thanklessness, revulsion, and weariness” (*Vndanck / Eckel vnd Vberdruß*) among the people with respect to God’s word, which leads God to withhold his gifts and to call outstanding people to himself, as he has done, among others, with Hunnius, Runge, Gesner, and Leyser. He prays that God would heal the breach and install a man to lead the congregation, that it not remain as “sheep without a shepherd” (*wie die Schafe ohne Hirten*).⁹⁰

Conclusion

While lamenting the passing of the five chief founders of Wittenberg Lutheran Orthodoxy, the *Report of the Christian Departure of Dr. Martin Luther Along with Six Funeral Sermons Delivered at the Interments of Outstanding Theologians Having Served Christ’s Church* also perpetuated their memory. First, it asserted their life and work to be in continuity with that of Martin Luther: All five professors, like Luther, had served the Wittenberg churches with their preaching, and the Theological Faculty with their lectures and disputations. All five, also like Luther, had worked tirelessly to delineate and defend a Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith against Catholic and other interpretations. All five, like Luther, had led the Wittenberg church through times of crisis.

Second, the volume held up the exemplary deaths of the five professors as models to be imitated, thus contributing to the genre of the Lutheran *ars moriendi* or art of dying. As can be seen in the sermons, the five Orthodox Lutherans valued confession of sins, reception of the Lord's Supper, and confession of their faith on their deathbeds as much as Christians before the Reformation had done. In contrast to their predecessors, however, they expressed assurance of their eternal salvation in the face of impending death. The manner in which the Lutheran professors died differed from Luther's death in that these men adhered more closely to traditional ritual: Each of them expressly summoned his pastor to confess his sins and receive the Lord's Supper. Additionally, while the dying Luther had confessed his faith in his "Heavenly Father" and his "Lord Jesus Christ," the Orthodox Lutherans David Runge and Salomon Gesner desired to die in the faith spelled out in the Lutheran confessional writings.

Finally, and more implicitly than explicitly, the commemorative volume sought to persuade readers from all walks of life to persevere in Orthodox Lutheran piety, and to continue to support the Lutheran church and the confessional state. Lutheran Christians were to listen, and to conform their faith and lives, to the preaching of their pastors. Pastors and professors were to teach Lutheran, not Calvinist, Catholic, or other heretical doctrine. Princes were to support Lutheran theologians, and the Lutheran schools and universities in which they were trained.

In seeking to fulfill each of the above functions, the volume exemplifies the many printed materials that Orthodox Lutherans employed to construct and promote a distinctive Lutheran confessional identity. These documents included the biographical sermons of Johannes Matthesius (1504-65), which narrated episodes from Luther's life,⁹¹ the biography of Luther written by Nikolaus Selnecker (1530-92), pastor in Leipzig,⁹² and the narrative of Luther's death included in the volume discussed here. They included confessions of faith, like the Formula of Concord, the adoption of which both Leyser and Hunnius had championed.⁹³ They encompassed countless collections of sermons, from sermons treating the gospels for the Sundays in the church year, to catechism sermons, to funeral sermons; Hunnius contributed a collection to each of these genres.⁹⁴ Finally, they included commemorative publications such as the 1602 volume commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the University of Wittenberg; this work contained sermons and orations held by David Runge, Aegidius Hunnius, and Salomon Gesner on the occasion.⁹⁵ The theme of divine legitimation of Luther's reforming work and the efforts of his successors permeated this literature: Luther was called by God to the "great task" of reforming the

Church. The re-introduction of Lutheranism in Saxony in which Aegidius Hunnius participated was guided by divine "providence." Polycarp Leyser was a "preacher, prophet, and judge" like the Old Testament prophet Samuel. The town of Wittenberg in which Georg Mylius preached and taught was ordained by God to be a "spiritual Jerusalem." The *Report of the Christian Departure* situated the five founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy in salvation history, and in doing so, contributed to celebrating and consolidating Orthodox Lutheran faith, tradition, and identity in the Wittenberg community and beyond.

Notes

- 1 "Denn da wir vns jtzo solten erlu(e)stigen mit betrachtung des grossen Geheimniß von der heiligen vnd hochgelobten Dreyfaltigkeit, da fu(e)get vns Gott im Trawrhause zusammen ... bey dem Begra(e)bniß eines starcken in Jsrael... vnsers lieben seligen ... Superintendenten... O wie gar vnbegreiflich sind die Gerichte vnd Wege des HERRN / Wer hat des HERRN Sinn erkandt? Rom. 11." Friedrich Balduin, "Die Fu(e)nfte [Leichenpredigt] // Bey dem Volckreichen // Leichbega(e)ngnis / des Herrn // D. GEORGII MYLII, // Gehalten am Sontage der heiligen Drey= // faltigkeit / in der Pfarrkirchen // zu Wittenberg. // ... Anno 1607," in *Bericht // Vom Christlichen Abschied // D. MART. LUTH. // Sampt Sechs Leichpredigten // Bey dem Begra(e)bniß // Der fu(e)rnehmen vnnd vmb die // Kirche Christi wolverdienten Theologen // D. MARTINI LUTHERI, // D. AEGIDII HUNNII, // D. DAVIDIS RUNGII, // D. SALOMONIS GESNERI, // D. GEORGII MYLII, // D. POLYCARPI LYSERI // Der H. Schriftt gewesen D. // vnd Professorn zu Wittenberg / (et)c. // ...* (Wittenberg: Johann Gormann, 1613), 157-58. References in this essay are to this digitized 1613 edition (VD 17 1:029987G) found in the *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (hereafter VD 16/17), www.gateway-bayern.de/index_vd16.html. All Scripture translations follow the NRSV, except where they have been adapted to reflect the original German or Latin meaning more accurately.
- 2 VD 17 39:113878A.
- 3 VD 17 3:303615D (1611); VD 17 1:029987G and VD 17 14:072326P (both appear to refer to the same 1613 edition); VD 17 14:072368E (1619).
- 4 On Friedrich Balduin, see Wilhelm Gaß, "Balduin, Friedrich," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (ADB)* (1875), Online edition, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116883391.html>, accessed September 9, 2016.
- 5 *The Last Days of LUTHER by Justus Jonas, Michael Coelius, and Others*, transl. by Martin Ebon (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) (hereafter Ebon), 53. "das thut mir der Teuffel allweg / wenn ich etwas grosses vorhab / vnnd außrichten soll / daß er mich zuvor also versucht / vnd mit einer solchen Tentation angreiff." Justus Jonas and Michael Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied aus diesem to(e)dlichen Leben deß Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri / Bericht," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 4.

- 6 Ebon, 55, adapted. "einmal öffentlichen vom Priester (so an dem Altar die Communion gehalten) die Absolution empfangen / vnnd zwier [sic!] Communicirt / vnnd bey der andern Communion / Nemlich / Sontags am Tag Valentini / hat er zween Priester / nach Apostolischem Brauch / selb [sic!] ordinirt vnd geweyhet." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 4.
- 7 Ebon, 55, adapted. "da er oft seines alters / vnd daß er sich daheim / wenn er gen Wittenberg wider kommen wu(e)rde / zur ruhe legen / gedacht hat" Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 5.
- 8 Ebon, 55, adapted. "vnd sein Gebet zu Gott ... ernstlich vnd em(b)sig gethan /" Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 5.
- 9 Ebon, 55, adapted. "viel wichtige Wort vnd Rede vom Todt vnd ku(e)nftigem ewigen Leben geredt" Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 5.
- 10 Ebon, 61. "Mir wird aber weh vnnd bange / wie zuvor / vmb die Brust." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 6.
- 11 Ebon, 63. "hat er sich aber hart geklaget vmb die Brust." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 7.
- 12 Ebon, 67. "Da ist die Nacht bey jhme in der Kammer blieben / D. Jonas / seine zween So(e)hne / Martinus / Paulus / sein Diener Ambrosius / vnd ander Diener." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 8.
- 13 Ebon, 69. "Ah lieber D. Jonas / ich achte / ich werde hie zu Eißleben (da ich geborn vnd getaufft bin) bleiben." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 8.
- 14 Ebon, 69, adapted. "In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, redemisti me Domine Deus veritatis." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 8.
- 15 Ebon, 71. "M. Simon Wild / ein Artzt / vnd D. Ludwig / ein Medicus / bald darauff Graff Albrecht mit seinem Gemahl." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 9.
- 16 Ebon, 73, adapted. "O Mein Himlicher [sic!] Vater / ein Gott vnd Vater vnsers HERRN Jhesu Christi / du Gott alles trostes / ich dancke dir / das du mir deinen lieben Sohn Jhesum Christum offenbart hast / an den ich gleube / den ich gepredigt vnd bekant hab / den ich geliebet vnd gelobet habe / welchen der leidige Bapst / vnd alle Gottlosen schenden / verfolgen / vnd lestern / Jch bitte dich mein HERR Jhesu Christe / laß dir mein seelichen bevolhen sein." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 10.
- 17 Ebon, 77. "Sprach er / das man es deutlich ho(e)ren kond / Ja." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 11.
- 18 Ebon, 77-78, adapted. "Jnn dem kam Graff Hans Heinrich von Schwartzenburg / sampt seinem gemal auch darzu / nach dem bald erleicht der Doctor sehr vntr de(m) angesicht / wurden jm fu(e)sse vnd nase kalt / thet ein tieff / doch senfft / odem holen / mit welchem er seine(n) Geist auffgab / mit stille vnd grosser gedult / das er nicht mehr ein finger noch bein reget / Vnd kond niemand mercken (das zeugen wir fu(e)r Gott auff vnser gewisse(n)) einige vnruhe / quelu(n)g des leibes / oder schmerzen des todes / sondern entschieff friedlich vnd sanfft im Herrn / wie Simeon singet." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 11.
- 19 Luther himself had had that account re-published, along with his own comments; see *An Italian Lie Concerning Dr. Martin Luther's Death*, in *Luther's Works, American ed.*, 55 vols. (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds.; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-86), 34:361-366 (hereafter LW), [=Luthers Werke, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 66 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1995), 54:192-194 (hereafter WA)].
- 20 In the Middle Ages, a genre of literature had developed consisting of handbooks on how a Christian should die. On the history of this genre, see Rainer Rudolf, *Ars Moriendi: Von der Kunst des heilsamen Lebens und Sterbens* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1957). For an example of a medieval ritual for ministering to dying persons, see Adolf Franz, ed., *Das Rituale des Bischofs Heinrich I. von Breslau* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1912) 32-39.
- 21 See the treatment of demonic assault in the *The boke of the craft of dying*, in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, vol. 2 (ed. C. Horstman; London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896) 408-12. The shortened, beautifully illustrated version of this book is almost entirely devoted to demonic assault; see the facsimile German edition provided by Ernst Weil, ed., *Die deutsche Übersetzung der Ars moriendi des Meisters Ludwig von Ulm um 1470* (facsimile reprint, Munich-Pasing: Roland Verlag, 1922). For a discussion of these texts, and the relationships between them, see Mary Catharine O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars moriendi* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1966).
- 22 *The boke of the craft of dying* advised sick persons to receive "spirituall medicins, [th] at is to seye takyng the sacramentis of holy church." (*The boke of the craft of dying*, 416). In his own *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519), Luther had advised the dying to confess their sins and receive the Lord's Supper, taking comfort in the sacrament as signifying Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil; see LW 42:99-115. [=WA 2:685-97.] On the transformation of the *ars moriendi* genre in the early Reformation years, see Austrá Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).
- 23 For Luther's position on the sacrament of unction, see *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:117-23. [=WA 6:484-573.]
- 24 Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam mocked this practice; see *The Funeral*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Colloquies* (trans. Craig R. Thompson; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 775.
- 25 *The boke of the craft of dying* teaches individuals attending dying laypersons to ask them: "Belevyst thowe principally an fully in the articles of the feyth, and also all holy scripture in all [th]ingis after [th]e exposition of the holy and trew doctours of holy chirche?" (*The boke of the craft of dying*, 413).
- 26 Siegfried Bräuer, "Entstehung und Überlieferung der Texte," in "Vom Christlichen abschied aus diesem tödlichen leben des Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri": *Drei zeitgenössische Texte zum Tode D. Martin Luthers* (ed. Peter Freybe; Stuttgart: Joachim W. Siener, 1996) 105.
- 27 Ebon, 101, adapted. "Zu einem solchen Christlichen abschied aus diesem elenden Leben / vnnd zu derselben ewigen Seligkeit / helffe vns allen / der ewige Himlische Vater / so gemelten D. Martinum / zu dem grossen Werck beruffen hat / Vnd vnser HERR Jhesus Christus / welchen er treulich gepredigt / vnd bekant / Vnd der H. Geist / der jhm wider Bapst / vnd alle pforten der Hellen / solche sonderliche freidigkeit / grossen muht [vnd] herz / durch seine Go(e)ttliche krafft / in vielen hohen kempffen / gegeben hat." Jonas and Coelius, "Vom Christlichen Abschied ... Lutheri," 17.
- 28 Justus Jonas and Michael Caelius, *Vom Christlichen // abschied aus diesem to(e)dlichen leben // des Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Mar= // tini Lutheri // bericht* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhaw, 1546), VD 16 J 905 and ZV 20628. For the other editions, see VD

- 16 ZV 8749 (Erfurt), VD 16 J 900 (Frankfurt am Main), VD 16 J 901 and J 902 (Magdeburg), and VD 16 ZV 8748 (Zwickau). For earlier treatments of this account of Martin Luther's death, see Christoph Schubart, *Die Berichte über Luthers Tod und Begräbnis* (Weimar: Hof Buchdruckerei, 1917); Theodore Tappert, "Luther and Death," and Martin Ebon, "Only Thirty-one Days," both in Ebon, 9-13, and 17-31; and Peter Freybe, "Einführung," and Siegfried Bräuer, "Entstehung und Überlieferung der Texte," both in "Vom Christlichen abschied aus diesem tödlichen leben des Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri": *Drei zeitgenössische Texte zum Tode D. Martin Luthers*, 3-14, and 105-20. Martin Brecht's comments are also helpful; see his *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546* (trans. James F. Schaaf; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993) 375-77.
- 29 "Diesen hohen Lehrer vnd Propheten / vnd von GOtt gesandten Reformatoren der Kirchen / hat vns GOtt weggenommen / Ah / wie ko(e)nnen wir das trawren vnd weinen lassen? Wie ko(e)nnen wir doch dem lieben Paulo hir gehorchen / da er saget / Jhr solt nicht trawrig seyn / vber denen die da schlafen?" Johannes Bugenhagen, "Vber der Leich vnd begra(e)b= // nis des Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini // Luthers / durch Herrn Johan Bugenhagen Po= // mern / Doctor vnd Pfarrher der Kirchen zu Witten= // berg / gehalten," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 19-20.
- 30 "[D]ie Person ist wol in Christo verschieden / Aber die gewaltige / selige / Go(e)ttliche Lehre / dieses thewren Mannes / lebet noch auff's aller sterckste." Bugenhagen, "Vber der Leich ... D. Martini Luthers," 20.
- 31 "hat also seine hende gefalten / vnd in feiner stille seinen Geist Christo auffgegeben." Bugenhagen, "Vber der Leich ... D. Martini Luthers," 29.
- 32 Justus Jonas and Michael Caelius, *Vom Christlichen ab= // schied ... D. Martini Lutheri / bericht/ // ... Jtem Oratio ... durch Philip Melanchton ... // Jtem. // Ein Christliche Predig ... durch D. Jo= // han Bugenhagen* (Nürnberg: Johann vom Berg und Ulrich Neuber, 1546), VD 16 J904, B9273, M3867. For the Magdeburg edition, see VD 16 J 903, B 9272, M3866 (Magdeburg, 1546). For the English translation, see VD 16 ZV 25460 (Wesel, 1546).
- 33 Cf. Helmar Junghans, "Kryptocalvinisten," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 36 vols. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1999-2010), 20:125-27 (hereafter *TRE*); Heiner Lück, "Wittenberg, Universität," in *TRE* 36:239; Markus Matthias, "Orthodoxie I, Lutherische Orthodoxie," in *TRE* 25:469-70.
- 34 Ernst Koch, "Ausbau, Gefährdung und Festigung der lutherischen Landeskirche von 1553 bis 1601," in *Das Jahrhundert der Reformation in Sachsen: Festgabe zum 450jährigen Bestehen der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Landeskirche Sachsens* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlanganstalt, 1989) 204-205.
- 35 The *Professorenbuch der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Wittenberg 1502 bis 1815/17* (ed. Armin Kohnle and Beate Kusche; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016) provides year-by-year chronological overviews of the professorships at the Theological Faculty and the men who occupied them.
- 36 The definitive treatment of academic disputations in Wittenberg is Kenneth G. Appold's *Orthodoxie als Konsensbildung: Das theologische Disputationswesen an der Universität Wittenberg zwischen 1570 und 1710* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), see esp. 28-30.
- 37 One of the most influential definitions of confessionalization is the following formulated by Ernst Walter Zeeden: "The term 'confessionalization' is to be understood as follows: the spiritual and organizational establishment of various diverging Christian confessional movements originating in the Reformation as relatively stable churches with respect to dogma, structure, and religious and ethical way of life. At the same time [the term refers to] their spread into the Christian world of Europe of the early modern period; their shielding of themselves with the help of diplomacy and politics against outside attacks; but also their being shaped by outside powers, especially the powers of the state." Zeeden, *Konfessionsbildung: Studien zur Reformation, Gegenreformation und katholischen Reform* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985) 69; cited in Appold, *Orthodoxie als Konsensbildung*, 1.
- 38 For an overview of ritual change, see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (1997; repr.; London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 39 On the purposes of Lutheran funeral sermons, see Cornelia Niekus Moore, *Patterned Lives: The Lutheran Funeral Biography in Early Modern Germany* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2006) 93-131, esp. 120 and 126.
- 40 Niekus Moore, *Patterned Lives*, 122.
- 41 For a comprehensive biography of Hunnius's Marburg years, see Markus Matthias, *Theologie und Konfession: Der Beitrag von Ägidius Hunnius (1550-1603) zur Entstehung einer lutherischen Religionskultur* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004); a similar treatment of his Wittenberg years is still lacking.
- 42 NRSV. "Denn ... die zeit meines abscheidens ist vorhanden / Jch habe einen guten Kampff gekempffet" Salomon Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus // des Herrn D. AEgidij Hunnij: Gehalten in // der Pfarrkirchen zu Wittemberg / durch // D. Salomonem // Gesnerum, den 7. Aprilis, // Anno. // 1603," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 35. The funeral sermon was originally published in multiple editions in Magdeburg (VD 17 12:620993G), Jena (VD 17 23:261859E and 1:029081N), Wittenberg (VD 17 23:247146G, 39:108302A, 1:029091, and 125:009770E), Strasbourg (VD 17 39:137122H), Frankfurt an der Oder (VD 17 1:029095Z), and Tübingen (VD 17 1:029086A), all in 1603.
- 43 "ein dapfferer Geistlicher Kriegsmann vnnd Ritter vnter dem Fa(e)hnlein Christi JEsu gewesen ... vnd ein Kind der ewigen Seligkeit worden." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 51.
- 44 "[J]m Jar Christi / 1592. als durch sonderbare schickung vnsers HERRen Gottes die Kirchen vnd Schulen in diesen Landen von dem heimlich eingefu(e)rten Calvinischen Sawerteig solten gesaubert / vnd Christlich reformiert werden / ... / jn ... / zum vorhabenden Christlichen Reformationswerk erbeten." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 79.
- 45 "D. Hunnius hat als ein bestendiger / ... Ritter im heiligen Geiste wider die Welt / Fleisch / Teuffel / Jesuiten / Calvinisten / vnd andere Sectirer / des HERRen Krieg ... gefu(e)hret." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 80.
- 46 "Spru(e)che / Psalmen / Historien vnnd predigten aus der Bibel." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 82.
- 47 "in beysein vnser der Collegen vnd Ertzten / auch anderer guter Freunde." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 83.
- 48 "in der Lehre / so er bißher gefu(e)hret / verteidiget vnnd geschrieben / seliglich abzusterben / vnd die selbe fur dem Richterstuel JEsu christi zu bekennen gedechte." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 83.
- 49 "gantz stille vnd sanfft in grosser Gedult mitten vnter dem Gebet / flehen vnd seufftzen / vieler anwesenden vornemer Leute eingeschlaffen / nach dem er zu o(e)fftern

- seine Seele ... in die gnedige Hende deß Himlischen Vaters befohlen." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 83.
- 50 Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... Hunnij," 84.
- 51 The funeral sermon was originally published in two editions, in Wittenberg (VD 17 39:112912S and 39:112933N; these both appear to be the same edition) and Stettin (VD 17 39:137125F), both in 1604. On Runge, see Volker Gummelt, "Die Theologische Fakultät und das Jubiläum der Universität Wittenberg im Jahre 1602," in *Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602: Beiträge zur 500. Wiederkehr des Gründungsjahres der Leucorea* (ed. Irene Dingel and Günther Wartenberg; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002) 225-26, and Walter Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg* (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1917) 403-404. Runge's father, Jacob Runge, was a professor of theology at the University of Greifswald; see Gummelt, "Jacob Runge, ein Schüler und Mitarbeiter Philipp Melanchthons in Pommern – seine Beziehung zum 'Praeceptor Germaniae,'" *Baltische Studien* 84 (1998) 57-66.
- 52 NRSV, adapted. "Als denn wird der Gerechte stehen mit grosser frewdigkeit / wider die / ... / so seine Arbeit verworffen haben ..." Salomon Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus desz // Herrn D. DAVIDIS RVNGII: Gehalten // in der Schloßkirchen zu Wittemberg / durch // D. Salomonem // Gesnerum, den 9. Iulij, // Anno 1604," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 85.
- 53 "in ... seinem Glaubensbekenntniß / daß er mit lehren / schreiben / disputiren wider allerley falsche vnnd jrrige Lehren / der Papisten / Calvinisten / vnnd anderer Sectirer / stattlich an tag gegeben hat." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 117.
- 54 "[A]lle Heiligen GOTtes mu(e)ssen solcher Anfechtung gewertig sein / vnnd wie vnser seliger ... Collega mitten in seiner Todsangst vnd engstigem Schweis sagte: Sie mu(e)ssen alle Schwitzen / vnd aus dem Angst-Becher trincken. Hat doch vnser Heyland selber Schmerzlich hieru(e)ber geklaget / vnd am Oelberg blutigen Schweis geschwitzet / in solche Trawrigkeit gerahten / das ein engel vom Himmel jhn tro(e)sten mu(e)ssen. Vnd am Creutz schreyet er: Mein Gott / mein Gott / warumb hastu Mich verlassen? Psal 22." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 121.
- 55 "Er hatte seinen beständigen trost / das Gott alle seine Su(e)nde in abgrund des Meeres versencket hette / vnd derselbigen in ewigkeit nicht gedencken wolte Mich. 7... ." Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 122.
- 56 "Mitten wir im Leben sind." LW 53:27476. [=WA 35:453-54.] For Luther's hymns on the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer, see LW 53:271-73 [=WA 35:451-52] and LW 53:295-98 [=WA 35:463-67], respectively.
- 57 "[ha]t ... mit heller stimme vnd grossem ernst sein beka(e)ntnis von den vornehmsten Hauptstu(e)cken des Christlichen Glaubens gethan / Jtem / was die streitigen Artickel ... von der ewigen Gnadenwahl der gleubigen vnd lieben Kinder Gottes / von der warhafften gegenwart des wesentlichen Leibes vnd Bluts Jesu Christi im Hochwu(e)rdigen Abendmal / vnnd andere der gleichen belanget / hat er sich standhafftig kurtz vor seinem ende durch vnd durch dermassen erkl(a)ret / wie solche Hauptstu(e)cke in Gottes Wort gegru(e)ndet / in der Augspurgischen Confession wiederhohlet / vnd in [sic!] Christlichen Concordien Buch ferner außgefu(e)hret vn(d) bestetiget sind. Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 123.
- 58 *Visitation [sic!] Artickel / im gantzen // Churkreyß Sachsen. // Sampt der Caluini= // sten Negativa vnd Gegenlehr / Vnd die // Form des Subscription, Welcher gestalt dieselbe // beyden Partheyen // sich zu unterschreiben sind vor= // gelegt worden. Jtem / die Namen der Herren Visitatoren, wie sie in der general // Visitation sind beysammen gewesen. // Gedruckt ein Monat vorm Jahr / der // Geburt Christi / // M.D.XCIII.* This edition of the articles is found in the library of the Evangelisches Predigerseminar Wittenberg, LC 464 nr. 10.
- 59 Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 124.
- 60 Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 124.
- 61 Gesner, "Bey der Leichbega(e)ngnus ... RVNGII," 126-27.
- 62 On Gesner, see Gummelt, "Die Theologische Fakultät und das Jubiläum der Universität Wittenberg 1602," in *Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602*, 224-45; Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg*, 402-403; Adolf Schimmelpfennig, "Geßner, Salomon," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1897), online edition, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd117543640.html>, accessed September 9, 2016.
- 63 NRSV, adapted. "VNser keiner lebet jhm selber / vnd keiner stirbet ihm selber" Georg Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung des Herrn D. Salomonis Gesneri, Gehalten in der Schloß Kirchen zu Wittemberg / Durch D. Georgium Mylium, den 10. Februar. Anno 1605," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 128. The sermon was originally published in several editions in Wittenberg (VD 17 3:003135H, 39:108286C, and 1:028833K), Leipzig (VD 17 39:106271Z), Magdeburg (VD 17 23:313003C), and Jena (VD 17 39:114536X), all in 1605.
- 64 Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 141.
- 65 Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 149.
- 66 "dessen er sich nicht zu schemen hat. Vor etlichen Wochen / als er auff dieser Cantzel gepredigt / mag er mit erhebung der Stimme vnd anderer Bewegung vielleicht der Sachen etwas zu viel gethan haben. Daher sich bey jhm in der Lungen ein Vnraht erhoben / vnd ein Aderbruch erzeiget hat / daraus ein solcher Blutfluß in etlichen Tagen erfolget ist / der zur To(e)dtlichen Kranckheit vo(e)llige Vrsach gegeben hat. Wolan / es ist besser zu Todt gepredigt / als zu Todt gefeyret / oder zu Todt geschlemmet. Viel meinen / Predigen sey eine schlechte mu(e)he / Das wissen die am besten die es erfahren haben. Die Schrift saget nicht vmbsonst: Viel Predigen macht den Leib mu(e)de / Eccles. 12. Ja / es schwecht jhn auch / das er endlich darob des Todes wird." Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 151. NRSV, adapted. Mylius is accurately citing Luther's Bible translation; see Martin Luther, [transl.], *Die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch, Wittenberg 1545* (ed. Hans Volz; 2nd ed.; 2 vols.; 1937; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972) 1151.
- 67 "setzet er sich mit vns / seinen erbetenen Collegis, zu Tische / fieng an mit gefaltene Ha(e)nden seine Confession zu thun / beruffet sich zu fo(e)rderst auff Gottes vnfehlbares Wort / vnd nechst diesem auff vnserer Kirchen *Symbolicos libros*, im Buch der Christlichen Concordien verfasst / so dann auch auff seine gethane Predigten / *Lecti-ones*, vnnd im Druck gefertigte Schriffften. Bey welcher [sic!] Glaubens bekandtnis er biß in sein seliges Ende zuverharren sich erklerte" Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 152.
- 68 "einen guten Kampff zu kempffen ... sich auch vor keinem Feinde / Su(e)nde / Todt / Teuffel oder Hellen zu fu(e)rchten." Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 154.
- 69 "Er wu(e)ste nunmehr von keinem Feinde nichts / mit dem Teuffel habe er gar nichts zuschaffen / vnd wu(e)rde gleich dieser oder andere Feindt kommen / vnd an jhn setzen wollen / so weise er sie ab an den / davon zuvor gesaget worden / das er sein Fu(e)

- rsprecher bey Got sey" Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 154. NRSV, adapted.
- 70 "neiget er dz Ha(e)upt / gibt seinen Geist auff / fast eher vnd ba(e)lder / als wir dessen recht gewar worden / mit zweyen fanfften vnd gelinden Zu(e)gen / Sanfftern Todt habe ich bey einigem nicht gesehen / die zeit meines Lebens / der ich doch sterbende Leut nicht wenig gesehen." Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 155.
- 71 Mylius, "Bey der Leichbestattung ... Gesneri," 153.
- 72 On the controversies surrounding the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in Augsburg, see Paul Warmbrunn, *Zwei Konfessionen in einer Stadt* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983) 359-86.
- 73 On Mylius's career, his banishment from Augsburg, and on the re-telling of Mylius's story from both Lutheran and Catholic confessional standpoints, see Kenneth Appold, "Der Fall Georg Mylius: Biographie als Mittel konfessioneller Identitätsbildung," in *Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602*, 155-72. Older biographical treatments are found in Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg*, 404, and Bernhard Pünjer, "Mylius, Georg," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1898), online edition, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd100216447.html>, accessed September 9, 2016.
- 74 NRSV. "Wol denen die in deinem Hause wohnen / sie loben dich jmmerdar" Friederich Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus / des Herrn D. GEORGII MYLII, Gehalten am Sontage der heiligen Dreyfaltigkeit / in der Pfarrkirchen zu Wittenberg. Durch D. FRIDERICVM BALDVINVM ANNO 1607," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 158-59. The sermon was originally published in 1607 in Wittenberg (VD 17 12:194999G, 39:112805C, and 39:112918N) and Magdeburg (VD 17 1:030755A).
- 75 "Gott hat jm diese Stadt auch in der letzten zeit der Welt zu einem geistlichen Jerusalem gemacht / vnd darinnen jm sein Haus erbawet ... / welcher er auch vor allen andern in Teutschland nach abschaffung der Pa(e)bstischen Grewel seinen Gottesdienst rein vn(d) vnverfälscht zu aller erst gego(e)nnet. Daher wir mit Warheit von dieser Stadt wol sagen ko(e)nnen / was der Altvater Jacob von Bethel sagte / Gen. 28. Wie heilig ist die sta(e)te / hier ist nichts anders denn Gottes hauß / hier ist die sta(e)tte des Himmels." Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 165. NRSV, adapted.
- 76 "Sein eiveriger Geist in Predigen / sein Dexteritet vnd Geschicklichkeit im Lesen vnd Disputieren ist E. L. wol bekand" Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 183.
- 77 "beydes im Predigamt vnd Collegio Theologico." Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 181.
- 78 NRSV. "das die Absolution vom Diener geschehen / Gottes Absolution sey / vermo(e)g der Wort Christi / Wer euch ho(e)ret / der ho(e)ret mich : hat er drauff mit frewdiger Stimm geantwortet / wie kan ich anders / die Wort sind zu ma(e)chtig vnd Go(e)ttlich / Wer euch ho(e)ret / der ho(e)ret mich. Darumb halt ichs gentslich dafu(e)r / das mir Gott selbst meine Su(e)nde vergeben habe." Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 182.
- 79 "da Gott seine liebe Seele gantz Still vnd Sanfft vom Leibe abgefordert / vnd zu sich in sein ewiges Reich genommen hat." Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 182.
- 80 "einen Gottfu(e)rchtigen / frommen vnd trewhertzigen / eiverigen vnd bestendigen Lehrer." Balduin, "Bey dem Volckreichen Leichbega(e)ngnus ... MYLII," 187.
- 81 On Leyser, see Christian Peters, "Polykarp Leyser der Ältere in Wittenberg: Eine Bestandsaufnahme," in *Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602*, 173-88. Older biographical treatments are found in Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg*, 302 and 323; and Theodor Mahlmann, "Leyser, Polykarp von," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 14 (1985) 436-37, online edition, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116991534.html>, accessed September 9, 2016.
- 82 On Jenisch, see Michael Wetzel, "Jenisius (Jenisch), Paulus (Paul)," in *Sächsische Biografie*, online edition, <http://www.isgv.de/saebi>, accessed September 9, 2016, and Hans-Joachim Böttcher, "Der Theologe Paul Jenisch," *Jahrbuch für Eilenburg und Umgebung* (2013) 54-57.
- 83 NRSV. "SAmuel starb / vnd das gantze Jsrael versamlet sich / trug Leid vmb jn / vnd gruben jhn in seinem Hause zu Rama." Paul Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz des Weyland // Ehrwu(e)rdigen / Achbarn vnd // Hochgelarten Herrn // POLYCARPI LYSERI, // der H. Schrifft Doctorn / vnnd Churf. // Sa(e)chs. Hofpredigers / ... // Gehalten // Den 1. Martij, in Sophien Kirchen zu Dresden // Durch M. PAULUM IENISCH, // Anno 1610," in *Bericht Vom Christlichen Abschied*, 191. The sermon was first published separately in 1610 in Leipzig (VD 17 39:106245L, 39:130308W, 23:626561B), Dresden (VD 17 7:697700T), and Magdeburg (VD 17 23:635676A).
- 84 "gepredigt / getro(e)st / gewarnet / falscher jrriger Lehr sich entgegen gesetzt / dem Kirchenraht mit Nutz fu(e)rgestanden / im Ober Consistorio guts geschafft / Kirchen / Schulen / Universiteten visitirt ... Witwen / Waisen / vnd armen Leuten gedienet." Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 219.
- 85 "wolte so lieb sich Todt arbeiten / als lange auff dem Bette siechen." Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 225.
- 86 "mit solcher Andacht / das es ohne Thra(e)nen nicht zu ho(e)ren war." Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 225.
- 87 "bey einem Christlichen scho(e)nen Actu, so mit Lesen / Beten Singen Ermahnen / Reden / Antworten auff o(e)ffentlichen [sic!] Bekentniß vnd Absegnen / in vieler beysein Christlich vnd Ehrlich verrichtet ward." Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 225.
- 88 Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 225.
- 89 "vnd die Seele Gott Vater / Sohn vnd H. Geiste zu trewen Ha(e)nden getrost befahle. Schlefft darauff ein / ruhet wol vnd lieblich / vnd gibt bey wehrenden Ruhen / ohn einig regen vnd bewegen / still vnd sanfft seinen Geist auff / kurtz nach acht Uhren / des Abends. Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 226.
- 90 Jenisch, "Beym Begra(e)bnisz ... LYSERI," 227.
- 91 For a recent discussion of Mathesius's sermons, see Susan R. Boettcher, "Martin Luthers Leben in Predigten: Cyriacus Spangenberg und Johannes Mathesius," in *Martin Luther und der Bergbau im Mansfelder Land: Aufsätze zur Ausstellung ... vom 25. März bis 12. November 2000 ... in Eisleben* (ed. Rosemarie Knappe; Eisleben: Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten, 2000) 163-87.
- 92 On Selnecker's biography of Luther, see Hans-Peter Hasse, "Die Lutherbiographie von Nikolaus Selnecker: Selnecker's Berufung auf die Autorität Luthers im Normenstreit der Konfessionalisierung in Kursachsen," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 86 (1995) 91-123.

- 93 On the confessional writings, see Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa: die öffentlichen Diskussionen um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996).
- 94 On Hunnius's catechetical sermons, see Austra Reinis, "Piety and Politics: Aegidius Hunnius's Sermons on the Lutheran Catechism (1592)," in *Archive für Reformationsgeschichte* 102 (2011) 220-42; on his funeral sermons, see her "Admitted to the Heavenly School: Consolation, Instruction, and Admonition in Aegidius Hunnius's Academic Funeral Sermons," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38/4 (2007) 995-1012.
- 95 For a discussion of this volume, and the anniversary celebration, see Gummelt, "Die Theologische Fakultät und das Jubiläum der Universität Wittenberg im Jahre 1602," in *Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602*, 223-36.

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American Lutherans and Suffering – Hymns of Faith and Hope Fall Academy 2016

Maria Erling

Pew racks hold a rich and complicated heritage of consolation, guidance, praise, and even lament. Through the several centuries of Lutheran presence in America, the hymnals they contain have played an important role in sustaining communities of faithful believers with words of consolation and encouragement. In this essay I will tell the hidden and intimate story of hymns as expressions of hope and as messages of communal strength. When we sing the same hymns today, we participate in a tradition that has lasting power to sustain believing communities. The music of hymns as well as the message belong to us as we sing them together, because as we engage our voices the melodies enter into our bodies. As a community we express a heritage and hope that draws on the past and extends into the future. Our singing can be heard; it extends beyond ourselves to our hopes, to God, to each other. As we keep faith in this powerful, intimate, and visceral way, we are joined to a larger hope.

In this essay I do not expect to hear your voices, but I can attest that at the Fall Academy I could hear how well Lutherans on Seminary Ridge can sing. In this reader's version we will look at five hymns that represent a response and a tool that helps believers cope with grief, turmoil, anxiety, loss, and despair. These hymns come from distinct periods in the American Lutheran experience, so they show us where we have come from, and because they focus on the distinct theme of suffering, they help us to understand a dimension of Lutheran history that, because it draws on the experience of pain and loss, is most intimate and can remain hidden to many worshippers who experience only the more upbeat worship gatherings.

These hymns tell the story of worry and sorrow, and they show us that Lutherans have not always lived as comfortably as they do today, and that from colonial times they experienced the painful side of coming to America, living as immigrants and strangers. Even while adjusting to life in American cities, towns, and farms, the Lutheran way of responding to life's challenges provided a distinct treasury of consolation.

Lutheran hymnals came along with the trunks that immigrants filled before their journey to a new land. Printers in the Americas started their trade by publishing hymnals because new, lonely, settlers needed them more than any other type of book. So we have hundreds and hundreds of hymnals to choose from if we aim to understand the devotional side of American Lutheran experience. We have variety, too, beyond the approved versions used by established Lutheran church bodies, for of course we recognize in every church quarrel the display of Lutheran theological and devotional diversity. A study of Lutheran hymnody in America is a vast topic, intimate and familiar to every one of us. All of us have some expertise in hymns, and have our favorites. Hymns shape the way that we think about God, about our lives, and about each other, and so we cannot understand our tradition unless we include our hymns.

On the American Lutheran frontier in Pennsylvania, colonial Lutherans from Germany lived alongside pacifists, pretenders, and purists who not only worried the pastors but started religious feuds that divided congregations and families. Factions contended for rights to altars, communion ware, and the precious church bells that ordered the rhythm of every working day and counted every passing life. Congregations, when they gathered, sang German hymns, but these hymns became American through their use. For all that we bring with us into new communities is a contribution to the work of the gospel where we are planted. American Lutherans used (and so made their own) hymns from their former homelands. But they made a selection from this bountiful source. And especially when they translated hymns from their homeland into English, they were baptizing these as American. American Lutherans wrote hymns because hymns are needed practically every week, and sometimes every day. Best sellers, church publishing houses kept on printing hymnals. They are like Doritos; you wear out those hymnals and Augsburg Fortress will make more.

I will delve into five representative traditions within American Lutheranism and select hymns that both address the problem of suffering and also tell us how the people sang and felt and thought about suffering – We'll sing Muhlenberg's favorite hymn, a song from the Swedish revival, a hymn written by a Norwegian pastor in Minneapolis, a hymn by a Missouri Synod leader Martin Franzmann to a tune by Hugo Distler, and the ecu-

menical Lutheran tradition represented by Gettysburg Seminary's Herman Stuempfle.

I.

"Befiehl du deine Wege" – Muhlenberg's oft quoted hymn – was a Paul Gerhardt hymn based on Psalm 37, which is a psalm of lament. The melody we will use is by Hans Leo Hassler that we know familiarly as the tune to "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." This hymn, for obscure reasons, is not familiar to us in our last three hymnals – The Service Book and Hymnal, the Lutheran Book of Worship, and the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book. The LBW did not include the psalms of lament, and perhaps for this reason they did not include this hymn. This hymn does however have a place in the Missouri Synod hymnal, the Lutheran Service Book number 754, with a new translation by Stephen R. Johnson, "Entrust your Days and Burdens." Lutheran hymnals in the nineteenth century included this hymn, translated as "Commit thy Ways" or "Thy Way and all thy Sorrows," sometimes including all 12 verses. As you read this translation, you can imagine how Henry Melchior Muhlenberg would use this hymn to express his confidence in God's guidance and care. Paul Gerhardt's images also accompany those who journey through wild places, and across the sea.

Entrust your days and Burdens
To God's most loving hand;
He cares for you while ruling
The sky, the sea, the land,
For he who guides the tempest
Along their thundering ways
Will find for you a pathway
And guide you all your days.

Rely on God your Savior
And Find your life secure
Make His work your foundation
That your work may endure
No anxious thought, no worry,
No self-tormenting care
Can win your Father's favor;
His heart is moved by prayer.

Take heart, have hope, my spirit,
And do not be dismayed;

God helps in every trial
 And makes you unafraid.
 Await his time with patience
 Through darkest hours of night
 Until the sun you hoped for
 Delights your eager sight.

Leave all to his direction;
 His wisdom rules for you
 In ways to rouse your wonder
 At all His love can do.
 Soon He, His promise keeping,
 With wonderworking pow'rs
 Will banish from your spirit
 What gave you troubled hours.

Muhlenberg mentions this hymn several times in his famous journals that recorded his daily reflections on his missionary work. His attempt to create a church order in the colonial German settlements met immediate challenges from other ministerial contenders, and also from the ordinary people he met. They were unused to his pious expectations, and these skeptical and flinty Pennsylvanians took their time before trusting him. Then he had to protect these wayward and independent congregants from the Moravian preachers. Muhlenberg mentions this hymn in his report to Halle in 1743. On the 25th Sunday after Trinity, October 20th, his congregation finally worshiped in a building. He wrote: "Oh, God, what a blessing this is in this strange, wild country! Our enemies have been hoping all along that the four men who made themselves responsible for the cost of the building would be cast into prison for debt before the church has been thus far completed. On this Sunday we again sang the beautiful hymn, 'Befiehl du deine Wege'." The hymn served as an inaugural prayer, but also to express a sigh of relief.

The competition from the Moravians did not stop. On December 12, in 1745, when the Moravians had in turn built their own church, he wrote,

So I beg, for God's sake, that the Reverend Fathers will again stretch forth their hands to save this poor congregation which is now at the stage where it can either go forward or perish all together. The Lord who has already shown His power and grace so clearly and who, in answer to the prayers of many souls has thrust three brethren into the field during the last year, the same Jehovah to whom all things

are possible, will surely be able to find a couple more and then send them over. The bad fish as well as the good are straining the net and threaten to tear it! Meanwhile on this side we shall sing "Befiehl du deine Wege."²

Perhaps the hymn gave comfort "on this side" of heaven, or "on this side" of the ocean. Such a familiar hymn clearly united Muhlenberg with his homeland. He was singing, on this side, a hymn so familiar that he did not need to cite the verses.

Gerhardt's hymn remained important to American Lutherans also in English versions. "Commit Thy Ways" appeared in *The Common Service Book* [1887] *The Lutheran Hymnary* "Thy Way and all Thy Sorrows" [1918], and in the *Augustana Hymnal* [1925]. Having come from the German and through the Scandinavian languages into English, the hymn also was experienced differently by the various Lutheran churches as it was sung to different melodies. In some traditions the hymn was located in the hymnal under seasonal rubrics, "Lent," and in the Missouri hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, this hymn is located in the section entitled "Hope and Comfort." Gerhardt's hymn retains an important position in the most recent hymnal used in German Protestant churches in the section "Angst und Vertrauen" [Worry and Confidence], but it does not appear in the last three hymnals produced by Lutherans in the Muhlenberg tradition in the United States. Missouri's new hymnal does give the hymn a new translation and a new melody, and this is a contribution to all singing American Lutherans.

II.

Our next hymn comes from the nineteenth century Swedish Revival. The Scandinavian people experienced a religious awakening movement that gave expression to many profound feelings of dislocation and loss, met by spiritual confidence and courage, as people left their villages and farms for American farms and factories. The awakening stimulated many song writers and preachers, both men and women, who helped people express their longing for a better life. While Scandinavian song writers wrote many of their own songs and hymns, they also translated many texts from the contemporary Anglo-American evangelical revival. Thus, "What a Friend we have in Jesus" made its way across the ocean to Scandinavia, and back to America with the immigrants, and into their hymnals. The awakening had roots in an older pietism, but the evangelical revival brought Scandinavian Lutherans into contact with the vibrant American evangelical song tradition. The nineteenth-century globalization of the evangelical song treasury thus made its way into the most staid Lutheran churches not only through exposure

to other American evangelical churches, but also in the song books packed away in the trunks of immigrants.

In 1892 the Augustana Synod published “*Hemlandssånger*,” or “Songs of the Homeland.” The hymnal was an important supplement to the Swedish psalmbok used in Sunday morning services. Sunday evening services needed a personal, informal, and pietistic song. *Hemlandssånger* contains many hymns that address suffering in seasonal sections, such as Lent, and also in the sections named Cross, and Burial. A section designating the way that suffering was uniquely understood by immigrants was called “Longing for Home.” This section, which could also be called “homesickness,” is large, with 31 separate hymns. Longing for home had a double meaning, both the popular pietist theme of spiritual pilgrimage, and the reality of separation from home and family that the immigrant experienced. The popular hymn writer Lina Sandell, who wrote the popular hymn “Children of the Heavenly Father,” composed many hymns that drew upon the theme of pilgrimage and longing for a home. The troubadour song leader and composer Oskar Ahnfelt often provided the melody to her songs, and we have an example of this in our Evangelical Lutheran Worship, number 790, “Day by Day,” which we will sing together shortly. In this hymn the spiritual journey is explored in the context of the everyday life of the believer, who experiences burdens and sorrows. God’s care is with the believer in every blink of the eye, every moment, in the original Swedish text. The earthly journey of the believer is directed towards the heavenly homeland, a promised land, and away from the fleeting struggles in this life. For immigrants the longing for a heavenly home promised also a final uniting with families and a beloved homeland they had left behind. This suffering, this homesickness, was felt by the uprooted generation, for whom immigration was a parting as profound as death.

Before we sing this hymn, I want to give a testimony to the power of the Scandinavian awakening to form the piety of a family. The songs provided a solace over the summer when my father lay dying. My family gathered and sang hymns for ourselves and for him. The hymns comforted us and came from so many sources, from our family’s Scandinavian heritage, from several Lutheran hymnals that we gathered from dusty bookshelves, and from memory. We sang in harmony, with friends joining in, until the long vigil was finished. The hymns gave him and us many gifts to accompany this painful journey. Spiritual strength and connection, a sense of God’s presence, and even the knowledge that our singing provided physical comfort. We learned from nurses that singing releases endorphins, and these are a pain reliever, so we were also using the best tool we had to counter

any physical suffering my father may have endured, and also for the emotional toll we also felt. The words and the music of hymns were our family’s response to suffering. And of course we sang “Day by Day,” more than once.

III.

You may be wondering when we will finally get to sing a hymn written by an American Lutheran. So here we are – our next hymn was written by M. Falk Gjertsen, and it also picks up on the theme of Christian life as a journey. “I know a Way Besieged and Thronging” made its way into the Concordia Hymnal, one of the powerful English language hymnals produced by Norwegian American Lutherans. This hymn was written in Norwegian, and the themes of the hymn show clearly that the same pietist awakening that inspired the songs of Lina Sandell continued in America, and also into the twentieth century. The author, a successful pastor and preacher, was a mover and shaker in the Norwegian American community in Minnesota that had become an established presence in Minneapolis. Gjertsen, pastor of the Trinity Congregation, not only exerted leadership in the congregation but also supported the Minneapolis Deaconess house and hospital, serving on the board, and providing the backing for the development of Augsburg Seminary. Lest you think that a pietist is a conservative force in the church, you should know that Gjertsen pushed to give women the vote in the congregation. He also got in trouble when he was accused of improprieties on a visit to Norway. What happened in Norway did not stay there. When a rival pastor made accusations, Gjertsen apparently skipped town and avoided arrest in Oslo, but when he came home his congregation fired him. This did not stop him, however, since he quickly founded Bethany Congregation only a few blocks down the avenue. His ministry lived another day, and his hymn may also give us a sense of his own personal story.

Gjertsen’s life from 1847-1913 spanned the period of immigrant adjustment and assimilation into American ways. The translation of his text by Oscar Overby also brings into English another theme important to Scandinavian hymns, which contain vivid reflections on nature. This hymn shows us also the blending of the Norwegian and the Swedish spiritual song tradition, as the composer of the tune of his hymn comes from the Swedish side.

IV.

On our battlefield we have many monuments on the Northern side, over by the Pennsylvania monument, but fewer on the Southern side, on Confederate Avenue. There are many reasons for this, but one of them is important

to the turn I am now about to make, and that is to recognize the need for lament when we think about our spiritual needs as a people.

The pietist orientation of many Lutheran hymns gives expression to suffering in our personal lives, but the life we experience as a people, as a nation, is also a place of suffering, remorse, and grief. And there are places on the Southern side of the battlefield where these important feelings surface. They are best seen in two monuments sculpted in the 1970s by Don Delue, for the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. These monuments are defiant, but they are also strong depictions of loss. Because they were created in the turmoil of American involvement in Vietnam, they were also controversial – the park commission that oversaw the placement of monuments found them very difficult to accept. The artist went beyond a simple depiction of a soldier to make statements about the meaning of loss in battle, and the war itself. The dead soldier, the fighting soldier, may have been defeated, but in death perhaps there could be a spiritual triumph. Triumphant expressions of national pride, of sectional pride, of political pride, had by the 1970s become less meaningful as our national mood sought for a more profound understanding of loss.

So, too, in the cultural battles fought between and within Lutheran denominations, the need for ways to express sorrow and loss was palpable. The polarization and fighting between the conservatives and the moderates in the Missouri Synod, and between similar factions in the other Lutheran churches on the long course of merging to form the ELCA, had begun to form. One of the important dimensions to the changes affecting Lutherans was a move away from the pietistic and personal orientation of faith to a new sense of a corporate responsibility for society. Instead of a moralistic focus, Lutherans began to see the challenges that persons faced in their individual lives in a broader context. The themes of justice and public responsibility started to resonate. The civil rights movement had something to do with this pivot away from personal morality to corporate responsibility. The church explored new dimensions of the biblical witness, including the prophetic books in the Old Testament, and in their work on renewing worship Lutherans rediscovered the psalms.

Lutherans at this moment also began to see clearly their global responsibility. American Lutherans learned what had happened to Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany, what was going on in South Africa, the dangers of proxy cold wars and military dictatorships in Central America, and the ongoing struggles of women for equal status and respect. These themes pressed themselves on the churches, and hymn writers gave voice to them.

V.

The Church has its own politics, of course. We will sing together a hymn written by one of the combatants in Missouri's internal conflicts, Martin Franzmann, which he named "Weary of all Trumpeting." This text was set to a tune by Hugo Distler, who composed his music in the midst of the Nazi horrors, and who lost his own life by suicide after he learned he was being sent to the Eastern front. The hymn conveys this dark mood, and resists any taint of chirpiness.

Lament became a separate section in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book in response to the needs of the hour. There were many factors that created this unique section. The Renewing Worship consultations worked with guidelines that, in true "denominationalese" included this application: M-16E, "Though not always easy, the Singing of lament [a characteristic of many of the psalms] expresses a healthy honesty before God. Composers, congregations, and worship planners are encouraged to explore the use of songs of lament." This was taken seriously by the hymnody editorial team for the ELW, according to recent communication I received from Martin Stelz who oversaw the project.

The team working on the hymnal had much good material to work with in the hymns written between 1975 and 2000. Many included texts that acknowledged and gave voice to anguish and despair over senseless dying, nuclear destruction, terrorism, and environmental damage. These examples numbered in the hundreds when the compilers began their work on the ELW. Hymnal projects in other denominations had come to similar conclusions.

Mainline Protestant churches informed by modern biblical scholarship recognized that the place of lament in the scriptures had come into a much clearer picture for people in the church. The adoption in 1994 of the Revised Common Lectionary brought the Psalms into the Sunday readings. And the African American hymn tradition, including blues, spirituals, gospel, also informed the ELW team, which benefited from the previous pan-Lutheran work on the hymnal *This Far by Faith* that came out in 1999.

Today in our hymnals we have the full book of Psalms, including all the psalms of lament. Psalm 37 is now present for us for the first time in our hymnal. And this psalm had inspired Paul Gerhardt's hymn that we sang at the beginning of our time together. The powerful message conveyed in that psalm is needed for a church living in times of challenge and communal polarization, our own contemporary brand of suffering.

Including the Psalms and the category of lament also occurred at a time when it was needed. The progress and optimism of the late twentieth century was dashed on 9/11. Older hymnals had included more somber

hymns that had not been so prominent in the SBH or the LBW. And the work of one of the teams working on the ELW actually occurred right in the aftermath of the terrorist attack – when even the compilers were looking for a way, through worship, to express their shock and dismay. One meeting to discuss hymns for baptism occurred on September 11, 2001, in Minneapolis, and the shock of current events impressed upon the compilers the need for something stronger in our hymnals.

Herman Stuempfle gave voice to these feelings in his hymn written in response to the attack, “When Foundations sure are Shaken,” and more generally in “Bring Peace to Earth Again,” ELW number 700. His hymn is a response of the individual, and of a people, to the fact of war’s devastation and the horrific feelings it unleashes in our communities. We will give him the last word today as we sing the hymn together, and with it, pray also for peace again to come.

I have had help in choosing 5 representative hymns, especially from Gracia Grindal, an expert in the Scandinavian spiritual song tradition, Norma Muench from Concordia Publishing House, Martin Steltz, the publisher of Augsburg Fortress who worked on the Renewing Worship effort, and Bishop Michael Burk of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, who steered the renewing worship effort that resulted in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book. Michael Krentz, worship professor from Philadelphia, assisted in presenting the hymns. These people were generous with advice and assistance, and I thank them.

Notes

- 1 *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, vol. 1 (trans. Theodore Tappert and John Doberstein; Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1942) 95.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 105.

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Psalm 90: Luther on Death – and Life Fall Academy 2016

Brooks Schramm

*Difficile igitur est retinere hanc fiduciam,
quod Deus sit iucundus super nos,
et de opera Dei nihil dubitare¹*

The words before you are from Martin Luther’s 1534-1535 university lecture series on Psalm 90: “It is a *difficult* thing to hold fast to the trust that God is kindly disposed to us and not to doubt the works of God.” My lecture this afternoon is devoted to this peculiar difficulty of which Luther speaks here, a difficulty that applies specifically to the day-to-day life of a Christian. His treatment of Ps 90 will be our primary guide, although a number of references will be made to Luther’s second lecture series on the Psalms from 1519-1521 (*Operationes in Psalmos*, or “Works on the Psalms”), and the conclusion will derive some help as well from the 1535 (1531) Galatians lectures.

The work that I am presenting to you this afternoon is an exercise in historical theology, that is to say, an attempt to explicate Luther’s thought on a particular issue within the boundaries of his own horizons. In this respect, I follow the counsel of Henri de Lubac regarding the study of the past:

When one wants to give an account *of the present*, it is entirely legitimate [. . .] to delve into the past in order to do research on the outlines and preparations for the present and to see how the present is anticipated in a more remote time. What is much less legitimate, if one wishes to know *the past*, is to be primarily interested in it only in order to detect elements in it that might bear some relationship to the

present. In this way, a person is liable to reject everything that does not make an immediately useful contribution in terms of a response to the questions of the [present] day. At any rate, if the past is not appreciated in and for itself, what is essential will have eluded us.²

The Agōn

March 9, 1522, was Invocavit Sunday in Wittenberg, the first Sunday in Lent. On that day, just three days after having returned from his exile on the Wartburg – what he referred to as his “Patmos” experience – Luther began the first of eight sermons that were preached over the course of eight consecutive days in the *Marienkirche*, the Church of St. Mary, the town church, in Wittenberg. The first words of the first sermon were as follows:

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight their own battle with death by themselves, alone. We can shout into each other’s ears, but everyone must themselves be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore everyone must themselves know and be armed with the chief things that concern a Christian.³

These words are familiar to many Lutherans, not so much because they have actually read Luther’s sermon, but more so because the words are quoted by Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* at the beginning of his chapter entitled “The Day Alone.” Nevertheless, there is perhaps nothing more constitutive of Luther’s conception of Christian life than this image of a battle (*Kampf*) with death, a battle that ultimately has to be waged alone, in the solitude of the human heart. That this is a *difficult* matter, Luther never tired of reinforcing. In fact, one can say that, for Luther, death was the primary rubric under which human life itself constantly exists, and Christian life is certainly no exception.⁴ Death stamps who we are, always and everywhere. Thus Luther can say in the *Dictata* (The First Lectures on the Psalms, 1513-1515): “This life [or, what we call life] is not [really] life, but more correctly [this life] is the departure *from* life and the entrance *into* death.”⁵ For Luther, this life is not so much a living as it is a dying, from the beginning. And thus the words of the medieval hymn that Luther so often alluded to, and for which he would compose his own German lyrics: *Media vita in morte sumus*, in the midst of life we are in death, *Mitten wir im Leben sind*.⁶ (How the editors of the ELW could not find their way to including this Luther hymn, of all Luther hymns, in the new hymnal is beyond me.) Luther’s fondness for this hymn is also an indication of just how profoundly he was

influenced by the thought-world of the lament Psalms. Luther knew quite well that “this experience of ‘death in the midst of life’ is ubiquitous in the Psalms of Lament.”⁷ Further, and more colorfully, as he states in the lectures on Ps 90: “Moses informs us that life is not a span of time but, as it were, a violent toss which catapults us into death.”⁸

In spite of the fact that Lutherans have the general reputation (well earned) of being rather dry and altogether not very jazzy, in spite of the fact that we are largely known as people-with-formulas, formulas that we love to repeat, Luther’s own theological expressions and formulations are anything but dry, if one pays attention to them and thinks about them. They are in fact highly experiential and even dynamic. As Denis Janz argued a few years ago when he spoke here at Luther Colloquy, “Luther’s theology has experience, more precisely religious experience, as its starting point.” Luther himself emphasized this very thing on numerous occasions. For example: “I didn’t learn my theology all at once. I had to ponder over it ever more deeply, and my *Anfechtungen* [*tentationes*] were of help to me in this, for one does not learn anything without experience [*sine usu*].”¹⁰

In what follows this afternoon, I want to push this issue of experience a bit further, in light of the *difficulty* that Luther mentions in the quote with which I began: “It is a difficult thing to hold fast to the trust that God is kindly disposed to us and not to doubt the works of God.” This is to be sure experiential language, but I want to suggest that it is a particular type of experience that Luther has in mind and which he describes, a type of experience that is best captured by the adjective *agonistic*. I use this adjective in the sense of the Greek term from which it is derived: the ἀγών (*agōn*), a contest or a struggle. For Luther, Christian life *coram Deo* (before God) is an *agōn*, a contest or a struggle, and the field or the arena in which this *agōn* takes place is the solitary human heart.

Just to give a foretaste of where this is headed: when Luther, for example, uses the language of daily dying and rising, this is not a mere pithy formula but rather an *agonistic* category that describes a real experience; and not a one-time experience either but rather one that must be continuously, repeatedly, endured. What is more, the experience has the potential to become ever more difficult, rather than easier, if in fact faith is genuine. (This is one of those counter-intuitive aspects of Luther’s thought that makes him so interesting.) For Luther, Christian life *coram Deo* does not become easier but rather harder. This agonistic experience that Luther describes, I would suggest, is not peaches and cream and happy kittens but something that is much more akin to things that go boom in the night.

Before we move on to placing the text of Ps 90 before our eyes, I thought it might be helpful to engage in a type of mental-adjustment exercise that can

help clarify what kind of thinker we are dealing with when we read Luther concerning matters divine and human. This mental adjustment is necessary in order for us to enter his world of thought, before we can even begin to ask how his world of thought might speak to ours. So, how many times have you heard someone say the following, or something near to it?

- 1] I was in distress (or, my loved one was in distress)
- 2] I called out to God
- 3] God did not answer
- 4] Therefore, *there is no God*¹

But if we put the same situation into Luther's mouth (and the situation is not a hypothetical one, actually), I would suggest that it would more likely come out something like this:

- 1] I was in distress (or, my loved one was in distress)
- 2] I called out to God
- 3] God did not answer
- 4] Therefore, *I am damned*

Perhaps we will have opportunity to speak further of this example during our discussion period later, for it would be interesting to pursue the question of whether these two positions are in reality as mutually exclusive as they initially appear. For now, though, the function of the example is strictly to highlight two different default positions around a common human dilemma vis-à-vis God and the experience of suffering.

Psalm 90

A few general words about Ps 90. Ps 90 occupies a strategic place in the Psalter. The Psalter is divided into five "books" of unequal length. These divisions are part of the canonical structure of the Psalter, with the last book of each division concluding with a benediction. Ps 90 is the first Psalm of Book IV, which runs from Ps 90 - Ps 106. This is a strategic location in the Psalter because of the way in which the previous book, Book III, ends, with Pss 88 and 89. Ps 88 is the most relentlessly hopeless Psalm in the Psalter, saturated as it is with images of unrelenting darkness. Its conclusion:

Your wrath has swept over me; your dread assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; from all sides they close in on

me. You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my only companions are in darkness.¹²

And then Ps 89 ends with strident accusations against God, charging God with violation of covenant, of having broken the covenant with David and his house:

But now you have spurned and rejected him; you are full of wrath against your anointed one. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust. You have broken through all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

But then comes Ps 90, with its unique superscription: "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God." This is the only psalm in the entire Psalter that is attributed to or associated with Moses. In this transition from Pss 88-89 to Ps 90, from Book III to Book IV, from David to Moses, modern scholars of the Psalms see echoes of an actual transition in the religion of ancient Israel: Ps 89 signals the historical demise of the House of David (that is, it makes reference to the Babylonian destruction and the decimation of the Davidic royal house), and Ps 90 with its reference to Moses signals the turn to the Torah, which will now anchor the people in the vacuum created by the great catastrophe. Here is the text of Ps 90, which will set us up for Luther's treatment of the Psalm.

A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.

- 1] Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
- 2] Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed
the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3] You turn us back to dust, and say,
"Turn back, you mortals."
- 4] For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.
- 5] You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
- 6] in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
- 7] For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

- 8] You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- 9] For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end like a sigh.
- 10] The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- 11] Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.
- 12] *So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.*
- 13] *Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!*
- 14] *Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*
- 15] *Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.*
- 16] *Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.*
- 17] *Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands –
O prosper the work of our hands!*

Luther's Treatment of Ps 90

Luther was intensively engaged with the Psalter over the entirety of his monastic, academic, and pastoral career. He lectured on the Psalms in whole and in part, he wrote commentaries and expositions on the Psalms, he translated the Psalms into German and continued to revise his translations in painstaking manner (his final German Psalms translation being a masterpiece of world literature), he preached on the Psalms, and, most of all, he prayed the Psalms. Among the most reliable of the records of the hours leading to Luther's death in Eisleben in the night of February 17-18, 1546, we know that the Bible verse that he repeated to himself was a verse from the Psalter – in Latin. Yes, the one famously known for translating the Bible into the German language of his people, in his own final hours prayed a Psalm-verse in the language in which it was on his heart, the language of the monastery: “*In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, Redemisti me, Domine DEUS veritatis*” (Into your hands I commend my spirit; you have redeemed me, Lord GOD of truth).¹³ Though he is best known for his work on

Romans and most especially Galatians, Bernd Janowski has stated: “Luther's reformation impulse owes no more to any biblical book than to the Psalter.”¹⁴ The Psalms were the seed-bed of his theology; the Psalms are where he went to school on a day-to-day basis. In 1519, in the initial installment of the publication of Luther's second lecture series on the Psalter, which would come to be called the *Operationes in Psalmos* (Works on the Psalms), Luther penned a dedication to his prince, Duke Frederick “the Wise” of Saxony, thanking the prince for his patronage of the University of Wittenberg and especially for his support of the study of biblical languages. Twenty-one year-old Philipp Melanchthon, the second finest Greek scholar in all of Europe, had arrived in the previous year, and it was a major coup for the university. In this dedication Luther states: “There is no book of the Bible to which I have devoted as much labor as to the Psalter.”¹⁵ That was in 1519. His labors would continue, virtually unabated, as he cranked out more and more material on the Psalms.

In the classroom, the very last Psalm that Luther lectured on was Ps 90, in 1534-1535. At the conclusion of those lectures, he stated as follows:

Now you have Moses' psalm as I interpreted it according to the insights which the Lord granted me. Later we shall, if the Lord lengthens my life, interpret Genesis; thus, when our end comes, we shall be able to die joyfully, being engaged in the word and work of God. May God and our Redeemer Jesus Christ grant this. Amen.¹⁶

The Genesis lectures to which Luther referred here, and which he would begin only three days later, would consume his classroom energies for the next decade, 1535-1545, and when completed and subsequently published they would constitute his *magnum opus*. In the lectures on Ps 90, however, we have a fairly concise statement of crucial and deep aspects of Luther's theological thought, and of his biblical hermeneutics, particularly in terms of the tensive convergence of Law and Gospel, judgment and salvation, *in the heart of the believer*.¹⁷

Jaroslav Pelikan, the editor of LW 13, describes Luther's Psalm 90 as a “Christian thanatopsis,”¹⁸ that is, a Christian meditation on death. But Luther's specific meditation derives its distinctive theological “umpf” from the fact that the Psalm, this Psalm of death, is ascribed to Moses himself, and that ascription brings with it certain theological consequences. Because, for Luther, Moses represents Law (with a capital L), and in this Psalm which speaks so severely and uncompromisingly about death, Moses is functioning, so Luther, in the office of Law (*officio Legis*), in which above all else Moses acts as a “severe minister of death” (*severus minister mortis*). The

coalescence of these three things – Moses, the office of Law, the ministry of death – leads Luther to say that in this Psalm, Moses is “at his most Mosaic” (*Mosissimus Moses*).¹⁹

To students: It is essential, whether you are just beginning your studies of Luther or whether you have been at it for awhile, to recognize that when Luther uses the terms Law and Gospel as antipodes, these terms function for him as ciphers for *death* and *life*. Because when Luther describes the relationship between Law and Gospel, as his particular and unique manner of describing the way in which God works in our lives and in the world, he describes this relationship identically to the way in which he describes the relationship between death and life. Law and Gospel, capital L and capital G: read, death and life.²⁰

In the lectures, Luther notes right off the bat that human beings tend to respond to the reality and the inescapability of death in one of two general ways: they ignore it or try to make light of it, on the one hand, or they rebel against it and immerse themselves either in a hedonistic or a nihilistic life, on the other, numbing themselves as it were on the way to the grave. Luther regards both of these responses as evasions of the highest order.²¹ He sees in this “most Mosaic” Psalm confirmation of the words of Paul in Rom 6:23, that “the wages of sin is death.” The sin of which Luther speaks, however, is very clearly *peccatum originalis* (original sin) as articulated in church dogma. Thus in Luther’s understanding, the wages of *original* sin is death.²² The result, then, and what Moses is driving at in this Psalm, is that death is not simply a factum that one learns from observation, it is not merely a biological reality that one learns in school, it is rather, and explicitly, a punishment, the expression of divine wrath. Though it sounds strange to our modern biologically-informed worldview, for Luther, *human* death is not “natural.” It is a catastrophe, and qualitatively distinct from the death of animals:

The death of the human being is in countless ways a far greater calamity than the death of other living beings. Although horses, cows, and all animals die, they do not die because God is angry with them. On the contrary, for them death is, as it were, a sort of temporal calamity, ordained indeed by God but not regarded by God as punishment. Animals die because for some other reason it seemed good to God that they should die. But the death of the human being is a misery and truly an infinite and eternal wrath.²³

This, for Luther, is Moses at his most Mosaic, *Mosissimus Moses*. His office, his job, is to confront us with a God who is against us, whose righteous will we cannot escape, and whose judgment we must accept: the judgment of death.

This particular view of Moses and of Ps 90 comes to a head in Luther’s understanding of Ps 90:3, the Hebrew of which reads: *tashev ’enosh ’ad dakkā* – “You return human beings to the dust.” Luther acknowledged the literal sense of the Hebrew passage, but then he went on to say that what these words really mean (*vera et germana sententia*) is: “You cause human beings to die” (*qui facis hominis mori*), that is, “You make them die”. Luther enshrined this radical interpretation in his 1531 revision of the German Psalter, where he rendered this verse as: *Der du die menschen lessest sterben* (You cause human beings to die).

The Hebrew Bible has numerous references to the brevity of human life, and Luther was fond of quoting them. Ps 39:6 – “Surely the human being goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather.” Isa 40:6 – “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.” Ps 102:11 – “My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.” Ps 144:4 – “The human being is like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow.” Job 14:1 – “A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last.” And so also in Ps 90:5-6 – “You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.” All of these passages, and many more, inform Luther’s treatment of what is probably the most well known verse from Ps 90, namely, verse 10 – “The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” Luther took the occasion to note that this 70-80 year lifespan described in Ps 90 does not refer to an average lifespan but rather to the maximum length of life that we can hope for, and then he added that even that modest number was no longer applicable in sixteenth-century Germany. In his day, he says, due to gluttony and immodest lifestyles, the limit is more like 40 or 50 years, with only a very small number of people actually reaching 60. This factoid is significant, because Luther himself was 51 at the time of these lectures and therefore he speaks as one who knows that he likely does not have long to live.²⁴

But beyond this, Luther ruminates on the ravages of old age, while also lamenting the ways in which even elderly people can be oblivious to what is actually happening to them, and why. His description is both poignant and hilarious:

Furthermore, one must interpret seventy or eighty years not according to their mathematical but rather their physical significance. Moses does not have in mind precisely seventy or eighty years, no more and

no less. Rather, since, as a rule, people reach this age, he has in mind the terminal aspect of seventy or eighty years. Whatever exceeds that terminal point does not deserve to be called “life,” since all things most essential to life are then absent. People who live beyond that point no longer really enjoy food and drink; they are, as a rule, unable to do various kinds of work; and they keep on living to their own disadvantage.

From God’s point of view, a life of seventy or eighty years is like a sound proceeding from the mouth, which vanishes most rapidly. From our point of view, it is like a flight in which we experience nothing but toil and trouble.

Consider what I am saying. Is it not a great tragedy that, although all older people suffer and experience the same thing, there are so pitifully few who, as I would say, are fully aware of the things they are experiencing? It is just as a German proverb has it: “There is no fool like an old fool.”²⁵ Who among all people is there who, even though he has become old and decrepit, realizes that old age, death, and similar experiences are punishments? Yes, as a result of an inexplicable folly, many become rejuvenated in old age not only with respect to their sense capacities but even also with respect to sexual desire.²⁶ *O miseriam miseriam!*²⁷

This, for Luther, is the real human condition: it is not merely that we are mortal, which is bad enough, but that our mortality is a punishment, and that God is the author of that punishment. When we come to that recognition, Luther would say that Moses has done his work; he has effectively executed his office. Or, stated differently, in Ps 90 and in the voice of Moses, we are confronted with a God who is *against* us.

Luther loved to quote the Delphic maxim, *γνώθι σεαυτόν* (know thyself), but he meant something very different by it. For him, to know oneself is to know one’s condition, the reason for it, *and* the role that God plays in it. For Luther, those who genuinely know themselves know that they are, therefore, in a desperate situation – that is, they are always poised on the very precipice of despair itself. For Luther, the human condition, the real human condition, therefore, is agonistic.

Now: you know what comes next. In Luther’s words, the Gospel is the *remedium* (remedy) for the desperation of the human situation. And this remedy is itself intimated in the words of Ps 90, not overtly but, as Luther says, in veiled or obscure language. If we return to the text of the Psalm, for Luther the major division comes at verse 12. It is at this point that one “rightly divides the word” (2 Tim 2:15). From that point on, Moses,

the severe minister of death, himself cries out for the Gospel and even announces it. Luther marks this “Gospel” character of the Psalm with his translation of Ps 90:14, the Hebrew of which reads: *sabbe’enu va-boqer chasdekha* – “Satisfy us in the morning with your *hesed*.” But Luther’s rendering is: “Fuelle vns frue mit deiner *gnade*” (Fill us in the morning with your *grace*).²⁸ And grace, for Luther, means Christ. In Ps 90, Moses both confronts us with our real condition and announces the *remedium* for it, Christ. Thus the great irony and power of the Psalm, for Luther, is that it begins by portraying the God who is *contra nos* (against us) and ends by announcing the God who is *pro nobis* (for us).

OK then. Problem solved. *Satis est*. Let’s all go have a beer and live happily ever after. Or, we could press on. Because we have only now reached the source of the *difficulty* with which we began. And, if we go further, the beer will taste better.

What Luther is describing here in this collision of Law and Gospel in Ps 90, this collision of judgment and salvation, is not merely a sequential process in which the latter trumps the former, which is the way it is so often explicated. Rather Luther describes the Christian human being as being caught between competing and seemingly mutually exclusive words: the word of death and the word of life. It is an experiential, an existential, and an agonistic impasse. It is as if the Christian is caught between two Gods: one who wants to kill us and one who wants to save us.

Two Gods?

What makes this situation so *difficult* is the fact that Luther was a monotheist; not a theoretical or an occasional monotheist, but a real and consistent monotheist. And so the very notion that what one is experiencing in the collision of Law and Gospel, judgment and salvation, death and life, is the work of two different Gods is unthinkable to Luther. Dualism is a very powerful theology. It has many adherents, even if most of its adherents do not really recognize themselves as such. Dualism does not solve all important theological problems, but it does solve a bunch of them, at least at the theoretical level. But Luther was no dualist. And that is why the situation that he describes is not only experiential but agonistic. For him, the experience of God against us and God for us is the experience of the same God.²⁹

Luther did not just make this up because he wanted it to be that way. He came to these conclusions under the coercion of Scripture itself. There are a number of texts that theology tends to relegate to the margins, or to ignore altogether, but these are the very texts that Luther placed in the center, in so far as his doctrine of God was concerned:

See now that I, even I, am he;
there is no god besides me.
I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal;
and no one can deliver from my hand (Deut 32:39).

The LORD kills and brings to life;
the LORD brings down to Sheol and raises up (1 Sam 2:6).

The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away.
Blessed be the name of the LORD (Job 1:21).

I make light and create darkness;
I give peace and create evil.
I am the LORD,
who does all of this (Isa 45:7; L45).

What Luther did do, however, under the coercion of texts like these, and of Ps 90, was to make a distinction not between two different Gods but between two different works of the same God. These works he called God's alien/foreign work (*opus alienum // fremdes Werk*) and God's proper work (*opus proprium // eigentliches Werk*).³⁰ This chart shows the essential contours of the two distinct works of the same God:

Work 1	Moses	Law	Death	Hell	{Satan}
Work 2	Christ	Gospel	Life	Heaven	Spirit

Ps 90:16 provides Luther with the occasion to explicate this two-fold work of God: "Let *your work* be manifest to your servants, and your glory to their children." Luther's question of this text is, which work of God is Moses calling out for at this point?

These works [of God] are the following: that Christ was made for us our righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, redemption (1 Cor 1:30), light, joy, and all that is good; that Christ is our way, truth, and life (John 14:6). When God appears to us in these works of life, salvation, and righteousness, God truly appears in God's glory. Yet before God so appears, God is truly, as Moses says, "under dark waters" (Ps 77:19).

Therefore trembling consciences, which do not see God's work of glory, fear God and imagine God to be the devil; for they cannot picture God as having a lovely form or disposition. They arm God with swords and lightning, as though, in reality, nothing in heaven or on earth were more repulsive and more horrible than an incensed God.

As such a God did God appear on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18). As such a God Moses also depicted God above.

But in the passage before us Moses prays that God might reveal another form of Godself, one which we can behold with pleasure and over which we can rejoice. Such a form God truly has when we behold God in the person of Christ. In Christ God is consummate mercy, life, salvation, and liberation. In Christ we see the glorious God, God clothed in God's glorious and pleasing works. And so Moses prays: "Show yourself to us miserable and condemned sinners in this manner."³¹

It would be nice if the human being could just say at this point: "OK then, Dr. Luther, I opt for Door #2, and we'll just forget about Door #1." And in fact, many Christian theologies both before and after Luther have done just that. Luther, however, would regard such a move as an illusion. It is an illusion that does not take experience seriously enough. For him, as long as we are in the flesh, and as long as sin still clings to us as a result, we Christians are caught up in the midst of these competing works of God. We experience God in contradictory ways. And we are, thus, in a constant struggle to experience the kindly appearance of God. As Luther puts it in the 1535 Galatians:

Therefore these two things [Law and Gospel/Christ], which are in fact so utterly diverse, must be joined together. What is more contradictory than to sense fear and horror before the wrath of God and at the same time to hope in God's mercy? The first is hell, the second is heaven; and yet in the heart these must be joined as closely as possible. *Speculatively* they can be joined together very easily; but *practically* [i.e., in real life] it is the most difficult thing of all to join them together, as I have learned very often from my own experience.³²

The life of a Christian, in Luther's ominous phrase already in the *Operationes*, is a becoming accustomed to fleeing to God against God (*ad Deum contra Deum*).³³ It is, as he says, a very difficult matter.

Dying and Rising in the Heart: Faith

When one reads Luther's treatments of biblical texts, and particularly the Psalms, it is startling how often he uses the term despair: the experience of either being in despair or being very near to it. For Luther, the Latin

desperatio (the absence of hope) and the German *Verzweiflung* (everything being thrown into doubt) describe the experience of being in hell itself, or very near to it. Despair is an agonistic category, and no formula or cliché can rescue us from it. For Luther, only the Gospel doing its work can.

But. it. is. not. magic. The Gospel, for Luther, is the divinely inspired proclamation that God in Christ wills good and life for us now and into eternity, that God is kindly disposed toward us, and that no matter how contradictory it may appear, God is good. In the proclamation of the Gospel, the Spirit brings Christ to us, who is the kindly, friendly face of God. But it is not magic.

This Gospel Luther called grace, and grace is the power of God condescending for our heart.³⁴ For Luther, this grace is grasped or apprehended (*apprehendere*) only by faith, a faith that emerges from that deepest depth of the heart, from which all other hopes, all other dreams, all other securities have disappeared. This is the faith described in his 1522 *Preface to Romans*, the preface that so warmed John Wesley's heart: "Faith is a living, thoughtful confidence in the grace of God, so assured that it would die for it a thousand times over."³⁵ But grace grasped or accessed by faith sprung from the depths of the heart is not magic; it is rather a difficult thing that emerges from experience.

On Sept. 20, 1542, Magdalena ("Lenchen") Luther, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Martin and Katharina, died in her father's arms.³⁶ Most of what we know of the circumstances surrounding the child's death comes from the Table Talks, a source that must be used only with caution, due to the tendency of the recorders to embellish the stories about and the words of Luther. The Table Talks describe a scene in which Luther comforts his daughter, asking her if she is prepared to leave her earthly father to go and be with her heavenly father, to which she reponds affirmatively. It is also recorded that Katharina stood at a distance across the room, and not at the child's bedside, because her grief was too great. When the funeral procession is described, it is recorded that Luther said to the mourners: "You should be pleased! I've sent a saint to heaven – yes, a living saint. Would that our death might be like this! Such a death, I'd take this very hour."³⁷ And maybe Luther did say such a thing.

But there is another source that paints a different picture. On Sept. 23, just three days after Magdalena's death, Luther wrote a letter to his close friend, Justus Jonas, in Halle, in which he speaks of Magdalena:

I assume that the rumor has reached you, that my most beloved daughter, Magdalena, has been reborn into the eternal kingdom of Christ. My wife and I ought to give nothing but thanks, being joyful

for such a fortunate transition and blessed end through which our daughter escaped the power of the flesh, of the world, of the Turk, and of the devil. Yet, nevertheless, the strength of parental affection is so great that we are unable to do this without sobbing and sighing in our heart, indeed not without great mortification. Deep in the heart there cling the constant glances, facial features, words, and gestures of my living and dying, most obedient and reverent daughter, such that even the death of Christ (and what is the death of all human beings compared with his death?) cannot take this completely away, as it ought [to be able to do].³⁸

There is no formula or cliché that can "fix" the experience here described. To be sure, it is a limit example, or an extreme boundary experience, one in which God for us and God against us come together in a way that can break a human being. To speak of the goodness of God in a situation such as this seems obscene. But, for Luther, only faith can make that claim. It can't be imposed, or extracted, or magically produced. Only faith, born in the deepest depth of the heart.

Conclusion: media vita – media morte

We began our afternoon with a quote from Luther's lectures on Ps 90: "It is a *difficult* thing to hold fast to the trust that God is kindly disposed to us and not to doubt the works of God." We examined this difficulty from various perspectives, with the intention to demonstrate that, for Luther, Christian life is a life in contradiction. And not merely a theoretical contradiction but one that is experientially based under the category of the agōn. This agōn derives its particular parameters from Luther's consistent monotheism. The locus of the agōn is the human heart, and the weapon or tool with which the agōn is waged is faith birthed in the heart by the Gospel, which is Christ, the kindly and friendly face of God, grace itself.

For Luther, as long as we live, we are in contradiction, and the contradiction is most tensively expressed in the antithesis of death and life. In the lectures on Ps 90 he put the contradiction this way: the Christian exists between two competing works of the same God. On the one hand we sing: *media vita in morte sumus* (in the midst of life we are in death). But on the other we also sing: *media morte in vita sumus* (in the midst of death we are in life).³⁹ For Luther, it is a contradiction that cannot be resolved in this life, because the contradiction is the locus of Christian life itself. If I might phrase things in my own words for what Luther is speaking about, the task of the church in its commission to proclaim the Gospel is to help its people

move, on a daily basis, just a freckle in the direction of the latter. In certain matters, sometimes a little is a lot.

Notes

- 1 WA 40/3:592,16-17.
- 2 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol 1: *The Four Senses of Scripture* (trans. Mark Sebanc; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) xviii; emphasis added.
- 3 LW 51:70, revised. (WA 10/3:1,7-2,2). “Hierjnn so muß ein yederman selber die hauptstück so einen Christen belangen, wol wissen und gerüst sein.”
- 4 See e.g., *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* (1519), LW 35:29-43. (WA 2:727-737).
- 5 LW 10:337, revised; emphasis added. (WA 3:401,30-31).
- 6 For the textual history of the hymn and Luther’s German lyrics, see WA 35:126-132, 453, 454.
- 7 Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God; A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms* (trans. Armin Siedlecki; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2013) 47.
- 8 LW 13:100. (WA 40/3:523,24-25). “Significat enim non cursum, sed ceu impetuosum iactum esse, quo ad mortem rapimur.”
- 9 Denis R. Janz, “To Hell (and Back) with Luther: The Dialectic of *Anfechtung* and Faith,” in *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies* (ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Schramm; Louisville, KY: WJK) 20.
- 10 *Ibid.* (WA TR 1:146,12-14, #352; early 1530s).
- 11 Or, if there is, it is not a God that I am interested in knowing anything about, or having anything to do with.
- 12 Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the NRSV.
- 13 See WA 54:490,14-16,34-37.
- 14 Janowski, *Arguing with God*, 341.
- 15 LW 14:285.
- 16 LW 13:141. (WA 40/3:593,32-35).
- 17 Bernard Lohse has issued a strong caution regarding Veit Dietrich’s edition of Luther’s lectures on Ps 90, because at certain points in the text Dietrich has clearly altered Luther’s ideas. (See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* [trans. Roy A. Harrisville; Minneapolis, MN: 1999] 329). Cognizant of Lohse’s warning, in this article I draw only from sections of the text that reflect ideas that can be documented elsewhere in Luther’s corpus.
- 18 LW 13:xii.
- 19 LW 13:77. (WA 40/3:486,23-28).
- 20 See Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 267-276, for a discussion of the development of Luther’s unique Law/Gospel paradigm. “The doctrine of law and gospel is the new Reformation formulation of the distinction between law and grace first proposed by Augustine [. . .] According to Luther, it is not true that the law is merely superseded by the gospel. Rather, in the old as well as the new covenant law and gospel remain in dialectic relation.” (268).
- 21 “Those who neither think about death nor feel any misery remain stupid fools, in that they do not inquire about God’s grace or help.” (*Summarien über die Psalmen und Ursachen des Dolmetschens* [Ps 90], WA 38:49,11-13).
- 22 See also Luther’s marginal gloss at Ps 90:8 in the *Lutherbibel*: “This refers to Adam’s sin (Rom 5), by which death is earned and of which the world knows nothing.” (D. Martin Luther, *Die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch: Wittenberg 1545* [ed. Hans Volz; Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1972] 1045).
- 23 LW 13:94, revised. (WA 40/3:513,18-23).
- 24 The length of life of Luther’s own family: Luther (63); Katharina (53); Hans (49); Elisabeth (8 mos); Magdalena (13); Martin (34); Paul (60); Margaret (36).
- 25 “Sicut Proverbio Germanico dicitur Senes stultos stultissimos esse.”
- 26 “non sensu solum, sed saepe etiam affectu.”
- 27 LW 13:120-121. (WA 40/3:559,23-560,21).
- 28 The Hebrew term *hesed* (kindness; loyalty) is a quintessential Psalms term. It is consistently rendered in the Vulgate by *misericordia* (mercy). The strategic rendering of *hesed* as *Gnade* is one of the most important characteristics of Luther’s translation of the Old Testament.
- 29 See esp. LW 13:94, 134-135.
- 30 The genesis of Luther’s thought on the alien work of God is Vulgate Isa 28:21: “Sicut enim in monte Divisionum stabit Dominus sicut in valle quae est in Gabao irascetur ut faciat opus suum alienum opus eius ut operetur opus suum peregrinum est opus ab eo.”
- 31 LW 13:136-137, revised. (WA 40/3:587,17-32).
- 32 LW 26:339-340, revised; emphasis added. (WA 40/1:523,13-19). “Ista ergo duo contraria coniungenda sunt, quae re ipsa diversissima sunt. Quid enim magis contrarium quam metuere et perhorrescere iram Dei et similiter sperare in misericordia eius? Alterum infernus, alterum coelum est, et tamen ea oportet esse in corde coniunctissima. Speculative coniunguntur facillime, sed practice ea coniungere est omnium difficillimum, Id quod propria experientia saepissime didici.”
- 33 WA 5:204,25-27 – “assuescamus ad deum contra deum confugere.”
- 34 Luther learned from his mentor Staupitz “that grace was not given to believers to make them pleasing to God but to make God pleasing to them.” (Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015] 53).
- 35 LW DB 7:11,16-17 – “GLaube ist ein lebendige erwegene zuuersicht auf Gottes gnade, so gewis das er tausent mal drüber stürbe.”
- 36 Death of Lenchen: <https://redbuddrive.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/luther-magdalenajpg?w=584>
Though this image is often referred to as a Cranach, it comes from the nineteenth century. The image is illustration #37 in the series, *Dr. Martin Luther, der deutsche Reformator: in bildlichen Darstellungen von Gustav König* (Hamburg: Rudolf Besser, 1847), and is itself based on an etching by Gustav König (1808–1869), whose images dominated the visual perception of Luther for generations. I am indebted to Pastor Holger Roggelin for this information.
- 37 LW 54:432-433 (#5499). (WA TR 5:193,18-21).
- 38 WA Br 10:149-150 (#3794). “Credo famam tibi retulisse, Magdalenam meam charissimam filiam renatam esse ad regnum Christi aeternum, et quamquam ego et uxor

deberemus nihil nisi gratias agere laeti pro tam felici transitu et beato fine, quo evasit potentiam carnis, mundi, Turcae et Diaboli, tamen tanta est vis τῆς στοργῆς, ut sine singultu et gemitu cordis, imo sine grandi necrosis non possimus. Haerent scilicet alto corde fixi vultus, verba, gestus viventis et morientis obedientissimae et reverentissimae filiae, ut nec Christi mors (cuius comparatione omnium mortes quid sunt?) penitus excutere possit, sicut oporteret.”

- 39 LW 13:83. (WA 40/3:496,16-17). “Legis vox terret, cum occinit securis: Media vita in morte sumus. At Euangelii vox iterum erigit et canit: Media morte in vita sumus.”

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Martin Luther, Jizō and Miscarriage: An Exercise in Comparative Theology Fall Academy 2016

Kristin Johnston Largen

This presentation is an exercise in comparative theology, looking specifically at Martin Luther's pastoral letter to women who suffered a miscarriage, and the role of the bodhisattva Jizō, who in the last few decades in Japan has become associated with miscarried and aborted fetuses. In this examination, I hope to shed light on possible new insights and veins of exploration in Luther's work – and Lutheran theology more generally – through an engagement with Japanese Buddhism. To begin, however, I want to say a word about comparative theology, the discipline in which I trained, and whose commitments ground this study.

Introducing Comparative Theology

So what is comparative theology? The term has a long history, dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was used primarily to designate what was then the nascent “non-confessional, ‘scientific’ study of religion.”¹ However, today's comparative theology is something different – particularly distinguished from “comparative religion” (which aspires to neutrality) and “theology of religions” (which tends to be soteriological in emphasis). Theologian James Fredericks defines comparative theology this way: “Comparative theology is the branch of systematic theology which seeks to interpret the Christian tradition conscientiously in conversation with the texts and symbols of non-Christian religions.”² Or, to say it another way: “Comparative theology [...] entails the interpretation of the meaning and truth of one's own faith by means of a critical investigation of other faiths.”³

What must be emphasized in all this is that the comparativist has the lofty aim of transforming her own tradition: applying what she has learned from another to her own understanding of Christianity, such that her own faith is deepened and strengthened in new ways. Thus, this comparative enterprise presumes that those engaging in it come with explicit loyalty to their own tradition, and feel themselves accountable to that tradition. That is, the comparativist comes to the task well-aware of the cloud of witnesses that surrounds her, to whom she is answerable, and on behalf of whom she does her work.

This means that the comparative theologian operates within a tension defined by 1) vulnerability to the transformative power of the Other, and 2) loyalty to the Christian tradition. “*All temptations to overcome this tension should be resisted.*”⁴ It is in this crisis, this vulnerability, and this resistance to minimalizing tense theological reflections where the exciting work happens. Another way to say this is to note that comparative theology works to “build a hermeneutical bridge that would allow the back-and-forth dynamic between identity and alterity.”⁵ It is a balancing act between “openness and commitment.”⁶

To summarize then: in what follows, I am operating out of a core theological claim that I am convinced is essential for a faithful and relevant articulation of Christian theology in the twenty-first-century global context: Christian theology as a whole is strengthened and enhanced through the engagement with non-Christian religions. The article unfolds as follows: after a brief word about the concept of a “fetus,” I move to a discussion of Martin Luther and his own theological context, particularly as it concerns issues of pregnancy and miscarriage in the sixteenth century. I then turn to Japan, also offering some background and contextual information before describing the bodhisattva Jizō and his role in the contemporary *mizuko kuyō* rites for miscarried and aborted fetuses. I conclude with some questions and considerations for further discussion.

The Liminal State of a Fetus

To begin, it is important to note that there is no one universal interpretation or understanding of a miscarried fetus, and indeed, ritual and belief varies widely from country to country, and from context to context.⁷ However, what can be said, almost universally, is that a fetus occupies a liminal position in many ways: on the boundary of personhood, on the cusp of identity. One of the ways this is evidenced is the fact that throughout the centuries, in a wide variety of academic fields, there have been complicated debates

about terminology, and at what point an embryo becomes a fetus becomes an infant becomes a person.

There are related theological issues related here, too, in no small part because the determinations that are made about the fetus have an important role to play in thinking about the “life” of that fetus. And in the context of this article, one of the most critical questions that is raised is whether or not that fetus is a “person” who experiences some sort of afterlife. And, if so, what does that afterlife look like? This not only has theological ramifications, but also practical and personal ones: anyone who has suffered a miscarriage knows that not only can it be a very painful situation interpersonally, with families and friends, but it also can be very difficult medically – sometimes parents have to choose if they want to deliver a fetus that has died in utero, or have that fetus removed by other means. Grieving is complicated and often private – often painfully so. Thus, related here is the question of how religious people talk and think about a variety of issues, including what kind of consolation can be offered to parents, what can and should be said positively about the fetus, and what kinds of promises, if any, can be made about its future.

Miscarriage in the History of Christian Thought

Fetuses that do not live to independent viability have presented Christian theology with a variety of challenges since its beginnings, and the early Christians wrestled with the ideas they inherited from both Greek and Hebrew thought. So, for example, Aristotle believed that a fetus should be regarded as human “forty days after conception if it was male, ninety days after conception if it was female.”⁸ In the Hebrew Scriptures, it was believed that if a man caused an abortion, he would only be put to death if the mother also died (Exod. 21:22); Augustine and the later Christian Church refined this position depending on whether or not the fetus was “formed” or “unformed.”⁹

Miscarriage in the Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages in Europe, people had very little understanding of why miscarriages occurred, but given the high incidence of miscarriage, stillbirth, and death in childbirth, “a fetus was considered to be in an especially vulnerable state.”¹⁰ People believed that curses or hexes could affect a pregnancy, as well as startling the mother in some way; so, for example, people thought that if a mother viewed a person with a disability, her child would

be born with the same disability.¹¹ Not surprisingly, there were plenty of superstitious protections that were equal to the superstitions themselves, which were regularly used up until the sixteenth century, when proscriptions against sorcery put the use of protective amulets and incantations under the larger category of witchcraft, punishable by death.¹²

Before moving to Martin Luther, a word about terminology is warranted. The word “miscarriage” had a different meaning in the Middle Ages than it does for us now, given the advanced medical technologies that now enable a woman to know when she is pregnant as soon as a week after conception in some cases. Kristen Kvam notes that “in the sixteenth century, the onset of pregnancy was determined by the expectant mother herself on the basis of her experience of her body. ‘Quickening’ (the experience of fetal movement) was understood to be the decisive factor in knowing that she was pregnant. For a first-time mother, this experience might not occur with any clarity until the fourth or fifth month after conception.”¹³ Therefore, what Luther called “miscarriage” more closely matches our use of the word “stillbirth”;¹⁴ in contemporary usage, a miscarriage usually refers to a spontaneous loss of pregnancy that occurs before week 20.

Miscarriage and Martin Luther

In some ways, Luther shared the thinking around women and pregnancy of the time, in three particular aspects. First, anyone who died unbaptized, and that included a miscarried or stillborn baby, was at risk for damnation. A little history here: Augustine is remembered as the theologian who stated definitively that infants who died unbaptized would not go to heaven, in the context of his debate with Pelagius. So, for example, in a sermon from 413, citing Scripture, Augustine is clear that unbaptized babies will not enter the kingdom of God, and this means they must enter hell: “there is no middle place left.”¹⁵ In another one of his writings (also against Pelagius), Augustine reiterates his position, but with a little softening: “One can correctly say that little ones who leave the body without baptism will be under the mildest condemnation of all. But one who preaches that they will not be under any condemnation misleads others very much and is himself very mistaken.”¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, this position proved controversial, and many other theologians subsequent to Augustine sought to find some wiggle room, maintaining both the necessity of baptism for salvation as well as some theological flexibility of mercy and grace for those for whom baptism was desired, but simply medically impossible. So, for example, this is the origin of the doctrine of “limbo”, which came to be understood as a permanent

place of rest for unbaptized children (and others) who, while not suffering the punishments of hell are denied the beatific vision. (In some cases, they were said to suffer “lighter” punishments as well). However, it should be noted that in 2007, then-Pope Benedict approved the findings of a Catholic commission, which determined that the traditional view of limbo was “unduly restrictive” and instead promulgated the view that there should be hope that unbaptized infants are saved. Now back to Luther.

The second commonly accepted view at the time was that pregnancy was a vulnerable time for a woman and the fetus, not only during the pregnancy, but also, of course, during the birth. Much that happened during a pregnancy was mysterious, and there was no medical explanation for why things went wrong. Edward Shorter writes that women and communities “had to take precautions against a whole armada of threats from the supernatural, from those dark forces which, most of our ancestors believed, hovered constantly at the threshold.”¹⁷ There are pages and pages of examples here, but we will take two from Luther.

In his lectures on Genesis, Luther takes as scientific fact the story about Jacob, the flocks, and the peeled rods (30:37-39), and offers his own examples from experience. He writes, “Here at Wittenberg we have seen a citizen with a face like a corpse who stated that while his mother was pregnant, she was suddenly confronted by the sight of a corpse and was so terrified that the face of the fetus in her womb took on the form of a corpse.”¹⁸ Later he offers a second example:

I remember that when I was a boy at Eisenach, a beautiful and virtuous matron gave birth to a dormouse. This happened because one of the neighbors had hung a little bell on a dormouse in order that the rest might be put to flight when the bell made a sound. This dormouse met the pregnant woman, who, ignorant of the matter, was so terrified by the sudden meeting and sight of the dormouse that the fetus in her womb degenerated into the shape of the little beast.¹⁹

The conclusion was clear: women who were pregnant needed to guard against physical and psychological upset and trauma, because there were “many dangers” in pregnancy.

Third, for Luther, pregnancy for women was simply assumed: to be a woman was to be a wife and mother (if you weren’t a nun – and Luther was quite sure you should *not* be a nun; more about that in a moment). He writes, “Hence, we see how weak and sickly barren women are. Those who are fruitful, however, are healthier, cleaner, and happier. And even if

they bear themselves weary – or ultimately bear themselves out – that does not hurt. Let them bear themselves out. This is the purpose for which they exist.”²⁰ In one aspect, however, he diverged significantly from the prevailing norms of his time. Where the Catholic Church always emphasized the superior holiness of celibate life of monks and nuns, Luther insisted that family life and marriage were equally as sacred – more sacred, actually. He criticized the “wretched” state of monks and nuns and insisted that being pregnant and bearing children was one of the most precious, godly duties one could practice.

We see this in many places in Luther’s writings, but particularly in his treatise on *The Estate of Marriage* (1522). He calls nursing, rocking, and bathing a child “golden and noble works,” and he argues that bearing a child is the greatest work a woman can do – even if it costs her her life. He writes that a woman in the pangs of childbirth should be consoled by this as well:

Dear Grete, remember that you are a woman, and that this work of God in you is pleasing to [God]. Trust joyfully in [God’s] will and let [God] have [God’s] way with you. Work with all your might to bring forth the child. Should it mean your death, then depart happily, for you will die in a noble deed and in subservience to God. If you were not a woman you should now wish to be one for the sake of this very work alone, that you might thus gloriously suffer and even die in the performance of God’s work and will.²¹

With all this as background, I turn to Luther’s specific writing on women and miscarriages. In 1542, Luther wrote a brief treatise titled *Comfort for Women who have had a Miscarriage*. The introduction in the English translation of Luther’s Works explains the origin of the text. One of Luther’s good friends, John Bugenhagen, wrote an interpretation of Psalm 29 and asked Luther to read it before he sent it off for publication. Luther was struck by one particular phrase in the work, “little children,” and he suggested that Bugenhagen add some words of consolation for women who had had miscarriages or whose children had died before they were able to be baptized. We do not know exactly why Luther made this suggestion, but one wonders if his own experience of miscarriage the year before, in January 1540, might have influenced his thinking; Katherina’s miscarriage that year made her so ill that “she did not walk again until the beginning of that March.”²² Bugenhagen chose not to take Luther’s suggestion, but he invited Luther to write something that he would append to his text. This treatise is the result. Kvam notes that this letter “provides important resources for contemporary

Christians when we consider ways our faith community could respond to those who grieve the miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death of awaited children.”²³

The first and central point that must be noted at the outset is that, for Luther, the “consolation” he was offering had one focus: the theological anguish a mother would have at losing a child before baptism, and the possible damnation of that child. Kvam writes that while Luther was concerned with the relationship between God and the grieving mother, his “major preoccupation” was “the mother’s desire for a relationship between God and the child she was expecting.”²⁴ Here, we see Luther at his most pastoral, as he relaxes what sometimes manifested as extreme theological rigidity in favor of the possibility of God’s radical grace and mercy that might exceed even traditional biblical and church doctrines.

Luther first makes clear that women who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth should not be frightened or saddened “by harsh words,” because the miscarriage was not their fault. However, he does emphasize the distinction between such guiltless mothers and those who “resent being pregnant” and “deliberately neglect their child, or go so far as to strangle or destroy it.”²⁵ (Thinking about this in a contemporary context, this establishes a clear distinction between women who have a miscarriage and women who have an abortion, a distinction that, for many Christians, continues to be critically important.) After emphasizing that the mothers are blameless, he goes on to give specific advice about how they should be consoled.

He begins by noting that miscarriages are not uncommon, and can be found even in Scripture – for example, he cites Paul’s own self-description of being one “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8), and Ps. 58:8: “Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime; like the untimely birth that never sees the sun.” He then emphasizes that based on the faith of the mother, one can justifiably hope that “her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer.”²⁶ Luther offers many different scriptural passages that lead one to hope that the Spirit works beyond what we can even know or say, and also that emphasize the power of prayer.

For Luther, however, the only prayers that are powerful are the prayers of Christians. Luther explicitly contrasts Christian prayers with the prayers of Turks, pagans and “godless persons.” The Christian, by contrast, “is precious in God’s sight and his prayer is powerful and great, for he has been sanctified by Christ’s blood and anointed with the Spirit of God. Whatever he sincerely prays for, especially in the unexpressed yearning of his heart, becomes a great, unbearable cry in God’s ears.”²⁷ For this reason, Luther says, we must be consoling to Christians, “even in such cases where we do

not know God's hidden judgment," and we can take heart in the promise that "all things are possible to him who believes."²⁸ This, in the end, is enough for Luther: "Therefore one must leave such situations to God and take comfort in the thought that he surely has heard our unspoken yearning and done all things better than we could have asked."²⁹ Thus, Luther says that "one ought not straightway condemn such infants for whom and concerning whom believers and Christians have devoted their longing and yearning and praying."³⁰ Christians are not like the unbelievers, who have no hope; Christians have a gracious God, who hears and responds to intercessory prayers; even when there is no faith in the one being prayed for, the faith of the one praying is enough.

The Medieval Japanese Context

We turn now to the Japanese context, and the bodhisattva Jizō. Pre-modern Japan (pre-1600) was vastly different in a variety of ways from pre-modern Europe – and the difference in the religious ethos between Buddhism and Christianity was preeminent. One example of this difference can be seen in the practice of *mabiki*, which literally means "clearing out space" and refers to the practice of infanticide. Elizabeth Harrison notes that during the Edo period (1603-1868), the practice of either strangulating or suffocating infants, either by a midwife or parent, was common, and there has been recent debate about whether it took place only in times of community stress (famine, drought, etc.), or whether it was more widespread.³¹

This practice reflects a very different understanding of children than we have today. Harrison notes that children were not seen as possessing full personhood until the age of seven; before that, they were still considered to be "of the gods" (*kami*). Therefore, if a child died before reaching that age, the child was not given a full burial, and children who died before they were named were not even registered.³² There was a sense in which, at their death, those children were returned to the spirit world from whence they would be able to be reborn in another form. As we will see in what follows, there has been a significant shift in understanding between a context in which a stillborn or infant child was not given a religious burial at all and today's context, where an increasingly popular rite exists specifically and explicitly for such infants – and for aborted and miscarried fetuses as well.

Mizuko Kuyō

This rite is called *mizuko kuyō*. A *kuyō* is a very common Buddhist rite that comes from the verb "to offer," and almost anything can receive the prayers,

thanks, and apologies that are "offered" during the service: ancestors, kitchen tools, pets, etc.³³ This particular *kuyō* usually takes place at a temple and is performed on behalf of a *mizuko* – literally, a "water child," a miscarried or aborted fetus, or stillborn/infant child.³⁴ Elizabeth Harrison describes the rite this way:

The focus [...] is primarily children who were aborted or who miscarried, or those who died while still very young. Until *mizuko kuyō*, all of these had been 'left out of' the usual Japanese Buddhist funeral and memorial services for the dead. Through the performance of a *mizuko kuyō* service, such children may be given a name or a form, brought to the attention of a deity, and provided with various sorts of 'nourishment' (one sense of the term *kuyō*), including offerings of money, food, flowers, prayers, incense, and the reading of religious texts, in the hope that they will not suffer greatly wherever they are, and that they will soon be reborn into a good life, and that they will stop creating problems for their living families, if they are perceived as doing so.³⁵

Technically, it is a service for the sake of "offering up prayers for the nourishment of the spirit of the aborted or stillborn child."³⁶ These services are similar to those that are performed for ancestors, but with a specific significance, given that they are performed for those who "in most cases never had a name and who historically have been excluded from family graves and established memorial rites."³⁷

It is important, however, to note that the practice of this rite, and indeed, views about it, vary across the spectrum of Buddhist schools. While many Buddhist priests in Sōtō Zen, Shingon, and Nichiren temples do perform the rite, most notably the Jōdo Shinshū school of Buddhism is very critical of the practice, and Shin ministers do not regularly perform it – this is true in the United States context as well.³⁸ One of the main reasons for this is that Shin founder Shinran rejected the idea that there was a karmic connection between spirits of dead children and one's contemporary problems. Thus, the original purpose of *kuyō*, which was respecting and caring for the three jewels – the Buddha, the Sangha and the Dharma, is distorted into something it was never intended to be – appeasement of the dead.³⁹

Another key reason, however, is that the idea of merit transfer goes against the understanding of salvation as already granted by Amida Buddha freely and out of pure grace. Helen Hardarce writes: "according to Jōdo Shinshū, humanity's salvation will be brought about by the *nenbutsu*, a phrase hailing Amida, the principal Buddha revered by the sect, and by

Amida's grace. Therefore, there is no need to provide ritual in the hope of salvation, because salvation is already assured."⁴⁰

In spite of these objections, *mizuko kuyō* has become increasingly common since the 1970s, but its beginnings as a formalized rite began in post WWII Japan.⁴¹ The history of the growing popularity of *mizuko kuyō* is intertwined with the legalization of abortion in Japan, which became more widely available in the 1950s. One of the opponents of legalized abortion, Hashimoto Tetsuma (later founder of Shiunzan Jizōji, "Purple Cloud Mountain Jizo Temple), began emphasizing that the spirit of an aborted fetus would cause problems – not only for the mothers but for other living relatives as well. The name for this is *tatari*, or "willful retribution."⁴² The idea is that "an aborted fetus doesn't just cease to exist – it passes into a sort of nether existence as a ghost and may cause harm to the living, especially its mother or her family."⁴³

This is the place to note that this practice of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan is highly debated, and some feminists (and others) are strongly critical of the practice, as they argue it promotes misogyny by emphasizing the mother's guilt and shame, particularly related to abortions. In this interpretation, what often is emphasized is the "threat" an aborted fetus is said to present to the mother in particular, and also the "fixed gender roles" that puts blame onto the mothers.⁴⁴ Some also emphasize how this has been a money-maker for Buddhist temples in recent decades, and the exploitation that has resulted. The debate around these issues is extensive, and lies beyond the scope of this article.

One of the first stories in which *tatari* is described concerns Jōdo priest Yūten Shōnin, who lived in the seventeenth century. The story is titled "The Attainment of Liberation by the Maidservant of Takano Shinuemon." It purports to tell of a possession of a girl by a fetus aborted by her mother (who also died in the process). A priest comes and convinces the spirit of the fetus to trust in Amida and let go of the girl; in the process, the spirit tells the priest that there are many others like her who need ritual Buddhist care.⁴⁵ This is perhaps the one of the earliest indications that aborted/miscarried fetuses warranted spiritual tending and concern.

The term *mizuko* dates from in the early 1970s, and during that decade the general ethos around the practice of *mizuko kuyō* solidified; this includes the belief in a continuing existence for the fetuses; the possibility that they can cause trouble for the living; and the need for a religious service/memorial for them – and, of particular importance here, the association of Jizō with the *mizuko*.⁴⁶ Although the bodhisattva Kannon also has some association with miscarried and stillborn children, Jizō is preeminent in this context.⁴⁷

The Bodhisattva Jizō

The bodhisattva Jizō has his roots in Indian Buddhism, where he was known by the name *kṣitigarbha*, which translates as "earth treasury" or "earth womb". In that context, he was known for his compassion for all beings, manifesting himself in various forms in all the six realms; but in particular, his compassion was directed specifically toward those trapped in one of the Buddhist hells. He usually is depicted as monk, with a shaved head, carrying a staff and a jewel, often called a "wish-fulfilling jewel"; in some statues, this actually becomes sort of a bubble, with a fetus inside.⁴⁸ From India, Jizō made his way into China, and from there, he came to Japan, where he has become much-beloved, and one of the most popular bodhisattvas in the country.

Jizō's association with aborted and miscarried fetuses is not surprising, given his general association with those who are most vulnerable. Hank Glassman writes, "Jizō has always been seen as a bridging figure in Japan; he oversees life's transitions and guards the territory at the peripheries."⁴⁹ Thus, what happened over time – since the thirteenth century onward in Japan – is that "his cult become more and more associated with liminal times and places, with marginal people, and with the special dead."⁵⁰ For this reason, "Jizō in Japan reached a degree of approachability, familiarity, even intimacy, for devotees that had been unknown on the continent, and this owes largely to his position as the guardian of spatial boundaries, the protector of the limen, and the savior of people and spirits on the verge of becoming something else."⁵¹

Mentioned in Japan for the first time in the ninth century, independent worship of Jizō accelerated in the Kamakura period in the twelfth/thirteenth century, and even as early at the eighteenth century, Jizō was associated with stillborn children or those who died in infancy. Images of Jizō have been found dating from 1710 that were erected for the safe delivery of children and for infant children who had died.⁵² Part of the reason for this stems from the centuries-old belief in *sai no kawara*, something akin to a children's limbo, where it is believed that the spirits of dead children are forced to pile up stones in order to create small stupas – these are meant to generate merit for their parents. Each night, however, a demon comes, threatens the children, and knocks down the stupas. Jizō, however, interferes, taking pity on them and hiding them under his robes.⁵³ The new aspect of Jizō's protective role in Japan is as savior and protector of miscarried and aborted fetuses; this dates back only to the 1970s, but it has become very popular and important.

The most dramatic and visible evidence of this role are the countless small figures that are ubiquitous in Japan – images, it would seem, of the

bodhisattva Jizō. Yet, these figures have a dual representative function. First, of course, they do embody Jizō, the savior, the protector of the children. He is wearing the full-length robe of a Buddhist monk, and is entirely bald. His eyes are nearly shut, indicating his advanced level of tranquil meditation.⁵⁴ However, there is more to the figure than this. Usually, the statues of Jizō are very often small – child-size or smaller – and the perfectly shaved head, and the peaceful gaze convey something else as well: Jizō seems to embody not only the protector of children, but those children themselves.⁵⁵ As Harrison notes, “The image, whether large or small, expensive or cheap, provides a place for both the child and its protector, to whom the mother or both parents pray.”⁵⁶

This visual connection between the bodhisattva Jizō and the children he guards is made most explicit by the ubiquitous red bibs that are seen everywhere on Jizō statues in Japan, often tied there by mothers seeking Jizō’s protection for their children: “one belief had it that by tying the bib of a dead child to a Jizō statue, a mother could hope that Jizō would, in bloodhound fashion, sniff out her child to help him or her in the otherworld.”⁵⁷ Thus, in some contemporary *mizuko kuyō* rites, a small statue of Jizō is put either on the family’s home altar (*butsudan*) or at the site of the ritual in the temple, as a memorial to the child and a sign of compassion for him/her.

To conclude this section, then, Jizō’s importance here is in no small part because he is a “salvific boundary figure between all forms of life and death.”⁵⁸ As such, he is able to seek out, find, and rescue the *mizuko* – these restless “boundary figures” who die without connections, whose spirits “remain in the limbo unless freed ritualistically to reenter, to be reborn within this world.”⁵⁹ In so doing, he provides comfort to mothers in particular, assuring them that the fetus or child is cared for and protected, and that she or he as someone who will guide them to the Buddha – typically understood as Amida Buddha and his Pure Land. They have not been abandoned, and they are not alone.

Conclusion and Lingering Questions

To conclude, then, I now return to a Christian context and ask what questions have been raised, and where we might be invited to think differently. First is the theological question of personhood: what does it mean to be a person, when does one “become” a person, and what sort of destiny, if any, do we envision for embryos and fetuses?

Second, when it comes to the *mizuko kuyō*, there is no difference, at least in the broad strokes of the rite, whether the *mizuko* is an early aborted

fetus, or a late-term miscarriage: regardless of how they were “lost,” “all *mizuko* are treated the same.”⁶⁰ Indeed, there are temples in Japan that are affiliated with hospitals and perform *mizuko kuyō* monthly, inviting doctors, nurses, patients and midwives to attend.⁶¹ By contrast, while some Christians and Christian denominations believe that “life begins at conception,” rarely is there a rite performed for an early-term miscarriage, nor is that embryo considered an individual as such. This changes, obviously, the closer the fetus comes to full-term, but it still seems that there is a difference, theologically, in the way Christians think about embryos and fetuses and infants.

Third, in the case of a miscarriage or abortion, who needs religious care, and for what? Often one assumes that the mother needs care, but what form should that care take, and what is its goal? When it comes to *mizuko kuyō*, the ramifications of that rite for the mother are worth noting. Harrison writes that “in acknowledging the existence of the child, the woman reconceives herself as the mother of that absent child,”⁶² and enables her, through the rite, to “mother” her unseen child.⁶³ Certainly, we can imagine that this would be important in the case of the death of a “wanted” child, but Harrison pushes it further. She says that even for the woman who has made the choice to abort a fetus and her life goes on as she desires, “her life *is as it is* in part because the child *is not* there and because she *is not* its mother.”⁶⁴ It seems to me this could be important, especially insofar as it does not demand shame or guilt or repentance. It simply acknowledges a relationship that was, and could have been, and perhaps, for some, still is, in some way.

And what about religious care for the child? The Catholic Church has relaxed its stance on limbo, and presumably all Christians have good warrant to believe that miscarried and stillborn children go to heaven. Yet rarely, if ever, is a funeral performed for such a one – although if the family is religious, a priest or pastor might perform a sort of anointing service at the hospital – but not always, depending on the circumstances. And, nothing typically happens in the case of an abortion. Might a more formalized rite in these situations be helpful for families and friends – and for the religious community as a whole?⁶⁵

This relates to my fourth observation, which is the general lack of blame or shame in Japanese Buddhism directed at the woman who chooses an abortion. While some would argue that there are temples in Japan that seek to make money off of this service and thus do try to guilt women into performing the *mizuko kuyō*, certainly Buddhism does not talk about this practice using the language of “sin” in the way it is often described in Christianity; and in Japan as a whole, there is no strong anti-abortion movement

seeking to make it illegal in the country. Instead, it is recognized as a loss, and women and families are invited to participate in a ritual that acknowledges one's own grief and also expresses care and concern for the fetus/child.

I wonder if such a rite might help Christians move beyond the ethical stalemates that occur when one has to say abortion is either "right" or "wrong." William LaFleur suggests the possibility, noting that "the Buddhist posture permits – and even encourages – language about the fetus as human life in some sense but refuses to draw the conclusion that, therefore, abortion is disallowed."⁶⁶ In this way it avoids the "dualizing" mentality found so often in the United States where a fetus is either a "life" equivalent to that of a fully-formed young child, or it is not. LaFleur writes: "There is no need to reduce the options to 'inviolable life' or 'an unwanted pregnancy.'"⁶⁷

Here it is significant that in the contemporary United States context, this rite has transcended its Buddhist roots and it is becoming more popular among Christians and secular populations alike. As Harrison observes, "[*Mizuko kuyō*] provides a formal, public, ritualized way to acknowledge the existence of a child – both its potential existence in this world as a result of its conception and its continuing existence somewhere else after death, to (re)establish a relationship with it, and to care for it wherever it may be. In this construction, although the child might be absent from this world, it nevertheless remains a child to its parents and a sibling to its living brothers and sisters."⁶⁸ In this sense, "Participation in *mizuko kuyō* acts as an acknowledgment that there *was* (by virtue of its conception), *would have been* (in that a child conceived is the seed of a child born), and still *is* a child, even though that child is not now present in the mundane sense of the word."⁶⁹ This could be source of comfort and closure for women, families, and communities alike.

To conclude, I want to reiterate that one of the primary benefits of comparative theological work is that it invites Christians into fresh ways of thinking, suggests novel theological questions, and creates the possibility of seeing traditional doctrines and practices in a new light. I hope to have done that in some small way in this article.

Notes

- 1 Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (ed. Francis X. Clooney, S.J.; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2010) 49.
- 2 James Fredericks, "A Universal Religious Experience? Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions," *Horizons* 22/1 (1995) 68.
- 3 Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology*, ix.

- 4 Ibid., 87 (emphasis added).
- 5 A. Bagus Laksana, "Comparative Theology Between Identity and Alterity," in *The New Comparative Theology*, 6.
- 6 Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology," 61.
- 7 See the various chapters in *The Anthropology of Pregnancy Loss: Comparative Studies in Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Neonatal Death* (ed. Rosanne Cecil; Oxford, UK: Berg, 1996).
- 8 Introduction to *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health* (trans. Beryl Rowland; Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981) 36.
- 9 Ibid., Introduction to *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, 36.
- 10 Heather L. Wrigley, "Wise Women and Medical Men: Obstetrics and Gynecology in the Middle Ages," in "Proceedings of the 14th Annual History of Medicine Days," (March 2005) 71, <http://medievalists.net/files/08121401.pdf>, accessed August 28, 2016.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 72.
- 13 Kristen E. Kvam, "Comfort," in *Hope Deferred: Heart-Healing Reflections on Reproductive Loss* (ed. Nadine Pence Frantz and Marty T. Stimming; Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005) 74. Kvam notes further that quickening was a sign of "en-soulment," that is, when God gave the baby a soul.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Augustine, *Sermons*, vol. 8, Sermon 294 (trans. Edmund Hill; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994) 181.
- 16 Augustine, "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones," in *Answer to the Pelagians*, part 1, vol. 23 (trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J.; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997) 45.
- 17 Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1982) 49.
- 18 Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, American ed., 55 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–86), 5:381 (hereafter, LW).
- 19 LW 5:381.
- 20 LW 45:46.
- 21 LW 45:40 (revised).
- 22 Kristen E. Kvam, "Consolation for Women Whose Pregnancies Have Not Gone Well (1542)," (forthcoming).
- 23 Kvam, "Comfort," 72.
- 24 Ibid., 76.
- 25 LW 43:247.
- 26 LW 43:247-248.
- 27 LW 43:248.
- 28 LW 43:249.
- 29 LW 43:250.
- 30 LW 43:250.
- 31 Elizabeth G. Harrison, "Strands of Complexity: The Emergence of *Mizuko Kuyō* in Postwar Japan," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/4 (1999) 778.
- 32 Ibid., 779.
- 33 Jeff Wilson, *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A Buddhist Ritual Comes to America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009) 7.

- 34 The origins of the word are not clear. See the discussion in Helen Hardacre, *Marking the Menacing Fetus in Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) 27.
- 35 Elizabeth G. Harrison, "Mizuko kuyō: the re-production of the dead in contemporary Japan," in *Religion in Japan: Arrows to Heaven and earth* (ed. P.F. Kornicki and I.J. McMullen; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 250-51.
- 36 Bardwell Smith, "Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan: Mizuko Kuyō and the Confrontation with Death," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15/1 (1988) 10.
- 37 Harrison, "Strands of Complexity," 770.
- 38 See the data compiled in Hardacre, *Marking the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, 92-97.
- 39 Elizabeth G. Harrison, "I can only move my feet towards mizuko kuyō: Memorial Services for Dead Children in Japan," in *Buddhism and Abortion* (ed. Damien Keown; Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) 98.
- 40 Hardacre, *Marking the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, 192.
- 41 Harrison, "Strands of Complexity," 771.
- 42 Ibid., 774. Harrison notes that another group in Japan, Seichō no Ie, also promoted the need to maintain a sense of contact with and attend to the spirits of aborted and miscarried children/fetuses. They call these *ryūzanji*, which means "children who have flown away" [776].
- 43 Wilson, *Mourning the Unborn Dead*, 8.
- 44 Kayoko Komatsu, "Mizuko Kuyō and New Age Concepts of Reincarnation," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30/3-4 (2003) 259. See also Elizabeth G. Harrison, "Mizuko kuyō," 251.
- 45 Harrison, "Strands of Complexity," 781. Also told in Hardacre, *Marking the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, 30-38.
- 46 Harrison, "Strands of Complexity," 789.
- 47 Hardacre, *Marking the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, 28-29.
- 48 Meredith Underwood, "Strategies of Survival: Women, Abortion, and Popular Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/4 (December 1999) 742.
- 49 Hank Glassman, *The Face of Jizō: Image and Cult in Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 6.
- 50 Ibid., 8.
- 51 Ibid., 11.
- 52 Anne Page Brooks, "Mizuko Kuyō and Japanese Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8/3-4 (1981) 130.
- 53 This story comes from the *Sai no kawara Jizō wasan* (the "Hymn to Jizō of the river Beach of Sai"). Brooks, "Mizuko Kuyō," 123.
- 54 William R. Lafleur, "Abortion in Japan: Towards a 'Middle Way' for the West?," in *Buddhism and Abortion* (ed. Damien Keown; Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) 74.
- 55 Ibid., 75.
- 56 Harrison, "Mizuko kuyō," 260.
- 57 Glassman, *The Face of Jizō*, 158.
- 58 Smith, "Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan," 17.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Harrison, "I can only move my feet towards mizuko kuyō," 105.
- 61 Brooks, "Mizuko Kuyō and Japanese Buddhism," 4.
- 62 Harrison, "Mizuko kuyō," 261.
- 63 Ibid., 262.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 It is worth noting here that all sects of Buddhism in Japan do not treat this rite the same way. For example, Jeff Wilson notes that Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism typically does not perform this rite – they argue it is superstitious and goes against the cardinal belief in the mercy of Amida Buddha. If pressed, the ministers sometimes will perform the rite, but only for the sake of the living, not to benefit the dead, and only as a means of teaching orthodox Buddhist doctrine. (Wilson, *Mourning the Unborn Dead*, 21-22).
- 66 Lafleur, "Abortion in Japan," 88.
- 67 Ibid., 89.
- 68 Harrison, "I can only move my feet towards mizuko kuyō," 108.
- 69 Harrison, "Mizuko kuyō," 261.

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Consolation for Suffering in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions: Notes and Comments on the 2016 Luther Colloquy

Leonard M. Hummel

This article, the last of the series in this edition of the *Seminary Ridge Review* on “Facing Suffering: The Search for Meaning, Consolation, and Strength,” is distilled from my presentation at the conclusion of the Luther Colloquy in 2016 that was focused on these same themes. As I was honored then to reflect on several presentations from the Colloquy, so I am grateful now to review some highlights in the publication of these lectures. And, as I did there, I offer here notes and comments on these recent presentations that connect with my having previously researched related matters in my book, *Clothed in Nothingness: Consolation for Suffering*.

That book was really two books in one. In a way, *Clothed in Nothingness* delineates the theology of consolation for suffering as portrayed in the early Lutheran tradition (bracketed in this work to Luther’s writing and the Lutheran Confessions) and also as exhibited in the lives of some contemporary Lutherans. In another way, the book explores how that early tradition both does and does not predict the ways in which Lutherans today seek out consolation for suffering. Throughout my analysis, I did discern the following leitmotif both in the early Lutheran tradition and in Lutheran lived religion: “Humanity has no essence and only a disconsolate existence apart from a right relationship with God. God does not bestow this consoling relationship directly on any of us but offers it to all of us only through the ministrations of others.”¹ That is to say, while the infinite God is recognized by Luther and the Confessions as the sole source of consolation, that

good God appears and acts only in, with, and under the mediation of the finite – i.e., various people, places and things. Most obviously these means of consolation are the well-described means of grace – as well as an assortment of other ministries. However, tightly braided to this single red-thread is another one: many of these means of Godly consolation are apparently “worldly” or “non-religious” ones (e.g., humorous conversation, games, sex, music). By all such means, God shows God-self to be for, with, and among us amidst that which is as bad as it gets – sin, death and the devil. And, to employ the very title of the 2016 Luther Colloquy, even before we would attempt any “search for meaning, consolation and strength,” God has offered them to us.

Next, I offer comments from the perspective of *Clothed in Nothingness* on the publications of these Colloquy scholars and note how they develop central themes in the early Lutheran tradition – and, by doing so, provide us with insights into how we now may face suffering. Finally, I conclude with some brief remarks.

Luther’s Reformation of Suffering: Ronald Rittgers

With a focus that is timely for this year’s celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, Ron Rittgers examines the sources and enduring significance for the reformation of suffering initiated by the Indulgence Controversy that erupted in 1517. Rittger’s survey is appropriate also because pastoral concerns motivate his own inquiry and, as he clearly demonstrates, fueled Luther’s own fiery protest against this practice. Reflecting over sixty-years ago in a now classic work on these events, church historian John T. McNeill put it succinctly: “In matters concerning the cure of souls, the German Reformation had its beginning.”² Accordingly, Rittgers, also a renowned church historian, is to be commended for explicating here as he has elsewhere, the pastoral bearings of Luther’s career as a reformer.³

The history of the Indulgence Controversy that launched the Reformation is, to be sure, complicated – but some things are clear enough. By various strategies, the church admonished the faithful to acquire indulgences in order to dispel their anxieties that either their loved ones might remain trapped in purgatory or that they themselves might soon suffer there. To be sure, Luther shared with many contemporary Catholic humanists of his time a revulsion at the worldly benefits which indulgences afforded some church leaders and secular princes. However, it was this pastoral practice’s failure to provide what it promised – consolation for suffering – that troubled him the most. Rittgers, therefore, rightly points out that Luther, himself, was terribly anxious that, as a consequence, needy penitents would

remain fearful of God. And it was to the terrified relationship with God produced by this pastoral malpractice – and to the terrible religious way of being in the world that inevitably ensued – that the Evangelical movement brought good news.

Rittgers helps us understanding that, at the very root of this reformation of late medieval penitential thought and practice, was a reformed theology of suffering. “According to Luther, divinely-ordained suffering is to be embraced and patiently endured, not avoided or rejected in favor of sacramental penances or indulgences. He maintains that there is no release from the divine penalty for sin in this life and insists that it is both dangerous and unchristian to seek one.”⁴ Rittgers points to pastoral issues about suffering that were relevant in Luther’s time and remain so in ours. As I noted in my own work, theological inquiry, then and now, into pastoral recommendations about human suffering have been varied and complex. They include some of the following: suffering is good, suffering is good for you; suffering is to be sought after, suffering produces endurance and character, suffering is to be avoided at all costs (even if those costs include the production of other kinds of suffering).

The claims of the Lutheran Reformation relate to all of the above. For example, early in the Reformation, Luther claimed that God may use our suffering to make us saints. “A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed.”⁵ Near to the middle of his life, he further proposed that the sufferer “must thank God diligently for deeming him worthy of such a visitation [...] Therefore, we should willingly endure the hand of God in this and in all suffering. Do not be worried; indeed, such a trial is the very best sign of God’s grace and love for man [sic].”⁶

On the other hand, Luther argued that while obedience to the Word of God may lead to suffering at the hand of opponents of this Word, one must never seek it out: “Since there is a bridge across the Elbe, it behooves us not to wade through the river, lest we drown.”⁷ Contemplating God-incarnate, we see that God’s will is not for our suffering but for our well-being: “No matter what misfortune befalls us, pestilence, war, famine, poverty, persecution, melancholy thoughts which deject us and make the heart pound and flounder, we must know and conclude that this does not come from Christ.”⁸

As Rittgers notes, Luther’s reformation of suffering brought with it a consequently reformed understanding of both the will of God and Christian

living in the face of life and death – and it is with these issues and much more that Brooks Schramm grappled “agonistically” in his article.

Psalm 90: Luther on Death – and Life: Brooks Schramm

In his presentation and article, Brooks Schramm, the Kraft Professor of Biblical Studies at Gettysburg Seminary, offers an “exercise in historical theology” that demonstrates the practical bearings of Luther’s biblical study. Luther, himself, was keenly aware of the connection between Christian theology and Christian living: “One becomes a theologian by living, by dying, and by being damned, not by understanding, reading, and speculation,”⁹ and Schramm offers us related Luther texts to demonstrate what we, without fear of anachronism, may rightly call “existential concerns” as the starting point of theological inquiry – e.g., “I didn’t learn my theology all at once. I had to ponder over it ever more deeply, and my *Anfechtungen* [temptations] were of help to me in this, for one does not learn anything without experience [*sine usu*].”¹⁰ And because Luther’s theology is focused on the God who is for us, it is always carried out with an awareness of God’s presence – *coram Deo*.

In his careful overview of Luther’s study of Psalm 90, Schramm elaborates on the existential character of Christian life found not only within this biblical exegesis but throughout Luther’s theology. “I want to suggest that it is a particular type of experience that Luther has in mind [...] that is best captured by the adjective *agonistic*. I use this adjective in the sense of the Greek term from which it is derived: the *agōn*, a contest or a struggle [...] and the field or the arena in which this *agōn* takes place is the solitary human heart.”¹¹ Schramm next clearly demonstrates that the key components of Luther’s theology throughout his career (e.g., Law/Gospel, God Hidden/God Revealed) relate to the enduring struggles that characterize Christian existence. That is, these theological terms are “ciphers” for the life and death that God brings us.

In *Clothed in Nothingness*, I observed that, while Luther only occasionally referred directly to the suffering of God after the *Heidelberg Disputation*, he did write extensively throughout his life about the suffering of the Christian. Luther believed that often connected to physical and social suffering is the experience of spiritual suffering of *Anfechtung*.¹² That term has a sense not captured in its usual English translations as either “temptation” or “trial” – which is that of “attack.” If God is the source of spiritual attacks, one might wonder whether God occasionally puts in appearances as some kind of attacking devil. In fact, Luther himself did so wonder – not idly, but in

the throes of his own *Anfechtungen*.¹³ Though assaults from God may occur without our provoking them, they do so invariably if, like Job, we ask God why we suffer: “When such trials of ‘Why’ come, beware that you do not answer and allow these attacks to get control. Rather, close your eyes and kill reason and take refuge with the Word. Do not let the ‘Why’ get into your heart. The devil is too powerful; you cannot cope with the situation.”¹⁴

Might it be that the devil is God in disguise, or – also, a troubling supposition in its own way – might there be “Two Gods,” (the title of one of Schramm’s sub-headings) both at odds with one another and one on the attack at us? These questions are not idle ones – either in theology or in the *agōn* of Christian existence. As I have commented, Luther distinguished between what he called the “hidden God” (*Deus absconditus*) and the “revealed God” (*Deus revelatus*) to explain why we cannot understand God’s will when we suffer. The revealed God is the God who sends consolation for suffering. The hidden God is the God we encounter when we seek to know God’s will for suffering. “We must discuss God, or the will of God, preached, revealed, offered to us, and worshiped by us, in one way, and God not preached, nor revealed, nor offered to us, nor worshiped by us, in another way . . . we have the saying, ‘To the extent, therefore, that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours.’”¹⁵ In the throes of various tempests, we may seek safe harbor by aiming to understand God’s will for our suffering, but, if we do so, we will crash into the wrath of the God hidden beneath the surface of that suffering.

To be sure, Luther’s theology of God – of the hidden God and the revealed God who is, ultimately, one God – is complex, but, as Schramm shows, so is the life of the Christian attempting to find meaning, consolation, and strength in the face of suffering. And we may add that, just as Camus eschews easy answers to the death of children in *The Plague*, Luther found none as he grieved for his own beloved young daughter Magdalena. Schramm analyses Luther’s rendition of this searingly painful event in his life as exemplary of pastoral needs for which no thin theological “cliché” may offer anything like an appropriate response. In *Clothed in Nothingness*, I also considered this same account in Luther’s life in order to add how Luther sought out consolation by his asking a close friend, Justus Jonas, “to give thanks to God in our stead!”¹⁶ Simply put: in this crisis, Luther turned to the priesthood of his praying companion in Christ.

In short: as we journey through life and death, consolation may come to us through the ministries we offer one another – for that is how God does God’s work. Such ministry, of course, may include the efforts of biblical and historical theology – and all other theological ventures.

The Lutheran Art of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Wittenberg: Austra Reinis

My remarks on Rittgers and Schramm have focused on their works given the theology of consolation in the early Lutheran tradition as I had analyzed and considered it in *Clothed in Nothingness*. As I earlier noted, in that book I also investigated the lived religion of Lutherans seeking consolation to determine how, by their very thoughts and practices, they both conformed to and also reformed that tradition.

In her presentation and article, Austra Reinis, herself, does not attempt to adjudicate whether the faith of Luther and his theological heirs was, as they lay dying, still in line with the Evangelical faith they had professed throughout their lives. Rather, she notes that those who provided accounts of their last days of lived religion were, themselves, anxious to demonstrate thereby that they had died such good deaths and to “set[ing] up Luther and his followers as models for Christian living and dying.”¹⁷ Reinis points out that Luther’s own death was held up as the very epitome of Evangelical faith as he “confidently asserted his conviction that his salvation was assured: ‘O, Heavenly Father, [...] I know for certain that I shall remain with you eternally.’ This assertion was significant, because it represented the core of Luther’s teaching of justification by faith. Medieval theologians had explicitly taught that ordinary Christians could not presume to be certain of eternal life.”¹⁸

Early in his life (long before his death) Luther reformed a common genre of the late Middle Ages – manuals on the art of dying – according to his understanding of justification. These manuals had directed the dying to do what they could to place themselves in a final right relationship with their maker and judge. In his reformation of this practice, Luther directed the dying away from reviewing past sins and searching for signs of God’s future favor, and directed them instead toward trusting the present promise of consolation: “So then, gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ, who descended into hell [1 Pet. 3:19] for your sake [...] In that picture your hell is defeated and your election is made sure.”¹⁹ For Luther, therefore, the sacraments of the church are not so much various means to obtain security in the face of death but rather consoling gifts for the terrified conscience at this “extreme” time. To be sure, Luther maintained aspects of the late medieval manuals by calling on the faithful to set their assets in order, to forgive their enemies, and to receive the sacraments, but he recast these practices in light of the assurance of the grace that God grants by means of them.

While it appears that the Lutheran article (itself framed by Luther) by which the church stands and falls – and also entails assurance of salvation – was upheld in the deaths of these early Lutherans (including Luther), we

may still ask: might there be any individual differences among these dying persons in their beliefs and practices or any apparent deviations by them from their shared tradition (to which they, themselves, had given shape)? In part, these questions derive from my findings in *Clothed in Nothingness* that no-one's lived religion is precisely like that of another and that no-one is a carbon copy of their received tradition. A quick analysis of the texts provided by Reinis suggests that there is an unexpected dimension in the lived religion of one of them that, on the face of it, also appears at odds with aspects of the tradition – that of Salomon Gesner.

In brief, here is what Reinis first reports regarding Gesner's own account of the dying of his colleague, David Runge.: "As Gesner writes that Runge was beset by fear of death, and he interprets this fear as having been induced by the devil. He goes on to explain: All the saints of God *must deal with such [demonic] assault*. As our blessed [...] colleague in the midst of this fear of death and fearful sweat said: They all *must sweat, and drink from the cup of fear*."²⁰

But *must* they all so sweat and so bad a brew drink, as Runge testified? And must they always experience attacks by the devil, as Gesner asserted? Given what we have learned about the purportedly anxious and agonistic nature of Christian life and Christian dying, it might seem that they must. On the other hand, given the complicated nature of religious life, one must ask whether they might not. And, upon examination, it appears in Reinis' following summary that Gesner's own dying was without the *Sturm und Drang* experienced by Runge and which he, agreeing with Runge, claimed all must undergo.

To be sure, Reinis reports that, when Gesner, himself, was near death "his colleagues exhorted him to "fight the good fight [...] and not to fear any enemy, whether sin, death, the devil, or hell."²¹ Classic studies in psychology of religion would suggest that someone so primed by his peers would be more likely to spot out and then battle with some enemy – any enemy. And given Gesner's own earlier words that a Christian *must* undergo such tribulation, one might predict with some confidence that Gesner would experience what he had expected.

Nevertheless, Gesner is recorded as confessing in response to his colleagues that "[he] didn't know of any remaining enemies, [and] he didn't have any dealings at all with the devil, and even if [the devil] or other enemies were to come to him and attack him, he would refer them to the one of whom it is said that he is [our] advocate before God [1 John 2:1]."²² Soon after this testimony of Christian calmness, Gesner then died apparently the serenest of deaths – and without any testament or evidence of the allegedly requisite prior turmoil.

To be sure, the account by Reinis regarding Gesner is not long or deep enough to draw clear conclusions, but it does raise some questions. One might ask if, when it was his turn to die, Gesner balked from practicing what he had preached as necessary for all others – and, accordingly, question whether he was really a model of the faith for others? Or one might wonder whether he was so deeply captive to devilish fear that he could not free himself by first facing and then confessing such damning dread? These questions are, actually, accusatory – and the complex and unconscious component of all religious psychology suggests that there might be some accuracy in these accusations. However, another plausible – as well as hopefully charitable – construction that does not completely exclude such harsh assessments would be that when Gesner came face to face with death, he could see before himself nearly nothing to worry about. In other words, Gesner died a saint after all, but without the struggle that he, Runge, and others had associated with sainthood.

And so, I have still other questions: If Gesner did not tremble much or at all, might he not share, thereby, across time and space, a spiritual kinship with "Charles" in *Clothed in Nothingness* – the highly Orthodox Lutheran who understood his Orthodoxy as enabling him to experience no *Anfechtungen* in either his life or his near-death – and, further, as being integral to his confidently claiming that, in all trouble, the consolation of God was his primary experience.²³ And might not these accounts about Gesner and by Charles be warrant for the hypothesis that there are at least some Lutherans (*even* highly Confessional Lutherans, or *especially* highly Confessional Lutherans?)²⁴ who, in the words of Auden's poem about Luther, may honestly confess that "the just shall live by faith" and yet "have never [...] trembled in their lives?"²⁵

I offer these notes and comments only to suggest, by means of a liberal paraphrase of Shakespeare, that, because God's good will in heaven permits much variation within creation, there may be more things in our lived religion on earth than are initially dreamt of in our religious philosophies – including those that search for meaning, consolation and strength in the face of suffering.

Closing Notes and Comments

God pro nobis. Luther's Tower Experience – an event that he reported in 1545 as having occurred in 1519 – has been dismissed by some as the euphoric recall of the aging Reformer. More appreciatively, Ludwig Feuerbach thought that it expressed a mistaken but wonderful wish for a deity who has various purposes for an absurd world. Yet, another way remains to receive this story:

as account wherein Luther expresses his trust in a good and loving God. “‘The just person lives by faith.’ I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God; the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise.”²⁶

In the context of the 2016 Luther Colloquy, one also may see this event as explicative of the Evangelical faith that the Trinitarian God, in its essence, is geared to be “for us” – and, therefore, offers “meaning, consolation and strength” when we suffer even before we seek after these good things.

Suffering, Lament and the Will of the Hidden God. Suffering remains a dark mystery for Evangelical theology – because no explanation of suffering, apart from the death and resurrection of Christ, brings good news with it. Luther understood the suffering of this world to be, somehow, under the providence of God – a God whose reasons for and place amidst suffering are unknowable. In that strict sense, one may say that suffering is sent us by God who, in doing so, hides God-self from us. Rittgers, himself, has lamented that Luther avoided lament or protest against this hidden God as part of a faithful response. And all Lutherans should lament that there is a record of Lutherans who, having resigned themselves to the will of God in the face of suffering, have not challenged sinful sources of suffering in this world.

While Luther may not have directly allowed for lament, he did occasionally express disappointment with the hidden God given the persistence in this world of sin, death, and the devil.²⁷ One Lutheran theologian, Gerhard Forde, described our dealings with this *Deus absconditus* as being very frustrating. “The Latin has a more active flavor to it than the English, as when someone absconds with the ‘goods’ and leaves behind only an absence, an emptiness, a nothingness [...] Not preached, God is the absconder, the one who will not be seen and leaves behind only an emptiness, a blank space. In that sense, God is not merely ‘hidden’ (that is, more or less passively unseeable or unknowable), but the one who actively hides from us, always ‘gives us the slip.’”²⁸ I suggest that disappointment and frustration with God is fuel enough to launch a lament. I give an example of doing so in this footnote.²⁹

1517, 2017, and Beyond. As my review of Rittgers’ work notes – and as I clearly laid out in *Clothed in Nothingness* – Luther never taught that suffering had any intrinsic value or merit. Luther did not do so because the primary aim of all his teaching, preaching and writings was this: to lead people to have faith in God. While Luther frequently proposed that suffering sometimes might drive us to trust in God, he also proposed that the production of such faith – while quite a good – was the only good to be found in suffering. Furthermore, he was well aware that, many times, suf-

fering might lead us to despair of our faith. In response to whatever persons experienced when they suffered, Luther was shameless in employing many strategies and also in his persistence to persuade them to trust in the mercy of God as shown in Jesus Christ.³⁰

Seeds of this lifetime ministry of mercy by Luther may be found in his protest against indulgences. The meanings of the Indulgence Controversy are many, but, within the context of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, an important one is its link with the doctrine of justification that assures, in this case, the anxious faithful that they need do nothing to procure their own salvation. And, given that the selling of indulgencies was also a cheap shot at persons concerned for the well-being of their loved ones on whose behalf they would do anything, we may add this: God has promised that nothing in heaven or on earth can separate our loved ones from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Notes

- 1 Leonard Hummel, *Clothed in Nothingness: Consolation for Suffering* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003) 148.
- 2 John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York, NY: Harper, 1951) 163.
- 3 See Ronald K. Rittgers, “How Luther’s Engagement in Pastoral Care Shaped His Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomir Batka; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 462-470.
- 4 Ronald K. Rittgers, “Luther’s Reformation of Suffering,” in this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.
- 5 LW 31:225.
- 6 LW 42:183-184.
- 7 LW 23:205.
- 8 LW 24:14.
- 9 *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521), WA 5:163.
- 10 Quoted from Denis R. Janz, “To Hell (and Back) with Luther: The Dialectic of Anfechtung and Faith,” in *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies* (ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Schramm; Louisville, KY: WJK) 20.
- 11 Brooks Schramm, “Psalm 90: Luther on Death – and Life,” in this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.
- 12 Some contend that Luther invariably connected physical and social suffering with these spiritual tribulations: Galen Tinder, “Luther’s Theology of Christian Suffering and Its Implications for Pastoral Care,” *Dialog* 25/2 (1986) 109; Martin Treu, “Die Bedeutung der Consolatio für Luthers Seelsorge bis 1525,” *Lutherjahrbuch* 53 (1986) 13. Others maintain that he believed that they may occur separately: Jane E. Strohl, “Luther and the Word of Consolation,” *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 67 (1987) 23; Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 397.
- 13 LW 3:265.

- 14 LW 17:128.
- 15 LW 33:139. Since Luther's time, a number of theologians have made the relationship between God hidden and God revealed their business. Walter Von Loewenich summarized how various nineteenth-century Lutheran theologians accounted for this relationship in *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 45-49, and B.A. Gerrish has done the same for twentieth-century theologians in "'To the Unknown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God," in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 131-147. The list of theologians who concern themselves with this puzzle continues to grow.
- 16 Quoted in Hummel, *Clothed in Nothingness*, 40. [=WA Br 10:150,28-29 (#3794)].
- 17 Austra Reinis, "The Lutheran Art of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Wittenberg," in this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 LW 42:105.
- 20 Reinis, "The Lutheran Art of Dying." Emphasis added.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Hummel, *Clothed in Nothingness*, 80-83.
- 24 And earlier in commentary, Reinis notes that, in the case of another of these eminent Orthodox Lutheran theologians, "there is no mention of the devil at Hunnius's death-bed."
- 25 For a commentary on W.H. Auden's sonnet, "Luther," see Martin E. Marty, "Martin Luther's Reckless Grasp of Grace," *Christian Century* (October 26, 1983) 962-965.
- 26 LW 34:336-337.
- 27 For example, see LW 6:376. See also David Terry, "Martin Luther on the Suffering of the Christian" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1990) 379-384, for a careful description of "The Game of God" in Luther's *Commentary on Genesis*. For an analysis of Luther's description of God's similar game with Jacob, see also Jane E. Strohl, "Luther and the Word of Consolation," *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 67 (1986) 24-26.
- 28 Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1990) 16.
- 29 Forde also provided the following description of the hidden God's eerie unresponsiveness to which we may respond with a lament: "God not preached is the God we can never get off our backs, the God who always comes back to haunt us when we think we have at last managed to escape by theological artifice, the God we invoke in curses even when we do not believe, the God about whose existence or nonexistence we argue in vain, the God whom we absolve from evil in our theodicies but in whose face we must shake our fist anyway, even the God to whom Jesus cried, 'Why have you forsaken me?' and received no answer." Ibid., 26.
- 30 See Hummel, *Clothed in Nothingness*, 38-41.

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Chapel Sermon, October 3, 2016

Ariel Williams

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

October 3, 2002 – three days after my 22nd birthday. (For those of you madly doing math in your head – YES! I am that old.) On this particular day I was visiting family friends in Spartanburg, SC, about an hour from Newberry College where I had recently transferred to complete my undergraduate education. I'd been living in South Carolina less than one month. Mark and Shannon (my surrogate parents while I was in college) had taken me out to dinner as a belated birthday celebration, and we had come back and were watching the movie *Castaway* when the telephone rang. Shannon answered and a few minutes later she came into the living room and said, "Mark, turn off the movie, Ariel's mom is on the phone and needs to talk to her." There was an edge to her voice, and in that moment I knew.

I knew that something had happened to my dad because if I had been being contacted about anyone else, he would have been the one placing the phone call. I picked up the telephone extension in the kitchen and said, "Mama, what happened to dad?" She was quiet for a minute and said – "How did you know?" I replied: "You're the one calling." She sighed deeply and said, "Sissy, I don't know how to tell you this – and then her voice broke, and she choked out – Dad took his life today."

Today marks the 14th anniversary of my dad's suicide. Today marks the 14th anniversary of the worst day thus far in my entire life. Worse even, than 7 months ago, when my husband of 12 years told me he no longer wished to remain married.

I was numb, I was in pain, I was shocked and in a state of disbelief, expecting someone to come say "Just kidding"; it hurt to breathe, and I can now admit, that I was ANGRY. I was angry with my dad for the selfish

choice he made, I was angry with the world – particularly happy people – I was angry with God. As the subsequent months went by, I actually became angrier, because as time passed, the numbness wore off and the hurt crept in, but it seemed like everyone around me had already moved on and expected me to have as well.

About a month after returning to school following my trip home for the funeral, I went running in the graveyard located next to the college. (It may sound weird, but this was actually a pretty typical training ground for Newberry College students.) As I ran, the oppressive weight that I felt constantly pressing on my chest seemed to get heavier and heavier. Finally, my inability to breathe (also partially due to the fact that I was crazy ugly crying) caused me to stop.

I knelt down next to a random grave and sobbed. In that moment the grave of a stranger may as well have been my dad's. I remember grabbing ahold of the headstone and screaming "Why???" "How could you have let this happen?" "Where were you, and where are you now?"

I'd imagine these questions were also being asked by the Israelites in our text this morning. A text that speaks to loneliness, isolation, suffering, bitter weeping, and remembering things that they once had, but no more. The author was either physically or metaphorically staring across a city that had been decimated by violence and reduced to rubble. The people who inhabited it were either murdered or dragged off in chains to live a life of hard servitude in exile. Babylon had come, had conquered, had destroyed. No more nation. No king. No Temple.

There is a sense that the Lord brought about the devastation and was now silent in the face of the people's cries of horrific suffering. "She weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has NO ONE to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies." "The Lord has made her suffer."

This brief book of the Bible is poetry or perhaps songs that are intended to fully express exactly how the author is feeling.

Alphonetta Wines writes: "Biblical writers understood the power of fully expressing our feelings before God. Psalms, Job, and Lamentations are examples of the healing power of honesty with God, and by implication, with oneself."

The author knows the transgressions that were committed by Israel and owns that, but does not focus on it. Instead of being self-deprecating he or she instead focusses on the nation's suffering and the silence of God. There is no resolution to these poems, just anguish and lament.

I think this sense of loss and lament is very real today. We see it on a global and national level with civil rights issues, the numbers of people

entrenched in poverty, the numbers of people just struggling to get by. It's hard, there is grief, and there never seems to be any resolution.

Here in this place we are all experiencing transition and change. Some of our journeys have been more difficult and more painful than others, but they are all hard. We live in a place that will cease to exist next year. Daily we look into the faces of community members who will be gone – exiled if you will – from this place. And that sucks. And it hurts.

Often in life we try to put a nice shiny, sparkly, happy face sticker over things that are ugly. We encourage one another to "move on" and "get over it" very quickly. Like I stated earlier, a month after my dad's death, people expected me to be absolutely fine. 14 years later, I'm still not, and I don't know that I ever will be.

In the class "The Psalter and the Life of Faith" last spring, Dr. Schramm spoke of Lament Psalms and stated that as Christians, we are really not okay with being angry with God. And it is okay, and we need to get better at that. And we need to get better with allowing people to be.

Our culture is so uncomfortable with sorrow, and grief, and lament. As soon as someone cries we immediately hand them a box of tissues most often in an attempt to get them to stop. Why? Why do we do this? Why can't we just name things for what they are and stew in the emotions we feel?

The first thing I was told when I did my clinical pastoral experience, was that I wasn't there to fix people, or change outcomes, or make them feel better. I was there to be with them as they were, where they were. That began an entire summer of sitting with people in their moments of lament. Hearing person after person after person ask – why? Why me? How could God have let this happen?

And that is what we are called to do. As the body of Christ we are baptized into community. We are called to be together. To sit with one another. To care for one another. To support one another. To lament together. To break the oppressive silence with our communal voices. When one person is too far into the unfathomable depths of lament to sense God, it is the rest of our job to sense God for them.

Music was a large part of the lives of the Israelites. These poems were likely sung, much like slaves in the Southern states sang songs of oppression. Music is often a safe space where we can truly express how we feel without reservation, which makes this chapter of the Bible all the more important.

In both cases of extreme grief in my life, I turned to music to fill the silence when I just couldn't seem to find God. Strangely enough it was the same song that I sought out for comfort. When my dad died, it was *Sound of Silence* by Simon and Garfunkel; last spring as I progressed through the

muck and drama of divorce, it was the same song, but this time a cover by the band Disturbed. Perhaps it's a little ironic that a song about feeling isolated, unheard, and silenced was the song that helped fill that void for me.

Often sermons end with some nice, clean, wrap up and take away – today it does not. There is no happy conclusion to lament. There is no resolution. Today as a community we will just rest in our lament together. Whether we grieve the loss of a loved one, the demise of a relationship, the loss of vocation, or sense of security, or if you happen to be one of those obscenely happy people who laments nothing – today be present in solidarity with those who do. Today we lament.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Money and Possessions

Walter Brueggemann (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. Interpretation Series)
Reviewed by Marty Stevens

Brueggemann is “the most widely admired and appreciated biblical scholar of this generation,” as noted in the Foreword by Richard Horsley (xi). No doubt. Brueggemann, in his long career, has tackled just about every biblical topic one can imagine. But even he admits in the Preface, “I have found the writing of this book to be a difficult challenge” (xix). The biblical material on money and possessions is plentiful and diverse, spanning all genres and time periods of biblical literature. Also, he readily admits that interpretation of New Testament texts is not his forte, although few would doubt his ability to suggest meaningful insights. He clearly relies on other scholars much more in the chapters dealing with the New Testament than those concerned with the Old Testament.

Throughout the book, Brueggemann contrasts two economic systems described across biblical texts. One system, the “economy of extraction,” favors the powerful elite who extract wealth from the less powerful workers. Biblical texts witness to the predatory transfer of wealth from the vulnerable to the powerful through tax arrangements, loans and credit stipulations, cheap labor, fraud, and theft. Biblical testimony counters the extraction economy with the “economy of restoration,” primarily enacted through laws to protect the vulnerable from the powerful, access to impartial justice, and cancellation of unreasonable debt. I appreciate his sustained focus throughout the book on the communal nature of the biblical witness to money and possessions.

The Introductory chapter is devoted to outlining “six theses concerning money and possessions in the Bible that will provide a general frame of reference for the textual particularity that follows. In light of these theses I

will survey, in canonical sequence, a variety of texts that variously witness to the truth of these theses (1).” The six theses are: (1) Money and possessions are gifts from God; (2) Money and possessions are received as reward for obedience; (3) Money and possessions belong to God and are held in trust by human persons in community; (4) Money and possessions are sources of social injustice; (5) Money and possessions are to be shared in a neighborly way; (6) Money and possessions are seductions that lead to idolatry.

The remainder of the book marches through the biblical material in (Christian) canonical order, highlighting texts dealing with money and possessions. Roughly two-thirds of the book surveys the Old Testament, moving from Exodus and Deuteronomy to the Historical Books to the Wisdom Literature and the Prophets. New Testament chapters deal with the Gospels, Acts, Pauline and Pastoral Epistles, James, and Revelation. Most readers will appreciate that the referenced biblical texts are printed out in the book, so there is no need to read the book with the Bible at hand. That said, the inventory and quoting of biblical texts alone consumes roughly 25% of the book’s pages. The odd thing is that the six theses set out in the Introduction are never mentioned again, nor are the referenced texts specifically correlated to the theses. So it’s hard to see how the inventoried texts “variously witness to the truth of these theses” (1). The structure suggested in the Introduction is belied in the following chapters.

One hesitates to offer any suggestions for how a book by Brueggemann could be improved. Nevertheless, for my taste, more attention could have been paid to the books of the Pentateuch. Only two chapters dealing with Exodus and Deuteronomy are devoted to the rich material on money and possessions in the first five books of the Bible. Explicitly missing is any attention to the Priestly temple offering system and how that impacted the economy. The Patriarchs are largely absent from the text; Joseph in Egypt is mentioned for his role in the extractive economy of Egypt. By contrast, texts that comprise the Hebrew Writings merit five chapters, only one chapter less than the whole New Testament exposition. Also, no information is available to lay readers about the term “money” in the ancient world, what it does and does not mean.

Brueggemann is right – surveying the biblical texts about money and possessions is a daunting challenge. The survey of texts in this book will be a welcome addition to the more focused treatments of the ancient economy, wealth, the poor, charity, and the like. Through this book, readers will be convinced that economic concerns are an integral part of the Bible’s witness to God’s work in the world.

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The Paradox of Church and World: Selected Writings of H. Richard Niebuhr

Jon Diefenthaler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015)

Reviewed by Maria Erling

In this tumultuous time in our own politics, when a clear voice of conscience is sorely needed, while the diminished role of the churches makes many leaders and commentators hesitant to speak out, this book that gives us a rich selection of theological and ethical advice, is very timely. Jon Diefenthaler, a historian of American religion who wrote his dissertation on H. Richard Niebuhr, has given careful attention to this pivotal figure in American theological history and shows us how relevant theology is for us today in our political predicament. These selected writings relate to the topic of church and world. American pastors and church members can profitably use them to think more critically about the role of the church in the public realm, and gain the confidence churches need to stand on their own over against the polarizing forces that tempt us either to retreat from the fray, or to stand on someone else's stage.

Diefenthaler's comprehensive volume traces Niebuhr's writings from the end of the First World War and such topics as the church's ethical stance in relation to the depression, socialism, Nazism, and the evils of racism. Niebuhr is a guide in thinking through how pastors, students, and active church members can better engage the changing times with critically informed minds that are theologically grounded.

Introductory chapters provide excellent orientation to the many events that conditioned Niebuhr's writings. Diefenthaler gives just the right amount of background information on Niebuhr's connections to his own German Evangelical denomination, as well as accounting for the high regard both H. Richard and his brother Reinhold earned within the wider Protestant and ecumenical circles of the mid-20th century American religious landscape. While the status of the church in our public life is diminished today, this volume brings to light the reality that the same concerns of decreasing relevance were very much in the forefront of church leaders in Niebuhr's day. In reviewing these selections from one of the sharpest observers the American church has ever produced, it is clear that Niebuhr's advice is still worth reading. His assessment that the malaise felt by the churches

is due to the assumption of a too easy accommodation to popular political and cultural currents, reminds us that wishfully thinking that being popular and trendy would do the work of making churches relevant, has been a long standing illusion.

Religious organizations today, both on the right and the left, have too easily clasped hands with political factions that have little real use for them, and even less interest in the church's welfare. While it is tempting to pull away into an isolated sanctuary and retreat from world oriented tasks, a sectarian pose is no better than letting the political stage determine the script that the churches might follow. The churches, Niebuhr would tell us, can stand apart and be true to their own convictions. The work of preaching and witness properly given to the church, based on the gospel, is a unique role given to no other institution. The church's witness to this gospel does not close it off from the world, but it does need to happen in a special, paradoxical relationship to the world. This third option of church and world in a paradoxical relationship is more consistent with the proper calling of the church than the simpler option of taking sides either with the factions of political engagement, or sectarian withdrawal so defined by the world's latest moods.

Of course the paradoxical option outlined by Niebuhr is complex, fascinating, and difficult to summarize. That is why it is worth your money to buy the book from Fortress Press and mull it over for a while. It is worth your time to fashion in your sermons and writings, in your public speaking and prayers, a more considered response to the multiple challenges that your congregation faces in its ministry. Becoming relevant is the payoff for taking more care with the words you speak. Diefenthaler helps us shape those words with this very fine book.

Maria Erling is Professor of Modern Church History and Global Missions and Director of Ministry in Practice at Gettysburg Seminary. With Mark Granquist she is co-author of The Augustana Story: Shaping North American Lutheranism. Her M.Div. is from Yale University Divinity School. Her Th.D. is from Harvard University Divinity School. Erling's "Gettysburg's Pilgrims" was published in Gettysburg: The Quest for Meaning: Essays on How We Remember the Battle and Understand Its Consequences.

POETRY + THEOLOGY

Science, Our Friend

Katy Giebenhain

As a grant recipient from the American Association for the Advancement of Science¹ to integrate science into core theological curricula, Gettysburg Seminary has enjoyed campus-wide experiences to deepen our awareness of the natural links between faith and science. In the spirit of this approach, I had an opportunity to meet with playwright Catherine Rogers and talk about the side-by-side pursuit of art and science in Narrative Medicine. It was a delight to have a kind of off-the-grid conversation about this relatively new academic discipline. Here are some excerpts from our conversation.

In a nutshell, Narrative Medicine is an interdisciplinary approach to education which seeks to improve healthcare. One such program is at Columbia University.² It uses the signature methods of close reading, attentive listening, and perspectival respect. It offers a master's degree, intensive workshops, lectures and other events.

Catherine Rogers is a playwright and performer based in New York City. Her M.F.A. in Playwriting is from the University of Texas where she was a James A. Michener Fellow. Her M.S. in Narrative Medicine is from Columbia University. She has taught classes and workshops at Columbia, NYU, Pratt Institute, Parsons School of Design and other schools, theaters and hospitals. Rogers was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to perform and teach in Greece at Aristotle University and the University of Athens. Her plays include *Einstein's Daughter*, *The Sudden Death of Everyone*, *Iowa Caucus* and others.

KG: At the Narrative Medicine workshop [at Columbia University] in October I kept thinking "I need to introduce this to the readers of Seminary Ridge Review." So much of it is pertinent for our students and alumni/ae.

CR: That's what struck me when I was reading a couple of articles in the journal [SRR]. One of the articles that struck me probably the most was by [Ann Milliken Pederson] from North Dakota who was working on the Gettysburg-funded project on art and science, then bringing together the Native American plus the government-funded scientific research. To me, that side-by-side pursuit of art and science is one of the crucial parts of Narrative Medicine. It's one that maybe we don't talk about so overtly in our theory right now, but for me as an artist, this is so Narrative-Medicine like, this kind of thinking.

KG: You bring these interesting layers to Narrative Medicine as an actor and writer and teacher. I had heard about an actor speaking to theology students in Germany and what an incredible difference it made in their delivery, posture, the making of a cross and sending forth at the end of worship... [he spent a week working with vicars in Hessen] as if the attention of close reading were brought into it. I think, somehow, it's just kind of expected, that through your theological studies you should know "how to be" in the same way as a doctor somehow you should know how to talk to patients. And the abilities that get you into medical school are not the things that help you talk to patients.

CR: It's not that you automatically know your body, and automatically know that it's something that can be studied and cultivated... One has to empathize completely with King Lear and not just say "what a horrible father. He didn't believe the one daughter who loved him." One has to actually enter into that man's entire psyche and body and justify and find the laudable motivation for what King Lear is doing, and then inhabit it and do it. You do not come on stage and point at King Lear and say "isn't he horrible?" Come onstage and be King Lear so the audience can gasp and say "she's the one who loves you! Stop!" So, those skills that an actor learns to cultivate can be useful to anyone who is in the position of needing to empathize with someone who is not them, to really understand what might be going on in that person's body. To show up as one's self is the hardest thing.

Craig Irvine [in the Columbia program] teaches a class about embodiment. It is basically a philosophy class but he and I talk a lot together about the connection between what he is teaching and what we teach in acting class or what actors learn to faithfully embody other people... So, Lawrence Olivier faithfully embodying King Lear is different from Ralph Richardson faithfully embodying King Lear. In other words, each actor brings him or herself to that part and lends his or her body and psyche to that part which is another thing that as human beings is a good thing to learn – how to

bring ourselves into the space – that we're the sphere of our own influence, the sphere of our own profession or pursuits.

KG: This is also what we are called to do as people – empathize with each other – and with ourselves, right? And we tend to have trouble with both of those things.

CR: Yes. Right. Compassion. I mean, empathy is a bit of a tricky word for Narrative Medicine, so I don't want to dwell too much on that word. I think sometimes Narrative Medicine gets a reputation that we great artists are teaching these doctors empathy and that really is *not* the pursuit. Compassion maybe is a better word in my head.

The Thing about Poetry

KG: Could you say something about poetry and about how reading poetry can be constructive for preachers, doctors, chaplains, this sort of group that we're talking about? Because, I believe that wholeheartedly but there are a lot of assumptions about poetry. I am curious about if you have anything to say about this more concise form as opposed to other forms of writing. One of the things that I love about close reading is that it also opens up the way that you watch a film and the way that you look at visual art.

CR: Well, there are a couple of things that happen in close reading poetry. Especially, perhaps, someone who hasn't done much close reading starts reading poetry by saying "what does that mean?" "Because I could not stop for Death, / He kindly stopped for me;"³ "Oh, so it means someone is comparing dying to taking a carriage ride to the cemetery." But at the next level, then, close reading is asking the reader to look at the same poem in many, many different ways not just the overall... a poet taking a carriage ride to the cemetery but the rhythm [it implies] click clock click clock click clock click clock – oh, it's like a horse. The whole poem is moving towards something in this same rhythm of a horse. Isn't that interesting? Or these illusions in the poem to other poems and to events in history making us think about more than just this moment. Oh the sound-scheme. Oh the rhymes.

And so you start to arm the reader with the sense that there are many different ways to look at the same poem, many different ways into the same poem, many different techniques I can use to examine this poem. There are many different ways I can use to examine my patient. One is asking that patient head-to-toe questions. "Does this hurt? How are your eyes? Another is, as Rita Charon says, "I'm going to be your doctor for a long time. Tell

me everything I need to know.” And one technique doesn’t exclude another. We don’t say “I know the rhyme scheme so I don’t need to know the meaning,” or “now we know the rhythm we don’t need to know anything about Emily Dickinson.”

We use all these tools and it reminds us how many tools we have in our own profession. It reminds us to use them. Poetry is specific as opposed to any other kind of art form. A poet’s pursuit is language and the use of language. It’s simply that. Language, language, language. And so therefore, when I’m close reading a poem, especially close reading it with others who are reading it in all different ways, suddenly that language, that poem starts to operate on me in ways that I am conscious of and ways that I am not conscious of. I start to have physical responses as this language operates on me.

[Keep reading Dickinson]... in the next line my breath goes out and kind of gasps in, like a quick turn. And I think “whoa, wait a minute, so here’s this poem that starts with this concept of eternity and right in the middle it takes this quick turn and at the very end it goes back to this concept of eternity. And what if I paste these two eternity lines together and there’s a quick turn in the middle? What do I have? I have a moebius strip, which is a path that is eternal. You travel both sides as one side. And that’s what this poem is and does and what I have experienced through the language and structure right here on the page.

Time sort of turns around. My death was always going to be, and is, always, and yet life is eternal. Emily Dickinson could have whole essays and paragraphs about it but instead she has this many lines with this little turn in the middle, this little pasting of beginning to end and she has created, in poetry, a moebius strip in which I, the reader, and close reader, experience this sense of eternity in what she has done. Most poets can’t be such a genius. But even those that aren’t, they create in us – via the language – physical reactions, emotions, questions so that when the poet’s going about the poet’s job the poet is taking language and creating an encounter with language. The poet opens and opens and opens worlds to us in ways that other kinds of uses of language don’t necessarily do, not quite in the same way.

KG: That’s really helpful. I like the moebius strip. That’s such a great example. And also it’s like one of my arguments for why [reading poetry] can be so helpful for writing sermons, because you can always go on and on, on any topic, right? But it’s what you’re striving to do... concentrate, instead of bringing in a cartful of berries you give them the jam. That’s a good sermon, right? And it’s really hard to do...

CR: Week after week.

KG: Week after week. Yes. So, when you’re writing a play you’re also having to think about what not to put in, right?

CR: Yes. Like when you’re writing a poem you get to a word and you know “this is the cliché word that first popped into my head and I know this isn’t it.” You get that feeling. You know. You’ve been writing and writing and you know this word. There’s an article [in *Seminary Ridge Review*] talking about this, about the word “broken.” You get to the word broken and you know there’s something behind that word. I tell my students “just relax. Let it go and something – it may seem quite unlikely to you – may come right to your head – write that down. And let that be the word or the phrase.”

That, to me, is a poetic gesture. A poetic process. Another thing about poetry, you know it’s also meant to be read aloud. The sound, the physicality of it is meant to be in your body in your ears in your vocal cords. Now I’m going to be vague again because I don’t remember the details but there was a study about students reading Shakespeare – which is poetry – aloud – and just doing that, just reading Shakespeare aloud, consistently over time, improved their speech. There is a physical difference that poetry makes on us.

The Influence of Narrative Medicine on Creative Work

KG: How would you say that the Narrative Medicine program has influenced your creative work?

CR: Profoundly. I’ve known for many years that this must be true and now I see that it is. 30 years ago I was in St. Louis, Missouri, in a parking lot, in my car and because of personal experiences of mine in the healthcare system at that moment I was vowing that I would do something that would positively affect the healthcare system in the United States.

Also in that same time, and going forward, I was working with arts councils and it began to dawn on me that I would think about my own work as a writer and then the work of all these other people and groups I was seeing as an arts administrator (ie: art colonies and developing works of art) and it just became more and more clear to me that I believed that if there could be an art colony where artists and scientists sat side-by-side we would both become better at what we do. Those scientists have these methods that are consciously practiced and spoken about in the classroom and in the laboratory and so on, and when they speak about it and when I hear

it I just instinctively understand more about how it is that I'm creating art, seemingly out of nothing – but not really.

And, I have a sense that those scientists sitting by me would – should – just let their imagination run wild and come up with things that are absolutely true. Maybe we could do that in the lab sometime.

I'm sure Einstein did it and Edison did it – those leaps of creativity and leaps of imagination, so I'm just thinking, these two things go together and need to be cultivated in the same room, consciously. I would say that to people over these 30 years and they would say “oh you mean like art therapy” and I would say “no, that is exactly what I don't mean.” Art therapy is great – it is needed – but it's not what I'm talking about.

In April 2011, I saw Dr. Charon on the internet and I said “that is exactly what I'm talking about” and when I made that vow 30 years ago, this is the direction I was thinking of. So, that's what took me to Narrative Medicine.

Your question was, did the Narrative Medicine practice affect my creative work? Yes, profoundly. I was right about that. So, sitting in the room with these doctors and med students and other artists where the daily pursuit is close reading – and then we haven't talked very much about reflective writing... We are constantly writing spontaneously to prompts and then bringing in [our own] creative and analytical work, reading it to each other, and getting that critical response from each other.

At least in my classrooms of Narrative Medicine when I was a student, there was creativeness, a real bond of trust and what one of my former teachers used to call the “believing mirrors” where I could bring my work and immediately have it reflected back to me not just willy-nilly but by people who were profoundly invested in the act of really deep looking and reflecting and just that action in and of itself made my work better. I felt more a sense of responsibility toward my work. I felt like my work had some effect. I saw the effect and the meaning and so it became much more important to me to continue to create work and to continue to get the work that I had created out into the public. You know, I'd have to do the qualitative research on myself to see if my work actually got better, but I always feel that it was no coincidence that a few days after I read my short story “After Three Tangos” *The Gettysburg Review* contacted me and told me they wanted to publish it. So that's a coincidence, and a happy one, and perhaps it's connected in more ways than I can articulate here.

KG: It's interesting that there's something more here about the desire to make healthcare better in this country. It's not just doing a piece of work that I like

individually for aesthetic reasons, like doing something technically interesting or whatever. You talked about having a sense of responsibility.

CR: In the literature classroom and in the arts it's not always clear that this work has any real-world influence. There's the sense of an ivory tower. I mean the stereotypes that are applied to us, students of literature and creative artists, those stereotypes include ivory tower, starving artist, those kinds of things that are detached from the everyday real world where people get diseases and die when in fact the opposite is true.

As an arts administrator 30 years ago it was clear to me that in those days the way we used to justify the arts to congress was to say “please give us your two cents per capita for the arts...” The arts have an economic impact on the community, which is true, but, to me, in the thick of seeing all this pursuit of the arts in these little towns through Missouri and Texas it became clear to me that, yea, okay great they do have an economic impact, people go out to dinner when they go out to the symphony. At the same time there must be something much deeper, much more profound, and I think it's this: in a community that's not so complicated and complex as ours people just practiced these things because they were healthy. Even if you have never sung a song you can feel the air moving through your body and healing you. Nowadays we don't have time to do these things for ourselves so we hire people to do it for us. Paint a picture. Put it on the wall then I'll look at it and be better.

So ask for your two cents from the National Endowment for the Arts so that our society can be healthy. And hire these actors and ballet dancers and poets to do this work on our behalf and for our experience. So that I also knew to be true. It goes back then – my role as an artist or a student of literature or a close reader has real world effects and it isn't so simple as just, well, “I help these doctors read poetry – I the great poet help these doctors read poetry and now they're not so horrible. Now they have better bedside manner.” Not really. That's kind of a simple way of looking at it and it maybe has a little bit of truth to it, but that's *not* it.

Our Reciprocal Agreement

This is a reciprocal agreement we have when coming to the Narrative Medicine table. And it's also the equalizer. We all have 100% chance of death and we're all looking at this together, and I'm learning from this doctor who says “oh, I'm an ophthalmologist and when I read ‘Monet Refuses the Operation’ here's the operation Monet is refusing. And now I understand

more about those impressionist cathedrals hanging in the Louvre.” So that commitment to writing is not just because somebody heard something I just wrote said and said “oh it’s beautiful” but it’s that I am part of that healing process. I am part of that better medicine. Partly because maybe I helped a doctor see something, but that’s not it really. It doesn’t stop there. It’s that the arts have always been good medicine.

KG: Mmmm

CR: And the arts must exist side-by-side with what we know as Western medicine to make things whole. The arts are part of the story. So, what I’m telling you today comes so much from my own experience and my own way of seeing Narrative Medicine it may or may not fit the party line of Narrative Medicine.

KG: It’s not, um – the orthodoxy of Narrative Medicine?

CR: Our particular brand of Narrative Medicine at Columbia as it’s being discovered and practiced. So, I’m not speaking for that. I may or may not be totally aligned in everything I’m saying.

KG: I appreciate so much what you say about science and the arts because this combination of research and critical thinking and imagination, all these things – one makes the other better – and the more things you bring together the better a problem solver you are, right? If you tend to be focused on the imagination, then you might miss something that would be more critical or methodical and vice versa. It’s different ways of coming at something and if you have some contact to community where you are physically in the same place looking in this shared contract, then every single person sees more, right?

CR: I think interdisciplinarity is a key word in academia right now and certainly I keep talking about Narrative Medicine as the arts and science next to each other, but I need to just call out that Narrative Medicine is a *really* interdisciplinary field in its foundation. So, this was Dr. Charon, who is a medical doctor, realizing she wanted to know more about story and therefore studying literature and getting a Ph.D. in literature, but then understanding that medicine is a practice of the self and the other, and drawing a philosopher, Dr. Irvine, into the mix. Dr. Charon, Dr. Spiegel, now Dr. Irvine. Political science was brought in, social science, the arts, the visual and performing and literary arts. So there’s really virtually no practice that is outside the interdisciplinary pursuit of Narrative Medicine. And

what I’ve been talking about today is simply my experience between creative arts and Narrative Medicine. That’s my experience and expertise but all of those other interdisciplinary links exist, like what we just said about different lenses at the table looking at the same thing. Open up different worlds. Everyone at the table benefits from this different way of looking.

KG: And it seems like one of the main things that’s so important is having the table at all, right?

CR: That’s beautiful.

KG: [Being at the table] can remove some of the assumptions that we make about these different directions. The more people that can have this experience and see how fruitful it is the better – I just think there is a lot of skepticism if you haven’t experienced it.

CR: Well, Rita Charon likes to call it “creating a clearing.” A kind of clearing where we can all come together. So, like, clear out those preconceived notions and clear out our white-knuckle attachments to our ways of looking. In the clearing we all bring something.

We Are All Lay People in Some Contexts

After speaking with Catherine Rogers I was reminded that something our audiences have in common is the gap between professionals and lay people. This is not just about trying to bridge perceived gaps between science and the humanities or science and theology. I am referring to a physician or healthcare provider and patient, as well as ordained pastors or theological scholars and parishioners, or chaplains and patients or family members, or the extensive variety of other clinical encounters. With Narrative Medicine, the purpose is to improve healthcare. The close reading of poetry and other verbal and visual works has a purpose. It is like weightlifting. It can make you stronger and more able to do your work. Write better sermons. Get more from one-on-one encounters. Be more effective. Surprise yourself by thinking about what you do and say and understand. Take pleasure in discovery. Respect the mystery of the other. Pay attention. No matter who you are, you are a lay person outside of your expertise. Here’s to bridging the gaps. Science is our friend. Amen, and amen.

Resources

For a list of academic programs featuring art in medical education visit www.narrativemedicine.org/aimresources.html.

The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) edited by Charon, DasGupta, Hermann, Irvine, Marcus, Rivera Colón, Spencer, Spiegel is perhaps the most current and authoritative book available at this time.

Notes

- 1 Gettysburg Seminary was one of 10 seminaries awarded this grant from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 2014. The project was carried out in consultation with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). Co-leaders of the project at Gettysburg Seminary are The Rev. Dr. Mark Oldenburg and The Rev. Dr. Leonard Hummel.
- 2 Learn more about the Narrative Medicine Master's program at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons: <http://sps.columbia.edu/narrative-medicine>. It seeks to strengthen the overarching goals of medicine, public health, and social justice, as well as the intimate, interpersonal experiences of the clinical encounter. For workshops in Narrative Medicine visit: www.narrativemedicine.org/workshops.html.
- 3 "XXVII." *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Rachel Wetzsteon, introduction and notes; New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003) 200.
- 4 Dr. Rita Charon directs the Program in Narrative Medicine at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. She is a general internist and literary scholar.

We Welcome our Poets

This issue includes poems by Amy Gottlieb (New York), Christopher Kempf (Pennsylvania), Heidi Lynn Nilsson (Georgia), Joseph Ross (Maryland), David Bowles (Texas), Hiram Larew (Maryland), Brent House (Pennsylvania) and Ed Granger (Pennsylvania). Book recommendations are for *The Paraclete Poetry Anthology: Selected and New Poems* edited by Mark S. Burrows and *Two Worlds Exist* by Yehoshua November.

Book Recommendations

Two Worlds Exist

In his latest book, Yehoshua November brings us sage, well-crafted poems. After his first collection I wondered if this one might be a bit disappointing. No worries. The poems in *Two Worlds Exist* sustain what we already began to appreciate in November's *God's Optimism*. These poems are serious, but not heavy. They are humble but seeped in authority. That's hard to pull off. Reading these poems, from very different circumstances than my own, I still felt like I was in particular company, and that I was listening to a voice I should listen to. You'll recognize a couple of them from the Autumn 2016 issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.

So, what do we have here? Readers celebrate Chanukah with Jewish inmates in Allentown prisons, catch views of a priestly blessing in a supermarket parking lot, ask about why irrevocable things happen or do not happen to us, scenes from old Russia, new New Jersey, a heart-grabbing yet unsentimental "You Stood Beneath a Streetlight Waving Goodbye," and, from "The Lower Realm," an acknowledgement that

God desires to be here
more than in the higher worlds,
which are not the purpose of creation. If they were,
He could have stopped with them and not created
this lower realm. (61)

Teaching night school means being away from your family at night. November acknowledges that different professions require this. Being away in the evening is a bit of a motif through the collection. The poems evoke other times and relationships beyond individual circumstances.

Here's the first stanza of "American Chassid":

What is asked of you, American Chassid
of the new millennium,
who grew up with Sam Cooke's croon floating
from your father's expensive speakers I the living room,
the Marx Brothers playing I the background
behind family dinners,
who spent high school summers in his attic bedroom,
reading Thomas Hardy and trying to forget the face

of the last young Jewish beauty
 who'd decided she needed more space? (63)

What is asked of us? We react to surfaces. We react to first impulses. November's poems wait, like a very experienced nurse pausing after the air has been pumped into the blood pressure cuff. He waits and lets us hear our own pulse. This is what poetry is supposed to do.

Visit Orison Books (Asheville, North Carolina), publisher of *Two Worlds Exist* at: www.orisonbooks.com.

The Paraclete Poetry Anthology: 2005-2016 Selected and New Poems

This new anthology from Paraclete Press, edited by Mark S. Burrows, brings us the work of 13 poets and three translators in a beautifully-organized format. The poets each have small sections to themselves, so readers get more acquainted with their work. Format matters. It's not decoration. It gets out of the way so readers can focus on the poems. Featured are the late Phyllis Tickle (to whom the book is dedicated), Scott Cairns, Paul Mariani, Anna Kamieńska, Fr. John-Julian, SAID, Bonnie Thurston, Greg Miller, William Woolfitt, Rami Shapiro, Thomas Lynch, Paul Quenon, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Work comes from books published in over a decade in the Paraclete Press poetry series. It is a rich and useful anthology.

Given what it is like to consume news in the U.S. right now I find a stanza from Rami Shapiro's "Psalm 29" jumping out at me:

In the Temple all say "Glory!"
 In the streets all cry "Chaos!"
 Who can see the order in the whirlwind?
 Who can see the pattern in the wildness?
 Who dares cry "glory" in the midst of chaos? (128)

Similarly, the first three lines of an eight-line poem from *99 Psalms* by SAID, translated by Mark Burrows:

Lord
 I refuse
 to engage prayer as a weapon (74)

Anna Kamieńska "Through the Body" includes my favorite line in the book on the identity of God: "You come through bodies, not through sunsets." (45) Her poems are translated by Grażyna Drabik and David Curzon. "The Prayer of Job" is another of Kamieńska's I appreciate: "Teach me not to answer / badly posed questions" (52) Thomas Lynch is always satisfying to read. We've got new work from William Woolfitt, and the final poems are lovely English translations of Rainer Maria Rilke by Mark Burrows. It is hard to reference Rilke without gushing, especially after reading a poem like "Apollo's Ancient Torso."

While *The Paraclete Poetry Anthology* highlights groups of poems from different writers it has a kind of liturgical unity. It never feels fragmented in its variety.

Visit Paraclete Press (Brewster, Massachusetts) www.paracletepress.com.

Braided Soul

David Bowles

Before the monks came,
the original peoples
had three souls.

Teyolia – to use one of its names – was the spirit,
living on after death, released into paradise
and whatever lies beyond even that unknowable realm.

Ihiyotl was the breath, soul of emotions
and passions, the source of personal magic,
which shamans pooled and channeled.

Tonalli was created upon birth, congealing
from the diving energy that infused blood and brain,
capricious and slippery animal soul, often straying.

The monks shook their heads at this.
“One soul,” they instructed. “El ánima.
Deposited in our flesh there in our mother’s womb.”

And as their culture and faith twist down the years
around those indigenous strands, we mestizo children
nod in growing epiphany sent from Dual God or Trinity –

There has always been one soul, just braided from the three.

“Braided Soul” is reprinted with permission of the author from Imaniman: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands edited by ire'ne lara silva and Dan Vera (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 2016). David Bowles is an assistant professor at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. A recipient of awards from the American Library Association, Texas Institute of Letters and Texas Associated Press, his books include the Pura Belpré Honor Book The Smoking Mirror. Bowles' work has also appeared in Rattle, Strange Horizons, Apex Magazine, Metamorphoses, Translation Review, Concho River Review, Huizache, Axolotl, The Thing Itself, Eye to the Telescope and elsewhere.

Gallery Ode

Amy Gottlieb

for the rest of your life, beauty

dripping sunlight on the edge of an airplane wing

for the rest of your life, loss

in pursuit of its sister beauty, grounding all flights

always this ceaseless dance

beauty chasing loss chasing beauty chasing –

as a tiger chases its tail while we wander the museums

tracking ancient gods, their flesh made of hunger and stone

Artists' Shabbat

A tailor may not go out of the house with his needle [on erev Shabbat], close to sunset, lest he forget and go out [with it after dark], and nor may a scribe with his quill . . . In actuality, they said: a teacher may look to see where his students will be reading from, but may not himself read.

– *Mishnah Shabbat 1:3*

To all who dwell in the imaginary realms:
at the gateway to Shabbat
abandon your quills, your brushes,
your needles and your inks.
If these tools are nestled in your hands
when the sun sets
how will you relinquish them?

Better to be a teacher, permitted
to follow the eyes of your students
as they follow the words on the pages
like camels marching on a trade route,
their hooves carving no imprint
on the shifting desert sands.

On Shabbat nothing that lasts
shall be rendered into being.
The birdsong will replace the symphony,
the sky will replace the canvas,
the wine will replace the ink,
and because your hands will be at rest
the Torah will be the story
you write with your open eyes.

Amy Gottlieb's debut novel The Beautiful Possible (Harper Perennial) was a finalist for a 2016 National Jewish Book Award and a runner-up for the Edward Lewis Wallant Award. Her poems have appeared in Zeek, Storyscape, The Bloomsbury Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Poetry, and elsewhere, and she was a finalist for the Ellen LaForge Poetry Prize. For more information visit www.amy-gottlieb.com.

Drinking a Barq's at American Legion #677, Kiln, Mississippi

Brent House

I sat eye level to treads, under the shade of tires, among the long rows
of fall threshing – noon cold cuts dampening bread to sog.

Across the fence & highway 603, beyond Victory & the auction house,
Legion #677 – a blue barn of old men in a hazy cold waiting.

I didn't want to enter, but I thirsted & I couldn't just drive a combine down the road –
I figured it wouldn't hurt & they were bound to have a Barq's in the freezer.

Sure enough, they did – so I pulled up a stool, placed my sandwich on the bar & partook of lunch.

I didn't play any slots, wouldn't now either – they ain't there no more
since our sheriff got voted out & the new guy had his deputies take them away.

Everybody said those boys were sorry – they all knew casinos would come to the coast.

At the pool table I lost a buck to a denizen with half a dozen Blue Ribbons
lined up – he pocketed every shot from an open bridge.

Come to find out, he knew every wrinkle of felt, since he got free plays, as captain
of the volunteers – he stayed near the trucks out back, just in case.

Back in the sun Brother Rob mowed his pastorium – I guaranteed his Sunday sermon
would be from Matthew 7:6, but there was also Matthew 5:44 & my crops

did well on leased land, so far from home, near Victory –
 where Brother Rob preached America lost, a boy could drink a Barq's with men,
 & in the auction house – on any given night – you might find flatbed cargo straps
 or lengths of culverting.
 So, I crossed the road, the fence a landowner built – when he planned
 for his son to stay & raise cattle – I greased each joint
 with the gun from the cab, climbed the steps – I torqued the engine,
 opened a window & waited for the breeze to blow away the autumn heat.

Brent House, an editor for The Gulf Stream: Poems of the Gulf Coast and a contributing editor for The Tusculum Review, is a native of Nacaise, Mississippi, where he raised cattle and watermelons on his family's farm. Slash Pine Press published his first collection, The Saw Year Prophecies, and his poems have appeared in journals such as Colorado Review, Cream City Review, The Journal, Third Coast and The Kenyon Review. He is an Assistant Professor at California University of Pennsylvania.

Ladybugs

Ed Granger

We discover husks strewn across
 our screened-in porch – souls
 apprehended neither in nor out
 of insect purgatory or wherever
 God's most intricate servants go
 uncaught by sins or beaks
 or truculent vacuum cleaners.
 Perhaps we're their heaven
 and what awaits us, in turn,
 is cool insides of bark, wide
 storm-gutter highways, lush carpets
 of pine needles where we'll weave
 our gospel of two-legged evils.

Ed Granger lives in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where he works for healthcare nonprofits. He holds a Master of Theological Studies degree from Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Little Patuxent Review, The Broadkill Review, Potomac Review, Roanoke Review, Free State Review, Naugatuck River Review, The Sow's Ear Poetry Review, and other journals.

Blessing of the Bikes

Christopher Kempf

Harleys they mean. Muscled Low Bobs. Softail
Slim Heritage Street-Glide Classics. They flash
like tinsel in the Pike House Lounge & Bar's
parking lot. The local ecclesiast
asks for quiet, &, like that, the gathered
faithful – hulking, leather-rigged – bow their heads
to their sweet machines. & some of them, science
tells us, the pickup truck turning westbound
on Fourth, in Guernsey, in summer, will fail
to distinguish from the heat waves rippling
the two-lane asphalt. Some of them – & this
for all their one God's grace – will lay their bikes
down flat at the Biglerville railroad. *Lo,*
I will maketh thee small among men. Most,
though, who shift, now, in their studded boots, who
lift their helmets at the preacher's word, will,
after, open the new twin-cam Milwaukee
Eight 130 engine & let it, like
some gilt chariot of old, carry them
through the woods & rolling hillside, & the high,
Allegheny shale barren – beautiful
country, with its schist & apple fields – He breathed on
to make Pennsylvania. I remember
God like that. Catholic, infatuated
still with His lush pageantry (*chasuble*
e.g. & *monstrance, dalmatic*) I raised
my throat – Saint Blaise Day, patron of carvers
& stone-cutters, of builders, wool-carders, &
throats) – to the priest's crossed candles. You call it
what you will. Faith. Superstition. As if
a few words, some wax, would do it. As if
that tiny, trilling engine threaded through
with its folds & chords could be delivered
from its bone-frame housing. Hasn't it been?

What Flesh is Heir To

In those years you, if you wanted
a home for your children, built
a home for your children & you built it
right. The war
was over. Everywhere
the war was beginning. For instance
here. How, in the fading gray
& silver close-up, my mother's
father, not
thirty, shirtless, leans
on his shovel above the basement. How behind
his tensed, ex-
soldier's body – bicep
flexed against the shovel, stomach
flat – the field
that would become the neighborhood
waits. In the basement
of my own parents' house, home
for Christmas, I am lifting
almost my entire weight on the bench press
& between sets – sweat-
soaked, sucking
wind – sift
through the stacks of photos. Slowly,
as if in a flip book, he builds. The bare
foundation. The frame. Eight
the year the banks failed he foraged
with his sisters in the streets of Cleveland. He is even
in this one hungry. He stuffs
the empty frame of the gablefront
with twenties & what I remember him
telling me is trust
nothing that you cannot touch. Trust
at any moment what you know
of the world will be reduced to you
& your family folded

together in your shelter. Somewhere
 in what is left I lower
 the bar to my chest developing
 my body also against
 the end. The flesh
 readies. My ribcage clenches
 beneath the metal. Again
 & again I push the bar back.

Christopher Kempf is the author of Late in the Empire of Men, which won the 2015 Levis Prize from Four Way Books. Recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, as well as a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University, his work has appeared in Gettysburg Review, Kenyon Review, The New Republic, PEN America, and Ploughshares, among other places. Kempf is the 2016-2017 Emerging Writing Lecturer at Gettysburg College, and a Ph.D. candidate in English Literature at the University of Chicago.

Tramping the Mount to Meet You

Heidi Lynn Nilsson

The simple twittering
 from a crate full of swallows

once stopped me
 from hearing you.

Limited by the number
 of nesting sites

this prosaic wingspan
 and my inability

to resist damage
 I composed (between

us) a critical distance.
 I've believed, too,

God swallows
 his crested sentences so

we'll undergo
 the crossing of that distance

and to each (limited) other
 we will listen.

Heidi Lynn Nilsson's poems have appeared in Ploughshares, TriQuarterly, AGNI, and American Poet. Her first full-length collection, For the Fire from the Straw, is forthcoming from Barrow Street Press in October 2017. She sits on the board and teaches life skills and literacy classes at The Salvation Army in Athens, Georgia, where she lives with her husband and three daughters.

Lutes

Hiram Larew

Shout alarmed, like when you see fire suddenly.
 Shout as if you're wild in pain.
 Or, if you're called up on stage, shout like that.
 Just as much too, shout the way you would
 Being a prisoner –
 And again, the way you must have
 When you first heard lutes.
 Terribly shout because of being grabbed from behind.
 Then, shout hard just before parents fade.
 And of course, always whisper to anyone bending towards you.
 Only shout, then above that, shout as soon as you feel wings.

Hiram Larew's poems have been published widely, most recently in the Amsterdam Quarterly, Honest Ulsterman and Shot Glass. Nominated for three Pushcart prizes, his work has received awards from competitions held by Louisiana Literature, The Washington Review and the City of Baltimore. Larew is a member of the Folger Shakespeare Library poetry board. He is a global food security specialist, lives in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and is very, very tall.

Midnight: Montgomery, Alabama

Joseph Ross

“I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.”
 – Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom*

I have always been
 here. In this midnight

kitchen. In this midnight
 city. In this midnight

life. I have always known
 this is when

the strength comes. In this
 midnight country.

In my midnight throat.
 From this midnight

God.

Joseph Ross is the author of three books of poetry: Ache, Gospel of Dust and Meeting Bone Man. His poems appear in many places including, The Los Angeles Times, Poet Lore, Tidal Basin Review, Beltway Poetry Quarterly and Drumvoices Revue. He has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations and won the 2012 Pratt Library / Little Patuxent Review Poetry Prize. Ross recently served as the 23rd Poet-in-Residence for the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society in Howard County, Maryland. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C. Visit www.JosephRoss.net.

GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

Signs, Symbols and a Seminary

John Spangler

Ultimately, this column will focus on what I expect will be the last work of fine art acquired by Gettysburg Seminary before it becomes United Lutheran Seminary on July 1. It is a work in wood by Sally Stewart, who was featured in the Autumn 2016 issue. First, we need to look back on almost two centuries of symbolic, graphic representation of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. For some, it may be a trip down memory lane.

What is more widely known as Gettysburg Seminary emerged in its early days officially as “The Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States.” It would have been a challenge to wrap that full name into a seal or graphic representation. The early diplomas were large scale to make it easier. In smaller print formats, it was a different matter. And at the end of its first centennial, the history written by Abdel Ross Wentz sported its round, traditional seal on its cover. (See Figure 1) Limits of space

required the abbreviation of the name to “THEO. SEM. GENL. SYN. OF EV. LUTH. CHURCH U.S.” Wentz already referred more often to the Seminary as “Gettysburg Seminary” in chapter heads and in textual references. This seal, also sporting a motto “Preach the Gospel” arcing over a book figure marked holy Bible, appeared in embossed form on diplomas in the 19th century as well.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

This seal had a long life for the Seminary, even anchoring the upper right hand corner of the newly inaugurated newsletter until the mid-1960's when the name formalization as Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg warranted a new, more updated look (see figure 2).¹ The square format integrated the formalized name, with a sword and a scroll, and emphasized the 1826 year of origin. While losing the proclamation-oriented motto, this official seal was sufficiently creative to serve as an early form of logotype for the Seminary, and was adapted for use in marking the sesquicentennial a decade later. Sword and scroll could be allusions to Revelation, but I suspect that it was an indirect updating of the motto of its predecessor with the gospel-oriented Law and Gospel theological motif. This duo, a paradox of the biblical witness, articulated a mainstay of Lutheran theology still attached to the preaching function of ministry. As a seal, it was bold and fresh in its style, unusually square in a form that traditionally preferred roundness.

Institutional seals and logotypes became separate things, at least after the mid-20th century. Logotypes are designed to capture the essence of the thing they represent, including brand value and emotional associations. Literally referring to the words of a name, the artwork was becoming more important in logotypes, as educational institutions were catching up with modern commercial marketing dynamics. popular culture reinforced this trend by paying increasing attention to visual characteristics. Television competed with the printed word. And Gettysburg Seminary began to awaken to the need for a specific, dedicated graphic and typographic mark that would represent the essence of the school.

Another decade after the 150th anniversary a new logotype appeared on the scene, an intricate if elegant mashup of five of the Seminary's main buildings: chapel, Valentine Hall, Schmucker Hall, Schmucker House, and Wentz Library. This architectural blending (see figure 3), featuring an overlapping and refined drawing of the buildings, was made for the then-dominant world of print marketing. This effort was the first to be designed as a logotype of graphic drawing and typographic name. The Seminary's square, framed seal remained in place on diplomas and other documents suitable for the official seal of the institution. The typography played up the unique character and location of Gettysburg, preferring Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary to the formal Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettys-



Figure 3.

burg. This complexity of architectural elevations anchored more brochures, more printed resources, and more publications at a time when the Seminary was producing more marketing materials than ever. Seminary files record much criticism of the mark, filling a fat file with letters of complaint.

New York designer Michael Bierut (Pentagram Design) says that "Logos are one of the few things that appreciate in value as they are used."² And this logotype proved the rule. It won a regional award in the year it was introduced and over time became a beloved graphic representation of the Seminary for a long stretch. Long enough, as it turned out, to witness the digital revolution. The emergence of computer screens with 72 dots per inch (dpi), compared to most print presses at 300 dpi, was not kind to the aging logotype. It was suddenly too complicated to look good on screens and it did not adapt well to smaller spaces such as pens or lapel buttons.

This interlinked, drawing-based design explicitly valued the physical place of Gettysburg Seminary's campus, architecture that was both intricate and traditional, Georgian and French, spanning more than one hundred years of building history. It supported in some important ways the essence of the influence that the landscape and surroundings had upon this Seminary's teaching and mission. And certainly its students, faculty and staff. It embraced gravity and seriousness, careful placement and detailed thinking that characterizes theological education.

By 2013, the limitations of the Seminary's first true logotype and the need for a website redesign forced a change, and Associate Director of Communications Katy Giebenhain created what has become the last logotype of Gettysburg Seminary (see figure 4). The mark included two shapes representing the shape of Seminary Ridge, an abstract figure of part of the campus map, doubled, and tied together with a horizontal slash capturing the "crossroads of history and hope" vision statement that had taken hold at the turn of the 21st century. New typography updated the name to Gettysburg



Figure 4.

Seminary, still the most commonly used name for the school in all its 191 years. It received national recognition among religion communicators, and enjoyed a positive response, even as the loyalty to its predecessor made it slower to be embraced.

This last logotype caught the eye of artist and wood sculptor Sally Stewart. She created a symmetrical, 26" by 26" Greek cross from one of the oak witness trees of Seminary Ridge and from other gathered wood, fashioned carved acorns and oak leaves to tie the Ridge to its original name of Oak Ridge (see figure 5). This sculpture in found wood will become part of the

commemorative history of artifacts that interpret the history of Gettysburg Seminary's mission and presence in its place. It will also be available for use in special worship contexts.

Educational institutions use art to fix their place in the world. In the most high-profile and frequent reproduction, schools, like corporations and nearly every other kind of organization with a public life have employed a logotype. Gettysburg Seminary enjoyed several. And its last one will be commemorated on campus in wood from the same Ridge, and bearing the logotype's graphic mark. As Gettysburg becomes part of United Lutheran Seminary, its sense of place will be necessarily subordinated to its united mission and synthesis with its partner institution from Philadelphia. But like other aspects of its 191-year history, a proud print and digital logotype history will not disappear from its walls. Even though it may be said to be "cosmetic," said Michael Bierut, "design is really important" in communicating what a school or organization, or business, or product is all about.

Notes

- 1 First known use was July 1965 in "The Gettysburg Newsletter."
- 2 Negative Space: Logo Design with Michael Bierut" in *99% Invisible*, a podcast by Roman Mars. <http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/negative-space-logo-design-michael-bierut/> accessed March 26, 2017.



Figure 5.



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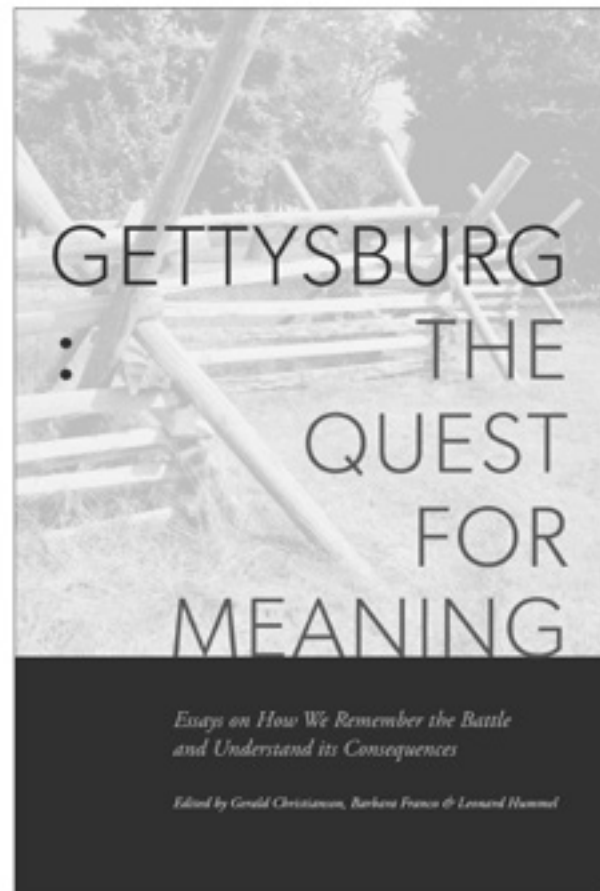


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