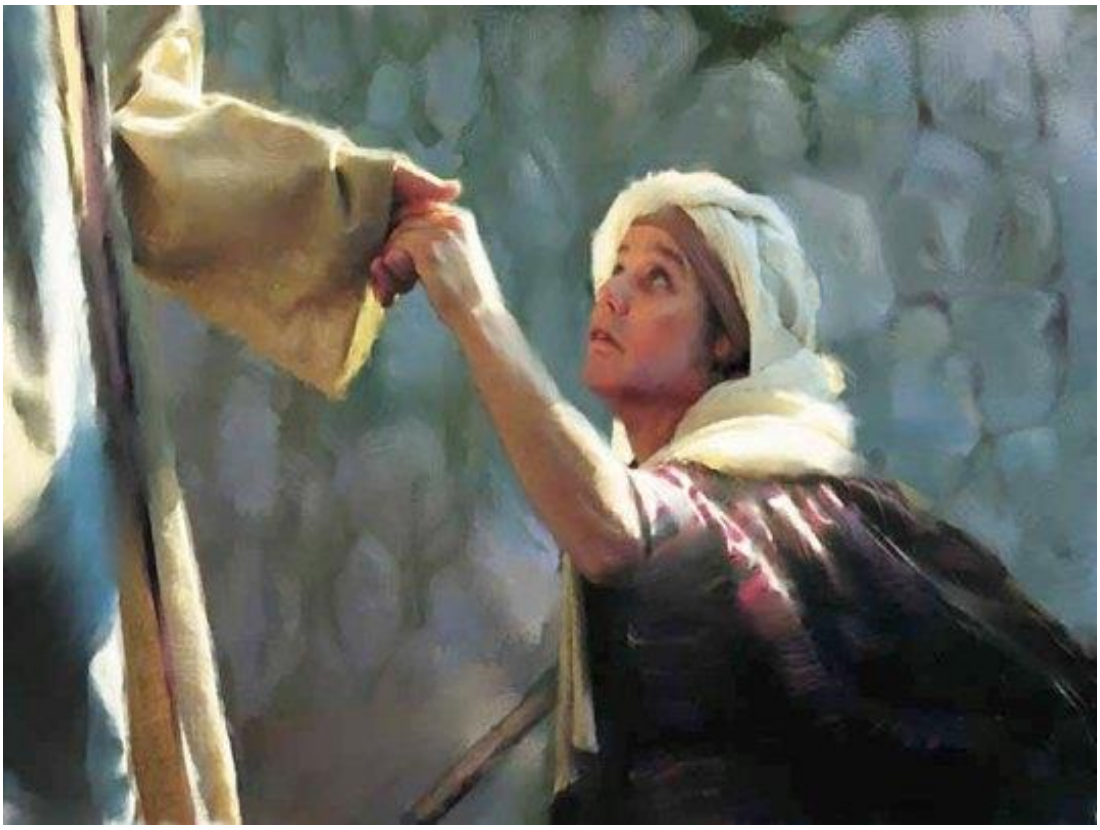
Woman, Stand Straight: An Integrated Lutheran Feminist Theological Concept of Human Flourishing



Doctoral Thesis by Hannah Ruth Stewart

Woman, Stand Straight: An Integrated Lutheran Feminist Theological Concept of Human Flourishing

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Abstract

Beginning with the theology of Martin Luther and drawing on a selection of feminist theologians, this thesis proposes a relational, agential model of human flourishing. It is rooted in Luther's doctrines of the hiddenness of God and of God's alien and proper work in the lives of believers. Such an approach gives rise to questions concerning human freedom and agency, sin, and the nature of our relationship with God and with other persons. Many feminist theologies provide an inadequate account of sin and its effects on the person and their relationships. This thesis asserts that taking sin and its effects seriously is essential to developing a secure and healthy self, and a healthy relationship with God and other persons. It therefore proposes a reworked understanding of religious incurvature as a relational model of sin which supports the goal of human flourishing. This concept of the self curved either inwards, or towards another, speaks to the nature of sin in its traditional understanding of sin as pride, as well as addressing feminist criticisms that the notion of sin as pride is not relevant to the needs and experiences of women. The model of human flourishing proposed here is specifically Christian in its assertion that we do not exist as persons, are not fully human, without our being in relationship with the triune God and other created persons. We flourish in community. Further, it supports the idea that true Christian freedom consists of a life dedicated to service of God and others.

Foreword

The 2017 celebration of five hundred years since the beginning of the Reformation presented an opportunity for aspects of Luther's life and teaching to be newly explored and shared with the Church and academy worldwide. My thesis illustrates the potential fruitfulness of honest, respectful conversation between Lutheran and Reformed theology and feminist theology(ies). It also demonstrates the necessity for ongoing critical conversation between progressive feminist scholars, and feminists theologians who like myself have chosen to retain their links with evangelicalism. I believe my research has relevance within the present conversation around what it means for both humanity and the earth to flourish. Once people's basic physical needs are being met, the question then becomes about how we can live *well*. The question is even more relevant for persons living in prosperous conditions, for it seems that the more we have, the less contented we become. The message that genuine flourishing can take place only in community and that it requires the giving of one's self to others is a one needed by persons both inside and outside the Church.

This thesis has occupied itself in large part with issues concerning the doctrine of sin. It has argued that feminist theologians have tended not to adequately address human sin and its effects. Some will argue that I have focused on individual sin at the expense of institutional and societal sin. This has been deliberate; too many feminist theologians have either ignored or watered down the responsibility that individual persons have for sin. My focus then on personal wrongdoing before God and other persons attempts in a small way to redress the balance. While women have, perhaps disproportionately, been sinned against, we have also sinned against each other, and sometimes against the men in our lives.

My thesis question underwent significant changes throughout the four years of my degree. Perhaps about two years into the process, my sense of direction began to change. Early on, I was much more focused on the doctrine of the hidden God and the alien work of God, and in how I might critique the sinful egocentricity I perceived in some feminist theologies. In an early presentation of (the perceived direction of) my project, I came up with the title "The Alien Work of God: A critical study of the *Deus absconditus* in Martin Luther's theology and its implications for contemporary feminist theology." Only as I continued to read and analyse Luther, Lutheran scholars, and a

range of feminist theologians, did the problematic aspects of Luther's doctrine of the bound will and the issue of agency within the divine-human relationship become apparent to me. I consequently faced the challenge of ensuring that Chapters Two and Three did not stand apart as a study on their own, unconnected to the overall goal of the thesis, which was to provide a model of human flourishing which drew upon the contributions and critiques of both Lutheran and feminist theologies. Over time I also came to recognise the significance of my own description of flourishing to the conversations currently going on in other academic communities.

Abbreviations

LW – *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes.

CD – *Church Dogmatics*, 14 volumes.

Notes:

Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard (Anglicised) Version.

British/New Zealand spelling is used throughout this thesis. However, where quotations have been taken from North American publications, American English spelling forms have been preserved.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

This research project can be described as part systematic theology and part liberation (feminist) theology. It engages with of a number of themes within Lutheran theology and feminist theology. Although this thesis draws extensively on the theology of sixteenth century German reformer Martin Luther (Chapters Two and Three focus on his thought), I am not involved with Lutheranism as a Protestant denomination. It was the writing of my Master of Theology thesis on violence and sacrifice in atonement theories that fostered the desire to go deeper into Luther's theology. I was introduced to feminist theology in my undergraduate days at Bible college. As with Luther, I wanted the opportunity to read and reflect more deeply on aspects of feminist theology(ies). This doctoral project has provided me with the opportunity to do both.

1.2 Research Question

> [A]t the heart of feminist theology lies the belief that God wills that women (along with all people) flourish, and that, as people of faith, Christians are called to follow God's will and seek out conditions for that flourishing, all the while recognizing the limits of sin and the need for the Holy Spirit. Feminist theologians thus affirm that God's grace has transformative power. They believe that human beings can be converted, changed, redeemed, reborn, remade. Thus, women's oppression in the broader culture (as well as in the Christian tradition) can be altered, new being is possible, selves and communities can truly be recrafted in grace.[1]

Beginning with the above conviction, this thesis poses the question of how central doctrines of Lutheran and feminist theologies may be used to critique each other in order to articulate a theological concept of relational, agential human flourishing. The concept of flourishing is important as an ongoing discussion within society, academia, and the Christian church. Examples of this include "The Human Flourishing Program"

[1] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 52.

at Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science,[2] and the "Christ and Flourishing Initiative" at Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture.[3] In my home country of New Zealand, Carey Baptist College has recently received a grant from the John Templeton Foundation to engage in a two year research project titled "Theological Anthropology, Fundamental Need and Human Flourishing."[4] Tyler VanderWeele, who is a member of the Harvard programme, gives the following definition of human flourishing, acknowledging that religious persons would add to it "some notion of communion with God or the transcendent within what is meant by flourishing."[5]:

> Flourishing itself might be understood as a[n ongoing] state in which all aspects of a person's life are good.… Conceptions of what constitutes flourishing will be numerous and views on the concept will differ. However,… regardless of the particulars of different understandings, most would concur that flourishing, however conceived, would, at the very least, require doing or being well in the following five broad domains of human life: (*i*) happiness and life satisfaction; (*ii*) health, both mental and physical; (*iii*) meaning and purpose; (*iv*) character and virtue; and (*v*) close social relationships.[6]

Defining exactly what Christian flourishing can and should look like, both for individuals and communities, is no straightforward task. A full definition must include social as well as spiritual and theological aspects. While I recognise that the fundamental goal of flourishing for all persons (which is a central goal of feminism as well as other forms of social activism) includes access to clean water, food, clothing, warmth, shelter, and a sense of physical safety, this thesis is primarily concerned with building a theological concept of flourishing, which includes within it spiritual and

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[2] 'Harvard University', *The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science* (blog), 2021, https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/.
[3] 'Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale Divinity School', https://faith.yale.edu/initiatives/christ-flourishing, *Christ and Flourishing Initiative* (blog), n.d., accessed 8 July 2021.
[4] 'Carey', *Carey Awarded Research Grant for Theological Anthropology Global Project*, accessed 8 July 2021, https://www.carey.ac.nz/2020/11/carey-awarded-research-grant-for-theological-anthropology-global-project/.
[5] Tyler VanderWeele, 'On the Promotion of Human Flourishing', *PNAS* 114, no. 31 (1 August 2017): 8149.
[6] VanderWeele, 8149. Author's italics.

emotional dimensions. Furthermore, while I support the church's growing awareness of its role in healing and supporting the natural world, ecological flourishing has not formed a part of my research.

1.3 A Word on Method

More specifically, this work fits within the niche of theological anthropology. It is a literature-based study. The research restricts itself primarily to English language articles and monographs, which means using respected translations of German works where necessary. My theology takes a systematic approach in that it addresses theological concepts and issues thematically. Part Two of this thesis draws heavily on sources within feminist theology. It therefore takes a critical approach to Luther's work, while wishing to preserve much that is valuable within his theology. Regarding its feminist perspective, this work prioritises the voices and concerns of women which have been traditionally overlooked by Anglo-American male systematic theologians. However, my work relies less on a hermeneutic of suspicion than many scholars engaged in liberation theologies, and may, by some, be considered insufficiently feminist in its critical orientation. If anything, I apply something of a hermeneutic of suspicion to my reading of feminist theologians. This is due to my strong reliance on Scripture as the fundamental source for engaging in theological reflection, and my desire for my work to remain theologically orthodox. Such is the continued influence of my evangelical Protestant roots.

1.4 Carving Out a Niche

One must, in order to engage in doctoral research, identify a gap, a problem or a conundrum to be addressed. The researcher must present a case for why any other scholar should take notice of her approach, questions, arguments, and finally her proposed solution to the issue addressed. A scholar must carve out a niche for her research. In reading a range of feminist theologians, including feminist responses to Luther's work, one begins to wonder whether a theological engagement between Luther and feminist thought that is both fruitful, and faithful to Luther, is even possible. I am concerned that many feminist theologians have a tendency (perhaps wilfully) to misread

Luther, in order to bend him to support a particular idea.[7] Surely what is required is to be honest regarding the points where Luther and feminism are *not* compatible and to demonstrate how they might critique and enrich one another. My research integrates three broad problems which arise when Luther and feminist theology are brought into conversation: the common feminist approach to sin, the problem of Luther's doctrine of hiddenness as it relates to free will and human agency, and finally the challenge of mapping out a concept of relational, agential, human flourishing.

1.5 The Problem of Sin

This thesis contends that a majority of feminist theologians do not address the problem of human sin with sufficient seriousness. From descriptions of so-called feminine sins which seem less serious and far-reaching in their effect on society than traditional masculine definitions of sin, to distorted doctrines of salvation which focus on societal and structural sin at the expense of individual sin and describe repentance as a kind of consciousness raising, I fear that the seriousness with which Scripture and traditional theology regard sin is being lost. Simply, if the disease of sin is not accurately diagnosed and the right cure offered, then neither individuals nor communities and societal structures will be enabled to find healing in those relationships and structures. This thesis focuses on the description of sin as incurvature – a turning in towards oneself - enabling as it does a relational understanding of sin, both towards the divine-human relationship, and relations with other persons.

1.6 The Problem of Hiddenness

Luther regards divine hiddenness as the result of sin. That is, God hides Godself because of humanity's wrongdoing. Luther explains in his commentary on Genesis chapter two that

> God also does not manifest Himself except through His works and the Word, because the meaning of these is understood in some measure…. Perhaps God appeared to Adam without a covering, but after the fall into sin He appeared in a gentle breeze as though enveloped in a

[7] See for example the collection of essays in Mary J. Streufert, ed., *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

> covering. Similarly he was enveloped later on in the tabernacle by the mercy seat and in the desert by a cloud and fire…. *This nature of ours has become so misshapen through sin, so depraved and utterly corrupted, that it cannot recognize God or comprehend His nature without a covering. It is for this reason that those coverings are necessary*.[8]

Humankind can no longer bear to view the *Deus nudus* (Latin, naked God), God without a covering, and so must content itself with a limited revelation of God. Luther develops the concept of the *Deus absconditus* (Latin, hidden or concealed God) in two ways. First, God is hidden in the events of the cross, in the last place that humankind would expect God to be present and operating. This aspect of his doctrine is entirely biblical and not at all problematic. As the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians, "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."[9] The difficulties arise in Luther's treatment of divine hiddenness as it concerns God's will and disposition towards humankind, particularly towards Christians. While asserting that nothing can be known of or about God outside of God's revelation in the incarnate Christ, he allows that there may exist a hidden divine will apart from this revelation which contradicts the will of God revealed through Christ. This complexity stems from Luther's high view of God's sovereignty, which insists that nothing can happen outside of God's will. This appears to necessitate God's not merely permitting but somehow being involved in human suffering, eternal death, and the actions of Satan. These ideas are closely interwoven with Luther's doctrine of the bound human (and demonic) will, and the *opus alienum Dei* (Latin, the alien work of God) and *opus proprium Dei* (Latin, the proper work of God).

Luther's understanding of divine hiddenness is important to this study for two reasons. First, it requires an opportunity for the feminist theologian to engage with Luther's understanding of the divine-human relationship and for common feminist understandings of human agency and freedom to challenge and be challenged by

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[8] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 11. Italics mine.
[9] 1 Corinthians 1:18.

Lutheran thought. Second, feminist theologians have up to this point not adequately engaged with the *Deus absconditus*. This thesis will demonstrate the way in which feminist theology can benefit from such an interaction, not least in assisting in a much-needed correction in the work of some feminists regarding a tendency towards anthropocentricity; making humans rather than the trinitarian God the centre and focus of both human existence and theological reflection. Luther's theology is always theocentric.

1.7 The Problem of Flourishing

Discussions of hiddenness, sin, freedom, and agency contribute to this thesis' goal of offering a description of human flourishing, one that is relational and agential in its outlook, and is able to retain rich Lutheran insights and a critical awareness and response to feminist concerns. The challenge of developing a definition of Christian flourishing that draws specifically on the Scriptures and the rich canon of Martin Luther's writings lies in the fact that Christian flourishing looks differently to the way it is generally understood as a concept in the (Western) world. The gifts of happiness, health, financial security, and even physical security, while they may be valued as blessings by God's children, are not necessary to a flourishing life. Christian flourishing must also contain a substantial element of self-giving and even sacrifice, which stems from the awareness that our lives are not our own but belong to Christ. There is also an element of paradox: whilst Christ promises abundant life (John 10:10),[10] he also counsels believers to deny their own will and desires, to carry Christ's cross, and to be prepared to give up their lives for him (Matthew 16:24-25).[11]

Most secular concepts of flourishing (including feminist ones) eschew suffering and like VanderWeele's definition above, may understand the goal of flourishing as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good." If such be the case, a flourishing life is out of the reach of most people, a mere pipedream which contributes to the feeling of dissatisfaction experienced by many. This thesis advocates a picture of flourishing

[10] "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I [Jesus] came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10).
[11] "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'" (Matt. 16: 24-25).

which focuses on living in relationship with the triune God and with other believers, with a life of service to God and neighbour at its centre. It accepts the reality of suffering in the Christian life and grieves over the pain and despair of a sinful world, while never sitting idle when there is something to be done that can lessen the suffering of another. Further, God is the glorious star around which our planet turns, the north point of our compass. This is the theocentric, the *Christocentric* life.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters divided into three parts, not including the introductory chapter (Chapter One), and concluding chapter (Chapter Seven). Part One (Chapters Two and Three) is a study of relevant aspects of Luther's theology. Part Two, made up of Chapters Four and Five, consist of an engagement with a range of feminist theologians. Part Three (Chapter Six) integrates the discussion thus far and introduces my reworking of sin as incurvature. Finally, it maps out a concept of human flourishing that is both sensitive to feminist concerns and committed to a faithful reading of Luther.

1.8.1 Chapter Two

Chapter Two focuses on Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* as discussed above, also including his understanding of the God who is revealed to humankind in the person of Christ. Significant to Luther's theology is his prescription against enquiring into the nature of the hidden God or of God's hidden will. A key text for Luther's understanding of divine hiddenness and of the freedom and bondage of the human will is *The Bondage of the Will* (1525, also known by its Latin title, *De Servo Arbitrio*). Chapter Two also discusses Theses Nineteen through Twenty-One of the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), which describes the necessary character and method of the theologian. It concludes with an in-depth discussion of Luther's twin doctrines of the *opus alienum Dei* (alien work of God) and *opus proprium Dei* (proper work of God). This doctrine is an important aspect of Luther's understanding of the *Deus absconditus*. He avers that God necessarily tears down and uproots – an alien work that is foreign to God's nature – so that God might do God's proper work of planting and building up. The final sections of this chapter reflect on the nature and experience of God's alien work in both the life of the believer and the life of Christ.

1.8.2 Chapter Three

Chapter Three discusses the understandings of and responses to Luther's thought in the theology of two twentieth century theologians, Karl Barth (Reformed) and Walther von Loewenich (Lutheran) and one contemporary theologian, Oswald Bayer (Lutheran). By assessing each theologian's approach to Luther, the interpretative lens through which he reads Luther can be discerned. For example, Barth's threefold concept of the Word of God strongly colours his critique of the idea that there exists a God *behind* God, in relation to Luther's leaving open the possibility that the will of the *Deus absconditus* may differ from God's will revealed in Jesus, the *Deus revelatus* (revealed God). Loewenich on the other hand, reads Luther's theology through his (Loewenich's) theology of the cross. This causes him to conflate Luther's dual understanding of God hidden behind the cross and God as the *Deus absconditus.* Bayer gives a fairly faithful reading of Luther, using Luther's doctrine of justification as his starting point. He wrestles honestly with the contemporary implications of the *Deus absconditus* and *opus alienum Dei,* counselling believers to engage in the biblical practice of lament as the only response open to them regarding the problem of divine hiddenness and theodicy.

The fourth section of Chapter Three is an excursus into the key Lutheran concept of *Anfechtung*. The German word *Anfechtung* (plural, *Anfechungen*) and its companion Latin term *tentatio* is used by Luther to describe the deep spiritual struggle and anguish that can occur in the life of the believer. The notion of *Anfechtung* is crucial to understanding Luther's doctrines of the *Deus absconditus* and *opus alienum Dei,* reinforcing as it does the pastoral nature of Luther' theology. Neither is the Reformer in the habit of theologising for mere theory's sake. He says for example, "I did not learn my theology all at once; but I have been searching deeper and deeper into truth, and to *that* my trials have brought me. Holy writ can never be understood, except by experience and temptations."[12] Problematically, the theologian must also engage with the implications of Luther's conviction that *Anfechtungen* come into the believer's life not only through the actions of Satan but by the hand of God.

[12] Martin Luther and Philip Charles Hirschfeld, *Gems of Luther*, trans. Philip Charles Hirschfeld (London/Dublin: Tims, 21, Wigmore Street/R. M. Tims, 1838), 22. Author's italics. For the original German, see *Tischreden, Weimarer Ausgabe,* 1.146.12.

1.8.3 Chapter Four

Chapter Four begins Part Two, as well as the feminist engagement of this project, discussing the theology of Valerie Saiving, Daphne Hampson, Mary Gaebler, and Serene Jones. Saiving is a seminal thinker in early feminist theology, and her 1960 landmark article "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" challenged the widely held belief that pride is the original or foundational sin for all human persons.[13] She suggests that women's sins may differ from the sins which men are tempted to commit. Saiving's descriptions of feminine sin, while flawed, must be seen as an important step in feminist theological reflection, opening the way for the realisation that persons of different race, gender, economic class, and educational background will experience God in different ways. This suggests that the same gospel must be preached to different persons in different ways, in order to issue an invitation for *all persons* to participate in the Kingdom of God.

Formerly active in the Church of England (Anglican) tradition, Daphne Hampson identifies as a post-Christian feminist theologian. Mark Sayers explains that "[p]ost-Christian culture attempts to retain the solace of faith, whilst gutting it of the costs, commitments, and restraints that the gospel places upon the individual will. Post-Christianity intuitively yearns for the justice and shalom of the kingdom, whilst *defending the reign of the individual will*."[14] This concept of the individual will versus the will and authority of God is important as it pertains not only to Hampson's theology but to the wider argument of this thesis; that within the concept of flourishing, God must have God's place and rule as the centre of the believer's life. Hampson critiques what she views as the autonomy of the Christian God and advocates her own concept of the relational and centred self. Furthermore, she maintains the conviction that there is no room within Lutheran anthropology for persons to develop into independent, agential selves. Lutheran Mary Gaebler offers a valuable contribution to discussions in Lutheran anthropology with her monograph *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*.[15] She addresses Hampson's criticism of Luther and makes a

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[13] See Valerie Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960): 100–112.
[14] Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 16. Italics mine.
[15] Mary Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, Studies in Lutheran History and Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

convincing case for there being more evidence of and room for human agency in Luther's anthropology than has been traditionally thought. Gaebler develops a Lutheran approach to theological anthropology that emphasises the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The final scholar discussed in this chapter is feminist Reformed theologian Serene Jones. While Hampson identifies as post-Christian and Gaebler situates herself more or less within the bounds of traditional Christian orthodoxy, Jones inhabits a place within the stream of progressive Christianity.[16] Jones believes that Luther's doctrine of justification is potentially harmful for women and advocates for an inversion in how the traditional doctrines of justification and salvation are preached. She reasons that women who are already damaged and downtrodden by life will be further harmed by hearing that God desires to shatter their pride – a pride from which, according to Saiving and Jones, women do not suffer – in order to save them. Jones believes that women should first hear words that build them up, making them strong enough to hear the word of God's judgement upon their sin. This section reflects on the legitimacy of such an approach.

1.8.4 Chapter Five

With the goal of developing a feminist Lutheran anthropology, Chapter Five discusses the nature of sin and the forming of a feminist self. The discussion interacts with the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Judith Plaskow, Susan Nelson, Jennifer Baichwal, and Jodie Lyon. A theological giant to Reformed theologians and anathema to feminists (Niebuhr's is the kind of theology to which Saiving directs her criticism), it makes sense to begin a discussion on the nature of sin with Niebuhr. From the second half of the twentieth century, his thesis of pride – the striving to be like God – as humankind's original sin as well as the associated sin of sensuality has been taken as "gospel" by a majority of those engaged in Anglo-American Protestant theology. A discussion of the problematic aspects of Niebuhr's hamartiology sets the scene for the rest of the chapter. Jewish American feminist theologian Plaskow's critique of Niebuhr's work is in part a response to and continuance of Saiving's 1960 article. Plaskow insists that Niebuhr's argument for pride having primacy over sensuality, in terms of original sin, is less than

[16] For an introduction to some of the beliefs held by progressive Christians, see Jones' 2019 interview with Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times*. Nicholas Kristof, 'Reverend, You Say the Virgin Birth Is "a Bizarre Claim"?', *The New York Times*, 20 April 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/20/opinion/sunday/christian-easter-serene-jones.html.

convincing. Neither is sensuality, described by Niebuhr as a flight from responsibility and freedom, merely an offshoot of pride. While not saying that women cannot be guilty of pride, Plaskow criticises Niebuhr for focusing only on the self-absorbed self in his doctrines of sin and grace. She accuses him of overlooking the self who tends towards self-abnegation, a self who may instead be suffering from the sin of not fully being a self or subject who can be addressed by God.

Chapter Five then moves on to Nelson, a feminist theologian who reworks the concept of the primal sin of sensuality into "the sin of hiding". Nelson is concerned primarily with the fact that women are carrying a burden of guilt for sins of which they are not guilty. This is because traditional Christian teachings focus on sin as pride, a message which serves to reinforce a woman's bondage instead of enabling her to break free from this bondage. Like Plaskow, Nelson criticises Niebuhr's lack of attention to the sin of sensuality. She renames it "the sin of hiding", developing the concept to include not only a person's escaping into sensual or hedonistic pursuits but also the losing of oneself in another person, institution, or cause.

Jennifer Baichwal's theology brings the conversation more closely back to Niebuhr. She defends his doctrine of sin as pride and sensuality, arguing that feminist criticisms of Niebuhr stem from their failure to understand the contextual nature of his theology. In brief, Baichwal argues that Niebuhr is concerned with persons and institutions in positions of power. In Niebuhr, sin stems from the anxiety created by the tension between humanity's freedom and finitude. Baichwal therefore argues that because women often live in situations where they are devoid of power, they lack the level of freedom and agency that is necessary to even be aware or capable of the transcendent reflections that bring about such sin-as-pride-inducing anxiety. As well as producing an insightful critical reflection of both Niebuhr and his feminist critics, Baichwal suggests ceasing to speak of masculine and feminine sins by replacing these terms with the sins of the "empowered" and the "powerless".

Jodie Lyon also offers criticism regarding classic feminist readings of Niebuhr but approaches this from a different angle to Baichwal. She argues that pride is indeed the root of all sin but that the symptoms of the disease of sin may manifest themselves differently in the lives of women. Lyon observes that pride may occur in more subtle ways than Niebuhr describes. Pride is about desiring one's own way rather than God's

will. “Not all of us want to be God and rule the world,” explains Lyon. “Some of us want to flee from God and our potential and shun responsibility.”[17] The danger lies in women (and others) who are tempted to flee God’s call to life and responsible freedom being counselled to crush their pride by acts of self-sacrifice. This serves only to reinforce women’s sinful behaviour, leading them further into bondage.

1.8.5 Chapter Six

Finally, Chapter Six brings the reader to the denouement of this project. It is an integrative chapter which draws on the many facets of this thesis’ reflections on the divine-human relationship, issues of human agency and divine will, and – within the message of salvation – the need to develop a doctrine of sin which can lead all persons to a freeing relationship with Jesus Christ rather than causing harm and leading them into further bondage. Bringing together insights gleaned from previous chapters, Chapter Six forms a concept of human flourishing that is biblically orthodox, addresses both Lutheran and feminist concerns, and recognises the priority of human agency and relationality. At the same time, it acknowledges the priority of the divine will within the God-human relationship. A relational understanding of sin is necessarily developed in an understanding of sin as incurvature. A phenomenon first encountered in second century theologian Augustine (although he may not have originated the concept), he describes humans as being turned inwards. Luther further developed this idea of *homo incurvatus in se*, the person curved in on themselves. According to Luther, the depravity of the human will causes humankind to “seek our [own] fulfillment and love ourselves,… [becoming] turned in upon ourselves.”[18] Drawing on previously discussed feminist critiques regarding pride as original sin and on Lyon’s argument regarding the symptoms of women’s sin being misdiagnosed, *this chapter develops the concept of sinful incurvature beyond its traditional framework*. Namely, if women tend to suffer from a lack of self-containment and the failure to establish boundaries in their lives, leading to their losing themselves in another person or cause, then incurvature can be extended to include the idea of being curved towards another, and losing oneself in that other. Both being curved in and focused on one’s self, and the act of curving one’s self

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[17] Jodie L. Lyon, ‘Pride and the Symptoms of Sin’, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 101.
[18] See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 245.

into another results in the failure to become healthy, flourishing selves. Drawing on Luther's use of the story of Jesus healing the crippled woman in Luke 10:17, I affirm that through the healing offered to us through Christ, women and men alike can begin to stand straight and praise God. Both Lutheran and feminist theology alike affirms that believers can be agents involved in their own healing. As an aid to developing a relational concept of personhood and persons as relational selves, this chapter also discusses the relationality of the triune Persons and the importance of that understanding for a Christian community which desires healthy relationships which are conducive to both individual and communal flourishing. Building on these aspects, the chapter returns to reflect on the *Deus absconditus* and the reality of suffering and *Anfechtungen* in the Christian life. Such a reflection must conclude that a biblical definition of human flourishing – one which seriously engages with feminist criticisms of sin, agency, and self-giving and retains Luther's conviction that God and not humankind must be upheld as the centre of all life and activity – must look very different not only from secular definitions but from other religious concepts of a flourishing life.

Chapter 2 Martin Luther on Divine Hiddenness

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will discuss a selection of passages from Luther's writings in order to introduce the reader to his concept of divine hiddenness and the way in which God chooses to interact with and work within the lives of believers. Luther's concepts of the *Deus absconditus* and *opus alienum Dei* will be central themes in this chapter and exploring Luther's ideas in his own words will also offer an introduction to the theological concepts of sin, revelation, and the bound human will. There is no particular pattern to the passages I have elected to explore; I chose those which most clearly illustrate the way in which Luther himself understood certain themes.[19] Before getting into the topic of this chapter, I would like to note two things. First, that Luther was no systematician; the content of his many biblical commentaries and lectures are not easily grouped into categories. Themes and ideas overlap and frequently repeat themselves. In this chapter, I tried to allow the passages to speak for themselves. Second, Luther believed that the Old Testament Scriptures were to be read in the light of the Gospel. He did not hold the concern of many contemporary biblical scholars to always address the historical and cultural concerns of the Hebrew Canon first, only then allowing the illuminating light of the gospel to be used as a secondary interpreter. Luther commonly read the Old Testament through the interpreting lens of the New. Consequently, the reader should not be surprised to discover that the work of Christ is discussed as freely in Luther's colloquies on Genesis or the Psalms as it is in his lectures on Romans and Galatians.

2.2 Divine Hiddenness

God's hiddenness is necessary due to humanity's sinfulness. In the Creation myth recorded in the early chapters of Genesis, God freely walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden. As a result of their disobedience, the primordial parents of humankind initiated a cycle of concealment and hiddenness that would become a key

[19] I am indebted to Paul Althaus and Walther von Loewenich for the abundant footnotes to Luther's writings included in their respective monographs. They proved an invaluable guide in my reading. See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966). and Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd, 1976).

aspect of the divine-human relationship.[20] Luther explains that persons can no longer recognise God without God's appearing to them behind a "covering". Our sin-corrupted nature means that we are incapable of recognising God as God is in Godself. "This nature of ours has become so misshapen through sin, so depraved and utterly corrupted, that it cannot recognize God or comprehend His nature without a covering."[21] Luther asserts that "God in his essence is altogether unknowable [to us] …though we burst in the effort."[22] He explains that God therefore "lowers Himself to the level of our weak comprehension and presents Himself to us in images, in coverings, as it were, in simplicity adapted to a child, that in some measure it may be possible for Him to be known by us."[23] Old Testament examples of this include God's revealing Godself to Israel in the desert as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21),[24] and God's choosing to dwell in the human-built tabernacle and later in the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. Humankind encounters the ultimate example of God's compassionate revelation to humankind in the Incarnation; God appearing in a covering of human flesh.

2.2.1 The Danger and the Paradox

Luther's doctrine of the hidden God is paradoxical. God is revealed yet remains hidden. God exists not only in God's revelation to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ but also exists in Godself, apart from this revelation. Luther however does not seem to have the contemporary need to try and dissolve paradox. Indeed, he warns that those who enquire into the divine Majesty, this God-in-Godself, do so at their own peril. This note of caution, often repeated in his biblical lectures and commentaries, can be seen in Luther's commentary on Psalm 5:1:

> From this absolute God everyone should flee who does not want to perish, because human nature and the absolute God… are the bitterest of enemies. Human weakness cannot help being crushed by such

[20] Adam and Eve sought to conceal their nakedness and tried to hide from God. See Genesis chapter 3.
[21] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, 11.
[22] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 45.
[23] LW: Vol. 2, 45.
[24] "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." (Exodus 13:21)

> majesty, as Scripture reminds us over and over…. The absolute God… is like an iron wall, against which we cannot bump without destroying ourselves.[25]

Keeping in mind this word of caution, the following sections will introduce Luther's doctrine of the hidden God by exploring some passages from *The Bondage of the Will*.

2.2.2 The Hidden God in De Servo Arbitrio

The Bondage of the Will (*De Servo Arbitrio*) was published in 1525. This volume was Luther's greatly anticipated response to a publication entitled *On the Freedom of the Will: A Diatribe* (1524), written by the eminent Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. *The Bondage of the Will* is frequently harsh and critical in tone.[26] The twenty-first century reader might be tempted to attribute this to arrogance on Luther's part. However, it is my belief that the fieriness of Luther's discourse can be attributed to two things: his commitment to accurate and faithful exegesis, and his pastoral heart. In *The Bondage of the Will* Luther repeatedly criticises Erasmus for engaging in complicated scriptural interpretations that are not warranted; cases where the meaning is in fact clear. Luther views his defence and explication of the bound human will as a salvation issue and a matter of eternal importance.[27] Whilst Erasmus maintains that the attitudes and actions of a believer can (at least in part) enable them to earn their salvation, for Luther and his fellow Reformers the gifts of faith and salvation are entirely unmerited. In fairness, Erasmus' primary motivation in defending a doctrine of free will was a moral one. He felt that without the need to actively work towards their salvation, ordinary

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[25] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 12: Selected Psalms I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 312.

[26] For example, Luther declares aspects of Erasmus' *Diatribe* to be "devoid of Christ, devoid of the Spirit," "impious, blasphemous, and sacrilegious." See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 30–32, 43.

[27] "Let me tell you, therefore – and I beg you to let this sink deep into your mind – that what I am after in this dispute is to me something serious, necessary, and indeed eternal, something of such a kind and such importance that it ought to be asserted and defended to the death, even if the whole world had not only to be thrown into strife and confusion, but actually to return to total chaos and be reduced to nothingness. If you do not understand this or are not concerned about it, then mind your own affairs and let those understand and be concerned about it on whom God has laid the charge." LW: Vol. 33, 50–51.

believers would become spiritually lazy, losing the motivation to maintain a moral lifestyle.[28]

2.2.3 Satan and the Bound Will

There is among many in the theological academy of the Western world today a skepticism regarding belief in a supernatural realm. Many persons outside of the evangelical tradition no longer believe in the existence of Satan as a malevolent spiritual being or in the existence of evil as a spiritual force or reality. Instead, the biblical "tempter and deceiver" is viewed as a mere symbol of evil, and the apostle Paul's "principalities and powers"[29] are interpreted as corrupt social and political structures.[30] With this in mind, it is important for the contemporary reader to grasp that in the late Medieval period, angels, demons, heaven, and hell were not obscure theological concepts, but rather concrete spiritual realities accepted from childhood. For Luther, Satan was very real. He viewed Satan as the enemy and opponent of every believer. In the 1520s, Luther gave a series of sermons on the Epistle of First Peter. He viewed 1 Peter 5:8, "Be alert and sober of mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour," as such an important warning that he suggested to his congregation that "it would be worthwhile to write this verse in golden letters."[31] The devil is "cunning and malicious" and believers live as inhabitants of the devil's realm; that is, the world.[32]

The consequence of the primordial rebellion is that every individual lives under the control of the devil until such time as they receive the gift of salvation. Quoting Jesus' words in Luke 11:20,[33] Luther goes on to say that "if God is in us, Satan is absent, and only a good will is present; if God is absent, Satan is present, and only an evil will is in us. Neither God nor Satan permits sheer unqualified willing in us, but… having lost our

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[28] For an understanding of Erasmus' position regarding freedom and bondage of the human will, see Philip S. Watson, 'Erasmus, Luther, Aquinas', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 11 (December 1969): 747–58.
[29] "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12, New King James Version).
[30] Such structures include sexism, racism, and classism.
[31] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 140.
[32] LW: Vol. 33, 140.
[33] "Whoever is not with me is against me…" (Luke 11:20).

liberty, we are forced to serve sin, that is, we will sin and evil, speak sin and evil, do sin and evil."[34] The human will is captive to the devil "and we cannot will anything but what he wills."[35] In other words, there is no neutrality in the human will. One must serve either God or Satan. There is no "middle kingdom" in Luther's understanding of the spiritual realm. One is an inhabitant of either God's kingdom or Satan's kingdom. As an inheritor of Adam's sin the human person is a natural citizen of Satan's kingdom which brings them "under the wrath of God and [makes them] a stranger to the Kingdom of God."[36] According to Luther's doctrine of the bound will, humanity has no power or ability to shift for itself. It is almost as if humans were spiritual chess pieces being moved around on a board by two unseen opponents; God and Satan.[37] This brings the discussion to the most infamous passage in *The Bondage of the Will,* the metaphor of the beast with two riders:

> [t]hus the human will is placed between the two [God and Satan] like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills, as the psalm says: 'I am become as a beast [before thee] and I am always with thee' [Ps. 73:22 f.]. If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; *nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.*[38]

Luther compares the will to a beast of burden, such as a mule or a horse. The animal has a rider on its back and a bit in its mouth. It cannot choose its own path or direction. It is "bound" to go in the direction dictated by its rider. Likewise the human will has no free choice; it is "ridden" by either God or the devil. Gerhard Forde suggests that one of the primary causes of contemporary discomfort with the beast and rider image is due to "our antipathy to the doctrine of bondage of self."[39] Forde explains that "it is… a matter of being taken captive, of being captivated, finally, by the Spirit of God.… The entry of

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[34] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 115.
[35] LW: Vol. 33, 65.
[36] LW: Vol. 33, 227.
[37] C.S. Lewis uses more profound chessboard imagery in C.S. Lewis, 'The Great Divorce', in *The Complete Works of C.S. Lewis* (Chicago: e-artnow, 2016), 2923–24.
[38] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 65–66. Italics mine.
[39] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 59.

the Spirit into one's life is not a polite choice but a radical change, something more like an invasion, breaking into the house of the 'strongman armed.'[40] A move, or rather a being moved, from death to life."[41] However, there is reason to question the accuracy of Forde's summary. While there may be a dramatic "invasion" of Satan's kingdom when God claims back one of God's own, it does not necessarily follow that it will be a violent event for the person God saves. For what does the word "invasion" conjure up, if not a sense of violence? Luther describes it thus:

> if God works in us, the will is changed, and being gently breathed upon by the Spirit of God, it again wills and acts from pure willingness and inclination and of its own accord, not from compulsion, so that it cannot be turned another way by any opposition, nor be overcome or compelled even by the gates of hell, but it goes on willing and delighting in and loving the good, just as before it willed and delighted in and loved evil.[42]

However, this raises the question of why sin and spiritual rebellion continues in the life of the believer once their will is "bound" to obey and follow God.

2.2.4 Satan as God's Tool

It is not the aim of this section to discuss in depth Luther's doctrine of the bound will. Rather, the goal is to establish Luther's understanding of the role that Satan plays in the spiritual realm; Satan's position in the divine interplay between God, humanity, and Satan, as an introduction into this chapter's primary focus on the *Deus absconditus*. Luther's belief in the devil as the enemy of the believer, and the imagery of the beast and rider described above appears to suggest an equality of position between God and Satan in the battle for the human will. However this is certainly not the case; Luther instead describes Satan as a tool in the hand of God. He explains that

> [t]hat remnant of nature [or will] …in the ungodly man and Satan, as being the creature and work of God, is no less subject to divine

[40] See Luke 11:21, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe."
[41] Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, 58–59.
[42] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 65.

> omnipotence and activity than all other creatures and works of God. Since, then, God moves and actuates all in all, he necessarily moves and acts also in Satan and ungodly man. But he acts in them as they are and as he finds them; that is to say, since they are averse and evil, and caught up in the movement of this divine omnipotence, they do nothing but averse and evil things…. Here you see that when God works in and through evil men, evil things are done, and yet God cannot act evilly although he does evil through evil men, because one who is himself good cannot act evilly; yet he uses evil instruments that cannot escape the sway and motion of his omnipotence. *It is the fault, therefore, of the instruments, which God does not allow to be idle, that evil things are done, with God himself setting them in motion*.[43]

According to Luther, *God works through the devil*. He explains that as a disobedient created being Satan is subject to Satan's own corrupted will. Luther further emphasises that Satan "is no less subject to divine omnipotence" than is a human person.[44] One might infer from this that as Satan can only act as God wills, Satan ought to be good. However Satan is clearly not good, so what is going on? Luther affirms that while "God moves and actuates all in all," God "acts in them [that is, human beings and Satan] as they are and as he finds them."[45] In other words, because they are evil, God has only evil material to work with. Indeed, God *cannot* do anything else. This leads Luther to conclude that the evil present in the world is worked *by God, through the devil.* But God in Godself cannot be said to be evil; God only works with evil instruments (in this case, the devil). Since it is not in God's nature to be inactive, God is always working through God's creatures, whether they be citizens of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan.

2.2.5 The Hidden and Revealed Will

This next section will discuss Luther's understanding of how God chooses to work with and relate to human persons. Those committed to following Christ are often confused regarding the ways in which God chooses to work. Although human persons do not

[43] LW: Vol. 33, 176. Italics mine.
[44] LW: Vol. 33, 176.
[45] LW: Vol. 33, 176.

have the power to free their human will from its bondage to sin, God holds that sin against them. The human will, still in bondage to Satan, naturally rebels against this. Personifying "Reason", Luther explains common feelings of bewilderment concerning this reality:

> For it remains absurd (as Reason judges) that a God who is just and good should demand of free choice impossible things; that although free choice cannot will good but is in bondage to sin, he should hold this against it… *These things, Reason will repeat, are not the marks of a good and merciful God.* They are too far beyond her comprehension, and *she cannot bring herself to believe that God is good if he acts in this way, but setting aside faith, she wishes to feel and see and understand how he is good and not cruel*.[46]

The issue here is the believer's desire to believe that God is good, despite experiencing events that suggest that the contrary is true. Luther's response to this problem is simple, although not always easily carried out: the Christian must learn to see through God's eyes. It is only the Holy Spirit that can enable us to do this.

> Many things as seen by God are very good, which as seen by us are very bad. Thus afflictions, calamities, errors, hell, and indeed all the best works of God are in the world's eyes very bad and damnable. What is better than Christ and the gospel? Yet what is more execrated by the world? *Consequently, how things can be good in God's sight which are evil to us only God knows, and those who see with God's eyes, that is, who have the Spirit.*[47]

Luther makes an important point that is worth dwelling on for a moment: "setting aside faith,… [human reason] wishes to feel and see and understand how… [God] is good and is not cruel."[48] There is a meaningful truth to be found here in what Luther does *not* say; that seeking "to feel and see and understand" is the very opposite of having an attitude of faith. As the author of Hebrews phrases it, "faith is confidence in what we hope for

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[46] LW: Vol. 33, 173. Italics mine.
[47] LW: Vol. 33, 175. Italics mine.
[48] LW: Vol. 33, 173.

and assurance about what we do not see."[49] The gifts of faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer are truly wonderful because "faith and the Spirit judge differently, they believe that God is good even if he should send all men to perdition."[50] This opportunity given to the believer to "see with God's eyes"[51] is the only glimpse they are permitted into God's hidden will. They must also accept that there are things which they cannot know. This brings the discussion to an oft-repeated theme in *The Bondage of the Will*; the believer is forbidden to enquire into the hidden will and nature of God.

Luther maintains a strict distinction between the will of God that is revealed to humankind (the God that is preached), and the will of God that is hidden from us. He chastens Erasmus for ignorantly failing to

> mak[e] any distinction between God preached and God hidden, that is, between the Word of God and God himself. God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word… It is our business, however, to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone, for we must be guided by the word and not by that inscrutable will. After all, who can direct himself by a will completely inscrutable and unknowable?[52]

This passage and others like it indicate Luther's conviction that the God revealed in the "Word of God" (which I understand to mean God as God is revealed in the Incarnate Son, Jesus of Nazareth), is only a part of who God is. The God who is revealed to humankind is separate from God in God's divine Majesty. Care must be taken here, in order that one does not begin talking about God as two separate persons. To do so would be to come close to Marcion's heresy.[53] Luther's God is Trinitarian; three in one,

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[49] Hebrews 11:1.
[50] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 174.
[51] LW: Vol. 33, 173.
[52] LW: Vol. 33, 140.
[53] Marcion taught that there were two Gods; the God of the Old Testament who was vengeful and evil, and the God of the New Testament (and the Father of Jesus) who is full of grace and love. A mid-second century C.E. heretical sect (Marcionism) developed as a result of his teachings, with adherents becoming known as Marcionites. For further reading see Tim Dowley, *A Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Revised (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 1990), 104–5.

and what he is defending is a belief that God is bigger, fuller, and more complex than the glimpse human persons are permitted of God. Luther insists that "we have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered, and worshiped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed, not offered, not worshiped."[54] He quotes the words of the Apostle Paul in Second Thessalonians 2:4 as a precedent for his view:[55]

> This [verse] plainly shows that someone can be exalted above God as he is preached and worshiped, that is, above the word and rite through which God is known to us and has dealings with us; but above God as he is not worshiped and not preached, but as he is in his own nature and majesty, nothing can be exalted, but all things are under his mighty hand.[56]

Luther's exegesis is a little suspect here. He basically argues that because Paul predicts that the Antichrist "will exalt himself *above God as he is preached and worshipped*" (the God revealed to humankind), there must *be* a God above which we preach and worship, namely a hidden God. However, both the New Revised Standard Version and the Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament translate the Greek phrase *epi pas legō theos ē sebasma* as '*every so-called god or object of worship*.'[57] The logical interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:4 then becomes a prediction that the Antichrist will set themselves above all *other* idols and false gods; the Antichrist themselves being a false "god". Consequently, any argument for a hidden, unrevealed God based on Second Thessalonians 2:4 cannot be sustained. However as the reader will see, Luther explores other avenues in explication and defence of the hidden God/hidden will concept.

Luther repeatedly argues that believers are forbidden to enquire into God's hidden will, insisting that "[i]t is enough to know simply that there is a certain inscrutable will in

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[54] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 140.
[55] "He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming that he himself is God." (2 Thess. 2:4).
[56] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 139.
[57] Robert H. Mounce and William D. Mounce, *Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+thess+2.4&version=MOUNCE.

God, and as to what, why, and how far it wills, that is something we have no right whatever to inquire into, hanker after, care about, or meddle with, but only to fear and adore."[58] Luther continues to state even more plainly, that God's hidden will "is no business of ours".[59] He also warns of the dangers of obtruding into the nature of God's hiddenness, and of trying to explain God's actions by means of human reason:

> we seek to measure God by human reason and make excuses for him, not reverencing the secrets of his majesty but insisting on prying into them. The result is that we are overwhelmed with his glory, and instead of a single excuse for him, we pour out a thousand blasphemies, quite forgetting ourselves for the time and gibbering like lunatics against both God and ourselves in the same breath, though we aspire to speak with great wisdom on behalf of both God and ourselves.[60]

The phenomena Luther describes might also be explained thus: when persons try to give an explanation for something they know nothing about, they end up talking nonsense and denying the truth of God's word as they do so.

2.2.6 Jesus and the Revealed Will

Before moving on from Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, it will help to explore briefly what Luther says about God's "revealed will", shown to humankind in the person of Jesus.

> God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor has he willed that we should have anything to do with him. But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word, through which he offers himself to us and which is the beauty and glory with which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed.[61]

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[58] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 140. See also LW: Vol. 33, 155, 139., "[i]t is enough to know that God so wills, and it is becoming for us to reverence, love, and adore his will, putting a restraint on the rashness of Reason," and "[t]o the extent… that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours." LW: Vol. 33, 140.
[59] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 139.
[60] LW: Vol. 33, 172.
[61] LW: Vol. 33, 139.

Believers are given access to God "clothed" in God's Word. The sense of God clothed is in contradistinction to God as *Deus nudus*, the "naked God", which Luther forbids us pursue. It is through the *Deus revelatus*, the revealed God in the person of Jesus, that persons receive and preach the message of salvation: "For it is this that God as he is preached is concerned with, namely, that sin and death should be taken away and we should be saved. For 'he sent his word and healed them' [Ps. 107:20]."[62] In discussing God as God is revealed in Jesus, Luther issues his readers with another important warning: if they continue to try and appease God and to earn their salvation through their own efforts, they turn Jesus from their mediator into their judge:

> For they have turned Christ from a kindly Mediator into a dreaded Judge for themselves, whom they strive to placate by the intercessions of his mother and the saints, and by a multitude of invented works,… in all of which their aim is to placate Christ so that he may give them grace. They do not believe that Christ is their advocate with God, and obtains grace for them by his own blood... *And as they believe, so it is with them. Christ is truly and deservedly an inexorable Judge to them, inasmuch as they abandon him as a Mediator and most merciful Savior*.[63]

Despite his unshaken conviction that there is much about God that humans cannot and indeed need not know, Luther assures believers that *in looking to Christ, they will find all that they need to know*.

> Let [human presumption]… occupy itself instead with God incarnate, or as Paul puts it, with Jesus crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, though in a hidden manner [Col. 2:3]; for through him it is furnished abundantly with what it ought to know and ought not to know.[64]

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[62] LW: Vol. 33, 140.
[63] LW: Vol. 33, 280. Italics mine.
[64] LW: Vol. 33, 145–46.

Moving on from *The Bondage of the Will*, the next sections will explore the concept of hiddenness in the *Heidelberg Disputation*.

2.2.7 The Heidelberg Disputation: God Hidden in the Cross

In 1518, explains Gerhard Forde, "Luther was asked to explain and defend his 'new theology' before the German Congregation of his Augustinian order in Heidelberg."[65] In what became known as the *Heidelberg Disputation*, twenty-eight theological theses and twelve philosophical theses were offered up for discussion.[66] The *Heidelberg Disputation* is relevant to this chapter because it demonstrates the first known instance of Luther's using the term *theologus crucis* (theologian of the cross) and its contrary form, the *theologus gloriae* (theologian of glory). It also includes an excellent summary and explanation of God's hiddenness in the cross. This section will therefore be a short discussion of three of Luther's theological theses; numbers nineteen through twenty-one, in the following brief sections.

2.2.8 Thesis Nineteen

In Thesis Nineteen, Luther states "[t]hat [a] person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20]."[67] Thesis Nineteen brings to mind Luther's directive in *The Bondage of the Will* concerning the need to view the work of God through God's eyes. That is, to see it with the aid of the Holy Spirit.[68] Christians cannot look at invisible or supernatural things through natural eyes and expect to understand them. For Luther, any theologian who does so is not worthy of the title "theologian".

2.2.9 Thesis Twenty

In Thesis Twenty however, Luther informs the reader that "[h]e deserves to be called a theologian… who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[69] Accordingly, the mark of a theologian is one who

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[65] See Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 19.
[66] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 35–70.
[67] LW: Vol. 31, 40.
[68] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 175.
[69] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 40.

understands God's "visible and manifest" actions present in suffering and in the events of Jesus' crucifixion.[70] Simply put, God is active in places and situations where one does not expect God to be. Luther gives the following reason for why God chooses to present Godself in this way:

> [b]ecause men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering.[71]

He quotes First Corinthians 1:21 in support of this argument: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." I understand Luther's talk of the misuse of the knowledge of God to be following on from Thesis Nineteen, when he condemns those who look at the created world and the actions of God and humans and claim to understand the mind of God. Due to such foolish arrogance on the part of humankind – "although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him,… [a]lthough they claimed to be wise, they become fools,"[72] – God chose to reveal Godself to humanity in an entirely unexpected way. While the wise seek God in God's opposite, fools continue in their folly and seek God only in visible things. Luther insists that "it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise."[73] Luther concludes his explication of Thesis Twenty by briefly discussing Jesus' conversation with his disciples in John 14, insisting that "true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ."[74]

2.2.10 Thesis Twenty-One

In Thesis Twenty-One Luther explains the difference between a theologian of glory and a theologian of the cross. "A theologian of glory [*theologus gloriae*] calls evil good and

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[70] See LW: Vol. 31, 40.
[71] LW: Vol. 31, 52.
[72] See Romans 1:21-22.
[73] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 52–53.
[74] LW: Vol. 31, 53.

good evil. A theologian of the cross [*theologus crucis*] calls the thing what it actually is."[75] Persons who can "call evil good and good evil" are clearly deceived;[76] they either do not know or refuse to believe that God is hidden in the cross of Christ and in his suffering. Consequently, such people "prefe[r] works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly… [and] good to evil."[77] This type of belief leads to the "salvation by works" mentality condemned so strongly in *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther explains in the *Heidelberg Disputation* that "through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified."[78] Only "friends of the cross" can recognise the evil in human efforts performed without faith.[79] It is also only these "friends" who can recognise that the apparent evil in the events of the cross is actually good.[80] Luther concludes his explanation of Thesis Twenty-one with the following statement: "It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's."[81] It is important to note that the teachings and admonitions found in the *Heidelberg Disputation* apply equally to lay Christians. It is simply that theologians and teachers, due to their responsibility in guiding believers and shaping theology, must take particular care that their lives reflect a working theology of the cross and not a fruitless theology of glory. This leads on to the second part of this chapter, understanding the *opus alienum Dei,* God's alien work.

2.3 Opus Alienum Dei

A key aspect of Luther's wider theology of divine hiddenness is the doctrine of the *opus alienum Dei*, God's alien work, so called because it describes the actions carried out by God that Luther considers foreign or "alien" to God's nature. As he writes in his Genesis commentary, "wrath is truly God's alien work, in which He engages contrary to

[75] LW: Vol. 31, 40.
[76] See Thesis Nineteen of the *Heidelberg Disputation* in LW: Vol. 31, 40.
[77] LW: Vol. 31, 53.
[78] LW: Vol. 31, 53.
[79] See LW: Vol. 31, 53.
[80] LW: Vol. 31, 53.
[81] LW: Vol. 31, 53.

His nature, because He is forced into it by the wickedness of man."[82] This section begins by looking at Luther's commentary of Isaiah 28:20-21, providing as it does an excellent introduction to the doctrine. The scriptural passage reads as follows: "For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it. For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon to do his deed – strange is his deed! – and to work his work – alien is his work!" Luther begins by explaining verse twenty.

> Let us understand… [the image of the bed and blanket] literally concerning distress. For just as the shortness of the bed keeps us from stretching our limbs but makes us pull them up so that we do not fall out and get cold, *so distress holds us together so that we do not fall away from the Word of God, neither in good times or in affliction, but by faith abide in it.* The cross teaches us how to snuggle up, since in good times we sometimes stroll and stray, inwardly by presumption and outwardly by our endeavors, our lusts and luxuries, and other evils.[83]

Luther's understanding of the writer's analogy is fairly straightforward; suffering and difficulty encourage believers to stay close to God. Distress causes believers to cling to God and strengthens their faith; a faith which enables them to abide in the truth of the scriptures. This language of abiding in the Word brings to mind John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples," and John 15:4, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."[84] The believer must stick close to Jesus as he has been revealed to them in his Word. As in Luther's beautiful image, one must "snuggle up".[85] It is humankind's "inward presumptions" and "outward endeavours" (that is, their arrogance concerning their own ability, goodness, a belief in their eternal security, and their own efforts) that make them believe they are doing well enough on their own, without divine aid or

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[82] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, 134.
[83] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 233. Italics mine.
[84] Both scriptural passages are taken from the New King James Version.
[85] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 233.

dependence. It is easy to forget how we struggled before meeting Jesus. Distress in our lives causes us to cling to God as God is revealed in the cross, in the person of Jesus.

2.3.1 The Difference between God's Alien and Proper Work

Luther goes on to explain the difference between God's alien work and God's proper work. He writes

> [f]or the proper work and nature of God is to save. But when our flesh is so evil that it cannot be saved by God's proper work, it is necessary for it to be saved by His alien work.… For if He wants to sow the seed, He must get rid of the weeds. Thus this is done by God's own proper work, in which He plants and raises His own, and uproots, drives out, and casts away the ungodly; and this same work becomes a strange work for the ungodly.[86]

Luther uses the analogy of sowing and planting; the weeds must be removed before the seeds can be sown. Luther explains that God's alien and God's proper work are part of the same thing; two sides of the same coin. It is only a person's inability to see this that makes God's "weeding" a strange and alien work that feels unpleasant to them. Luther highlights a further aspect or reason for God's alien work: "the righteousness of the Gospel had to be established, and for that reason it was necessary to condemn man's own righteousness and works."[87]

2.3.2 God's Alien Work in the Life of the Believer

As the reader will have observed, Luther's doctrine concerning God's hiddenness is paradoxical, God's works often appearing in an opposite form. It requires faith to believe that the opposite of what one sees and experiences is actually happening. Luther explains in the following way:

> *whenever a carnal man is touched in a wholesome way by the Word of God, one thing is felt, but another actually happens.* Thus it is written (1 Sam. 2:6–7): "The Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to

[86] LW: Vol. 16, 233–35.
[87] LW: Vol. 16, 235.

> hell and raises up; He brings low, He also exalts." Isaiah also beautifully portrays this allegorical working of God when he says (28:21): "He does His work - strange is His deed; and He works His work - alien is His work!" It is as if he were saying: *Although He is the God of life and salvation and this is His proper work, yet, in order to accomplish this, He kills and destroys. These works are alien to Him, but through them He accomplishes His proper work. For He kills our will that His may be established in us.*[88]

God's proper work is that of saving, healing, and building up. God's proper work is that of salvation and the giving of life. To do this however, God must first break down the person's self-appointed righteousness and the rebelliousness of the human will. Luther once again uses strong language so that his readers might not mistake his meaning: "He kills our will that His may be established in us."[89] Remember the metaphor of the horse with two riders discussed above? Human persons are either citizens of God's kingdom or of Satan's kingdom. For Luther there can be no middle ground and no half-done saving work. He also urges the believer to remember that this strange work is always for their good. Luther suggests that experiencing the dark side of God enables us to discover other facets and sides of God; he insists that it would be impossible to understand about faith, grace, sin, or death without experiencing suffering and trial. In sum, "we would never learn to know God himself."[90]

Discerning God's actions towards the believer, Luther insists "that God does not send… distress to destroy him… [but] to drive him to pray."[91] In his commentary on Romans chapter eight, Luther explains that God also works in a strange way regarding the believer's prayer life. God often answers prayers in a way contrary to human expectations, even to the extent that one begins to think that their prayers have offended God.[92] But why is this? Luther once again explains that God must carry out an alien work within us before God's proper work can take place: "he does all this because it is

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[88] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 335. Italics mine.
[89] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 335.
[90] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 60.
[91] LW: Vol. 14, 60.
[92] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 365.

the nature of God first to destroy and tear down whatever is in us before he gives us his good things."[93] All this is necessary to bring the believer to a place of humility before God; where they must abandon their own wisdom and cease their own efforts, until "we are made purely passive before God."[94] God's alien work is an exercise in humbling the believer. Luther describes humility as "a great, broad, long, daily, and unending sacrifice."[95] His use of the word "sacrifice" highlights the fact that this process, the "great, broad, long, daily, and unending process" of being humbled by God, costs something. The creature suffers painfully in submitting their own will to God's, because it goes against their sinful nature. The "end" of God's alien work in Christians is "that our sinful old Adam becomes mellow and soft."[96] Luther hints at what the believer's attitude should be when he writes that "[w]hoever can suffer and endure this and remain constant and persevere, and at the same time thank and praise God as one who sincerely means well, he it is who can sing this verse: 'I thank Thee that Thou dost humble me.'"[97]

2.3.3 Enduring God's Alien Work

But how is the believer to sustain such an attitude of humility and patience whilst God does this violent and difficult work within them? From Luther's writings I have gleaned three things that the believer has to rely upon and draw on during these times: perseverance in prayer, holding onto the Word of God, and depending on the aid of the Holy Spirit. These three things build faith. The reader will be familiar with the verse in Hebrews which says that faith is "assurance about what we do not see;"[98] Luther further explains that

> [f]aith does not despair of the God who sends trouble. Faith does not consider Him angry or an enemy, as the flesh, the world, and the devil strongly suggest. Faith rises above all this and sees God's fatherly heart

[93] LW: Vol. 25, 365.
[94] LW: Vol. 25, 365.
[95] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 94.
[96] LW: Vol. 14, 94.
[97] LW: Vol. 14, 94–95.
[98] "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1).

> behind His unfriendly exterior. Faith sees the sun shining through these thick, dark clouds and this gloomy weather.[99]

Faith enables one to see beyond the paradox and past the battle of opposites. When looking toward God with eyes of faith, the things one cannot understand take second place. One might even say that they cease to matter. *In faith, the Christian chooses to believe that God is good,* ignoring what they experience with their physical senses and refusing to let spiritual anguish (*anfechtung*) have the final say. Human reason cannot be trusted here. Instead, faith must be courageous, "call[ing] with confidence to Him who smites it."[100] Luther emphasises that faith is a "skill", and "the work of the Holy Spirit alone."[101] He further explains that it is faith in Jesus that makes this work of the Spirit possible: "if you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then you see immediately that you have a gracious God."[102] Despite the mystery of hiddenness, faith makes God the Father readily accessible to believers. Luther even goes so far as to suggest that it is *believers* who put a barrier between themselves and God, insisting that "anyone who regards Him as angry does not see Him correctly, but has pulled down a curtain and a cover, more, a dark cloud over His face."[103] It is also the case that Jesus is towards the person what they believe him to be. As discussed above in the section on *The Bondage of the Will*, if someone "abandon[s] him as a Mediator and most merciful Savior" and believes Jesus to be instead "an inexorable Judge,"[104] they will receive judgement rather than grace because they do not have faith in God's goodness.

2.3.4 The Habit of Believing in God's Goodness

The spiritual skill[105] which enables a believer to believe in God's gentle touch when they are experiencing the heavy hand of God's wrath takes training: "practice and experience are required for this knowledge of God, and it must be continually taught and dealt with."[106] Luther believes that this special knowledge of God needs to become

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[99] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 59.
[100] LW: Vol. 14, 59.
[101] LW: Vol. 14, 59.
[102] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 37.
[103] LW: Vol. 21, 37.
[104] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 280.
[105] See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 59.
[106] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 6: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 151.

a "habit" in one's life.[107] Only with practice will Christians be able to recognise "signs of God's wrath… [as] indications of His great love and goodwill."[108] As noted above, the believer also needs to form the habit of clinging to or abiding in the Word of God. God is revealed to believers in God's Word.[109] Luther insists that they should know and see nothing but God's Word, describing it as a "lamp… shining before us."[110] Perhaps he had in mind the words of the Psalmist, "[y]our word is a lamp for my feet, [and] a light on my path."[111] The Word of God does two things for the one experiencing God's hiddenness and alien work. First, it enables the believer to stand before God without fear: "anyone who takes hold of the Word of God and who remains in faith can take his stand before God and look at Him as his gracious Father. He does not have to be afraid."[112] Second, the Word prevents them from being swayed by their fears and feelings: "one must look at the Word, for those who do not have the Word follow their own feeling and remain without comfort in their tears and sorrow."[113]

2.3.5 Predestination and the Mystery of Salvation

The biggest fear faced by the medieval Christian concerned the mystery of life after death, and of their eternal destination. Near the end of *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther explains how believers can have faith regarding the mechanics of predestination, which cannot be grasped with our limited human outlook. He writes

> [l]et us take it that there are three lights - the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory, to use the common and valid distinction. By the light of nature it is an insoluble problem how it can be just that a good man should suffer and a bad man prosper; but this problem is solved by the light of grace. By the light of grace it is an insoluble problem how God can damn one who is unable by any power of his own to do anything but sin and be guilty. Here both the light of nature and the light of grace tell us that it is not the fault of the unhappy man,

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[107] LW: Vol. 6, 151.
[108] LW: Vol. 6, 151.
[109] LW: Vol. 6, 148.
[110] LW: Vol. 6, 148.
[111] Psalm 119:105.
[112] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, 39.
[113] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 7.

> but of an unjust God; for they cannot judge otherwise of a God who crowns one ungodly man freely and apart from merits, yet damns another who may well be less, or at least not more, ungodly. But the light of glory tells us differently, and it will show us hereafter that the God whose judgment here is one of incomprehensible righteousness is a God of most perfect and manifest righteousness. In the meantime, we can only believe this, being admonished and confirmed by the example of the light of grace, which performs a similar miracle in relation to the light of nature.[114]

The light of nature, humankind's mere natural understanding, is insufficient to understand why God permits suffering; only by the light of God's grace can one understand the problem of theodicy. On the other hand, the lights of both nature and grace are insufficient to illuminate the puzzle of why God apparently saves one person and damns another. What now seems unjust to human minds, believes Luther, will at last become clear in the eschaton, when the light of God's glory revealed to humankind will permit us to comprehend the mysteries of God's righteousness.

Luther's beliefs regarding the believer's predestination to salvation is the aspect of his doctrine of God's alien and proper work that I find most problematic. This is because I do not agree with the premise that God wills that only some of God's creatures should be saved. It is my belief that God wills salvation for all of humankind. I regard Luther's doctrine of predestination as the inevitable conclusion of his doctrine of the bound human will. That is, because the believers cannot work towards their own salvation, it follows that those who are damned were destined to this end by the will of the Creator. Of course, any Reformation doctrine of eternal predestination, including John Calvin's disturbing concept of double predestination, emphasises the fact that God performs a merciful act in saving anyone, seeing as we are all sinners deserving of death. Logically, this is the theological price paid for maintaining an extremely high view of divine sovereignty.

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[114] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 292.

Like all other aspects of God's hiddenness, the reader should not be surprised that Luther cautions against inquiring into the mystery of salvation.

> I have taught that one should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed through the calling and through the ministry of the Word. For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation and say: "I believe in the Son of God, who said (John 3:36): 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.'" Hence no condemnation or wrath rests on him, but he enjoys the good pleasure of God the Father.[115]

Believers are to have faith that they are saved, and that God wills good towards them. For Luther, this is enough. He explains that while a person may have doubts concerning how another person feels towards them; with regards to God, believers "must maintain with assurance and without any doubt that He is well disposed toward [us]… on account of Christ and that [we]… have been redeemed and sanctified through the precious blood of the Son of God."[116] This enables the Christian to be certain of their predestination to salvation, "since all the prying and dangerous questions about God's secret counsels have been removed,"[117] questions which Satan would use to drive a person to unbelief and death.[118] The key here is faith; we must have faith that we are saved. To do this we must hold fast to Jesus in his Word. Concerning this, Luther imagines God saying the following:

> Look at [Jesus]… as He lies in the manger and on the lap of His mother, as He hangs on the cross. Observe what He does and what He says. There you will surely take hold of Me.… If you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or

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[115] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 50.
[116] LW: Vol. 5, 49.
[117] LW: Vol. 5, 49.
[118] See LW: Vol. 5, 49.

> despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned.[119]

Luther further explains that Satan will cause believers to fear and doubt their salvation. Satan "keeps crying out in [our]… hearts that [we]… are not worthy of this promise."[120] When this happens, Luther encourages believers to "fervent[ly] pra[y] that God may give us His Spirit, in order that the promise may not be wrested from us… Our only consolation is that in affliction we take refuge in the promise" we have received through the sacrament of baptism.[121]

2.3.6 Jesus and the Alien Work of God

There is just one place where believers can see and know God clearly, where they can approach the divine without clouds or coverings, and that is in Jesus. This chapter has discussed the way in which Luther repeatedly cautions his readers to abandon all efforts to enquire into the mystery and majesty of the hidden God.[122] Like a true pastor, he leads his readers to Jesus. Luther explains that believers "must pay attention only to this Man, who presents Himself to us as the Mediator…. When you do this, you will see the love, the goodness, and the sweetness of God. You will see His wisdom, His power, and His majesty sweetened and mitigated to your ability to stand it."[123] Although the mystery and darkness may have been removed, the historical reality of Jesus as the Incarnate Christ still does not make sense to his followers. In the words of the apostle Paul, the message of "Christ crucified" is foolishness to those who hear it.[124] This is because they fail to recognise the strange and alien work that God has performed through Jesus at the cross. "[T]his Christ – who was crucified, killed, and condemned by you… is proclaimed as Lord over all lords. It is most difficult of all to recognize as King one who has died such a desperate and shameful death."[125] The reason that the

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[119] LW: Vol. 5, 45.
[120] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, 93.
[121] LW: Vol. 4, 93. Cf. LW: Vol. 4, 95. "What else should you do in this situation than say: 'I know that I am baptized and that God, for the sake of His Son, has promised me grace.'"
[122] See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, 30.
[123] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 30.
[124] "…but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (2 Corinthians 1:23-24).
[125] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 342.

person of Jesus – his life, death and resurrection – baffles human persons so much is because it means that God has shown up in the last place and in the last person that they expected to encounter God. Along with Jesus' disciples, believers ask how it can be that God is condemned and crucified, failing to recognise that this too is God's alien work, brought about for the good of the believer.

If the first challenge to the Christian's understanding is in "recogniz[ing] as King one who has died such a desperate and shameful death,"[126] the "second difficulty" is in the dawning realisation that God must do a similar work in us as believers. Luther explains:

> The second difficulty is that through His reign this King teaches that all the things you hoped for in the Law should be condemned, and that all the things you feared should be loved. He offers the cross and death…. You must die if you would live under this King. You must bear the cross and the hatred of the whole world…. For this is the King who became a fool to the earth and died, and who thereupon destroys His own with a scepter of iron and smashes them like a potter's vessel.[127]

As Luther elucidates so well, religion, as people have understood it, is turned on its head when they encounter Jesus. They learn that their good works are worth nothing. As Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 16:24-25, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." We must literally live life under the shadow of the cross and, as believers, learn to love ignominy and death. The terrifying aspect of God's alien work continues to be a reality for followers of Christ. The only course open is to cling to the Jesus we find in God's Word.[128] Luther insists that Christ's followers "must know that there is no other God than this Man Jesus Christ."[129] He warns that "[o]utside Christ, the Way… you will find no other way to the Father; you will find only wandering, not truth, but hypocrisy and lies, not life, but eternal death."[130]

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[126] LW: Vol. 14, 342.
[127] LW: Vol. 14, 342.
[128] See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, 29.
[129] LW: Vol. 26, 29.
[130] LW: Vol. 26, 29.

2.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has begun the reader on a journey, explicating themes which will be further reflected upon in Chapter Three and more particularly in the second part of this thesis when Luther's theology of sin, human agency, and divine sovereignty will be challenged by feminist theologians. Although Luther takes an uncompromising position on the issue of divine hiddenness concerning what humankind can and cannot know of God's character and plans, his theology is ribboned through overwhelmingly with hope, or rather with faith in the goodness of God and the faithfulness of God's Scriptural promises. Although he is often harsh, this harshness stems from the love of a pastor determined to protect Christ's lambs from the wolves who preach salvation by works and encourage pride in those works. Right theology, a theology of the cross, is for Luther quite literally a matter of spiritual life or death. This is why he fights so hard. Later, the reader will meet a collection of feminist theologians who have also fought hard to challenge traditional interpretations of Scripture and theology which they regard as harmful to women and other minority groups within church and society. But first this thesis will explore some twentieth and twenty-first century theologians who have engaged with Luther on the theological themes discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 Luther's Interlocutors

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter surveys the work of three respected theologians, Karl Barth, Walther von Loewenich, and Oswald Bayer, chosen for their insightful grasp of Luther's thought. While Loewenich and Bayer are staunch supporters of Luther's theology, Barth expresses significant concerns regarding Luther's understanding of divine hiddenness, and his view of divine revelation clashes with Luther's understanding at key points. This chapter assesses each theologian's interpretation of Luther, by means of identifying the interpretative lens through which they read the Reformer. For Barth, it is through his doctrine of the threefold form of the Word, and how God reveals Godself to humankind. For Loewenich, it is through the lens of Luther's *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross). Bayer meanwhile, frames his reading of Luther around what he sees as the key Lutheran doctrine of justification. Finally, this chapter concludes with an assessment of Luther's concept of *Anfechtung*. *Anfechtung* is an important idea to grasp, both theologically and pastorally, concerning as it does the believer's lived experience with the hiddenness of God.

3.2 Karl Barth

The following section will explore and critically evaluate Barth's understanding of divine hiddenness, revelation, and the knowledge of God, as it relates to and/or interacts with Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus*. Unfortunately, Barth devotes little time to the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium Dei*, or at least not in relation to how Luther understood these concepts. However, Barth is important to this discussion because of his understanding of divine hiddenness. Despite his agreeing with Luther on many points regarding what believers can and cannot know about God, Barth's theology parts ways with Luther when he denies Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus*. As Joshua Miller explains, "Barth's denial of the existence of God hidden outside of God's revelation is based on the central premise of his theology, which is that God freely, uniquely, and totally reveals God's self in Jesus Christ."[131] At this point a caveat must

[131] Joshua C. Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 82.

be introduced. The following section does not attempt to provide an overview of Barth's doctrine of the knowledge of God, a subject on which a vast amount has already been written. Drawing primarily from Barth's *Church Dogmatics* II.1,[132] a selection of passages has been chosen which relate to Luther's doctrine of hiddenness. Luther's name is not always mentioned in these extracts, but they stand out as expressing a position at variance with Luther's views.

3.2.1 Bondage to the Word of God

Barth is convinced that from the very beginning of one's search for knowledge of God and particularly in seeking to know what can be known *about* God, one must be "bound" or "constrained" by the Word of God. Barth declares that "[b]inding by the Word of God must take place at the beginning.… If this constraint does not take place at the beginning it does not occur at all. There, at the point of departure we are constrained by the Word of God."[133] In order to read Bath accurately, one needs to understand his doctrine of the Word of God in threefold form.[134] Barth understands the Word of God as simultaneously the Word as proclamation (preaching), the Word of the Bible, and Jesus Christ the revealed Word. These three interact with and inform each other. Barth emphasises that the revealed Word cannot be known in the abstract, but only through the other two.[135] He explains the relationship between the three as follows:

> The revealed Word of God we know only from the Scripture adopted by Church proclamation or the proclamation of the Church based on Scripture. The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which fulfils proclamation or through the proclamation fulfilled by revelation. The preached Word of God we know only through the revelation attested in Scripture or the Scripture which attests revelation.[136]

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[132] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker et al., vol. II/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957).
[133] CD II/1:9.
[134] See Barth's discussion on "The Word of God in Its Threefold Form" in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 24–88.
[135] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 121.
[136] CD IV/1:121.

As the reader will see, it is out of his conviction of the believer's need to be bound to the Word that Barth is able to challenge Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus*, criticising Luther's suggestion that there is more to God than has been revealed to humankind. Barth asserts that a person cannot wander and question wherever they please in their quest for an understanding of the divine – "a free choice of this or that object, of this or that 'God'"[137] – at least not if it is the Christian God that is being sought.

> The knowledge of God with which we are here concerned takes place, not in a free choice, but with a very definite constraint. It stands or falls with its one definite object, which cannot be different, and which cannot be exchanged for or even joined with any other object. Because it is bound to God's Word given to the Church, the knowledge of God with which believers are here concerned is bound to the God who in His Word gives Himself to the Church to be known as God. Bound in this way it is the true knowledge of the true God.[138]

If one is not bound to God's Word – the same Word to which God binds Godself and the medium by which God has chosen to reveal Godself to the Church – then all that will be found is "a false knowledge of God".[139] We will find ourselves running after "false gods, [and] no-gods."[140] It is also important to note here that there is no striving on the part of the believer, no *trying* to bind ourself to the Word. Barth insists that any yearning to bind ourselves to God's Word merely proves that we are not already bound.[141] As demonstrated earlier, the believer deceives themselves with any thought that binding is a matter of free choice. It can happen only in the commitment to faith.[142] This is why Barth can say that if this constraint does not take place in the beginning, it does not happen at all.[143] It is this powerlessness to make it happen on our own that leaves the Christian with only one course of action: "we must fight the good fight of

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[137] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:6.
[138] CD II/1:7.
[139] CD II/1:8.
[140] CD II/1:8.
[141] CD II/1:9.
[142] CD II/1:9.
[143] CD II/1:9.

faith in order that the constraint may be acknowledged and that we may let it come upon us."[144]

3.2.2 Revelation in Covenant Relationship

As an aid to discovering Barth's response to Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness, including its most infamous aspect, the *Deus absconditus*, this section must take a detour into Barth's theology of the covenant between God and humankind. The reader must understand three things. First, that God created humankind to be in covenant relationship with Godself. Second, that humankind has no claim to be in a covenant agreement with God; God's choosing to have this relationship with us is an entirely gracious act on God's part towards humanity. Third, that persons can perceive and understand these realities only when they hear the eternal Word of God regarding the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ.[145] Barth explains that "[i]t is not in an act of spontaneous self-knowledge, but in the hearing of this first and eternal Word of God, that… [the believer] can know that he does actually stand on this ground,… in the sphere of the covenant as the being with whom God has associated Himself and whom God has associated with Himself."[146] Barth asserts not only that human beings have not done anything to earn or deserve being in a covenant relationship with God, but that no person can reach an understanding of this act of grace on their own.[147] Barth explains "that this grace is truth, the first and final truth behind which there is concealed no other or different truth, that he can be and live absolutely by this truth, is something which he can and must perceive and accept in the first and eternal Word of God as it is spoken to him in time."[148] There are two aspects of Barth's thought which it is necessary to highlight here. The first is "that this grace [that is, the covenant which God freely establishes between humankind and Godself] is absolute truth, the first and final truth behind which is concealed no other or different truth."[149] This assertive statement flies in the face of Luther's concept of God's revealed will and God's hidden will. As discussed in Chapter Two, Luther separates God and God's will as it is preached from the will of God that is hidden from humankind. The reader may recall Luther's criticism

[144] CD II/1:9.
[145] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1956, IV/1:51.
[146] CD IV/1:51.
[147] CD IV/1:51.
[148] CD IV/1:51.
[149] CD IV/1:51.

of Erasmus for failing to distinguish "between God preached and God hidden, that is, between the Word of God and God himself."[150] In contrast, Barth censures Luther for doing this very thing. This is why, as the reader will soon see, Barth completely rejects the doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* as prescribed by the Reformer. The truth that we read in scripture of God's covenant with humankind brought to completion in Christ's atoning work is the "first and final truth" regarding the believer's position before, and in relationship with, the triune God. God wills to be in a gracious relationship with believers and has promised them eternal life with Godself. Barth insists that God has no hidden or alternate agenda. To repeat his own words, "there is concealed no other or different truth."[151] More than this, the believer can "live absolutely by this truth."[152] In other words, Barth is convinced that Christians can live confidently in the knowledge that the things promised them and revealed to them in God's Word are in fact exactly how things stand. *God is not hiding any darker realities from us.* Barth then adds to this another aspect, which is clearly significant to him:

> The first and eternal Word of God, which underlies and precedes the creative will and work as the beginning of all things in God, means in fact Jesus Christ. It is identical with the One who, very God and very man, born and living and acting and suffering and conquering in time, accomplishes the atonement. It is He alone who is the content and form of the gracious thought and will and resolve of God in relation to the world and man before ever these were and as God willed and created them.*[153]*

The eternal Word, the gracious will that God has had towards humankind since the beginning is, and is the same as, Jesus Christ. For me, this adds a richer meaning to the Chalcedonian declaration of *homoousios*; Jesus is fully man and fully God. God the Father is nothing that God the Son is not.

In order to add support to the position here ascribed to Barth and to add clarity to ideas already explored, an examination of a few other passages will be helpful. In one of

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[150] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 140.
[151] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1956, IV/1:151.
[152] CD IV/1:51.
[153] CD IV/1:51.

Barth's lengthy discussions on the knowledge of God, he poses a set of hypothetical questions concerning whether God might be different from the God that has been revealed to humankind.[154] Barth plays devil's advocate, suggesting that despite "establish[ing] a claim by making Himself known and acting in the covenant with man,… *in Himself and absolutely He is perhaps very different*."[155] Barth expands on this theme, suggesting that the God believers think they know might be subordinate to another divine being, or that the covenant that God has set up with humankind may be in fact different to how it appears.[156] Barth offers these unsettling reflections in the form of the following questions: "As He is in truth, is He quite different from the One who meets us in that self-demonstration? Is there again the possibility that we can look past His self-demonstration, groping perhaps in the darkness, or perhaps penetrating through cracks and fissures in His concealing veil to His real and ultimate being and lordship?"[157] Before considering Barth's answer to these questions, it is necessary to return to Luther for a moment. Luther distinguishes between God as God is revealed to humanity and God as God is in Godself. Therefore, Luther's answer to Barth's question of whether God might be "different from the one who meets us in that self-demonstration" would be in the affirmative. Also, despite Luther's firm remonstrances against "groping in the darkness" or attempting to get a glimpse behind God's "concealing veil," he leaves open the possibility that there lies a God behind God; a hidden God whose will contradicts the will of the God revealed to humanity. Barth provides the following answer to his questions: "if it is true that He forcefully carries through that self-demonstration in His Word, and in the covenant established with man by His Word, all these questions are *ipso facto* excluded."[158] He goes on to explain that each person must find the answer to this on their own; an answer which can be found within God's Word and the reality of God's activity in their own life.[159] In case the reader is concerned about the potential subjectivity of such an answer, Barth reminds his audience that "His Word is the truth beside which there is none other, and by which all other supposed truth is judged."[160] As well as this, Barth asserts that "the truth of His

[154] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:46–47.
[155] CD II/1:46. Italics mine.
[156] CD II/1:47.
[157] CD II/1:46.
[158] CD II/1:46.
[159] See CD II/1:46–47.
[160] CD II/1:46.

self-demonstration judges other supposed truths, unmasking them as lies."[161] It is at this point that the reader can appreciate the importance of Barth's earlier insistence on being bound to the Word. It is time now to move onto the next aspect of this discussion on Barth, which will be to take a closer look at where Barth crosses swords with Luther. To conclude then with a final word on the subject of divine hiddenness and revelation from Barth; "*[w]e either know God Himself and therefore entirely, or we do know him at all. If our knowledge of God is under a quantitative limitation it is obviously under a limitation of its truth.*"[162]

3.2.3 Barth's Critique of Nominalism

One cannot study Luther without encountering the medieval system of Nominalism,[163] although scholars differ in opinion regarding how Luther's early training in nominalist thought affected the development of his theology.[164] Barth draws attention to the concepts of the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, later developed by adherents of nominalism, and which he believes influenced Luther's views on how God acts and reveals Godself. Barth begins:

> According to Thomas Aquinas *potentia absoluta* is the power of God to do that which He can choose and do, but does not have to, and does not actually choose and do. *Potentia ordinata*, on the other hand, is the power which God does actually use and exercise in a definite *ordination*. Interpreted in this way, the distinction is simply a description of the freedom of the divine omnipotence.[165]

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[161] CD II/1:47.
[162] CD II/1:52. Italics mine.
[163] "Nominalism represents a decisive shift, or more accurately, a radical breaking with a theological cosmology out of which it proceeded. Stemming from the work of William of Ockham in particular, who was himself heavily influenced by Duns Scotus, who was in turn influenced by Henry of Ghent and Avicenna, et al., Nominalism is founded upon the notion of absolute divine freedom, and in particular power *vis-à-vis* will. Nominalism is thus about the sheer force, reality, and freedom of divine will." Rustin E. Brian, *Covering Up Luther: How Barth's Christology Challenged the Deus Absconditus That Haunts Modernity*, Veritas 9 (Eugene: Cascade, 2013), 14.
[164] For views on Luther's education in the *via moderna* and nominalist thought, see Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 27–71. and Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 116–24.
[165] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:539. See also Aquinas' Summa Part 1, Fifth Article, Question 25, "Whether God Can Do What He Does Not?" [I, Q.25, Art. 5] in Thomas Aquinas, 'Summa Theologica,

Barth explains that the nominalism of the late Middle Ages developed Aquinas' doctrine in the following way:

> In virtue of His *potentia ordinata* God was indeed able actually to do everything in the way He chose. But in virtue of His *potentia absoluta* He could actually have done everything, and still can, very differently. Originally and properly, then, He had a power in the use of which He was and is perfectly free to create and maintain a world ruled either by His wisdom and righteousness or equally by their opposites.[166]

One can conclude from the above doctrine that behind God's decisions and actions towards humankind there lies "a quite different capacity in God and therefore a quite different possibility of manifesting and revealing Himself in a quite different work as a quite different being, a 'wholly Other'."[167] The reader has already seen that Barth rules out any idea of there being a "God behind God". He reacts with equal scorn to the idea that God would will anything which is contrary or different to God's will and actions as they have been revealed. Whilst emphasising the fact that God is completely free in God's actions or "capacity", *because* God has revealed Godself thus "it is completely invalid to ascribe to Him a capacity different from that which He has in fact revealed in His work, and one which contradicts it."[168] Barth explains that God has freely chosen a "particular way" and will remain faithful to it.[169] He maintains complete confidence in the fact that God is the same as the God who has revealed Godself in the Scriptures and through the person of Jesus. Because of this, other options are no longer open. As Barth explains, "[w]e no longer need reckon with the possibility that He could have acted differently. We must come to terms with the fact that in His freedom He was able to act in this and not in another way."[170] The way God manifests Himself to and interacts with the world is God's true Self (or "capacity"), because God has ordained that it would be this way.[171] Because of this, "every other conceivable capacity is a capacity which He

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Part 1 (Prima Pars)', in *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, American Edition (Claremont: Coyote Canyon, n.d.), 276–78.

[166] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:541.

[167] CD II/1:541.

[168] CD II/1:541.

[169] CD II/1:541.

[170] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1956, IV/1:541.

[171] See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:541.

Himself has excluded and rejected."[172] God's true Self "is not one which contradicts and therefore compromises the capacity in which He actually manifests Himself."[173] If this were not so, then God's Word would not be trustworthy.[174]

All of this is important because according to Barth, "it cannot be denied that Luther sometimes spoke of his *Deus absconditus* as if he understood by this concept a *potentia absoluta* or even more a *potentia inordinata* [disordered power]."[175] However, even if Luther's theology of God's hiddenness and revelation does retain vestiges of his nominalist training, Luther recognised the issues posed by the nominalist interpretation of *potentia absoluta* and sought to address them.[176] As Barth explains, "Luther clearly saw… [that] there could be no assurance of salvation… [t]here could never be more than a restless seeking and asking for God's true capacity with which we might assure ourselves on the basis of His work."[177] However, he questions Luther's proposed solution to the nominalist problem; that believers should "worry as little as possible about the *Deus absconditus*" and cling to the God revealed in Jesus (the *Deus revelatus*).[178] I believe Barth's comments are inadequate here. Luther does not command us not to worry about the *Deus absconditus* but rather to flee from the hidden God, and repeatedly warns of the dangers of inquiring into the hidden God. Returning to the issue at hand, Barth challenges Luther on how we should follow Luther's instructions when "there is not denied but asserted a very different existence of God as the *Deus absconditus*, a very real *potentia inordinata* in the background?"[179] Barth also questions whether "in all His possibilities, all His capacity in the regions and dimensions inaccessible to us, the *Deus absconditus* is none other than the *Deus revelatus*?"[180] This thesis would answer that contra Barth (for it seems that Barth rarely asks a question without proffering an answer), the *Deus absconditus is* the *Deus revelatus*, but that Luther understands the *Deus revelatus* to be but a partial revelation of

[172] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1956, IV/1:541.
[173] CD IV/1:541.
[174] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:541.
[175] CD II/1:541.
[176] CD II/1:542.
[177] CD II/1:542.
[178] See CD II/1:542.
[179] CD II/1:542.
[180] CD II/1:542.

the *Deus absconditus*. However, we must be careful not to suggest that the *Deus revelatus* is not fully God, which is simply not scriptural.

To conclude, contra both the nominalist doctrine and Luther's attempt to rework this doctrine, Barth asserts that God's *potentia absoluta* is also *potentia ordinata*.[181] There is no dark and dangerous wilderness that is the *Deus absconditus*. Because of the covenant God has set up between Godself and humankind, God wills Godself to act graciously towards God's followers for all time. Whatever might have come before that is beside the point.[182] For this reason,

> We are no longer free but forbidden to reckon on an essentially different omnipotence from that which God has manifested in His actual choice and action, as if God could exercise a different choice and action and capacity from what He has done. We can count on a greater omnipotence, but not on a different one. We can reckon with the freedom with which God willed to choose and did choose the possibility of His work revealed to us in His Word. But we cannot for this reason reckon on possibilities which are materially different.[183]

3.2.4 False Divisions in Luther

The following section will discuss one final example of Barth's challenge to Luther's theology of divine hiddenness; namely the false divisions created by Luther concerning God's actions. Barth begins by explaining that "Luther usually referred the consciousness of sin, the fear of God's wrath and penitence, to a special revelation of divine Law, holiness and wrath, separate from the revelation of divine grace; to a special aspect of God's being, its majesty and hiddenness."[184] In other words, Luther regarded the process by which human persons become aware of their sinfulness before God, the resultant fear of God's judgement, and finally their repentance, as a part of God's *opus alienum*. When God sets before humankind the fearful holiness and wrath of God and the knowledge of the Law, we find ourselves quivering before the *Deus*

[181] CD II/1:542.
[182] See CD II/1:542.
[183] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1956, IV/1:542.
[184] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:362–63.

absconditus. Luther would then have us flee to the *Deus revelatus,* in whom we find comfort and gracious forgiveness. Barth writes that he finds himself unable to follow Luther at this point, because Luther's system cannot be maintained in light of the Scriptural witness.[185] He accuses Luther of making things more complicated than they need to be,[186] explaining that "[i]n Scripture we do not find the Law alongside the Gospel but in the Gospel, and therefore the holiness of God is not side by side with but in His grace, and His wrath is not separate from but in His love."[187] For Barth, the law and the gospel, grace and wrath, are two sides of the same coin rather than separate currencies. Miller further explains that "[i]n the event of Calvary, God's wrath is… revealed in such a way that it can only be known through the love and grace of God revealed in the crucified Christ. For Barth, any knowledge of God, even of God's wrath, must come through God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."[188] It is important to Barth to maintain both the unity of the Scriptures and the unity of the triune God found within them.[189] However Barth is able to state, perhaps not without irony, that "Luther seems fortunately to have contradicted Himself many times. That the Holy Spirit, the One who convicts the world in respect of righteousness… and of judgment… also convicts the world in respect of sin… was after all written effectively in his Bible too."[190] This reminds us once again of the recurring theme of this discussion; the importance Barth places on our being bound to the Word of God.

3.2.5 Barth's Interpretative Lens

This discussion on Barth's interactions with Luther will conclude by evaluating the interpretive lens used by Barth to read and assess Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness. Barth's writing is often complex and dense. This is part of what makes Barth's work such a rich resource for contemporary scholars. However, this complexity also means that one cannot assign a single theme or priority to Barth's theology. It may therefore be said that he did not view the theological task through one lens but many lenses. This section will therefore highlight a few aspects of Barth's theological approach that I believe affected the way in which he read Luther. To begin with, there is

[185] See CD II/1:363.
[186] See CD II/1:363.
[187] CD II/1:363.
[188] Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 85.
[189] For example, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1957, II/1:364.
[190] CD II/1:363.

his doctrine of revelation. John Dillenberger explains that for Barth, "[r]evelation is the one and only starting point for theological thinking, and it is the only concern which theology can have as its centre."[191] As the reader has seen, true revelation can be found only in the Word of God; the Word of God to which the believer must be bound. Barth's primary objection to Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* is that he [Barth] denies its presence in the Scriptures. Barth's theology is also highly Christological. Dillenberger describes Barth's assertion that "God is known only through Jesus Christ."[192] For Barth, true knowledge of Christ can of course be found only in or through the Word. This allows Dillenberger to call him "the most consistent Christological thinker in the history of theology."[193] This consistency may be attributed to Barth's twofold commitment to the Word of God and the unity of the divine Persons. Miller shares Dillenberger's view regarding the Christocentric focus of Barth's theology; "Barth's denial of the existence of God hidden outside of God's revelation is based on the central premise of his theology, which is that God freely, uniquely, and totally reveals God's self in Jesus Christ."[194] I wish to highlight here Miller's inclusion of the word "totally," affirming as it does Barth's insistence that there is not only no revelation of God to humankind outside of Jesus Christ, but that no God exists apart from or outside of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is for this reason, Miller explains, that "Barth is suspicious of any existence of God outside of Christ."[195]

3.2.6 Barth: Concluding Thoughts

In his 1963 monograph *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, Barth writes that "A God who confronted man simply as exalted, distant, and strange, that is, a divinity without humanity, could only be the God of a dysangelion, of a 'bad news' instead of the 'good news'. He would be the God of a scornful, judging, deadly *No*."[196] As has been demonstrated, this is certainly not Barth's God. Instead, the God he finds in the Bible is not a God from whom humans need flee in fear. "His inevitable No is enclosed

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[191] John Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus and Its Significance for Religious Thought*, Classic Reprint (London: Fb&c, 2015), 117.
[192] Dillenberger, 117.
[193] Dillenberger, 117.
[194] Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 82.
[195] Miller, 83.
[196] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Foley Grover (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 11. Author's italics.

in his primary Yes to man. In this way, what God wills for man is a helpful, healing, and uplifting work, and what he does with him brings peace and joy. Because of this he is really the God of the euangelion, the Evangel, the Word that is good for man because it is gracious."[197]

3.3 Walther von Loewenich

Walther von Loewenich is included in this brief review of how theologians have interacted with Luther not only because he is a respected twentieth century Lutheran scholar, but because he devotes significant time in his monograph on Luther's *theologia crucis*[198] to Luther's doctrine of the *opus alienum Dei* in the life of the believer. This is something that few prominent scholars have done. Loewenich embraces Luther's understanding of the cross as paradox, rejecting as he does so the belief that Luther's *theologia crucis* was a feature of only his early (pre-Reformation) theology.[199] Loewenich argues that Luther drew his theology of the cross from the apostle Paul, writing that "God reveals himself in concealment, God's wisdom appears to men as foolishness, God's power is perfected in weakness, God's glory parades in loneliness, God's life becomes effective in the death of his Son."[200] As a result of this, direct knowledge of God is not possible for humankind.[201] Drawing on First Corinthians 1:18, Loewenich explains that "[t]his means that the Word (*logos*) to which all theology must be related is the word of the cross."[202] He insists that the "distinctive principle of theological knowledge" which is so apparent in Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* is also present in his later writings, although not always "consciously" or "openly".[203] It is therefore reasonable to conclude that a theology of the cross, ostensibly the same theological framework that guided both Paul and Luther, is used by Loewenich as a lens for understanding Luther's theology of revelation, namely his doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* and the alien and proper work of God. Whilst acquainting the reader with Loewenich's reading of Luther, the aim of this discussion is to judge how accurately he

[197] Barth, 11.
[198] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*.
[199] Loewenich, 12.
[200] Loewenich, 11.
[201] Loewenich, 11.
[202] Loewenich, 11.
[203] Loewenich, 13.

reads the Reformer, and whether Loewenich's chosen interpretive lens aids or hinders a faithful engagement with Luther's doctrine of hiddenness.

3.3.1 The Theology of the Cross

This discussion of Loewenich's theology will focus mainly on the third chapter of *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, titled "Life under the Cross."[204] Without discounting the importance and influence that Loewenich's *Theology of the Cross* has had on Luther scholarship during the past fifty years, it may be said that Loewenich does not offer an earth-shattering thesis. He appears to agree with Luther in nearly all points of his theology. This said, the popularity of the *theologia crucis* theme and the development of the suffering God theologies during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries[205] would not have been possible without the formulation of *theologia crucis* theologies by theologians like Loewenich. In his introductory chapter, Loewenich states that "Christian theology is theology of revelation.… [T]he Word (*logos*) to which all theology must be related is the word of the cross."[206] In other words, theology is about revelation, and revelation is about the cross. Loewenich insists that "the theology of the cross is a principle of Luther's entire theology,… [and] this formula offers a characteristic of Luther's entire theological thinking."[207] Loewenich believes there to be five key facets to Luther's *theologia crucis*. They are as follows:

> 1. theology of the cross as a theology of revelation, stands in sharp antithesis to speculation. 2. God's revelation is an indirect, concealed revelation. 3. Hence God's revelation is recognized not in works but in suffering, and the double meaning of these terms is to be noted. 4. This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith. 5. The manner in which God is known is reflected in the practical thought of suffering.

With this in mind it is time to explore Loewenich's understanding of Luther, beginning with the *Heidelberg Disputation*.

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[204] See Loewenich, 112–43.
[205] For example, in liberation theologies and in the work of Jürgen Moltmann.
[206] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 11.
[207] Loewenich, 12–13.

3.3.2 The Heidelberg Disputation

Given that Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* is the earliest and most deliberate explanation of his theology of the cross, or rather an explanation of what is required of a theologian of the cross, it is not surprising that Loewenich begins his discussion of the *theologia crucis* concept here. In the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther sets up for his readers the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. As can be seen in his five tenets of an authentic *theologia crucis* that is faithful to Luther, Loewenich joins the Reformer in his rejection of human attempts to earn salvation by good works, and of the human desire to reach God through speculation regarding the Divine. He explains that "[r]eligious speculations and holiness by works are two consequences of a single human desire – the desire for an unbroken and direct communion with God…. But for Luther this desire for unbroken communion with God constitutes the theology of glory."[208] There are no shortcuts or easy ways to knowing God. Drawing on Luther's proof for Thesis Twenty,[209] Loewenich explains that "in order to reveal himself… [God] has hidden himself beneath suffering and cross."[210] It is Loewenich's preoccupation with suffering and his Lutheran formulation of the *theologia crucis* that is of interest here. While not dismissing the importance of Christ's suffering on the cross as it relates to God's self-revelation to humankind, this discussion will focus on his understanding of Luther's concept of suffering in the life of the believer, as it relates to the doctrine of the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium Dei*. Loewenich states in clear terms the particular significance that suffering has for a theology of the cross,[211] writing that "[t]he knowledge of God derived from the works of creation was opposed to that which arises at the cross of Christ, and holiness by works is now opposed to the thought of suffering.… For that reason… [a theologian of the cross] does not, like the theologian of glory, flee sufferings but regards them as the most precious treasure. To all that is humble and lonely he turns in love."[212]

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[208] Loewenich, 20.
[209] "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross." See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 52.
[210] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 21.
[211] Loewenich, 21.
[212] Loewenich, 21–22.

3.3.3 Life Under the Cross

Loewenich explains that "[t]he cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian belong together."[213] In his unpacking of Luther's *theologia crucis*, Loewenich reminds his readers of the fact that suffering is a reality to be expected in the Christian life. A theologian of the cross is not a spectator. Rather they are "drawn into the event" of the cross,[214] participating in the sufferings of Jesus. In the words of Philippians 1:29, "it has been granted to…[us] on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him." Loewenich asserts that knowledge of God is also to be found in suffering, explaining that the *theologus crucis* (theologian of the cross) "knows God can be found only in Christ and suffering."[215] It is only the theologian of glory who attempts to avoid suffering, not understanding that "God himself is hidden in sufferings."[216] However Loewenich never attempts to make a virtue out of suffering, asserting that "[s]uffering must never become a good work."[217] The "value" of suffering is merely that it provides an opportunity for spiritual growth. He establishes an important link between suffering, hiddenness, and faith, writing that "[i]f the footprints of God in our life are all too visible before us we have no need of faith, and then faith does not come into being."[218] In other words, Loewenich argues that divine hiddenness is beneficial to our faith. It is when the believer cannot see or feel God that faith grows. If one could see God, one would not need faith. As the writer of Hebrews says, "faith is… assurance about what we do not see."[219] It is this attitude that enables Loewenich to assert that "faith stands in a closer relationship to suffering than to works."[220] This life of faith and suffering is what Loewenich refers to as "the demand of a life under the cross."[221]

3.3.4 On Suffering

Loewenich explains that as God is a hidden God, so the Christian life is a hidden life. In describing the life of the believer as a hidden "object of faith",[222] he explains that

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[213] Loewenich, 113.
[214] Loewenich, 113.
[215] Loewenich, 113.
[216] See Loewenich, 113.
[217] Loewenich, 119.
[218] Loewenich, 113.
[219] See Hebrews 11:1; "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (New International Version).
[220] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 113.
[221] Loewenich, 113.
[222] Loewenich, 114.

"[w]hat we see is never the real thing; only God and faith see this innermost core."[223] This hidden life is "a contrast between perception and reality."[224] In other words, what the believer feels and sees is not a true or reliable guide regarding how God is actually working in their life. They can however take comfort in the knowledge that this state of affairs will not last forever. Loewenich encourages his readers with the promise that "[j]ust as the contrast between the hidden God and the revealed God will come to an end when faith is permitted to attain to sight, so also the Christian life will one day shed its hiddenness. The old man will submerge, and the conflict between flesh and spirit will cease, and the 'Christ lives in me' can be said without reservation."[225] In his discussion on suffering in the Christian life, Loewenich asserts that "the Christian life is a discipleship of suffering",[226] further explaining that the suffering in our lives is the work of the Spirit and the will of God.[227] This, explains Loewenich, is God's alien work: "God does his alien work when he leads us into suffering. But thereby he aims at his proper work, even when we do not recognise it."[228] He asserts that suffering signals God's grace at work in the life of the Christian,[229] and "in contrast to the suffering of the ungodly, its purpose is not punishment and destruction but grace and cleansing."[230] Never losing sight of his *theologia crucis* motif, Loewenich reminds his readers that this concept of faith joined to suffering "is a characteristic of the theology of the cross."[231]

3.3.5 Regarding Translation

A word of caution is necessary before proceeding. I believe translator Herbert Bouman's choice of the word "trial" in place of the German *Anfechtung* and Latin *tentatio* (which Luther uses as a companion term) is a narrow and theologically confusing translation. David Scaer astutely observes that "[s]ome words defy adequate translation." Consequently *Anfechtung*, as a "multifaceted concept," is best left untranslated.[232] We will discuss the concept of *Anfechtung* later in this chapter. For the

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[223] Loewenich, 114.
[224] Loewenich, 115.
[225] Loewenich, 117.
[226] Loewenich, 118.
[227] Loewenich, 119.
[228] Loewenich, 119.
[229] Loewenich, 119.
[230] Loewenich, 119.
[231] Loewenich, 119.
[232] David P. Scaer, 'The Concept of Anfechtung in Luther's Thought', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (January 1983): 15.

present, the reader should keep in mind that the English word "trial" may not express everything intended by either Luther or Loewenich in their original use of the terms *Anfechtung*/*-en* and *tentatio*.

3.3.6 Concerning *Tentatio*

Loewenich asserts that a "[t]heology of the cross is a theology of trial."[233] This adds weight to the idea that the believer who seeks to be faithful to the *theologia crucis* model of Christian living or discipleship will experience suffering and that *tentatio* is one of the forms that it takes. Loewenich affirms Luther's conviction that the experience of trial is a form of God's alien work and that such suffering is beneficial to our faith; "for trial keeps faith in motion."[234] Faith seems to be a dual concept here, for while the believer's faith is increased or strengthened by trial, it is also faith that enables us to make it through the trial: "the movement of faith… constantly pushes through from the hidden God to the revealed God, from the alien to the proper work. Trial arises when faith cannot execute this breakthrough."[235] Loewenich highlights Luther's belief that when Christians are experiencing trial, it can seem as though God were playing a game with us.[236] He explains that the trial arises because "we do not see through this game."[237] Our faith also experiences trial when God looks to be contradicting Godself; "[i]n trial faith wrestles with the self-contradiction of God."[238] Loewenich explains that in these instances the believer is facing God in God's hiddenness, and is reminded that "the hidden God… arrives at his proper work only by way of his alien work."[239] He also explains that the trial reaches its turning point "when faith recognizes the trial as alien work."[240] To achieve this we must at times "fight against God himself;"[241] to push through God's alien work to God's proper work and from the hidden God to the revealed God. Only then will the trial reach its end.[242]

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[233] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 136.
[234] Loewenich, 136.
[235] Loewenich, 136.
[236] Loewenich, 136.
[237] Loewenich, 136.
[238] Loewenich, 136.
[239] Loewenich, 136.
[240] Loewenich, 137.
[241] Loewenich, 137. See also Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 6: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, 131.
[242] See Loewenich, 137.

3.3.7 Loewenich: Concluding Thoughts

One significant problem in Loewenich's reading of Luther's doctrine of the hidden God is his insistence that the hidden God is the same as the revealed God. For example, he declares that "the hidden God is none other than the revealed God. God is hidden for the sake of revelation."[243] Loewenich adds in a footnote to this statement that "the Incarnation as such is concealment,"[244] and "the hidden God is none other than the crucified God."[245] He goes on to insist that the "hidden God cannot be a hypostasis in or behind God, but is the one living God who is manifest as he is concealed in the cross of Christ."[246] If Luther's writing did demonstrate that the hidden God is the revealed God and vice versa, it would avoid some of the problematic aspects inherent in the doctrine discussed in Chapter Two.[247] However, I am not convinced that such is the case. Miller helpfully articulates Loewenich's error. He writes that "[c]ontrary to Luther's clear articulation of the distinction between God as God exists in revelation and God as God is hidden in God's self, von Loewenich collapses God's hiddenness in God's self into God's hiddenness in revelation."[248] Miller contends that Loewenich does not read Luther accurately on this point. Loewenich himself writes that "God himself could not be grasped by us but would crush and annihilate us in his majesty, for he is a consuming fire. For that reason God wraps himself in his word. He becomes the 'clothed' God. With him alone can we have any dealings. God must conceal himself in the word in order to be able to reveal himself. The revealed God is the clothed God."[249] In order to spare humankind from encountering the awfulness of the naked God, God invests Godself in human form, in order that God might reveal Godself to humankind in a salvific way. This is certainly an accurate reading of Luther up to a point. However as Miller demonstrates, it is an incomplete and consequently inaccurate interpretation of Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness. Miller explains that

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[243] Loewenich, 30.
[244] See footnote 20, Loewenich, 175.
[245] Loewenich, 30.
[246] Loewenich, 30.
[247] For example, if Loewenich could convince the reader that the hidden God and the revealed God are one and the same in Luther, the troubling aspect of the hidden, mysterious God who is not bound by the promises made by the revealed God in Jesus would be removed.
[248] Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 70.
[249] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 33. See also Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 70.

> [t]his view of God's hiddenness is accurate, when one speaks of God's hiddenness within revelation through suffering and the cross, as Luther delineates in his teaching concerning the theology of the cross in the *Heidelberg Disputation*. Luther's teaching concerning God's hiddenness outside of revelation, however, is something altogether different. When Luther speaks of this kind of divine hiddenness in *The Bondage of the Will*, he is not simply restating what he articulates in the *Heidelberg Disputation* concerning God's hiddenness in revelation. Instead… Luther clearly states that the hiddenness of the unpreached God in God's self as a hiddenness outside of revelation cannot be grasped by humans at all. Von Loewenich is thus quite mistaken to identify God hidden in God's self with God revealed in the Word simply by appealing to the event of God's clothing God's self with revelation and thus hiding in revelation.[250]

It is of course not enough merely to identify an error or misdirection in a theologian's thinking; we must seek to understand why it is so. I stated at the beginning of this section that Loewenich clearly identifies his own interpretive lens. When reading Luther, Loewenich keeps always at the forefront his conviction that Luther's *theologia crucis* is the key theme in Luther's theology upon or around which everything else is built. The important question is whether the stance leads Loewenich to misread Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness, due to his desire to make the doctrine fit within a *theologia crucis* framework. Miller states that "von Loewenich reads and interprets Luther's doctrine of the hidden God through his own assumption that the theology of the cross is the controlling feature of Luther's entire theology."[251] In terms of cause and effect, Miller accurately concludes that Loewenich's choice of the *theologia crucis* as an all-encompassing interpretive lens causes him to "misconstru[e] the ultimate trajectory of Luther's notion of the hiddenness of the unpreached God in God's self by mistakenly identifying it with God's hiddenness in revelation."[252] This is a heavy

[250] Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 71.
[251] Miller, 68.
[252] Miller, 71.

charge, and in Miller's opinion, it limits Loewenich's ability to make a meaningful contribution to the conversation concerning Luther's doctrine of the hidden God.[253]

As a final critical observation, I wish to comment on a theme in Luther's theology which Loewenich wholeheartedly embraces; the conviction that all suffering comes by the hand of God. I hold the non-Lutheran view that God permits but does not cause suffering in the Christian life. As stated in the previous chapter, I believe Luther's conviction that God causes suffering and permits the devil to torment the believer is a result of his understanding of God's complete sovereignty or autonomy. This forces Luther, and all those who closely adhere to this aspect of his teaching, to wrestle with the possibility that evil and suffering are in some way caused by God. Although this may be simplifying the concept a little, it seems that a hidden God with a hidden will (which differs from the will of God revealed to humankind) is Luther's problematic conclusion to this self-created conundrum. Loewenich merely follows closely in Luther's footsteps.

3.4 Oswald Bayer

This chapter has so far discussed Luther's doctrine of hiddenness in the work of two historical thinkers, Reformed theologian Karl Barth and Lutheran theologian Walther von Loewenich. In order to usher the discussion into the twenty-first century, this section will explore how Luther's theology is applied and interpreted within the work of German Lutheran scholar Oswald Bayer. Bayer, who is a devoted reader of Luther, asserts that Luther's work remains relevant to contemporary theology because the questions that Luther asked are still relevant:[254] "[h]e speaks to our contemporary situation… he imposes himself upon us."[255] Luther's questions include how one should speak of the divine-human relationship and how salvation plays out in a sinful world, as well as questions of ecclesiological and eschatological importance.[256] Bayer reminds the reader that "these questions were clearly not resolved by the transition from the Middle Ages to the present age and on into the postmodern world."[257] Like Loewenich, Bayer

[253] Miller, 71.
[254] See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), xix–xx.
[255] Bayer, xix.
[256] Bayer, xix–xx.
[257] Bayer, xx.

reads Luther through his own particular lens. It is time then to explore Bayer's theological approach.

3.4.1 Justification and the Question of Method

For Bayer, theology begins with the doctrine of justification. He insists that "[j]ustification is the starting point for all theology and it affects every other topic."[258] He also argues for its "ontological significance," explaining how Luther brings the doctrine into the theological realm of creation.[259] Bayer provides the example of Luther's explication of the first article of the Creed in his *Small Catechism*.[260] Following declarations of how God creates, preserves, provides for and protects humankind, Luther sums up with the statement that "[a]ll this he does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him."[261] Bayer insists that it is decisive for the understanding and development of both doctrines that justification and creation be kept together.[262] He goes on to articulate the significance of Luther's inclusion of the doctrine of justification in the first article of the Creed: "[w]hat is implied by including the concept and fact of justification in the article on creation is that God as judge not only does not owe me a reward. Rather, my very beginning, my birth, and now my present existence are unmerited and freely given."[263] Along with Luther's three rules for doing theology (*oratio* [prayer], *meditatio* [meditation; study], *tentatio*), it is upon the following excerpt from Luther's *Table Talk* (*Tischreden*) that Bayer builds his own methodology:[264] "What [asks Luther] makes each person a theologian? (1) The

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[258] Oswald Bayer, 'Justification as the Basis and Boundary of Theology', trans. Christine Helmer, *Lutheran Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 274.
[259] Bayer, 274.
[260] "*'I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'* What does this mean? Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property; that he provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me from all evil. All this he does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true." See Martin Luther, 'The Small Catechism', in *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg, 1959), 344–45.
[261] Luther, 345.
[262] See Bayer, 'Justification as the Basis and Boundary of Theology', 275.
[263] Bayer, 276.
[264] See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 15–43. See also Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 285–88. Cf. WA 50:659. 5-21.

grace that is worked through the Holy Spirit; (2) the agonizing struggle; (3) experience; (4) opportunity; (5) constant, concentrated textual study; (6) knowledge and practice of the academic disciplines."[265] Bayer believes that Luther is right to place the grace of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his "how-to" list for the theologian. He explains that "being a theologian is situated initially within a fundamental understanding of what it means to be human."[266] It is God's creative Spirit which forms persons as theologians, and as human beings.[267] Humankind can take no credit for their gifts or abilities. Bayer further describes a theologian as "*one who, driven by agonizing struggle, enters with prayer into the Holy Scripture and interprets what is set forth within it, in order to give insights to others who are engaged in agonizing struggle, so that they in a like manner – with prayer – can enter into the Holy Scripture and can interpret it.*"[268] Here then is Bayer's understanding of the theological task as well as its purpose within the body of Christ. For Bayer, the "agonizing struggle" of *Anfechtung/tentatio* is "more powerful than the most radical intellectual doubt, grabbing hold in the fear one faces when being shaken to the depth of one's being, grabbing hold as well when one faces danger and the loss of trust in oneself and in the world."[269] His understanding of experience (*experientia*) is also important to this study. Bayer explains the way in which, for Luther, experience is passive rather than active; *human persons are acted upon*: "[w]hen Luther refers to 'experience,' he does not refer primarily to an *actio* but to a *passio*, not primarily to the experiences that I am in charge of, but in connection with that which I suffer. It is – to take it to the highest level – the experience that is mine in the agonizing struggle with the Word of God."[270] He adds a further corrective to this concept, explaining that "it is not experience as such that makes one a theologian, but experience with the Holy Scripture."[271] The Bible must always be – for theologian,

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[265] The above is Bayer's translation of an excerpt from *Tischreden*, see WA TR 11-13 (no. 3425): "'Quae faciant theologum: 1. gratia Spiritus; 2. tenatio; 3. experientia; 4. occasio; 5. sedula lectio; 6. bonarum artium cognitio.'" It is not included in the English translation of *Tischreden*, (LW: 54 *Table Talk*). See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 17.
[266] Bayer, 17.
[267] See Bayer, 17–18.
[268] Bayer, 19. Author's italics.
[269] Bayer, 20.
[270] Bayer, 21.
[271] Bayer, 22.

preacher, and lay-Christian alike – the primary theological source with which we must constantly engage.

3.4.2 Theology and Hiddenness

The subject of theology is often viewed as simply "God" or the study of God, but for Bayer this is not enough. Drawing on Luther's study of Psalm 51, he asserts that "the *sinning* human and the *justifying* God" is the true subject matter of theology.[272] Because of the reality of divine hiddenness, theological dialogue is alive and dangerous. It is a "battle" between "the sinning human and the justifying God."[273] Bayer elucidates on this danger: "[s]uch a dialogue is not some harmless effort to find a way to square knowledge of God with knowledge of self. That is because it is not completely clear at the outset just who the opponent is, this one who stands opposite the individual human being. Is it God or the devil?"[274] He further explains the significance of living with the reality of divine hiddenness. Like Jacob and the mysterious figure wrestling by the river Jabbok, the outcome of each divine-human encounter is uncertain.[275] Although Jesus "interject[s] himself within this collision between the naked God and the naked human being,"[276] theology – the relationship and dialogue between the sinning human and the justifying God – can only retain meaning if one retains the memory of one's "yearning for meaning and the terrors that come with it"; the subject of theology remains "a living dramatic event."[277] In Bayer's thought, the subject and dialogue of theology take place within three elements or settings.[278] Namely, "in the conflict with the *law* that judges me,… in the promise of the *gospel*" and of primary concern to this study, "in the assault of the *hiddenness of God,* which cannot be understood merely as the effect of the law and which so radically contradicts the gospel in an oppressive and incomprehensible way."[279] Bayer's methodology might then be summarised as the conviction that the subject of theology concerns the sinning human and the justifying God, an event which

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[272] See Bayer, 37–38. In Luther's commentary on Psalm 51, he asserts that "[t]he proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner." See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 12: Selected Psalms I*, 311.
[273] See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 39–41.
[274] Bayer, 'Justification as the Basis and Boundary of Theology', 40. Bayer, 40.
[275] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 39–40.
[276] Bayer, 40.
[277] See Bayer, 41.
[278] Bayer, 41.
[279] Bayer, 42. Author's italics.

takes place in concert with the law, the gospel, and the hiddenness of God. The discussion will turn now to Bayer's understanding of the *Deus absconditus* as it relates to the unity of God.

3.4.3 The Omnipotence and Unity of God

Observing the central place that the predicate of divine omnipotence holds in Luther's thought, Bayer rightly queries what "sort of a theological understanding would give God's omnipotence such centrality."[280] He concludes that the primary reason for this preoccupation of Luther's, including his at times troubling doctrine of divine hiddenness, is Luther's desire to maintain God's oneness or unity.[281] Bayer also states that while we may find Luther's understanding of omnipotence (or rather his application of it) offensive,[282] Luther intends "to do nothing other than lay out that which is found in the Scriptures."[283] This includes God's being "ascribed the authorship of evil."[284]

Bayer moves on to explain the reason behind Luther's "sharp distinction" between the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus*. Luther "does not speak this way in order to arrive at a dualism" asserts Bayer, "but rather precisely in order to preserve the oneness of God. He is radically serious in his opinion that there is no outside-of-God."[285] Bayer reminds the reader that Gnosticism, Manichaeism and Marcionism all espoused some form of dualism in the Divine.[286] "By contrast, according to Luther, God would no longer be God if the dark power of this terrible hiddenness were denied that general name, the *nomen appellativum,* 'God'. If evil and that which contends against life did not rest within the domain of God's power, then there would be powers without master that stood next to or opposite God."[287] In short, to allow for any existence or realm which is outside of God's control would be to allow for a limitation in God's all-powerful oversight. This is something which Luther will not allow and therefore neither does Bayer. Consequently, "[f]or the sake of God's oneness there can be no

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[280] Oswald Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', trans. Jonathan Mumme, *Lutheran Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 85.
[281] See Bayer, 91.
[282] See Bayer, 90.
[283] Bayer, 90.
[284] See Bayer, 90.
[285] Bayer, 91.
[286] See Bayer, 91.
[287] Bayer, 91.

foreswearing talk of the *Deus absconditus*. The only thing that can be disaffirmed is that this hidden God is for us the Trinitarian God; he is not, not yet."[288] This rather surprising statement needs elucidation. The hidden God, he says, is not the trinitarian God, or perhaps it is that believers do not yet *experience* the hidden God as the trinitarian God? A longer quotation from Bayer is necessary here:

> Theologians who presuppose the triune nature of God attribute the dark side of God to the person of the Father and speak of the wrath of God as the other side of his love. But that results in rendering impotent what Luther identified as demonic, which is experienced as completely incomprehensible, and was also discussed specifically in Scripture – as for example in the story of Jacob engaging in battle at the Jabbok with the unknown and anonymous one during the night. *The incomprehensible hiddenness of God does not imply that there is a Trinity; its clarity indicates the exact opposite*. Only the one who flees from the hidden God, who looks away, and who by the power of the Holy Spirit looks to Christ will recognize that he is Father as well.[289]

Simply, the doctrine of divine hiddenness cannot be dismissed in an attempt to preserve the divine unity. As I understand it, Bayer is saying that the believer cannot conceive of the fact that the "terrifying hiddenness"[290] is also one with the trinitarian God without it being revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Neither, when one experiences the assault of the *Deus absconditus*, can one know or assume what lies on the other side. If God must be experienced even as the devil, there is no taking for granted that the loving Father is the one behind the terror, who has sent God's Son to save human persons from the hidden God; one must experience the divine hiddenness in its full and terrifying force. This is why one must "flee to God against God [*Ad deum contra deum confungere*]."[291] The believer will only fully understand and experience a God free from God's hiddenness when they meet God face-to-face:[292] "Only when faith's journey is passed

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[288] Bayer, 91.
[289] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 336.
[290] Bayer, 213. Italics mine.
[291] See Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1892), 204. 26-27.
[292] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 91. Bayer, 91.

and we live by sight will *this monstrously biting and stinging discrepancy between God's terrible hiddenness and his love* as revealed through the Son in the Holy Spirit be expunged, overcome, and finally disappear."[293] While it is of course true that persons will only fully know God "when we meet God face-to-face", Bayer's argument, which so closely follows that of Luther, evidences a flaw in his (Bayer's) theological approach. Bayer begins with the terrifying aspects of God in the Old Testament, and only later turns to the New Testament, where God in Christ is revealed, the Holy Spirit is given, and we can begin to get a glimpse of the God whom believers would later identify as Three in One. Surely the Old Testament can only be read in light of the New, if one actually begins with the Gospels and Epistles. This is the type of approach of which Barth is so scathing. That is, the failure to begin with the revelation of Christ the Word. However, Bayer's perspective is not yet fully discussed. Next comes the love of God.

3.4.4 The Love of God

Bayer observes, regarding the nature of God's love, that it

> is not something that is obvious in and of itself; it can be experienced and conceptualized only in the dynamic action of God to provide redemption, which tears the sinner away from judgement 'as if through fire' (1 Cor. 3:15). His mercy and love is that which we have no right to claim, that which is completely secret and wondrous: that *he* turns to go the other way and repents (Hos. 11:8-9). God does this because we cannot; he turns back and takes his judgement away. That is the gospel. *The triune nature of God is nothing other than the God who reveals himself to us in the gospel*.[294]

Bayer is consequently critical of theologies that seek to turn love, namely God's love, into a theological principle. He explains that Luther denies this as an option. "Turning love into a principle makes it a form of enthusiasm, which impatiently does away with the difference between faith and seeing – and the assumption that the terrifying

[293] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 91. Italics mine.
[294] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 336. Author's italics.

hiddenness of God, which is so contradictory to his love, is already in the past."[295] Bayer criticises Barth and those who have followed in his theological footsteps, for "advocating the view that darkness and evil have been rendered impotent" since the event of the cross.[296] This suggests that evil is no longer real; evil is regarded as having only the *appearance* of evil.[297] Bayer suggests that the result of such a theological position is that "the reality of evil is no longer taken seriously by this solution; one might say in a nuanced way that evil has been robbed of its impact by a questionable application of Christology."[298] The crux of Bayer's concern is as follows: "it is questionable whether and how one can make love into a principle to stand the test in real situations of need, and correspondingly in pastoral care."[299] This brings the discussion to Bayer's chosen theological response to evil and divine hiddenness; that of *lament*. The theme of lament runs as a strong thread through Bayer's writings.

3.4.5 Lament

Building on the belief that Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness and concept of *Anfechtung* is his attempt to expound the truths found in the Bible,[300] Bayer offers the biblical practice of lament as the only solution to the problems discussed above. He expresses surprise that complaint or lament has been mostly overlooked as a literary genre in the Scriptures.[301] This is all the more surprising given that Luther himself encouraged the biblical practice of lament in prayer. For example, in his commentary on Psalm 118:5 Luther exhorts his readers in the following way:

> We read: "I called upon the Lord." You must learn to call. Do not sit by yourself or lie on a couch, hanging and shaking your head. Do not destroy yourself with your own thoughts by worrying. Do not strive and struggle to free yourself, and do not brood on your wretchedness, suffering, and misery. Say to yourself: "Come on, you lazy bum; down on your knees, and lift your eyes and hands toward heaven!" Read a

[295] Bayer, 208.
[296] Bayer, 208.
[297] See Bayer, 208.
[298] Bayer, 208.
[299] Bayer, 209.
[300] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 90.
[301] Bayer, 89–90.

> psalm or the Our Father, call on God, and tearfully lay your troubles before Him. Mourn and pray, as this verse teaches[.][302]

Bayer defines the practice of lament in the following way: "God is called on in the expectation that he will rescue from trouble. He, who for the moment is being experienced as a dreadful foe, completely incomprehensible and hidden in his harm, is reminded of his earlier help and of how he presents himself as one who promised to be true and faithful."[303] The concept of lament is important in both this discussion and to the human experience of divine hiddenness. It may indeed be the only avenue of response open to Christ's followers. Bayer explains that for "those who tak[e] seriously God's promise of life that is offered to all creatures," this promise seems to be daily contradicted.[304] Christians are forced to ask themselves the question of whether God keeps God's promises. As Bayer poetically expresses the problem, "in direct contradiction to… [God's] promise to hear, the problems of the world cry out in anguish."[305] He also states that in contrast to "the modern theologians of love" (such as Barth), Luther takes seriously the reality of evil in the world.[306] This allows Luther "to understand the world realistically."[307] Dennis Ngien observes that "Luther parted company with a tradition that readily submits suffering to the fate of divine providence without lamentation. Like the psalmist, Luther engaged with God and laid bare before him. Lamentation is the language of suffering and thus is a fitting category for a discourse with God."[308]

Bayer also emphasises that Luther's discussion of the distinction between the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus* is never for purposes of mere speculation, or an effort to make sense of suffering, nor an attempt to make "what is unbearable bearable."[309] Bayer sets up lament as the biblical response to the pain of "the self-

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[302] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 60. See also Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms*, Kindle Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).
[303] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 90.
[304] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 11.
[305] Bayer, 11.
[306] Bayer, 4.
[307] Bayer, 4.
[308] Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms*, Book Introduction, section heading: Lamentation as a Fitting Category for Discourse with God, n.p.
[309] See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 11.

contradiction of God." [310] The biblical complainant refuses to remain silent or consent to things as they are.[311] The person who laments refuses to "simply accept that which has befallen him by resigning himself finally and entirely to some wise and reasonable providence."[312] They ask "Why?" because they cannot understand the situation they find themselves in, and impatiently ask, "How much longer?"[313] Bearing witness to the many examples of lament recorded in Job, Lamentations, and the Psalms, Bayer exclaims that the attitude of the lament is "rebellion and resistance – not resignation!"[314] Drawing on Psalm 42:2, he further describes the genre of biblical complaint as a cry to look upon the face of God.[315] It is the desire "to no more perceive God in an ominous word, in such an obscure form, but to see God 'face-to-face'."[316] Having established a biblical precedent for lament as a legitimate response to the believer's experience of the *Deus absconditus*, Bayer offers a note of hope, declaring that "the gospel is a promise that this cry is already heard."[317] Finally, the act of lamentation is about justice. "Together with all co-creatures, we press hard and assail God to establish justice against the last enemy, death (Luke 18:1-8), crying to God to remain faithful to his own promise, to the justice God has established by the promise of life. The cry and plea to behold God's face is meant to be understood according to this forensic, definitive, justice-creating sense."[318] Finally, this section must assess how well and how accurately Bayer reads Luther.

3.4.6 How Bayer Reads Luther: Departure and Development

"Bayer begins and ends his understanding of divine hiddenness squarely in line with the thought of the reformer, but he also develops Luther's thoughts in two ways that the reformer did not," writes Miller. "The first of these two ways consists of the significant position occupied by the doctrine of the hidden God in Bayer's theology. The second entails Bayer's inclusion of the problem of evil within the discussion about the work of

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[310] Oswald Bayer, 'The Modern Narcissus', trans. Christine Helmer, *Lutheran Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 312. Bayer, 312.
[311] Bayer, 'The Modern Narcissus', Autumn 1995, 312.
[312] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 90. Bayer, 90.
[313] Bayer, 'God's Omnipotence', 90.
[314] Bayer, 90.
[315] Bayer, 'The Modern Narcissus', Autumn 1995, 312.
[316] Bayer, 312.
[317] Bayer, 312.
[318] Bayer, 312.

the hidden God in *Anfechtung*, forming a creational dimension to that discussion."[319] The way in which Bayer works the doctrine of divine hiddenness into his methodology has been discussed previously, as well as his connection between the doctrines of justification and creation. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how Bayer redefines Luther's concept of *Anfechtung*. Miller observes that Bayer moves quickly past the concept of *Anfechtung* as it relates to predestination,[320] setting up the experience of theodicy as the primary cause of *Anfechtung* in the life of the believer.[321] He "goes a step further than Luther by identifying such experience [of *Anfechtung*] as occurring within the believer's wrestling with the question of the problem of evil in the context of the promise he or she has already received from God in Christ."[322] This was demonstrated in the above discussion on lament, where believers struggle against the *Anfechtung* caused by their doubts concerning God's goodness, and whether God keeps God's promises to care for God's creatures and the world. Miller defends Bayer's decision to replace the causes of *Anfechtung* repeatedly described by Luther, primarily death and the question of predestination, as well as God's alien work in the life of the believer, with the problem of evil. I can see that it might be useful and reasonable to lower the emphasis on predestination and death, recognising that except for those within the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, few people (both believers and nonbelievers) concern themselves with the concept of eternal predestination.[323] However, I would argue that Bayer's replacement of the *opus alienum Dei* with theodicy avoids rather than solves such theological problems.

Miller argues that Bayer's doctrine of the hidden God is "squarely in line" with Luther, explaining that "Bayer goes a step further than Luther by identifying such experience as occurring within the believer's wrestling with the question of the problem of evil in the

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[319] See Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, 268.
[320] Miller, 271.
[321] Miller, 271.
[322] Miller, 273.
[323] Interestingly, Miller cites Bayer's reluctance to be associated with the reformed view of predestination as a possible reason for his passing quickly over the *Anfechtung* of predestination: "Bayer addresses the issue of double predestination only briefly and then leaves it out of his discussion of the relationship between the hiddenness of God and God's justification of the sinner through the promise in the gospel of Christ. Perhaps Bayer avoids discussing double predestination in order to avoid confusion with Reformed theology. This seems to be the case, given Bayer's strong rejection of Calvin's approach to double predestination." See Miller, 276.

context of the promise he or she has already received from God in Christ."[324] However this cannot be so, not if Bayer bypasses and ignores the true nature of God's alien work and the way it leads to God's proper work. If I may remind the reader of a quotation from Luther discussed in the previous chapter; "[a]lthough He is the God of life and salvation and this is His proper work, yet, in order to accomplish this, He kills and destroys. These works are alien to Him, but through them He accomplishes His proper work. For He kills our will that His may be established in us."[325] While Bayer attributes theodicy as the cause of *Anfechtung*, it is more personal than this for Luther. God's alien work consists of what God is doing *to me* and *in me*. God breaks down my independence and captures my will, which Satan has blinded to the point of my believing that I am the one in control. Making spiritual struggle more about the state of the world around a person than the condition of their rebellious heart and mind, depersonalises the experience of *Anfechtung* in a way which I do not think that Luther intended or of which he would have approved. However, I do appreciate the way in which Bayer embraces and develops Luther's understanding of the biblical practice of lament. Bayer's view that the only "practical" response to the experience of *Anfechtung* is to imitate the biblical practice of lament (as seen particularly in the Psalms), demonstrating his basic conviction that the theologian's primary task is to engage faithfully with the Word of God. Bayer recognises that this is a task which requires humility on the part of the believer: "[n]o interpretation of Holy Scripture will try to get around the way that God presented himself. The humiliation involved in the way God gave of himself will correspond to the humility with which one engages in interpretation."[326] Furthermore, I feel that Bayer's explanation of the difference between doubt and unbelief in the context of lament is on point. Basing his argument on Luther's understanding of sin as unbelief,[327] he explains that

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[324] Miller, 273.
[325] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, 335. Italics mine.
[326] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 34.
[327] Luther discusses sin as unbelief in his "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans", writing that "the Scriptures look especially into the heart and single out the root and source of all sin, which is unbelief in the inmost heart. As, therefore, faith alone makes a person righteous, and brings the Spirit and pleasure in good outward works, so unbelief alone commits sin[.]… Hence Christ calls unbelief the only sin, when he says in John 16[:8–9], 'The Spirit will convince the world of sin… because they do not believe in me.' For this reason too, before good or bad works take place, as the good or bad fruits, there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief. *Unbelief is the root, the sap, and the chief power of all sin*."[327]

> [o]nly by the power of the Word that has already been spoken… can such agonizing struggle teach one to pay attention to the Word. Because of the answer that has been given already, the lament in the midst of the agonizing struggle drives one to take hold of the oppressive, incomprehensible God at the point where he allows himself to be comprehensive and understood, in the Word of his promise.[328]

Bayer's understanding of doubt, unbelief, and legitimate complaint has the potential to free us from a fear of angering God with our questions. The practice of lament creates a place for the Christian to bring their grief and their grievances to God; they flee the "terrifying hiddenness" of the things they do not understand and come to the God they can safely look upon. That is, God in Christ, whose resurrection provides hope that the believer can hold onto; the faith that one day all things will be made right, and all questions will receive their answers. The final part of this chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of Luther's concept of *Anfechtung*.

3.5 *Anfechtung*: Introduction

Sometime between 1530 and 1540, Luther declared that "[i]f I should live a little longer, I would like to write a book about *Anfechtung*. Without it no man can rightly understand the Holy Scriptures or know what the fear or love of God is all about. In fact, without *Anfechtung* one does not really know what the spiritual life is all about."[329] In the introduction to his 1962 essay on *Anfechtung*,[330] theologian Warren C. Hovland suggests that Luther was particularly well-qualified "to speak about the nature of doubt, temptation, anxiety, and the dark night of the soul."[331] In short, *Anfechtung*. As noted in the above discussion on Loewenich's work, scholars seem mostly to agree that the word *Anfechtung* is practically impossible to translate into English. There is simply no word in the English language that can capture the meaning of the German term. A common

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See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 369. Italics mine.

[328] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 11–12.

[329] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Tischreden No. 4777 (1530-1540) (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883). Quotation translated by Hovland. See C. Warren Hovland, 'Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis', in *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton*, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Richmond: John Knox, 1962), 46.

[330] Hovland, 'Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis'.

[331] Hovland, 46.

definition of *Anfechtung* repeatedly quoted in the literature belongs to Roland Bainton: *Anfechtung* "may be a trial sent by God to test man, or an assault by the devil to destroy man. It is all the doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man."[332] As previously mentioned, Luther himself links *Anfechtung* with the Latin word *tentatio*. In what is probably the most positive description of the concept to be found in Luther's own writings, in 1539 he describes *Anfechtung* as "the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."[333] Here of course, the good doctor explains what the experience of *Anfechtung* can do for the believer; he offers no description of what the experience of *Anfechtung* actually consists.

3.5.1 Definitions of *Anfechtung*

As already indicated, *Anfechtung* is a slippery concept, and difficult to define. Janz observes that Luther's own descriptions of *Anfechtung* "vary widely."[334] He suggests that Luther himself found *Anfechtung* difficult to define, reminding the reader that "often people's most deeply felt experiences elude precise delineation in ordinary language."[335] This brings us to an important point to remember when exploring the concept of *Anfechtung*; that *it is an attempt to describe a spiritual experience or experiences, rather than to define a belief or doctrinal concept*. In Scaer's words, "doctrinal truths are believed in faith, [whereas] the *Anfechtungen*[336] are personal sufferings within the soul."[337] Hovland writes that for Luther it is "the religious problem *par excellence*"; that of a person's standing before God. This makes it truly a matter of life and death.[338] He explains that *Anfechtung* takes place within, or as a result of, the divine-human encounter.[339] Hovland therefore defines *Anfechtung* "as the terror the individual feels in the moment he is confronted with some dark aspect of God. God may

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[332] Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 31.
[333] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, 286–87.
[334] Denis R. Janz, 'To Hell (and Back) With Luther: The Dialectic of Anfechtung and Faith', *Seminary Ridge Review* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 45.
[335] Janz, 45.
[336] *Anfechtungen* is the plural form of *Anfechtung*.
[337] Scaer, 'The Concept of Anfechtung in Luther's Thought', 27.
[338] Hovland, 'Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis', 48.
[339] Hovland, 48.

confront man as judge, as enemy, as tempter, as the hidden one, as the arbitrary one."[340] In this description, *Anfechtung* seems essentially to be a fear of the unknown; an anxiety regarding the hidden God, and of God's disposition or will toward us. Reflecting on my extensive reading of Luther and his commentators, I believe the phrase "spiritual anguish" sums up well Luther's understanding of both *Anfechtung* and *tentatio.* The richest description of the experience comes from Thomas Trapp in his translation of *tentatio* as "agonizing struggle."[341]

3.5.2 Nominalism and the Fear of Death

Gerrish explains well Luther's very real fear of the hidden God, which is something most people living in the twenty-first century find difficult to grasp. Gerrish insists that

> it is impossible to read…[Luther] and not to recognize that there was a terror in his encounter with the hidden, predestinating God and that the emotional, religious, or spiritual content of the experience burst the limits of the merely rational and conceptual. We can judge from his own testimony that the encounter was a shattering one, which brought him right up to the rim of the abyss, where the Naked and Unknown God waited and threatened.[342]

To understand this dread of a God who predestines some to heaven and others to hell, it is necessary to return to the roots of Luther's theological training in the *via moderna* and the doctrinal/philosophical system of nominalism. One of the pioneers of nominalist thinking was William of Ockham, who

> insisted on the *potentia Dei absoluta,* the absolute potentiality of God. However, this teaching claimed that God's will is unpredictable. Such a position introduced the element of dread and uncertainty in a human's relationship to God. One was left to realize that God can damn as

[340] Hovland, 48.
[341] Thomas Trapp has translated Bayer's *Martin Luthers Theologie. Eine Vergegenärtigung* into English. See especially Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 19–21.
[342] B.A. Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', *The Journal of Religion* 53, no. 3 (July 1973): 274.

> whimsically as save. Ockham's reasoning, and that of the *via moderna*, led to the notion that one cannot deduce a reliable saving will of God.[343]

This inability to know whether one is saved or dammed was a source of considerable worry and fear to the medieval Christian.[344] It therefore comes as no surprise that seeking to discover "God's intentions and will… was the pursuit of the predominant theology of Luther's time."[345] For a young man of Luther's extreme spiritual sensitivity, it was the cause of severe *Anfechtung*.

3.5.3 Luther's Theological Determinism

The reader will remember the discussion in Chapter Two concerning Luther's historic dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam about the nature of the human will with regard to salvation; of whether it is bound (Luther) or free to choose (Erasmus). Luther insists that the human person has no ability to decide to follow God, and neither has done nor can do anything to ensure his or her own salvation. He dismissed the idea of merit and salvation by works and clung to the soon-to-be classic Reformation doctrine of "justification by grace through faith". Gerrish explains that "[w]ere it not so, the source of assurance would be snatched away from us: our confidence rests in the knowledge that God has taken salvation out of the control of *our* wills and has placed it under the control of *his*."[346] It is Luther's conviction that "God foreknows nothing contingently, but that he foresees and purposes and does all things by his immutable, eternal, and infallible will."[347] Luther's theological/divine determinism; his conviction that nothing happens that does not happen by the hand of God, leaves Luther with at least two serious theological problems. First, the conviction that there is a side to God that is hidden behind the God revealed in Christ – an unknown God with a concealed and possibly contradictory will – is understandably a cause of great *Anfechtung* for Luther. God in God's hiddenness becomes "the God who will forever remain unknown to us, a mysterious and sinister being whose intentions remain concealed from us."[348] Second, it

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[343] Anna M. Madsen, *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective*, Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology (Eugene: Pickwick, 2007), 71.
[344] See McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 110–11. and Madsen, *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective*, 71.
[345] Madsen, *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective*, 71.
[346] Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', 271.
[347] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 37.
[348] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 165.

suggests that any evil or suffering present in the world that is not caused by human sin must be eventually traced back to God, even if it first filtered through the medium of Satan's actions.

Both McGrath and Gerrish offer perceptive criticisms concerning the theological problems which Luther creates for himself. McGrath suggests that Luther reaches an impasse when he declares not only that "God wills many things which he does not disclose in his Word,"[349] but he (Luther) allows that God's hidden and revealed will may contradict each other.[350] In Gerrish's words, "the two wills fall apart in a bifurcation which Luther does not profess himself able to overcome."[351] In short, Luther compromises his commitment to doing theology based solely on the cross.[352] McGrath goes so far as to say that Luther's failure to solve this "dilemma… [of] his own creation" is an "abandonment of… *Crux sola est nostra theologia* [the cross alone is our theology]!"[353] Gerrish echoes this criticism, declaring that "Luther's argument ends up jeopardizing his own theological starting point."[354] It seems to me that in an effort to maintain God's omnipotence, Luther creates insurmountable contradictions within his doctrine of God. Gerrish extends this problem to the Lutheran tradition itself, identifying "an unresolved dialectic in Reformation faith corresponding to a dialectic in the conception of God."[355] McGrath cautions that "if… statements… can be made on the basis of divine revelation [which] may be refuted by appealing to a hidden and inscrutable God, whose will probably contradicts that of the revealed God," then theology becomes irrelevant.[356] It seems that the only solution Luther can offer regarding these theological problems (which are arguably of his own creation), is the command to refrain from enquiry into the Divine; to flee the hidden God and cling to Christ and his cross. However, if there is a possibility that there exists a divine will

[349] McGrath, 166.
[350] See McGrath, 166.
[351] Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', 274.
[352] See Gerrish, 273. and McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 167.
[353] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 167.
[354] Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', 273.
[355] Gerrish, 290.
[356] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 167.

which contradicts the heart of God revealed in Christ, does that not place the cross to which we cling on shifting sands, rather than on the solid rock of God's Word?

3.5.4 *Anfechtung*, Predestination, and the Sacraments

Luther regarded the doctrine of the predestination and the consequent fear of death as the most severe source of *Anfechtung* a believer could experience.[357] Luther himself had suffered strong doubts regarding his salvation[358] and his advice to those suffering from similar anxieties was simple: we are to have faith in the Gospel and efficacy of the sacraments.[359] In his lectures on Genesis, Luther explains that Christ "instituted… [the sacraments] to make you completely certain and to remove the disease of doubt from your heart, in order that you might not only believe with the heart but also see with your physical eyes and touch with your hands."[360] Luther chastises his hearers for failing to take comfort or assurance in the aforementioned sacraments.

> Why, then, do you reject these and complain that you do not know whether you have been predestined? You have the Gospel; you have been baptized; you have absolution; you are a Christian. Nevertheless, you doubt and say that you do not know whether you believe or not, whether you regard as true what is preached about Christ in the Word and the sacraments.[361]

Almost five hundred years have passed since Luther offered advice and comfort to the many within his congregation who viewed death with trepidation, fearing that God would not be gracious to them, nor heaven's gates open to them. In the following section, I will suggest that Christians no longer fear death in the same way, but that other aspects of contemporary life cause persons to experience *Anfechtung.*

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[357] See Scaer, 'The Concept of Anfechtung in Luther's Thought', 25–26.
[358] See for example Luther's 1531 letter to Barbara Lisskirchen in Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 115–17.
[359] I would like to note here that I do not share Luther's view that the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist hold a kind of salvific power of their own; that they help to keep believers "within the fold". I view them rather as symbols of my commitment to Christ and to my ongoing involvement within his body, the Church.
[360] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 45.
[361] LW: Vol. 5, 45–46.

3.5.5 The Experience of *Anfechtung* in Contemporary Society

One could argue that for individuals living in the beginning of the sixteenth century, a fear of death was natural. War, plague, famine, and other natural disasters were always imminent. Many women died in childbirth, and without modern antibiotics minor infections often resulted in death. In a way that a majority of persons living in Western developed countries cannot understand today, Luther and his contemporaries lived with death as a close companion. Also, without having the knowledge of later scientific discoveries, the cause of death was often a frightening mystery. However, the time when many in the West had at least a nominal connection to the Church and a belief in heaven and hell has long passed. Millions now live with little or no affiliation to the Christian Church or indeed to any of the major world religions.[362] To generalise, many of our neighbours believe that after death they will go to heaven, achieve eternal peace, or reach some kind of higher spiritual plane as a reward for their having lived as a "basically good person". This belief that because of one's goodness one warrants a better existence hereafter may be seen as a kind of works righteousness. The alternative to this is of course the belief that there *is* no spiritual realm, and that physical death is simply the end. While atheists might be apprehensive about the *process* of dying or of leaving loved ones behind, they have – at least in theory – no dread regarding what might be waiting "on the other side". But what about those within the myriad of Christian traditions and communities which exist today? Counting myself among these believers, I suggest that we no longer fear death and eternal damnation in the same way; that the *Anfechtungen* of the Middle Ages are no more. Thanks are due not only to the Reformers of the sixteenth century but also to the revivalist preachers of the early eighteenth century[363] for the strong grasp which most Protestant Christians have on the doctrine of righteousness by grace through faith. Catholics too inhabit a more developed doctrine of grace, as well as their belief in the efficacy of the sacraments, despite retaining the practice of the priest as an intermediary in the confession of sin.

In a 1973 article, Gerrish declared that "the symbol of the Hidden God, so far from being ready for the rubbish heap of discarded medieval superstitions, may even be said

[362] For example, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.
[363] For example Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758.

to have a peculiar strength, vitality, modernity about it."[364] He suggests that the idea of "the strange, threatening *Deus absconditus* – the God who takes upon himself the features of the devil", can be understood by contemporary men and women.[365] Gerrish further explains that it is "in the anxiety of finitude and insignificance, [that] modern man experiences the hiddenness of God [and faces] this other dark possibility that he really is lost in a boundless and senseless universe."[366] Gerrish's observations were extremely insightful, and remain so. More than forty years later we are still afraid of being alone, some fearing loneliness more than death. Persons strive to be smarter, fitter, wealthier, more attractive, and more successful, all in an effort to find love, acceptance, and that ever elusive "happiness". They also fear that they are not enough, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "imposter syndrome". Imposter syndrome is the fear of being found out as a fraud; that others will come to see that we are not all that our words and actions profess us to be. Many are haunted by crippling insecurities. Christian writer and blogger Kelsi Klembara believes that "[t]oday's world has replaced *Anfechtung* with an entirely new sort of despair: the kind that wakes you up in the morning and drives you to scroll endlessly through Instagram, the type that feeds the fear of internet trolls and the insecurities of twitter bullies."[367] She explains that this kind of anxiety is not concerned with God's wrath, but with "the definitions of a world who has killed Him."[368] "Definitions" seems an odd choice of word here. "Judgements" seems more logical, but perhaps the writer seeks to highlight the fact that in our contemporary *Anfechtung* experience it is our peers who set the standard, who seem to define our worth. Klembara describes how Western civilisation did away with God, believing that it would be better off: "We thought when we killed God we also killed the guilt and the *Anfechtung* too.… But try as we might, we cannot really escape suffering, we can only repackage it, or perhaps avoid it for a little while."[369] Klembara suggests that human persons now fear the wrath of their own kind, rather than the wrath of the Divine. "Our modern *Anfechtungen* no longer stem from anxiety about God's

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[364] Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', 291.
[365] See Gerrish, 291.
[366] See Gerrish, 291.
[367] Kelsi Klembara, 'Luther's Anxiety of the Heart and Today's Despair', *1517.* (blog), 27 July 2018, https://1517.org/1517blog/kelsiklembara/anxiety.
[368] Klembara.
[369] Klembara.

acceptance but instead anxiety about the acceptance of others."[370] She goes on to identify a disastrous consequence of society's "God is dead" mentality; "[w]hile we've convinced ourselves that we've eliminated the problem of *Anfechtung*, in reality, we've only abolished the solution."[371] In other words, the emotional and spiritual anguish that contemporary persons experience is no less than that experienced by their medieval forebears, but they have dismissed the only One who can lead them through it and out the other side. Namely, Jesus. Klembara reminds the reader that believers can neither soothe "the *Anfechtung* of our souls," nor "console the anxiety and despair created by our own standards",[372] an anxiety and despair that is aggravated and inflamed by society's saturation and obsession with the internet and social media. Klembara wisely recognises that the solution to this twenty-first century *Anfechtung* is exactly the same solution that Luther preached: "only in clinging to the promises of Christ, delivered through water, wine, and bread, are we freed from our prisons of angst."[373] We must return again and again to the Lord's table.

Although Klembara displays much sensitivity and insight regarding the contemporary "human condition", she misreads Luther at one important point. For him, the experience of *Anfechtungen* is peculiar to Christians. This is because *Anfechtung* stems from the divine-human relationship, in our inability to discern the will and nature of the *Deus absconditus*. Hence Luther's counselling believers to cling to Christ, in whom God's love, compassion, and good will for humankind is revealed. Second, believers experience *Anfechtung* through the actions of Satan, who would try to heap the guilt of their sin again upon them, sow fear and discouragement, tempt them to stray from walking in the will of God, and cause them to doubt Christ's salvific gift and the Father's promises to them. Consequently, while non-believers may experience anxiety and despair, it is not the peculiar anguish of *Anfechtung*. However, neither are Christians immune to imposter syndrome. Losing hold of the truth that one's self-worth and identity are based in Christ; it is easy to fall into a fruitless striving for approval from others.

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[370] Klembara.
[371] Klembara.
[372] Klembara.
[373] Klembara.

3.5.6 On Humility

This talk of human insecurities brings us to the problematic subject of humility in Luther's doctrine of the *opus alienum Dei*, and its manifestation in *Anfechtungen*. Problematic that is, for the feminist theologians the reader will encounter in the next two chapters. This section will therefore serve as an introduction to and provide a glimpse of some of the issues to be discussed in Part Two of this thesis. Luther takes the time to speak about the role and importance of humility in Theses Sixteen through Eighteen of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.[374] Quoting 1 Peter 5:5[375] and Matthew 23:12,[376] Luther explains that "the law humbles, grace exalts.… [T]hrough knowledge of sin… comes humility, and through humility grace is acquired. Thus an action which is alien to God's nature results in a deed belonging to his very nature: he makes a person the sinner so that he may make righteous."[377] As Luther makes clear, the Law should bring about an attitude of humility before God, which in turn allows us to receive God's grace. Thesis Eighteen states that "man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ."[378] This despair, which stems from the realisation that a person cannot save themselves, is a form of *Anfechtung*. This creation of despair and humility is God's alien work within the believer, which then allows God to do God's proper work, the giving of God's saving grace to the humbled person. Madsen explains that "[a]lthough it goes against reason, a believer must experience *Anfechtung*, a feeling of alienation and humility before the Lord, before one can truly experience God."[379]

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[374] "16. The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.
17. Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.
18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ." Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 40. For an explanation of the theses, see LW: 31, 50–52.

[375] "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5). Luther quotes the last phrase of the verse here, which is a paraphrase of Proverbs 3:34.

[376] "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12).

[377] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 51.

[378] Luther, 51.

[379] Madsen, *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective*, 78.

Luther's theology is rife with paradox; God is hidden *and* revealed, God performs both alien *and* proper work in the life of the believer, and also it seems, there is paradox in Luther's concept of humility. Disputation Sixteen suggests both that Christians should humble themselves, *and* that it is the law that does the humbling. McGrath explains it well: "in order that a man may be justified, he must recognise that he is a sinner, and humble himself before God. Before man can be justified, he must be utterly humiliated – and it is God who both humiliates and justifies."[380] The point of concern here is whether or not this act of humbling oneself might be misconstrued as an action on the person's part towards the gaining of salvation. In other words, a work that helps to merit grace. In this case, could not humility become an act of pride? Forde dismisses this idea out of hand, explaining that Luther's concept of humility can in no way be conceived of as a human work. Rather, he emphasises the fact that

> humans have no active capacity to humble themselves but only a passive capacity. They can *be* humbled. Thus… humility is always something done to us. The instrument of this doing is the law and wrath, *God's* 'alien work,' not our pious posturing. Humility in this context means precisely to be reduced to the position where we claim *absolutely nothing*.[381]

To those who persist in making humility a "work" Forde provides the following response, one which sounds remarkably like an answer Luther himself might have given.

> [T]he impetuous question of whether or not humbling oneself or falling down and praying for grace is 'doing something' can only be turned back on the questioner: 'When you humble yourselves and plead for grace, are you making the claim you are doing something? If so, you are not pleading for grace but only for your own cause. And so you are still lost. Give up and believe the gospel!'[382]

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[380] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 151.
[381] Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 62. Author's italics.
[382] Forde, 63.

The argument has established then that God's alien work of humbling the sinner is inseparably linked to their reception of God's grace. A person cannot come to a saving faith in Christ without first being humbled by God. Indeed, "'God gives grace to the humble' was a watchword of Augustinian – and Lutheran – theology".[383] A reflection on the nature of humility also necessitates a discussion on passivity for, as has been demonstrated, both believers and "pre-believers" are passive recipients of God's work within them. This passivity is an important aspect of Luther's doctrine of the bound will.[384] The apparent need for such humility and passivity has long troubled feminist theologians. At first glance, Luther's conviction of the need for persons to be humble and passive, not only in the process of salvation but within the divine-human relationship, does not meld well with contemporary feminist convictions regarding women's need for self-autonomy. Understandably, talk of humility and the like are often viewed as dangerous and detrimental to women's flourishing. This is something that the remainder of this thesis will explore.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

In a discussion of how Barth, Loewenich, and Bayer read Luther's theology of hiddenness, and an assessment of how accurately they have done so, this chapter has sought to demonstrate ways in which Luther's thought has been criticised, embraced, adapted, and misunderstood. Through Barth's strong focus on the doctrine of revelation, and the ways in which believers are bound to and interact with God's threefold Word, he demonstrates that Luther's suggestion of God apart from the God revealed in Christ is less than biblical. However, Barth's assertion that God's wrath is merely the flipside of God's love may be oversimplifying the matter. While Loewenich erroneously collapses God's hiddenness in the cross into Luther's wider concept of the *Deus absconditus* into whose nature no person may enquire, he helpfully reminds the reader of the benefit, however painful, of the ways that God hides Godself. Namely, the experience of suffering provides an opportunity for spiritual growth and strengthens our faith. Meanwhile, Bayer's definition of theology as a reflection on the sinning human and the justifying God can help in the vital task of keeping God as the centre of

[383] Forde, 61.
[384] For Luther's treatise *The Bondage of the Will*, see Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*.

theological reflection. As the reader will see in the upcoming chapters, feminist theology can tempt the pursuer to anthropocentricism, making the theological task about ourselves. Finally, this chapter's assessment of *Anfechtung* highlights some problematic aspects of Luther's doctrine of divine hiddenness. Particularly, that God leads the believer into suffering and that it comes by God's hand. This leaves Christians with no other route of reflection but to conclude that God is at least partially responsible for the suffering of God's creation. While it may seem a narrow distinction to say that God permits suffering for our growth rather than that God is the one who brings it about, there is an ocean's width of difference in how such claims cast God's character.

Chapter 4 A Christian Feminist Self

4.1 Chapter Introduction

We have so far explored relevant doctrines in Luther's own writings and discussed their appearance and usage in the theology of a small selection of theologians, both historical and contemporary. This chapter moves us closer to the goal of this research project, a description of feminist Christian flourishing, by beginning to sketch a picture of a Christian feminist self that takes seriously Luther's theological insights, as well as the concerns and contributions of late twentieth and early twenty-first century feminist theologians. It is not possible to survey the whole canon of feminist theology. However, focusing on the work of Valerie Saiving, Daphne Hampson, Mary Gaebler, and Serene Jones, the following chapter will address issues of human agency, divine and human relationality, and in light of the traditional doctrines of original sin as pride, the breaking down and undoing required in the process of salvation. To outline this chapter in brief, it will begin with Saiving's classic definition of feminine sin and its challenge to theology, as well as surveying historical and contemporary responses to her work. Second will come an engagement with post-Christian theologian Daphne Hampson, who has dismissed Christian theology's description of God as hegemonic, particularly in its Lutheran form. She objects to the assertion that we cannot exist as true selves apart from our being in relationship with God, a God who is above us and apart from us, and who is deserving of worship. She also introduces the idea of "centredness in relation". Next comes an extensive interaction with the work of Lutheran theologian Mary Gaebler. Gaebler develops a theological anthropology that allows for a much greater level of human agency in Luther's writings than has generally been recognised by Protestant theologians. Important to Gaebler's argument, is her emphasis on the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. She also focuses on relationality in Luther, in terms of the believer's relationships with God and neighbour. Gaebler's work also provides significant engagement with Hampson. The fourth and final feminist scholar to be explored in this chapter is Serene Jones. Jones' work is rooted in the Reformed tradition. Drawing on both Martin Luther and John Calvin, she attempts to reformulate the doctrines of justification and sanctification, in order to address what she regards as errors in the traditional Protestant formulation of salvation. That one might avoid telling the story of the rebellious sinner whose pride must be broken, she reverses the traditional presentation of the aforementioned doctrines. She believes that in this way

the story of salvation might be narrated without causing further damage to the woman who is already broken, who lacks proper boundaries and a healthy sense of self. To begin then with Saiving.

4.2 Valerie Saiving

In 1960, *The Journal of Religion* published an essay titled "The Human Situation: A Feminine View".[385] The writer was Valerie Saiving, a woman pursuing graduate studies in theology at the University of Chicago. Saiving's essay has been described as "groundbreaking"[386] and "monumental",[387] while Mark Douglas credits Saiving with "provid[ing]… a set of tools by which to criticize the deficiencies of the implicitly masculine theology described by [Reinhold] Niebuhr and others."[388] Despite the more recent appreciation for her work, "Saiving's article lay mostly dormant in theological discussions for nearly twenty years. By the 1980s, though, her ideas had stimulated many scholars, particularly women, to awaken and articulate their own distinctive feminist theologies."[389] Back in the 1970s, American women had begun to enter seminaries and the theological faculties of the country's graduate schools in larger numbers. The "awakening" was further spurred on by the publication of Jewish American feminist theologian Judith Plaskow's *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*.[390] Plaskow encouraged other women "in the struggle with traditional religion" to "tak[e] up Valerie Saiving's cudgel and attempt[t] to write systematic theology from a feminist perspective."[391] Situated as I am, a theologically trained woman working two decades into the twenty-first century, it is difficult for me to imagine the significance of "The Human Situation"; what it must have meant to many Anglo-American women of Saiving's generation and more particularly to the generation of women who came after.

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[385] Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View'.
[386] Margaret D. Kamitsuka, 'Towards a Postmodern and Postcolonial Interpretation of Sin', *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 2 (April 2004): 179.
[387] Lyon, 'Pride and the Symptoms of Sin', 97.
[388] Mark Douglas, 'Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 103.
[389] Mark Douglas and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, 'Revisiting Valerie Saiving's Challenge to Reinhold Niebuhr: Honoring Fifty Years of Reflection on "The Human Situation: A Feminine View": Introduction and Overview', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 75.
[390] Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham/London: University of America Press, 1980).
[391] Plaskow, vii.

In a 1988 interview, Saiving recalled that "I got so many letters from all over the world,… Many of the people who wrote me said, 'Oh, I was so glad to find that you were saying what I was feeling, but couldn't put into words.'"[392] Saiving begins her essay with the following: "I am a student of theology; I am also a woman. Perhaps it strikes you as curious that I put these two assertions beside each other, as if to imply that one's sexual identity has some bearing on his theological views."[393] For many theologians today, the truth of this statement goes without saying – we do not find it "curious" at all. Before Saiving however, no one had dared to suggest in print that someone's gender (as well as their race and social class) could or did influence the way they did theology. She took up the task of "criticiz[ing], from the viewpoint of feminine experience, the estimate of the human situation made by certain contemporary theologians."[394]

Although Saiving lays much of the blame on theologians Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr for the strong Protestant emphasis on sin as pride and self-sacrifice as its solution,[395] she "believe[s] that they represent a widespread tendency in contemporary theology to describe man's predicament as rising from his separateness and the anxiety occasioned by it *and to identify sin with self-assertion and love with selflessness*."[396]

> The human condition… [has been] universally characterized by anxiety, for, while man is a creature, subject to the limitations of all finite existence, he is different from other creatures because he is free.… This freedom of man, which is the source of his… creativity, is also the source of his temptation to sin.… *Sin is the self's attempt to overcome that anxiety by magnifying its own power, righteousness, or knowledge*.[397]

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[392] Valerie Saiving et al., 'A Conversation with Valerie Saiving', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 99–115.
[393] Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', 100.
[394] Saiving, 100.
[395] Specifically, Nygren's *Agape and Eros*, and Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963). and Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, Second Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).
[396] Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', 100. Italics mine.
[397] Saiving, 100. Italics mine.

Saiving explains that within traditional theology, the concepts of sin and love are dependent upon one another:[398] "Love is the precise opposite of sin... and the one real solution to the fundamental predicament in which man stands. Love, according to these theologians, is completely self-giving, taking no thought for its own interests but seeking only the good of the other."[399] She explains that the above description of love has long been viewed as "normative and redemptive" because it "answers to man's deepest need". However, if traditional theology has been mistaken in its description of "the human situation," then its overarching doctrines of sin and love are brought into question.[400] Saiving contends that due to "significant differences" in the way men and women experience the world, "feminine experience reveals in a more emphatic fashion certain aspects of the human situation which are present but less obvious in the experience of men."[401] Consequently, because theologies of sin and love have been based on male experience, "*these doctrines do not provide an adequate interpretation of the situation of women*."[402]

Saiving then moves on to an extended discussion regarding the differences between humans as male and female. She draws on both biological and anthropological arguments, relying heavily on the work of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead.[403] Saiving explains that traditional theology's description of the human condition as "anxiety, estrangement, and the conflict between necessity and freedom" and its accompanying description of sin as "pride, will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects rather than persons", is relevant to "modern man's existence".[404] However these are incomplete definitions of both human experience and human sin, which brings the discussion to the most well-known and oft quoted passage in Saiving's essay:

> the temptations of woman *as woman* are not the same as the temptations of man *as man,* and the specifically feminine forms of sin – 'feminine'

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[398] Saiving, 101.
[399] Saiving, 101.
[400] Saiving, 101.
[401] Saiving, 101.
[402] Saiving, 101. Italics mine.
[403] See Saiving, 101–8. See also Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: New American Library, 1959).
[404] Saiving, 107.

> not because they are confined to women because women are incapable of sinning in other ways but because they are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure – have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as 'pride' and 'will-to-power.' They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; an inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason – in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.[405]

The reader will find that from time to time I will refer back to Saiving's criticism of traditional definitions of human sin, and to her description of feminine sin.

4.2.1 Theological Responses: Race, Sexuality, and Social Class

In 2012, the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* published a roundtable discussion, a collection of ten essays on the following theme: "Fifty Years of Reflection on Valerie Saiving's 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View.'" In their introduction to the roundtable, Mark Douglas and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty honour both Saiving's contribution to feminist theology and the continued significance of her work.

> No one can deny what Saiving accomplished: she clearly identified the neglect, misunderstandings, and mischaracterizations of women's experience by a vast and overwhelming majority of male theologians. She called into question theological anthropologies and views of sin, redemption, and love promoted by twentieth-century white male theologians, particularly Reinhold Niebuhr. And she shaped a pattern for feminist theological criticisms of modern theology – one that attends not only to women's experience but also to the construction of identity and nontheological disciplines – that continues to this day.[406]

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[405] Saiving, 108–9.
[406] Douglas and Hinson-Hasty, 'Revisiting Valerie Saiving's Challenge to Reinhold Niebuhr: Honoring Fifty Years of Reflection on "The Human Situation: A Feminine View": Introduction and Overview', 75.

Despite continued appreciation for her 1960 paper, Saiving has garnered serious critique. To begin with, she has been criticised for claiming to speak for all women in her description of female experience. Womanist and more recently queer theologians have criticised feminist theologians, Saiving among them, for assuming that their voices represent all women, and for their ignorance regarding the fact that they are speaking out of their own white, Anglo-American, heterosexual, middle-class experience. As feminist Susan Thistlethwaite writes in her 1989 book *Sex, Race and God*, "[w]ithout a historically accurate definition of what it means to be female in different racial, class, and sexual role definitions, Saiving's contribution to understanding 'sin for women' is misleading."[407] Mark Douglas adds that Saiving's essay is "insufficiently nuanced with regard to the multiple contexts in which women exist and… struggle." Like Thistlethwaite, Douglas points out that the writing of early feminist theologians "proved irrelevant" to many women:[408]

> As womanist, *mujerista*, Asian, lesbian, and other feminist scholars have demonstrated, the context of white upper-middle-class and generally highly educated women can no more function as templates for the experiences of all women than Niebuhr's description of the human condition can function as a template for all persons.[409]

To her credit, Saiving later acknowledged her oversight in this area. She explains that

> even limiting my article to American culture, a lot of things I say here may not be true of subcultures in our culture – of poor whites, or of black people or Chicanos. What I say comes out of not only the middle class, but the white middle class. Some of what I say might have wider validity, although it might be said quite differently by people from other cultures. *But what I know now that I don't think I understood then is*

[407] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroad/Continuum, 1989), 79. Quoted in Rebekah Miles, 'Valerie Saiving Reconsidered', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 80.
[408] Douglas, 'Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving', 106.
[409] Douglas, 106.

> *that the class and race you belong to are absolutely crucial in determining how you experience the world*.[410]

4.2.2 Theological Responses: Experience and Essentialism

Mark Douglas observes that "the concept of experience has fallen on philosophical hard times,"[411] while Rebekah Miles writes that essentialism has become "a dirty word" among many working in the academic fields of feminist theory and feminist theology.[412] She explains that during the last fifty years, "scholars within women's theological discourse have been engaged in a hesitant call-and-response cycle with each new generation or group pointing out the errors of those who came before. Observing this chain of error and indictment, it is tempting to forego *any* claims about experience and instead to fall silent."[413] We can add to this Douglas' further observation that "[e]ven where experience maintains its grasp,… it is increasingly particularized, thereby making it decreasingly helpful as a generally applicable philosophical or theological term."[414] While it is true that Saiving's essay offers a "dated account of women's experience and sexual differentiation",[415] as well as "mak[ing] some gross generalizations about gender",[416] both Miles and Douglas agree that there remains a need for experience to be used as a category in theology, including the field of feminist theology. Douglas believes that experience remains a "useful too[l] for enquiry", provided that "when we use the language of experience, we… connect it to a sufficiently rich and deep tradition or conceptual framework [in order] for that language to function."[417] I also agree with Miles in her assertion that

> in spite of the controversies around claims about human nature or women's or men's experience and in spite of the potential for error, we are morally obligated to consider the differences that basic facts of biology make for a constellation of experiences for men and women.…

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[410] Saiving et al., 'A Conversation with Valerie Saiving', 111. Italics mine.
[411] Douglas, 'Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving', 104.
[412] Miles, 'Valerie Saiving Reconsidered', 84.
[413] Miles, 84. Author's italics.
[414] Miles, 104.
[415] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'The Imago Dei and a Reformed Logic for Feminist/Womanist Critique', in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 102.
[416] Miles, 'Valerie Saiving Reconsidered', 84.
[417] Douglas, 'Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving', 106.

> While taking exception to some of Saiving's claims, it is difficult to mount a convincing argument that basic biological differences between men and women do not have significant ramifications for male and female experiences across culture and time. Because of these basic differences, women around the world and across cultures are more likely to be raped, more likely to be beaten by their spouse, and more likely to be single parents in poverty."[418]

While she is careful to assert that the basic facts of female biology "do not mean that all women everywhere will experience these things", Miles emphasises that women are more at risk *simply because they are women*. As a result, she believes that "feminists need to take risks and make claims that could provide the basis for a more just social order."[419]

4.2.3 Assessing Saiving's Description of Feminine Sin

This discussion of Valerie Saiving's 1960 paper will conclude with a brief assessment of her definition or description of female sin. I will begin by addressing two criticisms, namely the observation that Saiving's description of female sin appears to be rooted in female biology, and also the criticism that "feminine" sins are inherently less "sinful" than "masculine" sins. As mentioned above, Judith Plaskow was among the first to critically engage with Saiving, with the goal of further developing her ideas. Despite her appreciation for Saiving, Plaskow explains that

> Saiving's own distinction between masculine and feminine character was not flexible enough to serve as a consistent basis for theological criticism. Although she approached her subject by asking how men and women have experienced themselves rather than whether there are innate differences between them, she tended to see differences and experiences rooted quite solidly in biology. *This raised questions as to how 'underdevelopment or negation of the self,' being inherent, can at*

[418] Miles, 'Valerie Saiving Reconsidered', 84–85.
[419] Miles, 85.

> *the same time be considered sinful* and why and how theology should seek to discourage what is inherent in the feminine character.[420]

While not "denying all innate differences" between male and female, Plaskow prefers to focus on the cultural factors that shape the "feminine personality".[421] I would however, like to attempt an answer to Plaskow's question regarding how aspects of our biological makeup might be considered sinful. If one holds to some form of the doctrine of human fallenness and inherited original sin, then it is not unreasonable to assume that sin affects us at the biological level. If the psalmist is right that "I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me",[422] then there could surely be characteristics or behaviours inherent in humankind for which God nevertheless holds us responsible. Also, the same aspects of our personality or character which lead us to do good or to serve others, can be a temptation to sin. For example, Saiving suggests that a woman's

> capacity for surrendering her individual concerns in order to serve the immediate needs of others – a quality which is so essential to the maternal role – can, on the other hand, induce a kind of diffuseness of purpose, a tendency towards being easily distracted, a failure to discriminate between the more or less important, and an inability to focus in a sustained manner on the pursuit of any single goal.[423]

However, whether men and women are really inclined to different types of sin is less certain.

This brings me to the second point of critique: Saiving's claim that men and women sin in different ways. To repeat, Saiving does not say that men cannot commit what she describes as feminine sins, nor that "women are incapable of sinning in other ways". Rather that the sins she describes "are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure".[424] My point of contention here is that Saiving's feminine sins appear much less serious and less likely to negatively impact the world than her description of male

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[420] Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*, 2. Italics mine.
[421] See Plaskow, 2.
[422] See Psalm 51:5. (New International Version).
[423] Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', 109.
[424] Saiving, 109.

sin. The actions that stem from the sin of pride are violent and far-reaching, while Saiving's "list of feminine sins reflec[t] a pitiful waste of human possibilities more than actual sins appropriate for a confessional."[425] It is also difficult to take Saiving's sins seriously, as demonstrated in the following comments by Jodie Lyon. Lyon explains that "[f]rom Saiving's perspective, women's sin looked nothing like pride. Her critique of Niebuhr's theological anthropology was based on her own experience and the experiences of other women she knew."[426] Interestingly, Lyon describes Niebuhr *as both validating and judging* the theological tool of experience:[427]

> In Niebuhrian theology, the pervasive sinfulness of the human person mitigates the ability to judge theology's fit with experience. Our sinfulness can cause us to intentionally misread our experiences. Sin involves not only doing what is wrong but also going to great lengths to convince others, and even ourselves, that what we are doing is legitimate.… We are consummate spin doctors, turning vices to virtues. *This means our experience cannot always be trusted to identify sinful behavior or to root out the cause of our sinful actions*.[428]

Women (and men) can therefore deceive themselves, even when it comes to describing their own experience.

4.2.4 Concluding Thoughts

As the reader has seen, Saiving's article does indeed contain flaws and oversights. However, her work helped to open up a new vista in feminist scholarship, clearing the way for ongoing feminist theological reflection on sin and salvation, and the structure of female theological identity. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson explains,

> Saiving's work went beyond the complaint about the explicit historical disempowerment of women.… Saiving initiated the crucial task of

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[425] See Roland Stone's discussion of the critique offered by Aurelia Takacs Fule in Roland H. Stone, 'Reinhold Niebuhr and the Feminist Critique of Universal Sin', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 95. See also Aurelia Takacs Fule, 'Being Human before God: Reinhold Niebuhr in Feminist Mirrors', in *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1992): A Centenary Appraisal*, ed. Gary A. Gaudin and Douglas John Hall (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1994), 55-78.
[426] Lyon, 'Pride and the Symptoms of Sin', 100.
[427] See Lyon, 100.
[428] Lyon, 100. Italics mine.

> identifying the gendered character of *all* theological discourse.… A theology of sin and redemption can disempower or diminish women by presenting a purportedly universal view of human nature that fails to take their experience into account.[429]

For this, her sister scholars continue to be grateful. It is time now to turn to Daphne Hampson, who addresses sin, agency, and identity from a very different starting point.

4.3 Daphne Hampson

British post-Christian feminist theologian Daphne Hampson may seem an odd choice to include in what is essentially an evangelical feminist project; the chance of finding any sympathetic point of contact in her work seems doubtful. However, as often as I may disagree with Hampson's conclusions, I respect the fact that the form of Christianity which she has rejected is more orthodox than that held by many progressive (liberal) Christian feminists. She defines the bounds of Christianity as follows:

> Christians and those who, in whatever way they may speak of uniqueness… find themselves compelled to speak of the Christ event as having had such a uniqueness. Other than define Christianity more narrowly… which I find no reason to do, it seems to me that this is the only definition of Christianity which there could be. What cannot… be held to be a Christian position, if one is not to muddle terms, is the belief (simply) that Jesus was a very fine person who was deeply in tune with God. To hold that Jesus was deeply in tune with God is indeed a theistic position, but if no more than that is being said, it is not a Christian position. The belief that Jesus was a great teacher and that is the end of it is not even a theistic position. An atheist might well hold this.[430]

However, there seem to be three particular aspects of the Christian faith with which Hampson takes issue, particularly in its Lutheran form.

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[429] Fulkerson, 'The Imago Dei and a Reformed Logic for Feminist/Womanist Critique', 102.
[430] Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity* (London: SCM, 1996), 21.

4.3.1 Christian Particularity

Her first objection concerns the assumption of particularity regarding the Christ event. That is, Christians assert that the virgin birth and Jesus' resurrection are unique events; they had never happened before and will not happen again. Hampson explains that these events would require "an interruption of the causal nexus of history and nature".[431] However, physics suggests that such interruptions are impossible, due to the causal nexus being closed. On this basis, the belief that God intervenes in the world is not credible.[432] The outcome of this for Hampson is that for the claim of Jesus having been raised from the dead to be believable, it would have had to have occurred elsewhere in history. Of course, if it had happened before, Christians would be unable to point to the resurrection as a unique event.[433] So much for the first objection. The second and third objections – the charge that the Christian God is hegemonic, and Hampson's conviction that the kind of relationship that Christians believe that human beings should have with God is detrimental to our forming a relational, centred self – will receive an in-depth assessment below.

4.3.2 A Hegemonic God?

Hampson's second objection to Christianity concerns how she understands the nature of God in relation to humankind. In Hampson's mind, the goal of the individual is to develop into an autonomous self, therefore the fact that the Judaeo-Christian God occupies a hegemonic position towards humankind is in conflict with her feminist principles. It may be said at this point that Hampson is in part fighting against a particular cultural construct of God, and not a scripturally accurate or Christian one. Still, it must be acknowledged that such a view is all too prevalent both inside and outside the Church. But returning to Hampson's argument, she reasons that such a view of God (and the religions built around it) must be abandoned:

> given that, since the Enlightenment, human beings have willed to come into their own and now women as well, and indeed notably they,

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[431] Hampson, 12. A causal nexus is defined as "[t]he bonding or link between a cause and its effect". See 'Causal Nexus', in *Oxford Reference* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095555933.
[432] Daphne Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', *Word & World* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 341.
[433] See Hampson, *After Christianity*, 13. For further reading on Hampson's argument regarding particularity, see Chapter One 'Christian Particularity' in *After Christianity*, Hampson, 12–50.

> speaking of self-actualization, there will be no place for a God in relation to whom humanity stands in a relation of heteronomy. God must be understood to complete what it is to be a human being and not be conceived as set over against humans. This… must make for a markedly different conception of 'God'.[434]

She further explains that

> [f]undamental to feminism has been the overcoming of what one might call deference to members of the opposite sex, or more generally… to powers and authority.… Now when we juxtapose such an outlook with Christianity there is a basic clash. For… by its very nature Christianity entails the possibility of heteronomy. Christians understand God as transcendent and other than the self. Moreover they believe there to have been a revelation in history, so that Christians must find an authority in that revelation or in the literature which tells of it.[435]

Hampson objects to two things here. First, the Christian belief that in the divine-human relationship God is separate and other, and second, that God is other in the sense of being all-powerful and transcendent; thereby deserving of human worship and deference.[436] Because she cannot conceive of a God who is not like us and who is not on our level, Hampson rejects the "Christian mindset"; the belief that human persons must give their service and obedience either to God or to the devil.[437] Hampson explains that it is also a matter of feminist ethics, writing that "I do not give over my being to any person or any God who lies outside myself."[438] She clearly believes not only in the right to human autonomy, but in the potential for human goodness, asserting her "faith in humanity's ability to stand on its own feet."[439] Hampson's form of feminism is based

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[434] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 9–10.
[435] Hampson, 77.
[436] Although it will not be discussed here, Hampson also turns to modern science as an argument against the concept of God as transcendent and other. For example, she writes that "[i]n a world in which it becomes increasingly apparent (as modern physics suggests) that all is interconnected, it is difficult to think in terms of a God who is separate from the world and humankind." See Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 341.
[437] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 38.
[438] Hampson, 38.
[439] Hampson, 38.

on "relationships of equality", whether between human persons, or between the person and God. This leads her to suggest that "the essence of feminism [may be] that a feminist cannot call anyone else 'Lord'."[440] Anticipating the Christian argument that while it would most certainly be idolatry to give worshipful allegiance to another human being, and the point is that it is God and not a human being whom we worship, Hampson refuses to be convinced;[441] "[t]his solves nothing. *For I should not want to worship God.* If one has cast such attitudes aside on ethical grounds, it is fundamentally impossible to import them into one's religion again."[442] She insists that it is time for a spiritual/religious paradigm shift.[443]

Like many feminists, Hampson charges men with having moulded a patriarchal, hierarchal, and transcendent God from their own reality, in much the same way as the traditional Christian definition of sin and its remedy has been touted as a response to male rather than female experience.[444] For example, she writes that "[t]he masculinist conception of the self… has led to a certain conception of God which has been modelled upon it."[445] Having rejected the "masculinist framework" of Christianity,[446] Hampson looks forward to the time when its God has faded away, believing that due to the positive "shift in social relations" in recent decades, Christianity and its God will soon topple.[447]

> [A] religion which reflects the past construal of gender can hardly remain unscathed.… At the same time, a shift away from a hierarchal ordering of social relations will mean that a God who was an extrapolation from the patriarchal lords of the past must be left high and dry. In so far as 'he' stands as the pivot of the system, 'his' demise or irrelevance must unsteady the whole.

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[440] Hampson, 77.
[441] See Hampson, 77.
[442] Hampson, 77. Italics mine.
[443] Hampson, 249.
[444] See for example, Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View'.
[445] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 252. Hampson explains elsewhere that "feminists may well contend that the postulation of God, conceived as exterior, other, and in opposition to the self, is a striking instance of male thought-forms." Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 341.
[446] Hampson believes that "Christianity, and Judaism before it, have grown within a masculinist framework." See Hampson, *After Christianity*, 149.
[447] Hampson, 208.

Thus, she concludes that "the overcoming of [gendered, hierarchical] heteronomous relationships within society will lead to the dismantling of the patriarchal God."[448]

Due to their conviction that such a definition of God is detrimental to human flourishing, feminists of Hampson's ilk have no use for a God who is believed to be greater and more powerful than humankind: "Feminists, who have wanted to get away from a heteronomous situation in which the will of one other than themselves ruled them, will scarcely want to replace dominant males by such a God."[449] Hampson's understanding of God holds no concept of a benign autonomy, in which the rule of God over the world benefits humankind. She also has an interesting critique to offer regarding those Christian feminists who have posited new names and images for God. Hampson asserts that "the direction which much Christian feminism has taken in recent years in speaking of God as a 'mother', 'friend', or 'lover' is beside the point, for so conceived God remains one with whom I inter-relate *as with an other*."[450] She argues that "[i]t becomes all the more imperative to develop Luther's insight that God must be seen as one who is fundamental to our being ourselves, not as some exterior other with whom we interrelate."[451] However, I suggest that Luther believes both to be the case. Whilst God is fundamental to a person being herself in the sense that she cannot be an authentic self apart from God, God is most certainly "Other". This can be seen most clearly in Luther's doctrine of the hidden God. It is this idea of being an authentic self *apart* from God in Hampson's writing that the discussion will turn to next.

4.3.3 The Self Apart from God

It may help to begin with an obvious but important fact to which Hampson draws her readers' attention. Christianity, being founded on a theology of revelation, does not "place human beings at the centre of the stage."[452] This is because the truth of revelation is "other". That is, spiritual truth is not found within ourselves or in the world around us, but "is other than the self; precisely, it is revealed."[453] Along with her conviction that a new religious paradigm is needed, Hampson declares that *"[n]o notion of God*

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[448] Hampson, 250.
[449] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 341.
[450] Hampson, 342. Italics mine.
[451] Hampson, 341.
[452] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 281.
[453] Hampson, 281.

must be allowed to disrupt the centrality of human beings… to the picture…. [T]here must be a move to relationality and not back to a heteronomous relationship to a Christian God."[454]

Further explaining why there is no place for feminists within a Christian paradigm, Hampson writes that

> [f]eminists believe that it is the transformation of individual lives which is crucial. Far from wishing to deny the self, or to say that an individual should be broken open and based on someone or something other than herself, feminists have wished to affirm the self. Feminists will that women should come into their own…. Feminists believe, not in the undoing of the self, castigating a person for her pride, but rather in building up what is already given. Feminists will therefore look askance at a doctrine which advocates turning away from the self to God. They will be sceptical about the contention that the self is only itself when it is based on that which is not the self, namely God.[455]

This brings the discussion to the crux of the problem that Hampson has with Lutheran theology, which can be articulated in the following way. A person cannot become a full and healthy self, living and functioning as God intended, until they have repented and come to faith. Sin marred the *imago Dei* and separated us from God, and it is not until persons receive salvation and begin to walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit that they become fully human; a true self in relationship first with God and then with others, as God intended.

Although Hampson writes repeatedly about the importance of relationality, she balks at the Christian conviction that one's first and most fundamental relationship is with God. She also takes issue with the idea of the human-divine relationship beginning with dependence upon God. Hampson's writing is peppered with terms like heteronomy, hegemony, and autonomy. This is because Hampson, along with a number of other feminist scholars both inside and outside the Church, are unable to equate the idea of

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[454] Hampson, 11. Italics mine.
[455] Hampson, 282.

God's sovereignty over all of life as being anything other than a position of domination. As discussed earlier in this section, feminists have repeatedly charged men with creating an image of God based on male forms of power. What Hampson completely overlooks however is the Christian conviction that God is completely good and desires only good for God's creation. Perhaps it is because they have only their experiences of human life and relationships to draw upon that feminists like Hampson cannot conceive of a divine authority that is based on love, a love completely free from petty jealousies and lust for power.

4.3.4 Hampson Reads Luther

At the beginning of her article on Luther's understanding of the self,[456] Hampson makes the following claim:

> The medieval Catholic understanding of the human relation to God… had supposed (as does modern Catholicism) that it is God's work to transform the human. Luther denied this. For him the revolution involved in being Christian is that one is no longer concerned about what one is in oneself, or what one could become through God's grace. For the Christian lives by God's righteousness and not by his own. *Therefore to be a Christian means that one has a radically different sense of oneself as being bound up with God and what God is.*[457]

The outcome of this new way of viewing ourselves is that we cease to be concerned with either our eternal status or our own internal "goodness". This frees us to serve God and our neighbour. Luther describes this "phenomenon" in *The Freedom of the Christian*: "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love."[458] One of the key themes in *The Freedom of the Christian* is of course Christian freedom. God's gift of righteousness to the believer means that they no longer need

[456] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique'.
[457] Hampson, 334. Italics mine.
[458] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 371.

concern themselves with earning their salvation; with being good enough for God or seeking approval from their fellow creatures. According to Luther however, we are freed not to live as we please but to serve others. No longer preoccupied with ourselves, "[t]he Christian lives *extra se*."[459] As Hampson explains, "[t]he the word for this placing of oneself with God is faith. For faith is trust, and when I trust, my sense of who I am comes to lie with another."[460]

However, the believer cannot live in this freedom unless they base themselves in God. Hampson explains that there is within Lutheran theology

> a dichotomy between trying to exist by myself (sin) in which I shall fail to be a self, and living from God (faith) whereupon I come to live as God intended that I should live.… *Since God is other than myself I must transfer my center of gravity to one who lies outside myself. God is integral to the self's being itself, such that God is conceived to be fundamental to the very constitution of the self in each moment*…. Luther contends that each moment I must base myself anew on God and so be the creature I was intended to be. *To think that I could in some sense first possess myself, then to relate to God as to another, would be to have an idol – one with whom I think I can deal.*[461]

Hampson finds this belief that a person must base themselves in another – that another should be essential to them being their true self and fully themselves – extremely problematic for women. Her concern is for women who have struggled with a sense of powerlessness and lack of self-determination in their lives, worrying that "to advocate that the self should be broken, that the person should learn to live from another who is God", must be potentially harmful for women.[462] Hampson explains that "it must be profoundly jarring to hear that she is only herself as she bases herself on one who lies outside of herself; that she must constantly live from some future not yet given, or from another's sense of her – even though that other be God; that, indeed, a growth from

[459] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 335.
[460] Hampson, 335.
[461] Hampson, 336–37. Italics mine.
[462] Hampson, 339.

within oneself and a concern with continuity of self is in essence 'sin'."[463] Hampson's argument seems to stem from the feminist discussion on the difference between male and female sin (which was discussed in the previous section on Saiving). Hampson echoes the familiar feminist position that "[w]omen are not typically self-enclosed and in need of finding connectedness. Their problem has been a lack of centeredness in self; their need, to come to themselves. The whole dynamic of being a self is very different from what Lutheranism has proposed."[464] She explains that the feminist goal is for women to become centred selves.

4.3.5 Relationality and the Centred Self

Phrases like self-realisation and human flourishing are popular within feminist rhetoric. Hampson herself talks a great deal about centredness, and the importance of being a centred self. She explains her choice of vocabulary as follows: "I like to speak of the self as being 'centred in relation'. In using such a phrase I wish to capture the sense that the self is both 'centred' and 'relational';… we are able to acquire centredness because we are in relation.… A many-faceted self comes to be itself through the interplay with others."[465] This can be summarised by saying that one can only form a healthy sense of self, with healthy relationship boundaries, by being in relationship with others. Hampson is careful to explain that the importance feminists place on individuals "com[ing] into their own" has nothing to do with the (autonomous male) understanding of the self as an "atomic entity".[466] Instead, "women conceive selfhood to be achieved in and through relationship".[467]

However, the following caveat must be added to this ethic of "centredness in relation": we can only be available to give ourselves to others and to receive from them in turn when we reach the place of being secure and balanced enough in our own sense of self "that we can be sufficiently free of ourselves to be present to another".[468] The feminist who has found a centred sense of herself "neither dominates others, nor attempts to lose herself in them. The love of others promotes a rightful love of self, while a secure self is

[463] Hampson, 339–40.
[464] Hampson, 339.
[465] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 106.
[466] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 340.
[467] Hampson, 340.
[468] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 106.

self-forgetful in delight of others."[469] This description of utopian human relationships sounds strikingly similar to the biblical command to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.[470] However, what is surely problematic for Hampson and her compatriots is that one must *first* give all of herself to God. It is only because the Christian loves God with all of her heart, soul, and mind that she can in turn love her neighbour. Although always imperfectly, we love ourselves because God first loved us, and we are able to love our neighbour because we understand what it is to be loved unconditionally. In this, feminists have the right idea: secure in the knowledge that she is loved and therefore secure in her 'centredness', a woman can love those around her for their own sake. The difference of course, is that as Christians we are centred in God, rather than in ourselves.

4.3.6 The Christian Threat?

The feminist position being discussed concludes that the Christian doctrine of God threatens human integrity and individuality. In other words, it endangers the achievement of true personhood. It is certainly true that Luther's doctrine of God's complete sovereignty over creation, including humans, is problematic. The Scriptures however, help to provide a picture of a God who supports human flourishing and individuality. Psalm 139:14 tells us that humankind is "fearfully and wonderfully made";[471] while Ephesians 2:10 declares that each person is a demonstration of "God's handiwork".[472] One can also find in the Bible numerous descriptions of the place that humankind holds in God's creation; descriptions far removed from Hampson's hegemonic God. As believers, God has "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,"[473] and "crowned… [us] with glory and honour."[474] The God of these verses is so far removed from Hampson's caricature of the

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[469] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 340.
[470] "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:18. Cf. Matthew 22:39).
[471] "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:14).
[472] "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10).
[473] "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesian 2:6-7).
[474] "[W]hat are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:4-5. Cf. Hebrews 2:6-8).

Christian God as to be unrecognisable. However, Hampson and her companions have rejected the Christian God and there seems no way to convince them, for they have rejected a theology of revelation. The idea of a transcendent God who reaches out to human beings to offer something that persons cannot find within themselves or for themselves has been dismissed as harmful to human flourishing, and particularly harmful to women. In Hampson's own words, "[w]hy anyone who calls herself (or himself) a feminist, who believes in human equality, should wish to hold to a patriarchal myth such as Christianity must remain a matter for bafflement."[475] As a person of evangelical convictions, I find myself equally baffled as to why she has chosen to abandon the "myth".

4.3.7 Why Engage with Hampson?

I have become convinced that any Christian engagement with Hampson's thought (I am reluctant to call it theology) can only be theoretical. Given her rejection of Christian particularity, the presenting of arguments that answer to Hampson's criticism of the doctrines of sin, justification, or the Person of God the Father almost becomes a moot point. Even if, theoretically, one was able to offer an argument that would cause Hampson to revise her criticisms, her theology could only ever be theistic, not Christian. This is because for Hampson, Jesus of Nazareth is not and never will be the Son of God made flesh. This naturally raises the question of how my engagement with Hampson is relevant to this wider thesis. The questions and objections to Christian faith, doctrine, and tradition raised by Hampson in her writing are representative of key issues in feminist theology. She theologises from the interesting position of continuing to debate traditions and doctrines that she has herself abandoned. Hampson therefore has no vested emotional interest in preserving said doctrines, meaning that one can often find in her writing an honest assessment of the issues involved in attempting to preserve them. However, *it is an honest assessment from a post-Christian point of view*. This provides a number of challenges for the Christian feminist theologian who engages with her work. At times, Hampson seems to wilfully misunderstand Christian logic, meaning that it can feel like trying to compare theological apples with oranges. For example, I discussed earlier in this chapter Hampson's understanding of the Christian God as

[475] Hampson, *After Christianity*, 50.

hegemonic. Her solution is to present a picture of God in which "God no longer competes with us".[476] This seems to be a deliberate twisting of the Christian understanding of the divine-human relationship. God never competes with God's creatures; it is human beings who compete with God (hence the doctrine of original sin). However, perhaps this makes sense in light of Hampson's theological reframing, which puts humankind rather than God at the centre of life. She explains that the doctrine which teaches "that the person should learn to live from another who is God, as does the Lutheran tradition, must be judged highly detrimental.… For it must be profoundly jarring to hear that… [a person] is only herself as she bases herself on one who lies outside herself; that she must constantly live from some future not given, or from another's sense of her – even though that other be God."[477] As a former Christian theologian, Hampson is fully cognizant of the inner logic of Christianity. She chooses however to ignore it, for "even though the other be God" is the whole point. The Scriptures witness to the fact that God's "sense of her" is that she has immense value as a child of God. They also tell us that God is completely good, guarding against any danger in our living from the sense of an other, when that Other is the Christian God.

Hampson's second objection here is that the Christian "must constantly live from some future not given." Hampson's own theology/spirituality lacks an eschatology, and she seems to have forgotten what this concept means for Christian faith. Believers do not live "from… [a] future not given." *We live fully in the present looking forward to a future with God in faith*. Followers of Christ may not know the details of their future, but they have faith that it will be a hopeful one. However, the future need not be spoken of in only an eschatological sense. One's life as a believer is also entrusted to the one who both knows and provides for their earthly future. This can be summarised by saying that Christianity has an internal logic of its own, and apart from this logic, the divine-human relationship – what God has promised to believers and what God requires from them in return – simply makes no sense apart from its being accepted by faith. Theologically speaking, Hampson's rejection of the Christian faith means that, regarding her theological reflections, she is now on the outside looking in. This chapter

[476] Daphne Hampson, 'Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique', in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. Richard Harries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 58.
[477] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 339–40.

will now proceed to a discussion of Mary Gabeler's theology, a feminist who addresses some of Hampson's concerns, and offers a case for human agency in a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

4.4 Mary Gaebler

Moving on from Daphne Hampson's arguments and dismissal of Luther, the discussion turns to Lutheran theologian Mary Gaebler and her book *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*. In part responding to Hampson's concerns, Gaebler builds an argument for the presence of human agency within Luther's theology. She develops a Lutheran anthropology focused on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Gaebler explains the problem in Lutheran theology as follows:

> Emphasizing Luther's doctrine of justification so much that it obscures his robust (if relatively unknown) teaching on regeneration in the Spirit, Hampson naturally sees it as unresponsive to the form of feminine sin. Unfortunately, this understanding of Luther's anthropology is widespread – the result of an influential group of theologians… [who] have assiduously worked to undermine the self-righteous pietism that both Luther and Paul viewed as dangerous to faith.[478]

The events of the Second World War had driven home for these theologians a real sense of human sin that they had lacked before: "just as Luther had to struggle against the semi-Pelagianism of his own age, Lutheran theologians felt likewise compelled to undermine the overweening confidence that had been blind to the demonic tendencies within."[479] Gaebler explains that after 1521, Luther developed an anthropology that became "opened towards an active, cooperating agency with the indwelling Spirit."[480] This development was commensurate with his increased engagement in the "temporal realm".[481] However, theologians have generally ignored this development. This has led to a widespread misunderstanding of Luther's anthropology; a misunderstanding that

[478] Gaebler, 10. Gaebler names Helmut Thielicke, Gustav Wingren, and Anders Nygren as examples of such "influential theologians".
[479] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 10.
[480] Gaebler, 10.
[481] See Gaebler, 12.

has led to a complete dismissal of Lutheran anthropology by Hampson and others.[482] Gaebler does not deny that the "prophetic denunciation of human efficacy before the grandeur of God" is a key feature of Luther's early work.[483] However, she argues that his work contains so much more. Gaebler begins by sketching out Luther's experiences and theological development (with the former often influencing the latter) after 1522. It was at this time that Luther returned to Wittenberg and became actively involved in the civic life of the city. She writes that "[t]his refocusing on the social and political situation resulted in a correlative opening up of his theology to include the temporal realm."[484]

4.4.1 A Sketch of Luther's Developing Anthropology

Gaebler provides a detailed survey of how Luther continually revised and developed his theological anthropology, from his lectures on the Psalms (1514-1516) through to his Romans lectures (1516-1518).[485] At the time of his Psalms lectures, Luther still maintained a dualistic anthropology strongly influenced by Augustine. That is, he considered the visible things of the temporal world to be nothing in themselves, useful only as "signs that point towards a hidden reality".[486] The visible world existed in opposition to the hidden spiritual world and the soul was superior to the body.[487] Gaebler explains that at this point in his thinking, Luther viewed the Christian life as one of progression; one gradually becomes more righteous and therefore closer to God.[488] Although Luther had reached his important understanding of justification by faith by the time he began lecturing on the book of Romans, according to Gaebler, he did not yet fully understand Paul's anthropology. Although the apostle Paul preached that the whole person is corrupted by sin, "[t]his is counterintuitive for Luther, who is accustomed to the Augustinian dualism that lifts up the invisible soul and rejects the body, along with all that is temporal and transient."[489] Gaebler gives as an example Luther's confused application of Paul in *The Freedom of a Christian*: "Man has a

[482] See Gaebler, 10.
[483] Gaebler, 13.
[484] Gaebler, 14.
[485] See Gaebler, 84–92.
[486] Gaebler, 84.
[487] Gaebler, 84–85.
[488] See Gaebler, 86.
[489] Gaebler, 86.

twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called a carnal, outward, or old man."[490] Luther has here equated the soul (the inner self) with the "new man" and the body (the outer self) with the "old man", a dualism that Paul never used.[491] However, Luther does get it right elsewhere in *The Freedom of the Christian*, demonstrating a better grasp of Pauline anthropology in his famous "happy exchange" metaphor, in which a "marriage" takes place between Christ and the sinner.[492] "In this justifying event as Luther now describes it, faith becomes the relationship that binds the individual to God through the spiritual marriage, so that henceforth this person is characterized by Christ. She is a Christian and bound to Christ in faith."[493] In Luther's developing understanding, the whole person (including the outer self/temporal body) relates to the world in the new way.[494] Importantly, the new creature "now engages her neighbours as Christ has engaged her."[495]

Gaebler explains that Luther is slow to lose "his old Augustinian distrust of the temporal world, (and in particular the body)."[496] What is evident in *The Freedom of the Christian* is that while Luther maintains his emphasis on self-discipline, it has become less about the spiritual advancement of the individual, and more a means of serving others.[497] Gaebler concludes that "Luther's theology, especially after 1522, took a practical new turn toward the temporal world as his doctrine of God's twofold reign[498] began to find its social/political expression."[499] This "new outward gaze" gradually

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[490] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 344.
[491] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 87.
[492] Luther writes of this in *The Freedom of a Christian*: "The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom…. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?" Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 351. See also LW: 31, 351–54.
[493] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 87.
[494] Gaebler, 87.
[495] Gaebler, 87.
[496] See Gaebler, 88.
[497] See Gaebler, 88.
[498] For an example of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms or "twofold reign" see Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles*, 20.
[499] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 89.

enabled Luther to view the self and the world in a more positive way.[500] Gaebler highlights 1517 as the year when Luther began teaching his "new theology".[501] By this time, Luther understood that the Bible "presented a very different view of human beings than did Aristotle or the scholastic theologians whose system depended on Aristotle's teaching."[502] This Aristotelian anthropology led to the Church's emphasis on good works. Luther's rediscovery of Pauline anthropology in which the old Adam is completely sinful but the new Adam lives in Christ, "posed a very different view of human beings."[503]

> By 1521… Luther had arrived at a description of the faithful that took account of their dualistic state of faith (meaning that one is either wholly righteous in faith or wholly unrighteous in their sins apart from Christ) but now *he included a different (and traditional) anthropology that allowed for the outer or temporal self to work toward (and enjoy) that increasing self-discipline* that is associated with a virtue approach to ethics. Though never attaining a righteousness that saves, *this disciplining of the residual flesh* that Luther had already described in *Freedom of a Christian* a year earlier, *he now understood as a godly process of healing. Thus a kind of sanctification has now reappeared in Luther's overall understanding of human beings under the influence of faith and the indwelling Spirit*.[504]

It was in 1521 that Luther published a theological treatise titled *Against Latomus*.[505] According to Gaebler, it is this little book that "initially marks the end point of his [Luther's] developing anthropology."[506] In *Against Latomus*,[507] Luther discusses the

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[500] See Gaebler, 89.
[501] Gaebler, 89.
[502] Gaebler, 89.
[503] Gaebler, 89.
[504] Gaebler, 90. Italics mine.
[505] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 135–260.
[506] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 91.
[507] In 1519, teachers from the University of Louvain released a document condemning Luther's writings. In March 1520, Luther responded by publishing a "disdainful answer." In April the following year, a member of the university named Latomus published a book defending the university's condemnation. *Against Latomus* ('*Contra Latomus*') was Luther's reply to this. See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II*, 135–135.

Pauline concept of "grace and the gift."[508] Gaebler notes that Luther has significantly developed his understanding since his Romans lectures several years earlier.[509] He now understands Paul in the following way:

> although there is sin… still there is there no condemnation…. The reason why there is no condemnation is not that men do not sin,… but because – as Paul says – they are in Jesus Christ; that is, they repose under the shadow of his righteousness as do chicks under a hen. *Or as is said more clearly in Rom. 5[:15], they have grace and the gift through his grace*. *So they do not walk in accordance with sin and sinful flesh; that is, they do not consent to the sin which they in fact have*. God has provided them with two immensely strong and secure foundations so that the sin which is in them should not lead to their condemnation. First of all, Christ is himself the expiation (as in Rom. 3[:25]). They are safe in his grace, not because they believe or possess faith and the gift, but because it is in Christ's grace that they have these things…. *The second foundation is the gift they have received, through which they neither walk according to the flesh, nor obey sin*. However, the first foundation is the stronger and more important, for although the second amounts to something, it does so only through the power of the first. *For God has made a covenant with those who are in Christ, so that there is no condemnation if they fight against themselves and their sin.*[510]

Although sin remains a reality in the life of the believer, they are not condemned by that sin. Christ's imputed righteousness protects them from the eternal effects of sin. If my reading is correct, Luther understands Paul's "gift" as the ability to resist sin in our daily life. Having received the "grace" of justification, we are able to resist sin because

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[508] "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Romans 5:15).
[509] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 91.
[510] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II*, 239. Italics mine.

we have already been freed from the guilt of that sin. We receive the gift through grace, only after having first received the grace itself. Gaebler explains that

> [t]his reflects Luther's new distinction – grace *monergistically* (as the work of God alone) covers the whole person, while the gift is given to work *synergistically* (in cooperation with God) to defeat the residual *substance* of sin (which is no longer imputed against the sinner). Luther could not be more clear; this temporal sin can be incrementally diminished and held in check. While Luther does not say that some particular degree of success must be reached, he is now prepared to tie these works of self-discipline directly to the presence of saving faith. There is no condemnation, Luther warns, *only* 'if they fight against themselves and their sins.'"[511]

Gaebler emphasises that Luther's discussion of "persisting sin" in *Against Latomus* is "a different anthropology altogether than that which defines the self in relationship with God."[512] In the matter of eternal salvation, Luther's anthropology remains a case of either/or; persons are either wholly righteous or wholly sinful, headed for either heaven or hell. Justification is *not* a process. However, as justified persons, we *do* struggle against sin and become "better" in small increments.[513] This process is generally referred to as sanctification, although Luther does not often use the term himself. As the reader will see, this evidence that Luther eventually made room for the believer "to do something"; not in a way that has any effect on our salvation, but which does allow believers a certain amount of agency in our spiritual lives, is very important to Gaebler's argument. As will be explored below, Gaebler links this possibility of human agency with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

4.4.2 Developing a Relational Anthropology

Gaebler argues that Luther's description of the "outer self" supports the concept of an "agential self", but that this is overlooked in the relational ontology of Ebeling and other

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[511] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 91. Author's italics.
[512] Gaebler, 92.
[513] See Gaebler, 92.

personalist theologians.[514] Ebeling for example, explains regarding Luther's concept of *coram Deo* (Latin, meaning "before the face of God" or "in the presence of God"), that

> something is defined… not in itself, but in its outward relations with something else, or more properly, in terms of the relationship of something else with it.… What is decisive in this relationship is that *there is a countenance which fixes its eye upon something, looks at it, perceives it and gives existence to it* as such. What is 'before' me is present to me, and exists for me.[515]

Gaebler explains that according to Ebeling, personhood seems

> to depend… on an agency beyond and outside of itself for its existence. In Ebeling's view, the self is constituted *only* as it receives itself from another, and thus would seem to have no 'being' in itself. Human existence, as it is described here, apparently lacks just that sort of being that Hampson emphasizes – a being, that is, with some degree of autonomy and ongoing self-continuity through time.[516]

She insists however, that "Luther explicitly identifies and appreciates these [ontic] structures, as they provide for that human deliberation, decision, and action by which the self is engaged in ongoing transformation."[517] Furthermore, Gaebler criticises twentieth century theologians for their unbalanced focus on the "early Luther" and their resulting tendency to use Luther's theology of justification as "the key to interpreting every other aspect of his theology."[518] The result of this continued oversight has been very serious. According to Gaebler, this failure to pay attention to "Luther's later double anthropology, with its temporal part/part description of the person, *coram hominibus* [in

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[514] See Gaebler, 96. Personalism is defined as "a school of philosophy, usually idealist, which asserts that the real is the personal, i.e., that the basic features of personality – consciousness, free self-determination, directedness toward ends, self-identity through time, and value retentiveness – make it the pattern of all reality. In the theistic form that it has often assumed, personalism has sometimes become specifically Christian, holding that not merely the person but the highest individual instance of personhood – Jesus Christ – is the pattern." T. Editors of Encylopaedia Britannica, ed., 'Personalism', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13 June 2013, https://www.britannica.com/topic/personalism.
[515] Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (London: Collins, 1970), 194. Italics mine.
[516] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 94. Author's italics.
[517] Gaebler, 96.
[518] Gaebler, 96.

the presence of/before human beings]", has resulted in twentieth century theologians viewing persons as either "wholly sinful in pride or wholly righteous in faith", which in turn has "obscure[d] the process of sanctification" in Luther's work.[519]

One effect of this unbalanced reading of Luther is that "it fails to empower those who seek redemption from the bondage identified by Saiving – a chameleon-like willingness to acquiesce to every request – a failure to make decisions – and a self-abnegating passivity emerging from the lack of an organizing centre."[520] Drawing on Saiving's definition, Gaebler explains that

> in bondage to the second form of sin, the needed redemption is a new ability to act agentially in the power of the Spirit, against those demons that paralyze a confident, self-initiated response to the world. Redemption in this context provides the ground for growth, promising a new hope that, little by little, an active, responsible relationship with the world will emerge, on the basis of a relationship already established by and with God.[521]

With this goal of redemptive agency in mind, it is time to assess Luther's approach as a pastor to his flock.

4.4.3 The Pastoral Luther

Gaebler suggests that the early Luther was "more interested in pastoral affect than systematic precision. For, as he observes, there is no harm done if people think too little of themselves; but there is the danger of infinite harm should people think of themselves too much."[522] It is just such an approach, which Gaebler calls "exaggerated, and non-evangelical",[523] that has done so much damage to Christian women. However, unlike many more contemporary (twentieth and twenty-first century) evangelicals, Gaebler asserts that "Luther was always prepared to adjust his approach in differing contexts".[524] See for example Luther's instructions to a class of students in 1521; "*To those who are*

[519] Gaebler, 96.
[520] Gaebler, 96.
[521] Gaebler, 96–97.
[522] Gaebler, 101.
[523] See Gaebler, 101.
[524] Gaebler, 101–3.

afraid and have already been terrified by the burden of their sins Christ the Savior and the gift should be announced, not Christ the example and the lawgiver. But to those who are smug and stubborn the example of Christ should be set forth, lest they use the Gospel as a pretext for the freedom of the flesh and thus become smug."[525]

4.4.4 The Holy Spirit and Human Freedom/Agency

"Meeting them from without and from within, Christians are drawn into the activity of the triune God through the power of the Holy Spirit." Recalling Hampson's objections, Gaebler "ask[s] whether that which believers call 'empowerment' is actually a kind of coercion, and if the self in such a response is liberated or heteronomously relinquished."[526] And further, "how… the complete presence of God, present with and active in believers, affect[s] the claim that the faithful are not left less agential, but more truly the responsible selves they are called to be."[527] She draws the reader's attention to the following phrase in Thesis Thirteen of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, "free will, after the fall, exists in name only",[528] and poses the following questions:

> Did Luther mean by this denial that persons are moved in such a way that the natural mental process of volition is somehow bypassed? Or, allowing for volition as a process in Luther's anthropology, does this concept of choosing and acting allow for contingency – that is, the possibility that agents have the freedom to choose and act in ways other than those ways they actually do choose and act?[529]

In other words, are the charges that Hampson levels at Christianity, particularly in its Lutheran form, accurate? Are human beings fully bound in their actions and decisions; those actions having only the appearance of agency? Gaebler holds to her claim that there is more to Luther's anthropology. She offers "a specifically Lutheran response" to Hampson's concerns regarding human agency, as well as Saiving's feminine sin of self-

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[525] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia, 1999), 35. Italics mine.
[526] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 113.
[527] Gaebler, 113.
[528] "Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin." Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 40. See also Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 155.
[529] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 155.

abnegation, in which she focuses on the idea of a "Spirit-empowered agency" in the life of the believer.[530] She believes that Luther experienced this kind of agency after he had found confidence in his salvation, [531] explaining that "God's reliability was now the ground of Luther's certainty; and it was this ground that transformed his crippling fear into freedom. *Ironically, however, this freedom, which rests on God's agency alone, rests therefore simultaneously on human beings' lack of freedom to interfere in the process.*"[532] As believers, we are freed from spiritual striving, including its manifestation in good works, precisely because God is in full control. But it would seem that one cannot have it both ways, and this challenge has resulted in the exit of Hampson (and many like her) from the church. The reader will recall the discussion of *The Bondage of the Will* (Luther's debate with Erasmus) in Chapter Two. Erasmus was concerned that Luther's teaching on the futility of doing good works to earn salvation would result in spiritual and moral laziness. However, Gaebler explains that

> [t]he acknowledgement of God's activity provides the ground for a cooperating, or theonomous, agency of the outer, temporal self, in tandem with the indwelling Spirit. Luther took this cooperative work to be effectively transformative. The turn to the world that Luther's teaching on vocation implies includes a simultaneous turn to the self, as the reluctant will is called forth in the power of the Spirit to do battle against those sinful habits that persist. *The salvation faithfully and passively received by the inner self becomes cooperatively, and freely, agential through the outer or temporal self as one engages the world through vocationally conceived relationships.*[533]

4.4.5 A Brief Word on Luther's Use of Language

Luther's creative use of language enabled him both to challenge existing paradigms and to create new ones.[534] This, according to Gaebler, "allows for multiple interpretations" of Luther's statements regarding the freedom and bondage of the will.[535] Gaebler further

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[530] Gaebler, 155.
[531] Gaebler, 155.
[532] Gaebler, 156. Italics mine.
[533] Gaebler, 156–57. Italics mine.
[534] Gaebler, 157.
[535] Gaebler, 157.

explains that in the medieval understanding, the freedom of the human will was something that separated humankind from the rest of creation; the ability to make decisions being indicative of humankind's ability to imagine a future. It was therefore a central concept in medieval theological anthropology.[536] When, instead of using the phrase "free will" in its commonly accepted sense, Luther chose to "apply it only to those decisions that affect one's ultimate destiny",[537] he must surely have known that he was leaving himself open to misunderstanding. As Gaebler observes, "the fact that he did not clearly eliminate the obvious confusion arising from his novel application of the term is interesting."[538] As a result, Luther's interpreters have "consistently misunderstood him on this point", especially considering the context of the discussion in *The Bondage of the Will* was clearly one of eternal and spiritual concern.[539]

4.4.6 Regarding *Anfechtungen*

I find Gaebler's discussion of the believer's experience of *Anfechtung* to be the most convincing aspect of her argument for the evidence of human agency in Luther's theology. Perhaps this is because the role of human activity is self-evident in Luther's descriptions of his own *Anfechtungen* and the pastoral advice he offers to others for combating spiritual struggle. Gaebler explains that "Luther's discussion of *Anfechtungen* suggest[s] his unacknowledged presuppositions regarding a human capacity for willing *that makes a difference*."[540] Within the framework of Luther's belief that *Anfechtungen* "are the result of a cosmic battle between God and Satan", Luther's sharing of his own experiences demonstrates the possibility of actively engaging in the struggle against "demonic temptations".[541] Furthermore, as Gaebler points out, Luther's writings on *Anfechtung* span the whole of his career.[542] It is not

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[536] Gaebler, 158.
[537] Gaebler, 158.
[538] Gaebler, 159.
[539] Gaebler, 159. Gaebler quotes from the following: "It is, you say, irreverent, inquisitive, and superfluous to want to know whether our will does anything in matters pertaining to eternal salvation or whether it is simply passive under the action of grace." See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 32.
[540] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 171.
[541] Gaebler, 171.
[542] Gaebler, 171.

something that can merely be attributed to the "early Luther" or the "older Luther". This adds significant weight to the argument.

Furthermore, in response to Hampson's descriptions of the Judeo-Christian God as hegemonic, Gaebler contends that "it is precisely Luther's insistence on a divine predestinating will that one can trust absolutely – a will that cannot be manipulated – *that provides the freedom out of which one discovers a new possibility*."[543] That is, it is exactly because God is in control that believers can live without fear of death and the guilt of sin; this frees us up to live out God's will for our lives and in compassionate service of our neighbour. Christians can live with hope for the future, without regret or fear regarding past sins. *This is what it means to be free.*

4.4.7 The Hidden and Revealed God

Gaebler describes the tension between the hidden and revealed God which drives believers to act with agency in their response to God. She writes:

> Luther identified a tension in the Godhead itself that pulls human beings into engagement – rousing responsible agency awake. In that space, somewhere between the *Deus revelatus* on the one hand (with the promise that salvation is for all) and the *Deus absconditus* on the other (before whom hope is crushed by doubt), persons are driven toward that relationship whereby they turn both to God and to themselves.[544]

As discussed in earlier chapters, this – for Luther unresolvable – tension between the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus* comes up again and again. However, the revelation of the *Deus revelatus* and the knowledge of God's good will toward the believer "opens up the real possibility to engage Satan in an efficacious struggle".[545]

Luther offered pastoral advice to friends and to those in his congregation on many occasions. Gaebler offers as an example Luther's 1532 letter to Jonas von Stockhausen.[546] Luther reminds von Stockhausen, who is suffering from severe

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[543] Gaebler, 172. Italics mine.
[544] Gaebler, 170–71.
[545] Gaebler, 172.
[546] See Gaebler, 172. See also Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 88–90.

depression and suicidal thoughts, that God wants him to live. Luther counsels him "not [to] doubt that your thoughts, being in conflict with God's will, were forcibly inserted into your mind by the devil. Consequently you must resist them sternly and either suffer them or eradicate them with like force."[547] He further tells his friend to consider the examples of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, who fought "against the weariness of life" as if they were words from the Holy Spirit, and to "cast out and reject the thoughts that impel you to act otherwise."[548] Offering the image of a man who strains hard against the chains that have him tightly bound,[549] Luther commands von Stockhausen to be "obstinate, headstrong, and wilful… If you impose such demands upon yourself and fight against yourself in this way, God will assuredly help you. But if you do not resist and oppose, but rather give your thoughts free reign to torment you, the battle will soon be lost."[550] It is clear that Luther sees his friend's situation as a spiritual battle in which von Stockhausen has an active role to play. Gaebler observes that persons of faith carry out such actions and make such choices "in a cooperative efficacious agency made possible by the indwelling Spirit."[551] She footnotes this comment with two important observations:

> the indwelling power of the Spirit is presumably the factor that changes the required response of the faithful. Now the Spirit is aroused and at work, creating precisely the situation of the divided will. The call in this context is to *choose with the Spirit* - to *co*operate, thus turning one's back on the devil. *If, indeed, Luther really believed that the cooperation by persons was ultimately ineffective in itself, it would have made more sense for him to pray than to exhort*.[552]

While there is never any suggestion in Luther that the believer can do anything on their own apart from God's enabling and in accordance with God's will, Gaebler highlights the fact that God provides believers with the opportunity to become involved in the world, and to take responsibility for both their physical and spiritual lives. This

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[547] Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 89.
[548] Luther, 89.
[549] Luther, 89.
[550] Luther, 90.
[551] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 172.
[552] Gaebler, 172, footnote 48. The word '*co*operate' is italicised by the author. Further italics are mine.

provision takes the form of God's Holy Spirit living in the believer. The key concept here is one of *cooperation*. The book of Acts for example, is a reminder of how a believer filled with the Spirit is transformed, and of what may be accomplished in combat with both earthly and spiritual powers when they choose to cooperate with the Spirit of God which dwells within them.[553] Acts is also a testimony of what can happen in a community when its members live their lives believing in that indwelling Spirit. At the end of the quotation above, Gaebler makes a very important point: if Luther was not convinced that as believers we are capable of effective action, then it would be nonsensical for him to call the believer to such action and cooperation with the Spirit.[554] She goes on to provide a wonderful description of the Spirit-empowered believer:

> Dressed for battle, she wields the sword of the Spirit, forcing that part of herself against which she has managed to effectively turn her will with the help of the Spirit within her. This is hardly the picture of a nonparticipant. She is decidedly more than a conduit for a volition not her own. The agent is the very one who, by her willing identification with the indwelling Spirit, assumes a transformed identity empowered and sustained by God.[555]

4.4.8 Regarding Human Responsibility

While explaining that the scholastic doctrine of free will was designed to protect human responsibility,[556] Gaebler asks if it is "possible to make sense out of Luther's absolute rejection of free will on the one hand and his exhortations to struggle in the Spirit on the other[?]"[557] This section has demonstrated that Luther recognises human responsibility, and that this is seen most clearly in the experience of *Anfechtung*, "as individuals are drawn into the cosmic conflict."[558] Luther also recognises that Christians have agency in the fulfilment of their vocations and relationships.[559] However,

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[553] Gaebler makes no reference to the book of Acts. This is entirely my own reflection.
[554] See Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 72, footnote 48.
[555] Gaebler, 177.
[556] See Gaebler, 182–83.
[557] Gaebler, 182.
[558] Gaebler, 183.
[559] Gaebler, 183.

> [w]hile it is clear that Luther does understand people to be making effective choices within these contexts, his own prophetic and pastoral vocation encourages them to undermine human pride whenever possible, in the interests of driving sinners into the arms of Christ. The Wittenberg theology is for the sake of sinners, and so Luther is sometimes willing to speak in unusual and exaggerated ways.[560]

Nevertheless, Luther recognises that believers "do in fact make agential choices with regard to their vocation; likewise, individuals do in fact make effective choices about whether to identify themselves with Christ or with the devil."[561] Gaebler also briefly outlines the role of prayer in this engagement with the Holy Spirit, declaring that the struggle "to cling actively to the Spirit that is already willing in concert with one's own" will is "itself an act of prayer."[562] The believer must have faith that they have been given this new will and pray for courage to take up the new responsibilities and new habits associated with their transformed self.[563] Gaebler explains that "[t]o overcome residual desires of the flesh, out of a new and good will – one that is elicited and sustained by the Spirit – is to enact faith over and over again in prayerful identity with the indwelling Spirit."[564] The believer is able to act in this way, being supported by God, whose "work proceeds and supports one's own without at the same time denying one the freedom to resist the invitation of the Spirit."[565]

4.4.9 Wanting to Will with the Will of God

> In his 1520 *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther speaks of the 'joyful zeal' of faith, and 'works done out of a spontaneous love'.[566]… It is this

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[560] Gaebler, 183.
[561] Gaebler, 183.
[562] Gaebler, 189.
[563] Gaebler, 189.
[564] Gaebler, 189.
[565] Gaebler, 189.
[566] "That which is impossible for you to accomplish by trying to fulfil all the works of the law – many and useless as they all are – you will accomplish quickly and easily through faith." Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 349. See also LW: Vol. 31, 359. "The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully…. While he is doing this, behold, he meets a contrary will in his own flesh which strives to serve the world and seeks its own advantage. This the spirit of faith cannot tolerate, but with joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under control and hold it in check…. Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he

> early emphasis on the spontaneity of good works that has been appropriated as Luther's final word on the subject by those post-WWII theologians particularly devoted to retaining the absolute monergism of justification. In the process… they obscure the synergism of those works that follow from faith.[567]

Gaebler explains that Luther became disappointed at the lack of spiritual fruit visible in the lives of his congregation. People were simply not producing the "spontaneous" acts of love that Luther had expected, as a result of hearing his message.[568] Consequently in his Galatians lectures Luther addressed "the problem of the *reluctant*, but nevertheless *faithful*, will – a will he had earlier described as automatic or spontaneous under the power of faith."[569] In his discussion of Galatians 5:16, Luther writes the following:

> It is as though he [the apostle Paul] were saying:… [']take careful heed that you walk by the Spirit, that is, that by the Spirit you battle against the flesh and follow your spiritual desires…. [T]here are two contrary guides in you, the Spirit and the flesh. God has stirred up a conflict and fight in your body. For the Spirit struggles against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit. All I am requiring of you now – and, for that matter, all that you are able to produce – is that you follow the guidance of the Spirit and resist the guidance of the flesh. Obey the former, and fight against the latter!'[570]

Here at last is the answer to a question raised in Chapter Two; how the person whose will is bound to Christ is still able to sin. Gaebler is not the first person to identify "the gap between the people… [we] are and the people that [our] given vocations call… [us]

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does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things."

[567] See Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 180, footnote 79.

[568] Gaebler, 178–79.

[569] Gaebler, 180. Author's italics.

[570] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6*, 65–66.

to be."[571] She emphasises that this is where faith comes into play, allowing the seemingly impossible to become possible.[572] Gaebler goes on to explain that

> in the power of that possibility, shortcomings are both recognized and transformed. Those who struggle in the faith are moved to do better; and they look for transformation through the power of the Spirit.… What they seek is a new will to do those things to which they are drawn and from which they are simultaneously repelled and the hesitation this entails. There is a new desire – a new will – within them.[573]

It is important to note Gaebler's emphasis that for Luther this "good will" does not originate with the person. It is "the will of the indwelling Spirit eliciting participation – drawing forth the reluctant will to join in willing what is difficult."[574] But what exactly is this process, what does it mean to will with the Holy Spirit? In his gloss on Galatians 5:17,[575] Luther observes that

> every saint feels and confesses that his flesh resists the Spirit and that these two are opposed to each other, so that he cannot do what he would want to, even though he sweats and strains to do so. The flesh prevents us from keeping the commandments of God, from loving our neighbors as ourselves, and especially from loving God with all our heart…. The good will is present, as it should be – it is, of course, the Spirit Himself resisting the flesh – and it would rather do good, fulfill the Law, love God and the neighbor, etc. But the flesh does not obey this will but resists it.[576]

Gaebler applies this understanding to the woman struggling with Saiving's "feminine" or second sin. Within her, there is

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[571] See Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 186.
[572] See Gaebler, 186.
[573] Gaebler, 186.
[574] See Gaebler, 186.
[575] "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want." (Galatians 5:17).
[576] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6*, 75.

> a longing for wholeness and self-integration derived from identity with God as her own unique gifts begin to be realized in effective and visible ways. She who has been in hiding begins to take on responsibility, or at least begin to see that this is a possibility, and that it would be good – both for her neighbor and for herself. She is tentative but committed to God. *She is a Christian who wants to want to do that which she believes she is called to. She is a theonomous self – in her sense of standing on and in God – but a theonomous self with lots of residual flesh still to overcome*.[577]

As with the divided self Luther describes above, this woman "wants to do *x*, or at least wants to want to do *x* [with *x* being what she believes to be the will of God for her]; other inclinations get in the way… Yet she at least wants to want *x*."[578] Gaebler believes it is the kind of situation that Luther identifies as "the indwelling Spirit battling against the residual flesh."[579] She further explains that when one wants to will *x*, knowing that "one is already identified with *x*," can be empowering revelation.[580] "In other words, if what you want is to will with God, then you should know that you are *already willing* with the will of God."[581] Such a proposal could also have a powerful impact on the lives of those struggling against guilt-ridden perfectionism; an experience common to many women. As Jesus told his disciples in John chapter five, "everyone who sins is a slave to sin…. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."[582] I would add to this one further thing; while Gaebler seeks to explain the "how" of the Spirit's engagement in the life of the believer, she overlooks the "why". In offering my own thoughts on this, I refer the reader to a well-known passage in Romans chapter seven: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do…. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I

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[577] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 186–87. Italics mine.
[578] Gaebler, 187–187. Author's italics.
[579] Gaebler, 187.
[580] Gaebler, 187.
[581] Gaebler, 187.
[582] "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'" (John 8:34-36).

will *to do,* I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do,* that I practice."[583] Luther has this to say about it:

> *This 'willing' is the prompting of the spirit [sic] which comes from love*… [Paul's] answer is that he does do the good but does not accomplish it perfectly, because he does not extinguish the concupiscence of the flesh. How then can a thoroughly carnal man who has no desire to do good have this will, a will which Ps. 1 attributes to the blessed man and *which the Spirit alone gives through love*?[584]

Perhaps it goes without saying that God sends God's Spirit to dwell in believers' hearts and to work with them against sin and in spiritual struggle because God loves them. It is no more or less complicated than this. God does not action God's will in our lives or in the world around us because God desires to be in a position of autonomy. Rather God's love for humankind results in an invitation to be active in our own spiritual lives, even though the matter of eternal salvation is out of our control. In Gaebler's words,

> [w]hile one may hear Luther's language as intended to overthrow pride (and thus undermine human empowerment), this is but one way to hear him. The other is to understand the presence of God not as a threat but rather as a gift. The way one receives the information about God's cooperating presence reflects whether one lives under the law and the *Deus absconditus*, or in Christian freedom, under the promise of the *Deus revelatus.*[585]

Hampson's writing sadly demonstrates that she is able only to see the divine presence as a threat to her own agency, and never the gift of invitation to live life in cooperation with the Spirit.

4.4.10 Assessing Mary Gaebler

Having outlined Gaebler's argument for human agency in both Luther's theological and pastoral writings, it is time to assess the strength of her argument. I will also look more

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[583] Romans 7:15, 18-19. Italics mine.
[584] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 333–34. Italics mine.
[585] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 196.

closely at the points where Gaebler specifically addresses Hampson's criticisms of Christian (and predominantly Lutheran) theology. To refresh the mind of the reader, Gaebler has argued that, for most of the twentieth and on into the twenty-first century, theologians have had too narrow an understanding of Luther's doctrine of justification, drawing their understanding almost exclusively from Luther's early work (the period before 1521). This has resulted in a distorted view of Luther's anthropology, causing feminists to insist that there is no room in Luther for the person to develop into an agential self (Hampson), or a point of connection for developing a doctrine of women's sin (Saiving). To begin with, I see no reason to dispute Gaebler's claim that there are numerous passages in the Luther canon to support the idea that the believer has a responsibility to be active in their own spiritual walk. For me, this is evidenced most clearly in Luther's writings on *Anfechtung*, both in his autobiographical excerpts and in his pastoral advice. Gaebler has argued for there being an important correlation between the events in Luther's life and the development of his theological anthropology. For example, his experience of marriage and parenthood, and his increasing involvement in civic and political affairs. As the reader has seen, Gaebler has compiled an impressive collection of texts in support of her argument for human agency in Luther. The question then remains as to how well Gaebler's argument regarding human agency addresses Hampson's objections.

4.4.11 Gaebler on Hampson

Luther's doctrine of sanctification is not as well fleshed-out or systematically described as his doctrine of justification (if we were, for example, to compare Luther with John Calvin). Forming an understanding of Luther's doctrine of sanctification requires a searching out and a piecing together of numerous passages from the Luther canon. Gaebler has done an exceptional job of this. The following will therefore be a more in-depth look at how Gaebler challenges Hampson on her understanding and/or dismissal of Luther's understanding of sanctification, human agency, and the formation of the self. While correctly recognising how important it is to Luther's theological anthropology, Hampson fails to recognise the role of personal transformation in his work. She writes that

> Luther's achievements lay in his reconceptualization of the human relation to God. The medieval Catholic understanding of the human relation to God, grounded as it was in the thought of the ancient world,

> had supposed (as does modern Catholicism) that it is God's work to transform the human. Luther denied this. For him the revolution involved in being Christian is that one is no longer concerned about what is in oneself, or what one could become through God's grace. For the Christian lives by God's righteousness and not by his own. Therefore to be a Christian means that one has a radically different sense of oneself as being bound up with God and what God is.[586]

Hampson further explains that "the 'change' is conceived of *relationally*; loved by God, I am free to love. In speaking of 'change' we are not talking of acquiring some kind of interior goodness."[587] While Hampson is correct that "in being [or rather, in becoming] Christian… one is no longer concerned about what is in oneself,"[588] it cannot be said that Luther was not concerned with internal change and growth. Gaebler has offered a strong argument for the believer's participation in their own healing and spiritual growth in cooperation with the indwelling Holy Spirit, as well their responsibility to resist sin and demonic attack.

Reminding her readers of the Reformation catchphrase *semper iustus, semper pecator, semper reformans*, Hampson comments on Luther's declaration that

> *'Progress is nothing other than constant beginning.'*[589] *It follows from this that there is no history of the development of the self; no movement within ourselves from being a sinner to being righteous.* Rather are there two ways in which we can live: in opposition to God (sin), and from God (faith). Each moment we must live anew from God."[590]

Hampson describes this "process" in Luther's theology as "liv[ing]… in a circle.… The human being can never come to rest.… The human being does not make progress; life is

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[586] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 334.
[587] Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35.
[588] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 334.
[589] Hampson borrows this phrase from a longer Luther quotation in Ebeling (R.A. Wilson's English translation). Ebeling footnotes the Weimar edition of Luther's Works; WA 4.350.15f (1515-13). I have been unable to find the quotation in the English translation of Luther's Works. See Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought,* 162.
[590] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 335. Italics mine.

not a *via*. After all what could progress mean if one is speaking in terms of trusting not in one's own righteousness but in God?"[591] However, Gaebler demonstrates the way in which for Luther, the believer – in cooperation with Holy Spirit – is able to resist sin, and indeed is commanded to do so. The Scriptures demonstrate that spiritual growth is required in the life of the believer. What is this growth, if not a kind of progress? We might add to this Gaebler's conviction that wanting to will with the will of God is an important step towards actually willing it, also lends itself to the idea of spiritual progress. I suggest that Luther's description of progress as a "constant beginning" refers to our need to continually resist sin, beginning again when we do sin. This is another instance in which the willing with God concept can offer encouragement to the believer. Furthermore, as discussed above regarding Luther's response to Latomus, God's gift of grace allows believers to work in cooperation with God in such a way that "sin can be incrementally diminished and held in check."[592] Therefore, although there is indeed "no movement within ourselves from being a sinner to being righteous", being freed from one's sinful past does not mean that a person forgets their history and the things that have made her who she is up to this point. One further comment regarding Hampson's assertion that Luther's theology views life as a circle rather than a *via*; in describing life as a circle, she continues to overlook the eschatological aspects of Christian life. Also, my reading of Scripture, and of Luther, suggests that a "way" is in fact an apt description of the Christian life. It brings to mind the familiar words of Hebrews chapter twelve:

> Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.[593]

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[591] Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, 50.
[592] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 91.
[593] Hebrews 12:1-2.

4.4.12 The Flourishing Centred Self

It is necessary to move onto another issue; that of Hampson's conviction that Luther's anthropology is not conducive to women becoming independent, flourishing selves. She suggests that women should "acquire" or learn to be relational in relationships with other persons, rather than with God. "The great advantage of this would seem to be that one can speak of growth from a centered self, rather than of having to break the self and be based on another (who is God).… *Luther's system, if it suggests that we can have no sense of our own integrity, could be said to work against becoming a centered self*."[594] Gaebler elucidates Hampson's position, explaining that she regards Luther as "fail[ing] to provide the ontic structures required for a self that can persist through time."[595] Hampson quite rightly regards this as detrimental to the feminist goal of women's flourishing and empowerment.[596] However, as Gaebler has demonstrated, Luther's theological anthropology includes the possibility of a divine-human relationship in which the believer is invited to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as an agent in his or her own life. However, there is one "problem" that Gaebler's defence of agency and divine-human cooperation in Luther cannot do away with, and that is Hampson's passionate objection to Luther's conviction that the Christian self cannot exist apart from God. Let us begin by returning to a passage in Gaebler quoted earlier in this chapter:

> [p]ersonhood [for Ebeling]… would seem… to depend (even as Hampson suggests) on an agency beyond and outside of itself for its existence. In Ebeling's view, the self is constituted *only* as it receives itself from another, and thus would seem to have no 'being' in itself. Human existence, as it is described here, apparently lacks just that sort of being that Hampson emphasizes – *a being, that is, with some degree of autonomy and ongoing self-continuity through time*.[597]

This is a response to Gerhard Ebeling's claim that the Latin word *coram* (meaning before, before the face of, or in the sight of, and in the presence of) is fundamental to Luther's understanding of being. Ebeling explains that "what is decisive in this [*coram*-]

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[594] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 341. Italics mine.
[595] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 192.
[596] See Gaebler, 192.
[597] Gaebler, 94. The word "only" is italicised by the author. Further italics are mine. Gaebler, 94.

relationship is that there is a countenance which fixes its eye upon something, looks at it, perceives it and gives existence to it as such."[598] Although human persons exist in a range of *coram*-relationships, including "existence in my own sight (*coram meipso*), existence in the sight of men (*coram hominibus*), and existence in the sight of the world (*coram mundo*)", the fundamental relationship is the *coram Deo*-relationship, our "existence in the sight of God, in the presence of God, in the eyes of God, in the judgement of God, and in the word of God."[599] This perspective might be summed up as "I live, because I live before God".

"That there is an underlying ontic structure out of which a natural understanding of self emerges in Luther's anthropology is undeniable," writes Gaebler. "Some will argue that it is precisely the self that is 'killed' and re-created into quite a different relational self. While this is no doubt an accurate description of Luther's understanding of the process of justification, it need not imply that the underlying structures that sustain self-identity are thereby excluded from the re-created, relational self."[600] In other words, there is room within Luther's anthropology for these two aspects to exist alongside each other. Gaebler further explains that these ontic structures "provide for that human deliberation, decision, and action by which the self is engaged in ongoing transformation."[601] This seems an ideal point at which to clarify my own view. Drawing on Gaebler's insights, I believe that the self has a limited free will (in terms of human agency) to act in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and to resist the devil and sin. Furthermore, I differ from Hampson's view in my conviction that a true self cannot exist apart from the human-divine relationship. The believer is reliant upon God for their identity; any self existing apart from this is incomplete. I believe that Gaebler supports this view.

4.4.13 Further Engagement with Hampson

This thesis observes one or two further points in Hampson's writing which can provide a point of contact with Luther, which Hampson herself has not observed; namely, regarding how she believes God ought to act. Drawing on the relationship models of

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[598] Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, 193–94.
[599] Ebeling, 199.
[600] Gaebler, *The Courage of Faith: Martin Luther and the Theonomous Self*, 94, footnote 38.
[601] Gaebler, 96.

web and hierarchy in the work of Carol Gilligan,[602] Hampson declares that a God that can be accepted by feminists "will need to be seen as involved in the web, supporting it, spinning it. God is the one who is among us, providing the context of our lives."[603] This is surely what Gaebler has described in her Lutheran model of Spirit-empowered agency. Furthermore, Hampson's "God becomes the one who allows us to come into being. God enables us to fulfil the potential of what we have it in us to be."[604] This is in contrast to the Lutheran God who "undermine[s] our self-integrity and 'shatter[s]' our selves."[605] Hampson overlooks the fact that what is being shattered is an already broken, unhealthy self. From a Christian point of view, "God absolutely "enables us to fulfil the potential of what we have it in us to be."[606] In Philippians 1:6 the apostle Paul expressed confidence "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." This allows for the element of continuity in the Christian life which Hampson believes is lacking. Paul further assured the Christians in Ephesus that they are God's workmanship, created to do good works already planned by God.[607] Of course, these passages confirm not only that God wants human persons to fulfil their potential, but that it is *God* who puts that potential within them. However, Hampson desires the freedom of self-integrity and self-directed pursuit, and she would no doubt feel that in the examples I have just provided, God takes a little too much upon Godself. It is this divine autonomy that is anathema to her. The discussion will leave Gaebler and Hampson for the time being, and move onto Serene Jones.

4.5 Serene Jones

Serene Jones is a feminist theologian who situates herself within the Reformed tradition. Like Gaebler, she seeks to rework and reflect on areas in theology which may not at

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[602] Gilligan concludes that "[t]he reinterpretation of women's experience in terms of their own imagery of relationships thus clarifies that experience and also provides a nonhierarchical vision of human connection. Since relationships, cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic, their transposition into the image of web changes an order of inequality into a structure of interconnection. But the power of the images of hierarchy and web, their evocation of feelings and their recurrence in thought, signifies the embeddedness of both of these images in the cycle of human life." See Carol Gilligan, 'Images of Relationship', in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Second Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 62.
[603] Hampson, 'Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique', 57.
[604] Hampson, 57–58.
[605] Hampson, 57.
[606] See Hampson, 58.
[607] See Ephesians 2: 10. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

first glance be regarded as conducive to the feminist goal of human flourishing. As shared in Chapter One, Jones offers the following definition of feminist theology:

> At the heart of feminist theology lies the belief that God wills that women (along with all people) flourish, and that, as people of faith, Christians are called to follow God's will and seek out conditions for that flourishing, all the while recognizing the limits of sin and the need for the Holy Spirit. Feminist theologians thus affirm that God's grace has transformative power. They believe that human beings can be converted, changed, redeemed, reborn, remade. Thus, women's oppression in the broader culture (as well as in the Christian tradition) can be altered, new being is possible, selves and communities can truly be recrafted in grace.[608]

Keeping this definition in mind, this section will focus on Jones' reworking of the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

4.5.1 Regarding Luther's Doctrine of Justification

Continuing in a vein of feminist criticism similar to Saiving and Hampson, Jones identifies "gender limits" present within Luther's doctrine of justification. She observes that "[a]lthough Luther no doubt meant to include women in his account of 'the sinner,' his conceptual focus on man suggests that she is only guilty and saved by association. Luther's story is no place for specificity as a 'woman.'"[609] However, women face even more serious issues when entering Luther's justification narrative.[610] Jones' approach to women's relationality differs from Hampson. Building on French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray's description of woman as fluid and lacking a proper boundary or structure,[611] she asks what might happen when such a woman is faced with Luther's doctrine of justification:

> Her sin is not one of overly rigid self-containment; her brokenness lies in her lack of containment, in her cultural definition in relation to

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[608] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 52.
[609] Jones, 61.
[610] Jones, 61.
[611] Jones, 42–43.

> others. *Instead of an overabundance of self, the source of her alienation from God is her lack of self-definition;* she is too liquid, she lacks the skin to hold her together, to embrace and envelop her. *She lacks the structuring boundaries that allow her to be an other in relationship to God in faith.*… She comes not with a robust self that needs to be dismantled by the wrath of the Law but as *a de-centered subject* whose lack of self is her prison. She comes before God not as a defendant caught in the bondage of the will; she comes as one whose will has been deleted in her many relations. In an ironic twist, one might say her will could benefit from bondage, for in its present state, her agency is dissolved into the fluid motions of her relations.[612]

The reader can quickly see where Jones differs from Hampson. Hampson writes that "we must conceive God to have an essential connectedness with all that is. God then cannot become an other, one whose will to act in accordance with would be to act heteronomously",[613] while Jones emphasises that becoming a "structured" self is necessary not only for human relationships, but for a relationship with God. In so doing, she confirms the biblical conviction that God is "Other". If this were not so, and if human persons were not separated from God, there would have been no need for God to send Jesus, the man who was like us, our high priest who is not "unable to empathise with our weaknesses."[614]

4.5.2 Rearranging the Doctrine of Salvation

Jones is well aware of the problematic aspect of God's alien work in the "process" of salvation. She acknowledges the difficulty and indeed the offensiveness of a doctrine which declares that a woman who is already broken and vulnerable must be further broken down before she can be saved. Jones suggests two possible outcomes when such a woman encounters Luther's classical definition of sin and divine wrath. First, she may find herself unable to relate to what she hears, leaving her "without a story to initiate her

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[612] Jones, 62–63. Italics mine.
[613] Hampson, 'Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique', 342.
[614] "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4:15).

into grace."[615] The second possibility, which seems to me to have even more serious consequences, is that

> she may identify with Luther's sinner and take upon herself a script designed for the prideful sinner. Already suffering from an excess of humiliation and a debilitating lack of self-containment, she is made by God's grace to recapitulate the dynamics of her oppression and self-loss.… Rather than a conversion narrative that opens into transformation and new beginning, the story that meets woman here is the story of a shattering she knows all too well – more like sin than the freeing act of divine mercy.[616]

This woman already knows that her life is a mess. She knows that she is broken. She already senses that she is not (good) enough. If the story of salvation is told to her in a way that further enforces the belief that she is not enough and that it is God's will to break her further then she will hear such news not as a message of liberation, but as one designed to lead her further into bondage.

Jones' solution to this serious theological and pastoral problem is that "[t]he story of God's judgement and mercy should… be told in reverse – starting with sanctification and its rhetoric of building up instead of with justification and its initial language of undoing."[617] The reasoning behind this doctrinal inversion is that it would allow a woman to first encounter "the doctrine of the Christian life" in a way "that constructs her, giving her the center and the substance she needs to become the subject then judged and graciously forgiven."[618] Jones insists that her proposal in no way "replace[s] or destroy[s] the logic of justification."[619] Instead, hearing the story of sanctification first allows a woman to become a "sturdy and resilient new creation" before being told of the "dismantling and forgiveness" that is also necessary.[620] According to Jones, conveying salvation doctrine in this way "simply allows the most problematic aspects of

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[615] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 63.
[616] Jones, 63.
[617] Jones, 63.
[618] Jones, 63.
[619] Jones, 63.
[620] See Jones, 63.

justification and (its first de-centering moment) to be tempered."[621] Furthermore, this approach allows Jones – as a feminist theologian – to declare that the Christian God wants to "empower and liberate women rather than to break what little self-confidence they have."[622]

My initial response to Jones' suggestion of transposing the doctrines of justification and sanctification was one of suspicion. After all, do not the Reformers clearly teach that one comes before the other; that having been justified by faith, a person then begins the process of growing in that faith? I was consequently intrigued by George Hunsinger's assessment of John Calvin's understanding of the "process" of justification and sanctification. Hunsinger explains how Catholic critics claimed that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone "evacuated the Christian life of its significance,… leading to quietism, lethargy and weak resignation."[623] This seems to be merely an extension of Erasmus' much earlier criticism of Luther; preaching the message that good works do not assist in their salvation will make Christians lazy in doing good. Second-generation French reformer Calvin sought to address this charge by reversing the order in which the doctrines of justification and sanctification were generally presented. In expounding the doctrines of salvation, Calvin began with sanctification, "postponing all detailed consideration of justification until the discussion of sanctification was complete."[624] In so doing he sought to demonstrate that spiritual growth and progress *are* part of the life of the believer, due to the fact that *justification and sanctification follow equally and inseparably from the believer's union with Christ*.[625] Hunsinger explains that

> Calvin's strategy of reversal was based on a logical point. Justification and sanctification, he argued, were given to faith 'simultaneously' (*simul*). Since the one was never given without the other, the order in which theology presented them was flexible. It made no essential difference whether one moved from justification to sanctification, or

[621] See Jones, 63.
[622] Jones, 63.
[623] George Hunsinger, 'A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth', *Zeitschrift Für Dialektische Theologie* 18, no. 3 (2002): 316.
[624] Hunsinger, 317.
[625] Hunsinger, 317.

> else from sanctification to justification, as long as one realized that both followed together from union with Christ by faith. The order of presentation could be chosen to meet the needs of the situation.[626]

Although Calvin's approach was a response to the Catholic criticism regarding the lack of Protestant emphasis on good works in the Christian life, it can logically be applied in a situation such as Jones describes. As a Reformed theologian, it is not unreasonable to assume that Jones had Calvin's theological wrangling in mind during the formation of her own approach. Nadia Marais confirms that for Jones, the doctrines of justification and sanctification are inseparable.[627]

4.5.3 Defining Sanctification

Despite the above argument, I find Jones' definition of the term "sanctification" to be problematic. Ellen Armour explains that "Jones places sanctification before justification to provide women with a metaphorical skin to protect them from justification's harmful effects."[628] As mentioned above, Jones insists that her inversion of justification and sanctification "does not replace or destroy the logic of justification."[629] Rachel Muers adds clarification to the issue, explaining that "Jones defends… the placing of sanctification, as the 'building up' of a reconstructed identity in Christ, *before* justification, as the undoing of false constructions of the self."[630] While I am content to accept "the undoing of false constructions of the self" as a partial definition of justification, as well as Jones' evident appropriation of Calvin's insistence that justification and sanctification are given to the new believer simultaneously, I do not see how she can define sanctification as "building up."[631] This is neither a Reformed nor a Lutheran definition of sanctification. Jones evidently knows this, for elsewhere she defines justification and sanctification as the "twofold character" of God's saving grace;

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[626] Hunsinger, 317.
[627] Rachel Muers, 'Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace', *Modern Theology* 18, no. 1 (January 2002): 87.
[628] Ellen T. Armour, 'Feminist Theory and Christian Theology (Book)', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (March 2003): 213.
[629] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 63.
[630] Muers, 'Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace', 140. Author's italics.
[631] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 63.

"[i]t *frees us* and *forms us*."[632] Jones further explains that "sanctification occurs when our eyes are opened to the grace-filled covenant God has made with creation and we seek to live according to its order, the Law. In other words, we seek to live in a Christ-like fashion."[633] This later definition says nothing about "building up". It also works against Jones' own earlier logic. If the nonbelieving woman of Jones' example is given the message of sanctification first, might she not "seek to live in a Christ-like fashion," in her own strength? She would naturally fail because she has not yet received the saving grace which joins her to Christ and justifies her, nor the indwelling Holy Spirit which will empower her to live a sanctified life. This would further compound her own sense of impotence and lack of self-worth. What Jones' woman needs to hear is that God desires to justify her because God loves her. The message of empowerment she needs to hear is that she is loved unconditionally, that she is forgiven, and that she is *enough*.

Returning to theological rather than pastoral concerns, Jones ignores the internal logic of the doctrine of salvation; the believer's identity cannot be "reconstituted" before the "false" self is deconstructed. Although Jones does not use the Lutheran terminology of God's alien work (*opus alienum Dei*), this is presumably what she means when she speaks of "the most problematic aspects of justification."[634] While I fully appreciate Jones' concern of not wanting to further burden an already broken woman, I do not think the full extent of the doctrine of justification can be avoided if we are to take seriously, as Luther did, the insidiousness of human sin, as well as Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will. Jones' approach, although well-intentioned, is not enough. I believe it would be better to develop Luther's suggestion of presenting the aspect of the gospel that the person most needs to hear and would best respond to. I suggest therefore that it is not a reversal of traditional doctrines that is needed, but rather a change in how the story is told. Many people do not need to be broken down by God. They are already broken, and they know it. They do not need either God or well-meaning Christians to tell them of their brokenness. And surely God only breaks down where it is needed?

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[632] Serene Jones, 'Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life', in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in the Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2002), 58. Author's italics.
[633] Jones, 59.
[634] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 63.

The road to salvation – to faith in Christ – is not a one-size-fits-all kind of journey. We must each confess the lordship of Jesus Christ and a belief in his resurrection in order to become part of the family of God;[635] each of us arrives at the place of making a confession in a different way and by a different road.

4.5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Despite my disagreement with Jones regarding how she introduces her subject – the broken woman – to the doctrines of sanctification and justification, she nevertheless describes what a knowledge of God's grace and all it entails can do for such a woman. Let me first remind the reader of some of Saiving's feminine sins: "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; [and] dependence on others for one's own self-definition."[636] As I mentioned above, Jones adopts Irigaray's description of woman lacking a skin or container. This echoes Saiving's idea of women suffering from diffuseness and lack of self-definition. Jones suggests that sanctifying grace might be described as the skin or container women need to give them definition.[637] Drawing on the Pauline language of "putting on Christ", she explains that a believer "puts on the law of love, and this gift of grace adorns the self, giving specificity, edge, skinned determinativeness to the self in Christ. When one is sanctified, one is regenerated, formed anew – adorned in the grace of God's redeeming love."[638] While I believe that this is a brilliant and theologically sound application of Irigaray's idea, I do not see that one can be sanctified *before* one is justified. At the risk of repeating myself, it defies the logic of salvation; for how can a person be remade, or in Jones' problematic language "built up", if they have not first been undone by God?

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

Through an exploration of select writings from Valerie Saiving, Daphne Hampson, Mary Gaebler, and Serene Jones, this chapter has surveyed and assessed feminist contributions to theological discussions of divine autonomy versus human freedom and agency, introduced feminist concepts of sin and justification, the role of the Spirit in

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[635] "[I]f you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9).
[636] See Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', 109.
[637] See Jones, 'Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life', 61.
[638] Jones, 61.

human agency, and the problematic aspects of what it means to be a self *coram Deo*. While Saiving has been criticised for not going far enough in her criticisms and naïvely assuming that her own experience was representative for all women, her work laid an important foundation for the task of feminist theological criticism. Hampson's work offers an important reminder to evangelicals engaged in feminist theology to pay attention to critiques outside of their own traditions and to allow their work to be informed by real world concerns, both inside and outside the Church. Jones' theology inhabits a place of embracing the new and challenging the familiar. Despite my not agreeing with Jones' approach, she reminds me that Reformation doctrines need to be constantly assessed regarding whether they help or hinder the body of Christ. This is the true meaning of *semper reformanda*. Finally, Gaebler makes a rich contribution to this project's concern with agency as an important aspect of human flourishing. She demonstrates, contra Hampson, that Lutheran theology includes theological room for manoeuvre in its concept of human freedom, regarding God's invitation for the believer to cooperate with the indwelling Holy Spirit in the ongoing task of resisting sin and the devil, as well as choosing with the will of God in ways that support her spiritual growth. The next chapter takes the reader on a more in-depth discussion of sin, focusing particularly on feminist responses to traditional descriptions of original sin as pride and sensuality.

Chapter 5 The Nature of Sin and the Feminist Self

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter follows closely on from Chapter Four. It will build on the exploration into what it means to be a flourishing feminist self in relationship with the triune God. This chapter begins the task of reflecting more seriously on the topic of sin and its relation to the divine-human relationship. Feminist perspectives on hamartiology are linked to feminist concerns regarding the way the gospel (the doctrines of justification and sanctification) is presented to women, as seen in Chapter Four's discussion of Jones' theology. This chapter begins by describing Reinhold Niebuhr's understanding of sin as pride and sensuality, focusing on those aspects which continue to concern feminists. It goes on to discuss the issue of sin in the feminist theologies of Judith Plaskow, Susan Nelson, Jennifer Baichwal, and Jodie Lyon, specifically their engagement with Niebuhr's hamartiology. While Plaskow and Nelson make what may be regarded as fairly traditional feminist objections concerning Niebuhr's failure to address feminine experiences of sin, Baichwal and Lyon challenge their feminist colleagues to read Niebuhr with new eyes, greater honesty, and a respect for the context in which he wrote.

5.2 Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Sin

Reinhold Niebuhr's description of pride as humanity's primal sin has been the cornerstone of Anglo-American Protestant theological anthropology for ninety years. Niebuhr's formulation of sin as pride has been a foil for feminist theologians since Saiving offered her critique of traditional sin doctrine. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (the text upon which this section will focus), Niebuhr declares that the biblical-prophetic sense of God as judge of humanity "is wholly lost in the contemplation of a God who is the fulfilment of each unique human individuality but not the judge of its sin."[639] Furthermore, "the individuality of man is tenable only in a dimension of reality in which the highest achievements of his self-knowledge and self-consciousness are

[639] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 62.

both known and judged from a source of life and truth beyond him."[640] I understand two things from this: one, *that the divine judgement of sin is a necessary part of human selfhood*; and two, that this judgement must come from outside of us.

While Hampson and others have insisted that traditional Christian teaching seeks to crush the self-worth and agency of the individual, Niebuhr's anthropology is formulated from the conviction that God is the creative Source and Sustainer of human life. True self-worth and freedom can only be found in a life of faith.

> Without the presuppositions of the Christian faith the individual is either nothing or becomes everything. In the Christian faith man's insignificance as a creature… is lifted into significance by the mercy and power of God in which his life is sustained. *But his significance as a free spirit is understood as subordinate to the freedom of God.* His inclination to abuse his freedom, to overestimate his power and significance and to become everything is understood as the primal sin. It is because man is inevitably involved in this primal sin that he is bound to meet God first of all as a judge, who humbles his pride and brings his vain imagination to naught.[641]

With this key conviction of Niebuhr stated, it will help to describe his understanding of the "process" by which human beings sin. The first "stage" is anxiety.

5.2.1 Anxiety

According to Niebuhr, it is their anxiety which causes humankind to sin.[642] The contradiction of being both finite and free makes us anxious.[643] He writes that

> man, being both free and bound, both limited and limitless, is anxious. Anxiety is an inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved. Anxiety is the internal precondition

[640] Niebuhr, 91.
[641] Niebuhr, 92. Italics mine.
[642] See Niebuhr, 168.
[643] See Niebuhr, 178–79.

> of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing on the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness.[644]

Yet Niebuhr is keen to emphasise that *anxiety is not sin*,[645] and that "there is always the ideal possibility that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency towards sinful self-assertion."[646] This "ideal possibility" is a faith in God's complete love for us, a love that can rout all our insecurities.[647] But this existential anxiety is not all bad. Niebuhr also identifies it as the source of human creativity; due to a drive to discover one's limits, for "[a]ll human actions stand under seemingly limitless possibilities."[648] If I may be allowed to make a side observation here, Niebuhr's view of the world strikes me as a very privileged one. Millions of people are not given the opportunity to strive for more. Dreaming of limitless possibilities is the luxury of those with full stomachs and an assurance of physical safety. But on to the sin of pride.

5.2.2 The Sin of Pride

"When anxiety has conceived it brings forth pride and sensuality."[649] Although Niebuhr begins by identifying both pride and sensuality as the primal forms of sin, he quickly asserts that "pride is more basic than sensuality" and that sensuality is somehow derived from pride.[650] Niebuhr believes himself to be in continuity with the biblical and Christian tradition(s), explaining that "Christianity regards [pride] as sin in its quintessential form."[651] Sensuality is instead "a secondary consequence of man's rebellion against God."[652] Niebuhr splits sin into its religious dimension (humanity's rebellion against God) and its moral and social dimension (injustice),[653] writing that "[t]he ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will-to-

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[644] Niebuhr, 182.
[645] See Niebuhr, 182–83.
[646] Niebuhr, 182–83.
[647] See Niebuhr, 183.
[648] See Niebuhr, 183. "Man is anxious not only because his life is limited and dependent and yet not so limited that he does not know of his limitations. He is also anxious because he does not know the limit of his possibilities." Niebuhr, 183.
[649] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 186.
[650] Niebuhr, 186.
[651] Niebuhr, 192. See also Niebuhr, 186, footnote 1.
[652] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 231.
[653] It is this "social dimension" of sin as injustice that tends to concern feminist theologians most.

power[654] inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life."[655] Niebuhr makes an important further point regarding what he terms "pride of power;" that the human ego believes itself to be the master of all situations, failing to "recognize the contingent and dependent character of its life and believes itself to be the author of its own existence, the judge of its own values and the master of its own destiny."[656] Significantly for the feminist theological critique and indeed for all liberation theologies interacting with Niebuhr, he acknowledges that "[t]his proud pretension is present in an inchoate form in all human life but it rises to greater heights among those individuals and classes who have a more than ordinary degree of social power."[657]

5.2.3 Sensuality

Niebuhr's description of the sin of sensuality is less straightforward than his description of pride, not least because Niebuhr begins by saying that the two forms of sin are equal, then a short time later asserts that sensuality *stems from* pride. However, a number of feminists have seized upon Niebuhr's descriptions of sensuality as an apt characterisation of so-called feminine or women's sin. It is therefore necessary to explore what Niebuhr has to say about the sin of sensuality in some detail. He explains that the human person is tempted "either to deny the contingent character of his existence" (which results in pride or self-love), or to escape from their freedom (resulting in sensuality).[658] The person tempted into sensuality "seeks to solve the problem of the contradiction of finiteness and freedom, not by seeking to hide his finiteness and comprehending the world into himself, *but by seeking to hide his freedom and by losing himself in some aspect of his abortive attempt to solve the problem of finiteness and freedom*."[659] More specifically, "[s]ensuality represents an effort to escape from the freedom and the infinite possibilities of spirit *by becoming lost in the*

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[654] The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines "will to power" as "the drive of the superman in the philosophy of Nietzsche to perfect and transcend the self through the possession and exercise of creative power; a conscious or unconscious desire to exercise authority over others." See 'Will to Power', in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary, s.v.*, accessed 6 August 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will%20to%20power.
[655] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 179.
[656] See Niebuhr, 188.
[657] Niebuhr, 188–89.
[658] See Niebuhr, 185.
[659] Niebuhr, 178. Italics mine.

detailed processes, activities and interests of existence, an effort which results inevitably in unlimited devotion to limited values."[660] Superficially this sounds a lot like Saiving's feminine sins of "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness",[661] although Niebuhr goes on to cite "sexual license, gluttony, extravagance, [and] drunkenness" as examples of sins stemming from sensuality.[662]

5.2.4 Does Sensuality Equal Selfishness?

Niebuhr raises an important question in his discussion of sin as sensuality which may be framed as follows: *if sin is to be defined primarily as pride and self-love, then what is the relationship between sensuality and selfishness*?[663] Is sensuality a form of selfishness, a consequence of sin, or perhaps "a distinctive form of sin, to be sharply distinguished from self-love"?[664] Niebuhr suggests the following distinction between the two: "If selfishness is the destruction of life's harmony by the self's attempt to centre life around itself, [then] sensuality would seem to be the destruction of harmony within the self."[665] The reader will note the words *would seem to be*, suggesting that Niebuhr is not confident in putting forth a concrete definition. Furthermore, although he briefly traces the theme in the apostle Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther,[666] Niebuhr does not seem convinced that this "inordinate love for all creaturely and mutable values" necessarily stems from a "primal love of self" after all.[667] He suggests that sensuality might be regarded as "an alternative idolatry in which the self, conscious of the inadequacy of its self-worship, seeks escape by finding some other god," rather than "a form of idolatry which makes the self god."[668] Perhaps the sin of sensuality is *self-ish* in the sense that it is unconsciously centred on the self, by virtue of the self's not recognising its need to be centred in God.

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[660] Niebuhr, 185. Italics mine.
[661] Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', 109.
[662] See Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 228.
[663] See Niebuhr, 228.
[664] Niebuhr, 228.
[665] Niebuhr, 228. Italics mine.
[666] See Niebuhr, 230–32.
[667] Niebuhr, 232, see also 233.
[668] See Niebuhr, 233.

5.2.5 Niebuhr: Concluding Thoughts

Despite maintaining throughout *The Nature and Destiny of Man* that sensuality stems from the more primal sin of pride and self-love, Niebuhr does not finally settle the relationship between sensuality and self-love/selfishness. I believe this leaves him available as a conversation partner with feminist theologies of sin, particularly in his language of commitment to mutable values. Finally, Niebuhr describes sensuality as a "further confusion" of the "original confusion" of the human person replacing God with one's own self as the centre of one's universe. This results in the person losing "the true centre of his life," and consequently being "no longer able to maintain his own will as the centre of himself."[669] This again is a statement worth exploring in relation to human agency, the apparent failure of women in maintaining boundaries, and the image of Irigaray's envelope. The chapter turns now to a series of feminist engagements with Niebuhr, beginning with Plaskow.

5.3 Judith Plaskow

Jewish American feminist theologian Judith Plaskow was one of the first to respond to Valerie Saiving's call for the need to challenge male experience as the norm for all human experience when doing theology. In 1980 Plaskow published a doctoral dissertation titled *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*.[670] Having already examined Niebuhr's hamartiology, the reader will permit me to pass over Plaskow's description of the content of Niebuhr's discussion on sin and grace and go immediately to her criticism and assessment of his work.

5.3.1 Pride and Sensuality

Plaskow argues that Niebuhr fails to "establish the primacy of pride" over sensuality,[671] insisting that "there is nothing inherent in the idea of sensuality (even narrowly defined) which suggests that it is secondary to the sin of pride."[672] She further states that Niebuhr's move to subordinate sensuality means that "he loses sight of it as a

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[669] See Niebuhr, 233.
[670] Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.* Plaskow's assessment of Tillich is beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore not be discussed.
[671] See Plaskow, 62.
[672] Plaskow, 93.

significant human sin and one independent of pridefulness."[673] This causes him in turn to overlook important aspects of humanity's "flight from freedom".[674] Plaskow explains that "pride is only one human sin. Human nature as finite freedom poses a danger but it also imposes a responsibility. Human beings can ignore their finitude, but they can also fail to live up to the obligations of their freedom."[675] She further suggests that the "predetermined order" of pride and sensuality that Niebuhr sets up for his discussion of the human experience of sin is a result of his experiencing just how destructive the sins of powerful people can be.[676] This recognition of Niebuhr's theological context is important, as will be seen in a discussion of Baichwal's work later in this chapter.

5.3.2 Becoming a Self

Although Plaskow does not deny that women's lives as well as men's can be characterised by "self-absorption or… petty pride", Plaskow regards as the primary error in Niebuhr's definition of sin "his insistence that turning away from God means turning towards the self."[677] Plaskow passionately refutes this assumption, as many feminists have done since. Niebuhr's understanding of grace in response to sin focuses on the self-absorbed self which "contradicts the love which is the law of its being. This is the self which needs to be broken open and thus opened up to others."[678] Plaskow explains that he fails to address the self which although devoted to serving others cannot meet them as subjects, because the self is not yet a subject. This leads her to insist that "[i]t is meaningless to say that the self can become a self only through being shattered and turned to others, *for its sin is precisely that it has no self to shatter*. The self-abnegating self may be in need of grace as surely as the prideful self, but the dynamics of grace must be understood in a different way."[679] While theologians have observed that the feminine sins described by Saiving (and taken up by Plaskow) do not seem very serious, Plaskow allows for an active "wilful" element in sensual sin, explaining that while "rebellion against God may amount simply to God-forgetfulness,… absorption in the everyday, refusal to become a self can also represent *deliberate* flight from

[673] Plaskow, 63.
[674] Plaskow, 63.
[675] Plaskow, 68.
[676] See Plaskow, 93.
[677] Plaskow, 151.
[678] Plaskow, 156.
[679] Plaskow, 156. Italics mine.

responsibility before God."[680] This allows her to suggest that "[t]he refusal of self-transcendence… [is] no less a sin than pride."[681] In the *refusal* to become a self, one sins not only against oneself but against God and against others; *"[i]f pride is the attempt to usurp the place of God, sensuality is the denial of creation and his image*."[682] It is also worth observing that Plaskow's including deliberate action here means that what she describes as sensuality can legitimately be considered sin, if sin is to be defined primarily as an act of the will.

5.3.3 Sin and Grace

Plaskow perceptively writes that "a doctrine of sin which is inadequate will probably be correlated with an inadequate doctrine of grace."[683] She regards Niebuhr's descriptions of both sin and grace as imbalanced; his doctrine of sin because it overemphasises pride at the expense of sensuality, and his doctrine of grace because "[i]t does not take into account the fact that the structure of human freedom both poses a danger (its prideful misuse) and imposes a responsibility (its full realization)."[684] Plaskow sees this as creating a serious problem, in that while Niebuhr's doctrine of grace offers a salvific solution to the prideful sinner whose self-centred self must be crucified, it fails the one whose "sin" is the failure to be a self.[685] She therefore explains that

> [g]race… must have a dimension which corresponds to the sin of failing to take responsibility for becoming a self, of failing to live up to the potentialities of the structures of finite freedom.… [It] must also be understood… as the acceptance of the self in its abdication of freedom and its consequent ability, however fragmentary, to act responsibly towards itself and others.[686]

In other words, if sin is to have a wider definition than grasping self-centredness, then grace (justification) must offer more than a call to selfless giving and sacrificial love as a path to Christian freedom. The Christian call to self-sacrifice is a concern and

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[680] Plaskow, 151. Italics mine.
[681] Plaskow, 68.
[682] Plaskow, 68. Italics mine.
[683] Plaskow, 155.
[684] See Plaskow, 84.
[685] See Plaskow, 84, 90.
[686] Plaskow, 90.

stumbling block for Plaskow, as it has been for many feminist theologians since. Her paramount concern is quite simply that women may not have a self to sacrifice.[687] She explains that "[t]he language of self-sacrifice conflicts with personhood and becomes destructive when it suggests that the struggle to become a centered self, to achieve full independent selfhood, is sinful."[688] Theology and the Church risk becoming one of the many voices in society "defining and confining the way women ought to live."[689] This brings this discussion to the theology of Susan Nelson, who also brings a criticism against Niebuhr's sin of sensuality. She takes Niebuhr to task for failing to make his description of sensuality sufficiently broad in scope, in order that his doctrine of sin might address the needs of women as well as men.

5.4 Susan Nelson

North American feminist theologian Susan Nelson[690] is concerned about the burden of guilt that women carry and the devastating effects it can have on their lives. She writes that "[women's] guilt is taking its toll.… It is… being etched into the secret lives of women who turn against themselves in self-hatred; who lose themselves in alcohol, drugs, starvation diets – or in the frenetic activity of trying to please everyone else."[691] Nelson explains that our sense of guilt is rooted in the Christian concept of sin, resulting from the way in which we perceive our sinfulness before God. The concept of guilt as related to sin is not isolated but situated within the context of God's mercy and forgiveness; mercy and forgiveness which is supposed to lead to a regenerated life.[692] However Nelson has identified a problem within this formula:

> the guilt of woman does not seem to have known this same redemptive promise [of regeneration]. Rather than guilt leading to confession of sin, the knowledge of pardon, and the transformation into a new life, guilt

[687] See Plaskow, 87.
[688] Plaskow, 87.
[689] Plaskow, 87.
[690] This theologian has also published under the name of Susan Nelson Dunfee.
[691] Susan Nelson, 'The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride', *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 316.
[692] See Nelson, 316.

> has led woman into the very cycle of bondage to guilt and patterns of destruction that the Christian faith is supposed to shatter.[693]

Nelson blames the Christian tradition for this; for developing the concept of sin as pride at the expense of sin as "hiding" (Nelson's concept of the sin of hiding will be examined below). She accuses Christianity of "perpetuat[ing] patterns of bondage and repression rather than breaking them.… [B]y encouraging woman to confess the wrong sin, and by failing to judge her actual sin", the church is guilty of "add[ing] to woman's guilt and fail[ing] to call her into her full humanity."[694] This is indeed a serious charge.

5.4.1 Sensuality Versus Hiding

Nelson believes that Niebuhr is incorrect in his use of the term "sensuality", in which he focuses on the idea of losing oneself in "some bodily form of finitude" and fails to develop the sense of "escapism" which Nelson believes is present in this form of sin.[695] She therefore prefers to speak of "the sin of hiding", "*which focuses more on the act, or nonact, of escaping rather than on the locus to which one escapes*."[696] Nelson criticises Niebuhr for failing to fully develop his hamartiology, asserting that "the very naming of the sin of hiding as sensuality betrays a certain narrowness of focus which eventually serves to lead him from his initial insight."[697] Niebuhr fails to see that the sinner may seek to escape her finitude not necessarily through losing herself in physical lusts but *by losing herself in another person, institution, or cause*.[698] Nelson explains that

> the sin of hiding can take the form of devotion to another – the expending of one's vital energies not in the acceptance of one's own freedom, but in the running away from that freedom by pouring those energies into the life of another. Had Niebuhr enlarged his understanding of the possible loci for such an escape, he would have

[693] Nelson, 317.
[694] Nelson, 317.
[695] See Nelson, 318.
[696] Nelson, 318. Italics mine.
[697] Nelson, 318.
[698] Nelson, 318–19.

> realized the very insidious hiddenness of the sin of hiding and could no longer have termed it the sin of sensuality.[699]

She further identifies an ambiguity or overlap between the sin of hiding and the sin of pride, explaining that one always becomes a secondary form of sin to the other:

> In seeking to overcome finitude, one eventually succumbs to the self-conscious idolatry of some form of finitude, which is reflected in the knowledge that the idol one worships is truly finite and not transcendent at all – the sin of hiding. On the other hand, in seeking to escape from one's freedom, one betrays in the very intention to escape a desire to control one's own existence, which reflects the sin of pride.[700]

In other words, sin is a complex phenomenon, and does not operate in an either/or fashion. While Niebuhr recognised this, he failed to develop sensuality to the same extent as his reflections on pride.

5.4.2 Hiding: A Secondary Sin?

Nelson identifies this failure to develop the sin of hiding, which she sees as a further point of confusion in Niebuhr. Because he identifies hiding with pride, the sin of hiding becomes a *form* of pride. Nelson also explains that because Niebuhr has identified the sin of hiding *as* sensuality, he "confuses the sin of hiding in its primary form with its secondary form under the sin of pride." She regards this as highly problematic, due to the fact that "under the sin of pride, sensuality has the connotation of a self-centred devotion to sensuality, with the emphasis on the self-centredness."[701] Niebuhr therefore "loses his initial, broader insight into the sin of hiding as the escape from freedom – not *in* freedom – into nothingness. And, the state of nothingness carries the connotation of dissipation *rather than the notion of a fear of becoming someone*."[702]

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[699] Nelson, 319.
[700] Nelson, 319.
[701] Nelson, 319.
[702] Nelson, 320. The word "in" is italicised by the author. Further italics are mine.

Nelson also identifies a problem regarding Niebuhr's belief that it is "true human nature" to reach for freedom and to become ever more transcendent.[703] As she explains, the consequence of this is that

> *not only does the sin of hiding, of totally denying one's freedom, never become a possibility*, but the true law of human nature – humanity's true fulfilment – is in the law of self-transcendence, the transcendence of self that becomes the giving of self and ultimately the total giving of the self in self-sacrifice…. *That is, not only is the total denial of freedom just not possible, but the ultimate goal of human existence is expressed in one's total self-giving*. The sin of hiding has become a nonpossibility, and the sin of pride has become *the* sin; and true humanity, as seen in the one true man Jesus Christ, is known through total self-sacrifice. *Self-sacrificial love, then, becomes the goal, the supreme human virtue, for all of humanity.*[704]

For Nelson, the dangerous result of the error and ambiguity of Niebuhr's hamartiology is that the sin of hiding – the attempt to escape from oneself – is seen to be the same as the loss of self, which Niebuhr regards as the highest of human virtues.[705] The consequence of this is as follows: "by making self-sacrificial love the ultimate Christian virtue, one makes the sin of hiding into a virtue as well, and thereby encourages those already committing the sin of hiding to stay in that state. One then becomes glorified for never truly seeking to become fully human."[706] Nelson's final indictment upon Niebuhr's theology is that he "has no understanding of how the one guilty of the sin of hiding can be judged on his/her sin and called to actualize his/her freedom. There is no judgement upon the one who escapes; there is no call to emerge from the state of hiddenness."[707]

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[703] See Nelson, 320.
[704] Nelson, 320. Italics mine.
[705] See Nelson, 321.
[706] Nelson, 321.
[707] Nelson, 321.

5.4.3 Regarding Guilt

At this point I bring the discussion back to Nelson's earlier comment regarding the guilt that women carry, allowing her to further describe the situation in which many women find themselves:

> inasmuch as woman has accepted the name of 'Other' within a patriarchal culture, inasmuch as she has accepted a role, a place, a name without realizing a human freedom to name herself, she has been guilty of the sin of hiding; inasmuch as she has poured herself into vicarious living, inasmuch as she has denied her sense of self in total submission to husband/father/boss or in total self-giving to children, job, or family, she has been guilty of the sin of hiding. As she has been afraid to dream a dream for herself as well as for others, and as she has trained herself to live a submerged existence, she has hidden from her full humanity.[708]

Nelson explains that for such a woman, the virtue of self-sacrifice "is synonymous with her sin."[709] Not until we let go of the symbol of the long-suffering wife and mother so deeply rooted in both church and culture will women be able to accept their freedom "without knowing the guilt of being named… as assertive, self-centred, unfeminine… [and a] sinner."[710] Furthermore, any theology that focuses on pride as one's fundamental sin fails both to recognise "that the sin of hiding is in actuality hiding under the guise of self-sacrifice", and to call women into full humanity and freedom.[711] For Nelson, "such a theology seeks to perpetuate woman's bondage to hiddenness", as well as creating feelings of guilt and anxiety in the woman who *does desire to be a self*.[712] She explains that women whose primary sin is that of hiding suffer the guilt of wanting to be more fully human while at the same time experiencing the guilt of not becoming a self.[713]

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[708] Nelson, 322.
[709] Nelson, 322.
[710] Nelson, 322.
[711] Nelson, 322.
[712] See Nelson, 322.
[713] Nelson, 323–24.

5.4.4 Repentance and Responsibility

The same God who judges pride judges the sin of hiding.[714] While many feminist theologians avoid the language of repentance, Nelson declares that "[u]ntil women repent of their real sin, *the sin of having no self to sacrifice,* they will know no end to the cycle of guilt and violence turned inward."[715] She perceives that as women have lived in the shadows, so they have sinned from the same place. "Rather than show our hands… and reveal ourselves, we manipulate from the shadows. And in our manipulation, we accept the name that has been thrust upon women throughout tradition: Eve, the feminine, the dark side of humanity."[716] When a woman admits to the sin of hiding, she step out of the shadows; she "stands revealed to the world and to herself,… exposed in her insecurities and self-doubts."[717] She must also learn how to deal with this vulnerability, because "while escaping from herself, she has not learned how to cope either with her own shortcomings, or with her talents and desires."[718] This is because, explains Nelson, claiming selfhood is about "accept[ing] responsibility for oneself."[719] It means that we can be ourselves in our relationships without needing to lose ourselves in those relationships.[720] But she does not do it alone; the woman who confesses to her sin of hiding finds in God "a deity who judges her passivity and escapism and who beckons her onward."[721] This gives women reason to hope. The chapter will now move on to the theology of Jennifer Baichwal.

5.5 Jennifer Baichwal

Canadian Jennifer Baichwal is unique amongst feminist scholars in offering a well-argued *defence* of Niebuhr's famous doctrine of sin as pride and sensuality. She contends that "Niebuhr is deliberately and consistently a contextual theologian"[722] and that the feminist critique of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin overlooks the contextual nature of his theology; it "rests on a mistaken assumption about the universality of his claim"

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[714] Nelson, 324.
[715] Nelson, 324. Italics mine.
[716] See Nelson, 324.
[717] Nelson, 324.
[718] See Nelson, 324–25.
[719] Nelson, 325.
[720] See Nelson, 325.
[721] See Nelson, 326.
[722] Jennifer S. Baichwal, 'Reinhold Niebuhr, Sin and Contextuality: A Re-Evaluation of the Feminist Critique', in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, vol. VI (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1.

regarding the sin of pride.[723] The reader will remember that feminist theologians since Saiving have tended to argue that while pride may be an accurate description of original sin for men, it is both inaccurate and unhelpful for women. This is because women tend to lack a healthy self rather than having a prideful self which needs to be broken. However, feminists have embraced (to varying degrees) Niebuhr's description of sensuality as being a more useful account of women's sin.

5.5.1 Arguing for Contextuality

Baichwal contends that "[t]he contextual claim that pride is a primary form of sin in those who are *empowered* is being mistaken for a claim that sin is primarily pride for all people, regardless of gender or context."[724] More specifically, because feminist theologians assume "that Niebuhr was making a universal claim about anxiety and pride, the feminist analysis neglects the complexity of the factors that initially trigger the self towards anxiety. It neglects, in other words, analysis of the *kind* of self he was addressing."[725]

The reader will remember from the earlier discussion Niebuhr's belief that human beings become anxious because they are both free and finite, and that sin stems from this anxiety. Baichwal explains that "[t]he self, in order to become anxious about its duality and finitude, must first *recognize* its duality and finitude."[726] In order for the self to recognise its "paradoxical status" it must be/become aware of both its freedom and the limits of its finite existence – "[i]t is only *after* such recognition that anxiety results."[727] In other words, self-transcendence is a prerequisite for the anxiety which is the prerequisite for sin.[728] Baichwal further explains that the kind of "radical self-transcendence" described by Niebuhr[729] requires a self-awareness or self-consciousness in which the self is able to "recogniz[e] itself as (i) distinct and individual; (ii) free; and (iii) capable of exercising ongoing agency."[730]

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[723] Baichwal, 1–2.
[724] Baichwal, 2. Unless otherwise stated, all italics in this section on Baichwal belong to the author.
[725] Baichwal, 44.
[726] Baichwal, 42.
[727] Baichwal, 42.
[728] Baichwal, 42–43.
[729] Baichwal, 44.
[730] Baichwal, 44.

5.5.2 Empowered and Powerless

Because the path leading to sin requires the kind of self-awareness described above, Baichwal argues that "given Niebuhr's contextual concerns with power,… he makes an implicit distinction… between the empowered and the powerless."[731] An empowered self is a self "which has met Niebuhr's preconditions for the sin of pride,… [while] a *powerless* self is that self which does not… meet these preconditions."[732] Baichwal suggests using *empowered* and *powerless* as parallel (replacement) terms for "masculine" and "feminine" sin. This would enable theologians to use "'sex/gender'-free terminology"[733] when talking about sin, avoiding the ambiguities of "masculine" and "feminine". She observes that although feminists such as Saiving and Plaskow acknowledge that "masculine" sin is not limited to men nor "feminine" sin to women, "[n]o attempt… [has been] made to describe what feminine sin as lack of self or negation of self would mean in a non-gender specific sense."[734] Furthermore, while the terms empowered and powerless are suitable for use in discussions of sex and gender, they have the advantage of not being limited to these issues.[735] Baichwal argues that because Niebuhr's theology concerns "a Promethean context where abuse of power is the norm, using these terms clarifies the direction of his doctrine of sin in a way that gender-specific terms would not."[736] For example, she points out that feminist critics do not object to Niebuhr's definition of sin as pride in and of itself, but to the supposed universality of that definition. Therefore "[i]f *empowered* is not a problematic substitute for *masculine*,… then this objection may be resting on a mistaken assumption about the extent of Niebuhr's claim."[737] She goes on to explain that if one were to take Niebuhrian descriptions of pride[738] "at face value – as intentional rather than as evidence of an unconsciously limited perspective" (as feminist critics do), then it would become evident that these descriptions are of "explicitly… empowered selves or states."[739] Whether Niebuhr is speaking of philosophers, churches, Reformers, or

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[731] Baichwal, 45.
[732] Baichwal, 45.
[733] Baichwal, 45.
[734] Baichwal, 45–46.
[735] Baichwal, 46.
[736] Baichwal, 46.
[737] Baichwal, 46.
[738] See Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 189, footnote 7.
[739] Baichwal, 'Reinhold Niebuhr, Sin and Contextuality: A Re-Evaluation of the Feminist Critique', 47.

international powers, in all his examples "a certain *type* of individual, state, or institution is being described."[740] They are in positions of power.

Continuing her argument regarding the need to read Niebuhr contextually, Baichwal points out regarding these individuals and institutions given as examples of the sin of pride, that "feminist theologians describe them as uniformly – but accidentally – *masculine*. On the contextual reading, they are uniformly – and *deliberately* – empowered."[741] *In other words, the gender of the sinner(s) is not particularly relevant. What matters is that they are all of them in a position of power over others.* This power allows for the temptation to hubris. In Baichwal's words, "empowerment… is a prerequisite for the sin of pride."[742] Based on her contextuality argument, Baichwal suggests Niebuhr's apparently "universal claim" that pride is the primary sin for all human beings should be read as "the more restrained assertion that pride is the primary form of sin in the empowered."[743]

5.5.3 Regarding Sensuality

Baichwal also makes some profound observations regarding the feminist critique of the sin of sensuality. As explained above, Niebuhr's feminist critics censure him for prioritising the sin of pride in his hamartiology, resulting in the underdevelopment (as they see it) of the sin of sensuality. Baichwal responds specifically to feminist theologians Judith Plaskow and Susan Nelson. Plaskow and Nelson of course criticise Niebuhr's definition of sensuality as the loss of freedom for being too narrow. However, Baichwal suggests that their criticism arises from a failure to correctly understand Niebuhr's own definition of the term.[744] Specifically, their efforts to make Niebuhr's definition of sensuality fit into their own definitions (Plaskow's discussion of "women's sin" and Nelson's descriptions of "the sin of hiding"), results in a false conflation of "two distinct kinds of loss of freedom – *willed* and *unwilled*."[745] It will help to look at an extended quotation in order to see exactly what Baichwal means by this:

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[740] Baichwal, 47.
[741] Baichwal, 47.
[742] Baichwal, 47.
[743] See Baichwal, 47–48.
[744] Baichwal, 55–56.
[745] Baichwal, 49.

> Because Niebuhr argues that sensuality proceeds from prior self-aggrandizement or pride, it also satisfies the preconditions of that form of sin: an antecedent self-consciousness, self-transcendence, recognition of finitude, and anxiety. It occurs *after* recognition of the self's radical freedom and responsibility and *after* a prior unsuccessful attempt to extend that freedom. The sensuality which succeeds pride, in other words, is willed.[746]

According to Baichwal's understanding, the same self-transcendence and empowerment that are required for a person to commit the sin of pride are equally necessary prerequisites for the sin of sensuality. Sensuality is a willed sin; the conscious giving up of one's freedom. Importantly, Baichwal argues that whenever Niebuhr describes sensuality, it "explicitly involve[s] deliberate self-loss or fragmentation."[747] If this is willed sensuality, Baichwal also identifies the existence of unwilled sensuality, which takes the form of either "unwilled self-fragmentation" or "unwilled non-self-realization".[748] Unwilled self-fragmentation she describes as "already consistently empowered selves whose agency or freedom is taken away from them", while unwilled non-self-realisation consists of a self who has "never, for external reasons, consistently experienced empowerment.… Both… would be subsumed under the rubric *powerless*."[749]

Returning to the feminist critiques with which this section began, namely that Niebuhr is wrong in universalising his definition of sin as pride and that he exacerbates his error by providing too narrow a definition of sensuality, Baichwal draws a surprising conclusion.

> I concur with the feminist claim that Niebuhr does not address these two forms of self-negation in his treatment of sensuality. But I am arguing that his omission is the result of a presupposition very much different from the error of universalizing a limited perspective. I am

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[746] Baichwal, 49.
[747] See Baichwal, 49.
[748] Baichwal, 51.
[749] Baichwal, 51. "An example of the first would be someone interned in a concentration camp; an example of the second would be someone born into systemic poverty or oppression." See Baichwal, 51.

> arguing that these two forms of self-negation are not treated in his definition of sensuality *because for Niebuhr they do not represent sin*.[750]

Baichwal can make this claim because the empowerment and agency required for the sin of pride (bearing in mind that for Niebuhr sensuality is an offshoot of pride) are not present. Furthermore, the "failed attempt at denial of finitude" Niebuhr requires as a necessary prerequisite for sensuality cannot occur; agency is denied externally and it is not the decision of the individual.[751] Instead, Baichwal concludes "that for Niebuhr unwilled self-fragmentation and unwilled non-self realization [sic] are *consequences* of sin. They are evidence, that is, of injustice."[752]

5.5.4 When the Powerless Gain Power

Baichwal points out that while Niebuhr supported the social justice issues of his day, he did not have any illusions regarding the ability of powerless people to act in prideful ways once they have received a measure of agency.[753] "For Niebuhr,… advocating the rights of the oppressed to adjust power in their favour does not mean idealizing the powerless or universalizing their perspective. It does not mean espousing utopian solutions *or assuming that the oppressed will not exhibit the same sin as the empowered when empowered*."[754] Unfortunately, it seems that many feminists are not prepared to accept such a "realistic assessment of all human endeavour as partially self-interested."[755] Niebuhr's realistic view of the world is a result of his commitment to doing theology contextually. To conclude, "Niebuhr *discerned* his context by recognizing the rampancy of human self-aggrandizement and linking such arrogance to sin."[756] Niebuhr's Christian realist approach "enabled him to penetrate the liberal

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[750] Baichwal, 'Reinhold Niebuhr, Sin and Contextuality: A Re-Evaluation of the Feminist Critique', 51.
[751] Baichwal, 51.
[752] Baichwal, 52.
[753] Baichwal, 53.
[754] Baichwal, 53. Italics mine.
[755] See Baichwal, 53.
[756] Baichwal, 54. Rebekah Miles explains that "[a]s a theological realist, Niebuhr understands God to transcend, to relativize, to give meaning to, and ultimately to unify all human projects and desires. Thus, genuine moral responsibility is possible when the tension between human boundedness and freedom is set in relation to God. Niebuhr combines this theological realism with both the grounding of moral claims in human experience (moral realism) and a deep suspicion about the embeddedness of self-interest in moral claims (political realism)." See Rebekah L. Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

march-of-progress fog and identify the danger and scope of human pretension."[757] Too many feminist theologians (Plaskow and Hampson among them) subscribe to this kind of belief; that through education and social change we can make the world a better place. While this may be true to an extent, it also suggests a deep naiveté regarding the insidiousness of sin and the brokenness which exists in the human condition. While Baichwal offers an insightful and well-argued challenge to traditional feminist criticisms of Niebuhr, as will be seen in the analysis of Jodie Lyon's work below, Baichwal herself retains some naiveté regarding the sin of pride and who is guilty of it.

5.6 Jodie Lyon

Despite accepting "that Saiving and the feminists who came after her are correct in their depictions of the unique manifestations of female sin", North American feminist Jodie Lyon argues "that *Niebuhr was also accurate in naming pride as the root of all sin*."[758] This is a potentially controversial claim to make, as Lyon herself recognises.[759] She prefaces her argument with an account from recent medical research. Specifically, that symptoms of an impending heart attack are less likely to be diagnosed in women because the medical community has traditionally focused on the symptoms that occur in men who have heart attacks, incorrectly assuming that said symptoms are identical in both men and women.[760] Applying this to the doctrine of original sin, Lyon explains that "[a]n incorrect diagnosis leads to the wrong treatment."[761] This leads her to ask whether the "symptoms" of women's sin might not be "misleading": "What if they suggest one problem only to mask women's condition? In other words, what if Niebuhr is right and pride is the fundamental human sin?"[762]

5.6.1 Experience: Distrusting Our Own Perceptions

Lyon observes that while both Saiving and Niebuhr rely on "human experience as a litmus test for a theological claim's validity", only Niebuhr recognised that a person's sinfulness can result in her wilfully misinterpreting her experiences.[763] Consequently,

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[757] See Baichwal, 'Reinhold Niebuhr, Sin and Contextuality: A Re-Evaluation of the Feminist Critique', 55.
[758] Lyon, 'Pride and the Symptoms of Sin', 99. Italics mine.
[759] See Lyon, 99.
[760] See Lyon, 96–97.
[761] Lyon, 99.
[762] Lyon, 99.
[763] See Lyon, 100.

his theology "stands in judgement of… [human experience], warning us that our own perceptions may be faulty because they are tainted with our own self-interest." As Lyon explains, sin involves far more than wrongdoing; it involves "going to great lengths" to convince both ourselves and those around that our wrongdoing is justifiable.[764] She writes that "We are consummate spin doctors, turning vices to virtues", meaning that human experience is not always a reliable means of identifying either one's sinful behaviour or its cause.[765] Lyon draws the reader's attention to the deceptive nature of sin, providing as an example the "surprising motivations" behind her own behaviour.

> From the outside, I am sure that my attempts to bury myself in relationships with others have seemed like clear cases of a lack of self-esteem or capitulations to my patriarchal upbringing. In reality, as a feminist with a healthy self-image I was simply doing what I wanted, even when I knew what I wanted was not what was best for me. A stubborn willfulness underlay the most seemingly passive acts of losing myself. A prideful refusal to attend to the development of my own gifts and talents lurked behind a self-sacrificial façade.[766]

Returning to the medical story at the beginning of her paper, Lyon reminds her readers that "[d]iverse symptoms can indicate the same disease."[767] She believes that just as both medical staff and the public need to become aware of "the counterintuitive link between the symptoms of… [heart] disease and the disease itself" (thereby saving lives), so we must become more familiar with the ways in which sin manifests itself in the lives of women.[768] "If we do not connect the dots between a failure to self-actualize and a prideful insistence on doing things one's own way, rather than God's way, we cannot move forward. We end up reinforcing our sinful behaviours, delving deeper into our own prideful ways."[769]

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[764] See Lyon, 100.
[765] Lyon, 100.
[766] Lyon, 100.
[767] Lyon, 100.
[768] Lyon, 101.
[769] Lyon, 101.

5.6.2 On Pride

Lyon explains that feminists do not generally identify women's sin with pride because it lacks "the self-aggrandizing tendencies that we typically associate with that sin."[770] She argues however that pride can be more subtle, manifesting itself on a smaller scale than that found in Niebuhr's descriptions.[771] Instead, "[p]ride is a preoccupation with the self, whether an over-glorification of the self or an attempt to bury the self in a relationship or the mundane affairs of daily life."[772] Rather than following God's will, the self strives to have its own way.[773] Lyon emphasises the fact that because we are individuals, men and women, we face different temptations: "[n]ot all of us want to be God and rule the world. Some of us want to flee from God and our potential and shun responsibility."[774] However a person is tempted, "the self's gratification of that desire is a decision to choose the self's way rather than God's."[775] This, says Lyon, is pride.[776]

5.6.3 Sin: Providing the Right Treatment

Returning to her heart-attack metaphor, Lyon writes that "we must be careful not to assume that women suffer from a completely different ailment than men simply because the indicators are similar, and waste our time treating symptoms rather than curing the disease."[777] She recognises the importance of Saiving's insight into female sin, charging theologians with "continu[ing] to call women to task for the particular ways they are tempted to sin", as well as providing the right kind of "treatment plans" for the types of sin manifest in women's lives.[778] As a final extension of her medical metaphor, Lyon explains that just as medical research has realised the need to test heart treatment medicines on both men *and* women, so self-sacrifice, which is traditionally prescribed as the way to treat the sin of pride, "may look very different for women than for men."[779] Lyon defines self-sacrifice as "acting contrary to our sinful desires", whatever

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[770] Lyon, 101.
[771] See Lyon, 101.
[772] Lyon, 101.
[773] See Lyon, 101.
[774] Lyon, 101.
[775] Lyon, 101.
[776] Lyon, 101.
[777] Lyon, 101.
[778] See Lyon, 101.
[779] Lyon, 102.

they may be.[780] She therefore suggests that self-sacrifice for women "is a call to the freedom of living into the full potential of a creature made in the image of God."[781]

5.7 Critical Assessment: Plaskow, Nelson, Baichwal, and Lyon

As the reader has seen, I chose the perspectives of four different theologians in order to reflect on Niebuhr's hamartiology. It made sense to begin the discussion with Plaskow, because she was among the first to theologically reflect on Saiving's insights and more importantly, to develop them. Although Plaskow is not a Christian (she practices Judaism), her criticisms of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin are representative of the concerns of feminist theologians in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries regarding Protestant doctrines of sin. Nelson on the other hand, both critiques and develops Niebuhr's hamartiology. In reworking Niebuhr's sin of sensuality into the sin of hiding, she offers an insightful corrective to his thought. Baichwal on the other hand, mounts a good defence of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin as pride, insisting on the need to read him contextually and criticising feminist theologians for failing to do so. I believe that her suggestions for a change in sin terminology (*powerless* instead of *feminine* and *empowered* instead of *masculine*) could be potentially useful. However, Baichwal retains the belief that *only the powerful tend to be guilty of the sin of pride*, something to which Lyon offers a stern challenge. To reprise her argument, Lyon suggests that women are just as likely as men to commit the sin of pride, but that it manifests itself differently and therefore needs to be addressed in a different way. The discussion comes now to the question of what aspects of these differing theological positions need to be challenged.

5.7.1 Redefining Self-sacrifice?

I would like to begin with Lyon. She offers an important challenge to traditional feminist criticisms of sin talk. Indeed, my only point of contention concerns her brief comments on self-sacrifice. She writes as follows:

> Rightly understood, self-sacrifice involves acting contrary to our sinful desires, whatever those desires are. When this is kept in mind, the

[780] Lyon, 102.
[781] Lyon, 102.

> feminist concern that calling women to self-sacrifice will only reinforce the sinful tendencies becomes unwarranted. Rather than relegating women to a life of altruistic subservience, it is a call to the freedom of living into the full potential of a creature made in the image of God.[782]

At first glance, it appears that Lyon wants to redefine the concept of self-sacrifice, something which I would suggest that as Christians we do not have the authority to do (if we are committed to reading the Scriptures faithfully). She writes that "self-sacrifice involves acting contrary to our sinful desires." While Lyon does not say that this is *all* that self-sacrifice is (she opts not to provide her readers with a full definition of self-sacrifice), her mentioning only one particular action is suggestive. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the notion of acting contrary to one's own (sinful) will, as a giving up on what one wants to do, is paramount to Lyon's understanding of self-sacrifice. However, while not forgetting the serious issues surrounding the topic of Christian sacrifice, I prefer the definition of sacrifice as the giving of something (to God or to others) which costs me something. I suspect this view is built around the words of King David in First Samuel 24:24, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." Added to this is the New Testament concept of Jesus as the Perfect Sacrifice for sin and the fulfilment of Israel's sacrificial system. With this understanding, surely all true sacrifice is *self*-sacrifice. This understanding means that Lyon's understanding of self-sacrifice as being primarily about the giving up or "acting contrary to" sinful inclinations or desires is incorrect in a Christian sense. This means that her implication (for though she does not say it outright she clearly implies it), that moving out into their full potential rather than continuing to live and act in ways that deny their identity as creatures made in the image of God is a sacrificial act for women, is also wrong. While I wholeheartedly agree that all human beings are called by God to live in the fullness that God desires for God's creation, our striving to do so cannot be called sacrifice. To live with a vision of humanity as the image of God and to call others to that same vision is an act of Christian obedience, not of sacrifice.

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[782] Lyon, 102.

5.7.2 Are Only the Powerful Proud?

The reader may remember from the exploration into Baichwal's reading of Niebuhr, her insistence that the sin of pride requires the sinner to first have agency. The sin of powerless individuals or groups is not of particular concern to Niebuhr in his discussion of the sins of pride and sensuality because Niebuhr's work is contextual; he is addressing the Western social and political powers of the mid-twentieth century. However, Lyon has argued in a convincing manner that (contra Baichwal) women are equally capable of committing the sin of pride, but that pridefulness may manifest itself differently in the lives of men and women. Baichwal has helpfully suggested *powerless* and *empowered* as replacement terms for the traditional feminist categories of feminine and masculine sin. I believe that this change of focus could be potentially helpful, given the tendency towards essentialism in the use of these categories. Unfortunately, Baichwal overlooks the fact that even a person living in a situation of powerlessness may maintain the belief that their own need for survival is greater than another's. If I place greater importance on my own comfort or my own life than on yours, what is this but a manifestation of pride? Baichwal offers as an example of powerless persons those who are living in a prison or concentration camp. She overlooks the fact that prisoners in such a situation will steal food from one another or betray a fellow prisoner in order to protect themselves or to curry favour with a guard. However understandable such actions may be, I believe that they stem from pride; the belief that one's life is worth more than the life of another.

5.7.3 Pride as Self-respect

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines pride as both "proud or disdainful behavior or treatment," and "the quality or state of being proud."[783] Three examples of this state are provided: "**a:** inordinate self-esteem **:** CONCEIT; **b:** a reasonable or justifiable self-respect; **c:** delight or elation arising from some act, possession, or relationship."[784] I would argue that while definition *a* suggests negative behaviour or attitudes and *c* could be either positive or negative (depending on the situation), *b* describes a form of pride that is undeniably positive. Furthermore, as an adjective of the noun *pride*, Merriam-

[783] 'Pride', Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v., 4 September 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pride.
[784] 'Pride'.

Webster includes amongst its definitions of *proud*, the concept of "having proper self-respect."[785] I have no doubt that all four of the feminists we have discussed would agree that the development of self-respect is a key aspect of developing human agency and flourishing. Surely most male theologians would also agree than pride as self-respect is necessary for healthy relationships. As the old adage says, if you do not respect yourself, no-one else will.

5.7.4 Must Feminists and (Women) Repent?

One thing repeatedly missing from feminist theological discourse on sin and justification is the language of repentance. We might say that it is conspicuous by its absence. Guilt too is rarely spoken of except in a purely "negative" sense, in which guilt is something put upon women by others. Salvation is depicted as the realisation of the need to change, which raises the question of whether feminist concepts of salvation are not all too often merely forms of consciousness-raising for religious women. Regarding repentance, there is no emphasis on acknowledging sin or wrongdoing to God. However, as suggested early in this chapter, a belief in the divine judgement of sin is a necessary part of healthy human selfhood. Repentance of sin and receipt of divine forgiveness are the necessary foundation for being in relationship with God. Both are also necessary if the human relationships necessary to a flourishing life are to be sustained.

Nelson is one of the few feminists I have read who includes in her writing the familiar theological terms of guilt, confession, judgement, and repentance. While I discussed earlier Nelson's belief that women's sin is different to men's, she also emphasises the need for women to repent of their sin, the sin of "of having no self to sacrifice".[786] She further affirms that God judges both the sin of hiding and the sin of pride. However, Nelson writes that God "judge[s] human hiding and passivity, not by demanding a sacrifice of the self, but by beckoning the forgiven self to affirm her full humanity through grasping and claiming her call to freedom."[787] It is reasonable to question whether it is biblically and therefore theologically accurate to say that we are forgiven

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[785] 'Proud', Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v., 1 September 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proud.
[786] See Nelson, 'The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride', 324.
[787] Nelson, 324.

before our sin is judged. Furthermore, how can being called into freedom be the same as being judged? Surely it would be more accurate to say that God judges our sin, but that when we repent, we are forgiven rather than condemned, because of Christ. As forgiven individuals, we are called into full humanity and freedom. This is similar to my criticism of Jones' theology, namely that sanctification cannot come *before* justification, however much we may want it to.

5.8 Chapter Conclusion

It is my hope that the themes of sin, agency, salvation, and the self discussed in this chapter have helped to build the foundation for the integrative, culminative chapter which is to follow. Chapter Six will provide a relational model of sin as incurvature, sin as a perversion or distortion of all relationships: my relationship with God, my relationship with myself, and my relationship with others. It will define what it means to be a Christian self and continue to map out of what a flourishing life can look like. As the reader will see, a continual working against sin in concert with the Spirit is necessary to sustain a Christian, feminist, flourishing life. I will also return more specifically to the work of Martin Luther, in this project's companion goal of assessing how far feminist and Lutheran theologies may be integrated in offering a theological description of flourishing.

Chapter 6 A Flourishing Life

6.1 Chapter Introduction

This penultimate chapter signals the culmination of this project. Drawing on all of the themes and theological doctrines discussed and critiqued thus far, I will be defining and filling in the details of which up to this point has been a series of sketches, enabling me to offer a clearer picture of human flourishing. This chapter will introduce a model of sin as religious incurvature, suggesting that it can be extended past its traditional limits in order to include experiences of sin in the lives of persons – men *and* women – who are powerless, as well as those who find themselves in positions of power. Based on this model of incurvature, a key image in my description of feminist flourishing is introduced; woman being healed in order to stand straight. Sin as incurvature is a relational model, reflecting on the effects of sin in all our relationships; with other humans, with God, and even with our own self. This chapter will also offer final assessments on the role of suffering and *Anfechtungen* within a flourishing life, the nature of self-care as well as care for others, the necessity of remaining centred in God, and the role of prayer and lament as tools to sustain flourishing.

6.2 Incurvature: A Relational Description of Sin

Markus Mühling describes sin as the perversion of the *imago Dei* within the human being. This perversion of personhood results in the violation of relationships;[788] be it the divine-human relationship, humanity's interactions with the natural world, or our relationships with one another. Luther gives sin as the reason for God's decision to hide Godself from humanity. Theologians and preachers alike declare that sin is the burden from which Jesus came to set humankind free. It should be clear by this point that I favour a relational understanding of sin, and to this end I will argue that the concept of religious incurvature is the model most suited to understanding and describing sin relationally; its effects on the human's relation with the Godhead, how it damages interactions between persons, and perhaps most importantly, how it warps the

[788] "Die *imago* ist zwar unverlierbar, aber dennoch pervertierbar. Und diese Perversion ist das, was Sünde genannt wird…. Da Personalität und Liebe gleichursprünglich sind, kann sie entsprechend entweder als pervertierte menschliche Personalität oder aber als falsches Lieben beschrieben werden." See Markus Mühling, 'Sünde als Ver-rücktheit: Zur Phänomenalität der Sünde im post-systematischen Betrachten', *Kerygma und Dogma* 67, no. 1 (March 2021): 34.

relationship a person has with their own self. The reader may remember from Chapter Five a quotation from Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, that "the individuality of man is tenable only in a dimension of reality in which the highest achievements of his self-knowledge and self-consciousness are both known and judged from a source of life and truth beyond him."[789] These words support my own conviction (which as the reader has seen would not sit well with some feminist theologians) that the divine judgement of sin is a necessary part of sustaining human personhood. Sin involves losing sight of God as centre and replacing one's self (or another person) in that role, leading to the self or heart curving downwards (Augustine) or alternatively, becoming curved in on itself (Luther). The concept of being curved towards another self or person is less evident in the descriptions of this model, but I will be exploring it as an alternative to the curving towards oneself, based on the feminist descriptions of sin we have discussed in previous chapters.

6.3 Augustine: Introducing the Concept

Whilst the concept of incurvature did not necessarily originate with Augustine, we encounter it first in his writings. In Augustine's *The City of God* (written in the early fifth century), he explains that

> 'pride is the beginning of sin.' And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself. This falling away is spontaneous; for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself, and so become frigid and benighted.[790]

[789] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I. Human Nature*, 91.
[790] St Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Overland Park: Digireads.com, 2015), Book 14, Chapter 13, 721.

It is not necessary to discuss Augustine's conviction that "pride is the beginning of sin", highlighting instead his concept of humankind's abandoning God in the false belief that there is a "something" to be reached outside of the God-human relationship that is more desirable than what humankind already has. Failing to recognise fellowship with God as the pinnacle fulfilment of relationality, one becomes one's own "end". However, as Augustine clearly illustrates, the "turn[ing] away to find satisfaction in [one]self" has results of which the rebellious human will is not aware. The will or self ceases to flourish, becoming cold and dark. Perhaps Augustine had in mind Ephesians 4:18, in which the apostle Paul describes the unbelieving Gentiles as persons who are "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart." Augustine continues:

> But man did not so fall away as to become absolutely nothing; but being turned towards himself, his being became more contracted than it was when he clave to Him who supremely is. Accordingly, to exist in himself, that is, to be his own satisfaction after abandoning God, is not quite to become a nonentity, but to approximate to that.… By craving to be more, man becomes less; and by aspiring to be self-sufficing, he fell away from Him who truly suffices him.[791]

Relevant to my conviction that genuine human flourishing can take place only in relationship with God and community, Augustine expresses in strong language the idea that in turning from God and turning toward oneself, the self becomes somehow less than fully human. As will be discussed later in this chapter, living in relation to God and others is essential to being human. While sin does not make us less than human – sin affects us, but it is not substance of who we are – the effect of sin upon human relationships can result in a person's relationships becoming distorted.[792] A person may even convince themselves that they do not need relationships in order to reach their misguided goals. In such a pursuit, explains Eberhard Jüngel, "one forfeits one's

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[791] St Augustine of Hippo, Book 14, Chapter 13, 721-722.

[792] In an attempt to defend Luther's doctrine of the bound will, Flacius (1520-1575) mistakenly affirmed that the *imago Dei* in humankind was not merely damaged by original sin but became sin in its very substance. See H. Vogel, 'The Flacian Controversy on Original Sin', *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (January 1979): 5–31.

humanity".[793] He describes this as the beginning of death, "[f]or death is the occurrence of complete relationlessness".[794] But more on relationality later in the chapter.

6.4 Luther: Developing the Concept

Luther takes this idea of being curved downwards or curved inwards and expands it into a fuller theological concept. It is key to Luther's understanding of sin and its effects, and he makes liberal use of the language of incurvature in his *Lectures on Romans.*[795] Luther begins in his discussion of Romans chapter three by calling his readers to be honest about the residue of sin that remains in the believer: "If we examine ourselves carefully… we shall always find in ourselves at least vestiges of the flesh by which we are afflicted with self-interest, obstinate over against the good, and prone to do evil."[796] He explains that when "we seek our fulfillment and love ourselves,… we are turned in upon ourselves and become ingrown at least in our heart, even when we cannot sense it in our actions."[797] Luther goes on to explain that while it is easy to recognise when we are drawn to act in a negative way, in spiritual matters "it is most difficult to see whether we are seeking only ourselves in them."[798] Our sinful hearts enable us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are seeking these things for God's sake, while it is really for our own.[799] The believer can turn her seeking of Godly virtues towards an end in which she serves her self rather than God.[800]

In discussing Romans chapter five, Luther explains to his hearers that spiritual trial is necessary for our salvation because

> our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them…, indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact,

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[793] See Eberhard Jüngel, 'On Becoming Truly Human. The Significance of the Reformation Distinction Between Person and Works for the Self-Understanding of Modern Humanity', in *Theological Essays II*, ed. J.B. Webster, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 222.
[794] Jüngel, 222.
[795] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*.
[796] LW: Vol. 25, 245.
[797] LW: Vol. 25, 245.
[798] LW: Vol. 25, 245.
[799] LW: Vol. 25, 245.
[800] See LW: Vol. 25, 245–46.

> that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.[801]

He quotes the prophet Jeremiah regarding the depravity and inscrutability of the human heart,[802] a heart "so curved in on itself that no man, no matter how holy… can understand it."[803] Luther also uses the biblical language of crookedness.[804] In his corollary on Romans chapter eight, Luther emphasises that this being turned in on oneself which results in using both physical and spiritual things for our own purposes[805] is a state from which we cannot escape, for "[t]his curvedness is now natural for us, a natural wickedness and a natural sinfulness. Thus man has no help from his natural powers, but he needs the aid of some power outside of himself."[806] This power, says Luther, is love;[807] a love without which we can never "live, do, and think all things for God alone."[808] For in our incurvature, the person can take even God's good gifts and instead of paying due homage to the Giver, "in them he seeks his highest good, and of them he makes for himself horrible idols in place of the true God."[809] To conclude, Luther asserts that only selfless love of one's neighbour can set one free from crippling, stultifying self-love.[810] This discussion will now move on to contemporary descriptions of incurvature.

6.5 Contemporary Descriptions of Incurvature

Brian Gregor defines incurvature in the following way:

> Sin is a refusal of the relations that constitute the human self; it is a proud and wilful turn away from God, leading to inappropriate self-love (*amor sui*), as well as misdirected and inordinate love of creation rather than Creator. Sin is an *aversio a Deo* – a sinful turn away from God, as

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[801] LW: Vol. 25, 291.
[802] "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse – who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). See LW: Vol. 25, 291.
[803] Luther, 291.
[804] See LW: Vol. 25, 292, 293.
[805] LW: Vol. 25, 345.
[806] LW: Vol. 25, 345.
[807] See LW: Vol. 25, 345.
[808] LW: Vol. 25, 345.
[809] LW: Vol. 25, 351.
[810] LW: Vol. 25, 513.

> a sort of perverse conversion (*conversio*) to oneself, which in turn distorts one's relations with others.[811]

Oswald Bayer (whose work on Luther was discussed in Chapter Three) adds that

> I perceive that my will desires a short circuit joining me immediately to myself in order to become united with myself, to become one, identical with myself. In this short circuit, however, I become afraid and terrified on account of the lack of distance between me and myself. In the distancelessness effected by such a search for identity, I become squeezed into a narrowness in which I cannot breathe. The liberation God brings to me shatters the narcissistic search for immediacy grounded in the self's deeply rooted needs for its own identity. This liberation offends and ruptures every type of immediacy in social relations…. Similarly, the desire of the individual I to merge with the I of the human species, usually supposed and postulated as 'humankind' and 'human nature,' is destroyed in the experience of God. In the experience of God, this desire becomes recognized as the desire to build a short circuit connecting myself to myself as well as connecting myself with those like me. *In the space of this collective narcissism, I become curved in upon myself in a social way*. In searching for my identity that is simultaneously the search for freedom, I become un-free. While trying to find life in this search for identity, I find, curved up in the search, in myself and those like me, death.[812]

Drawing on his Lutheran understanding, Bayer explains that the first word from God is one in which we are confronted by the law and by which, like King David before Nathan the prophet, we judge ourselves.[813] "Questions such as these accuse me; light is shed on what I am unaware of. Yes, I am altogether discovered…. The law I experience on the outside accuses me at the same time on the inside. Its externality is neither a

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[811] Brian Gregor, *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 61.
[812] Oswald Bayer, 'The Modern Narcissus', trans. Christine Helmer, *Lutheran Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 301–2. Italics mine.
[813] See 2 Samuel 12. See also Bayer, 309.

heteronomy of which I could only be a redundant echo nor a kind of self-knowledge as self-reflection."[814] Only after this can the "second word" of the gospel be heard, in which God speaks *for* us, rather than *against* us.[815] The effects and ramifications of sinful incurvature are many and far-reaching. Matt Jenson observes that

> [w]ho we are, bound up as it is with relation to God… [and neighbour], makes no sense without reference to God and our relation to him. Thus, in being curved in on our own understanding, we become *homo absconditus* and do not know ourselves. It goes without saying that we also find God to be the *deus absconditus* and know only an idol.[816]

This idea that incurvature results in the experience of God as *Deus absconditus* may be paired with Luther's conviction that as a result of turning away from Christ as saviour and mediator, the sinner encounters in him an "inexorable judge."[817]

6.6 Sin, Hiddenness, and Evil

It is of serious concern, both theologically and pastorally, that feminist theology does not correctly or adequately address the problem of sin. *Believers cannot truly flourish until sin is taken seriously,* acknowledging both its effects on human lives, and each person's culpability. Until sin is dealt with, a person cannot know where they stand *coram Deo*. Luther contends that God hides Godself in response to humanity's sinfulness. Throughout this project I have struggled to integrate the apparent harshness of Luther's doctrine of hiddenness into my own theology. Indeed, I have remained reticent regarding how far I am willing to go with Luther. However, as one of the key tasks of this thesis is to demonstrate an integration of feminist and Lutheran ideas, I must do so here. Luther asserts that divine hiddenness is a result of human sin. In other words, God never desired for a veil to exist between the Godhead and humankind. In the Incarnation the veil is partially lifted; in the person of Jesus God gives us a glimpse of Godself. The reader will recall from Chapter Three Barth's insistence that the hidden God *is* the revealed God. God is therefore *nothing extra* and *nothing other* than what we

[814] Bayer, 309.
[815] See Bayer, 309.
[816] Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 73.
[817] See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 280.

see in Jesus. This assurance is shared by Jüngel, causing him to exclaim: "As if God 'in himself', God 'in his majesty and nature', could be someone other than the revealed God!"[818] Joined with this is Barth's conviction that God's wrath is the flipside of God's love. In contrast to this, Luther's doctrine of hiddenness allows that God may be more than is revealed in Christ. Further, the will of the hidden God may even be contrary to God's revealed will. Luther creates this problem for himself due to his extremely high view of God's sovereignty; nothing happens but that God wills it. God works evil in the world through the sinful "tools" of the devil and human persons.[819] It is at this point that I cannot agree with the Reformer. Contra Barth, I am open to the possibility that God is more than is revealed in Christ. Jesus' declaration of John chapter fourteen that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father"[820] does not negate the possibility that there is more still to be revealed. Neither should it cancel out Yahweh's warning in Exodus 33:20 that "no one shall see me and live." However, contra Luther, the *Deus absconditus* does not will and act contrary to the *Deus revelatus* encountered in the Incarnation. While God may be more than is revealed in Christ, God is not other or contradictory to that earthly revelation. Any doctrine that claims otherwise calls God a liar. As Jüngel affirms, "God is… [in his majesty and nature] no other, dark God, but rather the God… who is hidden in the *light* of his being. It is theologically illegitimate to infer from an *opus alienum* of God which works everything in everyone without difference, that there is a *deus absconditus*… whose majesty incites terror."[821]

I am also reluctant to say that God *causes* evil. Jüngel is again helpful here, explaining that it is not God who is hidden, but rather God's *opus alienum*. It is therefore permissible to speak of an "*opus dei absconditum* [hidden work of God]" rather than a *Deus absconditus*.[822] I would also suggest that under the new covenant of Christ, God is

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[818] See Eberhard Jüngel, 'The Revelation of the Hiddenness of God. A Contribution to the Protestant Understanding of the Hiddenness of Divine Action', in *Theological Essays II*, ed. J.B. Webster, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 136.
[819] See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 176.
[820] See John 14:7-9; "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
[821] Jüngel, 'The Revelation of the Hiddenness of God. A Contribution to the Protestant Understanding of the Hiddenness of Divine Action', 136. Author's italics and parentheses.
[822] See Jüngel, 137. "God's *opus proprium*, his merciful agency, reveals the divine subject, the divine essence, God himself. God *himself* is not hidden, but his *opus alienum*, his activity which allows evil and

(no longer) in the habit of stepping in to actively punish wrongdoing but rather allows humanity's sin to enact its own harmful consequences.[823] Such consequences range from violent crime and distorted human relationships to the global environmental crisis, which results from humankind's selfish relations with the earth. One sin begets another, and its offspring is oppression and injustice on a collective and institutional scale, as well as in the lives of particular persons. The result is spiritual and emotional incurvature, in which a person either becomes obsessed with their own needs and desires or else loses themselves in another through seeking to fulfil the needs and desires of that other.

6.7 Sins of the Powerless: Incurvature in the Lives of Women

Sin involves losing sight of God as centre. Incurvature affects not only oneself but wreaks havoc on one's relationships. As we become crooked, so our relationships become twisted and perverted. According to Jenson, "we assert an insidious gravitational force, seeking to pull all others into our orbit."[824] Echoing this idea, Terry Cross explains that although "[o]ther-centered love was the original reflection of God in us… love has become perverted, twisted into a centripetal force that sucks everything around it into the center of our little universe – namely, the self. Sin is the spiritual blackhole that pulls all orbiting objects into its dark and mysterious center."[825] Fixating on oneself or on another person as one's central point and key value results in sinful incurvature. I aim to demonstrate that the metaphor of sin as incurvature can be extended to include, in Baichwal's terminology, the sins of the powerless. While this description concerns primarily women, it also relates to men who find themselves in positions of powerlessness. It is important to acknowledge that we can be in a position of powerlessness towards a person or institution, while at the same time exerting our

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which even uses evil. There is no terrible *deus absconditus who incites terror* but only an *opus dei absconditum* [hidden work of God] from which the gospel's *lumen gloriae* [light of grace] can in fact turn us towards Jesus Christ. Even in the light of grace, this hidden work remains an *opus dei absconditum.* This hidden work of God will only be 'illuminated' in the *lumen gloriae*, in the eschatological light of glory, which will show the harmony of all divine works, and therefore also the harmony of the hidden divine activity, which *at present incites terror*, with his grace." See Jüngel, 137. Author's italics and parentheses.

[823] There are of course perplexing exceptions to this, such as the Ananias and Sapphira narrative in Acts 5:1-11.

[824] Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*, 2.

[825] Terry L. Cross, *The People of God's Presence: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 209.

limited power over persons with less agency than ourselves. Cynthia Crysdale for example, reminds us that we can be both victims and perpetrators.[826] The reader may remember that Niebuhr likewise refused to romanticise powerlessness; if a powerless person gains power, they are likewise capable of sinning against another.

Fixating on oneself or on another person as one's central point and key value results in sinful incurvature. This focus on a person's self instead of on God results in a displacement or disordering of their relationships, leading Mühling to describe sin as "*Ver-rücktheit*" or "insane shift."[827] He explains that "[d]ie Grundform der Sünde besteht dabei darin, dass die grundlegende dynamische Bezogenheit zu Gott als Schöpfer, Versöhner und Erlöser trotz ihres realen Beststehens nicht im Wahrwertnehmen anerkannt wird und infolgedessen auch die anderen Beziehungen des Menschen – zur Natur, zum Sozialen, zu sich selbst – gestört sind."[828]

To partially repeat the earlier quotation from Augustine, "if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself."[829] It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that, along with turning away from God to "find satisfaction" in oneself, the will (or the self) may also attempt to find satisfaction by seeking to fulfil its emotional and spiritual needs through being absorbed in another. In seeking to fulfil the needs of another "self", be it partner, children, employer or church, many women would doubtless identify with Augustine's description of the soul that "become[s] frigid and benighted."[830] Augustine suggests that in turning from God and turning toward oneself (and I would extend this to include the turning toward an other), the self becomes somehow less than fully human. Luther speaks of "becom[ing] ingrown… in our heart."[831] The idea of becoming ingrown

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[826] See Cynthia S.W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 20–24. A biblical example of the victim and perpetrator cycle can be seen in the life of Sarai/Sarah the wife of Abraham in the book of Genesis. Abraham abused his responsibility of care toward his wife in twice giving her over to satisfy the lusts of another man. However, Sarah's experience of exploitation did not cause her have compassion toward her slave. Instead, Sarah abused Hagar, and forced the girl into Abraham's bed.
[827] See Mühling, 'Sünde als Ver-rücktheit: Zur Phänomenalität der Sünde im post-systematischen Betrachten', 32–35.
[828] Mühling, 35.
[829] St Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, 721.
[830] St Augustine of Hippo, Book 14, Chapter 13, 721.
[831] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 245.

reminds me of the unpleasant image of a painful ingrown nail. This pain of being "ingrown" can apply to women's experience of sin, whether they become turned in on themselves, or sinfully turned in on (or toward) an other. It is also helpful to reflect on the fact that the virtue of serving others can become sinfully perverted in such a way that it hurts us. Luther acknowledges that even believers may be totally unaware of the motives behind their actions.[832]

6.8 The Self Curved Outwards (Towards Another)

Bayer explains that in the process of incurvature, "I become afraid and terrified on account of the lack of distance between me and myself. In the distancelessness effected by such a search for identity, I become squeezed into a narrowness in which I cannot breathe."[833] Drawing on Jodie Lyon's logic that women may manifest different symptoms of the same (sinful) disease, I suggest that the sin of the curved self might manifest itself differently in women (and some men) and have different effects. Rather than being squeezed, the sinner experiences an opposite but related feeling of being diffused, spread out, without centre or boundary. She also faces terror in the "distancelessness" experienced in the lack of self and identity which results from her sin. French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray,[834] whom I mentioned in relation to the theology of Serene Jones in Chapter Four, writes of the need to reconceive women's "*containers,* or *envelopes of identity*."[835] Along with lacking the boundaries of a "container" or "envelope", woman also struggles with "the problem of place",[836] for "her issue is how to trace the limits of place herself therein *and welcome the other there*. If she is able to contain, to envelop, she must have her own envelope."[837] In failing to keep her focus on God as centre of her life and pursuing an other(s) as that central focus, woman loses the boundaries of her self, the bounded self which results from

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[832] See LW: Vol. 25, 245. "[W]e are turned in upon ourselves and become ingrown at least in our heart, even when we cannot sense it in our actions."
[833] Bayer, 'The Modern Narcissus', Autumn 1995, 301.
[834] Despite not having a broad knowledge of Irigaray's work, I observe that the essays included in Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). appear to contain a boundedness to the physical and a focus on human sexuality which I do not adopt in my own theology.
[835] Luce Irigaray, 'Sexual Difference', in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7. Author's italics.
[836] Luce Irigaray, 'Place, Interval: A Reading of Aristotle, Physics IV', in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 35.
[837] Irigaray, 35. Italics mine.

having her identity firmly established in God. Without these boundaries, without her God-given envelope, woman, in becoming curved towards an other, begins to dissolve into that other. As in Nelson's sin of hiding, or what Niebuhr has called a devotion to mutable values, she loses herself in devotion to another person, community, or cause, due to the false belief that in giving completely of herself, she will discover her worth or have her worth confirmed, thereby establishing or reinforcing her sense of identity.

6.9 Effects on Relationships

The lack of a bounded self and secure identity can have a serious effect on a woman's relationships. To use Irigaray's assertion as a starting point, when a woman lacks "place" – a bounded self and identity – she is unable to "welcome the other there."[838] Further, the diffusing of self, the losing of her self in an other, negatively affects a woman's companions as well as herself: "she will plummet down and take the other with her."[839] The reader may remember Daphne Hampson's model of the self "centred in relation",[840] briefly discussed in Chapter Four. Such a self, she writes, "while having a certain integrity and agency, finds itself through deep connections with others."[841] Hampson further suggests that "this is the only adequate understanding of what it is to be human."[842] In this she is absolutely right, except that her post-Christian position results in too narrow a view of what it means be a human-being-in-relation. Indeed, in light of the gospel the relationships of Hampson's flourishing woman are sickly and anaemic. Without the richness of an identity that comes from being rooted in Christ, woman has no "place", "she will plummet down and take the other with her."[843] To heap tragedy upon tragedy, "liberated" women of Hampson's ilk never know that they are falling.

6.10 The Deceptiveness of Sin

Sin, however, is a complex and self-deceptive phenomenon. Being curved in on or towards another does not preclude the sinner from also manifesting the companion "symptom" of incurvature, that of being curved in on oneself. This is because grasping

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[838] Irigaray, 35.
[839] Irigaray, 35.
[840] See Hampson, *After Christianity*, 106.
[841] Hampson, 106.
[842] Hampson, 106.
[843] See Irigaray, 'Place, Interval: A Reading of Aristotle, Physics IV', 35.

after an other in order to secure one's own identity is also sinful, although the sinner may be unconscious of her actions. I further suggest that it may be a manifestation of (unconscious) pride, in that the sinner seeks to fill the lack she recognises within herself through her pursuit of another. Both forms of incurvature refuse to acknowledge God's place as centre. However, "curving out" as opposed to curving in is more commonly the sin of the powerless. Despite the relative powerlessness of the sinner in relation to dominant individuals or institutions in her life, it is necessary to acknowledge the responsibility of the sinner regarding her sin. In Chapter Five, I shared Nelson's assertion that "the sin of hiding can take the form of devotion to another – the expending of one's vital energies not in the acceptance of one's own freedom, *but in the running away from that freedom by pouring those energies into the life of another.*"[844] I share it again in support of the assertion that powerless persons are not merely passive but *active* in their sinfulness, thereby confirming the traditional concept of rebellion against the Creator. However not all persons, whether facing the powerlessness of systemic injustice, or a more self-inflicted powerlessness in the turning to an other in the attempt to escape from self, have the ability or opportunity to reason out their situation or behaviour.

6.11 Standing Up Straight

This brings the discussion to the important task of proposing how the self is healed or set free from her incurvature. Writing on Romans 6:6,[845] Luther warns that the very religious or spiritual and "righteous" person (such as the theologian?) is particularly susceptible to the sin of incurvature, because "in all these things he 'enjoys' the gifts of God and 'uses' God."[846] Luther goes on to remind his hearers that only the grace of God can free us from that "which in the scriptures is called curvedness, iniquity, and crookedness."[847] He suggests that the woman in Luke chapter thirteen is a symbol of our "curvedness."[848] It is worth including Luke 13:11-13 in full: "And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent

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[844] Nelson, 'The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride', 319. Italics mine.
[845] "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6:6).
[846] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 313.
[847] See LW: 25, 313.
[848] See LW: 25, Luther, 313.

over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God." I agree that this story has the potential to be a powerful contribution to the incurvature metaphor. Jenson even describes incurvature as a "metaphor of sinful scoliosis."[849] The question which begs to be answered then, is how we are to be freed from our curved selves. *What needs to happen so that all persons – including women – are able to stand up straight and begin praising God?* We, quite clearly, need to be healed. This thesis previously stated that feminist theology all too often obscures or ignores the need for the sinful self to repent, regarding it merely as a growing awareness of the need to change. The "method" by which we become aware of our sinful state and indeed how a change in that state might be initiated, is generally left vague. Reformation theology, however, leaves believers in no doubt as to how such a change is brought about, even if theologians may disagree on the finer details. As Gregor explains, "[s]elf-understanding requires the mediation of another – namely, the proclamation of the word that discloses the self to itself. The self needs the external word of preaching and the sacraments to break open its incurvature."[850] Luther affirms that "this crookedness, this depravity,… [is] that something most profound in our nature, indeed, it is our very nature itself, wounded and totally in ferment, *so that without grace it becomes not only incurable but also totally unrecognizable.*"[851] Human persons need this preached grace if we are to be set free from our incurvature. However, this is where the Reformation maxim of *simul iustus et peccator* comes in. For Luther, while we are declared righteous once for all, we are also made righteous in gradual increments. "It is similar" Luther says, "to the case of a sick man who believes the doctor who promises him a sure recovery and in the meantime obeys the doctor's order in the hope of the promised recovery and abstains from those things which have been forbidden him, so that he may in no way hinder the promised return to health or increase his sickness until the doctor can fulfill his promise to

[849] Matt Jenson, 'The Scriptorium', *A Mind Curved in on Itself* (blog), 19 August 2013, patheos.com/blogs/scriptorium/2013/08/a-mind-curved-in-on-itself/.
[850] Gregor, *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*, 63.
[851] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 351.

him."[852] As Jenson writes, "we who are sick are in the midst of a life-long healing process."[853]

6.12 Agents in Our Own Healing

This healing process is one in which believers are invited to take part. In other words, Luther allows an opportunity for agency.

> But trusting only in their own powers they go about doing their works, although always with tedium and difficulty, when actually *they ought to be seeking God with earnest prayers* that He might take this tedium from them and fill their will with happiness and through grace take from them their inclination toward evil. For this, I say, *there must be earnest prayer, earnest study, earnest work and reproof,* until this old habit is eradicated and a newness of will comes into being. *For grace is not given without this self-cultivation.*[854]

Surely this passage, and particularly the phrase "grace is not given without this self-cultivation", must finally clinch the argument in favour of Luther's allowing an element of agency to the believer. Not in matters of eternal salvation it is true, but in the working out of our salvation (Philippians 2:12) we surely have a role. It consists in the deliberate addressing of our weaknesses in prayer, as well as in active behaviour. Luther expands on this, explaining that "we must always pray and work so that grace and the Spirit may increase but the body of sin decrease and be destroyed and our old nature become weak. *For God has not yet justified us, that is, He has not made us perfectly righteous or declared our righteousness perfect, but He has made a beginning in order that He might make us perfect*."[855] It can therefore be said that the believer is offered by God a role in working out their salvation, remembering that although Christians are agents in their own healing, they would be lost without the Physician.

Having discussed in depth the nature of sin as incurvature and begun the task of explaining how, like the bent woman, we are being healed to standing straight, it is time

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[852] LW: Vol. 25, 260.
[853] Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*, 51.
[854] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 244. Italics mine.
[855] LW: Vol. 25, 245. Italics mine.

to look more closely at the nature of human flourishing, which happens in relationships of which human persons as curved selves are a part. The question then is how humanity is to flourish in spite of sin, *the first clue being that Christian flourishing does not operate or look like its worldly version*.

6.13 Can We Describe Personhood as Relational?

Before proceeding to describe what relational, flourishing, Christian personhood can and should look like, including within that a relational understanding of sin and its effects on both divine-human relationships and person to person relations, *it is necessary to establish the validity of speaking of personhood as relational*. In order to do this, we need to decide on the way in which we may speak of personhood as relational, while identifying any ways in which it is not theologically or anthropologically legitimate to do so. Harriet Harris observes a trend in theological anthropology which asserts that "we become persons through our relations to others."[856] While acknowledging the pastoral and ethical value in the belief that we develop as persons in our relations with others, Harris believes it has "been used wrongly to underpin the claim that personhood is relational."[857] She correctly identifies the danger inherent in a relational understanding of personhood, namely that persons with intellectual disabilities or psychological issues who may have difficulty forming or maintaining "normal" relationships are excluded from such a definition and their personhood is undermined.[858] Harris goes on to highlight the "danger of collapsing a psychological or… moral judgement about someone's self-development into an assessment of their ontological status as a person, as though it would make sense to attribute only a limited degree of personhood to someone who has not been properly nurtured in community or who has difficulty in relating to others."[859] Harris concludes that "[a] normative concept of personhood should recognise that relations are crucial to self-development… but it has to include more than that, *otherwise a person's value is dependent on the richness of her relations*."[860] While her concerns are absolutely valid,

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[856] Harriet A. Harris, 'Should We Say That Personhood Is Relational?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998): 214.
[857] Harris, 214.
[858] See Harris, 215.
[859] Harris, 224.
[860] Harris, 233. Italics mine.

the limited scope of Harris' paper means that she takes pains to explain what personhood is not, while failing to affirm what it is. Harris acknowledges as much.[861] And as will be demonstrated through the following insights of the trinitarian theologians discussed below, Harris misses the point. To be human, to be a person continually formed through the Spirit, *is* to be in relationship.

There are two primary reasons for my wishing to retain a relational understanding of personhood. First, if personhood is to be understood relationally, then so must human sin. Second, the profound relationality of the Godhead suggests that humankind "made in our image" is also relationally based. While our relationships shape us, drawing us either toward flourishing or into crookedness, our relationship with the divine is the source of all authentic personhood. Therefore, a theological concept of personhood must be rooted in trinitarian relationality.

6.14 Trinitarian Relationality

"To be made in the image of God is to be endowed with a particular kind of personal reality," writes Colin Gunton. "*To be a person is to be made in the image of God*."[862] Because God is trinitarian; "a communion of persons inseparably related", Gunton confirms (contra Harris) that there is a way in which we can speak of the relatedness of persons to others as being central to our human being, to being persons.[863] This relatedness has both a vertical and a horizontal orientation. "We are persons," says Gunton, "insofar as we are in right relationship to God."[864] Sin makes it necessary for God's image to be "reshaped, [and] realised" in Jesus, who as God's Son is the "archetypal bearer of the image."[865] A person's being in God's image therefore means her being "conformed on the person of Christ."[866] It is important to Gunton to demonstrate that all three persons of the Godhead are involved in this humanising, imaging God process, which comes about through "the creating and redeeming agency

[861] See Harris, 234.
[862] Colin Gunton, 'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei', in *Persons, Divine and Human: Kings College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 58. Italics mine.
[863] See Gunton, 58.
[864] Gunton, 58.
[865] See Gunton, 58.
[866] Gunton, 58–59.

of the triune God."[867] Christoph Schwöbel adds to these insights, affirming not only that the divine-human relationship "is the key to the understanding of all relationships in which human beings exist", but that "the relationship of God to humanity can only be adequately understood as the basis for human relational being, if it is understood as the relationship of the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit to humanity."[868] Schwöbel goes further than Gunton however, reasoning that because it is God's relationship with humankind that makes possible "the revelation of the Father through the Son, in the Spirit," *the receipt of this revelation* "*is the foundation of what it means to be human*."[869] Schwöbel also asserts that the God-human relationship restored by Christ is "perceived as participation in the personal communion of the Trinity."[870] This enables him to say that "[t]he restoration of human personhood in faith is both characterized by the relationship and by the distinction of human persons to the tri-personal God."[871] Gunton's concept of relatedness has a horizontal as well as a vertical orientation. This means that as well as being drawn into relationship with the triune God we also express our humanity and image God in free and reciprocal relationships with other persons.[872] Gunton concludes that "[t]o be a person is to be constituted in particularity and freedom – to be given space to be – by others in community." He speaks of "free otherness" in human relations; describing "*[o]therness* and *relation*… [as] two central and polar concepts", both of which must be operating if humankind is to live in full personhood.[873]

6.15 Defining Personhood and Human Becoming

It becomes necessary at this point to offer a definition of personhood. If Christians claim that human beings are made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and more specifically in the image of a trinitarian God, then we are in fact *imagines trinitatis* –

[867] Gunton, 59.
[868] Christoph Schwöbel, 'Human Being As Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology', in *Persons, Divine and Human: Kings College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 143.
[869] See Schwöbel, 144.
[870] Schwöbel, 158–59.
[871] Schwöbel, 159.
[872] See Gunton, 'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei', 58–59.
[873] See Gunton, 59. Author's italics.

made in the image of the Trinity.[874] For Mühling, "*[a] created person is a particular and proceeding becoming-from-and-for-others*",[875] also referred to as "*whence-and-wither-becomings*". Since humankind is fashioned in God's image and not God in ours, it is the trinitarian God that first inhabits this sense of personhood as becoming-from-and-for-others.[876] God is love and the creation resonates the love of God, explains Mühling. Humans are therefore "shaped… as resonances of divine love."[877] Such a perspective highlights the fallacy of two corresponding beliefs – that of an arbitrary deity who exists and acts in isolation,[878] and that of a human person who exists in isolation. Having come to understand ourselves as "creatures of divine relationality", we are forced to abandon any concept of a person existing as an individual, apart from other persons.[879] "Being personal" writes Mühling, "always means standing in constitutive relationships to oneself and others."[880] He adds that this relationality is *essential* to human being[881] or rather, human becoming. Human *becoming* because rather than being static, persons exist within an ongoing "narrative history".[882] Believers can further be described as becoming-from-and-for-others in the sense that through the work of Christ and the Spirit, they are being restored within the relational framework in which God willed for humankind to dwell.[883]

Human becoming is also about living in reliance on God in such a way that allows God to open up possibilities for that becoming.[884] To be a person is to be human and to be human is to live in what Ingolf Dalferth calls "creative passivity",[885] in which God

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[874] See Markus Mühling, *Resonances: Neurobiology, Evolution and Theology. Evolutionary Niche Construction, the Ecological Brain and Relational-Narrative Theology*, ed. Christina Aus der Au et al., vol. 29, Religion, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft/ Religion, Theology, and Natural Science (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 182.
[875] Mühling, 184. Author's italics.
[876] See Markus Mühling, 'The Resonating Body in Triune Eternity', in *Eternal God, Eternal Life: Theological Investigations into the Concept of Immortality*, ed. Philip G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 38.
[877] Mühling, *Resonances: Neurobiology, Evolution and Theology. Evolutionary Niche Construction, the Ecological Brain and Relational-Narrative Theology*, 182.
[878] See Mühling, 180.
[879] See Mühling, 184.
[880] Mühling, 184.
[881] Mühling, 184.
[882] Mühling, 184–85.
[883] See Mühling, 186.
[884] See Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Creatures of Possibility: The Theological Basis of Human Freedom*, trans. Jo Bennett, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), Ch. 7, Sect. 22 Creative Passivity, n.p.
[885] Dalferth, Ch. 7, Sect. 22 Creative Passivity, n.p.

continues to shape us into the *imagines trinitatis*. Dalferth therefore insists that "one cannot be said to *be* God's image: one *becomes* it, and humans become God's image by becoming the place of his presence to such an extent that their lives become the place of God's presence *for others*."[886] Like Mühling, Dalferth's theology highlights the fact that human becoming can only take place in relation with other persons.

> God makes… [human persons] into the place of his creative presence in such a way that they are able not only to respond but also, through the reality of their lives, to behave in such a way that they obscure or illuminate this presence for others. They become God's image, either as their lives obstruct, obscure, and distort God's presence *for others*, or as they *become* for them a place where this presence is revealed, clarified, and made accessible.[887]

While persons are given the opportunity to accept and walk into the possibilities that God opens up to them, an emphasis must be placed on God as the agent. Furthermore, while it might be argued that Dalferth allows a limited agency to the person to choose to "life opportunities" which allow them to truly "become huma[n]", it is God alone who makes the person into the place of God's presence.[888] Agency can only come *after* passivity. As Dalferth writes:

> Not until we have become this place [of God's presence] are we able to choose, decide, and act for ourselves, but we do not reach this place through our own choice, decision, or activity. Just as no one can make herself an heir, but can only behave as an heir when she becomes one by accepting or rejecting her inheritance, so too no one can make herself the place of God's presence, but can only behave as such by her assent or rejection.[889]

This sense of choosing or refusing to live as human becomings in God's presence, along with the sense of our either revealing of obscuring God's presence for others, bring to

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[886] Dalferth, Ch. 7, Sect. 19 Orientation to God, n.p. Author's italics.
[887] Dalferth, Ch. 7, Sect. 23 Beings of Possibility, n.p. Author's italics.
[888] See Dalferth, Ch. 7, Sect. 22 Creative Passivity, n.p.
[889] Dalferth, Ch. 7, Sect. 22 Creative Passivity, n.p.

mind Luther's understanding of God's activity in humankind. God as agent is always active and works with whatever material God finds – God must work evil in evil persons, just as God works righteousness in righteous persons.[890] Divine neutral action is not possible.

I have further come to understand that any language of human agency must be used carefully. Jüngel explains that "[o]nly in a limited and very secondary sense is it true that the human person is essentially an acting, active, working subject."[891] Contemporary society has lost sight of this, meaning that we "understand ourselves exclusively on the model of our relation to the world: namely as subjects who determine ourselves by our acts."[892] However, in what acts as a challenge to feminist theology (including my own work), Jüngel affirms that the message of God's forgiveness "so addresses a human being that his or her person becomes *distinguishable* from his or her acts. Preceding all human attempts at self-realization, the gospel is the promise that the human person is already a definitively approved person, namely by God."[893] Given this thesis' primary concern with the nature of flourishing, the message that I am a "self who lives from God's recognition"[894] means I therefore live from this sense of who God says I am, quite apart from my actions or non-actions, or from another's actions towards me. This has the potential to be freeing to women who struggle with a sense of being not enough, or perhaps of being too much. This living from God's recognition says Jüngel, is what justification means – "it grants to the person an unconditional 'self-worth'".[895] This leads to true Christian freedom that allows the believer to love and serve their neighbour, with no strings attached.

The task now is to summarise and integrate these rich insights into a working definition of personhood, of what it means to be human. To begin with, Mühling's concept of becoming-from-and-for-others affirms that relationality is central to human being, created as we are in the image of a relational God. Furthermore, it affirms that persons

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[890] See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 176.
[891] Jüngel, 'On Becoming Truly Human. The Significance of the Reformation Distinction Between Person and Works for the Self-Understanding of Modern Humanity', 227.
[892] Jüngel, 227.
[893] Jüngel, 236. Author's italics.
[894] See Jüngel, 237.
[895] Jüngel, 237.

are shaped by their relations with God and with other persons – we contribute to their developing personhood, and they contribute to ours. Personhood is therefore in the nature of human *becoming*. Living out true humanity means allowing God to make us a place of his presence, and in this passivity to walk into the life opportunities that God opens up to us. God gives humans the freedom to permit him to constantly form them into an *imagines trinitatis*, as well as choosing or refusing to be this image – this place of God's presence – for others. Lastly, God loves and accepts the repentant sinner, bestowing upon her a value apart from her actions. This freedom from needing to look to self or to others in order to establish self-worth sets the believe free to serve her neighbour with complete self-giving, able to love them because of the value that they too hold in the eyes of God. As Jüngel writes, "[t]ruly human persons are those able to accept themselves, able to receive their being continually anew as a gift [from God]."[896]

6.16 The Gift and Problem of Space

The discussion so far has established the validity of speaking about personhood as relational, rooted as it is in the relationality of the triune God. Whatever terms are used – human becoming, the *imago Dei*, humanness, or relationality – in its essence personhood refers to the believer's restored relationship with the triune God. Secondary to this, personhood is formed by our relations with other persons, within community. It is on the daily level of relating to other persons, while maintaining our own God-gifted personhood, that difficulties arise. This is because brokenness – the curvature of sin – is ever present, both in our own self and in the other. This brings to mind again Luther's conviction that Christians must live as if we were healed, whilst knowing that our healing is not yet complete. With the Spirit's help, we follow the Physician's instructions so that we will one day be well. The Spirit, says Gunton, is the triune member who creates community.[897]

This chapter has described sin as both the tendency to become curved in and obsessed with one's self, and to become curved towards and lost in another person or task. What Gunton has to say about "space" is therefore meaningful. He explains that the trinitarian

[896] Jüngel, 237–38.
[897] See Gunton, 'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei', 59.

doctrine of God; "three persons in communion, related but distinct" provides the concept of "*personal space*."[898] He describes this personal space as

> the space in which three persons are for and from each other in their otherness. They thus confer particularity upon and receive it from another. That particularity is very important: it is a matter of space to be. Father, Son and Spirit through the shape – the *taxis* – of their inseparable relatedness confer particularity and freedom on each other. That is their personal being.[899]

In having space, from the other, in being free, the persons of the Trinity are able to remain distinct, and yet their relation to the other persons is as much a part of their freedom to be particular persons as is their "space". This gift of space is extended to humankind in God's act of creation, which Gunton describes as "the giving of being to the other." This includes our being given "space to be: to be other and particular."[900] Through the free act of God's creation, God has provided humankind with the space to be human. In other words, with a measure of freedom.[901] However, "we need more than space. Indeed, from one point of view, space is the problem… [T]here is so much space between people that they can in no sense participate in each other's being."[902] This leads Gunton to make the acute observation that "[t]here is clearly space and *space*."[903] Gunton suggests that the reason for this "too much space" between persons is individualism. This thesis describes it rather as being curved in on one's self. There is an irony evident here. While on the one hand the self is suffocated and squeezed through its occupation with itself, that same self-absorption keeps other persons at a distance, a space apart. God graciously allows this space within God's creation in order that human beings might be free to grow and express themselves within relationships of mutuality. Because of sin however, this space becomes a problem, both of too much space and of not enough. Having explained how sin as incurvature can manifest itself in an alternative way, as diffusion and lack of boundary, resulting in giving too much out

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[898] See Gunton, 56.
[899] Gunton, 56.
[900] Gunton, 56.
[901] See Gunton, 54–55.
[902] Gunton, 55.
[903] Gunton, 55. Italics mine.

and seeking to lose one's self in another self, it is necessary to ask how Gunton's description of space might express itself in this context. Within God's gift of human being, there is the gift of "otherness", the integrity of particular selfhood. Gunton rightly observes the need to "find a conception [of space or otherness] which is correlative with that of relation."[904] This raises the question of how a balance between self-contained personhood and the human need and desire for relationship, both equally gifted by God, might be found.

6.17 Thoughts on Trinity and Freedom

I will now consider some further insights from trinitarian theology which will aid my exploration into human freedom and agency. Feminists could learn from trinitarian theology's approach to discussing freedom, which is to begin with God's freedom rather than humanity's freedom. We must grasp the nature of God's freedom before being able to describe human freedom. Michael Horton observes that often in theology "a false choice is pressed between a God who acts unilaterally upon the world and a self that is determined entirely by its own libertarian choice."[905] Regarding a self who is determined by her own choice, one thinks back to Daphne Hampson's description of Christianity, with its tension between the autonomous God and the human being whom she believes ought to have full self-agency. "Like a pie divided unequally between the host and the guests," such types of theology assume that "free agency is something to be negotiated or rationed."[906] The problem lies in the theological tendency to understand agency in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, explains Horton.[907] That is, if God has greater agency, then humankind must have less, and vice versa. Instead, God can be understood as having or inhabiting a different kind of freedom to the kind that human beings enjoy.

The reader will remember my engagement with Daphne Hampson's criticisms of divine power and agency in Chapter Four. I suggest now that the only way to overcome Hampson's description of the Christian God as an all-powerful, solo reigning, monistic

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[904] Gunton, 55.
[905] Michael Horton, '"Let the Earth Bring Forth...": The Spirit and Human Agency in Sanctification', in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 127.
[906] Horton, 128.
[907] Horton, 128.

"Other" is by retaining and emphasising the doctrine of God as trinitarian. One can recognise in Hampson's descriptions of God what Horton call a "unipersonal deity," analogous to "a person exercising force, acting on an object."[908] He observes that "debates over divine sovereignty and human freedom focus on the impact of one divine subject on the creaturely world. The persons are simply collapsed into 'God,' as if divine agency could be reduced to one mode."[909] Horton further explains that "in all of the external works of the Godhead everything is done *from the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit*."[910] In the ancient words of the Nicene Creed:

> I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,… [a]nd in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, …being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made….Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven… and was made man;… [a]nd I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.[911]

In the face of this, objections such as Hampson's begin to break down and the description of God as the old man in the sky which the Old Testament patriarchs apparently modelled on themselves, fails to convince.

6.18 Returning to Agency in Luther

This discussion turns now to a Luther text not yet explored in any detail, although it was touched on in the discussion of Gaebler's work in Chapter Four. That text is Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*,[912] known alternatively by the title *On Christian Liberty*. In this brief monograph published in 1520, Luther explicates the nature of Christian liberty, namely that through faith in Christ the believer is saved, hence good works do nothing to impress God or make us more righteous. Having established this, Luther informs his readers that out of this freedom, the Christian has a responsibility to serve

[908] Horton, 131.
[909] Horton, 129.
[910] Horton, 129. Italics mine.
[911] 'Nicene Creed', *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed 30 April 2021, https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed.html.
[912] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 325–77.

others. This Christian servanthood is nothing more than to follow in the footsteps and actions of Christ. Key to Luther's concept of freedom is the fact Christians have been freed from the Law, and consequently their works will not add to their righteousness:

> It is clear, then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law…. This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation.[913]

Freedom from works righteousness does not absolve the believer from the need to serve, however. "Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works."[914] Furthermore, these works should be done with the goal of pleasing God.[915]

At the heart of Luther's doctrine of Christian freedom/liberty is the idea of one's being freed to perform the God-given task of serving others, rather than merely being free to act as one chooses. *It is freedom to responsibility, rather than freedom for its own sake*. Luther clearly demonstrates that such responsible freedom is not without precedence, namely in the life of Christ. Drawing on the Christ hymn in Philippians chapter two, he explains that

> [a]lthough the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.[916]

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[913] LW: Vol. 31, 349–50.
[914] LW: Vol. 31, 372–73.
[915] See LW: Vol. 31, 360.
[916] LW: Vol. 31, 366.

This passage also reinforces the truth of 1 John 4:19, "[w]e love because he first loved us." Although Luther does not cite this passage from John, he expands on its meaning, writing that "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."[917] Luther also describes this Christ-like service as a means of bringing about Christian unity; "we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians."[918]

6.19 Caring for My Neighbour, Caring for Myself

This emphasis on the giving of one's self to others makes it necessary to reflect on another important aspect of the Christian life which is too often overlooked; self-care. However, in light of this thesis' understanding of the self as relationally constituted, it is impossible to speak of self-care as an isolated exercise that concerns only myself. Caution must therefore be taken in proposing a definition of Christian self-care. Jaco Hamman defines self-care as "a *commitment to your optimal health and well-being for your own sake, for those who love and care about you, and in the service of God's kingdom*…. self-care is one way to love yourself so that you can love your neighbour."[919] I believe self-care is a important aspect of developing a concept of human flourishing in which the self can be in relationship with others, while maintaining a healthy integrity and boundedness of one's own self. Whether reading *The Freedom of a Christian* or elsewhere in Luther's lectures, letters, and sermons, we get the sense that Luther does not place limits on the level of service and personal giving we should provide for our neighbour. While it may be true that at times in his writings Luther exaggerates to effect, there is also evidence to suggest that Luther was not good at self-care. Indeed, material discussing Luther's life suggests that the Reformer paid little concern to his own physical health, particularly prior to his

[917] See LW: Vol. 31, 367.
[918] LW: Vol. 31, 367–68.
[919] Jaco Hamman, 'Self-Care and Community', in *Welcome to Theological Field Education!*, ed. Matthew Floding (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2011), 102. Author's italics.

marriage.[920] Luther declares that a believer "lives only for others, and not for himself,… considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor."[921] Further, in following Christ's example, he writes that "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."[922] Instructions for such complete self-giving, although biblically inspired, are evidently problematic for feminist theologians who are concerned that a woman may give of herself excessively and to her own detriment. Further, within our understanding of sin as incurvature, a woman, or indeed any person, inclined towards the sin of giving so much of their self that they lose their self in the other, a doctrine of service without limits may be regarded not only as harmful but as potentially self-indulgent. This not a sufficient reason to dismiss Luther's view regarding love of one's neighbour, however. Indeed, Mühling observes that Christ's command for a person to love their neighbour (German, *Nächstenliebe*) is an impossible task for the natural human being to carry out,[923] unless they have Christ's love within their own heart. For this reason, *Nächstenliebe* must be distinguished from merely humanistic benevolence or goodwill.[924]

Fortunately, a closer reading of Luther's call to Christian service allows for a measure of concern for self, in order that we might be fit for service. Luther declares that "caring for the body [is] a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work… to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker."[925] Simply, we cannot care for or work to support the other if we do not also take care of our own health. Failing to listen to and tend to the needs of our own bodies results in weakness of spiritual, mental, or physical health. Drawing *The Freedom of a Christian* to a close, Luther declares that "the Apostle [Paul] has prescribed this rule for the life of Christians, namely, that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, *since each has such abundant riches in his faith that all his other works and his*

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[920] Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, 226–28.
[921] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 365.
[922] LW: Vol. 31, 366.
[923] See Markus Mühling, 'Nächstenliebe I. Zum Begriff', in *Religion in Geschichte Und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch Für Theologie Und Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 14.
[924] Mühling, 14.
[925] LW: Vol. 31, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 365.

whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor."[926] There are moments when Luther can be overly optimistic concerning the good works which he expects to "naturally" flow from the life of the believer. As is evident from the high levels of burnout among clergy and others in Christian ministry, the surplus of an abundant life of faith cannot come out of a life that has become dry and empty, a self without any kind of boundaries which allow the self to contain itself in a healthy way. Despite the fact that Jesus himself took time out to be by himself or to take a nap, many Christians feel that self-care is unbiblical, or a concept derived from an individualistic society. Leanna Fuller observes that self-care is regarded by many Christians as "potentially self-indulgent and theologically problematic."[927] It has been critiqued as "a façade used to disguise selfishness or self-indulgence" and "a pathway towards self-centredness."[928] Fuller observes that such criticisms stem from an individualistic understanding of the self.[929] Instead, a workable concept of self-care needs to "recognize that individual well-being and the work of communal transformation are inextricably intertwined."[930] At the same time, there needs to be "a focus on the individual self as a primary center of agency."[931] All this allows Fuller to conclude that

> it is this agency, this claiming of freedom and responsibility, which commends the continued use of the term 'self-care' because it serves as a reminder that each person is made in the image of God and thus is called into the abundant life promised by the creator. To ignore that calling through practices of inordinate self-denial – even when done in the name of ministry or service – is, ultimately, to fail to take responsibility for the gifts we are given. This is not to say that self-care should become yet one more task to be accomplished perfectly. Rather, it is an invitation to revisit the notion of the self as an appropriate place to focus one's energies as a pathway to life-giving ministry.[932]

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[926] LW: Vol. 31, 365–66. Italics mine.
[927] Leanna K. Fuller, 'In Defense of Self-Care', *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 6.
[928] Fuller, 7.
[929] See Fuller, 10.
[930] Fuller, 16.
[931] Fuller, 16.
[932] Fuller, 16.

I would like to offer a few concluding thoughts on the subject of self-care. First, academic literature on self-care is generally concerned with those in formal ministry (it focuses on how a person should address their own self-care needs and the pastoral needs of the community they serve). Conversation around the need for self-care in the life of "ordinary" Christians is markedly absent.[933] Second, Luther himself, despite his hectic schedule, found time to spend with his spiritual mentor and confessor, his pastor Johannes Bugenhagen.[934] This illustrates the fact that Luther recognised the need for spiritual self-care. The Church needs to come to the place where she recognises that self-care is as important for her lay people as it is for those in formal ministry or social work. In his teaching on vocation, Luther sought to do away with the belief that the clergy are holier persons engaged in more important work than lay people.[935] As an extension of this reasoning, if believers are of equal value and their work of equal importance to God, then self-care is necessary for the well-being of every Christian, be they businessperson, teacher, sanitation worker or stay-at-home parent. Fuller accurately observes that "Christian ideals of selflessness and self-sacrifice have been disproportionately applied to women and used to discourage them from claiming the space for care that they may desperately need."[936] This raises the question of whether a case for Christian self-care can be made simply because each person is precious, and desired by God to live a flourishing, abundant life. However, self-care cannot ever become an individual concern. As difficult as it may be for feminists to accept, the fostering of physical, spiritual, and psychological wellbeing cannot be prioritised simply for the sake of the individual. This is because we do not exist as individual persons, relationless persons. However, the reality of sin means that the framework or web of relationships in which the triune God intended us to live and flourish is distorted. Hence the ongoing challenge and call to living faithfully as human becoming[s]-from-and-for-another.

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[933] My cursory search of the literature revealed one exception. See Jeffery Gates, 'Self-Care: A Christian Perspective', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 1 (2015): 4–17.
[934] See Martin Lohrmann, 'Bugenhagen's Pastoral Care of Martin Luther', *Lutheran Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 125–36.
[935] For an introduction to Luther's understanding of vocation, see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).
[936] Fuller, 'In Defense of Self-Care', 8.

6.20 Anthropocentric Theology

If my first contention regarding feminist theology(ies) is its failure to consider the problem of sin and its effects with sufficient seriousness, the second concerns the overwhelmingly anthropocentric nature of its literature.[937] Although not so crudely expressed, too many feminist theologians follow Hampson's creed that a woman should be the centre of her own universe and fully operate in her own agency. Any feminist theologian who takes to heart the theological concerns of Martin Luther (even if she may not agree with all of his solutions to these concerns) cannot have anything to do with such a self-centred approach to theology. Although he is not a Lutheran, British theologian Philip Watson shows himself caught up in Luther's passion to keep God in God's proper place. The contemporary Christian Church struggles at least as much as it did in Luther's day with the temptation to try and push God's throne just a little off centre, in order to push ourselves a little more forward. Watson explains how

> Luther seeks to eradicate every vestige of the egocentric or anthropocentric tendency from the religious relationship. There is no place for the slightest degree of human self-assertion or self-interest in the presence of God. Here, man must be content to receive undeserved the gifts God wills to bestow upon him, and to obey without thought of reward the commandments God pleases to give him. In other words, *he must let God really be God, the centre around which his whole existence moves*. This theocentric emphasis can be described as the fundamental motif of Luther's entire thought.[938]

In the language of John 6:60,[939] such quotations contain "hard sayings" for feminists. However, Watson is correct in his observation that religious persons – including many feminist theologians – have "transfer[ed] the centre of gravity from God to man."[940] I

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[937] British theologian Sarah Coakley and North American theologian Kathryn Tanner are notable exceptions here. While bringing forth feminist concerns, the work of these two scholars is consistently orthodox and Christocentric. See for example Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). and Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[938] Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947), 37–38. Italics mine.

[939] "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (John 6:60, King James Version).

[940] Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther*, 44.

propose that this sense of needing to restore God as centre might be used to broaden and correct Hampson's guiding concept of being centred-in-relation.

6.21 Centredness-in-relation

In order to reflect on the concept of centredness it is necessary to begin with a passage from Hampson's *After Christianity*.[941] She writes:

> I like to speak of the self as being 'centred-in-relation'. In using such a phrase I wish to capture the sense that the self is both 'centred' and 'relational'; moreover that it is not that there is conflict between the two. Thus we are able to acquire centredness because we are in relation…. [I]t is only as we have a certain centredness that we are able to be present to others…. [I]t is not until we have a certain integration, a certain centredness, as I have called it, that we can be sufficiently free of ourselves to be present to another.[942]

To begin with, Hampson's conviction that a woman can achieve a sense of personal centredness on her own, even if this takes place in part by relating to other persons, is theologically naïve. Naïve because Hampson's theological framework lacks a hamartiology; if sin exists for her at all it dwells in institutional and societal frameworks and is propagated primarily by men. She is however correct in her realisation that we need to "be sufficiently free of ourselves to be present to another."[943] We find this sense in Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*; because believers are freed from the need to earn salvation by works, they are "freed up" to serve God through loving and caring for others. However, if the Church's theology – its preaching and its worship – does not confirm God's place as the centre of human (and non-human) existence both individually and collectively, then persons have no hope of finding a centredness, a balance, outside of this priority. However, by keeping Christ as central to *everything* in our life and above everything and everyone in our life, there is hope for a kind of balance within our self, that is strengthened by being in relationship with others, and

[941] Hampson, *After Christianity*.
[942] Hampson, 106.
[943] See Hampson, 106.

offers centring strength to others, particularly when we share the same central focus on the triune God.

6.22 Sustaining Selves, Building Community

"All interpersonal human relationships" writes Schwöbel, "have their criterion in the restored relationship of humankind with God", and

> the reconstruction of created sociality as redeemed sociality is the reconciliation of personal freedom and personal communion. The dialectic between freedom and community is overcome where both freedom and communion are understood as grounded in the relationship of the trinitarian God to humanity who enables human beings to be free in community and to live in community as free agents, since both freedom and communion are equally constitutive aspects of human personhood.[944]

All of this sounds good in theory, a Christian community where all relationships have as their standard the restored relationship between human persons and the triune God. So too, the restored balance between the agency of each self and the self's contribution to and participation in community. However, without specific practices to bring healthy Christian community into being, Schwöbel's descriptions remain a utopian, eschatological vision.

Luther observes in his commentary on Galatians chapter five that

> [f]or as long as we live, sin still clings to our flesh; there remains a law in our flesh and members at war with the law of our mind and making us captive to the law of sin (Rom. 7:23). While these passions of the flesh are raging and we, by the Spirit, are struggling against them, the righteousness we hope for remains elsewhere. We have indeed begun to be justified by faith, by which we have also received the first fruits of the Spirit.[945]

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[944] Schwöbel, 'Human Being As Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology', 160.
[945] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6*, 20.

Schwöbel explains how the gospel message reveals "the self-destructive character of relational being" and identifies the alienation or estrangement in human relationships as sin.[946] All this raises the question of how we are to heal existing relationships and build new ones, while also receiving healing for our own curved and broken selves. How, like the woman in Luke's Gospel bent over for eighteen years, are we to be made straight?[947] I propose two ways in which we may begin. *Prayer, and service of each other[s].* As the concept of service has already been discussed in detail, this section will turn briefly to the importance of prayer.

6.23 Prayer

Despite the numerous demands on his time and the burden of academic, pastoral, and political cares, Luther made time for daily prayer and encouraged others to do the same.[948] He often used the Lord's Prayer as a guide when he prayed,[949] but was not bound by this format. Rather, Luther recognised the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide the believer in prayer. He explains that the Spirit may sometimes interrupt our planned prayers and petitions, and that we should stop and listen:

> If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.[950]

And again Luther says, "I repeat… what I previously said in reference to the Lord's Prayer: if in the midst of such thoughts the Holy Spirit begins to preach in your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, honor him by letting go of this written scheme; *be still*

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[946] See Schwöbel, 'Human Being As Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology', 161.
[947] See Luke 13:10-13.
[948] "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, 'Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.' Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day." See Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, 193.
[949] LW: Vol. 43, 194–98.
[950] LW: Vol. 43, 198.

and listen to him who can do better than you can."[951] In his commentary on Second Corinthians 3:17[952] seventeenth century Nonconformist minister and scholar Matthew Henry writes that "*[W]here the Spirit of the Lord is,* and where he worketh… *there is liberty*[;]… freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the servitude of corruption; liberty of access to God, and freedom of speech in prayer. The heart is set at liberty, and enlarged, to run the ways of God's commandments."[953]

The collective wisdom of these two experienced pastors highlights the need for two things in prayer: petition and silence. Requesting without listening is fruitless. It assumes that the bringing about of the petition is all up to God, when in fact making time to listen allows the Spirit to reveal to the petitioner the ways in which she too has a role to play. Neither can we overlook the fact that living a life dedicated to service is hard work. Quietness before God is a necessary restorative to the fatigues of the Christian life, and no one knew this better than Christ. Mark 1:35 will be a familiar verse to the reader: "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." Jesus' making time to pray and to be alone follows right after he had spent time healing the sick and casting out demons (verse 34). He needed to be built up again by spending time with his heavenly Father. It is also reasonable to assume that Jesus sought and received spiritual direction during that early morning, for he afterwards set off on a preaching tour of Galilee (verse 38).

6.24 Prayer as an Exercise in Rebuilding Boundaries

Prayer is also an exercise in receiving space for God and for our own self. Although it may seem like a contradiction, prayer provides the opportunity for those inclined to the sin of giving to others to the point of excess and losing themselves in the care of others to begin to establish their own boundary, their own envelope. More accurately, the experience of prayer and meditation provides God "room" to create for us an envelope, a security that is our identity in Christ. Further, it is a beginning in allowing God to really be God in our life. When the believer re-establishes God as her central focus, she

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[951] LW: Vol. 43, 201–2. Italics mine.
[952] "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17).
[953] Matthew Henry, 'An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians', *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, n.d., https://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.iiCor.i.html. Author's italics.

allows God to restore the balance of her life. Jesus offers the following counsel to his listeners in Matthew chapter six:

> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.… When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words…. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [that you need] will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.[954]

This passage also emphasises the importance of forgiveness in maintaining both the divine-human relationship and our relationships with others.[955] Forgiveness will always be a necessary part of living successfully in community. A particular challenge for women can be in recognising that forgiving "seventy times"[956] should not mean putting up with abuse or allowing others to take advantage of her. There is also a fine line between letting go of anger against and forgiving an abuser, and maintaining the necessary righteous anger within herself that is needed in order to continue working against the societal, religious, and political injustices that help to facilitate abusive behaviour.

6.25 Suffering and *Anfechtung*

This brings the discussion around to the final and most challenging aspect of creating a picture of flourishing – the reality of suffering and spiritual anguish (*Anfechtung*) in the life of the believer. Believers living in the West are rarely called to suffer for their faith in the biblical sense; mild ribbing from non-believing friends, family members, or colleagues is likely all that most of us have experienced. Meanwhile, Christians in many Asian, Arab, and African countries are being barred from high-level jobs, ostracised from their families or communities, and may endure torture, rape, and imprisonment

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[954] See Matthew 6:6-7, 33-34.
[955] "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15).
[956] "Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

because they follow Jesus. While we thank God for our freedom to worship, what we do share with our persecuted sisters and brothers is the experience of spiritual anguish, *Anfechtung*. All Christians lament the reality of illness in our not-yet-redeemed bodies and grieve the death of loved ones who are gone too soon. Some will face poverty or feel stuck in a social or political system impervious to change. Many are discouraged by the conflict in their relationships or are survivors of abuse. Others are simply fatigued with the effort of living, and God seems absent, hidden.

Patricia Wismer identifies four primary types of suffering: "physical pain, emotional trauma, social isolation, and spiritual crisis."[957] She explains that a true experience of suffering does not affect only "one part of our being" but our very self.[958] Wismer observes that there are two primary camps regarding feminist perspectives on suffering. They can be described as "'suffering: never again'", and "'suffering: part of the web of life.'"[959] She observes that

> [t]he 'never again' position challenges us to never minimize suffering or settle for suffering that could be eliminated, especially when it is rooted in injustice. It provides the passion and anger to fuel the critique of that injustice and the struggle for liberation. However, it doesn't help us discover any meaning in suffering that cannot be eliminated. Nor does it help us to learn how to accept such suffering or how to live and grow through it. Those points, however, are precisely the strength of the 'web of life' position, especially when such suffering is rooted in natural causes. But if the 'web of life' position constituted our total framework [for a theology of suffering], we might be tempted to give in too soon rather than exploring all possibilities for healing.[960]

[957] Patricia L. Wismer, 'For Women in Pain: A Feminist Theology of Suffering', in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O'Hara Graff (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 140.
[958] See Wismer, 140.
[959] Wismer, 141.
[960] Wismer, 148.

These two perspectives must therefore be held together in tension, since both are necessary to building a theological understanding of suffering that avoids simplistic answers or responses.

6.26 Suffering and the *Deus Absconditus*

A reflection on suffering gives rise to the question of whether there is room for a theology of the *Deus absconditus* in a feminist working out of what it means to flourish in divine and human relationships. I believe that such a description may indeed be helpful although not in a fully Lutheran sense. I previously rejected Luther's conviction that God causes suffering in the lives of God's people as the means to a greater good or benefit; an important aspect of his doctrine of the alien and proper work of God. Instead, a theology in which God gives a measure of free will to humankind regarding salvation retains the mystery of a God who permits evil and suffering to continue, yet works through that suffering to bring about growth within the life of both the particular believer and in her church and community. In this way, the *opus alienum Dei* must still come before the *opus proprium Dei*. Any doctrine, including Luther's, which says that God *causes* harm I find morally abhorrent and is foreign to the concept of a loving God. In this the feminists are right. I prefer to walk the theologically fine line which says that God allows things to happen for reasons that human persons do not understand. If we allow it, suffering can become an opportunity for God to work in our lives, and to work in the lives of others through us. This might be considered a partial reworking of Luther's doctrine of God's alien and proper work. As believers we encounter daily that divine hiddenness – God performs small acts of uprooting weeds and pruning branches (John 15:1-2) – in order that God's proper work of sanctification and final redemption can take place.

6.27 Luther's Three Lights

Near the end of *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther shares his doctrine of the "three lights". Although his discussion primarily refers to the mystery of election it can be applied to other aspects of the Christian life. He writes

> *Let us take it that there are three lights - the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory*…. By the light of nature it is an insoluble problem how it can be just that a good man should suffer and a bad man prosper; but this problem is solved by the light of grace. By the light of

> grace it is an insoluble problem how God can damn one who is unable by any power of his own to do anything but sin and be guilty. Here both the light of nature and the light of grace tell us that it is not the fault of the unhappy man, but of an unjust God; for they cannot judge otherwise of a God who crowns one ungodly man freely and apart from merits, yet damns another who may well be less, or at least not more, ungodly. But the light of glory tells us differently, and it will show us hereafter that the God whose judgment here is one of incomprehensible righteousness is a God of most perfect and manifest righteousness. In the meantime, we can only believe this, being admonished and confirmed by the example of the light of grace, which performs a similar miracle in relation to the light of nature.[961]

In short, there are things which if viewed through natural eyes are inexplicable but with the help of God's grace the believer can come to understand. However, there are some things that seem unjust even in the light of grace. For example, the suffering and inequality in the world seem to suggest that God is inured to, and even supports, injustice. However, the biblical revelation of God's love and righteousness means that we know this cannot really be true. This is an aspect of the divine hiddenness which neither our knowledge and experience of human nature nor our limited knowledge of the divine nature – revealed to us in the person of Christ – can explain. Luther believes that we are better off not even attempting an inquiry into these things. Many mysteries must wait until the revelation of God's glory in the eschaton.

6.28 Faith and Lament

All persons experience the effects of sin – in our emotions, reason, relationships, and physical bodies. Sometimes we suffer due to the consequences of our own actions, the actions of other persons, and often the effects of the collective sin of humankind. A combination of lament and continued faith that God is good is the only response open to us. We cry out with the psalmists and prophets, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?"[962] The

[961] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 293.
[962] Habakkuk 1:2.

apostle Paul writes that even the natural world cries out for redemption.[963] There is no better cry of both faith and battle to be taken up by feminist Christians than the final words of the prophet Habakkuk:

> Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.[964]

While at first glance Habakkuk's prayer may seem one of placid resignation, it reminds the reader that in the midst of drought and injustice, God is still on God's throne. God will strengthen believers for their given tasks when they keep God as the central focus of their work and relationships. When they do this God will strengthen them, even though they are suffering. This knowledge also allows them to support and strengthen other believers.

6.29 Conclusion: A Picture of Human Flourishing

What then, does it mean to flourish? How do I weave all these many reflections and observations together, or draw a new map that will help us get to this place? A new map may indeed be necessary, since we have learned that a biblical and Christian understanding of flourishing often does not look like the world's concept of it.[965] Indeed, the rise of the so-called prosperity gospel and the increasing numbers attending experience-based mega-churches suggests that both pastors and congregants are losing their grip on the essence of the gospel, as well as Christ's words in Matthew 16:24, "'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and

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[963] See Romans 8:19-23, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

[964] Habakkuk 3:17-19.

[965] I have borrowed the image of mapping from Jones. See Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, 19.

follow me.'"[966] The assessment of a cross-section of feminist theologians has allowed us to see that many are not comfortable with the affirmation that women are sinners too, or that the experiencing of suffering in the name of Christ or for our neighbour may be a necessity and even a blessing. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus explains that those who are persecuted for righteousness and the sake of Jesus' name will be blessed.[967] On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah tells us that "[b]lessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit."[968] *A Christian feminist concept of flourishing must therefore hold in tension both the reality of suffering for those who serve Christ, and the fact that this service results in their being nourished, fruitful and blessed.*

Furthermore, *there is no sense in which flourishing is an individual achievement or exercise*. Persons can only flourish in relationship and community, in relationship with the trinitarian God and with other persons. Although believers are freed from their bondage to sin, sin remains in our world, and we see its effects daily. *Vestiges of sinful curvedness also remain in the lives of believers, and we must work daily to keep God as our central focus. These vestiges make it necessary from time to time for God to do his alien work in us, to cut away the sinful remnants that cling.* To return to an image previously used, God must trim that curved in, ingrown nail and this can be painful. Spiritual trial strengthens and purifies our faith, driving us to cling to Christ all the more. I shared in Chapter Two the imagery Luther creates in his explanation of Isaiah 28:20-21. However, it is worth repeating:[969]

> just as the shortness of the bed keeps us from stretching our limbs but makes us pull them up so that we do not fall out and get cold, so distress

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[966] Cf. Luke 9:23.
[967] "'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'" (Matthew 5:10-12).
[968] Jeremiah 17:7-8. Cf. Psalm 1:3.
[969] "The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you. The Lord will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon – to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task."

> holds us together so that we do not fall away from the Word of God, neither in good times or in affliction, but by faith abide in it. The cross teaches us how to snuggle up, since in good times we sometimes stroll and stray.[970]

Luther captures so well the sense in which God permits suffering or challenges to occur, not as punishment but as an opportunity to grow closer to God; in other words, to continue to flourish. Thank the Lord that we are not forced to do Christian life alone, but alongside other believers in Christian community. In this way, we can support each other. Believers must never be content to simply rest in their own place of flourishing in God. To do so would result in spiritual stagnation, and even lead us back to a place of self-occupied incurvature. As both believers and feminists, we have a responsibility to support and nurture others, helping them to reach a place where they too can flourish. For example, survivors of abuse, persons with mental illness, and those who live with an intellectual disability may find it difficult to build relationships that sustain flourishing. However, it is important to acknowledge that persons with intellectual disabilities which affect their ability to relationally engage are, like all of us, met by God where they are and can therefore be in a flourishing relationship with the divine in ways that those of us who can more easily communicate will never understand.

Only the love of God can free us from our curvedness and sustain us in that new freedom. A person's healing is a life-long process, and God allows us agency both in the gift of taking part in our own healing, and in contributing to the healing of our brothers and sisters. The believer's freedom is a freedom from bondage to sinful curvedness and a freedom to responsibility and service to others. In this way, *flourishing takes place in community*. *A rich prayer life, both individually and collectively, along with the sacraments of the Eucharist and the preaching of the Word help to nurture our flourishing as both individuals and as communities.* Coming together to share the bread and wine enables us to participate anew in both the healing and new life offered in Christ, as well as the reminder of Christ's suffering in which we take part, "'[f]or those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will

[970] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 233.

find it.'"[971] Although few readers will be called to literally give their lives for Christ, we are called daily to the task of "bear[ing] one another's burdens."[972] We cannot truly flourish whilst those around us are suffering; the goal of both Christian flourishing and feminist flourishing therefore requires that *we continue to work until every woman, every man, every child, is able to stand straight and praise God*. This is our God-given task.

[971] Matthew 16:25. Cf. Luke 9:24.
[972] See Galatians 5:2; "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This brief and final chapter summarises the contribution of my research and the way in which I have filled the niche carved out by my questions. It also offers suggestions for how feminist theology might benefit from further engagement with the ideas presented in this thesis.

7.2 Summary of Thesis Goals and Findings

This thesis set the goal of demonstrating how central doctrines of Lutheran theology and a selection of feminist theologies could be used to both thoughtfully critique and build upon each other in order to articulate a theological concept of human flourishing. This concept needed to respond to feminist concerns, such as the need for personal agency and the supposed "power imbalance" between God and human beings. It needed to recognise more fully than most feminist theology does, the serious effects of sin upon humankind's relationship with the divine, and the correspondent effects upon human relationships. A key aspect to be addressed was the widespread concern among feminist theologians that Protestant doctrines of sin tend neither to recognise nor adequately address the fact that for people living in situations of powerlessness (of whom an overwhelming number are women), sin may manifest itself in different ways. I wanted to present a model of sin that both emphasised the relational aspects of sin and that lent itself to "adaptation", in order to address the reality of sin in the lives of powerless as well as empowered persons. A description of religious incurvature answers both of these aspects. Sin as incurvature has a theological pedigree, appearing in the writings of Augustine and becoming more fully developed in Luther.

This project began deliberately with a study of Luther (Chapters Two and Three), setting up his descriptions of the bound human will, divine hiddenness, and the alien work of God, as a jumping off point for my interactions with a range of feminist scholars on the subjects of agency, relationships with God as well as with other human persons, the failure of sin doctrine to address the situations of women, and the struggle that many women face in maintaining the adequate boundaries needed to flourish as a self. Beginning with Luther's doctrines of the hidden God, God's alien work, and the common experience of *Anfechtung* enabled me to pave the way to incorporating the reality and even necessity of suffering in the life of the believer. The description of

flourishing given in this thesis, while focusing on the need for healthy relationships and a commitment to living a God-centred existence, also recognises the believer's responsibility to struggle against the vestiges of sin that remain, and the experience of suffering – spiritual, emotional, and physical – that is a necessary aspect of serving God in a world ravaged by sin.

More specifically, I argued for a model of sin as incurvature, which describes the sinner as one who, rather than living with their focus turned "up" toward God, has become curved in upon and obsessed with their self, their own will and desires, believing these desires to be more important than the needs of other persons, or the will of God. Feminist theology commonly asserts that traditional hamartiology does not adequately address women's experience of sin. Jodie Lyon suggests that because the symptoms of sin in the lives of women (and other powerless persons) differ from theology's male norm of experience, the cure offered to them must be different. I consequently argued that, as the Lutheran description of sin as incurvature pertains primarily to the experience of powerful persons, it could and should be extended to include sin as the curving of one's self into or towards another person, or cause. While the traditional understanding of incurvature consists of a person looking to themselves as the fulfillment of their own will, in the powerless, incurvature means the failure to look up to God as their source, centre, and ultimate fulfilment, seeking instead to lose their self in another self. The sinful condition is worsened because the powerless person lacks sufficient boundaries, the space to live as a contained self. The goal of Christian flourishing then becomes about enabling all persons – whether curved in on their own self or turned towards and absorbed in another self or cause – through repentance to receive healing and be enabled to stand straight and praise God (Luke 13:10-13). It is about developing a sense of self bounded by the knowledge that our identity is given to us through Christ, within the divine-human relationship. God's healing act of making us to stand straight begins with rebuilding our relationship with the triune God, and learning how, in cooperation with the Spirit who dwells within each believer, to fight against the vestiges of sin and the attacks of the devil; to withstand the seasons of *Anfechungen* without losing faith. We must live as though Christ's healing is complete in us, whilst knowing that this healing and redeeming work is ongoing. The work of flourishing happens in community, with believers supporting each other in struggle and offering encouragement in growth. The hearing of the preached Word, prayer, service of

others, and participation in the Eucharist are the necessary tools that support Christian flourishing in community.

7.3 Avenues for Future Research

I would like the opportunity to flesh out the concept of human flourishing more fully. The parameters of my study mean that I was restricted to Luther's work as a starting point for my reflections. I allowed his views on agency, sin, hiddenness, and the God-human relationship to dictate the questions put to my feminist interlocuters. My work on sinful incurvature has also revealed the need for future research. The theological approach of this thesis sought to deal with sin in an individualistic way. That is, sin as it affects the relationship between myself and God, and sin as it affects my relationship with my neighbour. This was deliberate, in that it was an attempt to redress the feminist tendency to make sin about structures and institutions, rather than individuals. While sins such as systemic racism, sexism or homophobia certainly exists within and may even be *built into* societal structures (for example, laws that unfairly target a specific racial group, or employment policies that make life difficult for women with young children), sin begins in one-on-one relationships. My concern has been that the feminist emphasis on societal or collective sins has resulted in the failure to acknowledge that I myself as a powerless person, can still act sinfully toward my spouse, child, colleague, or neighbour. However, if the model of incurvature cannot be extended to include the sin which exists within societal structures and for which persons are collectively responsible, then its potential reach as a model within feminist theological reflection will be limited. This model could also be developed to address *passive* sin. Incurvature means that I am either obsessed by my own needs or overly absorbed in the needs of an other. This unbalanced focus can consequently cause me to disregard or become oblivious to the sinful acts that are being perpetuated around me. I sin passively by ignoring the needs of others. It is only when I look *up*, instead of inwardly or downwards, that I can see these sins, and begin to occupy myself with the things with which God is concerned.

7.4 Conclusion

The research for and writing of this doctoral thesis has been an enriching experience. I believe it succeeds in making a small but original contribution to the ongoing conversation between Lutheran and feminist theologies. I hope that my work also highlights avenues for fruitful research and theological reflection by others.

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