"Poor Maggot-Sack that I Am": The Human Body in the Theology of Martin Luther

Charles Lloyd Cortright

Marquette University

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“POOR MAGGOT SACK THAT I AM”:
THE HUMAN BODY IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER

by


A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2011
ABSTRACT

“POOR MAGGOT SACK THAT I AM”:
THE HUMAN BODY IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER


Marquette University, 2011

This dissertation represents research into the writings of Martin Luther [1483-1546] reflecting his understanding of the human body in his theology. Chapter one reviews the history of the body in the theology of the western Christian church, 300-1500. Chapters two through five examine Luther’s thinking about various “body topics,” such as the body as the good creation of God; sexuality and procreation; and the body in illness, death, and resurrection. Chapter six presents conclusions.

Luther’s thinking is examined on the basis of consultation of the Weimarer Ausgabe and the “American Edition” of Luther’s works. Special attention is given to Luther’s interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2, to his writings on marriage and celibacy, and his sermons and letters. Various entries in the Tischreden pertinent to the subject are also examined.

In contrast to the kinds of “body topics” currently debated and discussed, Luther’s concern was with the body that dies and yet will be raised again. In addressing issues concerning the body this research shows that, in general, Luther remained a medieval Catholic thinker about the body. However, he was distinct from many medieval voices in the way he affirmed the goodness of human sexuality as a created capacity and purpose of the male and female body. While he was sharp in his critique of sexual sins, this examination of Luther does not discover in him a “grim negativity” about sexuality that some have suggested. Luther viewed sexuality-after-the-fall as he did every other aspect of human activity: infected by sin, but redeemed in Christ.

Luther’s thinking was informed by Scripture, but directed often by experience. Thus this research also traces the impact of his many illnesses, his marriage to Katherina von Bora, and the experience of the deaths of his parents and daughter on his theologizing.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


A page like this that falls under the eye of a reader unassociated with the project may seem similar to the kinds of breathy speeches given by Hollywood award recipients upon receiving their award. Having labored at this project, however, my perspective as the author compels me to say thank-you—whatever the perception—in the profoundest way I can to a number of people who have helped and supported me in this project, and to whom I am deeply grateful.

As I think back over this project, my thanks are due to my colleague and friend, the Rev. Dr. Paul Lehninger—himself a Marquette graduate—who first set me on the track of proposing a dissertation topic on “Luther and the body.” In addition, I want to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the members of my committee—Dr. Deirdre Dempsey, Dr. Ulrich Lehner, Dr. Susan Wood, SCL, and Dr. Wanda Zemler-Cizewski—who patiently waited for this project to be completed and who have always been encouraging while it was being written.

My special thanks are given to Dr. Mickey L. Mattox who has served as my dissertation director, but especially as a mentor and benevolissimus auctor throughout my coursework at Marquette and while dissertating. I am only being honest to say I could not have done this without his guidance and assistance. He has my sincere thanks, admiration, and respect for his scholarship and teaching—a true Doktorvater.
Finally, Luther liked to call his wife Katherina his “Rib (costa),” and regarded her in very biblical terms as the Helper God gave specially to him. Anyone who becomes involved in Luther’s biography quickly sees the genuine love and esteem he grew to have for her and she for him. Luther’s Katie is my Connie, my wife and closest friend, whose love, encouragement, and support are behind every success I have had: “You are all my reasons.”

In gratitude to my mother, Marian, and in loving memory of my father,

+ Kenneth B. Cortright +

Nos fecisti ad Te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.
- St. Augustine
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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. 85 vols. Vienna, 1866—.</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Schriften. 64 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883—.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

On 19 October 1512, Father Martin Luther of the Augustinian Eremites (OESA) took the oath required of a doctor of theology in the fledgling University of Wittenberg. Luther had been picked for the position of Lectura in Biblia by the man he would be replacing and who was also his spiritual mentor, the Augustinian Vicar-General Johann von Staupitz [1460-1524].¹ As a doctor of theology and a professor—a position in which he continued to the end of his life—Luther was charged with presenting regular lectures to students on the Holy Scriptures, supervising theological disputations, and tending to the variety of other duties incumbent on a member of the university’s theological faculty.² Professor Luther was going to be a busy man: his academic duties came in addition to his responsibilities as the designated Prediger for his monastic house (1511), his service as subprior of his order in charge of eleven monastic houses in Saxony and


² Luther’s responsibilities are described in all of the standard biographies of his life. See also, however, Marilyn J. Harran, Martin Luther: Learning for Life (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 127-130.
director of studies within his own monastery (1512), and his commission to preach regularly at St. Mary’s, the town church (1514). Despite the tumults of the Reformation years ahead, it was this work as a teacher and preacher that provided the regular rhythms of his life.³

Because Dr. Luther was a busy professor, preacher, and churchman his theological output did not proceed in the smooth and systematically ordered manner of the great medieval summae, that is, in an orderly flow from the consideration of first principles through the various loci of theology. Rather, Luther’s press of duties and the exigencies of the times in which he lived required that he address himself to theological issues as circumstances dictated (as in the case of many of his “Reformation writings” dealing with disputes over doctrine and practice in the church), or as they surfaced in connection with his teaching and preaching duties at the University of Wittenberg and the town church.⁴ In the words of Timothy Lull, Luther was a “contextual theologian” writing and responding to the kaleidoscopic shifts that made up the Reformation era.⁵

³ Gerhard Ebeling comments about the importance of Luther’s professorship and its close connection to his work as a preacher by noting: “Unless this close connection...is taken into account, the true essence and meaning of the Reformation is bound to be misinterpreted, the figure of the reformer himself distorted. All Luther’s most characteristic actions, his struggle and his testimony, his work as a publicist and his bitter polemics, his activities as a churchman and popular teacher, can only be seen in their true light when we recognize in them the work of the professor of holy scripture...” Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought, trans. R. A. Wilson, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 16-17.

⁴ See Markus Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” trans. Katharina Gustavs, The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87: “Martin Luther was not a systematic theologian. He did not develop and present his ‘teachings’ in concise treatises, logically arranged and secured to all sides. Luther’s theology rather grew out of a concrete situation. As much as he favored reliable and clear statements on the one hand, so little would he have himself tied down to specific doctrinal formulations on the other. The lively, situation-centered and context-
This is a study of Martin Luther and the human body. Like many studies in Luther, its genesis is not a response to something particular in Luther’s vast œuvre, but comes from a desire to answer questions via Luther’s thinking about the body which arise from the author’s world. The body-as-topic and studies about the body have exploded today in such diverse areas as literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, history, etc.—although, as Caroline Walker Bynum observes, “despite the enthusiasm for the topic, discussions of the body are almost completely incommensurate—and often mutually incomprehensible—across the disciplines.” Nonetheless, the body is of renewed interest also in Christian theology so that one can find a growing number of “theology of the body” books nowadays.

This study, therefore, does not purport to explicate a specific, discrete “theology of the human body” in Luther, but will confine itself to exploring how Luther spoke and

related style of Martin Luther’s Scripture interpretation cannot and could not be pressed into a Procrustean bed of orthodox confessional and doctrinal writings.” Add to this, however, the caution of Joseph Sittler about Luther’s presumed systematic untidiness: “If...by system one means that there is in a man’s thought a central authority, a pervasive style, a way of bringing every theme and judgment and problem under the rays of the central illumination, then it must be said that history shows few men of comparable integration.” Quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Expositor (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 43.


7 Most prominent is the catechetical study of the body by Pope John Paul II. Written by Cardinal Wojtyla before his election as pope, the cycle of these catecheses were delivered in general audiences given by him between 5 September 1979 and 28 November 1984, and eventually published in English under the title A Theology of the Body. See John Paul II, Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body, trans. Michael Walstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).
thought in his writings about the body across a spectrum of life situations and issues. Indeed, in keeping with the above, it would be misleading to speak about a “theology of the human body” in any formal sense in Luther. For one thing, Luther never wrote a specific treatise on the body nor did he articulate a theological understanding of the body in accord with scholastic norms of doctrinal formulation. To be sure, Luther thought about the body theologically (as he did most things), but what he thought and how he thought about it are matters that can only be ferreted out of his writings hier und wieder. More important, however, is that such an isolation of the body theologically probably would have sounded quite strange to him. For one thing, Luther lived on the nether side of the “Cartesian divide” of body and mind (soul) and so saw the body always in vital connection with the spirit/soul in keeping with his solid, medieval theological anthropology. For another, much more important than the body in his theology was the disposition of the spirit, the “house where faith and God’s word dwell (das hausz, da der glawbe und gottis wort innen wonet).”

Thus, proposing to describe how Luther deals in his theology with “just the body” is to propose something perhaps artificial as far as Luther’s own thinking is concerned, but something that is interesting to those on the “near side” of the mind/body divide to hear what he has to say. And he has much to say. Luther theologized life: theology addressed life and life, theology. A writer of prodigious output, he produced tracts,

8 This does not ignore Luther’s 1536 “Disputation on the Human Person” (Disputatio Reverendi viri Domini D. Martini Lutheri de Homine), WA 39:175-180; LW 34:133-144, which, despite its tantalizing title for a study such as this, mainly discusses the place of reason in the human person (although thesis 21 affirms the dignity of the body). Overall, the disputation is fragmentary and preserves only snippets of Luther’s thoughts de homine.

treatises, sermons, disputations, letters, hymns and translations—hundreds upon hundreds of pages. But in all his work, Luther was keenly in touch with how the issues he wrote about connected with life in general and especially with the lives of “Hans und Greta” in the pew. With respect to the latter, Luther combined the universal human experiences of his life—the stages of youth, middle age, and decline—with a unique constellation of life situations—Augustinian friar, celibate priest, theologian and teacher, pastor, husband, father—to comment on and apply the Scripture’s meaning to Christians, all in a time of unique foment and change. Luther thus brought an extraordinary perspective to much of what he wrote. Luther’s own body and health contributed to and molded how he thought and talked about the body in his theologizing throughout his life. In the cloister, he had punished his body; at the Leipzig debate (1519) he was described as gaunt and wraith-like because of his privations; a stint of “catching up” on his breviary prayers in 1520 left him an insomniac; digestive problems and gall stones plagued him in middle age, so much so that he was convinced he was dying in 1535. The human body, frail and subject to disease was a “lowly body,” a “sack of maggots” that sin, death, and the devil plagued.

But the body was nonetheless the good creation of God and revealed God’s glory, something made manifest for the believer in the body of Jesus Christ born in lowliness of the Virgin, but risen and glorified in his Resurrection. Luther could disparage the human body doomed to decline and death because of sin, but he exulted in the body as God’s creation, redeemed and glorified like Christ’s. Luther believed passionately in the hope for the body enshrined in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the resurrection of the body…” It is this overarching theological tension about the body in Luther that these
pages seek to explore via his words. To facilitate that exploration, these questions have guided this research:

- What was the medieval “starting point” for Luther with regard to the human body? How did it speak about the human body, both male and female?

- How did Luther change with respect to this heritage? How did he exhibit continuity with it?

- What did Luther see as the theological meaning of gender differences? Luther was originally committed to the celibate life, but he left that life and married Katherina von Bora. Did this change exhibit itself in his views of both the male and female body?

- The mortality of the body was a “given” in a society where death was a part of life. How did the deaths of Luther’s parents and his daughters (particularly his daughter Magdalena’s in 1542) show themselves in the theology of a man who wrote extensively about death and dying?

- Did Luther’s own illnesses shape his theologizing and commenting on Scripture?

- What did Luther bequeath to the emerging Lutheran Church in terms of its anthropology and understanding of the human body?

In addition to asking and seeking answers to these kinds of questions, a project that sets out to distill from Luther’s works what he had to say about the body also offers another view of Martin Luther qua theologian and the chance to add to the greater, on-going conversation among historical theologians interested in assessing his theological character and place in western Christian history. This matter, too, will be explored.
METHoD

While it is the goal of this research to present as broad a picture as possible of what constituted Luther’s theologizing about the human body, it is unrealistic to assay to shake every tree in the forest of Luther’s writings for what he said about the body. But there are within Luther’s works treatments of certain biblical “body texts”—texts such as the creation account of Genesis, the “resurrection chapter” of 1 Corinthians, etc.—that will be explored in the context in which Luther used them—in his sermons, exegetical works, tracts, letters, and so on.

As Luther is parsed for statements about the created body, it will be useful to distinguish at times between whether it is the “young,” the “mature,” or the “old” Luther speaking because Luther’s output over 35 years was, naturally, not static in its approach or content. Genesis is especially significant in this regard because the creation account and the doctrine of creation are of paramount importance in Luther’s theologizing about human beings and their bodies as the *creatura bona* of God. Moreover, because Luther lectured at least twice on the opening chapters of Genesis during his career as well as preaching an extended sermon series on the book, Genesis offers the opportunity to track Luther’s discussion of the creation of the human body over his life.

Such a division of Luther’s life into eras—early, “mid-career,” late—is a common convention among Luther biographers. Martin Brecht’s three-volume biography, the most extensive contemporary treatment available to English readers, cordons off the years 1483-1521, the “early years,” as a reasonable first division of Luther’s life. In terms of Luther’s theological development and career, this spans the period of time of his
education and entry into the monastery in 1505, through the posting of the 95 Theses in 1517 to the end of his “exile” at the Wartburg castle in 1521-1522 in the aftermath of the Diet of Worms. This is also the period of Luther’s life when his “Reformation breakthrough” took place—the exact “when” is still widely debated—and in which his evangelical theology was formed. Thus, Luther scholarship has long seen this period as the venue for exploring Luther’s intellectual and theological development.

It also needs to be noted that in the case of some Scripture texts which a modern reader of the Bible would anticipate eagerly as an occasion for Luther’s comment, often the “doctor is not in.” For example, the “early Luther” can be disappointingly unremarkable in his treatment of some texts, especially those—such as his early Psalms lectures—in which he was still following the procedure of lecturing on the glossa ordinaria. Moreover, some anticipated texts simply may be missing because Luther

10 See Luther’s retrospective account of his breakthrough in his 1545 preface to his Latin writings, WA 54:179-187; LW 34:327-338. Arguments by various scholars for when this event occurred have been advanced for various years, e.g., 1513 (H. Boehmer), 1517 (G. Rupp), and 1518/19 (U. Saarnivaara). Whatever the case may actually have been, Heiko Oberman cautions against investing too much in the event as if Luther solely and suddenly discovered the “Reformation gospel” in one fell swoop. Referring to such claims, Oberman says: “I find myself embarrassed by the Protestant triumphalism so manifest in this expression. Had no-one known the Gospel before Luther, and did Luther not refer to innumerable faithful prophets and evangelists? Did he not always speak of the medieval Church as our common Mother Church, that handed down the treasures of the Gospel with such great faithfulness? The medieval Church passed the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the sacraments and Holy Scripture down from one generation to the next. Without these treasures and without the faithful perseverance of the medieval Church no faith would be imaginable to later generations.” Heiko A. Oberman, The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications, trans. A. C. Gow (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 63. For a report of the scholarly debate and questions involved see also Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development, ed. and trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 85-95.

11 See Oberman’s essay, “The Reformation: The Quest for the Historical Luther,” The Reformation, 1-21, in this regard.
lectured on a limited number of biblical books in his career and the desired text falls outside the range of Luther’s exegetical writings. And, there are also some texts that fall victim to translation and linguistic issues. For example, Psalm 139:13-14, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” [NIV], may be tantalizing in its modern dress as a premiere biblical “body statement.” However, the *Weimarer Ausgabe*’s record of the 1513-1515 *Dictata super psalterium* contains no witness to Luther’s comments about Psalm 139. Luther cites Psalm 139:13 in connection with his comments on Psalm 16, but only on the basis of the Vulgate’s rendition of verse 13: “*Quia tu possedisti renes meos* (You have possessed my reins [= kidneys],”)—a very wooden translation of the Hebrew original. Luther discusses what the “kidneys” were according to various exegetes’ understandings, but the passage does not offer any fruitful help in revealing Luther’s own thought about the psalmist’s wonderment about the body.

For this research Luther’s words have been examined in Latin and/or German on the basis of the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (WA), the critical edition of Luther’s writings begun in 1883. The “American Edition” of Luther’s works (LW) has also been consulted where available. The translations of Luther are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

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13 WA 3, 107; LW 10, 108. Note that the *Lutherbibel* (1545 revision) continues to translate the Hebrew of Psalm 139:13, *כָּלֵי יַעֲצָה בִּלְבָּד חַיָּךְ בְּמַעַל מְכָר אֲזֵרִי,* as: “Denn du hast meine *Nieren* in deiner gewalt, Du warest vber mir in mutter Leibe” (“For you have my *kidneys* in your power, you were over me in the womb”), emphasis added.
In proceeding, then, to look at Luther and the human body, chapter one of our exploration looks at the development of concepts and theological considerations about the body in western Christianity from the late patristic age to the late fifteenth century. The chapter will draw on the prominent theological voices and historical events (such as the advent of the Black Plague in 1347) that set the distal and proximal context in which the body was considered at the dawn of the sixteenth century.

Luther’s own understanding of the body is bound up with his Schöpfungsbegriff, his overall view of God’s work of creation. The body as God’s good creation must be seen against the ground of this primary concept of Luther’s theology to be appreciated. Therefore, this will be the focus of chapter two, *Am anfang schuff Gott hymel vnd erden*.14

Chapter three, *Er schuff sie eyn menlin und frewlin*, will explore Luther’s understanding of the created body by tracing its development over his career as an exegete of Genesis. The fact that the “young,” “mature,” and “old” Luther all took the tree of Genesis in hand to shake it offers a unique opportunity to chart this development over time. Our emphasis will be on the particular “body texts” of Genesis 1-2 and Luther’s comments about the prelapsarian bodies of Adam and Eve.

In 1525 Luther married Katherina von Bora. His marriage scandalized his enemies, encouraged his supporters, and brought tears of joy to his aged father. *Es ist nicht gut das der Mensch alleyn sey*, says Genesis in Luther’s German. Luther’s marriage

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14 The chapter titles for chapters 2-4 are taken from Luther’s translation of the Bible, 1545 edition; the title for chapter 5 is from a 1533 sermon on John 14:6.
supplied a missing piece to his experience; it salted his polemics about monasticism and enriched his exegesis of the body. Chapter four will look at Luther, the body, and sexuality.

Chapter five will explore the post-lapsarian body in Luther’s thinking. The body, indeed, his body, was a poor, “maggot-sack (Madensack)” that sin, death, and the devil ravaged. Here, Luther’s experience with personal illness and death along with his letters and sermons of pastoral comfort will inform us of his view of the lowly body. It is this body that is sown in dishonor, but which will be raised in glory. Thus, the final portion of this chapter will explore Luther’s hope for the body on the basis of his sermons on 1 Corinthians 15. A final chapter (chapter 6) will serve to consider the overall conclusions of this research.
CHAPTER 1
The Human Body in the Theology of the Latin West, 300 – 1500

To survey the concept of the human body in Western Christianity prior to the time of Luther is not to consider a simple, single concept or tradition. Although Christian thinking about the human person always included (at least) “body and soul,” Christian thinking by the time of Luther—not unlike the world of today—was a “cacophony of discourses” in which theologians and doctors, poets and mystics, saints and heretics widely diverged in their understanding of the human body.¹ This chapter seeks to “set the stage” for examining Martin Luther’s view of the body by surveying some of the more influential theological voices that are beneath or which rise above the din of medieval discourse about the body. Various major developments will be traced: first, the incorporation of Platonic dualism into Christian anthropology; second, the synthesis and modification of Platonism by St. Augustine of Hippo with Scripture; third, the creation of...

¹ See Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” Critical Inquiry 22 (Autumn, 1995): 1-33, for her lively discussion concerning the variegated conversation about the body in Middle Ages: “‘Middle age people’ (as vague a notion, by the way, as ‘modern people’) did not have a ‘concept of the body’ any more than we do; nor did they ‘despise’ it (although there is reason to think that they feared childbirth, or having their teeth pulled, or the amputation of limbs without anesthesia). Like the modern world, the Middle Ages was characterized by a cacophony of discourses. Doctors took a completely different view of sexuality from theologians, sometimes prescribing extramarital sex as a cure for disease. Secular love poets and ascetic devotional writers meant something radically different by passion. Pissing and farting did not have the same valence in the grim monastic preaching of the years around 1100 and in the cheerfully scatological, although still misogynistic, fabliaux of two centuries later. Alchemists studied the properties of minerals and gems in an effort to precipitate change and prolong life, whereas students of the Bible saw in these same objects lessons about fortitude and truth” (7).
a Christian anthropology rooted in Aristotelian understandings by St. Thomas Aquinas; and finally, the rise of late medieval mysticism. The contributions of these major streams will be augmented by an overview of the historical connective tissue that led from one to the next.

1.1 - THE BODY AS “PROBLEM” TO THE SOUL: PLATONISM

Christianity arose out of Judaism, but grew in the context of the first century Roman Empire and the Hellenized culture of the Mediterranean world which the Empire encompassed. Therefore the earliest voices about the body cannot be considered “western” or “Latin.” As the early church spilled out of Palestine into the wider Mediterranean world, early Christian understandings of the body were formed by the Hebrew Scriptures and within the matrix of commonly held ideas about the body derived from classical Greek philosophy.

From the start, one of the most important voices in Christian discussions about the body was the Greek philosopher Plato [429-347 B.C.] whose dualism conceived of the human body largely in negative terms. In Platonic thinking the soul was everything: an immortal, incorruptible, intellectual principle that pre-existed the body and which transcended the body, passing after the death of the body into other bodies in a process that came to be called metempsychosis.² Plato conceived of the soul as not possessing

² Regarding ΜΕΤΕΜΨΥΧΩΣΙΣ, see Liddell and Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, which traces the term to the first century B.C. historian Diodorus Siculus. ΜΕΤΕΜΨΥΧΩΣΙΣ was later used by the sixth century A.D. Alexandrian philosopher Olympiadorus in connection with his commentary on Plato’s Phaedo. Although Plato himself does not use this or any other specific term to label the concept, the transmigration of souls is spoken
such physical characteristics as sex or race; rather, the soul is incorporeal, immortal, and transcendent. It is the true self whose earthly existence in the body is most often described in the Platonic dialogues as a kind of exile, an imprisonment, a tomb: σῶμα σῆμα.

Plato’s noblest view of the body appears in the late cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* is of particular significance to the wider matter of the medieval view of the body since it was the only Platonic dialogue available in a Latin translation (and that only in part) during the Middle Ages. Moreover, the *Timaeus* presents a different, more constructive view of the body than other Platonic dialogues such as the *Phaedo* in which the body is essentially a prison for the soul and disrupts the proper workings of the soul. *Timaeus* presents the human body “less like a prison for the rational soul and more, as one might put it, like a rather comfortable hotel with quite a few

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4 σῶμα σῆμα—“the body is a tomb”—is a Pythagorean saying adopted by Plato. See also Socrates’ observation in the *Phaedo*: “οὐκοῦν καὶ ἑνταῦθα ἢ τοῦ φιλοσοφοῦ ψυχῆς μάλιστα ἀτιμάζει τὸ σῶμα καὶ φεύγει ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ζητεῖ δὲ αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν γάρ γε σθαλ.” (“The philosopher’s soul utterly despises his body and flees from it, seeking to be alone by itself.”) Plato, *Phaedo* (*LCL*, Plato I), 65d.

Nonetheless, Plato’s overall view of the body remains mildly antipathetic: even in the *Timaeus*, the “truly blessed life (βίον ἐν διάιμονα)” would be that of a “purely rational and disembodied life.”

In the *Timaeus* the human person is presented as a copy or reflection of the cosmos—τὸ κόσμος—which is itself a “Living Creature endowed with soul and reason (ζῷον ἐν ψυχῇ ἐν νοσύνῃ).” The cosmos is a great body, the human being a little body; both owe their life and form to indwelling soul and reason. Thus, in the *Timaeus* the human body is seen against the background of the cosmos: it is both a part of it and an encapsulation of “the All”—τὸ πᾶν. Informed by reason and soul, the body, by virtue of its analogous nature to the cosmos, is a key to understanding the cosmos. In the third part of the *Timaeus* (69A – 92C) the body is described as giving physical expression to the soul and the soul’s threefold nature of reason, psychological or emotional energy (θυμός), and the passions or desire (ἐπιθυμία). The soul is expressed through the disposition of the four primal elements—fire, air, water, and earth—in the body and by the balance of the “four humours (χυμοί)” in the body. The body-in-balance is the key

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8 Plato, *Timaeus* (*LCL, Plato* IX), 30B.


to health, because health is obtained “by imitation of the form of the All.”\footnote{Plato, \textit{Timaeus} (\textit{LCL}, Plato IX), 88C. “τὸ τοῦ παντὸς ἀπομιμούμενον ἐλθὼς.”} This Platonic conceptualization of the body as an organism whose health is a matter of balance between the humours in imitation of the cosmos yielded an understanding of the body that persisted beyond the late Middle Ages and the new attention given to the structure of the body’s organs in the Renaissance.\footnote{Bynum, “Why All the Fuss,” 7.} Even sexual activity was conceived of mirroring the energies of the cosmos. As Peter Brown colorfully explains, the bodies of men and women in late antiquity “were fiery little universes, through whose heart, brain, and veins there pulsed the same heat and vital spirit as glowed in the stars.”\footnote{Peter Brown, \textit{The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17.}

It was this Platonic dualism-\textit{cum}-antipathy toward the body that dominated early Christian anthropology as an early major protagonist in the story of the body. The human person was seen primarily as a spiritual soul housed by a body, but whose identity was not bound to the body. Plato’s basic anthropology was adapted first into Christian theology by the Alexandrian theologians of the third century, especially Clement of Alexandria [\textit{ca.} 150-216], Origen [\textit{ca.} 185-254], and Athanasius [\textit{ca.} 293-373].

However, it was the fourth century anti-Arian works of Hilary of Poitiers [300-368] that translated Platonic ideas regarding the body into the Latin language of the emerging western church. Hilary had spent time in exile in Asia Minor where he had become acquainted with Alexandrian theology. In his major treatise \textit{De trinitate}, Hilary’s defense of Christ’s divinity utilized Clement of Alexandria’s view regarding the body of
Christ by stipulating that, although the human body of Christ was a real body, it was a “celestial body (corpus caeleste).” As such, Christ’s body did not share in the same weakness—or present the same hindrances—as the bodies of humanity descended from Adam and Eve. In Book X of De trinitate Hilary put forward the idea that the body of Christ “receives the force of pain…but without feeling pain.” It “was transformed into heavenly glory on the Mount, it put fevers to flight by its touch, it gave new eyesight by its spittle.”

Ambrose of Milan [339-397], the mentor of St. Augustine, also manifested Platonic thinking. Ambrose was much influenced by the Platonism embedded in the works of Philo and Origen (although Ambrose’s moral works seem to be influenced by Stoicism). However, Ambrose avoided Hilary’s platonically-driven, quasi-docetic view of the body of Christ and was generally very careful to correct the more dangerous aspects Platonism suggested about Christ. In his In hexaemeron and De paradiso, Ambrose relied especially on the platonized thought of Basil of Caesarea [329-379] for his presentation on the opening chapters of Genesis.


15 Hilary, De trinitate (CCSL, 62a), 478. “virtus corporis sine sensu poenae vim poenae in se desaevientis exceptit.”

16 Ibid., “quod in caelestem gloriam conformatur in monte, quod adtactu suo fugat febres, quod de sputu suo format oculos.”

17 Quasten, Patrology, 153, 166.

18 Grillmeier, Christ, 404-405.

19 Quasten, Patrology, 154.
For Ambrose, the soul (or mens, the highest part of the soul or “the inner man”) constituted the person; the body was at best only an outward instrument. Human beings were created in the “image of Christ”; Christ, in turn, is the “Image of God” by virtue of the union of Christ’s mind by grace to the Holy Spirit. Christ’s body—the “outer man”—was in harmony with his mind in one “spirit.” Adam’s voluntary fall resulted in the alienation from God of the human person—both soul and body, inner and outer man—so that humanity no longer possessed God’s image. Rather, the human person was now “flesh” which manifested itself in the inherent weakness of the body. The image is restored by grace, but warfare continues between the inner and outer man, between spirit/soul and flesh/body until “paradisal peace” is restored in the resurrection of the eschaton.20

1.2 - THE BODY AS FOIL TO THE SOUL: AUGUSTINE

The modification and synthesis of the Platonic body with the anthropology of Scripture in western Christian theology reached its zenith in the thought and writing of St. Augustine of Hippo [354-430] who fixed this tradition for much of the subsequent history of the Latin church.21 However, while affirming the basic, underlying dualism of Platonism, Augustine was the earliest Christian theologian who saw the necessity of understanding the body as an integral part of the human person, interdependent with the

20 Quasten, Patrology, 154-155.

21 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1500: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe (Yale University Press, 1980), 44.
soul. In Augustine, the antipathy toward the body inherent in Platonic thought (as so strongly expressed in Porphyry, Augustine’s erstwhile philosophic mentor\textsuperscript{22}) was suppressed. In contrast to Porphyry the mature Augustine came to affirm the body positively such as when he said in a 417 sermon, “Take away death, the last enemy, and my own flesh will be my dear friend throughout eternity.”\textsuperscript{23}

Augustine came to his mature understanding only after an extended struggle to grasp the body’s importance for the human person. It was a fruitful struggle: according to Margaret Miles, this is what helped shape “Augustine’s understanding of the central Christian doctrines of creation, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the Christian Church as Corpus Christi and sacraments.”\textsuperscript{24}

Upon his conversion in 386, Augustine found that he had to let go of his pre-Christian denigration of the body in the face of Genesis’ clear declaration about all of creation: \textit{Vidique Deus cuncta quae fecerat, et erant valde bona} (Gen. 1:31). The body also was “good” and an integral component of the human person despite the younger Augustine’s reflexive stress on the soul as the better or “higher” part. The human body is both corpus and caro in Augustine’s early parlance, but these terms are not necessarily

\textsuperscript{22} Porphyry taught that the “body must be fled” (“omne corpus fugiendum”) in both an eschatological and aesthetic sense. Frederick van Fleteren, “Porphyry” in \textit{Augustine Through the Ages}, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 662.

\textsuperscript{23} Augustine, \textit{Sermo} CLV (CCSL 41), 15. “detrahatur mors novissima inimica, et erit mihi in aeternum caro mea amica” (emphasis added); Mary T. Clark, \textit{Augustine of Hippo} (Georgetown University Press, 1994), 32.

equivalent: *omnis enim caro etiam corpus est, non autem omne corpus etiam caro est.*

*Corpus* tended to emphasize the human body’s congruence with “bodies” in general, that is, material beings possessing *mensura, numera, et pondus.*

*Caro* was “body,” too, but it often highlighted the “flesh,” that is, that which is sin in humanity. Thus, these “body terms” for Augustine could refer to the sinful inclinations due to the fall, to the *habitus* of sin in fallen humanity, or they could refer simply to the physical human body. However, T. J. van Bavel suggests that even when speaking about the “body” as code for what is sinful in humanity, Augustine’s repeated use in his earlier works of terms such as “withdraw,” “leave behind,” and “renounce” in connection with the body reflected congruence with Scripture on his part rather than simply a reflexive denigration of the body *qua* body.

Indeed, early on Augustine saw that the good of the body was integral to the good of the soul. Indeed, in combination with the senses, “the body is a kind of image of the truth.”

Augustine was further informed in his understanding of the physical body by his thinking about the Incarnation. In the early writing *Contra academicos* he stated that the “authority of the Divine intellect (*divini intellectus auctoritatem*)”—Christ—was placed into a body “so that souls would be aroused not only by divine precepts but also

25 Augustine, *De fide et symbolo,* (CSEL, 41), X, 24.

26 For a fuller discussion of the significance of these terms for Augustine, see Lewis Ayres, “Measure, number, and weight,” *Augustine Through the Ages,* ed. A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 550-552.

27 Tarsicus Jan van Bavel, OSA, “‘No One Ever Hated His Own Flesh’: Eph. 5:29 in Augustine,” *Augustiniana* (45) 1995: 53-54.

by divine acts to yearn for their fatherland." Similarly, the early Augustine affirmed the certainty of the resurrection of the body because of the resurrected body of Christ, even if he vacillated for a time in his understanding of the continuity of the temporal body in the body resurrected to eternal life.30

Van Bavel further notes that in those places in which the early Augustine writes about Christian charity and honor due one’s neighbor, love for the neighbor’s body is enjoined because the body is meant “for the Lord” (1 Cor. 6:13).31 It should be noted here, however, that the later Augustine taught that love for neighbor should not be conditioned on anything to do with the body, but solely for the sake of Christ.32

As would be naturally expected, over time Augustine exhibited an “evolution in [his] attitude towards…sensible and corporeal reality.”33 Coming more and more in his thinking under the tutelage of St. Paul’s epistles—the Apostle’s words in Ephesians 5:29

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31 Ibid., 60-62.


33 van Bavel, “No One Ever Hated,” 83.
were especially potent—Augustine grew in his appreciation of the body first as a priest [ordained, 392] and then as bishop [consecrated, 396].

Robert P. Russell suggests that Augustine’s growth in understanding the body together with the soul as essential for human personhood was also a function of his growth in understanding the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This set Augustine starkly in contrast with Platonic contempt for the body (especially, again, as that was expressed in Porphyry). Augustine himself indicated his growth in this regard in his Retractationes written near the end of his life where he revised what he had said about the resurrection of the body in De fide et symbolo [393]. The mature Augustine taught

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34 Eph. 5:29: “nemo enim unquam carnem suam odio habuit.” (“For no one ever hated his own body.”)


37 A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA, “Body,” in Augustine Through the Ages, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 106. In Retractationes 1:17, Augustine makes specific reference to De fide et symbolo 10.24 where he had written: “resurget igitur corpus secundum christianam fidem, quae fallere non potest. quod cui videtur incredibile, qualis nunc sit caro adtendit, qualis autem futura sit non considerat:quia illo tempore inmutationis angelicae non iam caro erit et sanguis, sed tantum corpus.” (“The body, then, will rise again according to the tenets of the Christian faith—a faith that cannot lead us astray. If this belief seems incredible to anyone, that is because he is thinking of the flesh as it is now and not as it will be in the future, for at the moment of its spiritual transformation it will no longer be flesh and blood but only a body.”) Augustine, De fide et symbolo (CSEL, 41), X, 24. In the retraction, he comments that anyone who would teach that the earthly body “as we have it now” would not be the body that is raised at the Last Day “is to be reproved, admonished by the body of the Lord who, after the Resurrection, appeared with the same members.” (“sed quisquis ea sic accipit, ut existimet ita corpus terrenum, quale nunc habemus, in corpus caeleste resurrectione motari, ut nec membra ista nec carnis sit futura substantia, procul dubio corrigendus est, commonitus de corpore domini, qui post resurrectionem in eisdem membris…apparuit.”) Augustine, Retractationes I (CCSL 62), 17.
that congruence of the human body in the resurrection with that of the resurrected Christ’s meant that the flesh would be raised without corruptibility and with immortality.

In a letter written in 410 to a young Christian enquirer, Dioscorus, Augustine said:

For God has endowed the soul with a nature so powerful, that from that consummate fullness of joy which is promised to the saints in the end of time, some portion overflows also upon the lower part of our nature, the body—not the blessedness which is proper to the part which enjoys and understands, but the plenitude of health, that is, the vigor of incorruption.\textsuperscript{38}

The mortal body is not left behind in the resurrection; it is transformed by the power of God.\textsuperscript{39} In the late treatise \textit{De cura pro mortuis gerenda} [422] Augustine noted that care for the bodies of those who have died is pleasing to God and “indicates a strong belief in the resurrection.”\textsuperscript{40} For the body that dies is the body that will be raised.\textsuperscript{41}

Beyond his denial of Platonic denigration of the body, Augustine also proved to be the pivot in the Latin church away from those understandings of cosmology and the body in the early church founded in Plato and wider Greek thought. In the \textit{Timaeus} Plato

\textsuperscript{38} Augustine, \textit{Epistolae} (CSEL, 34), CXVIII, 14. “sanitas autem perfecta corporis illa extrema totius hominis immortalitas erit; tam potenti enim natura deus fecit animam, ut ex eius plenissima beatitudo, quae in fine temporum sanctis promittitur, redundet etiam in inferiorem naturam, quod est corpus, non beatitudo, quae fruentis et intelligentis est propria, sed plenitude sanitatis, id est incorruptionis vigor.” On Dioscorus, see A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, \textit{The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire} (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 367.

\textsuperscript{39} In a section in \textit{De Civitate Dei} too long to reproduce here, Augustine chides the Platonists for denying the power of “the supreme God” who raises the body uncorrupted and immortal along with the soul. See Augustine, \textit{De civitate dei} (LCL, Augustine City of God, IV), XIII, 15-18.


\textsuperscript{41} Augustine, \textit{Contra faustum manicheum}, (CSEL, 25), XI, 3.
did not venture to stipulate from where ἀπὸ τὸ ἀλλὸ— the All—arose; all Timaeus did in the
dialogue was to tell Socrates “a likely account of these matters”\(^{42}\) with the caveat, “not to seek beyond it.” After Plato, however, philosophic inquiry ignored the exhortation in the
Timaeus and from the second century A.D. onwards philosophic cosmogonic thinking in
the Platonic tradition became especially concerned with the process in which “the All”
came from the One.\(^{43}\) The Greek Platonic philosopher Plotinus [204-270 A.D.] saw the
process on the one hand as a demonstration of the goodness of the One, but on the other,
as the primal fall via an act of separation from original simplicity, the repair of which
required the soul’s return to the One.\(^{44}\) Although Christian cosmogony as inherited from
the Hebrew Scriptures traditionally differentiated between the goodness of God exhibited
in the creation of all things and Adam’s sin as the source of a cosmological fall, this view
was not always taught. Origen, for instance, took biblical phrases and ideas and
understood them in ways congruent with Platonic thinking. In De Principiis Origen
taught that although the current state of the world was the result of the fall of humanity
the fall had a very different place in his system from its place in more
conventional Christian thinking. The fall, for Origen, did not impair an already
existing world but brought it into existence. The material world for him is God’s
provision for rational creatures who have failed to abide with God. Origen seems
to have followed Plato in interpreting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden

\(^{42}\) Plato, Timaeus (LCL, Plato IX), 29D: “ὅσσον περὶ τοῦτον ἔτι κόσμον ἀπὸ ἡμῶν ἑτεροκλημονούσα πρέπει τούτου μηδεν εἶπτι πέρα ζητεῖν.” (“...thus it is fitting that we accept the likely account of these matters [i.e., the generation of the Universe] and try not to seek beyond it.”)

\(^{43}\) Louth, “Body,” 114.

\(^{44}\) Anne-Marie Bowery, “Plotinus,” Augustine Through the Ages, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 654. Note Plotinus’
dying words in this regard: “I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine
in the All” (Ibid.).
as the expulsion of human souls from the supersensible ideal world to the material world and the coats of skin God mercifully provided them as our gross, material bodies. Origen thereby ascribed our bodily nature, in Platonic fashion, to our separation from a higher, supersensible realm.\footnote{Joseph Wilson Trigg, \textit{Origen: the Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church} (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 109-110.}

This is Origen’s notorious “double creation” or “two-stage” view of creation: the “first stage” was comprised of spiritual beings made in the image of God; the “second stage” was the embodiment of souls that fell away from God in which, significantly, they manifest sexual differentiation as a sign of their fall from original simplicity and unity.\footnote{Brown, \textit{The Body and Society}, 165; Louth, “Body,” 114.}

The doctrine of a double creation (Louth labels it an “ideology”\footnote{Louth, “Body,” 117.}) exerted a powerful influence on the ideals of Christian living in late antiquity, particularly in terms of the ideals of virginity and celibacy.\footnote{See Brown, \textit{The Body in Society}, passim, for the fullest discussion of the various justifications for virginity and celibacy in the early church through Augustine.}

Louth explains:

If the state of those risen from the dead is beyond the distinction of sex, then it is like man’s first creation: the end is like the beginning. The celibate is seeking to return to his or her original, primal state. The eschatological justification for celibacy becomes protological: it is justified by humanity’s first state. And that readily becomes ontological: the celibate is seen as seeking to return to his original, natural state, he is becoming what, most deeply, he is.\footnote{Louth, “Body,” 116.}

As chronicled in his \textit{Confessions} [Book VIII], Augustine’s conversion to Christianity also marked his conversion to celibacy. Yet despite this fact, it was Augustine who came to challenge the ideals of virginity and celibacy which had developed in congruence with the cosmological view outlined above. Once again,
Augustine was involved in a process of development. In his 388/389 polemic De Genesi adversus Manicheos Augustine taught that God created Adam and Eve as a celibate couple. Eve, he wrote, was made as a companion suited to Adam to share Adam’s praise of the Creator. But in his later (and longer) De Genesi ad litteram [401/415] Augustine proposed—in Peter Brown’s words—“a markedly different exegesis…[one that] ensured that the golden mist that had hung over the slopes of Paradise would lift forever in the Latin West.”

Augustine’s break with the exegetical past was that he described Adam and Eve in Eden as endowed with the same bodies and sexual characteristics as post-lapsarian humanity. That is, Adam and Eve were not created to be a “virginal couple,” and had they not fallen they would have had sex (although this would have taken place without lust) and begotten children in Paradise. Sexual differentiation, Augustine claimed, was part of the created order, and would characterize the bodies of men and women in the resurrection. Origen’s platonically-saturated doctrine of a double creation was thus replaced by Augustine’s doctrine of a perfect creation that included physicality and sexuality; the subsequent fall into sin was responsible for the introduction of evil into what was previously an unambiguously “good creation.”

In rejecting the traditional cosmic view, Augustine thus shifted the way in which the body was understood. In the traditional view, the body—replete with gender and its “composite complexity”—was thought to reflect per se the loss of perfection implied by

51 Ibid.
52 Augustine, De Civitate Dei (LCL, Augustine, City of God IV), XIV, 22, 26.
53 Ibid., XIV, 17.
the creation of the material cosmos. At the same time, the body was also viewed as the venue in which restoration could occur. It was thought that through the incarnate Logos a “new principle” was introduced into the cosmos that called humankind back to union with God: it was in the body, through ascetic striving, that the dualities of fallen humanity—including male-female duality—could be overcome. Under Augustine all this was peeled away in favor of Scripture’s declaration of the goodness of the created body—male and female; salvation of the body was a function of the salvation of the soul.

Most importantly, for Augustine all of this was qualified by an understanding of the human person as a spiritual being defined by *inwardness*. That which is corporeal is outward; it is composite, differentiated; it is easier to grasp than the baffling simplicity of the spiritual. Christ’s Incarnation makes it possible to frame these things in parables about spiritual truth that are easier to grasp, but once they are grasped, they are to be interiorized. That which is bodily can hinder the spiritual: it can distract it; it can try to offer a kind of pseudo-inwardness—the “private”—in which the spiritual self can lose itself. Asceticism may help, but Augustine is not very enthusiastic about asceticism’s usefulness in this regard. Indeed, the aim of asceticism is a kind of “effortless inwardness” in which the soul is at home in the body and in control: asceticism *per se*

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55 See Augustine, *Confessions*, (CCSL, 27), 10, 28, especially: “nemo quod tolerat amat, etsi tolerare amat. quamvis enim gaudeat se tolerare, mavult tamen non esse quod toleret. prospera in adversis desidero, adversa in prosperis timeo.” (“no one loves what he endures, though he may love to endure. For though he rejoices at his endurance, yet he would rather that there was nothing to endure. In adversity I desire prosperity, in prosperity I fear adversity.”)
does nothing to address anything as fundamental as the resolution of the duality embedded in the traditional “cosmic” view. So Augustine’s concern with inwardness is not some kind of individualism. Rather, this “effortless inwardness” renders the body “transparent,” so to speak, and makes communion possible between souls that have been cut off from one another by the murkiness of the fallen body.56 This possibility will only be fully realized in heaven where “God will be so known by us and so present to our eyes that by means of the spirit he will be seen by each of us in each of us, seen by each in his neighbor and in himself.”57 It was the hope of achieving some approximation here of what will be in heaven that fueled Augustine’s efforts to shape Christian communal life, especially in the religious communities in which he lived from his conversion to his death. Significantly, his monastic rule begins: “The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.”58

Augustine’s understanding of inwardness produced changes in the way the body was regarded especially from the twelfth century onwards. Why there was such a delayed effect of Augustine’s ideas is too large an issue to discuss here, but it is certainly

56 Cary, Augustine’s Invention, 141-142.

57 Augustine, De civitate dei (LCL, Augustine City of God VII), xxii, 29. “ita Deus nobis erit notus atque conspicuous, ut videatur spiritu a singulis nobis in singulis nobis, videatur ab altero in altero, videatur in se ipso.”

connected with the “renaissance” that occurred in that century, a rebirth of interest in
theology, provoked by the cathedral schools and the new universities.\textsuperscript{59} Augustine had
something to say about most things and so was rediscovered by many “pensive readers”
in that century.\textsuperscript{60} The doctrine of original sin, for example, only re-emerged in its
Augustinian form then.\textsuperscript{61} Augustine’s view of the outward body as the instrument by
which the inward person expresses himself established the body as an integral part of the
person, but one that acted as a foil to the soul.

\textbf{1.3 - The Early Middle Ages, 500 – 1200}

Church historians often suggest that the sun set on the patristic age in the west
with Gregory the Great [\textit{ca.} 540-604]. Gregory’s theology followed Augustine but “in a
simplified and unsophisticated form” which exhibited a practical, pastoral bent as
evidenced in his influential \textit{Moralia in Iob}.\textsuperscript{62} Gregory followed Augustine in stressing the
psychological aspects of the inner life and showed a deep and profound sympathy for the
weakness of the human condition. For instance, in setting forth the seven capital sins,
Gregory cast them as the root of human frailty and described the struggle between the

\textsuperscript{59} Carl A. Volz, \textit{The Church of the Middle Ages} (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 74.

\textsuperscript{60} Brown, \textit{The Body and Society}, 433.


\textsuperscript{62} Bengt Hägglund, \textit{History of Theology} (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 148.
soul which desires the transcendence of the Divine and the body as a result of the body’s weakness by which it wearied and troubled the soul.\textsuperscript{63}

After Gregory, however, little was added to Augustine’s understanding of the body in the seventh century or in the eighth century Carolingian revival until the advent of John Scotus Eriugina \textit{[ca. 810-877]}. Eriugina translated works by Denis [Pseudo-Dionysius], Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor thereby making eastern strains of Platonic Christian theology available to the Latin west. In translating Denis, Eriugena encountered the eastern mode of signifying the Divine affirmatively and negatively—the affirmative positing of what God \textit{is}; the negative positing of what God \textit{is not}. The \textit{via negativa} was more fruitful in Eriugena’s mind because God transcends and is beyond being and goodness, wisdom and truth.\textsuperscript{64}

In his masterwork, \textit{Periphysion} or \textit{De divisione naturae} Eriugena employed Denis and Maximus to explore how creation proceeds from and returns to God, renewing in the west a version of the “traditional cosmological view” Augustine had largely dismantled. Eriugena taught that God the One created the eternal Ideas of all things in the Word, and these eternal Ideas then became the source of the whole of the spiritual and material creation by a process of hierarchical descent through multiplication. Each lower member of the hierarchy of being was viewed as a negation of that which was above it and from


\textsuperscript{64} David Luscombe, \textit{Medieval Thought} (Oxford University Press, 1997), 34. Luther also appreciated the apophatic theology of Denis in his early days lecturing on the Psalms. See Martin Brecht, \textit{Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521}, trans. J. Schaaraf, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 137.
which it proceeded, and so down and down it descended until individual things—the least and most corporeal of all—were reached.65

With regard to the human person, Eriugena posited that the eternal Idea of humanity is one and sexless: temporal human beings manifest male- or femaleness, sinful sexuality, and other sinful drives as fruits of the fall. Salvation comes as all things eventually return to God through Christ, the Incarnate Word. The lower creation returns to God by its being known by human beings. Human beings are a microcosm reflecting the spectrum of the bodily and the spiritual of the created hierarchy. The human person returns to God by contemplation and then by liberation of the soul from the material body at death. Finally, in the resurrection, the body itself attains a spiritual condition by means of its reunion with the soul, so that all matter will return to God through the spiritualized human person.66

Eriugena’s appropriation of Dionysian Platonism did not exert immediate influence, but percolated up later in time to emerge in the thought of two clusters of theologians in the twelfth-century, the School of Chartres and the School of St. Victor, along with the Cistercians.67 The theologians of Chartres had obtained and drunk deeply of the cosmology of the Timaeus via Calcidius’ fourth-century Latin translation. William of Conches [ca. 1080-1154], whose writing ranged from 1120-1150 and included glosses

65 Luscombe, Medieval Thought, 34-35.
66 Ibid., 35-36.
67 In noting Eriugena’s influence in Chartres and among the Victorines, it should be pointed out that there were other “Platonic influences” at work as well too nuanced for our purposes here. The matter is discussed by M.-D. Chenu in his collection of essays on the twelfth century, particularly the essay, “Platonisms of the Twelfth Century.” See M.-D. Chenu, Nature, Man, and Society, 49-98.
on Boethius and a treatise *Philosophia mundi*, examined the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* in an attempt to supplement the information contained in the creation account of *Genesis*.\(^\text{68}\)

William explained that the account given in *Genesis* of the creation of Adam’s body from the mud does not indicate God’s work alone, because there were natural forces and causes created by God which enabled the human body to be formed from the four elements. Likewise with the creation of Eve, William does not believe that Scripture should be read as signifying literally that she was made from Adam’s rib, but rather that the body of woman is not different from that of man nor the same.\(^\text{69}\)

Indeed, William courted condemnation for heresy by musing that the Holy Spirit is Plato’s concept of the “World-Soul.” He believed that “a deeper meaning” was embedded in Plato’s text that enhanced the reading of Scripture even if it did not replicate Scripture’s teaching.\(^\text{70}\)

In contrast to Chartres, the Victorines and Cistercians were more concerned with spiritual life, but they added other strains of Platonic thinking to Augustine’s as well. Hugh [d. 1141] and Richard [d. 1173] of St. Victor—along with others of this school—proposed a mystical cosmology in which the soul ascends to God via contemplation by intellectual and ascetic discipline, an idea echoed by the Cistercians, most notably

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\(^{\text{69}}\) Luscombe, *Medieval Thought*, 60.

Bernard of Clairvaux [1090-1153]. 71 The English Cistercian Isaac of Stella [ca. 1100-1175] incorporated into his contemplative anthropology insights gained from Chartres and especially developed the Platonic theme of the human person as a microcosm while adding a strain of Dionysian apophatic mysticism: it is by knowing ourselves that we come to know God and in his light all creation. 72 In his Letter on the Soul addressed to his fellow Cistercian Alcher, Isaac wrote,

There are then three realities—the body, the soul, and God; I profess that I do not know their essence, and that I understand less what the body is than what the soul is, and less what the soul is than what God is. 73

Nevertheless, interest in the body continued to grow as was evidenced by William of St. Thierry in his De natura corporis et animae. In this treatise, William borrowed his treatment of the soul largely from Gregory of Nyssa’s The Making of Man (which Eriugena had translated), but prefaced this with a very detailed discussion of the body that used source materials from medical authors going back to the Galenic school. 74 The twelfth century gave a clear indication of the turn toward the serious, scientific interest in the material universe that Christian thought was about to take in the thirteenth century.

Thus, up until the “twelfth-century renaissance,” it is apparent that western theology worked gradually to overcome Platonic denigration—mild or severe—of the


74 Ibid., 30-32.
body as theologians after Augustine recognized the body as the necessary instrument and expression of the soul—even in the resurrection. At the same time Christian thought continued to think in terms of Platonic epistemology: the senses only played the role of awakening the soul to turn to an inner truth and upward to ineffable Truth. Such a theological current swept biblical “body-texts” such as the creation account along in the grip of its other-worldly understandings about bodily existence.

1.4 - The Body as Human Condition: Aristotelianism and Aquinas

What about Aristotle? Aristotle fared far differently in the western church than in the east where he was largely neglected in favor of the philosophical themes of Plato and the Stoics. In the west Aristotle was viewed initially with great suspicion because he was deemed too pagan—the result of his views on the eternity of the world and seeming denials of providence and the immortality of the soul. Moreover, prior to the mid-twelfth century only a limited amount of Aristotle’s works were available as a result of Boethius’ [ca. 480-525] Latin translations: the so-called logica vetus. In the Carolingian revival of the ninth century—which witnessed Eriugena’s Platonic revival—there was also a renewed study of the logica vetus based on Boethius. However, midway through the twelfth century the logica nova made its appearance via Latin translations of four more books of Aristotle’s Organon: the Prior and Posterior Analytics, Topics, and Sophistical Refutations. In addition the Nicomachean Ethics (Books II and III), the Metaphysics, and

75 Luscombe, Medieval Thought, 17.
On the Soul also made their way west in Latin dress along with numerous pseudonymous works thought to be Aristotle’s.\textsuperscript{76}

The magnitude of the shock which the recovery of Aristotle delivered to the theology of the western Church at this point in the Middle Ages cannot be over-emphasized. The Augustinian tradition generally maintained a very low opinion of the powers of the unaided human intellect: the human mind was incapable, by itself, of attaining knowledge, but needed assistance from outside itself via illumination. This notion was common doctrine by the twelfth century, although it was hard in practice to explain just how illumination differed from revelation. The standard view was that no knowledge worthy of the name could be had apart from faith.\textsuperscript{77} Even Anselm, who thought he could find necessary reasons for the truths of the faith, had said in the preface to his Proslogion, “Unless I believe, I will not understand.” Into this context strode Aristotle, a pagan, who did not have faith. He presented an epistemology in which the human mind was thought to have much more power in its own right. That his thought came “packaged,” as it were, in texts from his own hand which explored deep matters without the aid of faith made his teaching a real challenge to the accepted view of illumination. This was not the issue with Plato in the Middle Ages. Even though Plato was a pagan, almost nothing of Plato’s own works were available, but, as has been seen, although Platonism was everywhere, Plato (with the exception of part of the Timaeus)

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 63-64.

\textsuperscript{77} Mary T. Clark, Augustine, 19-25.
was not. The Platonism that was in circulation was so thoroughly synthesized into Christian thinking that there was nothing scandalous about it.\textsuperscript{78}

An essential difference between Platonism and Aristotelianism consists in their relative epistemologies. For Plato, true knowledge (\textit{\textepsilon\textsigma\texttau\textomicron\textupsilon\textomicron\textepsilon, episteme}) could never come from the senses which perceive only contingent, fleeting reality. \textit{Episteme} comes only from innate insight into eternal truth, the Ideas. For Aristotle, true knowledge could only come from the experience of the senses insofar as the mind realizes those experiences. Richard McKeon comments, “The difference [between] Plato and Aristotle has always required a division of the universe, usually into a world of changeless things assigned for lofty contemplation to Plato and a world of changing things assigned for empirical investigation to Aristotle.”\textsuperscript{79} Christian theologians (such as Thomas Aquinas) who followed Aristotle, while confessing the necessity and power of divine revelation to give to humans insights that surpass anything available simply to human reason, nonetheless also ascribed a genuine autonomy to reason in gaining knowledge. Moreover, they sought to show how the realms of faith and reason could be harmonized in the unity of the human person as both knower and believer.\textsuperscript{80}

Ètienne Gilson has chronicled the gradual entry of Aristotle’s works into the curriculum of the medieval universities, the tardy acknowledgement of the


epistemological differences between Aristotle’s thought and that of Plato, the conservative resistance of theologians to these innovations, and finally the slow awakening of the twelfth-century theologians and bishops to the possible orthodoxy and value of an Aristotelian-tinged theology. During this, the battle-line in the schools was between the theology and arts (that is, the liberal arts, sciences, and philosophy) faculties. As a result of Aristotelian epistemology the liberal arts found for the first time an adequate justification for their independence as secular disciplines. It was realized that “philosophy” (including what today would be considered the natural, life, and behavioral sciences) had a method and validity of its own, not merely as theology’s handmaid; the arts were distinct and independent areas of knowledge. Some theologians also began to see that these disciplines could not really be of service to theology unless they were developed according to their own proper principles.

This development is assessed by Fernand van Steenberghen by looking at the earliest scholastics such as William of Auxerre [d. 1231], William of Auvergne [ca. 1180-1249], Phillip the Chancellor [ca. 1160-1236] at the University of Paris, and Robert Grossteste [ca. 1175-1253] at Oxford. All were faithful followers of Augustine and so of his modified Platonism, but were already making use of philosophical views which van Steenberghen describes as an eclectic, neo-platonizing Aristotelianism. This was the result of these scholars’ experience: they found that the works of Augustine did not

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supply them with the kind of developed, systematic philosophy they needed to teach their students who had already completed their studies of the liberal arts, a need which the works of Aristotle amply supplied. Aristotle’s works, however, were often interpreted with the help of Arab neo-platonizing commentators who read Aristotle in a manner which concealed the difficulties inherent in this eclecticism for some time.\textsuperscript{84}

The approach of these eclectic theologians to the human person can be illustrated by two examples. William of Auvergne in his \textit{De anima} and \textit{De immortalitate animae}—parts of his \textit{Magisterium divinale}—mixed Platonic and Aristotelian elements as he argued that the human person is not the soul, but the composite of soul and body, yet he dealt principally with arguments to show the superiority of the soul to the body and the possibility of its action independent of the body, essentially treating the body as an instrument to be used or discarded.\textsuperscript{85} Robert Grosseteste, on the other hand, showed an intense interest à la Aristotle in scientific investigations of the material world and went on to establish the scientific tradition of medieval Oxford, but his approach to science nevertheless remained fundamentally Platonic in its stress on the abstract mathematical order of the cosmos (echoing the \textit{Timaeus}), rather than (as for Aristotle) on its physical, material, dynamic character.\textsuperscript{86} He also believed in an Augustinian illumination of the intellect by the divine ideas and regarded light in all its manifestations—physical, divine, and intellectual—as a “metaphysical factor” in bodies of all types (including the human

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 89-94.


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 261-264.
body) which provided life-giving power. In Grosseteste’s understanding, the human body was comparable to a lamp which both radiates and obscures the flame of the soul.  

However, the full development of scholastic anthropology came only after the entry of the Dominicans and Franciscans into the universities in the thirteenth century in a partnership which soon morphed into rivalry. Although a full catalog and discussion of scholastic thought on the human person during this period is impossible in this overview, Thomas Aquinas [ca. 1225-1274] must be credited with the first thorough-going use of Aristotle in western theology, and provides the best example of an “Aristotelian Christian theology” with respect to the human person.

Aquinas affirmed with Aristotle on the one hand that the rational mind can understand what is acquired via the senses: reason is the “tool” God created for investigating the sensible world. On the other, Aquinas affirmed with Augustine that mysteries such as the Incarnation were not comprehended by reason but apprehended by faith via revelation. Moreover, while the mysteries of the faith can be explored by fitting analogies, they are beyond full explanation or proof. Thus, a true understanding of the human person according to Aquinas required the use of reason to explore the body and physical life (including the world in which the body lives) and faith to understand the soul and spiritual life. Human society of the thirteenth century was Thomas’ laboratory for observing and interpreting the outward life and experiences of the body; theology

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87 Luscombe, Medieval Thought, 86-87.

88 ST Ia, 13; see also Ralph McInerny, Aquinas and Analogy (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), especially 53-85.
based in revelation was the means for looking into the mystery of the human person as the creation of God, made in his image.

In St. Thomas’s view, the soul could be distinguished properly from the body, but was fully and intimately engaged in everything the human person does from the “highest activities” such as thinking and the contemplation of God to the body’s most mundane activities such as digestion.

Such a union [of body and soul] explains why the mind can restrain bodily activities, or the passions impede reason; why depressing thoughts can paralyze the body and diseased glands corrupt the mind.\(^{89}\)

Thus, St. Thomas could not say, as Plato could, that the soul was the person. At the same time, he could not use St. Augustine’s formulation that the person is the soul using the body as its means for sensing the world. For Thomas, the body and the soul were two realities—material and spiritual—but neither could be “person” without the other. “[I]t is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body.”\(^{90}\) Moreover, the body-soul connection is indissoluble.

We showed in Book II that the souls of men are immortal. They persist, then, after their bodies, released from their bodies. It is also clear from what was said in Book II that the soul is naturally united to the body, for in its essence it is the form of the body. It is, then, contrary to the nature of the soul to be without the body. But nothing which is contrary to nature can be perpetual. Perpetually, then, the soul will not be without the body. Since, then, it persists perpetually, it must once again be united to the body; and this is to rise again. Therefore, the immortality of souls seems to demand a future resurrection of bodies.\(^{91}\)


\(^{90}\) *ST* Ia, 75, art. 4.

\(^{91}\) *Summa contra gentiles* IV, 79, 10.
To be united to the body belongs to the soul by reason of itself, as it belongs to a light body by reason of itself to be raised up. And as a light body remains light, when removed from its proper place, retaining meanwhile an aptitude and an inclination for its proper place; so the human soul retains its proper existence when separated from the body, having an aptitude and a natural inclination to be united to the body.\textsuperscript{92}

Aquinas’ doctrine of the permanence and robust interdependence of the human soul and body led him also to posit that the precision and sufficiency of the human mind is dependent upon the vitality and health of the body.\textsuperscript{93} And, in a surprising turn away from sight as the sense possessing “the greatest degree of certainty and nobility”\textsuperscript{94}—the general view of the sense of sight in the Middle Ages—St. Thomas declared touch to be the “basis of all the other senses.”

For it is clear that the organ of touch is spread throughout the whole body, that each instrument of sense is also an instrument of touch, and that something is called sensory as a result of the sense of touch.\textsuperscript{95}

Human sexuality is also treated differently by St. Thomas as a result of his doctrine of soul-body interdependence. Aquinas did not teach—as Augustine did—that original sin is transmitted at conception, fallen human sexuality being the instrumental cause.\textsuperscript{96} Rather, human sexuality shares in the debilitation brought about by the fall; it

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\textsuperscript{92} ST Ia, 76, reply to objection 6.

\textsuperscript{93} Anderson, \textit{The Human Body}, 6.

\textsuperscript{94} Suzannah Biernoff, \textit{Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 70.


does not transmit sin *per se*. Sex, rather, is assessed by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae* under the question, “Whether in the state of innocence there would have been generation by coition?” where he replies:

> For what is natural to man was neither acquired nor forfeited by sin. Now it is clear that generation by coition is natural to man by reason of his animal life, which he possessed even before sin, as above explained [ST Ia, 97, art. 3], just as it is natural to other perfect animals, as the corporeal members make it clear. So we cannot allow that these members would not have had a natural use, as other members had, before sin.  

Indeed, St. Thomas contends that sexual intercourse would have been the keenest of pleasures had Adam and Eve not fallen, but because of the fall the sexual act was also affected with the general sluggishness and disability sin brought on the entire human person.

> Beasts are without reason. In this way man becomes, as it were, like them in coition, because he cannot moderate concupiscence. In the state of innocence nothing of this kind would have happened that was not regulated by reason, not because delight of sense was less, as some say—rather indeed would sensible delight have been the greater in proportion to the greater purity of nature and the greater sensibility of the body.

> There is an innate equilibrium to most of what Aquinas writes. Thus, St. Thomas was careful in connection with the soul-body balance not to collapse the soul into the body. Bodies are necessary for reason; the body’s senses are needed for the person to interact with the sensible world. The soul contributes, however, by its higher faculties to

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97 *ST* Ia, 98, art. 2.


99 *ST* Ia, 98, 1.
make sense of the world, to construct concepts, and, via the drawing of comparisons, to shed light on what God has revealed.\textsuperscript{100}

With regard to the sexes, Aquinas noted that it is incorrect to speak generically of the human body, as if such a thing could exist apart from or before the creation of male and female. However, in approaching the relationship of males and females, St. Thomas was of a piece in his thought with his contemporary St. Bonaventure [ca. 1217-1274], namely, that all of creation is hierarchical in its design\textsuperscript{101} and that no two different natural beings can be on the same level. Hence, Thomas posited that male and female bodies are different in \textit{natura} and thus on different planes in the hierarchy of creation. In the \textit{Summa Theologiae} Ia, 92 St. Thomas asks, “Whether the woman should have been made in the first production of things?” and cites Aristotle in \textit{De generatione animalium}, II, 3 in answer (\textit{Objectiva 1}): “the female is a misbegotten male (\textit{femina est mas occasionatus})”—that is, women’s bodies are failed, or incompletely formed male bodies.\textsuperscript{102} However, to that basic question, St. Thomas counters Aristotle’s “No” with his

\textsuperscript{100} Anderson, \textit{The Human Body}, 17.


\textsuperscript{102} Aristotle’s claim and characterization of the female body as a “misbegotten male” opens a Pandora’s box of medieval thought and culture. Examples of misogynistic thinking from the crudest characterizations of women’s bodies imaginable to serious claims concerning female physiology of women being “inside-out men” abound. See Caroline Walker Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption} (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 218, 220. Intellectual traditions from the ancient world onwards conditioned both men and women in the Middle Ages to hold certain views and expectations about women’s bodies as being weak and inferior to men’s bodies by nature. Indeed, many medieval thinkers associated “body” with woman, just as they associated “mind” with maleness. See Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}; Alexandra Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic} (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2007; and \textit{Medieval Theology and the Natural Body}, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, (York,
own answer of “Yes”: woman should have been produced in Eden, Aquinas said, since she is necessary for the generation of the species. He then contends with the objection in which Aristotle was cited by conceding Aristotle’s point that woman is “misbegotten,” but only when considered as an individual and only with respect to the body or matter, and not the soul.\textsuperscript{103} The differences between the sexes are natural, not a fruit of sin. Procreation via sex is necessary for the continuation of humanity; the creation of Eve was especially for the purpose of procreation. However, both man and woman were created for ultimate beatitude, \textit{soul and body}.\textsuperscript{104}

Thomas’s efforts were aimed at differentiating on the one hand and yet integrating on the other the spiritual and the material, soul and body, faith and reason, theology and philosophy. Aspects of St. Thomas’ Aristotelianism were not very well understood and certainly not generally accepted. The Archbishop of Paris in 1277 (after Thomas’ death in 1274) in condemning Averroism and other errors, included some of the key points of Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotle. Although Aquinas’ orthodoxy was later guaranteed by his canonization in 1323, the more traditional “Augustinianism” remained dominant both at Paris and Oxford and was given a more developed form. Thomism itself was

\textsuperscript{103} Aquinas’ words in Latin in his “Reply” which are usually translated as “defective and misbegotten” are \textit{deficiens et occasionatus}, which can mean “unfinished and caused accidentally,” meanings which ameliorate Aquinas’ view for modern sensibilities.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{ST} Ia-IIae, 4.
eclipsed by the Franciscans until its revival by John Capreolus [ca. 1380-1444] in the fifteenth century.  

1.5 - THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

Scholastic theology after the condemnations of 1277 shifted to what Heiko Oberman called the “Franciscan alternative”—or even more strongly, the “Franciscan hegemony.” This shift involved a rereading of Aristotle without the goal of synthesizing The Philosopher and Christianity à la St. Thomas—“the forced effort of baptizing the Stagirite,”—but with a view to understanding him in an unforced, “purer” manner. The result was that “the pagan Aristotle was discovered and allowed to speak for himself, often proving himself to be too self-willed for theological usage or exploitation.” By veering slowly but inexorably away from the causal system of Aristotle and Aquinas in which everything was related to and derived from a “chain of being” that began with God, the Franciscans, beginning in the fourteenth century, associated God and necessity: the Prime Mover of Aristotle was replaced by a sovereign God who called all things into being in accord with his absolute freedom and power.

105 Luscombe, Medieval Thought, 120, 181.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., emphasis added.
Subsequently, theological conversation among the scholastics focused especially on the “question of Universals,” a debate as to whether reality exists primarily in ideas (realism) or in individual beings or things (nominalism). In terms of the human body, realism continued to discuss its nature in Aristotelian terms: matter, form, universal, individual, will, etc. John Duns Scotus [ca. 1265-1308], doctor subtilis, while disagreeing with Aquinas’ view that the human person was purely hylomorphic—form (soul) plus matter (body)—nevertheless continued to uphold a modified realism later dubbed by his fellow Franciscan-yet-detractor William of Occam [ca. 1288-1348] as the *via antiqua.* Occam, a nominalist, propounded his views of reality in what came to be called the *via moderna.* Under Occam, the concept of “body” was not more real than any individual body for which the concept was named. The “universal of ‘body’” was merely the imbuing of significance into the word “body” to designate the idea of body, hence the label, “nominalism.” One might use the universal term in a proposition to replace what it designated, but what was real remained the individual body.

Nominalism loosened the theological and philosophical connections that had existed in the *via antiqua* between the body as the necessary vehicle for beatitude by virtue of its nature and the soul, and turned attention rather to the body’s participation in salvation as a result of God’s naked decree by virtue of his *potentia absoluta.* The body

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109 Scotus’ anthropology contended that the body included its own “this-ness,” or *haecceity,* that defined the body even in the absence of the soul. At death, for instance, the body did not disappear upon the separation of the soul, which in Aristotelian-Thomistic thought gave the body its form. Rather the “this-ness” remained together with the *materia* of the body so that the body, although bereft of the *forma vitae,* was nonetheless the corpse of a human being. See Efrem Bettoni, OFM, *Duns Scotus: the Basic Principles of His Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Bernadine Bonasea (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 67-76.
was what it was, did what it did, and would be what it would be in the resurrection because God made it so.

But while scholasticism scleroticized itself in these theological and philosophical debates about the nature of reality,110 outside the academy the two centuries before Luther witnessed a burst of lay-centered religious fervor arising out of the crucible of the plague. The plague which broke out in Europe in the 1340s and continued in pandemic proportions—with gradually diminishing ferocity—until the seventeenth century left death and its reminders everywhere so that death and its contemplation seemed to characterize much of late medieval European culture.

Reminders of death were ubiquitous and the notion that a person’s entire life passes before their eyes at the moment of death originated in the fourteenth century. Ars moriendi (art of dying) literature presented death as the moment of ultimate self-knowledge. Stages of putrification [sic], complete with worms were featured in prayer books illustrated with the “dance of death,” on church walls and apses, and in cemeteries.111

Mystical writings and treatises—the “most universal literature of the Middle Ages”112—responded to the need for life in the midst of death and garnered wide attention throughout much of Europe. The mystic voice was not a monotone, but presented a variegated message centered loosely around the individual’s contemplative relationship with God for the sake of devotionis et salutatis. Its expression may best be considered regionally: mysticism in Germany was not necessarily the same in England;

110 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1500, 73.


112 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1500, 115. Much of this literature was written in the vernaculars of the day.
English mysticism differed from that in Spain, etc. Yet with respect to the body, mysticism everywhere engaged in a general disparagement of the body as an antidote to its weakness and its vulnerability in the vicissitudes of earthly life and the face of death. 

Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that concern about the body in popular piety in these centuries was not centered so much on the death of the body itself, nor with the soul-and-body relationship, but with questions about the continuity of the body in the resurrection after death (the randomness of death simply making this concern more urgent). Scholastic arguments—the Quodlibet, or “Whatever” debates—frequently took up questions about resurrection and reassembly of the dead such as the resurrection-fate of “risen embryos, foreskins, and fingernails, of the subtlety of glorified flesh, of how and whether God makes whole the amputee or the fat man.” But the whole cult of holy relics which involved the boiling of the corpses of the saints to facilitate distribution of body parts to shrines and churches; the concomitant practice among the wealthy nobility to have their bodies cut up at death to permit multiple interments next to holy sites; reactionary fulminations by popes and preachers against such practices; and 

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113 Ibid., 116.


115 Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption, 253.

“prurient horror” over nascent medical dissection practices—all of these spoke to the late medieval preoccupation with the fate of the body in the resurrected state.117

This fascination with the body, its weaknesses and its survival of death exhibited itself further in the emergence of “transi tombs” in the fourteenth century. Transi tombs (from the Latin word transeo, to “cross over”) depicted putrefaction of the entombed’s body in gruesome detail, the more elaborate examples often featuring a representation of a life effigy of the deceased on top of the tomb beneath which was a depiction of the decomposing body—replete with worms and toads. Beneath this was a skeleton. Inscriptions describing the transition or exhorting the attention of the living to their future in death often festooned the tomb.118 The tomb of Jean Cardinal La Grange of Amiens [d. 1402] typified the phenomenon. It was inscribed with words of warning above an effigy of the shrunken corpse of the cardinal:

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\text{Ergo miser cur superbis,} \\
\text{nam cinis es et in cadaver fetidum,} \\
\text{cibium et estam vermium ac cinerem,} \\
\text{sic et nos, reverteris}.119
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Under the assaults of death, the body was once again conceived of as a trammel for the soul, temporal, a clumsy opponent of the spiritual, and thus, despised.

117 Ibid., 239-286; see also Caroline Bynum, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 320-327, for further material on late medieval burial practices.

118 See Kathleen Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol; the Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

119 Cohen, Metamorphosis, 13. Also see fig. 5. “Therefore, wretch, why are you proud, for you also are ashes in a stinking carcass, and so will revert like us to worm fodder and dust.”
Mysticism thus sought to answer these concerns of death and the body by moving beyond the body. The Dominican priest, teacher, and mystic Meister Eckhart [ca. 1260-1328] taught, for example, that inner peace and union with God involved a series of contemplative steps that systematically stripped the self of everything that would obscure the core of the soul “where the seed of God exists.” The soul was the true self: the body must be forgotten. The soul must break away from it because

The body is too strong for the spirit and so there is always a struggle between them—an eternal conflict. The body is bold and brave here, for it is at home and the world helps it. The earth is its fatherland and all its kindred are on its side: food, drink, and comforts are all against the spirit. Here the spirit is alien. Its race and kin are all in heaven. It has many friends there. To assist the spirit in its distress, to weaken the flesh for its part in this struggle so that it cannot conquer the spirit, penances are put upon the flesh like a bridle to curb it, so that the spirit may control it.

Eckhart was deeply influential on such later northern European mystics as Johann Tauler [ca. 1300-1361], Jan van Ruysbroeck [ca. 1293-1381], and Gerhard Groote [1340-1384], the founder of the Brothers of the Common Life. In Groote one finds a new surge of asceticism meant for the layman emphasizing “prayer, a rejection of worldly goods, and the practice of virtue” that was at the root of the Devotio moderna movement. It was this movement that spawned the fifteenth century’s most well-known book, Thomas à

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120 For a brief and useful assessment of Meister Eckhart see Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1500, 127-134.


122 Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy, 443; Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1500, 132.

Kempis’s [ca. 1379-1471] *De imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi*, or simply the *Imitation of Christ*.

The *Devotio Moderna* movement envisioned communities in which the inmates were welded together by an inner resolve. As the movement spread far beyond the Low Countries and grew in scope to include hundreds of houses in the Holy Roman Empire, France and even Italy, practical concerns to avoid charges of heresy led these initially “free-wheeling” communities eventually to affiliate with established orders. Male houses became Augustinian in 1394; female houses became Tertiary Franciscans.¹²⁴ These “brothers and sisters of the Common Life” practiced an “inner devotion” that was both regulated by and which regulated the body. The body was thus “redeemed” by the recognition of its interconnection with the soul as the “method” of religious life.

1.6 - THE MEDIEVAL LEGACY OF THE BODY

Trammel, partner, glory, mystery, castaway, traitor, even “my dear brother ass”¹²⁵—the body was considered in all these ways by the dawn of the sixteenth century. Theologically, as we have seen, the body was discussed primarily in connection with the soul. Despite Augustinian amelioration and Aristotelian assertion to the contrary, Platonic denigration still strongly influenced the conversation only to be answered by concerns for the body’s inherent worth born of contemplation of the body of Jesus. But scholastic

¹²⁴ Miles, The Word Made Flesh, 201.

¹²⁵ St. Francis of Assisi is reputed to have referred to his “refractory flesh” as “Brother Ass.” Sophie Jewett, *God’s Troubadour: the Story of St. Francis of Assisi* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2005), 164.
arguments about the nature of reality and the body voiced within the academy made little
difference in muddy medieval town streets where death reigned and medieval mystic
preachers addressed the concerns of life weighed down by the frailty and fragility of the
body. In some venues the body and its inner workings were the object of growing
exploration as the curtain of the skin was being pulled back by nascent medical science;
in most others, superstition and myth—much of it rooted in ancient views of the world
and humanity’s place in it—continued to determine the body’s place. But everywhere, the
body and its relationship to the human person, to the “I” in human existence and
especially its eternal disposition were of paramount concern. “In [scholastic] debates
about fetuses and fingernails as in their popular preaching and legends, medieval people
expressed the understanding that the body is essential to the person and material
continuity to body.”126 It was to this “cacophony of discourses” that Luther would add his
own voice.

126 Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 297.
So, where ought one to begin listening to Luther’s voice in the varied, late medieval conversation about the body? Luther himself approached the human body in many ways: as a man who was successively a celibate friar, a husband, and a father. He thought about the body as a pastor and dealt with his own body as a patient—all of these. But, it is, of course, pre-eminently as a theologian that Luther spoke and wrote, and it is in that capacity that he ought first to be heard. In that regard, Luther’s approach to the human body as a matter for theological exploration began appropriately “am Anfang,” that is, “in the beginning” with his view of creation generally and of the creation of the body specifically. For this reason, an examination of Martin Luther’s understanding about the human body needs to begin by listening first to his Schöpfungsbegriff, his dynamic understanding of God’s creation of all things including the body. And Luther’s voice is robust in this regard: he may well have begun his theological teaching career with Genesis¹ and it is certain he ended it with his great Genesis lectures

¹ Just when Luther first dealt with Genesis is an intriguing question. Some have conjectured an early lecture series on Genesis beginning in October 1512 through the spring of 1513 [see, for example, James M. Kittelson, Luther the Reformer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 85; and E. G. Schiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 282] apparently on the strength of the thinking of Heinrich Boehmer [Heinrich Boehmer, Martin Luther: Road to Reformation, trans. J. W. Doberstein and Theodore Tappert (New York: Meridian, 1957), 118] regarding Luther’s words in his 1539 tract, Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, in which the older Luther retrospectively mentions exegetical work he did during his early years including “Genesis with the help of SS. Ambrose and Augustine”: “Und las sie noch ein Buch fur sich nemen aus der
Thus, Luther’s voice on this subject grew husky from his extensive contemplation of the Bible on creation.

Luther’s development is reflected in the fact that he did not begin his 1535 lectures on Genesis 1 and 2 with a discussion of God or of God’s omnipotence in creation, that is, in accord with the kind of scholastic prolegomena he was exposed to as a student. Rather, he launched into what the omnipotent God had made in keeping with his (by then) established practice of exegetical lecturing on biblical texts. Especially prominent in this regard is the thought Luther articulated explicitly in connection with Genesis 21:17, the story of Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion: “The creature is ex nihilo; hence, all things of which the creature is capable are nihil, that is, if they are opposed to the Creator, who gave it being.” Although appearing long after his discussion of the Hexaemeron, this dictum encapsulates a driving theme in Luther’s theologizing about creation—including the body, of course—namely, that everything is the work of God,

2 For a discussion of the extent of Luther’s commentary work on Genesis see Mickey L. Mattox, Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs: Martin Luther’s Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesin, 1535-1545 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), Appendix I, 259-264.

3 See the opening of the Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38. WA 42:4ff; LW 1:3ff.

4 Genesisvorlesung, 1538/42. WA 43:178; LW 4:61: “Creatura ex nihilo est: ergo nihil sunt omnia, quae creatura potest, si scilicet creatori opponuntur, qui dedit ei esse.”
whose work precedes everything and is independent of everything: absolutely every thing must receive from God what every thing is or has. So the body in all its aspects is created as the good creature of God (\textit{creatura bona Dei}): to think or claim otherwise would be to deny created reality.\footnote{Luther’s emphasis here mirrors that of Athanasius in \textit{De incarnatione verbi Dei}, I, 4. Speaking of mankind after the fall, Athanasius states, “Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in the process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.” \textit{St. Athanasius On the Incarnation: The Treatise} De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, ed. and trans. “a Religious of C.S.M.V.,” (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 1993), 29-30.} And although this particular statement was made in the late 1530s, Luther was echoing the substance of his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed written nearly ten years earlier [1529]:

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, wife and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.\footnote{\textit{The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church}, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354-355.}

It is this utter dependence of all things on God that provides a foundational point for Luther’s thinking about the body whether we think of its creation, preservation, or salvation.

Our exploration of this matter will focus especially on Luther’s late Genesis lectures, particularly his comments on Genesis 1 and 2. However, pertinent aspects of
Luther’s understanding of creation and the body also surface in some of his Reihenpredigten, the series of expository sermons Luther preached during his career using continuous readings (lectio continua). His sermons on Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7)—particularly concerning God’s care for the world (Matt. 5:45)—and (especially) the sermons on the prologue of St. John (Jn. 1) dealing with Christ as the creative Word will augment the discussion along with Luther’s lectures on “Moses’ Psalm”—Psalm 90—delivered just before he began his 1535 lectures on Genesis. But to begin with, Luther’s foundational appraisal of the human body is predicated on his understanding of the absolute creation of all things ex nihilo.

2.1 – Luther and Creatio ex Nihilo

Not surprisingly, Luther’s stress on creatio ex nihilo mirrors the language and theology about creation of the late Middle Ages in many ways. As a concept, creation in medieval theology generally had two different thrusts. The first emphasized the work or deed of God in making all things—creare. The second emphasized the result or product of God’s creating power—creatura. The first is bound up in the nature of God: God is the creating God; the second—what God has made—is distinct from God. The concept of creatio ex nihilo served especially to maintain this distinction and was used by Luther in that same capacity.

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7 LW 13:75, fn. 1.

8 See, for example, ST Ia, 44 (Treatise on Creation) where Aquinas examines “The procession of creatures from God, and of the first cause of all things.” For the emphases in medieval Latin specific to the terms creare, creatura and creatio ex nihilo,
Reflecting an emphasis on God’s sovereignty that was part of the via moderna in which he was taught, Luther occasionally maintained the creare-creatura distinction by contrasting the creature with the sovereignty of God. Since God is “neither created nor made (nicht geschaffen oder gemacht),” but made all things ex nihilo, he is not like his creatures because that which has been made is completely dependent on him who made

see the entries in Richard A. Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985).

9 For the history of Luther’s education in the via moderna, see Martin Brecht, Martin Luther and His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521, trans. J. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 38ff. Sammeli Juntunen demonstrates, however, that Luther’s Ockhamist training at Erfurt did not extend to espousing an orthodox Ockhamistic ontology that denied the common theological metaphysics of the Middle Ages. Rather “the education which Luther received can be called Ockhamist only in a limited sense,” viz., following the tutelage of his professors, Luther approached ontological questions with the logic of Ockham, but held that “the existence of a creature consists in a certain kind, limited by the essentia, of participation in the absolute esse, God.” Thus, in connection with God’s omnipresence, Luther held that God’s presence was the basis of its being. Juntunen cites as an example Luther’s scholae [1513/15] on Psalm 68:35 (“God is wonderful in his saints”): “Et mirabilis altitudo maiestatis, que etiam in infimis presens est et operatur et loquitur cum illis. Cum sit altissimus, omnium fere videtur esse communissimus et omnibus obsequi et benefacere. Sunt enim multe differentie rerum, et in his omnibus deus est super et subter, intra et extra, ante et retro. Ut mole est omni superior, inferior, interior, exterior, prior, posterior. Sic etiam vita qualibet et sensu et intellectu. Ad omnes enim omnium illorum differentias et limites deus adest et superest. Et in his omnibus stupendus, metuendus, terrible et mirabilis, scilicet in sanctis suis.” (“And wonderful is the height of majesty, which even in the lowest is present and attends and speaks with them. Although he is the Most High, he seems almost to be the most common of all and to all to yield and do good. For there are many differences in things, and in all of them God is above and below, within and without, before and behind. So he is higher, lower, more inward, outward, earlier, later than every quantity. Thus he is also with regard to any life and feeling and thought. For to all of these differences and limits God is present and above them. And in them all he ought to be held in awe and fear; [he is] terrible and wonderful, that is to say, in his saints.”) See Sammeli Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics: What Is the Structure of Being according to Luther?” Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 149-150.
it.\textsuperscript{10} God is perfectly sovereign: he can do and order as he desires. Unlike his creatures, his will to do and his capacity to do are one and the same for him. In his debate with Desiderius Erasmus [ca. 1466-1536] Luther stipulated that God alone truly has “freedom of choice (liberum arbitrium)” and as a result, he is not limited or constrained in his actions.\textsuperscript{11} He does not need to create in order to be God, and all creation is subject to him. Now, in maintaining these things, Luther is quite conventional. But for Luther, what is most important is not that the sovereignty of God demonstrates God’s power \textit{over} creation, but that it demonstrates God’s active and loving presence \textit{in} creation because creation is the free, sovereign expression of the love of God.\textsuperscript{12} This is the important thrust to note in Luther. The psalm verse, “Our God is in heaven; whatever God wills is done”

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\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Reihenpredigten über Johannes 1-2 1537/38}. WA 46:544; LW 22:9: “Denn Gott ist nicht geschaffen oder gemacht, wie wir Menschen geschaffen sind, sondern ist von ewigkeit, niemand hat jm sei Wort, rede und gespreche etc. gegeben, was er ist, das ist er von jm selbr von ewigkeit, was aber wir sind, das haben wir von jm, und nicht von uns, er aber, Gott, hat alles von jm selber.” (“For God is neither created nor made as we men are created, rather, he is from eternity [and] no one has given him his word, speech, or speaking, etc. That which he is, he is from himself from eternity; what we are, on the other hand, we have from him and not from ourselves. God, however, has all things from himself.”)

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{De servo arbitrio}, 1525. WA 18:636; LW 33:68: “Sequitur nunc, liberum arbitrium esse plane divinum nomen, nec ulli posse competere quam soli divinae maiestati.” (“Now it follows that free choice is plainly a divine term, nor is it possible to apply it suitably to anyone other than to the divine majesty alone.”)

\textsuperscript{12} Juntunen comments in this regard: “For Luther God is in his essence a pure, giving love whose motive is not to get good for himself, but to give good to that which lacks it in itself. God’s love is creative; it never finds its object as something preexistent. Rather, it turns to that which is nothing and is in itself needy in order to create it and make it existent and good through loving it.” Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 131. For a different discussion with the same conclusion, see Heinrich Bornkamm, \textit{Luther’s World of Thought}, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 180-184.
(Ps 115:3, NAB), is a touchstone of this truth for him. He does not desire to ground God’s sovereignty in philosophical considerations about God’s nature as the highest and best *Being*, but in the testimony of the Scriptures about the creative love of God. By stressing this, Luther augments the medieval concept of *creatura*, including, of course, the human body: more than being merely that which has been made, the creation is that which has been commanded or willed into being by the sovereign will and love of God. God and his creation thus share more than a “cause-and-effect relationship”: between God as “cause” and creation as “effect” always lies *nihilo*: the Creator is always the highest and best *will* who “births” all things into being, form, and order *ex nihilo*.

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13 See Luther’s citation of this verse in *De servo arbitrio*, 1525, WA 18:636; LW 33:68; and in the *Römervorlesung 1515/16*, WA 56, 93, 384; LW 25, 83, 374. See also the discussion of Luther’s general orientation via the Old Testament toward creation in Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 57-64.


15 *Genesisvorlesung*, 1535/38. WA 42:13; LW 1:16: “Dicit enim Deum esse, ut sic loquar, Dictorem, qui creat, et tamen non utitur materia, sed solo verbo, quod profert, ex nihilo facit coelum et terram.” (“For [Moses, Gen. 1:3,] says that God is, so to speak, the Speaker who creates and yet does not use *materia*, but creates heaven and earth out of nothing solely by the Word which he speaks.”) See also the *Vorlesung über psalm XC*, 1535, WA 40III.509b; LW 13:91: “Verbum (נָבֹא) significatius est, quam si dixisset: priusquam crearentur aut fierent montes. Significat enim proprius ipsum egressum Creaturae ex nihilo in aliquid, Sicut ex homine nascitur aliud corpus mirabili ortu, non sicut faber ex materia aliquid facit, dum materiam parat, aliquid vel resecat vel addit, dum materiam format etc., Sed sicut arbores nascuntur ex terra tanquam ex nihilo, ut videantur omnia nasci verius quam formari aut creari. Dicit enim montes natos, tanquam gignente Deo, ut significat id, quod in Psalmo ex Genesi est: ‘Ipse dixit et facta sunt. Per verbum enim ita sunt omnia facta, ut verius nasci quam creari aut formari viderentur.’” (“The [Hebrew] word נָבֹא is more meaningful than if [Moses] had said: ‘Before the mountains were crearentur aut fierent (created or made).’ For the Hebrew word itself denotes the emergence of the creature from nothing into something, just as another body is born from its mother by means of the amazing birth process. It is not like a smith who makes something from material and while he prepares the material either removes or adds something while he forms the material, etc. It is instead like trees born from the
Before proceeding, it should be pointed out that the expression *ex nihilo* is not a biblical expression *per se*, although the concept is testified to in both the Old and New Testaments.\(^{16}\) The term received its earliest dogmatic development and molding during the first Christian century in the theology of the anti-Gnostic fathers. In their writings they maintained that the world was not—as the Gnostics believed—the work of an evil demiurge, but the *ex nihilo* creation of the good, freely-loving God. Early Christian theology rejected Gnostic dualism, but, as reviewed in chapter one, it also dallied with the notion of the eternity of *materia* under the influence of Greek philosophy. After Irenaeus [d. ca. 202], however, the viewpoint that the world was made by God alone *ex nihilo* triumphed.\(^{17}\) St. Augustine developed the doctrine further\(^{18}\) and a thousand years after Augustine, Luther—like the medieval Church before him—held firmly to the orthodox belief (and terminology) that God created the world *ex nihilo*.

As an Augustinian Luther was, of course, especially close to “Blessed Augustine” in many aspects of his theology. However, Luther’s own conflict with Greek philosophy saw him part company in his exact understanding of *ex nihilo* with Augustine, who had earth, so to speak, from nothing, so that everything is more truly *born* than *formed* or *created*. For he says that the mountains were born by the begetting of God, so to speak, in order to express in his Psalm that which is in Genesis: ‘He himself spoke and they were made.’ For through the Word were all things thus made, so that more truly they might appear to be born than created or formed.”)

\(^{16}\) The Vulgate uses the expression once in 2 Maccabees 7:28: “Peto, nate, ut aspicias ad caelumet terram, et ad omnia quae in eis sunt:et intellegas, quia *ex nihilo* fecit illa Deus, et hominum genus.”


\(^{18}\) See, for example, Augustine, *Confessions*, XI:5 and XII:7.
combined biblical and neo-Platonic elements in his theology. Moreover, in his very first lecture on Genesis, Luther criticized Augustine’s speculative and philosophical approach to Genesis 1. In Augustine, the nihil out of which God created all things was not a way of affirming the will of God as the sole cause of creation. Rather, nihil was tinged by neo-Platonic ideas about the material creation and so is a sort of “negative principle” in Augustine’s formulation. But for Luther, nihil is the absolute negation of anything other than the will of God and becomes, in a sense, identical with the sovereign will of God expressed by the Word: “God made all things ex nihilo” ultimately means out of himself, that is, by his will alone through his Word. God’s creative will is the only source of the creature.


20 Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:4-5b; LW 1:4-5: “Ac Augustinus mirabiliter ludit in tractatione sex dierum, quos facit mysticos dies cognitionis in Angelis, non naturales. …Quod igitur ad hanc Augustini sententiam attinet, statuimus Mosen proprie locutum, non allegorice aut figurate, hoc est, mundum cum omnibus Creaturis intra sex dies, ut verba sonant, creatum esse.” (“And Augustine astonishingly plays in his tract on the six days, which he makes into mystical days of knowledge among the angels [and] not natural ones. …Therefore, as far as this opinion of Augustine’s is concerned, we stipulate that Moses spoke properly, not allegorically or figuratively, that is, that the world with all its creatures within six days, as the words say, was created.”)


22 Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:14; LW 1:17: “Ergo in principio et ante omnem creaturam est verbum, et est tam potens verbum, quod ex nihilo facit omnia.” (“Therefore, in the beginning and before every creature there is the Word, and this is such a powerful Word because it made everything from nothing.”) See also Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 148.
Luther also used *ex nihilo* as a buttress against the Aristotelian world view of the eternity of matter by which every thought of an *on-going* creation was excluded. For Luther, the world is not comparable to “a house, a ship, or other such project” which, after it has been built, is left by the builder who “then goes his way.”

God is not a mastercraftsman, who works like a carpenter or architect, who, once he has readied, completed and built a house, ship, or other such project, hands the house over to its owner so that he may live in it, or commends the ship to the mariners and sailors to sail in over the sea, and the carpenter then goes on his way. Indeed, the *nihil* from which the world has been made lies not in the past, *am Anfang*, but is that from out of which each new creature, each new person is born. In every moment and in every hour God is always creating anew. As a result, Luther’s understanding of creation differs somewhat in its dynamism from the majority of earlier conceptions of the term *ex nihilo*.

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24 *Reihenpredigten über Johannes 1-2* 1537/38. WA 46:558; LW 22:26: “Aber [Gott] ist nicht ein Meister, der da thut wie ein Zimmerman oder Baumeister, welcher, wenn er ein Haus, Schiff oder sonst ein werck, es sey auch, was es wolle, bereitet, vollendet und gerichtet hat, so lesst er das Haus seinem Herrn stehen, das er darinnen wone, oder befihlet das Schiff den Possknechten und Schiffleuten, das sie uber Meer darinnen faren, und gehet der Zimmerman davon, wohin er wil.”

25 See Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 139: “Luther’s notion of being is clearly connected with…Ockhamistic creatio continua. According to him creation has not occurred only once. God always creates all things. Above every created individual (as both *esse naturae* and *esse gratiae*) hangs the same nothingness out of which God once created the world and still creates it. In this sense it is legitimate to speak about the actualizing, nonstatic understanding of being in the Reformer. For Luther being is not a static being-in-itself. Being is a matter of continuous reception of being from God. Human beings exist only because they receive God’s gifts from outside themselves, such as life, being (*esse*), reason, intellect, nourishment, and clothing.”
It is important to note as well that in Luther’s late Genesis lectures the creation which took place am Anfang is conceived of in a completely non-dualistic manner: everything that is, is God’s creation.\(^{26}\) God’s creative power is not conceived of as competing with another force: nihil is not the polar opposite of God, but an expression of the freedom and sovereignty of God who alone creates. This is the central thought behind the words from Luther’s lectures cited earlier: creatura ex nihilo est: ergo nihil sunt omnia, quae creatura potest…\(^{27}\)

Thus the preposition ex does not indicate some sort of “material” or “state” from which God brought forth creation. In his interpretation of Genesis 1, Luther stipulates that God’s creation comes ex nihilo because in the beginning there was nothing other than God.\(^{28}\) God created “at the beginning of the first day…the crude mass of mire or of earth (rudem molem luti seu terrae) and the mists or waters (et nebulae seu aquae)”\(^{29}\) ex nihilo,

\(^{26}\) See Genesisvorlesung 1535/38, WA 42:6; LW 1:7 on Genesis 1:1 for a typical statement in this regard: “Mosis igitur simplicissima est sententia haec: Omnia, quae sunt, esse creati a Deo.” (“Therefore, the simplest sense of Moses’ sentence is: Everything that is, is created by God.”) In Luther and the Old Testament, Heinrich Bornkamm comments that Luther teaches an “inseparable duality” with regard to creation. This is not, however, some sort of duality of creators, but an acknowledgment that the post-fall world is “both a created and a corrupted world.” Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, 58-59.

\(^{27}\) Genesisvorlesung, 1538/42. WA 43:178; LW 4:61: “The creature is ex nihilo; therefore, all things of which the creature is capable are nihil…”

\(^{28}\) Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38. WA 42:14; LW 1:17-18: “Neque enim de his possumus aliquid statuere aut cogitare: Quia extra illud initium creaturae nihil est quam nuda essentia divina et nudus Deus. Is autem quia est incomprehensibilis, illud etiam incomprehensibile est, quod fuit ante mundum, quia nihil est nisi Deus.” (“For concerning these things we cannot stipulate or think anything: because outside that beginning of creation there is nothing else than the bare divine essence and God. Moreover, since he is incomprehensible, that, too, is incomprehensible which was before the world, since it is nothing but God.”)

\(^{29}\) Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38. WA 42:7; LW 1:7.
that is, by his word and will.\textsuperscript{30} However, it is important in this regard to note that Luther posits a two-fold creation \textit{ex nihilo}: first, matter was created, and then God created order or form (\textit{ornamenta}). In and of itself, the primal creation—“the crude mass of mire”—did not have the capacity for form, but was called out of its primordial formlessness only by the power of God. This form, Luther emphasizes, was also created \textit{ex nihilo}: the unordered world depended on God’s will because the world was itself a “Nothing” in terms of its power or capacity. Before the world was “decorated (\textit{ornamata}),” it was void and empty (יררכו ירה), and for as long as this condition persisted, it was neither an “almost Nothing” (\textit{prope nihil}, Augustine), nor an independent being possessing potentiality for form (\textit{materia sit pura potentia et substantientur per suum posse}, Lyra), but entirely subject to God’s creative will. By that will God gradually filled creation with form and life, so that there was something of an “intermediate stage” or progression in creation that led from something dead and inert to something active and alive.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus Luther teaches in connection with the words “let the earth bring forth” (Gen. 1:11, 20, 24) that there is not some sort of a latent potentiality for plants, animals or people in the “primary material (\textit{prima materia})” of creation, but that plant and animal life are entirely subject to the will of God and are themselves “nothing” until God’s creative call is heard bringing forth their form and order from “the heavens and the earth.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus it is clear that \textit{nihil} in the context of the “ornamentation” of the heavens

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{30} See note 15 above.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Genesishvorlesung, 1535/38}. WA 42:6-8; LW 1:7-9 on Genesis 1:2. The language ascribed to Augustine and Lyra is in Luther’s original.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Genesishvorlesung, 1535/38}. WA 42:27-41; LW 1:36-55. Representative of Luther’s comments in this regard is this statement about the creation of plant life on Day
and the earth does not denote pure emptiness. Rather, Luther uses *nihil* in this context to
denote the thought that there is no order or life where God’s speaking does not ring out:
the clod of earth from which God made Adam’s body is not a piece of man, or potential
man: Adam becomes God’s “most beautiful creature” by being formed by the hand of
God.\textsuperscript{33}

For this reason the creation of the world cannot be conceived of as a mechanical
organizing or fashioning process: it is a dynamic process of birth and growth.\textsuperscript{34} Luther
understood the creation narrative quite literally: just as in the spring trees and plants
spring from the bare ground, life sprang by God’s will from the unadorned and empty
earth on the third day when “evening came, and morning followed” (Gen. 1:5 NAB). The
creation of Adam was for Luther the same “organic event” as the birth of his own
children because both were the act of God.\textsuperscript{35} The creation of the world is birth and the

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3 of the *Hexaemeron*: “Quod igitur terra profert frumentum, arbores et omnis generis
herbas, huius diei opus est. Nunc quidem omnia nascuntur ex sui generis semine. Sed
prima creatio sine semine simpliciter ex virtute verbi est facta.” (“Therefore, it is the
work of this day that the earth brings forth grain, trees and every type of plant. Now,
certainly everything is produced by its own kind of seed. But the first creation without
seed was simply done by the power of the word.”)
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\textsuperscript{33} *Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38*. WA 42:63; LW 1:84: “Itaque Adam, antequam a
Domino formatur, est mortua et iacens gleba eam apprehendit Deus et format inde
pulcherrimam creaturam...” (“Therefore Adam, before he was formed by the Lord, was a
dead and inert clod. God took it and formed from it his most beautiful creature...”)
\end{flushleft}

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\textsuperscript{34} *Vorlesung über psalm XC, 1535*. WA 40\textsuperscript{III}:509b-510b; LW 13:91-92: “Sed
sicut arbores nascuntur ex terra tanquam ex nihilo, ut videantur omnia nasci verius quam
formari aut creari.” (“It is instead like trees born from the earth, so to speak, from
nothing, so that everything is more truly born than formed or created.”) Cited in Johannes
9.
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\textsuperscript{35} See note 15 above. The commentary on Psalm 90 was produced from Luther’s
lectures on the psalm in Fall 1534 and Spring 1535. WA 40\textsuperscript{III} reproduces the lecture notes
\end{flushleft}
birth of a child is creation. The two are inseparably connected in his thought.\textsuperscript{36} Both have their origin in the reality of the creative will of God, through which life was born out of \textit{nihil}. But again, the earth and its fullness (including human beings) are not the raw material out of which and through which things are made: every aspect of creation, “\textit{am Anfang}” to the present, ultimately rests, rather, in the will of God. Bernhard Lohse reminds how Luther’s thought was molded by the Bible in this respect:

Regarding the \textit{creatio ex nihilo} Luther appealed first to Psalm 33:9, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth”; next, to 2 Maccabees 7:28, “Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being”; then to Romans 4:17: “[God] who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.\textsuperscript{37}

\subsection*{2.2 – \textit{Creation in Time through the Word}}

God wills that the birth-like process of creation takes place within his own creation of time. Time is not merely a mental construct or concept, but something that is recorded by Georg Rörer, Caspar Cruciger, and Viet Dietrich as “Seite A” and the printed version as “Seite B.” Note 15 reproduces the “B” (“finished”) version of Luther’s comments. WA 40\textsuperscript{iii}, 509\textsuperscript{a}—the note—reads: “Dicit montes ‘natos’ et terram et omnia etc., significat quasi proprietatem et conditionem creationis. Non utitur vocabulo ‘creavit,’ ‘fecit.’ Scilicet significat ipsum egressum Creaturae ex nihilo in aliquid. Sicut ex homine, bestia aliud corpus, sic montes etc. Incredibilis est iste egressus omnium creaturarum. Non ibi faber, materia, quae paretur, ubi resecetur. Sed terra ex aqua et mari, Arbores ex terra, prietate quam ex nihilo. Verius videntur nasci quam formari. Videtur mihi significare, quod in Genesi: ‘Dixit et facta sunt’…”


\textsuperscript{37} Lohse, \textit{Martin Luther’s Theology}, 240.
itself a creation of God: just as the creation receives its life and form from the hand of God, so it also receives time from his hand. Time, however, is not something static imposed on creation. Both the creation and time are on-going and in dynamic motion together moving toward the goal God has established. Since human thought can never pierce the veil of time, it is necessarily bound to what happens in time. Early on in the *Genesisvorlesung* Luther chides those who would attempt to peer past the barrier of time with Augustine’s retort to presumptuous speculation about what God was doing before the beginning of the world: “[God was] making hell ready for those who pried into meddlesome questions.” Luther goes on to say:

It is senseless to argue much about God outside of and before time, since this is an attempt to comprehend pure divinity, or the pure divine essence. Because this is impossible, God wraps himself in his works and in certain “cloaks” (*species*), just as today he wraps himself in Baptism, in Absolution, etc. If you were to depart from these, you would then be outside measure, place, time and in the *barest nothing* (*merissimum nihil*), concerning which, according to the Philosopher, no knowledge is possible.

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38 As in other aspects of his interpretation of Genesis 1, Luther does not expend many words in philosophical discussion about time, but on humanity’s created *capacity* to perceive time as the creation and gift of God. See, for example, his remarks in connection with the ordering of the luminaries as the “originators and rulers of day and night,” WA 42:30-36; LW 1:42-48. The relationship of the Creator to time (his creation) is also given frequent attention. In this regard, see Luther’s remarks especially in connection with Psalm 90:4: “For a thousand years in your eyes are in Thy sight as yesterday…” WA 40III:523ff; LW 13:99ff.; and 2 Peter 3:8 (quoting Ps. 90:4) WA 14:70ff; LW 30:195ff.

39 *Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38*. WA 42:9; LW 1:10: “Deum praeparasse infernum curiosa scrutantibus.” Luther’s reference is to Augustine’s *Confessions*, XI, 12.

40 *Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38*. WA 42:10; LW 1:11: “Et insania est disputare multa de Deo extra et ante tempus, quia id est velle comprehendere nudam divinitatem, seu nudam essentiam divinam. Hoc quia impossibile est, ideo involvit se Deus in opera et certas species, sicut hodie se involvit in Baptismum, in Absolutionem etc. Ab his si discedas, tunc abis extra mensuram, locum, tempus et in *merissimum nihil*, de quo secundum Philosophum non potest esse scientia” (emphasis added).
Luther confesses the orthodox faith that God is “timeless”: “For [God] is simply outside the reckoning of time”\(^{41}\); “there is with God no ‘earlier’ or ‘later,’ ‘swifter’ or ‘slower’; rather everything is ‘now’ in his eyes.”\(^{42}\) Indeed, for God, all of time is but a moment. And because the flow of time from the first to the last moment is always an eternal “now” for God, it can be said from God’s perspective that all things were made in an instant.\(^{43}\) For God, every individual thing was made already in the beginning when he said, “Let there be…” But because a human being is created in time and given “his hour (\textit{seiner Zeit}),” creation must be viewed by human beings as a wellspring of new life and God’s creative work perceived as continuous throughout each individual’s journey through life.

Then we can see with our eyes the new person, young children born into this world, who were not in the world beforehand, new trees, new beasts on the earth, new fish in the water and new birds in the air, and such preservation and creation will continue until the Last Day. God-Father, God-Son with the Holy Ghost: they do not rest from their work in the way craftsmen, shoemakers, and tailors retire from their labors when they have made their shoes and garments—they do not desist from working (on those things they have created) until the end of time, and ere one thing comes to its end, they make another in its place, that thus their creation might continue on and on.\(^{44}\)

\(^{41}\) Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:58; LW 1:76: “Est enim simpliciter extra temporis rationem.”

\(^{42}\) Ibid.: “Non enim apud Deum sunt prius et posterius, citius aut tardius, sed omnia sunt eius oculis praesentia.”

\(^{43}\) Declamationes in Genesin. WA 24:61b-62b: “Oben ist gesagt, das fuer Gott der anfang der welt und das ende gleich als auff ein augenblick sind und gleich gilt der erste augenblick und der letzt am ende der welt.” (“It was stated above that for God the beginning of the world and its end are like a moment and the same goes for the first and last moment to world’s end.”)

\(^{44}\) Reihenpredigten über Johannes 1-2 1537/38, WA 46:558-562; LW 22:26-29: “Denn teglich sehen wir fur augen, das neue Menschen, junge kinder zur Welt geboren werden, die vor nicht gewesen sind, newe Beume, newe Thier auff Erden, newe Fische
Creation is thus viewed as the work of God in history. But as Luther lays out his views about creation, he eschews all philosophical speculation in this regard in favor of a biblically-founded realism which interprets creation as the on-going work of God in history. Luther sets this course immediately in his opening lecture of the *Genesisvorlesung* on Genesis 1. After briefly criticizing Hilary and Augustine for their respective interpretations of the nature of the days of Genesis 1, he states:

For nor is it useful at the outset to make Moses mystical and allegorical. For since he desires to teach us not about allegorical creatures and an allegorical world, but about actual creatures and a visible world understood by the senses, he calls, as the proverb says, “a Schapham a scapham,”* that is, he uses “day” and “night” just as we are used to doing, without allegory. …[W]e assert that Moses spoke properly, not allegorically or figuratively, that is, that the world, with all its creatures within six days was created, as the words say.45

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45 *Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38.* WA 42:4-5; LW 1:5ff: “Nec etiam utile est, Mosen in principio tam facere mysticum et allegoricum. Quia enim nos vult docere, non de creaturis allegoricis, et mundo allegorico, sed de creaturis essentialibus et mundo visibili ac exposito sensibus, appellat, ut Proverbia dicitur, Schapham scapham, hoc est, diem et vesperam vocat, sicut nos solemus, sine allegoria. statuimus Mosen propri locutum, non allegorice aut figurate, hoc est, mundum cum omnibus Creaturis intra sex dies, ut verba sonant, creatum esse.” [*The WA notes that Luther is employing a “playground pun” (Schulwitz) here in which the German Schapham (= Nachen, a small boat with masts) is paired in a pun with the Latin scapham (= skiff). George Schick’s translation in LW 1:5 is: “he calls ‘a spade a spade’…”*]
Similarly, Luther’s interpretation of Genesis 2:21 (“So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep…”) notes that “it is necessary to understand these days as real days, contrary to the opinions of the holy fathers.”

Luther’s comments must be understood as an effort to maintain the reality of the biblical creation account over against a speculative understanding of creation. For Luther every other philosophical or theological theory finally ends in futility: either God is not seen as preserving the world, or worse, his existence is denied:

The same thing would have to be pronounced about the world, which for that reason the philosophers have asserted is eternal. However, even if arguments were sketched out by which it was established that the world is not eternal, nonetheless reason would incline toward this notion with all its strength. For what finds its beginning in nothing? Moreover, if you should say that the world began and that there was a time in which the world was not, it immediately follows that before the world was, there was nothing, infinite other absurdities follow by which means the philosophers judge that the world is eternal. If you say that the world is infinite, immediately another new infinite—the succession of humans—is produced. But philosophy does not concede plural infinites and yet it is inclined to concede [their existence] because it knows no beginnings of the world or human beings. These contradictions and obscurities gave opportunity to the Epicureans to say that the world and humans exist for no reason and that they will also perish for no reason, just as cattle perish, which die in such a way as if they never were. This leads to another [thought]: God either plainly does not exist, or does not care for people. Reason is led into these labyrinths when it puts away the Word and follows its own judgment.

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46 Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38. WA 42:92; LW 1:122: “Quod igitur Adam sexto die est conditus, quod adducta sunt ad eum animalia, quod audivit praecipientem Dominum de arbore scientiae boni et mali, item, quod immisit ei Domini somnum, haec omnia manifestum est, quod ad tempus et ad animalem vitam pertinent. Ideo necesse est istos dies intelligi veros dies, contra opinionem sanctorum Patrum.” (“That Adam was made on the sixth day, that the animals were brought to him, that he heard the Lord’s command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, likewise, that God sent upon him a sleep—all these things are plainly about time and biological life. Thus it is necessary to understand these days as real days, contrary to the opinions of the holy fathers.”)

To resume the matter of time, in his 1534-35 exposition of Psalm 90—the “Prayer of Moses”—Luther describes the transience of life-lived-in-time in powerful language reminiscent of Augustine’s exposition of the same psalm.\(^{48}\) However, Luther’s Augustine-like tones are sounded not to contrast the transitory nature of life with God’s unchangeableness as Augustine does in his exposition, but to explicate the futility of life because of sin. For Luther, the downside of life, including its brevity, always derives from the fact that fallen humanity is in the state of imprisonment to sin, not time. Luther’s words sound pessimistic, but this is consonant with his view of the human condition. Human life lasts but a moment, a *punctum mathematicum* which quickly passes. Humanity only finds consolation in the Creator’s hand, who makes it anew and rescues it out of its emptiness:

Therefore Moses prays: Nevertheless give us grace that “they number their days.” Speak to the very heart so that they reckon how long life should be, as he said above: “We are shadows,” we fly away like shadows. …What is 80 years? A *mathematical point*, that is, nothing. Therefore, teach them to think how pathetic and brief this life is.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) See Augustine, *Enarratio in psalmum 89* [90], *Patrologia, Series Latina*, XXV, 1143-1144.

Thus, for Luther, Psalm 90 is not about the distance between God and creation or the chasm between time and eternity. Rather, it is about the contrast between life and death. Nor is time distant from God because all time is gathered up in God’s creating hand. As a result, God’s creative acts are only done at a specific time, and when God makes something, he also gives its portion of time, its “hour.”

Creation takes place in time, but it is the Word that is the primary focus of the relationship between the Creator and the creation. Again, Luther’s comment in connection with the command, “Fiat lux…,” pertains: “Therefore in the beginning and before every creature there is the Word, and it is such a powerful Word that it makes all things out of nothing.” God makes all things ex nihilo, without materia, but he does create through “something”: “For [Genesis 1:3] says that God is, so to speak, the Speaker who creates and yet does not use materia, but creates heaven and earth out of nothing solely by the Word which he speaks.” The creative Word of God is the only

sollen leben, quia supra dixit:‘Umbra sumus,’ fugimus ut umbra. ...Quid est 80 anni? Punctus mathematicus, i.e. nihil. Ideo doce eos cogitare, quam misera et brevis sit hec vita” (emphasis added).

50 Reihenpredigten über Johannes 6-8 1530/32. WA 33:404; LW 23:254: “Denn also genaw hats Gott gefasset und alles abgewessen, das er alle gedancken und werck in seiner hand haben wil, das es nicht fortkomen kan, es kome denn die stunde, die von Gott dazu bestimet.” (“For it is certain that God has ordered and measured everything so that he holds all thoughts and works in his hand so that it cannot come to pass [but] when the hour which God has set for it arrives.”)

51 See note 22 above.

52 Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38. WA 42:13; LW 1:16: “Dicit enim Deum esse, ut sic loquar, Dictorem, qui creat, et tamen non utitur materia, sed solo verbo, quod profert, ex nihilo facit coelum et terram” (emphasis added).
“instrument” and “means” of the Creator: the Word delivers what it says and in this way reveals the Creator and imparts God’s wonderful gifts.

The identity between the “Word” and Christ, so that the world was made by and for Christ (Col. 1:16b), is a major theme in Luther’s thinking, especially for his anthropology. While a full treatment of this theme exceeds what can be said here, it should be pointed out how Luther combines the Logos of the prologue to the Gospel of St. John (Jn. 1.1) and the ἀρχή of the Genesis account.53 The divine Word is no mere sign; it imparts the thing it speaks. Although human thinking must separate them, God’s Word

53 See, for example, Genesisvorlesung, 1535/38, (WA 42:15; LW 1:16): “Sed retinenda est simplex sententia et vera: Deus dixit, id est, per Verbum condidit et fecit res omnes, sicut Apostolus comprobat, cum dicit: ‘Per quem condita sunt secula.’ Item: ‘Omnia per ipsum et in ipsum sunt condita.’ Atque inter hos limites debet consistere cogitatio creationis, non debemus longius evagari, quia tum in tenebras certas et exitiales prolabimur. Ergo satis nobis sint ista, cum de mundo et eius conditione queritur: Quod ad materiam mundi attinet, ex nihilo esse factum, sic ex non luce factam esse lucem, ex nihilo factum coelum et terram. Sicut Paulus dicit: ‘Vocat ea, quae non sunt, ut sint.’ Instrumentum autem seu medium, quo Deus usus est, est eius omnipotens Verbum, quod cum Deo fuit ab initio, et sicut Paulus loquitur, ante constitutionem mundi. Ergo quod dicit Paulus: ‘Per ipsum sunt condita omnia’ (utitum enim praepositione ‘in’ Ebreaorum more pro ‘per’; sic enim Ebreaei usurpant literam ξ et similia loca ex hoc Mosi loco sunt desumpta, qui loquitur de verbo prolato, quo iubetur et praecipitur aliquid.) (“But this simple sense and truth must be held: God said, that is, through the Word he created and made all things, just as the apostle affirms when he says: ‘Through whom the worlds were created’ (Heb. 1:2). Likewise: ‘All things through him and for him were made’ (Col. 1:16). And within these limits thinking about the creation must remain, nor ought we go farther afield, because then we shall surely get into darkness and mischief. Therefore, let us be satisfied with these facts when questions are raised concerning the world and its creation: so far as the matter of the universe is concerned, it was made out of nothing, just as out of non-light light was made, so out of nothing heaven and earth [were made]. As Paul says: ‘He calls the things which are not that they be’ (Rom. 4:17). Moreover, the instrument or means which God used is his omnipotent Word, which was with God from the beginning and, as Paul says, before the establishment of the world (Eph. 1:4). Therefore what Paul says: ‘Through Him all things are made’ (Col. 1:16) (for he employs the preposition ‘in’ according to Hebrew usage for ‘through’; for in this sense Hebrew employs the letter and similar passages were drawn from this passage of Moses, who is talking about the spoken Word, by which some command and order was given.)”)
and work are the same to God who “calls into being what does not exist” (Rom. 4:17b, NAB). God does not speak as humanity does for his words are not mere words, but reality:

But also this must be held to: these words, “Let there be light” are the words of God, not of Moses, that is, they are realities. For God calls those things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17) and he does not speak mere [grammatical] words, but true and substantial realities, so that that which among us is just a word, that very thing is a reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are “words” of God, in fact only one single syllable or letter compared to the entire creation. We, too, speak, but only “grammatically,” that is, we just assign names to created things. But divine Grammatica is different, namely, when he says: “Sun, shine,” immediately the sun shines and is there. Thus the words of God are realities, not bare words.  

Luther sees creation so filled by God’s “Word,” by the “Holy Scriptures,” by God’s “living speech,” that all things—“fish or fowl”—are “words” in God’s grammar or, as he says in the late Genesis lectures, “the words of God are res, not mere words.


55 Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:37; LW 1:48: “Verbum igitur si sonet, omnia possibilia sunt, ut ex aqua fiant vel pisces vel volucres. Quaelibet igitur avis, piscis quilibet sunt nihil nisi nomina divinae Grammaticae, per quam grammaticam, quae sunt impossibilia, fiunt facillima, et quae plane sunt pugnantia, fiunt simillima, et econtra.” (“However if the Word is spoken, all things are possible, so that out of the water are made either fish or fowl. Therefore any bird and any fish are naught but nouns of the divine grammar, through which grammar those things which are impossible become simply effortless, and those that are plainly contrary to one another become almost alike, and vice versa.”)
From this it is quite apparent why Luther always speaks of the Word so forcefully: the Word is basically a creative Word, a word that gives what it declares. Creation through the Word means furthermore that everything is made *through and for* Christ the Word (Col. 1:16b), that is, through him who is the Word and thereby the gift of God to humanity. But it is also important to note that Luther strongly held that creation is at the same time the work of the *entire Trinity.* He can therefore say that the things that are spoken by the Father have their existence through the Son, the Word of the Father, and that to them is joined the Holy Spirit, who “sees and approves” the creation.

56 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/38.* WA 42:15; LW 1:18.

57 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/38.* WA 42:10; LW 1:11: “Sed dignius observatione est, quod Moses non dicit: *In principio creavit Adoni coelum et terram,* sed utitur vocabulo pluralis numeri *Elohim,* quo nomine in Mose et alibi tum Angeli, tum Iudices seu magistratus appellantur, sicut in Psalmo 82: ‘Ego dixi, Dii estis.’ Hic autem certum est significare Deum unum et verum, a quo creata sunt omnia. Cur igitur utitur plurali nomine? Iudaei varie cavillantur Mosen: Sed nobis clarum est, voluisse eum Trinitatem seu personarum pluralitatem in una divina natura tecte ostendere. Quia enim dicit de opere creationis, manifeste sequitur, quod excludit Angelos. Manet igitur illa contradictio, quod unus est Deus, et tamen illa unissima unitas verissima etiam est pluralitas, quorum enim aliqui attinet Mosen plurali numero uti?” (“It is more worthy by way of observation that Moses does not say: ‘In the beginning created heaven and earth’ but that he uses a word in the plural number, *יְהֹוָה,* by which name Moses and others designated the angels as well as judges and magistrates, as in Ps. 82:6: ‘I have said, ‘You are gods.’” Here, however, it is certain that it designates the one true God, by whom all things were created. Why, therefore, does he use the plural noun? The Jews cavil against Moses in various ways: but to us it is clear: Moses wants to point out the Trinity or the plurality of persons in one single divine nature. Because he is speaking about the work of creation, it follows clearly that he is excluding the angels. There remains, therefore, this contradiction, namely, that God is one, and nevertheless that most ‘unified unity’ is also the truest plurality, for why else should it matter that Moses makes use of the plural number?”)
2.3 – “To Create is Always to Make New”

Already in his 1518 *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses* Luther declared, “To create is always to make new.” In other words, creation cannot be considered a one-time, completed act of God; rather, “God creates—yea, daily.” Lecturing on the creative work of the third day when God said, “Fiat herba,” Luther chalked *DIXIT* on his blackboard and said, “Mark here how our Lord God plows: as everyone knows, he says but a word. He has a large plow which is called HE SAID.” God “creates” daily by sending his word like a “plow (Pflug)” throughout the world making it fruitful.

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Fili personae verbum ‘fecit.’ Filius enim in se habet exemplar non solum maiestatis divinae, sed etiam exemplar omnium rerum creatarum. Ideo dat esse rebus. Et sicut a Patre res dicuntur, ita per Filium et Verbum illud Patres res omnes subsistunt. Adiungitur autem his tertia persona Spiritus sancti, qui res creatas ‘Videt’ et probat.” (“But here what the holy fathers, and especially Augustine, observed must also be attended to: When Moses uses these three words: ‘God said, made, saw’ it is as if in this way he desired to point out the three Persons of the divine majesty. By the word ‘he said’ the Father is denoted. He begets the Word in eternity and in time makes this world through this Word. Thus Moses’ saying attributes ‘he made’ to the Person of the Son. For the Son has in himself not only the image of the divine majesty, but also the image of all things created. Thus he gives being to things. And just as things are spoken by the Father, so through the Son and the Word of the Father all things subsist. And to these is joined the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, who ‘saw’ and approved what was created.”)

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60 WATr 5:17 (Nr. 5227); LW 54:400 (No. 5227): “Das Gott creator heist, das ist ein unverforschlich ding, *vnd Gott schaffts doch teglich*” (emphasis added). (“That God is called ‘Creator’ is an unfathomable thing, and *God creates—yea, daily.*”)

Creation is thus seen to be an event that encompasses the world of each individual human being. In the creation of “Adam” God creates “humanity.”\textsuperscript{62} Within the flow of time, God’s creative act of making “Adam” continues ceaselessly, because, as Luther states:

Where God does not act, there nothing can be; where he ceases to act, there nothing can stand for he has not created the world in the way a carpenter builds a house only to leave it to stand as he made it. On the contrary, God remains close by and upholds everything as he made it, else it would fall and not remain.\textsuperscript{63}

Thus every created thing comes and goes, rises and sinks in the stream of time, as long as time flows toward the end: “For the seasons are like a river: they come and go, ascend and descend, crest and sink, begin and end. One builds up, another tears down: for all things stand or cease by their enmity or friendship. Not so eternity.”\textsuperscript{64} This rising and falling has nothing to do with chance or accident, but is closely connected with the fact that God gives every thing its particular time (sein Zeit). The creature lives only so as

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Luther reminds his hearers in the \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/38}, WA 42:231; LW 1:314, that “Adam significat hominem” (“‘Adam’ means ‘mankind.’”)
\item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{Cruciger Sommerpostille}, 1544. WA 21:521: “Es mus alles Gottes sein, das, wo er nicht anfehrt, da kan nichts sein noch werden, wo er auflöseret, da kan nichts bestehen, Denn er hat die Welt nicht also geschaffen, wie ein Zimmerman ein Haus bawet und darnach davon gehet, lest es stehen, wie es stehet, Sondern bleibt daben und erhelt alles, wie er es gemacht hat, Sonst wuerde es weder stehen noch bleiben koennen.” Cited in David Löfgren, \textit{Die Theologie der Schöpfung bei Luther} (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1960), 39.
\end{itemize}
long as it is caught up in the flow of time. When it dies, its time is over: time and life collapse together.

Luther emphasizes just this dynamic of the flow of time and life-development in his 1535 Genesis exposition of the *Hexaemeron*: God makes and forms the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*; these become the wellspring out of which God makes “life”: plants, fish, birds, and beasts; and finally, God creates humankind. Note that this progression is both qualitative and quantitative: qualitative in that everything is not in its final or mature form—moreover, things exhibit difference and variety; quantitative in that creation is called to “increase and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28) with life. Luther is emphatic, however, that none of this occurs because of an inherent capacity in creation itself, but because of the Creator’s own unceasing work.65

One might object here that Luther has overlooked the distinction between *creare* and *conservare*. Bernhard Lohse notes in this regard:

In a host of places Luther spoke of the creation and of the preservation of the world, in the course of which he united the two activities respecting their content, though he distinguished them respecting the idea and the concept. For example, in the *Disputation Concerning Justification* (1536), he said: “That whatever God creates, he also preserves is simply true and must be granted, but still it does not follow that human nature is unspoiled, which is corrupted daily. For God has made creatures changeable. …For as he creates, so he preserves. Thus we have been created so that we can be changed.” Similarly, the Small Catechism distinguishes creation and preservation.66

In keeping with Lohse’s observation, Luther stipulates that Adam and Eve were “not born, but made (*non nati, sed creati sunt*),” and yet declares in connection with his

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66 Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 241. Lohse’s reference may be found in WA 391:107; LW 34:176-177.
exposition of Genesis 22:13 (the ram stuck in the thicket in the Akedah narrative), “We Christians know that with God to create and to preserve is the same (Nos Christiani scimus, quod apud Deum idem est creare et conservare).”67 Luther likewise uses creare and generare in similar senses. God works through the natural orders and laws of creation without being bound to them. As the almighty Creator he can always bring something new and unexpected into being. Continuing his exposition of Genesis 22:13 of the Akedah, Luther replies to the “customary question,” where did the ram come from? by noting:

He who knows the Creator’s power, will not discuss with curiosity whence came the ram. Scotus discusses where God will get the fire on the Day of Judgment for incinerating the world. What can be more stupid to ask or think? This much is plain, the wise do not make errors except that they are major ones (insignes errores). But, so that we can say something concerning the question that has been asked, let us remember this, that Holy Scripture shows that God is quite able to produce things which were not, or to multiply things which exist through the voice of an angel or some other servant. By the word of Moses—a man!—water flows from a rock, quail scatter through the camp. If God has a single quail, then he has one-hundred thousand or innumerable quail. …If we believe that the divine power made all things from nothing, why can we not believe this, that he is able to multiply and increase what exists already?68

However, Luther maintains that the preservation (conservatio) of creation is also God’s work which he brings about through the participation and co-operation of created


68 Genesishvorlesung 1538/42. WA 43:233; LW 4:136: “Qui novit potentiam creatoris, non disputabit curiosis, unde venerit aries. Scotus disputat, unde Deus sumpturus sit ignem in die iuditii ad conflagrationem mundi. Quid potest quaeri aut cogitari stolidius? Sapientes scilicet non committunt nisi insignes errores. Sed ut aliquid dicamus de proposita quaestione, illud meminerimus, quod scriptura sancta usitatum Deo esse ostendit, ut per Angeli aut ministri alicuius vocem producat ea, quae non erant, aut ea, quae existunt, multiplicet. Ad verbum Mose hominis manat aqua ex petra, coturnices sparguntur per castra. Si Deus unam coturnicem habet, centena millia aut innumeras habet. …Si credimus potestia divina omnia ex nihilo esse condita, cur non et illud credamus, eum hoc, quod iam existit, posse multiplicare et augere.”
things. Indeed, as the pinnacle of God’s creation, human beings through their bodies fulfill the work and will of God to “increase and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:22) as an integral aspect of their being.\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, the human body, together with all organic life, possesses a great gift from God in comparison to the inorganic creation in that it is made to be a participant in regeneration and birth. But this takes place through the power of God’s creative word, without which neither birth nor life would be possible. For this reason Luther sees scant difference between creare and generare, “For he who formed man from a clod of earth, is the same who today creates people from the blood of their parents.”\textsuperscript{70} The creation of humans—that is to say, their birth—takes place by virtue of the continuing, effective creative command of God so that birth and development are also part of God’s ongoing creatio ex nihilo.\textsuperscript{71}

By the same token, preservation of the body does not occur via a power inherent in what has been created. Rather, the body is preserved through God’s power and blessing given to it unceasingly and “personally,” that is, in accord with God’s “pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy” (Small Catechism, Art. I). Thus, Luther’s dictum, “to create is to always make new” articulates God’s freedom and his fidelity toward the

\textsuperscript{69} This is explored below in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{70} Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:95; LW 1:127: “Nam qui ex gleba formavit hominem, idem adhuc hodie creat homines ex sanguine Parentum” (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{71} Declamationes in Genesin. WA 24:61b: “Wir sehen teglich fuer augen, das noch ymerdar allerley geschaffen wird, alles was sich besamet auff erden, alle frucht und alle thiere, und ist doch ein werck, das Gott eygentlich zugehoert, wie Christus selb sagt ym Johanne ‘Mein vater wirckt bis hie her, und ich wircke auch.’” (“Daily we see with our eyes that still all sorts of things are forever being created, everything which has been sown on earth, all fruits and all beasts, and yet it is a work that really belongs to God, as Christ himself says in John [5:17], ‘My Father is at work ‘til now, and I work also.’”)
body, that is, the Creator wills his creation to continue as he has created it and to that end, he constantly and willingly makes anew.\textsuperscript{72}

David Löfgren noted that already as a \textit{Sententiarius} Luther had written in his 1510/1511 \textit{Randbemerkungen} on the \textit{Sentences} of Peter Lombard that “to preserve is the same as to create continually.”\textsuperscript{73} Luther’s polemics against any proposal of an inherent ability in human life to effect its own development and preservation (something he links with his polemics against human cooperation in salvation) are connected with his nascent theologizing about creation and with his mature concept of God’s personal care for us:

Just as no creature was able to contribute toward its creation at the beginning, so it has not been able to work toward its preservation and the perpetuation of its kind. Thus, as we human beings did not create ourselves, so we can do nothing at all to keep ourselves alive for a single moment by our own power. The fact that I grow and develop is God’s work alone; without Him I would have died many years ago. If the Creator, who continues to work forever and ever, and His Co-worker were to interrupt Their work, all would go to wrack and ruin in a twinkling. This truth prompts us to confess in the articles of our Christian Creed: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” If He had not preserved us whom He created, we would have died and perished long ago, yes, even in the cradle or at birth.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} See note 60 above.

\textsuperscript{73} Löfgren, \textit{Theologie}, 42, fn 34. Löfgren cites Luther’s \textit{Randbemerken zu den Sentenzen des Petrus Lombardus}, 1510, WA 9:66: “Die ergo septimo: Unde conservare videtur majus esse quam creare. Quia multi incipient, sed pauci perseverant. Est enim conservatio semper nova incepto. \textit{Est autem conservare idem quod continue creare}. Et conservatio est continuata creatio, unde adhuc Hodie creat deus Heb. 1. ‘portans omnia’ etc.” (“Therefore, concerning Day 7: Whence it appears that to preserve is greater than to create. Since many things begin, but few last. Observe that preservation is always a new beginning. Moreover, \textit{to preserve is the same as to create continually}. And preservation is continued creation, whence to the present day God creates, Heb. 1., ‘bearing all things,’ etc.”), emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Reihenpredigten über Johannes 1-2 1537/38}, WA 46:560; LW 22:28: “So wenig nu alle Creatur dazu gethan haben, das sie im anfang geschaffen sind, so wenig haben sie koennen dazu thun, das sie bisher in jrem wesen und stande blieben und erhalten worden, fur und fur gemehret und erhalten sind. Jtem, wie wir Menschen uns selbes nicht gemacht haben, so koennen wir durch unser kreffte bey dem Leben uns nicht
Luther’s understanding—thus already under development in his early academic career—of the preserving power of God’s creative word surfaces frequently in his later writings. Attention has already been called to the especially pointed way Luther speaks about *creatio-conservatio* in his sermons preached in the late 1530s on St. John’s Gospel and to the material that he gave those who gathered to hear the Genesis lectures of the last decade of his life. Luther speaks about how God’s creative word works, preserves, and governs creation like a “plow” which causes the earth to be fruitful; in the *DIXIT* of God’s living speech;\(^75\) by the living power of the word in seed;\(^76\) in the order in nature,\(^77\) and in the whole universe. No ability or power of the creature can replace the creating Word:

Some of the philosophers have spoken about the stars and the heavenly bodies as if these possessed life and reason. …In his *Timaeus* Plato discourses in this manner. But this idea must plainly be driven out, and our intellect calibrate itself to the Word of God and to Holy Scripture, which clearly teaches that God created all these things…and that he governs and preserves them by the power of his Word, by which they were made. …Other ideas, which are advanced without the support of Scripture, must be rejected.\(^78\)

\(^75\) See note 62.

\(^76\) *Genesisvorlesung 1535/38*. WA 42:27; LW 1:11.

\(^77\) Ibid.

\(^78\) *Genesisvorlesung 1535/38*. WA 42:35b; LW 1:47: “Quidam ex Philosophis de stellis et superioribus corporibus ita locuti sunt, ac si essent animata et rationalia. …Ac Plato in Timeo ad hunc modum disputat. Sed haec sententia plane est explodenda et
Because creation depends on the creative Word of God and not on an inherent power of its own, human philosophy and theology assess the world differently. Natural philosophy views the world through the prism of “natural” causes and effects. The theologian, however, marvels at the effective Word of God in nature, even in the most mundane matters. Even how a hen lays an egg and hatches a chick is a miracle of God’s working through the hen with the Word:

Therefore, what is the cause of this remarkable generation? A hen lays an egg, warms it, until a living body comes to be in the egg, which the mother later hatches. The philosophers allege this as the cause: this happens by the working of the sun and the womb. I concede this. But theologians more properly say that this happens through the working of the Word, which says here: “He blessed them, and said: Increase and multiply.” This Word is present in the very body of the hen and all living things, and the heat by which the hen warms her egg is from the divine Word, which, if the Word were absent, that heat would be useless and ineffective.”

Indeed, this effective blessing of the Creator is the key to faith that flows from the doctrine of creation because faith is taught to see that God’s blessing is what causes life and increase. When we bless, Luther continues in his “chicken and the egg” exposition, we express a mere wish: we cannot make it happen. But God’s fruitful blessing which he places on his creation is not a wish, but the good will of God that imparts what he desires:

Therefore, for the sake of this remarkable creation, God adds also the blessing that such bodies [as the hen’s] will be fruitful. And here it is discerned just what the blessing is, namely, increase. When we bless, we accomplish nihil except asking for what is good, this, however,—what we ask for—we cannot bring about. But the blessing of God resounds in increase and is immediately efficacious. Just as, by the contrary, God’s curse means decrease, which is also efficacious.

Thus, were God to withhold his blessing, creation would be left desolate. As a result, for Luther, the biblical view of creation means that life is never “just a natural process” nor a game of chance, but a wonder-filled (plenum admiratione) act of divine providence. Indeed, where God does not bless, death and destruction threaten. In the context of commenting on Hebrews 1—“through whom [i.e., Christ] he created the worlds”—Luther compares God’s “upholding (portans)” of creation like the passage through the Red Sea where God held back the power of death, and where the life of the creature was upheld by the present power of his Word. The slender wall that holds back destruction is quite thin after the fall of creation. If God withdraws his Word, then, the

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81 Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:27b; LW 1:36-37: “Quod autem nunc semina proveniunt, Id quoque est creationis opus plenum admiratione. Nam singularis virtus est, quod granum in terram cadens suo tempore surgit, et fert fructum secundum speciem suam. Illud autem certum est indicium non fortuitam creationem, sed praecipuum divinae providentiae opus esse, quod similia a similibus perpetuo ordine enascuntur. Sic ex tritico non fit nisi triticum, ex ordeo non nisi ordeum, ex siligine siligo.” (“However, the fact that seeds now produce is also a completely astonishing work of creation. For it is a singular strength that a seed falling on the ground rises in time and produces fruit according to its kind. Moreover, this is certain proof that creation is not a matter of chance, but the specific work of divine providence, namely, that like is brought forth from like in a perpetual sequence. For from wheat comes only wheat, from barley only barley, from rye, rye”), emphasis added.
life of the creature will be swept away as the Egyptians were in a torrent of water. But God guards life by his blessing just as the Israelites were kept alive in the midst of the sea, and the song of praise of those who believe in his creation rises to him.  

2.4 – What About the Body?

God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all creatures. One must thus believe about the creation—and it is the most important part of [the teaching of] creation—that we know and believe that God stoutly upholds those things that he has made. …One must thus understand that also all things were made through the self-same Word by which they are preserved, else they would not long remain.

This chapter has looked in general at Luther’s theology of creation so aptly captured in the quote above. However, our specific subject, the human body, has not figured large in our discussion or in Luther’s words. Nonetheless, what we have seen in Luther’s theologizing about creation can be applied to the body, even if Luther himself would find the exercise somewhat strange. What can we say, therefore?

First, the human body is God’s specific creation. As such, it shares with the wider creation all the aspects of the Creator-creature relationship we have seen. Most eminent is


that the body is utterly dependent upon its Creator for its very being and life itself, as Luther rehearses in his explanation to the First Article. The human body is because God gives it form and life. The body lives and continues because God continues to “stoutly uphold” it as his good creature. God gives, we receive: that is the melody that Luther is always playing in constantly new variations. This is the basic thrust of Luther’s theology that must be reckoned with at the very outset.

Second, it is imperative to see the body, its creation and preservation, as part of the good will of God. Luther’s concept of creation is relational, not merely mechanical. In creation God initiates a relationship that extends to all his creation, especially to people—the crown of creation—and, for our purposes, specifically with the individual bodies of human beings. That relationship is an expression of divine, giving love. As Luther continues in his explanation of the First Article of the Creed: “And all of this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy.” The body is the locus within which spiritual life is lived. And while because of the fall into sin the body is degraded from its original perfection, Luther’s creation theology never allows it to be despised for its own sake. In his on-going creation, God works unceasingly by grace. It is creation which supplies the matrix within which the story of law and gospel is carried out.

Hearing Luther speak thus about creation, we are prepared in the next chapter to explore how Luther assessed and celebrated the body as the *creatura bona dei* and how he literally (and personally) grieved over its degradation and loss through the fall into sin.

Finally, in listening to Luther’s view of creation as his initial conversation about the body, we have not been dinned with radical speculations or formulations about creation. Luther was determined to listen to the text in accord with his developed
hermeneutic of focusing on the “plain, simple sense” of Scripture both as a means of explication and as a demonstration of his exegetical method: *Was Christum treibet.*

Others have noted that the strong Trinitarian fashion in which he viewed Genesis 1 was actually something “remarkable” in terms of the exegetical history of Genesis. Luther’s voice has been remarkable also in terms of the way we have heard him speak: direct, narrative in form, whimsical at times, certainly never shy or tentative! This aspect of Luther’s voice will only increase as we turn to what he has to say about the body—male and female—and its glories, foibles, and failings.

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84 See Mattox, *Defender,* 10. “Luther’s choice of Genesis…[reflected] the aging Reformer’s strong desire to pass on what he had learned about biblical interpretation to a new generation of pastors and theologians trained to read the text as he thought it should be read.”

CHAPTER 3
“Er schuff sie eyn menlin und frewlin” – Luther on the created body

They rightly say concerning the first chapter of Genesis that a preacher cannot exhaust its content. It is the highest section of the Old Testament.¹

Luther often expressed his profound regard for the books of the Bible in vivid terms. He referred to Galatians as “my Kathe von Bora,”² and said of Romans that it was “the daily bread of the soul.”³ The Psalms opened windows, “yes, into heaven itself;”⁴ while by their witness to Christ the prophets provided “strong comfort and comforting strength (ein starcker trost, vnd troestliche stercke).”⁵ It was a regard based on Luther’s extensive personal knowledge and experience with the Bible. By his late forties he could say without hyperbole, “Scripture is a vast forest, but there is not a tree [in it] that I have not shaken by hand.”⁶

¹ WA Tr 1:163 (Nr. 374); LW 54:59 (No. 374): “Recte dixerunt de primo capite Genesis, das man es nit konne aus predigen. Es ist das hochst stuk in vetere testamento.”
² WA Tr 1:69 (Nr. 146); LW 54:20 (No. 146): Luther is comparing his love for Galatians to the love he held for his wife, Katherina.
³ WA DB 7:4; LW 35:365.
⁴ WA 10¹:102; LW 35:255.
⁵ WA DB 11¹:3; LW 35:265.
⁶ WA Tr 1:320 (Nr. 674); LW 54:121 (No. 674): “Scriptura est ingentissima Silva, sed nulla arbor est, quam manu non pulsavi.”
It was certainly true that Luther had frequently and vigorously shaken the “tree” of the book he called “the dear Genesis.”\(^7\) In the late 1510s and early 1520s he had approached the book twice sermonically and for the last decade of his life delivered his lecture series on the entire book in his Hörsaal at the University of Wittenberg. Genesis was the protology to Luther’s theology in general; it was essential to his understanding of the body.

Because Luther preached and taught about Genesis in the late 1510s and early 1520s, and again during the period from 1535 to 1545, his work in the key “body texts” of Genesis 1 and 2 affords a unique opportunity to chart changes and development in his understanding of the body.\(^8\) This chapter will present Luther’s “early view” about the body from his *Scholia in librum Genesios* (1519-1521) and his *In Genesin Mosi librum sanctissimum Declamationes* (published in 1527), and then his “late” or “mature view” on the basis of the great Genesis lectures of 1535-1545 (*Enarrationes in Genesin*) for the sake of making just such a comparison and assessment.

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\(^7\) Luther’s sobriquet, “the dear Genesis,” was spoken on 17 November 1545, as he closed his decade-long series of lectures just a few weeks before his death on 18 February 1546. See *Genesivorlesung 1543/45*. WA 44:825; LW 8:333. “Das ist nu der liebe Genesis. Unser Herr Gott geb, das andere nach mir besser machen. Ich kan nit mehr, ich bin schwach, orate Deum pro me das er mir ein gutes, seliges stuendlin verleihe.” (“That is now the dear Genesis. May our Lord God grant that another after me do better. I cannot do more, I am weak. Pray for me to God that he will grant me a good, blessed final hour.”)

3.1 - The “Early” Luther and Genesis

The *Weimarer Ausgabe* devotes space in three of its volumes to Luther’s early work on Genesis: the *Scholia in librum Genesios* (1519-1521), the *Predigten über das erste Buch Mose* (1523-1524), and his *In Genesin Mosi librum sanctissimum Declamationes* (1527). The *Scholia* present Luther’s comments (scholia) and marginal remarks (Randbemerkungen) on Genesis 1-34 as recorded by Johannes Graumann (Poliander) on the basis of sermons delivered by Luther late in the 1510s and early 1520s. Luther’s later 1523-1524 sermon series on Genesis (*Predigten über das erste Buch Mose*) was recorded by Georg Rörer and Stephan Roth as part of the reformation project to create the *Postils*—sermon helps—of the early 1520s. Rörer’s and Roth’s notes provided the basis for the later commentary, the *Declamationes*, which was published in Wittenberg in 1527. Although scholars remain divided over the isagogics of these early Genesis interpretations by Luther, exactly when they were written and what their relationship is to one another is not essential to this inquiry. What is of importance is the

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9. The *Scholia* are in WA 9:329-415; the *Predigten* in WA 14:97-488; and the *Declamationes* in WA 24:1-710. None of the three are included in LW.


information they yield about the “young Luther’s” understanding about the created body.\(^\text{12}\)

### 3.2. - THE SCHOLIA

Taking the *Scholia* first, what can be gleaned from this resource is admittedly sparse. Luther’s notes concerning Genesis 1 and 2 cover just over 3 pages in the *Weimarer Ausgabe*.\(^\text{13}\) Luther’s focus in the prologue of Genesis (Genesis 1) was an exploration of the question of “whether God created all things at the same time or not” as was taught by “Blessed Augustine and Hilary”\(^\text{14}\)—an opinion Luther emphatically rejected on the basis of his literal-historical reading of the text and the numerical ordination of the days of the *Hexaemeron*.\(^\text{15}\) Thus he only notes in passing that “last of

\(^{12}\) For a succinct overview and discussion of the scholarly isagogical debate over the *Scholia*, etc., see Mickey L. Mattox, “*Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs*”: *Martin Luther’s Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesin*, 1535-45 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 260-262.

\(^{13}\) *Scholia in librum Genesios*. WA 9:329-332.


all, on the sixth day, man and woman were created at the same time...,”16 and makes no further comment about the creation of humanity on the basis of Genesis 1, not even concerning the pivotal issue of the image of God reported in Genesis 1:26-27.

Luther understood the biblical account of creation quite literally and consistently viewed the relationship between the prologue of Genesis (1:1-2:3) and the material of Genesis 2 as one of recapitulation and amplification: the *Scholia* establish that this was his view in 1519.17 But Luther’s notes on chapter two highlight portions of just two verses of the chapter: Genesis 2:7, “the man became a living being”; and 2:23, “This one is flesh of my flesh.” An enumeration of the “careful planning (*quanta deliberatione*)” with which God prepared paradise for humanity furnishes the explanatory material to verse 7. Concerning Adam’s declaration about Eve—*Haec est caro de carne mea*—Luther notes:

This is said by Adam: she will be called ἴσα [Isha], that is, *Vira*, by which it is understood that Adam wished to signify that the woman made from him did not differ from him. For ἴσα she certainly is, because she differs not from *Viro* and yet is not a man.18

But with this comment Luther closes out his consideration of creation in the *Scholia* and moves immediately to Genesis 3 and the fall narrative.


17 *Scholia in librum Genesios*. WA 9:331: “Principium 2° capitis brevis est recapitulation primi capitis.”

18 *Scholia in librum Genesios*. WA 9:332: “Hic quod dicitur ab Adam: haec vocabitur ἴσα, id est Vira, ita intellige, ut significare voluerit Mulierem ex se factam plane nihil ab eo differe. Est enim ἴσα tale quiddam, quod nihil differt a Viro et tamen non sit vir.”
Although the brevity of Luther’s comments in the *Scholia* do not by themselves support any wide-ranging conclusions about Luther’s view of the human body and its creation, they are sufficient to establish the general trajectory of his view from early on:

Man and woman were the crown of God’s creation *also in their physical bodies.*

Moreover, Luther plainly sees Genesis 1 and 2 as reporting the creation of humanity especially in physiological, gendered terms, that is, at creation humanity was embodied in the perfect male and perfect female bodies of Adam and Eve. The important implication is that the human body is integral to the human person and has a created dignity no less than the soul. This differs from the exposition of those exegetes—such as Augustine—who viewed the creation narrative (especially Genesis 1:26-27) as primarily a description of created human interiority, that is, the creation of the “higher” (male) and “lower” (female) powers of the soul.\(^\text{19}\) Actually, Luther’s emphasis on the physical body has more in common with Aquinas’s than Augustine’s view of Genesis.\(^\text{20}\) Luther’s intrigue with the interplay between the Hebrew words for “man” (יָשָׁה, *ish*) and “woman” (יָשָׁה, *isha*) in Genesis 2:23—itself a recapitulation of a viewpoint held by earlier exegetes—further corroborates the point.\(^\text{21}\) Luther adds a feminine ending to the Latin masculine noun *vir* to represent what he understood in the Hebrew. The woman is created as man’s counterpart

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\(^{20}\) In the *ST*’s “Treatise on Man,” Thomas discusses the creation narrative of the human body as a historical event in contrast to Augustine’s view of the Genesis account as descriptive of the relative powers of the soul in male/female terms. See *ST* I, Q91, Art. 4, “Whether the Production of the Human Body Is Fittingly Described in Scripture?”

\(^{21}\) Mattox, *Defender*, 91.
also physically: she is *vira*, but yet “not a *vir.*” He would expand on this when he returned to “shake the tree” of Genesis in the future.

### 3.3 - The *Declamationes of 1527*

Intervening between the early *Scholia* and the later sermons that eventually produced the 1527 *Declamationes* were the tumults of Luther’s excommunication under the papal bull *Exsurge domine* (June 1520) and his defiant stand at the Diet of Worms ten months later (April 1521). The events at Worms led to Luther’s protective exile at the Wartburg Castle from May 1521 until March 1522 when he returned to Wittenberg despite the emperor’s edict declaring him outlaw.22

The immediate catalyst for Luther’s return was the chaos at St. Mary’s Church, the city church in Wittenberg—chaos precipitated by the iconoclastic reforms instituted by his university colleague Karlstadt and the agitations of the “Zwickau prophets.”23 Luther’s answer to the disorder was to leave the shelter of the Wartburg and reclaim his pulpit where he preached his “Eight Wittenberg Sermons” during the week of Invocabit.

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22 The imperial edict—“Edict of Worms”—was issued after the close of the imperial diet on 25 May 1521. Luther had departed from Worms on 2 May and was “kidnapped” and taken to the Wartburg on the night of 4 May in anticipation of his condemnation by the emperor. The edict upheld the papal bull *Exsurge domine* and accused Luther of “innumerable evils assembled in one stinking pool” so that he was to be considered an “obstinate schismatic and manifest heretic” and therefore outside (outlaw) of the protection of imperial law. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483 – 1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 474. For the text of the Edict of Worms, see http://www.crivoice.org/creededictworms.html., ed and trans. Dennis Bratcher, copyright © CRI/Voice, Institute.

23 For an account of the situation in Wittenberg and Luther’s return see Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 25-45; 57-66.
1522. These sermons soothed the fevered parish, but they also convinced Luther of the need to resume what the Diet of Worms had interrupted: the sermonic exposition of key books in Scripture for the sake of edifying Hans and Greta in the pew. Luther’s goal in preaching on Genesis was to lead his hearers to see the unity of the Scriptures in Christ, as he made clear in a sermon introducing the series in March 1523: “…Scripture coheres everywhere with itself, and…all examples and stories, indeed, the entire Scripture through and through directs itself [so] that one knows Christ…” But Genesis per se also greatly attracted Luther. The creation story with its prologue gave the book an exalted beginning (der anfang dis buchs...ist warlich hoch angefangen) and provided the protology of the history of the gospel and of Christ. Moreover, the narrative character of the book acted like a tonic on Luther’s own storytelling and linguistic gifts. Bornkamm assesses the purpose and place of the 1523-1524 Genesis sermons in Luther’s preaching program in this way:

24 9 March 1522-16 March 1522. These sermons are contained in WA 10III:1-64; LW 51:69-100.

25 Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 57-58; Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 229.

26 Ein Sermon und Eingang in das erste Buch Mosi (15 March 1523). WA 12:438a: “…damit ein yglicher Christ sehe, wie die geschrift allenthalben uberein stimpt, und wie alle exempel und Historien, ya die gantz geschrifft durch unnd durch sych lenden dahyn, das man Christum erkenn…” Cited in Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 236.

27 In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:24: “The start of this book…is truly begun loftily.”

28 For a discussion of Luther’s expository work in Genesis as illustrated in the great Genesis lectures of 1535-1545, see Mattox, Defender, 14-18. See also the analysis in John A. Maxfield, Luther’s Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), ch. 2.
[Luther’s] intention was twofold as he combined a homiletical-devotional approach with a popular hermeneutical goal. Besides, as if to make up for his absence, he offered two series of sermons simultaneously, one from the Old Testament (Genesis), the other from the New (Matthew). Both themes [the homiletical and the hermeneutical] return with this fresh resumption of his preaching, if not simultaneously, then at least sequentially, and are repetitive at times in order to make their interconnection plain.²⁹

Flowing from these 1523-1524 Genesis sermons, the *Declamationes* (unlike the *Scholia*) covered the entire book, and being founded as it was on expository preaching, engage the reader by its conversational manner.

### 3.3.1 – GOD MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE…

Unlike the *Scholia*, Luther’s exposition in the *Declamationes* of the sixth day when God “*schuff sie ein menlin und frewlin*” (Gen. 1:27) dwells on the matter of the special creation of human beings in the image of God. Luther notes that “Moses writes here with few words about [the image] (*Denn Moses schreibt hie mit wenig worten davon*)”; few because “…he [Moses] will expound it later in the second chapter (*wird es aber hernach verkleren ym andern Capitel*).”³⁰ Luther is careful to point out how the narrative differentiates mankind from the rest of what God made on the basis of God’s interior discussion recorded in Genesis 1:26—“*Let us make man… (Last uns menschen machen…)*”—and his resolve to make human beings with the concomitant blessing of bearing his image. In addition, the narrative testifies to the Trinity against the “Jews

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²⁹ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 229-230.

Concerning the pivotal issue of the image of God, Luther argues that the *imago Dei* is not “as our teachers old and new” have described it: a threefold likeness of the soul consisting in “memory, reason, and will (*gedechtnis, verstand, und wille*)” and corresponding to the three Persons of the Trinity—a conceptualization “from which so many questions have come.” Rather, following St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:48 and Ephesians 4:22-24 where he contrasts the “heavenly man” (Christ) against the earthly man (Adam), Luther posits that the image of God consisted in that man was made in the beginning to be a likeness that was similar to God, full of wisdom, virtue, and love, etc. …This uprightness was naturally both of body and soul, and had Adam remained in it, he would have begotten also children in whom there would have been no evil desires, but they would each have been friendly and helpful, as God is. Thus would we all have been like God, had we maintained original righteousness…

Maintaining a sense of proportion vis-à-vis Moses’ brevity about the image of God, Luther does not expand further on the matter in connection with Genesis 1:27, but proceeds to God’s empowering blessing spoken in verse 28: “Be fruitful and increase and...

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31 *In Genesin Declamationes*. WA 24:49: “Denn das wortlin ‘Uns’ zeygt an, das der da redet nicht allein sey, Wiewol die Jueden den Text verspotten damit, das also ein weyse sey zu redden, auch wo nicht mehr denn eine person ist, Die lassen wir faren, das wort wird fuer yhn wol bleiben.” (“For the little word ‘us’ indicates that the one speaking is not alone, although the Jews mock the text thereby [saying] that it is also a manner of speaking where there is no more than one person. We will let it go; the word will remain true for Him.”)

32 *In Genesin Declamationes*. WA 24:49-51: “…der mensch am anfang geschaffenen ist ein bilde, das Gott enhlich war, vol weisheit, tugend und liebe &c. …Diese auffrichtickeit war naturlich an *leib* und seel, und wo Adam darynne blieben were, hett er auch solche kinder gezeugt, ynn wilchen kein boese lust gewesen were, sondern weren yederman freundlich und dienstlich gewesen, wie denn Gott ist, Also weren wir alle Gott enhlich gewesen, Das hette man denn geheissen ein erbgerechtickeit…” (emphasis added).
fill the earth and subdue it under you and rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds beneath heaven and over all beasts that move on the earth.”

Luther assessed this blessing as revealing an essential aspect of human bodily existence, namely, that man and woman were given their physical bodies under the blessing of the image of God to fulfill this creative, blessing word via procreation. Moreover, Luther’s understanding of the relationship of Genesis 2 to Genesis 1 as recapitulation led him to see the estate of marriage established in 2:23-24 as the focus by prolepsis. This linkage brings to the fore the voice of Luther-the-reformer as he announces about the present text: “Here now is much said about the estate of marriage, and much good at that, which one who is involved in it ought to receive well. Therefore, we will say something about it…”

Luther’s exegesis and application of the blessing text of Genesis 1:27 must be viewed against the backdrop of the continuing “tense and polemical situation” of the first half of the 1520s with monastic vows, the vows of the regular clergy, and marriage at its center. Already in his 1520 treatise, To the Christian Nobility, Luther had critiqued

33 In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:51: “Und Gott segnet sie und sprach zu yhn: Seyt fruchtbar und mehret euch und erfuelt die erden und bringt sie unter euch und hirschet uber fisch ym Meer und uber voegel unter dem hymel und uber alle thier, das auff erden kreucht.”

34 In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:52: “Hie were nu wol viel vom Ehelichen stand zu reden, und were wol gut, das einer wol erfaren were, der davon handlen solt, Doch woellen wir etwas davon sagen…” Celibacy and marriage became major issues for Luther’s attention in the 1520s; chapter 4 examines this issue as its special focus.

35 Mattox, Defender, 52. Among the other tumults and events of 1523-1524 were the burning of the first Reformation martyrs in Brussels (July 1523), the election of Clement VII to replace Adrian VI as pope (September 1523), and the publication of Erasmus’ treatise against Luther, De libero arbitrio (September 1524).
celibacy, and while still sequestered at the Wartburg had written the sharp treatise, *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows.* As a result, several priests in and around Wittenberg took wives and the Augustinian house in Wittenberg dissolved. Somewhat contradictorily, Luther himself resumed wearing the Augustinian habit when he returned to Wittenberg while also keeping up the attack. Writing to the Strasbourough reformer Martin Bucer, he said, “I can scarcely keep up with all the letters: so many things and cases have fallen on my neck, especially about marriage and the priesthood.”

Thus, as Luther’s 1523-1524 Genesis sermons were fashioned into the Declamations of 1527, they reflected the fact that Luther had been in controversialist mode in the pulpit and used the Genesis text of the blessing of Adam and Eve to deliver *ein donnerschlag widder des Bapsts gesetz* regarding celibacy. Indeed, the German version of the Declamations at this point fairly crackles as Luther delivers a philippic denouncing priestly and monastic celibacy as being contrary to the creative word of God.

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37 *De votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium* (1522); WA 8:573-669; LW 44:251-400. Although Luther wrote the treatise in November 1521, Georg Spalatin, the secretary to Luther’s prince, Elector Frederick, withheld it from the printer for fear of its “explosive” content. The treatise was finally printed the following February. Interestingly, Luther dedicated it to his father, Hans, who had long desired his son to marry. See LW 44:245-249; Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 23.


that made man and woman *in their bodies* for marital fruitfulness. For Luther, to be a man or woman meant to embrace this creative blessing in faith.

So we conclude: just as other works of God are not subject to human control, so also it is not under human control for one to determine to be male or female. The sun cannot say, “I want to be the moon”; likewise the moon cannot bring it about to be the sun, but must remain what God made it to be. Just so a man must remain as he is; he cannot be a woman. And by the same token, a woman must remain a woman just as she was made; it is not within her power to change.

Moreover, God said to human beings when he created them, “Be fruitful and increase.” This utterance is a thunderbolt against the pope’s law and grants to all priests, monks, and nuns leave to marry. For just as the sun shines and cannot stop itself from doing so on its own (for thus has this function been planted in its nature by God’s word and command), *so also is it planted in human nature to be fruitful, that is, to be a man or a woman.*

This application of Genesis to the matter of celibacy thus reveals an important emphasis in Luther’s thought regarding the body in the *Declamationes*. The human body, both male and female, was created by God and is, in accord with his on-going creative command to be “fruitful and increase and fill the earth,” God’s created means by which man and woman *qua* man and woman were to “thank and praise, serve and obey” him through procreation. Luther maintains that all this is apprehended by faith through insight given by the Holy Spirit:

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41 *In Genesin Declamationes.* WA 24:52-53: “Daher schliessen wir: wie andere Gottes werck nicht ynn menschen krafft stehet, also auch nicht, das ein mensch man oadder weyb sey. Die Sonn kan nicht sagen: ich wil Mond sein, widderuemb der Mond kan nicht machen, das er die Sonne sey, sondern ein yglichs mus also bleiben, wie es von Gott geschaffen ist, Also mus auch ein man bleiben das er ist, und kan nicht ein weib sein, widderuemb mus das weib ein weib bleiben, wie es gemacht ist, und stehet auch nicht ynn yhrer gewalt solchs zu wandlen. Auffs ander hat Gott zum menschen gesagt, als er geschaffen war ‘Seyt fruchtbar und mehret euch.’ Dieser spruch ist ein donnerschlag widder des Bapsts gesetz und gibt urlaub allen Pfaffen, Muenchen und Nonnen ehelich zu werden, Denn wie die Sonne leuchten mus und sich nicht enthalten kan, (denn es also eingepflantzet ist ynn yhr natur durch Gottes wort und gepot), *Also ists auch ynn des menschen natur eingepflantzt, das er mus fruchtbar sein, es sey menlin oadder frewlin*” (emphasis added).
We conclude from this furthermore that it is not possible to perceive what a man or a woman is other than in connection with faith. For God’s word and work are described here, but no one can understand either his word or work but by faith and the Spirit. Yes, it happens that one has evil desires for a man or woman, but that does not mean one perceives what a man or woman is, for whoever recognizes what a woman is must also be able to understand her as God’s work, which only faith does, for reason is incapable of it. Reason is blind and thinks nothing more than “if only I had this one or that one,” and does not see that she is God’s work or creation. Rather, reason only leads one to romp about in one’s desires; it raises its eyes never so high that it recognizes God in his works. Thus it follows that reason despises the estate of marriage, for it finds nothing therein and sees misery and ill-fortune...  

3.3.2 – MAN BECAME A “LIVING SOUL”

The next major “body text” Luther addresses occurs at Genesis 2:7 where, in Luther’s understanding, Moses returns to the sixth day of creation week to speak further about the making of humanity:

“And God the LORD made the man from the dust of the earth.” I have said above ([Moses] wants to say) that God made a man and a woman; now I want to tell how it happened.  

42 In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:55-56: “Weiter schliessen wir auch hieraus, das nicht mueglich ist zu erkennen was ein weib oder man sey, denn ynn dem glauben. Denn Gottes wort und werck sind hie beschrieben, Aber es kan widder wort noch werck niemands verstehen denn durch den glauben und geist. Das geschicht wol, das man boese lust zu einem man adder weib habe, aber das heisset nicht man odder weib erkennen, Denn wer da sol wissen, was ein weib sey, der mus also geschickt sein, das er sie halt fuer Gottes werck, wilchs allein der glaube thut, denn vernunfft vermag es nicht, sie ist zu blind, denckt nicht mehr denn “hette ich nur diesen odder diese,” sihet nicht, ob es Gottes werck odder Creatur sey, sondern feret nur ynn yhrer tollen lust hyn, hebet die augen nymer so hoch, das sie Gott erkenne ynn seinen wercken. Daher koempts, das sie den ehelichen stand veracht, denn sie nichts darynne findet und sihet denn jamer und unglueck…” (emphasis added).

Luther pauses briefly to discuss the nature of the *staub*, or “dust,” from which man was formed but focuses mainly on the meaning of 2:7b, “And so the man was a living soul (Und also war der mensch ein lebendige seele).” To the question of what is meant by the term “living soul,” Luther answers by distinguishing between the soul as it was generally understood in western Christianity as spiritual life and its meaning in the Old Testament. In Old Testament usage “soul” is “everything which lives in the five senses (Moses und die schrift heissen das seeel: alles was da lebet ynn den funff synnen).” Thus, the Scriptures also call a fish that lives in water a “soul” (Gen. 1:20) as it says in chapter one above: “Let the water bring forth living creatures (animam viventem)” (which I have translated as lebendige thier). Likewise the birds of the air and the beasts which live on the earth are named the same way—as “bodies which live” or “living bodies.”

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44 *In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:66:* “‘De limo terre’ haben wir ym lateinischen Text, das ist: von schlam, heisset auff Ebreisch ‘Aphare’ und ist eben das wort, das er hernach verdolmetscht ‘pulvis’, da er sagt ‘Pulvis es et in pulverem reverti’. Es heisset aber eygentlich eine solche erde, die auff gegraben ist und ein wenig auff geworffen wie ein land das gepfluegt ist oder von einem grabe, aber noch nicht staub, wilcher ynn die luft fleuget. Von solcher loser erde hat er genommen ein schrollen und den menschen davon gemacht.” (“‘De limo terre’ the Latin text has, that is, from mud (schlam), which in Hebrew is ‘אפר’ and is precisely the word that he later uses for ‘dust’ (pulvis), when he says ‘Dust you are and to dust you will return.’ But it denotes actually that kind of earth that is dug up and piled up as when land is plowed, or a grave is dug, but not dust such as flies through the air. He took a clod from such loose earth and made a man from it.”)

45 *In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:67:* “Das wort ‘seele’ muessen wir auch lernen recht verstehen. Das heissen wir ynn unser sprache eine seele, die so bald der mensch stirbet vom leibe feret. Aber Moses und die schrift heissen das seeel: alles was da lebet ynn den funff synnen. Als das heist sie auch seele, das ein fisch ym wasser lebt, wie ers oben ym ersten Capitel genennet hat: Producent aque animam viventem. Und ich gedeudscht habe ‘lebendige their,’ Item als die vogel ynn der luft und die thier auff erden leben, das es auffs eygentlichst heisset ein leibs leben oder ein lebendiger leib. Also das der spruch eygentlich auff den verstand gehe, das der mensch geschaffen ist ynn das leibliche leben, das wir heissen das naturliche leben.” (“We must also learn to understand the word ‘seele’ correctly. In our language we mean by ‘soul’ that which soon separates from the body when a person dies. But Moses and the Scriptures mean by ‘soul’ everything which lives in the five senses. The Scriptures also call a fish that lives in water...
The phrase *lebendige seele* is thus equivalent to that which is called “the natural life (*das natuerliche leben*).”

This is also St. Paul’s meaning when he uses the term in 1 Corinthians 15:45, notes Luther.⁴⁶ There the apostle, quoting the Septuagint’s translation of Genesis 2:7, employs the terminology ψυχὴν ζωσαν (lit.: “living soul”) to contrast Adam in his “natural life” with Christ, the “Last Adam” who is a “life-giving spirit” (πνευμά ζωοποιουν). On the basis of Paul’s comparison, Luther concludes:

Paul’s phrase, “The first man was made a natural being” must be understood the same way [that is, as the “natural life”]. For he sets “living” and “spiritual” being against one another. The living being is this: a man hears and sees, smells, grasps, tastes, digests, ingests and excretes, propagates children, and does whatever else the body does as a natural being and function. That is what the Hebrew language calls “seele.” So we read in Exodus: “All the souls that were descended from Jacob were 70,” that is, 70 children which were born to him. That is almost always the meaning throughout Scripture.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 15:45: “οὐτος καὶ γέγραπται·ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζωσαν, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιουν.” (“So, too, it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being,’ the last Adam a life-giving spirit”) NAB. See chapter 5 below, pages 237-238.

⁴⁷ *In Genesin Declamationes.* WA 24:67: “Also verstehe den spruch Pauli ‘Der erste mensch ist gemacht yns natuerliche leben,’ Denn daselbs setzt er gegen einander ein leiblich und geistlich leben. Das leibliche leben ist:das man hoeret und sihet, reucht, greifft, schmeckt, dawet, zu sich nimpt und auswirfft, kinder zeuget und was der leib fuer natuerlich wesen und werck hat. Das heist die Hebreische sprache ‘seele.’ Also lesen wir ym andern buch Mose ‘Aller seelen die aus den lenden Jacob komen waren, der waren siebenzig,’ das ist:siebenzig kinder, die von yhm geboren waren, Das ist nu fast gemeyn ynn der schriftt durch und durch.”
Luther thus wants to distinguish between *bodily* life, such as was given Adam (and which is transmitted by propagation to humanity) and the *spiritual* life revealed in Christ (to which the faithful will ascend). Genesis 2:7b, in other words, does not describe the spiritual life of Adam by calling him a “living soul,” but only his natural, bodily life.

Therefore, one cannot translate the word “soul” better than “the bodily life” or “a human being, who lives in a bodily life.” Thus Adam is made in a natural life, but Christ, who is the “last Adam,” says Paul, lives “in the spiritual life,” that is, has a spiritual body so that he no longer eats or drinks, sees or hears like us, does no bodily thing or work, but is a quite different being and, indeed, a truer man, as we will be in that life.⁴⁸

In regard to this exegesis and the matter of Adam’s “natural life,” as the *Declamationes* are to the *Scholia* in terms of their development of thought, so the *Enarrationes* of 1535-1545 turn out to be in relation to the *Declamationes*: Luther’s thinking was not completely settled in 1527—as a result, he would return to shake this branch of the Genesis tree even more vigorously and expand his comments. In the meantime, Luther revisited the Genesis 2 account of the creation of Eve in the *Declamationes*, enlarging on what he noted briefly in the *Scholia*.

**3.3.3 – GENESIS 2: ENTER EVE**

¹⁸The Lord God also said: It is not good that man is alone; I shall make him a help which should be before him.

⁴⁸*In Genesin Declamationes*. WA 24:68: “Darumb kan man das wort ‘seele’ nicht besser deudschen denn ‘das leibliche leben’ odder ‘ein menschen, der da lebet ym leiblichen leben.’ Also ist Adam yns natuerliche leben gemacht, Christus aber, der ‘der letzte Adam ist,’ spricht Paulus, ‘yns geistliche leben,’ das ist: er hat ein geistlichen leib, also das er nicht mehr isset noch trincket, sihet noch hoeret wie wir, thut kein leiblich ding noch werck, sondern ist gar ein ander wesen und doch warer mensch, wie wir auch ynn jhenem leben sein werden.”
When the Lord God had formed from the ground all the animals of the earth, He brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. For everything that Adam called a living being, that was its name. And Adam called all the animals by their names, and all the birds of the heaven and all the beasts of the land. But for Adam was not found a help that might be about him. Then the Lord God sent a deep sleep upon Adam, and when he had fallen asleep, He took one of his ribs and closed the place with flesh. And the Lord God built the rib which He had taken from Adam into a woman, and He brought her to Adam. And Adam said: This, then, is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She will be called Woman because she has been taken from man. Therefore a man will leave father and mother and will cling to his wife. But both were naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:18-25 is the last and most extensive “body text” of the opening two chapters of Genesis. In looking at Luther’s comments on this text it is important at the outset to reaffirm the area of investigation under examination regarding the creation of woman in the Declamationes, for as Luther speaks more fully of the creation of Eve, the larger, more complex matter of “Luther’s View of Women” starts to clamor for attention. As sixteenth-century scholars Susan Karant-Nunn and Merry Wiesner-Hanks note, it is a subject in need of more thorough examination because “there continues to be relatively little scholarship on Luther’s ideas about women.” Nonetheless, while not ignoring the important implications that Luther’s view of the created female body has for his general understanding of women, this present study needs to remain focused on the more narrow

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49 Genesis 2:18-25 according to the Vulgate text contained in WA 42.

50 Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Luther on Women: A Sourcebook (Cambridge University Press, 2003). 2. Karant-Nunn’s and Wiesner-Hanks’ aptly named Sourcebook presents a useful introduction and overview to the “present” (2003) state of Luther studies vis-à-vis women. As feminist historians, the authors are forthright in disclosing their understandings and approach to Luther, and offer a valuable assessment of strengths and weaknesses in current Luther scholarship on their subject. The various chapters offer pertinent excerpts from Luther’s writings, letters, and the Tischreden grouped topically together with context-setting introductions.
issue of the physical body of women (and men) in Luther’s theology, particularly as he discusses the body in his exegetical writings.

In that regard Luther begins his comments on Genesis 2:18-25 by noting the immediate action in the text, *viz.*, that among all the creatures God had made “Adam found no helper for him[SELF] (*fand [Adam] keinen gehuelffen umb yhn*).” In keeping with his understanding of the theological nexus between the body and God’s creative promise “to be fruitful and increase” (Gen. 2:23-24), Luther understands the nature of this “helper (*adiutorium/gehuelffen*)” as being specifically tied to the matter of generational fruitfulness: “Our text reads [in Latin]: *Adiutorium simile ei*—‘a helper like him’—but it should rather be *Coram eo*, that is, a helper *for the sake of generation.*”\(^51\) Thus, despite the words of Genesis 2:19b regarding God’s purpose—at least in part—in bringing the animals before Adam for him to name, Luther parses the action of the text as being solely for the sake of establishing Adam’s need for *seine Sie*, “his ‘her’.” He comments:

Adam recognized that this one [the woman] was his image and like him, for before there had been no animal that adhered to him as though it desired *to help him to give birth* in accord with the word of God, “Be fruitful and increase.” Thus God has implanted this in human beings, that there must be a man and a woman, and neither without the other can bring forth fruit. And it was decided that the woman had been created for this purpose, that she be a helper for the man, not for the sake of lust or knavery (*bueberey*), but so that the word [of God] goes forward.\(^52\)


\(^{52}\) *In Genesin Declamationes*. WA 24:78-79. “Adam erkand, das dis sein bilde yhm gleich were, denn zuvor war kein thier da, das sich gegen yhm stellet, *als woelt es yhm helffen zur gepurt* nach dem wort Gottes ‘Seyt fruchtbar und mehret euch.’ Das hat nu Gott also gepflantzet, das der mensch mus ein man und weib sein und keines on das ander frucht zeugen kan, Und ist beschlossen, das das weib daraumb geschaffen ist, das es des menschen gehuelffe sey, nicht zur lust noch bueberey, sondern das der spruch fort gehe” (emphasis added).
Two things in particular invite brief comment concerning Luther’s view that woman’s created purpose is “to help [man] to give birth” via her body. First, there is Luther’s purely male perspective and emphasis in this arresting statement. Luther is, of course, not asserting some physiological impossibility about men, but is noting the “headship” of the male even over this quintessential female ability. This is both consonant and consistent with his traditional and medieval understanding of the relationship of the sexes. As he expresses his understanding of woman physiologically, it is wrapped up in the “need” man has for woman in order for him to fulfill God’s will under Genesis 1:28. The Latin version of the Declamationes bluntly states:

Woman was created to be a helper for the man, not for pleasure, but that the statement “Increase and multiply” might be fulfilled. Therefore they were created for this in order to be fruitful. And this again condemns papistical celibacy, for this word works in us potently. Only God is able to change us, we are his creation: to whom he gives that great and rare gift of chastity, they alone are able to live chastely. To the rest the blessing of the Lord and the work of God cannot be denied, and this word “increase” cannot be removed; it must be observed with the greatest diligence.


In Genesin Declamationes, WA 24:78-79a: “Mulier creata est, ut sit adiutorium viro non ad voluptatem, sed ut impleatur dictum ‘Crescite et multiplycamini’: ad hoc ergo creati sunt, ut fructificant. Atque hic rursus damnatur coelibatus Papisticus, verbum enim hoc operatur in nobis potenter. Solus Deus nos mutare potest, huius sumus figmentum:quibus ille donat magnum hoc et rarum castitatis donum, ii solum caste vivere possunt. In reliquis benedictio Domini et opus Dei arceri non potest, et non est sublatum hoc verbum ‘crescite,’ id quod diligentissime est notandum” (emphasis added).
Secondly, however, the *Declamationes* also reveal Luther’s culturally-induced conventionalism as far as his understanding of the biology of human conception and gestation are concerned.\(^{55}\) In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, in connection with the on-going *querelle des femmes* that ranged across theological and incipient scientific lines concerning the nature and place of women, one of the biological questions under discussion was the contribution of women to conception.\(^{56}\) Did a mother also contribute “seed” as the father did? The common medieval view of the female reproductive system held that the woman was physiologically an “imperfect male” whose reproductive organs were a male’s turned inside out.\(^{57}\) Thus, according to two fourteenth- 

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\(^{55}\) It should be noted that Luther’s “culturally-induced conventionalism” with respect to the biology of conception and gestation was not intractable. By the 1530s the University of Wittenberg—which owed its creation in large part to Martin Pollich von Mellerstadt [*ca.* 1450-1513], a medical scholar—was developing into a center of new thinking and study about human anatomy under the direction of Luther’s colleague, the “theologian, educator, and universal scholar” Phillip Melanchthon, with Luther’s enthusiastic support. In particular, Melanchthon introduced into the arts curriculum the new anatomical work of Andreas Vesalius [1514-1564]. Vesalius was a Belgian anatomist and physician whose dissections of the human body and descriptions of his findings were helping to correct misconceptions prevailing since ancient times. Luther’s interest in medical science is further reflected in the encouragement he gave his son, Paul [1533-1593], to become a medical doctor. See Vivian Nutton, “Wittenberg Anatomy,” *Medicine and the Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 11-32; see also Carter Lindberg, “The Lutheran Tradition” in *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in the Western Religious Traditions*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Darrel W. Amundsen, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 173-203.

\(^{56}\) See the chapter “Ideas and Laws Regarding Women” in Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3d ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17-51, for an overview of the *querelle des femmes* including the question of conception.

\(^{57}\) See Thomas Laqueur, “Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology,” *Representations* 14 (Spring 1986): 1-41, for an overview of ancient and medieval homologous thinking concerning male and female anatomy: “For several thousand years it had been a commonplace that women have the same genitals as men,
century surgeons, “The apparatus of generation in women is like the apparatus of
generation in men, except that it is reversed”; and, “the womb is like a penis reversed or
put inside.” Or as another surgeon, Ambrose Paré [1510-1590], conjectured, “Women
could turn into men if, owing to an accident, their internal organs were suddenly pushed
outward.”58 Thus, in medieval thinking, women were imperfect versions of men. Indeed,
the two dominant voices about human generation in medieval thinking, Aristotle and
Galen,59 both taught that women were less fully developed than males due to a “lack of
heat” during their generation with the result that “…[a woman’s] sexual organs have
remained internal; she is incomplete, colder and moister in dominant humours, and
unable to ‘concoct’ perfect semen from blood.”60 So, to the question of “female seed”:
although Galen dissented from Aristotle’s view of the nature and extent of the material
contribution of a woman’s “seed” to the conception of her fetus, the doctor from
Pergamum agreed heartily with the philosopher from Stageira on the overall inferiority of

except that, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa in the sixth century, put it, ‘Theirs are inside
the body and not outside it.’ Galen…developed the most powerful and resilient model of
the homologous nature of male and female reproductive organs…” (2). As preposterous
as the notion may sound to modern ears, the medieval opinion that a woman’s ovaries
were (defective) testes was theologically attractive on the basis of Adam’s statement that
the woman was “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Taken as she was
from Adam, the medievals believed that the woman’s physiology must therefore
(imperfectly) mirror his. See also Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A
Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life
(Cambridge University Press, 1980), 35.

58 Quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on

59 Respectively in De generatione animalium, II, and De usu partium corporis,
XIV.

60 Reported in Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman, 31.
“female seed” compared to the male’s.\textsuperscript{61} This notion of male hegemony in all things seminal—ingrained as it was in the “science” of the day—was not questioned by Luther, but extolled as a marvel of God’s creation. It appears embedded in the Declamationes in the passivity of the “helper” in facilitating obedience to God’s command to increase, but the later Enarrationes celebrates it explicitly:

We hear that God took a clod and made a man; we regard this with wonder, and we are led on account of this wonder to think it to be a myth. However, that today he takes a drop from the blood of the father and creates a person, this we do not wonder at, because this happens daily, the former was done once, although both of these happen by the same skill, the same power, by the very same author.\textsuperscript{62}

Luther also stipulates that woman’s purpose as “helper” in her body “to help him give birth” is emphasized by the verb used to describe her specific creation. She is not formed like Adam from the earth, or molded or spoken into existence. Rather, “notice that, as God makes the woman from the rib of the man, the Text even uses the word ‘build’ (\textit{bawen}). He \textit{builds} a woman, just as though she should be a \textit{house}, something we will hear about later.”\textsuperscript{63} In accord with common medieval thinking, Luther thought that a woman was a passive recipient in the biology of sex who served—in house-like fashion—as an incubative shelter for the male’s “seed.”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 37.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Genesisvorlesung 1535/38. WA 42:95; LW 1:127: “Audimus Deum apprehendisse glebam et fecisse hominem, hoc admiramur, et prae admiratione ducimus esse fabulosum. Quod autem \textit{apprehendit adhuc hodie guttam de sanguine patris et creat hominem}, hoc non admiramur, quia hoc quotidie fit, illud semel factum est, cum tamen utrunque eadem arte et eadem potentia fiat, ab eodem autore” (emphasis added).
\item \textsuperscript{63} In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:78: “Und mercke, das, als Gott das weib aus der riebe des mans machet, brauchet der Text eben das wort ‘bawen.’ Er \textit{bawet} ein weib, gerade als solte es ein \textit{haus} werden, darvon wir hernach hoeren werden (emphasis added).”
\end{itemize}
Luther revisits the matter of the naming of woman noted in the *Scholia* as part of his discussion of the relationship of man and woman. As he did previously, the significance of the name given to the woman is vested in the physical creation of her body that was “taken from a man.” Luther repeats the information in the *Scholia* regarding the interplay of the Hebrew words *ish* and *isha*, but notes:

In Hebrew the word is actually *Ish*: a man among (*unter*) men, for it is *sochar* [*?[", male*] among the other animals. So he names her now from his name “*Isha,*” so that she has her name from and for him, as it has remained to the present, that one names the woman after the man. …So she must have her name from him, that he gives it to her and holds authority.64

With respect to the statement in the text about the “oneness of flesh” (1:24) created in marriage, Luther’s understanding does not limit *fleisch/caro* to mean “that [husband and wife] only physically become one (*Diese wort sind nicht also zuverstehen, das sie allein leiblich ein fleisch und blut sein*...).” Rather,

[these words] pertain to everything that belongs to the outward physical life. So the word calls *fleisch* everything that belongs to the flesh that one has to have: servants, children, money, fields, meadow, property, honor or poverty, shame, illness and health, and so forth—whatever may befall the flesh. Thus *fleisch* means an outward life in the flesh. So it should now be that everything belongs to both of them alike and that they accept everything alike, and that each one brings to the other body, goods, honor, shame, poverty, illness, and whatever else there is. That is, [it should be] such a life that transpires in the flesh that in fleshly existence and everything that pertains to it everything should be shared, except that the husband should exercise authority and she should have his name…65

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65 *In Genesin Declamationes.* WA 24:80: “…sondern von allem was gehoeret zum eusserlichen leiblichen leben, So heist die schrifft ‘fleisch’ alles was zum fleisch gehoeret, das man mus haben, hausgesinde, kinder, gelt, ecker, wiesen, gut, ehre odder armut, schande, kranckheit und gesundheit und so fort an, was dem fleisch mag zufallen.
3.3.4 – SUMMA SUMMARUM

What picture of the human body emerges from the *In Genesin Declamationes*?

The title of the “commentary” may provide a useful caveat to begin with. A *declamatio* was a public oration, an exercise in public speaking. Luther’s “Genesis Speeches” were not the same as the 1523-1524 *sermons* that formed their basis, but as “speeches” they did share in the limited, demarcated scope of the sermons. In other words, the *Declamationes*, while certainly more extensive than the notes and marginalia of the earlier *Scholia*, were not truly a “commentary” in the classical sense of the word.\(^66\) They represented, rather, Luther’s limited exposition of the Genesis text with the specific purpose of proclaiming the word for the edification and instruction of his hearer/reader. Luther was not trying to be exhaustive in his comments but focused,\(^67\) so that the hearer

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\(^66\) While the English cognates satisfactorily distinguish a *declamatio* from a *commentarius*, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1982) defines a *commentarius* (3d entry) as “a treatise, textbook; an expository treatise, commentary.”

\(^67\) D. G. Buchwald’s table charting the progression of Luther’s 1523-1524 sermon series—the series recorded by Stephan Roth and Georg Rörer and reproduced in WA 14:92-488—physically demonstrates the limited scope of Luther’s comments. Luther preached just three sermons—22, 29 March and 12 April 1523—on Genesis 1 and only two sermons—19, 26 April 1523—on Genesis 2. The *Declamationes* expands this material from approximately 15 full pages in WA 14 to approximately 45 pages in WA 24, a significant addition, but one more than doubled (105 pages) by the later *Enarrationes*. See WA 14:95-96.
might see Christ most of all. By their very nature, one would not expect a comprehensive theological commentary involving the body to emerge from this one work.

However, from his selective comments on the “body texts” of Genesis 1-2, it can be said that Luther plainly continued to see the body as God’s special creation and the climax of the *Hexaemeron*, but he also distinguished the human body from other animal life not on a biological level, but by means of the *imago Dei* given to man and woman alone among creatures. Luther certainly saw the body as integral with the soul in forming the whole human person, but, in keeping with his theology of creation, he emphasized its importance in connection with God’s creative will and blessing as the means by which man and woman were to fulfill that will and receive that blessing through procreation. Along these same lines, the body was the locus of man and woman’s “natural life,” the means by which humanity’s stewardship of the earth was to be carried out. At the same time Luther excluded the body even in its state of created perfection from being the created seat of “spiritual life.”

Luther’s understanding of woman as the equal of man in dignity and honor was predicated on her full possession of the image of God, but he maintained the view that in her body, she was like the moon to the male sun. Her body was given to her to play the

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68 See note 24 above.

69 Luther used the relationship of the sun and moon in various contexts (see note 39 above). He applied it explicitly in the woman/moon, man/sun form in this statement from the later *Enarrationes*, WA 42:51-52; LW 1:69: “Ac quamvis Heva fuerit praestantissima creatura, similis Adae, quod ad imaginem Dei attinet, hoc est, ad iusticiam, sapientiam et salutem, tamen fuit mulier. Sicut enim sol praestantior est luna (quanquam luna quoque sit praestantissimum corpus), Ita mulier etsi esset pulcherrimum opus Dei, tamen non aequabat gloriam et dignitatem masculi.” (“For although Eve was a
subordinate role as man’s “helper” in fulfilling God’s command and blessing to procreate. That the element of companionship in marriage was ignored by Luther strikes modern sensibilities as strange, although the later, married Luther spoke quite affectionately about his wife and the companionship of wives. Here, the unmarried Luther is merely echoing sentiments that were mainstream thinking in scholastic commentaries — commentaries and treatises written by celibate men — and theologizing about the purposes of marriage. He considered the woman’s role in conception and gestation purely functional and passive: the mother supplied far less causally in terms of form or matter than the father — a viewpoint maintained more by Luther’s medieval understanding of biology and anatomy than necessarily by theology. Luther saw the naming of woman “from the man” as significant in affirming her body and function as derivative from the man and a testimony to his authority over her.

Finally, original innocence allowed for Adam and Eve to behold each other naked without shame or sin. Luther surmised a return to such innocence as being among the joys of heaven, but saw the post-lapsarian human body filled with shame, lust, and every great sin as a result of the fall.

Most excellent creature, like Adam because she held fast the image of God, that is, in justice, wisdom and happiness, nonetheless she was a woman. For just as the sun is more excellent than the moon (although the moon is also a most excellent body), so the woman, even though she is a most beautiful work of God, nonetheless does not equal the glory and prestige of the male.”

See, for example, Aquinas’ discussion of the purpose of the creation of woman in ST Ia, 92, 1-2.

In Genesin Declamationes. WA 24:80-81: “Und sie waren beyde nacket, Adam und sein weib, und schemeten sich nicht. Das sehen wir an allen thiren, das sie nicht ynn dem stande sind, das sie sundigen kuennen. Also war es auch mit dem menschen. Aber nu ist es aus, wie wir hoeren werden, Das wir uns schewen und schemen muessen, Die
Such a *summa* of the body in the *Declamationes* actually underscores how traditional Luther was in most respects in his early understanding of the human body. With the exception of his attack upon celibacy with its concomitant insistence on the purpose of the body *soli procreationi* (a fourth Reformation “sola”?), Luther tended otherwise to hold to late medieval understandings of the pre-lapsarian Edenic body.

Although by the time of the *Declamationes* Luther was committed to the authority of *sola scriptura* so that his theological *process* was different from most western medieval theologians, he was nevertheless deeply shaped by the western theological tradition— even consciously dialoging with it—despite his desire to be exegetically unfettered to anything but the sacred text.

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schande muessen wir leiden bis an den Juengsten tag, darnach wird es wider also sein, das keins sich fur dem andern wird schemen, so viel freude wird ym hymel sein.” (“And they were both naked, Adam and his wife, and they were unashamed.”) So we see concerning all the animals that they are not in the condition that they can sin. So, too, it was with people, but now that is past, as we will hear. For we are shy and embarrassed [and] our shame will cause us sorrow until the Last Day; then it will again be the case that no one will be ashamed before another, so many will be the joys in heaven.”

72  *In Genesin Declamationes*. WA 24:90: “Da folgen nu die groben sunden. Zum ersten werden yhr augen wacker, wie der Teuffel gesagt hatte, sehen und fuelen, das sie nacket sind. Da war nu unmueglich zu weren allen gliedmassen, die sie hatten, noch der boesen lust zu steuren, Sie sahen sich beyde an mit boeser lust und unkeuschen begirten, als sie nacket waren, wilche yhn zuvor unbekand waren: Sie waren abgefallen und Gotte ungehorsam worden…” (“Now follow the gross sins. In the first place their eyes were opened as the devil had said [and] they see and feel that they are naked. Now it was impossible to restrain all their members or to control their evil desires. They looked at each other with evil lust and unchaste desires because they were naked, with which before they were unfamiliar. They were fallen and had become disobedient to God…”
3.4 – The “Later” Luther and the Body in Genesis 1-2

On Monday, 31 May 1535, Luther concluded his lecture series on Psalm 90, “Moses’ Psalm,” by announcing:

You have this psalm explicated, as much as the Lord has given to me. After this we will explicate Genesis, while the Lord prolongs my life, so that at last we may die thus happily in the word and work of God, which may God and our Redeemer Christ Jesus grant. Amen.73

On the very next day Professor Luther appeared in his lecture hall—as he did every Monday and Tuesday unless otherwise occupied74—and began his decade-long exposition of “the dear Genesis,” the Enarrationes in Genesin.

The Enarrationes have regained their regard and value in the study of Luther’s theology after the authenticity of Luther’s voice in them was questioned in the first half of the twentieth century.75 The debate over the legitimacy of the Enarrationes coupled


74 LW 1:iix. Jaroslav Pelikan, the editor of LW vol. 1, sets the date for the first lecture as Tuesday, 1 June 1535.

75 In modern Luther studies, the authenticity of the Enarrationes in transmitting Luther’s thought was questioned in the 1930s by German theologian Erich Seeberg and his student Peter Meinhold. The critique focused on the transcription process of the lectures and editorial emendations that the critics claimed compromised Luther’s content. The introduction to LW 1 by Jaroslav Pelikan discussed the Seeberg/Meinhold critique already in 1958 acknowledging the need for caution, but rejecting that Luther’s true theological position had been changed in the published Enarrationes. Pelikan’s refutation has been supported and the argument for the legitimacy of the Enarrationes advanced by the work of such scholars as Arvid Wikerståhl, Verbum Och Filius Incarnandus: En studie i Luthers utläggningar av Genesis (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1969); Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Yale University Press, 1989), 166-167; Martin Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation
effectively with the dominance of the “young Luther” in Luther research in the middle of the same century to inhibit the study and use of the lectures, but this has changed as those arguments were roundly answered and a hermeneutic developed to assess the lectures.\(^76\)

Thus, after years of relative neglect, the *Enarrationes* are now the object of numerous studies and investigations. This portion of the chapter will look at statements from the same key “body texts” of Genesis 1-2 examined in connection with the *Declamationes* to highlight his development. So—as Luther himself invites—“Let us now proceed to the last and most beautiful work of God, the creation of humankind.”\(^77\)

### 3.4.1 – *Genesis 1:26-28*

Luther begins his exposition of Genesis 1:26—“Let us make a man according to our image and likeness”—by noting as he had in the *Declamationes* the “obvious deliberation and plan” embedded in these words that denote the special nature of the creation of humankind:

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\(^76\) Mattox, *Defender*, 265-273; Maxfield, *Luther’s Lectures*, 7.

\(^77\) *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*. WA 42:41: “Sed accedamus iam ad ultimum et pulcherrimum opus Dei, ad hominis creationem.”
Moreover here God calls himself to a council and indicates some sort of deliberation when he desires to create a man. Therefore in the first place is signified here the extraordinary difference of humanity from all other creatures.\textsuperscript{78}

In his exposition of the verse Luther’s emphases remained what they were in the \textit{Declamationes}: 1) the image of God as “the extraordinary difference” between humanity and the rest of the world’s “\textit{animae viventes}”; and, 2) how the words “Let us make” are “aimed at making sure the mystery of our faith (\textit{pertinet ad mysterium fidei nostrae confirmandum}),” namely, the Trinity of Persons in the one God. However, Luther mixes in among these emphases statements about the nature of the human body when the image of God is not taken into consideration.

In terms of human bodily life, Luther is forthright in stating his thinking that human beings and the higher animals (\textit{bestiae}) “greatly resemble” one another. Luther’s point of comparison is not that man and beast \textit{look} like one another, but that they \textit{do} the same things in terms of their bodies. “If therefore you consider their way of life, their food, and their support, the similarity is great.”\textsuperscript{79} And like the life of the beasts, human bodily life is meant \textit{even in its perfect state} only for this earth. In this regard, Luther’s distinction made in the \textit{Declamationes} between Adam’s “natural life”—what is meant by the term “living soul”—and the “spiritual life”—which Christ displays, 1 Corinthians 15:45—resurfaces. The elder Luther continued in his earlier thinking that Adam’s physical body was tied to the earth even in its perfect state. What the image of God

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Genesisvorlesung} 1535/37. WA 42:42; LW 1:56: “Hic autem Deus se ad consilium vocat, et indicit quasi deliberationem, cum hominem creare vellet. Primum igitur significatur hic insignis differentia hominis ab omnibus aliis creaturis.”

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Genesisvorlesung} 1535/37. WA 42:42; LW 1:56: “Si igitur conversationem, victum et alimoniam consideres, magna est similitudo.”
imparted in addition to original righteousness and moral perfection like God’s was
“something far different from the concern of the belly, …things for which the beasts also
have understanding and appreciation.”\textsuperscript{80} In its “natural life,” the body pursued the created
activities associated with it—“eating, drinking, procreating, etc.”—and “this service” was
in itself pleasing to God. But the image of God imparted to the human person both the
longing for and the promise of “translation (\textit{translatio})” to eternal life. In short, despite
the perfection in which Adam was made, he was created “for a better life in the future
than this physical life.”\textsuperscript{81} Luther cites Peter Lombard with approval in this matter,\textsuperscript{82} but
he could also have appealed to the \textit{Summa Theologiae} for a similar statement. St. Thomas
also taught that by its very nature, human physical life was not immortal \textit{per se}:

\begin{quote}
Man’s body was indissoluble not by reason of any intrinsic vigor of immortality,
but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, by which it was
enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself
subject to God.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Luther thus affirms with the scholastics that although the physical life of Adam would
have been “a service pleasing to God (\textit{servitus Deo grata}),” nevertheless, the image

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{80} Genesivorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:42; LW 1:56: “Haec imago longe aliud est,
quam cura ventris, cibus et potus, quae bestiae etiam intelligent et appetunt.”

\textsuperscript{81} Genesivorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:42; LW 1:56: “Mose igitur spiritualibus
significat nos ad excellentiorem vitam esse conditos, quam haec corporalis esset futura in
natura etiam integra.”

\textsuperscript{82} LW 1:56 supplies the citation: Peter Lombard, \textit{Sententiarum libri quatuor}, II,

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{ST} Ia, 97, 1: “Non enim corpus eius erat indissolubile per aliquem
immortalitatis vigorem in eo existentem; sed inerat animae vis quaedam supernaturaliter
divinitus data, per quam poterat corpus ab omni corruptione preservare, quandiu ipsa Deo
subiecta mansisset” (Dominican Fathers, trans.).
\end{verbatim}
imparted “an indication of another and better life than the physical (haec est signification alterius et melioris vitae, quam animalis).”

He concludes:

Therefore Adam had a compound (duplicem) life: physical and immortal, but the immortal was not yet plainly revealed except in hope. In the meantime he would have eaten, drunk, worked, fathered children, etc. With these few words I want to bring to mind this difference which God makes through his counsel by which he distinguishes us from the rest of the animals with whom he deigns that we live.

Still, the human body with the endowment of the image of God is raised above its earthbound nature. The human body, male and female, is God’s “most beautiful creature (pulcherrimae creaturae)” to whom is given “dominion over the fish of the sea, etc.” (1:26) and which exercises this dominion in connection with “enlightened reason, justice and wisdom (per rationem illuminatam, per iusticiam et sapientiam).” But these interior glories showed themselves also in the physical bodies of Adam and Eve:

[This] image without doubt in the state of innocence was singularly reflected in the faces of Adam and Eve. Just as after sin also the Gentiles concluded from the situation of the body—because only mankind walks upright and lifts his eyes to heaven—that human beings are extraordinary creatures among all the rest of creatures.

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84 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:43; LW 1:57.

85 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:43; LW 1:57: “Habuit igitur Adam duplicem vitam: animale et immortale, sed nondum revelatam plane sed in spe. Interim edisset, bibisset, laborasset, generasset etc. Haec paucis admonere volui de differentia ista, quam Deus facit per suum consilium, quo discernit nos ab aliis animalibus, cum quibus nos sinit vivere.”

86 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:49; LW 1:66. Note the equality of the sexes in regard to the matter of dominion over the earth in Luther’s exegesis. See Mattox, Defender, 76-77.

87 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:65; LW 1:86: “quae imago procul dubio in statu innocentiae singulariter reluxit in facie Adae et Hevae, Sicut post peccatum tamen Gentes ex positu corporis, quod solus homo erectus incedit et attollit oculos ad coelum, collegerunt hominem praestantiorem esse creaturam inter omnes reliquas creaturas.” For two representative discussions of the image of God being reflected in humanity’s posture and face, see Ambrose, Hexaemeron, 6.8.44-45 in which he muses on 2 Corinthians 3:18,
Luther’s belief about the potency of the image in terms of the body engendered various speculations on his part about the natural powers of Adam and Eve. Speaking first of Adam, Luther states:

To these inner qualities (that is, of intellect, memory, and will) came also those most beautiful and superb qualities of body and of all the limbs by which he surpassed all remaining living things. For I fully think that before the sin of Adam his eyes were so acute and clear that they surpassed the lynx and the eagle. Moreover, Adam’s strength being greater, he handled lions and bears, whose strength is very great, as we handle puppies (catulos).  

Similarly, Eve was “the most extraordinary creature (praestantissima creatura),” “a most beautiful work of God (pulcherrimum opus Dei)” so that between Adam and Eve there was a “glorious union of hearts and wills (insignis animorum et voluntatum coniunctio).” “No other sight in all the world was for Adam more lovely and more charming than his Eve (Nec alia species in toto mundo Adae suavior et venustior est visa quam Heua  

and Aquinas’ ST Ia, 91, 3 (Whether the body of man was given a fitting disposition?). Luther himself comments in this regard: “Plato, Cicero, and other philosophers who belong to the better sort state in their discussions that man walks with his head erect, while the rest of the beings look at the earth with their heads bent down. To man they attribute reason or the ability to understand; and later they reach the conclusion that man is an extraordinary animal created for immortality. But how tenuous and almost useless this is! All this is based on a knowledge of man’s form. But if you go on to give consideration to his substance, does not reason compel you to declare that this being must again be disintegrated and cannot be immortal?” Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:93; LW 1:124-125.

88 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:47; LW 1:62: “Ad haec interiora accessit etiam illa corporis et omnium membrorum pulcherrima et excellentissima virtus, qua omnes reliquas naturas animatas vicit. Plane enim existimo ante peccatum Adae oculos itauisse acutos et claros, ut lincem et aquilam superaret. Leones autem et ursos, quorum maximum robur est, ipse fortior tractavit non alter, quam nos catulos tractamus.” A 1542 “tabletalk” records how Luther surmised that “Adam had been able to see a hundred miles as clearly as we can see a halfmile. The same was true of his other senses.” (“Ego credo illum vidisse tam clare 100 miliaria quam nos ein halbe. Sic de omnibus sensibus.”) WATr 5:174 (Nr. 5475); LW 54:426 (No. 5475).
And like Adam, Eve, also, was accorded abilities that far surpassed her fallen daughters, particularly in regard to the central matter—in Luther’s thinking—of child-bearing. Luther proposes that in “the state of innocence women would not only have given birth without pain, but their fertility would also have been far greater.”

However, Luther’s literary exuberance over Adam and Eve does not mean that he saw no qualitative differences (beyond the obvious physiological ones) between them. For all of Eve’s created excellence, “she was nevertheless a woman (tamen fuit mulier),” an assessment that Luther explained by means of an analogy:

Just as the sun is more excellent than the moon (although the moon, too, is a most excellent body), so the woman, even if she was a most beautiful work of God, nontheless did not equal the glory and dignity of the man.

What does this mean? Luther’s answer is that Eve possessed “a much weaker constitution (ingenium)” than Adam, that is, she was smaller in size and native strength. Luther would leave the “handling of lions and bears like puppies” to Adam and the rigors of childbearing to Eve.

Luther’s near-rapturous speculations about the splendors of Adam and Eve’s conditions in Eden are predictably and uniformly followed by equally fervent laments.

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89 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*. WA 42:50; LW 1:67. One can almost hear Luther saying, “…than my Käthe.”

90 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*. WA 42:100; LW 1:133: “Sicut etiam generationis reliquiae extant, quanquam in statu innocentiae non solum sine dolore peperissent mulierculae, sed etiam multo maio fuerit futura foecunditas.”


92 Ibid. See the discussion about the translation of *ingenium* and the meaning of Luther’s assessment of Eve in this regard in Mattox, *Defender*, 80-82, fn 47.
over corresponding post-fall realities. While he naturally concentrates on the spiritual fallout that attended the fall, Luther gives ample attention and vivid language to the blighting of the body:

To what extent is man today surpassed by the boars in their sense of hearing, by the eagles in their sense of sight, and by the lion in his strength?\(^{93}\)

Adam would not have known his Eve except in the most untroubled spirit toward God, with a will obedient to God, wholly devoid of evil thought. Now, after sin, we all know how great passion is in the flesh, which is not only passionate in its desire but also in its disgust after it has acquired what it wanted.\(^{94}\)

Therefore procreation remained in the human race, but very much debased, even completely overwhelmed by the leprosy of lust, so that procreation is only a bit more moderate than that of the brutes. Added to this are the perils of pregnancy and of birth, the difficulty of feeding the offspring…\(^{95}\)

With a sigh we can recall that it has been lost; we cannot recover it in this life.\(^{96}\)

3.4.2 – Genesis 2:7: “And so the Lord God formed man from the dust”

Luther’s treatment of this “body verse” in the Enarrationes builds on his thinking in the earlier Declamationes. He again affirms that the “animal life” (\textit{vitam animalem}) which man possesses after the creation is not what distinguishes a man from a donkey:

\(^{93}\) \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/37}. WA 42:46; LW 1:62: “Apri quantum hodie auditu, aquilae quantum visu, leo quantum viribus hominem antecellit?”

\(^{94}\) \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/37}. WA 42:46; LW 1:62: “Adam non cognovisset suam Heuam, nisi securissimo animo erga Deum, et voluntate obediente Deo sine omni viciosa cogitatione. Nunc post peccatum norunt omnes, quantus sit furor in carne, quae non solum furiosa est in concupiscendo sed etiam in fastidiendo, postquam nacta est, quod voluit.”

\(^{95}\) \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/37}. WA 42:54; LW 1:71.

\(^{96}\) \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/37}. WA 42:69; LW 1:90.
“animal life has need of food and drink; it has need of sleep and rest; their bodies are fed in like manner by food and drink, and they grow; and through hunger they become faint and perish.” Moreover, the difference cannot be in the way human beings are propagated since it is “in the same manner as the other beasts,” God having created the reproductive process of the higher animals so that “here there is no difference between a pregnant cow and a woman with child (Hic nulla dissimilitudo est inter vaccam foetam et gravidam mulierculam).” Rather, the difference again is vested in the imago Dei which is signaled in this verse by the special creation of Adam “from a clod (ex gleba)” “by the finger of God (digito Dei formata est)” and on the special creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, but also by the “unusual manner of speech” by Moses that “God breathed into his face a breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Luther adds to his discussion of this verse at the close the observation that anagogically “Moses wanted to intimate dimly [in this verse] that God was to become incarnate.” He goes on to explain:

The statement that though man is created according to the similitude of God, he does not differ from cattle in his animal life is clearly contradictory, or, as they call it in the schools, “a contradiction in the predicate.” Nevertheless, because he was created in the image of the invisible God, this statement is a dim intimation, as we shall hear, that God was to reveal Himself to the world in the man Christ. These seeds, as it were, of very important facts the prophets have carefully gathered from Moses and considered.

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97 This is a translation of the Vulgate’s rendition of Genesis 2:7 used by Luther. “Formavit igitur Dominus Deus Hominem de pulvere terrae, et inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae, et factus est homo in animam viventem.”

98 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:66; LW 1:87: “Nam quod homo creatus ad similitudinem Dei secundum animalem vitam nihil differt a pecude, haec plane est disparata praedicatio, seu ut in scholis vocant, oppositum in adiecto. Et tamen, quia est conditus ad imaginem invisibilis Dei, occulte per hoc significatur, sicut audiemus, Deum se revelaturum mundo in homine Christo. Haec semina quasi maximarum rerum Prophetae in Mose diligenter collegerunt et observarunt.”
In its focus, Luther’s comments in the late Genesis lectures on this pericope do not simply enlarge on the material of the *Declamationes*. This time around, Luther did not appraise the focus of this text to be the creation of Eve *per se*, but the establishment of marriage and the household. The elder, married Luther saw this as a natural progression in the formation of God’s order in creation: first the church was established by the Word (Gen. 2:9) as Adam was given the command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then, because “[t]here was no need of civil government, since nature was unimpaired and without sin, now also the household is set up (*Nunc etiam oeconomia instituitur*)”. Since the “household” centers on the begetting of children in keeping with God’s command to “be fruitful,” the creation of Eve is an integral part of God’s “definite plan (*certo consilio*)” in this regard. Discussing Eve Luther comments about her created excellence as Adam’s “help (*adiutorium*)”:

Moreover, Moses wished especially concerning the other part of human nature, that is, the woman, to point out that by the singular plan of God she was made so that she show also that this sex pertains to that kind of life that Adam was expecting, [and] that this sex was to be useful for procreation. Thus it follows that except that by the serpent the woman was deceived and sinned, in all ways she would have been the equal of Adam. Now this punishment is inflicted on her after her sin and on account of her sin: that she is subject to man, just as to other vexations and dangers, birthpangs, sadness and countless other troubles. Therefore not as a woman today was it so for Eve; far better and more excellent

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99 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*, WA 42:87; LW 1:115. See the discussion and analysis of Luther’s wider exegesis involving the “Hierarchies” of creation in Mattox, *Defender*, 87ff.
was her condition and in no thing [was she] inferior to Adam, whether you count the endowments of the body or the spirit.¹⁰⁰

Luther’s statements about Eve are a curious mixture. On the one hand, he proclaims Eve as the most excellent of God’s good creation, the equal of Adam in every way “whether you count the qualities of the body or those of the mind (in nulla re inferior Adamo, sive corporis seu animi dotes numeres),”¹⁰¹ and yet on the other, his inferior who “shines by reason of her husband’s rays (Mulier fulget radiis mariti).”¹⁰² The “good” which Eve supplies to Adam is the ability to procreate because he was hitherto alone. Once again, this discussion leads Luther to consider the contrasting situation that pertained after the fall. Interestingly, it is in this context that Luther discusses the gift of companionship which the woman brings to marriage.¹⁰³ She is also important in the fallen world in her rulership over the household (Oeconomia)—“for the management of the household must have the ministration of the dear ladies (Nam

¹⁰⁰ Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:87; LW 1:115: “Peculiariter autem de altera parte humanae naturae, hoc est, de Foemina voluit Moses admonere, quod singulare consilio Dei sit condita, ut ostendat, hunc quoque sexum pertinere ad istud genus vitae, quod Adam expectabat, qui sexum servire debebat ad generationem. Hinc sequitur:Nisi per Serpentem mulier decepta esset et peccasset, eam in omnibus parem fuisset futuram Adae. Nam quod nunc viro subiecta est, ea poena est inflictia ei post peccatum, et propere peccatum, sicut aliae molestiae et pericula, labor partus, dolor et infinitae aliae aerumnae. Non igitur ut hodie est mulier, ita tum fuit Heua; longe melior et praestantior fuit conditio et in nulla re inferior Adamo, sive corporis seu animi dotes numeres.”

¹⁰¹ Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:87; LW 1:115.

¹⁰² Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:103; LW 1:137.

¹⁰³ Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:88; LW 1:116: “Hodie, postquam natura peccato corrupta est, est mulier necessaria non solum ad multiplicationem, sed etiam ad vitae societatem et defensionem quoque.” (“Today, after our nature has been corrupted by sin, woman is necessary not just for the sake of increase, but also for companionship and the protection of life as well.”)
ministerio muliercularum opus habet Oeconomia)—and for the “medicine” against illicit sexual activity she provides!\textsuperscript{104} Luther confides to his audience:

The Master of the Sentences declares learnedly that matrimony was established in Paradise as a duty, but after sin also as an antidote. Therefore we are compelled to make use of this sex in order to avoid sin. It is almost shameful to say this, but nevertheless it is true. For there are very few who marry solely as a matter of duty.\textsuperscript{105}

Luther’s musings on marriage and the desirability of children that he engages in at this point are transparently the result of his ten-plus years of marriage to Katie. Luther’s defense of women in general, while still overtly chauvinistic to modern ears, is noteworthy and likewise seems to be a fruit of married life. Male aspersions against women “serve to emphasize original sin” and have been exacerbated by “ungodly celibacy (impius coelibatus).” Luther inveighs:

However, it is a great favor that God has preserved woman for us—against our will and wish, as it were—both for procreation and also as a medicine against the sin of fornication. In Paradise woman would have been a help for a duty only. But now she is also, and for the greater part at that, an antidote and a medicine; we can hardly speak of her without a feeling of shame, and surely we cannot make use of her without shame. The reason is sin. In Paradise that union would have taken place without any bashfulness, as an activity created and blessed by God. It would have been accompanied by a noble delight, such as there was at that time in eating and drinking. Now, alas, it is so hideous and frightful a pleasure that physicians compare it with epilepsy or falling sickness. Thus an actual disease is linked with the very activity of procreation. We are in the state of sin and of death; therefore we also undergo this punishment, that we cannot make use of woman without the horrible passion of lust and, so to speak, without epilepsy.

\textsuperscript{104} See the discussion of this view in chapter 4 below.

\textsuperscript{105} Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:88; LW 1:116: “Et Magister sententiarum erudite dicit coniugium in Paradiso esse institutum ad officium, post peccatum autem ad remedium quoque. Itaque cogimur hoc sexu uti ad vitandum peccatum. Hoc quidem pene turpe dictu est sed tamen verum est. Paucissimi enim sunt, qui tantum propter officium uxores ducunt.”
Because of sin the same thing has happened to us in the case of spiritual gifts. Even though we have faith and live in faith, nevertheless we cannot avoid doubt and an awareness of death. These punishments of original sin the holy fathers have clearly seen and felt. For this reason Scripture, too, uses the term pudendum or disgrace.  

Genesis 2:22—“And the Lord God built the rib which He had taken from Adam into a woman, and He brought her to Adam”—engenders further commentary by Luther on womankind, marriage, and celibacy. As with the Declamationes, Luther sees great significance in the Hebrew verb build, noting how Nicolas of Lyra believed the word was used in reference to the “novel form of a woman’s body,” while other commentators saw in it an allegorical expression to the church. But as in the Declamationes, Luther sees the word as pertaining again to the woman’s role in procreation. “This expression is common in Scripture, that the wife is called a household building because she bears and brings up the offspring (Ita usitata haec Phrasis est in scriptura, ut uxor dicatur aedificium Oeconomicum propter generationem et educationem.
Luther is again drawn into a defense of marriage and of wives and offers a critique of men who denigrate marriage and men who desert their wives:

There are not only men who think it is clever to find fault with the opposite sex and to have nothing to do with marriage but also men who, after they have married, desert their wives and refuse to support their children. Through their baseness and wickedness these people lay waste God’s building, and they are really abominable monsters of nature. Let us, therefore, obey the Word of God and recognize our wives as a building of God. Not only is the house built through them by procreation and other services that are necessary in a household; but the husbands themselves are built through them, because wives are, as it were, a nest and a dwelling place where husbands can go to spend their time and dwell with joy.\(^{109}\)

Adam’s words naming “this one, this time” as “Woman, because she was taken from the man” (Gen. 2:23) allow Luther to repeat his observation made in the *Declamationes* about Eve’s complementariness to Adam via the Hebrew *isha*:

And now, just as through the Holy Spirit Adam had an understanding of past events which he had not seen, and glorified God and praised Him for the creation of his mate, so now he prophesies regarding the future when he says that she must be called “Woman.” We are altogether unable to imitate the nicety of the Hebrew language. \(\text{אשה}^{2}\) denotes a man. But he says that Eve must be called \(\text{אשה}^{2}\), as though for “wife” you would say “she-man” from man, a heroic woman who performs manly acts.\(^{110}\)

\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*. WA 42:100; LW 1:134: “cum non solum sint, qui sapientiam esse ducant conviciari sexui et aspernari coniugia, sed qui ductas coniuges deserant quique liberorum curam omnem abiciant. Hi aedificium Dei improbitate et perversitate sua destruunt ac vere sunt foeda quaedam naturae monstra. Pareamus itaque verbo Dei, et agnoscamus nostras uxoribus ceu aedificium Domini, quod per eam non solum aedificatur domus per generationem et alia ministeria in oeconomia necessaria, Sed etiam quod ipsi mariti per eas aedificantur, quibus sunt tanquam nidus et habitatio quaedam, ad quam se conferant, ubi morentur et habitent cum voluptate.”

Luther closes his comments on Genesis 2 with a brief commentary on verse 25—

*but both were naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.* Human nakedness, while a matter of shame and embarrassment in the post-fall world, was “commendable, wonderful, and delightful (*laudabile, gloriosum et iucundum*)” for Adam and Eve. Offering a final bit of speculation of the pre-lapsarian body and its powers, Luther muses that Adam must have been impervious to heat and cold—“as human eyes are”—for he did not need the “shade of houses” or “a variety of garments” as we do. Then he adds:

> And, even better in many ways, Eve, our mother, would have sat among us naked; and no one would have been offended by the nakedness of her breasts and the other parts of the body, of which we must now be ashamed and which, because of sin, kindle lust.\(^{111}\)

### 3.4.4 — *Summa Summarum*

As with the *Declamationes*, the title of Luther’s lectures, *Enarrationes in Genesin*, is instructive about the nature of Luther’s comments. With these lectures,

\(^{111}\) *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37*. WA 42:105; LW 1:140: “Ac quidem multis modis melius Heua, mater nostra, sedisset apur nos nuda nec quenquam offendisset nuditas uberum et reliquarum partium corporis, quae nunc pudendae sunt et accendunt propter peccatum libido nem.”
Luther intended to give a “full explanation” of the text and meaning of Genesis to his students.\textsuperscript{112} Others have noted how

the lectures on Genesis open a window into Luther’s lecture hall during the last decade of his life, allowing modern readers to view a sixteenth century professor engaging his students with the text of scripture and using that text to form them spiritually.\textsuperscript{113}

Perhaps even our limited focus on the “body texts” of Genesis 1 and 2 has permitted this to be demonstrated. But in terms of that limited focus, while Luther’s comments about the created bodies of Adam and Eve are expanded greatly over his earlier work, much of Luther’s core understanding of the texts of Genesis which direct his understanding of the body in the \textit{Enarrationes} remains the same in its essence as in the \textit{Declamationes}. There are consistent echoes and repetitions of that prior work, coupled with passages that are plainly extensions and elaborations of what was said previously. What is especially different, however, is the expansiveness of expression and freedom to range that can be sensed in the \textit{Enarrationes}. Most importantly, Luther had narrowed, if not closed an “experiential gap” that in the early 1520s had kept him separate from the kind of theologizing about Genesis he was wont to do.\textsuperscript{114} The missing experience was marriage.

\begin{quote}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{112} The verb \textit{enarro} at the root of Luther’s title means “to explain fully,” or “interpret.”
\textsuperscript{113} Maxwell, \textit{Luther’s Lectures on Genesis}, 1-2. See also Mattox, \textit{Defender}, 10.
\textsuperscript{114} Luther has been called an “experiential theologian” frequently. See such assessments in Oswald Bayer, \textit{Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation}, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 21-22; Klaus Nürberger, \textit{Martin Luther’s Message for Us Today} (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2005), passim; Otto Hermann Pesch, \textit{The God Question in Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther}, trans. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 16. Pesch notes particularly in this regard: “There was a restlessness in Luther that made him react spontaneously to each and every problem and debate that presented itself”(16).
\end{quote}
Luther himself famously once said, “Experience alone makes a theologian (sola experientia facit theologum),” though he was probably thinking in terms of experience with Scripture. Still, in 1534 when Luther again took the stem of Genesis in hand to begin shaking it for his great Genesis lectures it was with a hand that bore a wedding band. Indeed, Luther’s betrothal and marriage to Katherina von Bora in June 1525 had set in motion the acquisition of a range of heretofore unknown “body experiences” for the former friar—some life-changing as when their six children were born, some winsome, if mundane:

In the first year of marriage a man has strange thoughts. When sitting at table he thinks, “Before I was alone; now I am with another.” Or in bed, when he wakes up, he sees a pair of pigtails (zoppfe) lying beside him which he hadn’t seen there before…

Zöpfe not withstanding, Doctorissa Luther modified in practice what Doctor Luther preached and perhaps even the manner in which he did it. Luther may well have continued to teach that woman’s creation and physiology indicated divine subordination of the female to the male, but as Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks note, “when we shift our gaze to Luther’s own experience, we see him closely bound to, and dependent upon, his Käthe.” Because of this important change in Luther’s situation, the Enarrationes reveal Luther’s development of thought about the human body in a unique way and underscore how Luther, while fitting well within the parameters of late medieval

115 WATr 1:16 (Nr. 46); LW 54:8 (No. 46).

116 Doctorissa was the title of “reluctant admiration” coined by various recorders of the Tischreden for Katherina in recognition of her influence on Luther. See Martin Treu, “Katharina von Bora, the Woman at Luther’s Side,” Lutheran Quarterly, 18 (1999): 172.

117 Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, Luther on Women, 9.
understandings of the body and its creation, brought to his exposition of these texts a new mode and excitement to hearing them.
CHAPTER 4
“Es ist nicht gut das der Mensch alleyn sey.” – Luther, the body, and sexuality

“For a man who did not marry until he was forty-one,” observes Scott Hendrix, “Martin Luther had a lot to say about marriage.”¹ For the purposes of this chapter, it should be added that Luther also had a lot to say about sex in the context of marriage, and that what he said is an important component for understanding his view of the body. Indeed, Luther’s thinking about sexuality and marriage was considered by Heiko Oberman to be “epoch-making” because of the force it exerted on society through its “connection of the Word of God with corporeality.”² By means of his much speaking on the matters of sex and marriage, Luther reversed the old order of things that saw the ascetic ideal as the locus for the authentically religious life of the body and replaced it on Reformation soil with the union of man and woman in marriage and in the home.³

Luther’s theologizing about the body and sexuality parallels the course of his personal life—and vice versa—from his years as a celibate friar and priest (1505- entry

¹ Scott Hendrix, “Luther on Marriage,” Lutheran Quarterly 14 (2000): 335. See his footnote 1 for a brief catalog of “direct treatments” of the subject of Luther on marriage in current literature.


³ Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, 1250-1550 (Yale University Press, 1980), 381-396.
into the Augustinian cloister) to his repudiation of the ascetic ideal (1521–On Monastic Vows) to his eventual marriage (1525) to Katherina von Bora. However, issues concerning the body, sexuality, and marriage were neither precipitating factors to, nor major issues for Luther in his early struggles with the church of his day. Rather, Luther’s reforming work was driven by his theological ferment over justification by faith and his hermeneutic of was Christum treibet. These acted like the first link that draws the rest of a chain after it: once set, Luther’s theological formulation of justification was applied by him to the life of the church in ever-widening areas:

Luther worked at clarifying his understanding of the biblical message and formulating his way of proclaiming it throughout this period [1512-1520]. In the eight years following the reception of his doctorate, his thought matured from his own reception of late medieval thinking to a proposal for a new paradigm for understanding God and what it means to be human. His thought continued to mature throughout his life, but by 1520 its essential elements had fallen into place. He applied and extended them in specific situations the rest of his life, following the trajectory set by his education and personality. He continued to

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4 For a discussion of Luther’s progress of thought vis-à-vis monastic vows, particularly with respect to the significance of his 1521 writing, On Monastic Vows, see Heiko A. Oberman’s “A Friar in the Lion’s Den.”

5 Early Catholic polemics charged the opposite, namely, that Luther was driven sola libidine, that is, his desire to justify not his soul, but his sexual desires. This was the charge of Luther’s contemporary, Johann Dobneck of Wendelstein [1479-1552] who Latinized his Stammort as “Cochlaeus.” Cochlaeus’ Commentary on the “deeds and writings of Martin Luther”—issued in various virulent editions—solidified this view for Catholic historiography from the sixteenth century down to the mid-twentieth when it was superceded by “a new epoch” of Catholic Luther studies under Joseph Lortz and Erwin Iserloh. On Cochlaeus, see Ralph Keen’s introductory comments in Luther’s Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Frazel (Manchester University Press, 2002), 40-52. Regarding the contributions of Lortz, Iserloh, and others see Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 232-235, and Robert Kolb, Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith (Oxford University Press, 2009), 7-8.
uphold his oath to “expound the Scriptures for all the world and teach everyone,”
writing in 1530, “I must indeed confess to my life’s end.”

4.1 – Luther’s Reformation Writings on the Question of Monastic Vows and Marriage, 1520 – 1525

The years 1520 to 1525 are especially crucial for tracing Luther’s development in
regard to the body and sexuality. During these years—so crowded with important events
and issues—as the practical ramifications of his teaching began to take hold, Luther’s
attention was brought time and again to the theologically symbiotic matters of celibacy
and marriage. The body was obviously integral to both in the specific matter of sexuality,
but in fundamentally different ways. In navigating his course through the issues, Luther
took Genesis 2:18 especially to heart. He labored in his translation of the verse into
German to find the best way to express the Hebrew, finally rendering it: *Es ist nicht gut
das der Mensch alleyn sey. Ich wil ym ein Gehülffen machen, die umb yn sey.*
“It is not
good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper meet for him.” Luther
summarized the importance of this verse for himself to a former student who was about
to marry:

The Scriptures say in Genesis 2, *Non est bonum homini esse solum. Faciam ei
adiutorium coram eo,* that is, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will

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6 Kolb, Confessor of the Faith, 25. The Luther quote is from the “Commentary on
Psalm 82,” WA 31\1\:212; LW 13:66.

7 WADB 8:42. This is the 1545 version. The 1523 version renders the second half
of the verse: “Ich will yhm eyn gehulfen gegen yhm machen.”

8 Oberman, Luther, 273. See his discussion regarding Luther’s final translation of
the verse.
make a helper meet for him.” Whoever holds that he is a man and believes that he ought to be included under the label “human being,” let him pay attention to what his God and Creator declares and says about him. God wills that he should not be alone, rather that he should increase, and makes for him therefore a helper meet for him, a help for him that he should not be alone. And this is the word of God, through the power of which in a man’s body seed for fruit, and the passionate, natural inclination for a wife is created and maintained. [It is a power] which may not be hindered by law or vow, for it is God’s word and work.\footnote{Christliche Schrift an W. Reißensbusch, sich in den ehelichen Stand zu begeben, 1525. WA 18:275. “Und die schrifft sagt, Genesis am andern Capitel. ‘Non est bonum homini esse solum. Faciam ei auditorium coram eo.’ Das ist ‘Es ist nicht gut, das der mensch allein sey, Ich wil yhm ein gehuelfen, die umb yhn sey, machen.’ Wer sich nu fur einen menschen helt, und gewobt, das er unter dem wort ‘mensch’ begriffen sey, der hoere hie, was sein Gott und Schöpffer uber yhn schleust und spricht. Er woelle nicht, das er einsam sey, sondern soll sich mehren, und schafft yhm dazu ein huelffe, die umb yhn sey, und heffle yhm, das er nicht einsam sey. Und dis ist das wort Gottes, durch wilchs krafft ynn des menschen leib samen zur frucht, und die bruenstige, natuerliche neigung zum weib geschaffen und erhalten wirt. Wilchs widder mit geluebden noch mit gesetzen mag verhindert werden, Denn es ist Gottes wort und werck.”}

The Reformation writings Luther produced during the years 1520-1525 were rooted in Luther’s commitment to this exegesis of Genesis and offer a core set of statements and theologizing about sex and the body developed in response to the matters of celibacy and marriage.

4.1.1 – Luther’s Writings Against Monastic Vows

As noted above, the starting point of the route that brought Luther to his eventual understanding about sexuality and the body turns out to be his entry into the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine (OESA) in Erfurt. Luther joined the Augustinians because he was a medieval Catholic in his views about sex, marriage, and monastic life. Hewing to
the opinion of St. Jerome—“virginity fills heaven, marriage the earth”\(^\text{10}\) —Luther eschewed marriage (to his father Hans’s anger and disappointment\(^\text{11}\)) in favor of taking a vow of celibacy and submitting to the rule of St. Augustine because he was convinced that such a life offered the “way par excellence to heaven.”\(^\text{12}\) However, as the events of the indulgence controversy unfolded and the “reformatory program” of the late 1510s arose, questions also began to percolate within him concerning monasticism and priestly celibacy.

Luther first addressed *priestly celibacy* in his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (August, 1520)\(^\text{13}\) in conjunction with the growing dispute over the primacy of Scripture alone to adjudicate churchly affairs. In his treatise Luther advised the German princes that priests should be free to marry and denied that bishops possessed authority under Scripture to forbid it. With regard to *monasticism, To the Christian Nobility* advanced a similar view and critique regarding the lack of scriptural authority,

\(^{10}\) *Against Jovinianus*, 1:16. Cited in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 396, q.v.

\(^{11}\) See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 58, for an account of Hans Luther’s reaction to his son’s entry into the Augustinian novitiate. It appears Hans was in the midst of arranging a favorable marriage for Martin at the time. See LW 48:330-336, Letter 104 [Martin Luther to Hans Luther, 21 November 1521]; also, ibid, footnote 10.

In the *Genesisvorlesung* Luther reminisces about how marriage appeared “so disreputable” (*infames*) to him as a young man because of the influence of the medieval ethos of celibacy: “Everybody was fully persuaded that anyone who intended to lead a holy life acceptable to God could not get married but had to live as a celibate and take the vow of celibacy.” WA 42:101, LW 1:135.


\(^{13}\) *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, 1520. The treatise is in WA 6:404-469; LW 44:123-217.
but Luther still supported monasticism as a voluntary lifestyle for Christians. However, in October 1520, Luther’s explosive treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, appeared with its critique of the medieval church’s sacramental system. In the portion of the treatise dealing with *marriage*, Luther excoriated the canons of the church that established and adjudicated impediments to marriage as being arbitrary and tyrannical, including those that annulled the union of priests and their wives:

The “impediment of ordination” is also the mere invention of men, especially since they prate that it annuls even a marriage already contracted. They constantly exalt their own ordinances above the commands of God. I do not indeed sit in judgment on the present state of the priestly order, but I observe that Paul charges a bishop to be the husband of one wife [1 Tim. 3:2]. Hence, no marriage of deacon, priest, bishop or any other order can be annulled, although it is true that Paul knew nothing of this species of priests and of the orders we have today. Perish then those cursed man-made ordinances which have crept into the church only to multiply perils, sins, and evils! There exists, therefore, between a priest and his wife a true and indissoluble marriage, approved by the divine commandment.

Drawing their own practical conclusions from Luther’s words, three priests married in the spring of 1521. Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz (in concert with Duke

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14 *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae*, 1520. The treatise is in WA 6:497-573; LW 36:11-126.


George of Saxony) had two of the offending priests arrested. Luther—then in hiding at the Wartburg in the aftermath of the Diet of Worms held that same spring—wrote a strong response to his “Electoral Grace” reminding Albrecht that he was himself living with a “mistress” (Hure, literally, a “whore”) and threatening him with the release of an exposé of Albrecht’s various follies, Against the Idol at Halle. During August and September 1521 we see Luther discussing monastic vows in a series of letters to Philip Melanchthion. This correspondence reveals Luther’s growing confliction over the legitimacy of the vow of celibacy—even if taken voluntarily—and shows how an eventual treatise about monastic vows was under development in his thinking.

In the meantime the situation on the ground in Wittenberg continued to change. As a result of “Reformation criticism” in the fiery preaching of Gabriel Zwilling [1487-1558], thirteen brothers left the Augustinian cloister in Wittenberg in November 1521. Their decision catalyzed Luther’s intent to write his treatise: it would serve as an aid for their consciences in defending the legitimacy of their actions. But these events also served to solidify Luther’s own thinking regarding monastic vows and celibacy: by the included Bartholomew Bernhardi, one of Luther’s “star” students and the dean (Probst) in Kemberg near Wittenberg.

17 WABr 2:406-408; LW 48:339-343, Letter 106 [Luther to Albrecht of Mainz, 1 December 1521]. See Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 12-13; also see E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 583. According to Schwiebert, Albrecht’s “mistress” was one Ursula Riedinger. The cardinal relented and the tract remained unpublished.

18 The letters, dated 1 August, 3 August, and 9 September 1521, appear in WABr 2, nos. 424, 425, and 428; LW 48, nos. 91, 92, and 95.

19 Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 23; Oberman, “A Friar in the Lion’s Den,” 210-211. Oberman makes the important point that Luther wrote On Monastic Vows in response to the current “exodus”; the treatise per se did not create it.
time he rendered his theological opinion in the treatise *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*, Luther himself—as Martin Brecht states the matter—“had grown out of the monastery.”

Luther critiqued the matter of monastic vows under five points which examined—in relatively mild polemical language—the lack of scriptural support for monastic vows and that they were contrary to faith, gospel-freedom, and the Commandments of God. However, in the fifth section—“Monasticism is Contrary to Common Sense and Reason (*Adversari Rationi Monasticem*)”—Luther first broached the impossibility due to human nature of maintaining the vow of chastity as part of his argument. It was this thought

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20 The treatise was ready in November 1521. However, Luther discovered that its printing was held up by Spalatin. When Luther threatened to have it printed and released elsewhere Spalatin relented and the book was printed and issued in February 1522. By that time, the entire Augustinian congregation in Wittenberg had disbanded (Epiphany, 6 January 1522). See the introduction to *On Monastic Vows* in LW 44:246-247; Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 24-25; Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530*, ed. K. Bornkamm, trans. E. T. Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 37.

21 *De votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium*. WA 8:573-669; LW 44:251-400. Luther included a dedicatory letter to his father Hans with this treatise calling to mind his disobedience to the commandment of God to “honor father and mother” and how Hans’ words questioning Luther’s monastic vocation “penetrated to the depths of my soul and stayed there.” The letter, dated 21 November 1521, is in WA 8:573-576; LW 48:330-336, Letter 104. For a discussion of the letter’s significance, see Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 30-31.

22 Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 373. Brecht relates the relevant history of Luther’s development in this regard in his chapter titled “The Reformatory Program,” (ch. 10), pages 339-388.

23 The fifth section begins at WA 8:629; LW 44:336. Luther takes up the point at hand in WA 8:663; LW 44:390: “Veniamus nunc ad nostra. Votum castitatis lex est mere corporalis de re corporalissem. Quare solvenda est cum fiducia, imo nunquam ligavit nec ligare potuit, ubi periculum animae aut corporis intercessit. Non enim ut perderes animam et corpus, votum exigit. Cogiteturque votum castitatis, ipsomet Christo interprete, hunc sensum habere: ‘Voveo castitatem, quantum fieri potest absque periculo corporis et animae.’ *Si itaque te postea sentias* [1 Cor. 7: 9.] *uri, iam votum nihil est, securusque*
which Luther amplified and developed in his treatises and exegetical lecturing and writing that concurrently amplified and developed his understanding of the body.

But if religious life was not to be found in the cowl and cell of the cloister, what of marriage and the marriage bed? Luther’s attention was drawn back to the institution of marriage when he received the news of the wedding of his mercurial colleague in the theology faculty, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt [1486-1541] to Anna Mochau, followed by that of another close Wittenberg colleague, Justas Jonas [1493-1555], to Katherina Falk.24

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*illud Pauli sequeris: ‘Si non continent, nubant.’ Et iterum: ‘Melius est nubere quam uri.’* An non Iudaei tam rigide voverant legem sabbati et panis sancti, quam tu castitatem? prorsus nihil est discriminis, secure arguis isto argumento Christi: Illi solverunt sabbati et panis sancti legem, necessitate excipiente et interpretante, et ego solvam legem votae castitatis maiore necessitate et periculo animae. Noli timere, Christus tete non fallet, non enim vere solvis, sed sanum intellectum voti apprehendis.” (“Let us now turn to the matter we have been discussing. The vow of chastity is a purely bodily affair that concerns absolutely nothing but the flesh. Therefore, it can be abolished with absolute confidence. In fact, it was never binding, or could it ever be binding where it imperiled soul or body. A vow never demanded that you lose your soul and body. According to Christ’s own interpretation the vow of chastity means this, ‘I vow chastity insofar as it is possible to do so without danger to the body or soul.’ If afterward you feel the surge of passion, then the vow is void and you may safely follow Paul’s advice, ‘If they cannot be continent, let them marry,’ and again, ‘It is better to marry than burn’ [1 Cor. 7:9]. Did the Jews not vow the law of the sabbath and law of hallowed bread just as rigidly as you vow chastity? There is absolutely no difference. You may safely argue on the basis of Christ’s principle that these men did break the law about the sabbath and about the shewbread because necessity demanded they do so and necessity interpreted the law’s true meaning. I will break the law of the vow of chastity on the ground of a greater necessity as well as a greater danger to the soul. Fear not; Christ will not fail you. You are not really breaking the vow; you are laying hold of a sound interpretation of what the vow really means” (emphasis added).

24 Karlstadt’s wedding took place on 19 January 1522: the groom was 36; Anna was reportedly a mere 15. See Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 200. Jonas was married the following February to his bride Katherina, the first of his three eventual wives. See Martin Lehmann, *Justus Jonas, Loyal Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 43.
Actually, Luther’s first preserved essay on marriage was a sermon delivered on 16 January 1519 (Epiphany 2) for which the Gospel lesson was the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). The sermon is unremarkable in terms of being a strong harbinger of Luther’s later thinking, but as is so often the case, it is worth examining retrospectively for the glimmers of his later thought that can be perceived. In this sermon Luther affirmed marriage as a sacrament and that “the doctors have found three good and useful things about the married estate,” namely, the sole-sanctioned outlet of the sex drive “by means of which the sin of lust…is counteracted (durch welche die sundlich lust...widderstatte wurde),” the covenant of fidelity by which husband and wife bind themselves to one another, and the fact that “marriage produces offspring,” which Luther affirmed as “the end and chief purpose of marriage (das end und furnhemlich ampt der ehe).” While he would later no longer consider marriage a sacrament in the strict sense, he continued to stress the matter of marital fides and, even more strongly, procreation as of primary importance in marriage.

Convulsions over the winter of 1521-1522 in Wittenberg due to the zeal and actions of Karlstadt and Zwilling combined with the presence of the “Zwickau prophets” and the timidity of Melanchthon to induce Luther to return to the city from exile at the
Wartburg on 6 March 1522.⁷⁷ “Satan has fallen on my flock at Wittenberg,” he wrote to Elector Frederick⁷⁸ and out of pastoral concern (and at considerable personal peril) he came back to reclaim his pulpit. The “Eight Wittenberg Sermons” Luther preached during the week of *Invocavit* shed considerable light on his consternation over how the gospel had been so ill-used—by his friends!—in Wittenberg in his absence, and raised the question of what the situation was in the wider countryside. Luther accepted invitations in April and May to find out just that via a visitation of certain prominent cities in Electoral Saxony—Altenburg, Borna, Zwickau, Eilenburg, and Torgau.⁷⁹ Most of the sermons from Luther’s tour have survived and reveal the breadth of topics Luther felt compelled to address for the sake of solidifying the Reformation—marriage was among them. Indeed, it is thought that this preaching tour, and the marital casuistry questions Luther encountered during it, served to catalyze his thinking for his 1522 treatise *The Estate of Marriage*.³⁰

Luther was facing something of a legal vacuum when he wrote this treatise: canonical law regulating marriage was *de facto* no longer in force and there was nothing in terms of civil law to replace it; *The Estate of Marriage* was an attempt to fill the

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⁷⁷ For Luther’s return from the Wartburg and the conditions necessitating it in Wittenberg see Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 33-45, 57-66; Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 206-214.

⁷⁸ WABr 2:459-462, Letter 456a [Luther to Elector Frederick, 7 or 8 March 1522]; LW 48:394-398, Letter 118: “zu Wittemberg...mir der Satan in meine Hürden gefallen ist.”


Luther framed his approach in Part 1 of the treatise in the same manner as he had in *The Babylonian Captivity*, namely, to affirm Christian freedom in the face of man-made law. He thereby ruled out the eighteen categories of impediments to marriage cited in canonical law in favor of those few for which there was biblical support, then castigated the church’s practice of granting dispensations for fees. In Part 2 he dealt with the New Testament passages on divorce and abandonment. Here one can see Luther’s realism in the face of the many conundrums and complicated casuistry issues divorce engenders. Speaking to the limits to which sinful behavior can be curbed, he says about those who cannot be stopped from following the sinful behavior of others: “God and their own consciences will catch up to them in due time. Who can prevent all wickedness?”

In the final part, Luther desired to speak to the aspect of *fides* in marriage, that is, the mutual fidelity of husbands and wives as they live together under Christ. In this portion Luther defended women against the defamations of pagan tradition and the misogynistic attitude that survived in various quarters of male society that disdained women and marriage as a result. Young men, in particular, should eschew the “common

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31 See Bornkamm’s assessment in this regard, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 111: “[O]ne must admire Luther for his attempt to give marriage a new legal basis and distinguishing character.”

32 *Vom Ehelichen Leben, 1522*. WA 10²:289, LW 45:33: “Gott und yhr gewissen wirt sie wol finden zu seiner tzeyt, wer kan aller boeßheyt weren?”

33 See, for example, the description of women in the medieval “classic,” *Malleus Maleficarum, 1546*: [Woman] is more carnal than a man. …She always deceives… What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors. …To conclude, all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable.” *Malleus Malificarum*, ed. and trans. Montague Summers (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), 41-48. It should be noted, however, that the thinking of the Middle Ages concerning the female body is very complex. While a strong,
complaints” they hear about marriage: it is “God’s good will and work” which “does not set well with the devil” who tries to keep men away from marriage for the sake of fornication and other secret sins.\(^{34}\) He again appeals to God’s creative design and purpose that “It is not good for the man to be alone” and urges—in keeping with Proverbs 18:22—that one find a wife. “Many have wives, but few find wives (Viel haben weyber, aber wenig finden weyber).”\(^{35}\) Husbands and wives are meant to be fathers and mothers, expending themselves for the sake of fulfilling God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. In this, wives should embrace childbirth (and its dangers) as the “work of God in you.” Fathers engaged in the service of their children cause God and all his angels and creatures to smile “not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith (nicht das er die windel wesscht, sondern das erß ym glawben thut).”\(^{36}\) Marriage is God’s blessed estate for men and women in contrast with “how wretched is the spiritual estate of monks and nuns by its very nature, for it lacks the word and pleasure of God.”\(^{37}\) Moreover, marriage “checks and eliminates” sexual sins, something “in itself…so great a good that it alone should be enough to induce men to marry

misogynistic meme was prevalent, the female body was nonetheless associated more readily with spirituality than the male. For a discussion see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992), 181-238, and Thomas A. Fudge, “Incest and Lust in Luther’s Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 330.

\(^{34}\) *Vom Ehelichen Leben*, 1522. WA 10\(^2\):294, LW 45:37.

\(^{35}\) *Vom Ehelichen Leben*, 1522. WA 10\(^2\):294-295, LW 45:38 (emphasis added).

\(^{36}\) *Vom Ehelichen Leben*, 1522. WA 10\(^2\):296-297, LW 45:40.

\(^{37}\) *Vom Ehelichen Leben*, 1522. WA 10\(^2\):297, LW 45:41.
forthwith, and for many reasons.”\textsuperscript{38} Marriage, because it offers godly sexual release, is also good for the body.

Physicians are not amiss when they say: If this natural function is forcibly restrained it necessarily strikes into the flesh and blood and becomes a poison, whence the body becomes unhealthy, enervated, sweaty, and foul-smelling. That which should have issued in fruitfulness and propagation has to be absorbed within the body itself. Unless there is terrific hunger or immense labor or the supreme grace, the body cannot take it; it necessarily becomes unhealthy and sickly. Hence, we see how weak and sickly barren women are. Those who are fruitful, however, are healthier, cleaner, [sic] and happier.\textsuperscript{39}

Finally, the propagation of children is above all else “the greatest good in married life,” declared the yet unmarried Luther.

Luther wrote \textit{The Estate of Marriage} with reticence because of the complexity of the subject and because he was certain that more conundrums involving marriage would surely be posed to him.\textsuperscript{40} Yet Luther’s writing—the only treatise from his pen devoted

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\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Vom Ehelichen Leben}, 1522. WA 10\textsuperscript{2}:299, LW 45:43.
\item \textsuperscript{39} \textit{Vom Ehelichen Leben}, 1522. WA 10\textsuperscript{2}:301, LW 45:45-46: “Daher auch die ertzte nicht ubel reden, das sie sprechen, wo man mit gewallt helt dißer natur werck, das muß es ynn das fleysch und blut schlachen und gifft werden, darauß denn ungesunde, schwache unnd schwenstige, stinckende leybe werden, denn was tzur frucht und mehrung sollt komen, das muß der leyb ynn sich selb vertzerhen. Wo denn da nicht ungeheurig hunger oder schwere arbeyt oder die hohe gnad ist, da wirts dem leyb tzu viel, und muß ungesund und siech davon werdenn. Daher man auch sihet, wie schwach und ungesund die unfriuchtbar weyber sind, die aber fruchtabar sind, sind gesunder, reynlicher und lustiger” (trans. Walther I. Brandt).
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{Vom Ehelichen Leben}, 1522. WA 10\textsuperscript{2}:275, LW 45:17: “Wie wol myr grawet, und nit gern vom Eelichen leben predige, darumb das ich besorge, wo ichs eyn mal recht anruere, wirts myrs und andern vil tzuschaffen geben. Denn der iamer durch Papstlich verdamppte gesetz alßo schendlich verwyrret ist, datzu durch hynlessig regiment, beyde geystlichs und welltlichs schwerts ßo viel grewlicher mißbreuch und yrriger felle sich drynnen begeben haben, das ich nicht gern drey nhe sehe, noch gern davon hoere. Aber fur nott hilfft keyn schewhen, ich muß hynan, die elenden verwyrreten gewissen tzu unterrichten, und frisch dreyyn greyffen.” (“How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! I am reluctant to do it because I am afraid if I once get really involved in the subject it will make a lot of work for me and for others. The shameful confusion wrought
exclusively to the institution of marriage—provided a new, fundamental understanding of marriage and a foundation for its eventual legal basis in Reformation society.  

4.1.3 — The Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7, 1523

To *Vom Ehelichen Leben* must be added a final writing that further laid out Luther’s thinking on celibacy, sex, and marriage in this same time period: his 1523 commentary on 1 Corinthians 7 written as a “wedding present” to “my gracious lord and friend,” Hans Löser of Pretzsch. The reason for its genesis was the ongoing controversy over monastic life and the celibate vow as more and more monks, friars, and nuns had quit their convents as a result of Luther’s 1522 treatise on monastic vows. A by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and the temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations, that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter nor to hear of it. But timidity is no help in an emergency; I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly” (Walther I. Brandt, trans.).


42 *Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523.* WA 12:92-142, LW 28:3-56. Hans von Löser was the hereditary marshal of Saxony and engaged to be married at the time of its writing. Luther conducted his wedding to Ursula von Portzig in December 1524; von Löser later served as godfather to Luther’s fifth child, Paul. For more on Faber and the occasion for Luther’s writing, see the introduction to the treatise in LW 28: ix-xi; Brecht, *Shaping and Defining,* 94; Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career,* 262-264.

43 Indeed, it was during April 1523 that Luther “received nine nuns from their captivity in the Nimbschen convent” (“ex Nimpschen monasterio novem moniales ex
Catholic response to this Reformation challenge to the “spiritual estate” came from Johannes Faber [1478-1541], the vicar of the bishop of Konstanz. Faber wrote a lengthy polemic against Luther defending monastic vows and the spiritual superiority of the celibate state, but only on the strength of citations from “fathers, fathers, fathers, councils, councils, councils,” not Scripture. In fact, Faber claimed that the pope could promote celibacy without the Bible and that the passage “Be fruitful and multiply…” was nullified by Jerome’s dictum, “Virginity fills heaven, marriage the earth.” Luther had little desire to respond to Faber’s “endless citations” to human authority and dismissed them with the quip, “My dog, too, looks at a lot of books every day.” Faber’s book goaded him only far enough to give the task of replying to it to the recently married Justus Jonas. Still, Faber had struck a nerve. Since the time of Jerome, Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 7 had been used to establish the pre-eminence of the celibate life.

captivitate accepi”), their number including his future wife, Katherina. WABr 3:53, [Luther to John Lang, 8 April 1523]. See Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 258; Kirsi Stjerna, Women and the Reformation (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 23-24.

44 The title of Faber’s diatribe was equally prolix: Against Certain New Dogmas of Martin Luther Which Are Thoroughly Opposed to the Christian Religion (Adversus nova quaedam et a christiana religione prorsus aliena dogmata Martini Lutheri).

45 Begleitbrief zu der Schrift des Jonas Adversus Iohannem Fabrum, 1523. WA 12:85. This is Luther’s characterization of Faber’s argument given in a foreword he penned for Jonas’ reply to Faber. Cited in Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 262.

46 Lehmann, Justus Jonas, 93.

47 Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 94.

48 LW 28, ix: “Faber, who admitted that he was anxiously awaiting Luther’s own reply to his book, must have been especially chagrined to have Jonas taunt him with the statement that he had accomplished what neither pope nor schoolmen nor ecclesiastical orders had been able to do so far, to silence Luther—but only because Luther’s friends begged him to spare the poor man.” See also Lehmann, Justus Jonas, 92-95.
1522 commentary by Melanchthon on the chapter criticized Jerome’s views of celibacy, but did not employ the kind of exegetical muscle Luther felt was needed, so he decided to take up the issues involved once again himself.

Luther’s *Seventh Chapter of St. Paul to the Corinthians* addressed the freedom of the Christian to either marry or not marry, both states being “equal before [God], for both are his divine gift (Also gillt auch fur yhm...gleich, denn beydes ist seyn goettliche gabe).” But more importantly, Luther went on to declare that the church, by institutionalizing the unmarried state and enshrining it as “religious,” and by calling the divine institution of marriage “secular,” had things exactly backward. “It should be just the reverse (Sondern es sollt umb gekeret seyn),” growled Luther.

Nothing should be called religious except that inner life of faith in the heart, where the Spirit rules. But since that also is termed religious which happens outwardly to the body through the spirit of faith, let us be very just and precise in our differentiation and understand that the state of marriage in all fairness should be termed religious and the religious orders secular. I speak here of the orders and the religious who have let people call and describe them thus. Those that act in true faith and are genuinely religious, they certainly belong to the right religious order of chastity.

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50 See Scott Hendrix’s appraisal, Hendrix, “Luther on Marriage,” 338: “Luther’s reinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 was revolutionary and should be set alongside his argument for the priesthood of all believers in his *Address to the Christian Nobility.*”

51 *Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523.* WA 12:105, LW 28:17.

52 *Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523.* WA 12:105, LW 28:17: “sollt wol nichts geystlich heyssen, on das ynnwendig leben des glambens ym hertzten, da der geyst regirt. Aber weyl nu das auch geystlich heysst, das auswendig am leybe geschicht durch den geyst des glawbens, so woellen wyr hie gar eben und feyn sehen und greyffen, das der ehestand mit allem recht geystlich, und die orden weltlich stende heyssen sollten. Ich rede aber von den orden und geystlichen, die sich bis her also nennen und rhuemen haben lassen. Denn die ienigen, so recht ym glawben faren und warhaffig geystlich sind, die haben freylich den rechten geystlichen stand der keuscheyt.”
To be sure, truly *chaste* celibacy is a great gift of God, and nobler than marriage because of its rarity. “Nevertheless, marriage is just as much a gift of God...as chastity is.” Only those to whom God grants grace to live without marriage could promise to do so. Those who could not should get married. Thus Luther did not anoint marriage as the “more excellent way,” but as the more *natural*, for within it alone the body’s gift of sexuality is rightly channeled and used.

Here St. Paul has piled all the reasons for marrying in one heap and set the goal for all the glory of chastity when he says: “But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.” This is as much as to say: Necessity orders that you marry. Much as chastity is praised, and no matter how noble a gift it is, nevertheless necessity prevails so that few can attain it, for they cannot control themselves. For although we are Christians and have the spirit of God in faith, still we do not cease to be God’s creatures, you a woman, and I a man. And the spirit permits the body its ways and natural functions, so that it eats, drinks, sleeps, and eliminates like any other human body. 53

4.2 – Marriage, the Body, and Sexuality

Luther’s concentration on monastic vows and marriage between 1520 and 1525 (calling to mind that he also undertook his sermon series on Genesis, which became the *Declamationes* of 1527) resulted in a body of literature in which the underlying issue of

53 *Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523. WA 12:113, LW 28:26:* “Und S. Paulus hat zwar hie alle ursach zu freyen auff eynen hauffen ausgeschütt, und allem rhum der keuscheyt das zill gesteckt, da er spricht:‘konnen sie aber nicht halleten, so lass sie freyen’. Das ist also viel gesagt: Nott heysst dich ehlich werden. Wie hoch nu die keuscheyt gepreyßet wirt, und wie eddel auch die gabe der keuscheyt ist, so weret doch die Nott, das gar wenig hynan koennen, denn sie koennen nicht halleten. Denn wie wol wyr Christen sind, und den geyst gottis ym glawben haben, so ist da mit doch nicht auffgehaben gottis Creatur, das du eyn weyb, ich eyn man byn. Und lesset dennoch der geyst dem leybe seyne art und natuerliche werck, das er isset, trincket, schlefft, dewet, auswirrfit, wie eyns andern menschen leyb.”
humanity’s creation as sexual beings is essential to Luther’s view of the ontology of the human body. Thus, it is the “mature” Luther we hear speaking about marriage and sexuality in a 1532 Tabletalk when he says: “These things are in marriage: sex is naturally sought after, likewise procreation and offspring, as well as cohabitation and mutual fidelity.”

In enumerating these, Luther is neither controversial nor necessarily original, but is affirming two of Augustine’s “three goods” of marriage enshrined in medieval theology’s understanding of the purposes of marriage: proles, the good of procreation and fides, marital fidelity. Luther does more than merely recapitulate Augustine, however. In his writings he distinctively draws out certain implications embedded in these purposes concerning the relationship between husbands and wives. While men and women marry ultimately because of God’s will, on a secondary level sex, fidelity, and progeny provide the basis for the relationship between husbands and wives.

4.2.1 – THE SEX DRIVE: “SEX IS GOOD”

A young woman, if the high, rare grace [of chaste celibacy] is not hers, can do without a man as little as without eating, drinking, sleeping, and other natural

54 WATr 1:83 (Nr. 185); LW 54:25-26 (No. 185): “In coniugio sunt haec, quod sexus naturaliter appetitur, item generatio et proles, item cohabitatio et mutua fides.”

55 Augustine posited “three goods of marriage: procreation (proles), marital fidelity (fides), and marriage’s function as a “sacred sign” (sacramentum). See David G. Hunter, “Marriage,” Augustine Through the Ages, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 535-536. See also Witte, Law and Protestantism, 226.

56 Witte, Law and Protestantism, 219.
necessities. And again, a man as well cannot do without a woman. The reason is this: it is so deeply planted in human nature to beget children as are eating and drinking. For this reason God provided and put in place the body with its members, arteries, fluids and everything that serves to that end. Now he who wants to stop this and not let happen what nature wants and requires, what does he otherwise do than keep nature from being nature, fire from burning, water from being wet, and man from eating, drinking, or sleeping?  

In speaking about the reasons for marriage, Luther most often lists the sex drive first: a fundamental reason for marrying is simply the natural drive that men and women have for sexual intercourse—something that is present within people as a result of God’s creative command to be “fruitful and multiply.” Yet, as straightforward as that may sound, this is one of the areas of Luther’s ethics of the body and marriage that is most criticized (the other being his understanding of male hegemony in marriage).  

Paul Lehmann’s study, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, for example, suggests that “with Luther, the felicity of the sexual act was included with an exalted and even exultant view of marriage and characteristically overshadowed by a grim negativity which found in marriage the one effective antidote to incontinence.” James B. Nelson similarly

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58 For an overview, see the introductory chapter to Susan C. Kurant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7-14. Mickey L. Mattox’s, *Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs: Martin Luther’s Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Ennarationes in Genesin, 1535-1545* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003) provides a scholarly discussion *sine propensione animi* of Luther’s understanding of Eve and her pre- and post-lapsarian status vis-à-vis Adam, pp. 87-102. See also in this regard Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 220.

suggests that “a positive affirmation of sexuality evaded [Luther].”\textsuperscript{60} Most critical of all about Luther’s view of the body’s sexuality are some feminist voices. For example, Karen Armstrong states that Luther was indeed “deeply indebted” to Augustine and carried his negative attitudes toward sexuality and marriage right into the heart of the Reformation. \textit{Luther particularly hated sex}, even though he himself got married and abolished celibacy in his Christian movement.\textsuperscript{61}

But are these characterizations really consonant with what Luther thought and wrote?

Much of the answer lies in Luther’s predilection for drawing strong dialectical contrasts. Lisa Sowle Cahill clearly states the point at issue vis-à-vis Luther’s view of sexuality in her \textit{Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality}.\textsuperscript{62} Cahill notes that in his 1522 \textit{The Estate of Marriage}, Luther clearly upholds sexuality, procreation, and the institution of marriage as God’s good creations; they are part of a “divine ordinance” that is embodied in men and women. However, at the same time and in the same treatise, Luther closes with the assertion:


Intercourse is never without sin; but God excuses it by his grace because the estate of marriage is his work, and he preserves in and through the sin all the good which he has implanted and blessed in marriage.\textsuperscript{63}

Cahill correctly notes that the tension between the two propositions—“sex is good; sex is sinful”—raises several questions which need to be answered in the context of Luther’s doctrines of original sin and humanity’s restoration in Christ.\textsuperscript{64} But, as Michael Parsons notes with regard to Cahill’s analysis, there are two main issues to keep in mind in this connection. The first is Luther’s teaching that sexual desire is a gift of God, the Creator. The second is that the use of this gift has been tainted by the Fall into sin (Gen. 3).\textsuperscript{65} Luther’s words must be considered within the Creation-Fall matrix in order to read them in the way in which he wanted to develop his teaching about sexuality and marriage.

Thus, in examining Luther’s view, the important thing to keep in mind is his explicit teaching that God himself created the sex drive and the mutual attraction between men and women as part of his original, good creation. Moreover, God’s powerful, creative word is rooted and operates in men’s and women’s bodies to form new life as part of God’s on-going creative work. Since this drive is part of the human body’s created nature by virtue of God’s powerful word, men and women are incapable in their bodies of resisting it—to attempt to do so is as impossible as “vowing to become God’s mother.”\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Vom Ehelichen Leben}. WA 10\textsuperscript{2}:304; LW 45:49; “Unnd das keyn ehepflicht on sund geschicht, aber gott verschonet yhr auß gnaden darumb, das der ehliche orden seyn werck ist und behellt auch mitten unnd durch die sund alle das gutt, das er dareyn gepflantzt und gesegnen hatt” (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{64} Cahill, \textit{Between the Sexes}, 124-126.

\textsuperscript{65} Parsons, \textit{Reformation Marriage}, 160.

\textsuperscript{66} Luther asserts this formally and informally. See WATR 1:98 (Nr. 233); LW 54:31 (No. 233): “Sine peccato non potes carere uxor. Coniugium autem est ordinatio et
It compels them to “be fruitful and multiply.” Commenting on this aspect of Luther’s teaching, Heinrich Bornkamm cautions against a misreading at precisely this point. Luther’s emphasis “signified no capitulation to the irresistible sinfulness of human nature, as some have interpreted him. Rather, it is part of his teaching on creation which declares that nature…” Bornkamm’s observation is especially important in the caution it issues about understanding Luther’s view of sexuality and the body: one begins in the wrong place, if one begins by looking at what Luther says about the sexual drive as it is after the fall into sin. Rather, Luther begins and roots his teaching about human sexuality in the understanding that sexual desire is part of created human nature. Originally (that is, before the fall) it was without sin. As Luther makes very clear in the Genesisvorlesung, at creation and before the fall there was no activity more excellent except proclaiming the name of God.

creatura Dei.” (“You cannot be without a wife and not sin. After all, marriage is the ordinance and creation of God.”); Christliche Schrift an W. Reifenbusch, sich in den ehelichen Stand zu begeben, WA 18:276: “Darumb nimpt vorwahr, der einsam sein will, einen unmueglichen streit fur, das er Gottes wort und creatur, wie sie durch sein wort erschaffen, erhalten und getrieben wirt, auff sich ledt und widderficht. Es gelinget yhn auch darnach, sie ringen, das sie fol hurerey und aller unreinigkeit des fleisch werden, und zu letzt darinnen ersauffen und verzweiffeln. Darumb gilt solchs geluebeb widder Gotts wort und werck, als eyn unmueglichs, nicht. Gott verdammet es auch, gleich als wenn ich gelobet, Ich wolt Gottes mutter werden, odder einen hymel schaffen.” (“Therefore, whoever will live alone undertakes an impossible task and takes on himself to run counter to God’s Word and the nature that God has given and preserves in him. The outcome is in keeping with the attempt; such persons revel in whoredom and all sorts of uncleanness of the flesh until they are drowned in their own vices and driven to despair. For this reason such a vow against God’s Word and against nature, being impossible, is null and void. And God also condemns it, just as if somebody should vow to be God’s mother or to make a heaven.” (Theodore Tappert, trans. ).)

67 Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 111 (emphasis added). Cited in Parsons, Reformation Marriage, 161.
Moreover, these well-known works of bodily life: eating, drinking, procreating, and so forth, would have been a service pleasing to God which we could have even given to God without the defect of concupiscence which now exists after sin, without sin at all and without fear of death.\(^{68}\)

While this shows that Luther emphasized the goodness of the sex drive as originally created more pointedly in his later career—particularly as he taught “the dear Genesis” in the last decade of his life, and as a result of his own marriage in 1525—we should note that the same thought appears already in *The Estate of Marriage* (1522) where he insisted that the sex drive is an intrinsic part of the creation of humanity. It is a “divine and natural ordinance (dem gotlichen und naturnlichen orden)” that is implanted and blessed by God.\(^{69}\) The *Tabletalk* of the 1530s also record several conversations in which the Doctor stated that sexual attraction between men and women is God’s creation:

**May 1532**

We [i.e., Martin and Katie] wouldn’t have received the blessing [of children] if the Lord hadn’t planted the desire in us. The ardor is in both [men and women], and children are engendered as a consequence.\(^{70}\)

**Summer 1532**


\(^{69}\) *Vom Ehelichen Leben*. WA 10\(^2\):279; LW 45:22. *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42*. WA 43:57; LW 3:255 on Genesis 19:4-5: “Sodomitarum singularis enormitas est, discedentium a naturali ardore et desyderio, quod divinitus implantatum est in naturam, ut masculus ardeat in foeminam…” (“The [deed of] the men of Sodom is singularly out of bounds—a falling way from the natural passion and desire which is divinely implanted in nature so that the male longs for the female…”)

\(^{70}\) By May 1532 the Luthers had four of their eventual six children: Hans, Elizabeth (✝ 1528), Magdalena, and Martin.
The longing of a man for a woman is God’s creation…

November 1538
…the act which attracts sex to sex is a divine ordinance. Even if by mischance the act is impure on account of original sin, in itself it’s still licit and pure.\(^71\)

Commenting on Titus 2:4 in 1527 allowed the then-married Luther to note that because the male body is itself God’s creation, a wife ought to enjoy her husband’s body.\(^72\) The underlying theological basis for this allows for the admonition to be reversed: the husband ought to enjoy his wife’s body, too, because she is God’s creation, something the married Luther did: “I go to bed each night with a beautiful woman and that is my Käthe.”\(^73\) In this regard Luther remarks that the Genesis 4:1 phrase, “Adam knew his wife” is very apt because it expresses not some abstract knowledge, but feeling and experience: “In this passage [Gen. 4:1] Adam knew Eve, his wife, in this way, not

\(^71\) Cited respectively from WATr 2:150 (Nr. 1607); LW 54:158 (No. 1607): “Nam benedictionem non suscepissemus, nisi Dominus immisisset nobis libidinem. Sed aror in utroque est, der macht auch die kinder”; WATr 2:166 (Nr. 1659); LW 54:161 (No. 1659): “Et appetitus ad mulierem est creatio Dei”; WATr 4:171 (Nr. 4153); LW 54:323-324 (No. 4153): “sed ille actus sexus ad sexum est ordinatio divina; quamvis per accidens est impure propter peccatum originis, attamen per se est licta et pura.”

\(^72\) Vorlesungen über Titus. WA 25:43-44; LW 29:54 on Titus 2:4: “Contra illos, qui dicunt, quasi gentile sit Carnaliter diligere, castigant non erudient. Ut bene habeant eorum corpora, curant.” (“This is directed against those who say that it is pagan to love in a physical way. People who say such things are rebuking, not teaching. These words mean that they should enjoy their husbands’ bodies and provide for them.”)

objectively or speculatively, but he truly experienced his Eve as a woman.”  

Heiko Oberman considered Luther’s assertion that “sexual drives were a divine force or even God’s vital presence” as something that demarcated Luther’s understanding of sexuality from his peers and notes significantly in this regard that, “For Luther, God is so vitally present in the power of attraction between man and woman that he inspires the conjugal union and Himself constitutes the sexual bond of marriage.”

What can fairly be said in view of this is that Luther was more open in speaking about the sex drive and of physical attraction between the sexes as having been created, implanted, and inspired by God than his era was wont to be. The sex drive per se is not the result of sin, nor is sexual intercourse in and of itself sinful. Far from “hating sex particularly,” Luther held it in high regard and viewed it as an essential and godly aspect of created bodily life. Speaking of the patriarch Jacob’s desire for Rachel in his comments on Genesis 29, Luther says:

> And these things, too, are only natural. But they are recorded by the Holy Spirit in order that no one may think that they are disgraceful or forbidden. For it is a Christian and godly thing to love a girl and to join her to you in marriage, since there is a natural desire and inclination of sex to sex. Although this is not completely without sin, yet God does not want it to be despised as dishonorable. For it is a work of God created in man’s nature, and it should not only not be despised or vilified but should even be honored. For God wants to be glorified in all his works, both small and great.

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74 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/38*. WA 42:179; LW 1:241 on Genesis 4:1: “Ad hunc modum hoc loco cognovit Heuam uxorem, non obiective aut speculative, sed realiter expertus est suam Heuam, quod esset foemina.”

75 Heiko A. Oberman, *Martin Luther*, 273, 274. See also the discussion in Mattox, *Defender*, 52-53.

76 *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42*. WA 43:623; LW 5:282 on Genesis 29:9-12: “Atque haec quoque tantum naturalia sunt, sed ideo scribuntur a spiritu sancto, ne quis putet ea turpia aut illicita esse. Est enim Christianum et pium, amare puellam, quam iungas tibi connubio:quia est naturalis στοργῆ et inclinatio sexus ad sexum, quae quanquam non
As part of the on-going, providential creation of God, the sex drive is reason enough for men and women to unite their bodies in the vocation of marriage.

### 4.2.2 – The Sex Drive: “Sex Always Includes Sin”

But, then there is the other member of Luther’s contrast, viz., marital sexual intercourse “is never without sin.” The inborn, powerful sex drive is now infected with sin that exhibits itself in both men and women. Edenic sexuality has been turned into

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77 Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523. WA 12:135, LW 28:49.

78 Luther seems to be quite equable in his assessment of the strength of libido in women and men and would thus seem to be at variance with the typical medieval assessment that women, being less endowed with moral and reasonable capacity than males, exhibited this in an excessive carnality. See Roberto Rusconi, “Hearing Women’s Sins,” *Medieval Christianity*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 215-216. For evidence of Luther’s equable assessment of libidinal power in both sexes, see *Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand, 1519*. WA 2:167; LW 44:8: “Und itzt dye begyrde des mans zum weyb, und widder umb, nit lauter ist, dann nit alleyn geselschaft und kinder, da zu es alleyn eyn gesetzt ist, ßondernn auch dye boeße luß fast starck gesucht wirt.” (“And now [i.e., after the Fall] the desire of the man for the woman, and vice versa, is sought after not only for companionship and children, for which purposes alone marriage was instituted, but also for the pursuance of wicked lust”) (emphasis added); see also Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523. WA 12:99; LW 28:10 on 1 Corinthians 7:1-2: “Soelche blinde elende leutt haben gemeynet, die keuscheyt von auswendig ynn die menschen zu brengen, so es doch eyn gabe vom hymel erab, von ynnwendig eraus qwellen mus. Denn wie wol es war ist, das es fast reytzet und anzündet, wo mansbild und weyberbild unternander sind, ist der sachen doch damit nichts gehoffen, das sie von eynander sind. Denn was hilft michs, ob ich keyn weyb sehe, hoere odder greyffe, und doch meyn hertz voll weyber stickt, und mit
the passion (*libido*) of the flesh; the original marital *fides* of mutual love and respect enjoyed by Adam and Eve has become the locus of self-gratification and selfishness. And because of this, Scripture must enumerate a new, post-Fall purpose for marriage as a bit and bridle for the restraining and directing of fallen sexual desire in the body. It is in this arena that Luther’s “sexual negativity” appears.

According to Luther, original sin is the source “from whence issues that familiar passion and burning in sex (*unde furor iste usitatus existit et ardor in sexum*)”\(^{79}\) and in a most Luther-like turn of phrase speaks of “the glory of the genitals [being] turned into the
gedancken tag und nacht an weybern hange und schendlicher ding denckle, denn yemand thun duerffte? Und was hilffts, eyn meydlin verschliessen, das es keyn mansbild sihet noch hoeret, und doch seyn hertz tag und nacht on unterlaß nach eym knaben seuffzet?” (“Such poor, blinded people thought chastity could be put into people from without, whereas it is a gift from heaven and must come from within. Although it is true that there is attraction and temptation wherever men and women are together, the matter is not helped by separating them. For how does it help me if I do not see, hear, or touch a woman and still my heart is full of women and my thoughts are taken up with them day and night, thinking of the shameless things that one might do? And of what help is it to a girl to shut her up so that she neither sees nor hears a man, when her heart still sighs day and night, without ceasing, for a young man?”). In the *Genesisvorlesung* WA 43:454; LW 5:37, Luther notes in connection with Genesis 26:8 (“Abimelech… saw Isaac fondling Rebecca his wife.”): “…*both* spouses are infected with original sin and the disease and frenzy of lust” (emphasis added). Similarly, in connection with the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, Genesis 39:7-10, Luther discusses—in a passage too long to reproduce here—youthful lust as a “disease (*morbus*)” which assails both sexes equally. See WA 44:355-356; LW 7:75-76 and Mattox, *Defender*, 242. Finally, in his comments on Matthew 5:27-28, Luther applies Christ’s warning about “anyone who looks lustfully on a woman (v. 27)” equally, *mutatis mutando*, to both men and women. See WA 32:371, LW 21:86. For a corroborating opinion, see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “The Masculinity of Martin Luther,” *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 172.

utmost disgrace (*genitalium gloria versa sit in summam ignominiam*)” as a result of the Fall. Thus, Luther frequently speaks of marriage as a remedy against sin in his sermons and treatises. The body needs marriage in this context as a corollary to the Fall and original sin which brings lust—a “burning” in the flesh. Luther evocatively likens this to sexual heat “as the deer has it, as a harlot feels it toward adulterers (*significant die brunst, sicut cervus, habet meretrix erga adulteros*).” Not surprisingly, Luther believed this lust to be more prevalent among the young: “For when youths are about 18 years old, original sin begins to rage, and there are horrible disturbances and thoughts of promiscuous lusts in their hearts.” However, Luther does not isolate sexual desire but co-ordinates lust with other sinful passions such as anger, anxiety, hatred and blasphemy. In his 1535 Galatians commentary he links it as well to impatience and mental depression. What this suggests is that Luther’s pessimism is not restricted to sexual desire *per se*, nor with the effects of sin on sexual desire alone, but with the whole range of sin that is part and parcel of life-within-the-body.

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81 Scott Hendrix, “Luther on Marriage,” 336-337. But this remediating character in marriage after the fall does not negate that marriage is the gift of God. See, for example, WA 42:268; LW 2:9 on Genesis 6:1-2, plus numerous statements in the *Tabletalk* such as WATr 3:606-608, (Nr. 3777); LW 54:270, (No. 3777).


83 *Genesisvorlesung*, 1543/45. WA 44:356; LW 7:75 on Genesis 39:7-10: “Nam circa decimum octavum annum incipit furere originale malum, et existunt horribiles commotions ac cogitationes vagarum libidinum in animis adolescentum.”


Pastorally, Luther’s ruminations about sex and marriage led him to advise those who suffer temptations of the flesh not to despair of Christ and his grace. Rather, following the example of godly Isaac (as he had been taught by his father, the “most holy”—sanc tissimus—Abraham), “one must contend against these flames, first by reading the Holy Scripture and praying, and then by working, being temperate, and fasting. These should be the exercises of adolescents, at least for one year or two…”

However, if one can no longer endure, Pfarrer Luther advised bluntly: “Ask the Lord to give you a wife with whom you may live in a pleasing manner and in true love (ora, ut Dominus det coniugem, cum qua suaviter vivas et in vero amore).” For in marrying people “walk by the Spirit” as St. Paul says, and make provision for their flesh enabl[ing] it to bear the requirements of both the mind and the body… Thus if your flesh becomes lascivious, repress it by the Spirit. If it persists, get married! “For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9). When you do this, you walk by the Spirit; that is, you follow the Word and will of God.

This understanding of marriage as a remedy against inevitable sin in an important reason in Luther’s argument against all conditions of celibacy. Unless one is endowed with “special grace (sonder gnad),” the consequence of not marrying will be sexual sin outside of marriage.


87 Galatervorlesung, 1535. WA 40 2:87; LW 27:69 on Galatians 5:16: “Quare iuxta praeceptum Pauli debemus carnis nostram curare, ut possit tolerare labores ingenii et corporis, …Itaque si caro incipit lascivire, reprime eam Spiritu, si pergit, duc uxorem (1 Kor. 7, 9). ‘Melius est enim nubere, quam uri.’ Hoc faciens ambulas Spiritu, Hoc est, sequeris verbum et voluntatem Dei.”
It is admittedly true, that he who will not get married must fornicate (*buben*): how could it go otherwise? For God made man and woman to have seed in themselves and to increase. So, why shouldn’t one preclude fornication by means of marriage? Because where special grace does not intervene, there human nature wants and will have seed and increase. If it doesn’t happen in marriage, where else can it happen other than in whoring or in secret sins? But, they say, what if I don’t marry, nor fornicate, and keep myself under control? Don’t you hear that it is unrestrained without special grace? For God’s word doesn’t let it be restrained, nor does the word lie when it says, “Be fruitful and multiply.” You cannot guard against nor restrain being fruitful and multiplying: it is God’s work and goes his way…

Later in his life, in the *Genesisvorlesung*, Luther moved beyond considering marriage only as a *remedy* to declaring it actually *curative*. Commenting on Genesis 18:9 and the “modesty or restraint” of the matriarch Sarah in her marriage, Luther opines:

And this modesty or restraint of Sarah is a work pertaining to the home. But what virgin or widow could be compared to her? But this very union of male and female [scarcely] moves the little saints (*sanctulos*), so that not only do they not think that this kind of life is holy, but even that it impedes saintly exercises. For it was for this reason that the pope imposed celibacy on his own people. Thence, this kind of life is too ordinary and common among all people; therefore it is devoid of all splendor, and is looked down upon most by those who want to be the saintliest.

Yet their eyes should have been fixed [on this]: …“God created them male and female,” and likewise, “He blessed them” (Gen. 1:27). Will you now consider these things to be insignificant?

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But if you consider the final cause, that a Church is prepared for God, and the hideous disease of the flesh *is healed through marriage*, and the way of sin is blocked, lest it ensnare us, surely these facts richly commend marriage.\(^89\)

Luther continued to call the fallen sex drive a “serious sickness,” and “a kind of disease, yes, a frenzy and a fury.”\(^90\) Yet his own pastoral experience (if the number of discussions regarding marital cases in the *Tabletalk* is any gauge) and his own marriage led him to move beyond a view of marriage as merely slaking the thirst of lust, but as a cure for it.

But how does marriage cure? The still unmarried Luther spoke obliquely about how in a 1521 letter to his friend Nicholas Gerbel [ca. 1485-1560] in Strassburg. Luther called Gerbel a “lucky man” because, by contracting an “honorable marriage,” he had “conquered that unclean celibacy which is reprehensible because it causes either a constant burning or unclean pollutions.” He then went on to say,

> That most miserable celibacy of young men and women daily presents such great horrors to me that even now nothing sounds worse to my ears than the words “nun,” “monk,” and “priest.” I consider marriage to be a paradise, even if it has to


\(^90\) *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42.* WA 43:378; LW 4:336 on Genesis 25:19-20: “Sic libido *gravis morbus* et onus est: sed resistendum est et pugnandum.” (“Thus lust is a *serious sickness* and a burden: but it must be resisted and fought.”); WA 44:358; LW 7:79 on Genesis 39:7-10: “morbus quidam, imo rabies et furor...”
endure greatest poverty. …Farewell, stay very happy, and pray for me. From my wilderness, 1521. 91

Through marriage, the fallen sexual drive of the body—otherwise unrestrained and unbridled—is controlled and directed. The man who takes pleasure in his wife will be more likely to avoid sexual immorality because marriage quenches sexual frustration. But he went even further in declaring the curative power of marriage in his Genesisvorlesung:

“Whatever remains of the flesh is devoured by faith, so that [to seek a wife] is spiritual: for the Spirit frees from the corruption and the blemish of original sin.”92 To say that marriage is “spiritual” is to acknowledge that although it belongs to temporal life (and is ruled by God through earthly authority—the Regiment of God’s “left hand”), it is nevertheless closely connected by the believer’s faith to God’s Regiment of his “right hand,” the Christian being a citizen under both Regimenter.93 The moral life called for under the one impacts the other so that marriage is God’s means for restraining sin and

91 WABr 2:397, Letter 435; LW 48:321-322, Letter 100 [Luther to Nicholas Gerbel, 1 November 1521]: “Felix tu, qui imprum istum caelibatum et vel uredine perpetua vel immundis fluxibus damnabilem honorabili coniugio superasti! …Tanta monstra mihi iste adolescentum et puellarum caelibatus miserrimus quotidie manifestat, ut nihil iam auribus meis sonet odiosius monialis, monachi, sacerdotis nomine, et paradisum arbitror coniugium vel summa inopia laborans. …Et tu vale felicissime, ac pro me ora. Ex Eremo mea 1521!” (Gottfried G. Krodel, trans.). For a similar statement by the “mature” Luther, see the Genesisvorlesung 1538/42. WA 43:295; LW 4:222 on Genesis 24:1-4.

For Luther’s relationship to Nicholas Gerbel, see LW 48:317-318; Martin Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 170.

92 Genesisvorlesung, 1538/42. WA 43:316; LW 4:252 on Genesis 24:5-7: “…sed quicquid de carne restat, absorbetur per fidem, ut sit spirituale: Spiritus enim liberat a corruption et vitio originalis peccati” (emphasis added).

93 For a discussion of the distinction and language surrounding Luther’s Zwei Regimenter Lehre, see John R. Stephenson, “The Two Governments and the Two Kingdoms in Luther’s Thought,” Scottish Journal of Theology, 34: 322-323.
healing lust. Nonetheless, although marriage is “higher than any other walk of life,”

94 it cannot save the body or the soul. 95

Luther obviously wrestled with the Augustinian conviction that sexual intercourse, although a gift from God, can never be without sin, but as we have seen, such relatively positive language about sexual intercourse within marriage came to dominate in him. We see this over the course of the 1520s. In the 1519 *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* Luther sounded reticent, speaking of sexual intercourse merely as a “conjugal obligation,” emphasizing that it works through “the wicked lust of the flesh, which nobody can do without.” Although he acknowledged that “it is not reprehensible when expressed within marriage;”—indeed, it is a necessary part of the marriage bond—even so, a husband had better be careful to control himself and “not make a sow’s manure wallow out of [his marriage] (nit eyne mist und ßaw pful drauß mache).” 96

Moving forward in the decade, in the 1522 treatise *Vom Ehelichen Leben* and the 1 Corinthians 7 commentary of 1523, Luther spoke more of the forgiving grace of God that permits and excuses the sin involved. 97 It is true, Luther noted, that considered only

94 Large Catechism, *Fourth Commandment*, Kolb-Wengert, 400.


97 *Vom Ehelichen Leben, 1522*. WA 102:304; LW 45:49: “Unnd das keyn ehepflicht on sund geschicht, aber gott verschonet yhr auß gnaden darumb, das der ehliche orden seyn werck ist und behellt auch mitten unnd durch die sund alle das gutt, das er dareyn gepflantzt und gesegenet hatt.” (“Intercourse is never without sin; but *God excuses it by his grace* because the estate of marriage is his work, and he preserves it in and through the sin all that good which he has implanted and blessed in marriage” (emphasis added). *Das siehente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den Corinthern, 1523*. WA 12:102;
in terms of “reason and outward appearance,” marital intercourse appears no different than sex in a brothel. “Yet the former is chaste and honorable under the forgiveness of sin and under the blessing, and is pleasing to God; the latter is shameful and condemned under the wrath of God.” Later, he remarked that dishonor is transformed into “very great glory” as a result of the “pure grace of God.” While Luther repeated the same ideas in the 1530s, he added an even more positive conclusion than before concerning procreation: “Through marriage God permits sexual intercourse [lit., “the use of women,” usum foeminae], and not only does he cover the sin which we cannot abstain from, but he also blesses the union between the male and the female.”

Thus, despite the inevitable presence of sin within the sexual relationship of husband and wife, Luther held to a confident hope in the greater grace of God in connection with it. Because of this Luther could categorically state in 1530 that “the

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LW 28:13 on 1 Corinthians 7:3-4: “Diße schuld macht, das Gott dem ehestand zu lesst und vergibt, das er sonst strafft und verdampt.” (“This right [to conjugal rights] arises out of God’s permission of the marriage state and His forgiveness of what otherwise He punishes and condemns.”


99 Genesisvorlesung 1538/42. WA 42:582; LW 3:48 on Genesis 16:4 (the story of Abraham and Hagar): “Deus per coniugium concedit usum foeminae, ac non tantum tigit peccatum, quo carere non possimus: Sed etiam benedicit coniunctioni maris et foeminae” (emphasis added).
sexual union of husband and wife is...most pleasing to [God].”

Moreover, sexual intercourse between husband and wife is understood as being a part of their vocational co-operation with God himself in his continuing work of creation.

When a man is born in the natural way, it is God’s work, too; for no man can manufacture the tiniest hair or the smallest drop of blood. God does this through father and mother, so that a human birth is always of their flesh and blood.

From this emerges something akin to Margaret Miles’ observation that in Luther’s understanding “the body reflects and participates in the justification event.” Luther, of course, affirmed frequently and forcefully that “Christians are sinners (Christiani sint peccatores).” But he also affirmed just as strongly (if in somewhat earthy terms) that it is also true that “the love of God toward us is stronger than our filthiness (sordes).” Consequently, even though we are sinners, nonetheless our shittiness (stercus) does not

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100 Reihenpredigten über Matthäus 5-7, 1530/32. WA 32:373; LW 21:89 on Matthew 5:30: “So hat er auch jnn der schrifft gepoten beide man und weib, das sie ein ander lieb haben sollen und zeigt das er grossen gefallen daran habe, wenn sich man und weib wol begehen.”

101 Predigten, 1535/36: Der CX Psalm. WA 41:164-165; LW 13:302 on Psalm 110:3: “Wol ist es auch Gottes werck, das der mensch naturlich geborn wird, Denn ja kein mensch von jm selbs kuend ein herlin odder bluts troepfliu machen, Doch thuet Gott solches durch Vater und Mutter, und koempt solche geburt aus jrem fleisch und blut.” See also Declamationes in Genesin, WA 24:61b: “Wir sehen teglich fuer augen, das noch ymerdar allerley geschaffen wird, alles was sich besamet auff erden, alle frucht und alle thiere, und ist doch ein werck, das Gott eygentlich zugehoert, wie Christus selb sagt ym Johanne, ‘Mein vater wirckt bis hie her, und ich wircke auch.’” (“Daily we see with our eyes that still all sorts of things are forever being created, everything which has been sown on earth, all fruits and all beasts, and yet it is a work that really belongs to God, as Christ himself says in John (5:17), ‘My Father is at work ‘til now, and I work also.’”)

102 Margaret R. Miles, “‘The Rope Breaks When It is Tightest’: Luther on the Body, Consciousness, and the Word,” The Harvard Review 77 (July-October 1984): 258.

take away our sonship, nor do we fall from grace on account of sin.”\(^{104}\) In a parallel fashion, however sinful the sexual relationship is between husband and wife due to original sin—and it cannot avoid being so—their intercourse has God’s blessing, and Luther affirms their sexual union as blessed. This is part and parcel of living vocationally in marriage in Christ and *coram Deo*. Luther observed in 1532—with Katie likely listening:

> When one looks back upon it, marriage isn’t so bad as when one looks forward to it. We see that our mothers and our fathers were saints and that we have the divine commandment, “Honor your father and your mother’ (Ex. 20:12). When I look beside myself, I see my brothers and sisters and friends, and I find that there’s nothing but godliness in marriage. To be sure, when I consider marriage, only the flesh seems to be there. Yet my father must have slept with my mother and made love to her, and they were nevertheless godly people. All the patriarchs and prophets did likewise. The longing of a man for a woman is God’s creation…\(^{105}\)

Rather than exhibiting a “grim negativity” and pessimism about the sex drive of the body, Luther approaches the body and sex as the created gifts of God. In this respect, Luther celebrated human sexuality, including his own. But because of the Fall, sexual passion is now bound by sin so that, barring special grace, Luther commends the body for

\(^{104}\) WATr 1:189 (Nr. 437); LW 54:70 (No. 437): “Sic Dei dilectio erga nos fortior est quam nostrae sordes. Quanquam igitur simus peccatores, tamen filiatum non adimit stercus nec excidimus a gratia propter peccatum.”

marriage as part of God’s good, creative will and marriage for the body as a bridle for the sexual drive and a cure for lust. In this Luther’s thinking is congruent with tradition, but he develops it distinctively in the context of creation and vocation lived out in faith before a gracious God. As a result, Luther is clearly not negative, but positive in his teaching about sexuality and the body.

4.3 – Children, the Fruit of the Body

Luther thus spoke of the sex drive as the result of God’s creative work: men and women are sexual beings because God made them that way. But Luther never saw the body’s sexuality as an end in itself. Rather, the fundamental purpose of the sexuality of the body was set in God’s creative word spoken to Adam and Eve, Seid fruchtbar vnd mehret euch vnd füllt die Erden… (Gen. 1:28, Lutherbibel, 1545). Thus the body was made and the institution of marriage established with children in mind. Therefore, as we have already seen, Luther viewed marriage not only as a remedium peccati for the body’s need for sexual release, but especially—and more fundamentally—as a means for God’s creative activity through the bodies of men and women. Luther seemingly never misses a chance to state the importance of procreation! Even though the unbelieving world

\[ \text{106 See, for example, Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand, 1519 where Luther calls procreation “the end and chief purpose of marriage (das end und furchtbar ampt der ehe).” WA 2:169, LW 44:12. In considering Luther’s view of children, the body, and marital procreation, the social context of the importance of procreation in the sixteenth century cannot be over-emphasized. As Susan Karant-Nunn observes, in the early sixteenth century “the significant events in women’s lives…were marrying and giving birth.” Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “Continuity and Change: Some Effects of the Reformation on the Women of Zwickau,” Sixteenth Century Journal 13:2 (Summer 1982): 26.} \]
thinks that “the propagation of the human race happens partly by nature, partly by accident (Gentes...partim natura, partim casu propagationem humani generis accidere putant),” Luther taught that God intends marriage for procreation. Commenting on the text, “Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Gen. 4:1), Luther states, “The work of procreation is something good and holy that God has created; for it comes from God, who bestows his blessing on it.” Thus, the human body serves God’s purposes, the man’s “to beget the fruit of his body”; the woman’s to be a helper for the man...that the statement ‘increase and multiply’ might be fulfilled.”

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108 See, for example, Genesisvorlesung 1538/42, WA 43:333, LW 4:276 on Genesis 24:21-22: “…causam finalem coniugii, quae est generatio et educatio prolis…” (“...the final cause of marriage, which is the generation and upbringing of offspring…”); and WA 43:679, LW 5:363 on Genesis 30:22-24: “Atqui finis coniugii non est deliciari et oeciari, sed procreare et educare sobolem, alere familiam.” (“But the purpose of marriage is not to have pleasure and leisure, but to procreate and raise children, to support a family.”)


110 Daß Eltern die Kinder zur Ehe nicht zwingen noch hindern, und die Kinder ohne der Eltern Willen sich nicht verloben sole, 1524. WA 15:167, LW 45:390: “eyn mensch zur ehe geschaffen ist, fruechte seynees leibs von sich zu zichten (so wol als eyn bawm geschaffen ist oepffel odder byrn zu tragen)...” (“A man is made for marriage, to beget the fruit of his body—just as a tree is made to bear apples or pears.”)

111 In Genisin Declamationes. WA 24:78-79a: “Mulier creat est, ut sit adiutorium vir...ut impleatur dictum ‘Crescite et multiplicamini’...” Luther’s way of framing the roles of man and woman show his adherence to the well-established, medieval “active/passive dichotomy” between man and woman in begetting children. For a discussion of this, see Kari Elisabeth Borresen, Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 41-43 and 193-195.
In this connection, the critique is sometimes leveled that Luther seemed to view the female body merely as a tool for use by a woman’s husband when it came to procreation. A typical statement in this regard is in the *Genesisvorlesung* where Luther notes in his comments on Jacob’s love of Rachel’s comeliness (Gen. 29:20):

By rights, of course, we should love the female sex simply for the sake of offspring and procreation. It was created by God to serve this purpose, not for us to misuse it merely to satisfy lust. The structure of a woman’s whole body bears this out. It has its own organs and members with which to conceive, nourish, and carry the fetus.\(^{112}\)

Similarly, he once wrote three nuns who were contemplating leaving their convent with comparable language:

The other reason [to leave] is the flesh. Although women are ashamed to admit such things, both Scripture and experience teach that among many thousands there is not one to whom God gives the grace to maintain pure chastity. A woman does not have the power [to do this] herself. God created her body to be with a man, bear children and raise them, as Scripture makes clear in Genesis 1. Her bodily members, ordained by God for this, also demonstrate this.\(^{113}\)

And in his comments on the key passage, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” (Gen 2:18), Luther assures his audience that “Moses wanted to point out…that [the female] sex was to be useful for procreation (*de Foemina voluit Moses admonere...qui sexus servire debebat ad generationem*).”\(^{114}\)

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\(^{112}\) *Genesisvorlesung, 1538/42.* WA 43:627, LW 5:288-289 on Genesis 29:16-20: “Iure id quidem debebat fieri, ut amaremus sexum simpliciter propter prolem et generationem, ad quam conditus est a Deo: non ut eo ad libidinem tantum abuteremur. Sicut aedificium totius muliebris corporis testatur, quod habet sua organa et membra, quibus concipiat, alat, gestet foetum.”

\(^{113}\) WABr 3:326-328, Letter 766 [Luther to Three Nuns, 6 August 1524]. Cited and translated in Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 141.

It is understandable that these comments have engendered criticism. However, Luther’s words need to be considered in the light of some foundational assumptions that ought not to be ignored. First, Luther admonishes that a husband should love his wife because she can bear children, not because Luther reduces women to the status of objects or mere tools. Rather, he believed that the essential, physical nature and reproductive capacity of women bears witness to the will of God. As we have seen, this is also deeply embedded in his theology of marriage vis-à-vis creation. This is to be contrasted against a view of women that is purely selfish and imbued with lust. Second, Luther spoke as he did precisely because he took seriously the command to “increase and multiply” as God’s good and on-going will for human beings. As a result, woman is “useful,” not so much from or with the viewpoint of man as the focus, but from the viewpoint of the creative purposes of God.

Thus, Luther’s theology of creation and his view of marriage as a vocation are again evident. Even though human beings use the gift of sexuality, generally speaking, on the basis of human reason and desire, the ability to reproduce is nonetheless the express creation of God who did not revoke it as a result of the Fall. And just because procreation takes place within the temporal and fallen vocation of marriage, this does not means that God is no longer the final cause of procreation. Rather, Luther always upheld marriage

\[115 \text{ An die Herren deutschs Ordens, daß sie falsche Keuschheit meiden und zur rechten ehelichen Keuschheit greifen, Ermahnung, 1523. WA} 12:242, \text{ LW} 45:155. \text{ “Wyr sind alle geschaffen, das wyr thun wie unser elltern, kinder zeugen und neeren, das ist uns von Gott auffgelegt, gepotten und eyngepflantzt, das beweysen die gliedmas des leybs und teglich fulen und aller wellt exempel.” (“We were all created to do as our parents, to beget and rear children, that is laid, commanded, and implanted on us by God, as is proved by the members of our bodies, our daily emotions, and the example of the whole world.”) For a similar statement see also Vom Eheliche Leben, 1522. WA} 10^{2}:276-277, \text{ LW} 45:18-19. \]
as “good” and blessed by God, even given the Fall, and that God still intended that husbands and wives would “be fruitful and multiply.” Thus the patriarch Noah is praised by Luther, not just because he was instrumental in saving the world spiritually-speaking at the time of the Genesis Flood, but also for his instrumentality in saving it physically, by procreation.

His strenuous efforts restrained him from marriage because of his extreme distress, for he was waiting for a better and more God-fearing age. But when he realized that this was a mistaken hope and the divine voice indicated to him the definite time when the world would perish, then he was prompted by the Holy Spirit to turn his mind to marriage, in order that he might leave at least a seed for the new age. In this way the holy man preserved the human race not only spiritually in the true Word and worship but also physically through procreation.

In procreation, then, husbands and wives in their bodies become God’s instruments, even partners, in his creative activity as part of their vocation in marriage.

Even though coitus appears “natural,” Luther insists that its generative power comes from God’s command—it happens “through the potency of the Word which was uttered by God.” That is, Genesis 1:28, “be fruitful and multiply,” is not to be taken as a merely

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116 WA 40²:380-383, LW 12:348 on Psalm 51: “Nam coniugium est bona et licita et a Deo institute.” (“For marriage is good and permitted and instituted by God.”)

Anticipating an objection, Luther asks in his *Genesisvorlesung* whether God does not have better things to do than be involved in such mundane, fleshly matters. His answer is that this is one way in which the Lord cares for everyone in his or her vocation. It is true, God could well create children without the agency of a man or a woman, but he wills to do so through them. Moreover, the human role in procreation is in accord with

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118 *Genesisvorlesung* 1535/38. WA 42:96, LW 1:128 on Genesis 2:21: “Quod igitur ex gutta sanguinis homo, non bos, non asinus nascitur, verbi virtute fit, quod a Deo prolatum est. Itaque vere, sicut in oratio dominica etiam Christus docet, Deum vocamus Patrem nostrum et Creatorem nostrum, sicut symbolum appellat. In hanc causam cum respicimus, tum caste, pure et cum gudio de ipsis rebus possumus loqui, quaram aliqui hac causa omissa sine foeditate et obscoenitate non possumus meminisse.” (“Therefore, that a man, not an ox or an ass is born from a drop of blood, happens by the power of the word, which was put forward by God. Truly therefore, just as also Christ teaches in the Lord’s Prayer, we call God our Father and our Creator, just as the Creed calls him. When we contemplate this cause, then with a chaste, pure [heart] and with joy are we able to speak about these things, which otherwise, if this cause is forgotten, we are not able to bring them to mind without filthiness and lewdness.”) See also WA 43:139, LW 4:4 on Genesis 21:1-3: “Quod enim Deus semel dixit: ‘Crescite,’ id verbum adhuc hodie est efficax, et miraculose conservat naturam: Sed quotusquisque est, qui credit aut videt.” (“For when God once said [Gen. 1:28]: ‘Be fruitful,’ that Word is effective to this day and preserves nature in a miraculous way. But how few there are who believe this or are aware of it!”)

119 *Genesisvorlesung* 1538/42. WA 43:645, LW 5:313-314 on Genesis 29:31: “Haec valde carnalia sunt. Dominus muss in das spiel sehen. An nihil aliud negotii restat Deo, quam ut respiciat ad illam humilitatem oeconomicam. Si ita abundat ocio, inveniet, quod agat adversus Diabolum deum huius seculi, aut cum monarchis et principibus mundi. Quid agit cum Lea puella? Respondeo: Quilibet in sua vocatione sciat se Deo curae esse. Deus enim parva, mediocria et magna curat: Creator est et gubernator omnium.” (“These are exceedingly carnal things. The Lord must get into the act. Does God have no other occupation left than that he should have regard for this lowly household? If he has such an abundance of leisure he will find something to do against the devil, the god of this world, or with the monarchs and princes of the world. What does he do with the girl Leah? I reply:Let everyone know that God cares for him in his calling. For God cares about the small, the mediocre, and the great:he is the Creator and ruler of all.”) See also WA 44:648, LW 8:95 on Genesis 46:28.
the fact that what God creates, he also preserves. Indeed, Luther’s view that procreation is so fundamental to sexuality and marriage and the crucial work of husband and wife that he judges Onan as worthy of death for spilling his seed and as being worse than an adulterer or someone involved in incest. In Vom Ehelichen Leben, he even comments that God is pleased by childbearing “as a woman can do, even though she bears a child out of wedlock (wie eyn weyb thun kan, obs gleych eyn unehlich kind tregt).”

In view of this, the assessment that the sixteenth century reformers upheld that “the virtue of sex in marriage” was not in procreation, but “that it expressed the couple’s love for one another,” does not hold particularly true for Luther. For Luther, certainly the relationship between man and woman is vital to the vocation of marriage, and Luther does praise marital intercourse in the context of a couple’s love for one another. But what Luther emphasizes is the purpose of God in maintaining society, not the mutual love of the couple. Through marriage, God continues to preserve society via procreation. Indeed,

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120 Genesisvorlesung 1538/42. WA 44:317, LW 7:20-21 on Genesis 38:9-10: “Das muß ein mutwilliger, verzweifelter Bub sein gewest. Hoc foedissimum peccatum est, longe atrocius incoestu et adulterio.” (“He [Onan] had to have been a malicious and incorrigible scoundrel. This is a most disgraceful sin, far more atrocious than incest and adultery.”) and Vom Ehelichen Leben, 1522, WA 10:2:297, LW 45:41: “Darumb sage ich, das alle nonnen und munche, die on glauben sind, und sich yhrer keuscheyt und ordens trosten, nicht werd sind, das sie eyn getauft kind wiegen odder yhm eyn brey machen sollten, wenß gleych eyn hurkind were. Ursach: denn yhr orden und leben hatt keyn gottis wort fur sich, muegen sich auch nicht rhuenen, das gott gefalle, was sie thun, wie eyn weyb thun kan, obs gleych eyn unehlich kind tregt.” (“Therefore, I say that all nuns and monks who are without faith, and who trust in their own chastity and in their order, are not worthy of rocking a baptized child or preparing its porridge, even if it were the child of a harlot. The reason: because their order and life has no word of God for it, nor can they boast that God is pleased by what they do, as a woman can do, even though she bears a child out of wedlock.”)

human fecundity is “a sure sign of divine blessing (benedictionis divinae certa nota est)” because through it “the human race and the very church of God are being rebuilt (quod per partum genus humanum et ipsa Dei Ecclesia restaurateur).”

Therefore, in Luther’s view we see that procreation becomes a powerful role of the body in marriage, because by the union of their bodies husbands and wives act in concert with the creative purposes and will of God. Sexuality expressed in the sphere of marriage is a partnership of the male and the female in ameliorating the results of the Fall, and a blessed cooperation of the human body with God in the generation and nurturance of children.

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CHAPTER 5

I am surely baptized in Christ and believe that he is my Savior and the way by which I will come to heaven. Therefore, though I do not know how long I will be here or when I will put off this maggot sack, yet I know that I will live eternally with him. Even though the old sack closes its eyes and all its senses, and does not know where it is, that doesn’t matter. For it ought neither know nor feel, but rather let itself be carried to the churchyard on its back and be put under the ground and come to dust until in God it is again awakened. But as a Christian (praise God) I know full well where I will go and be for it has been assured to me by baptism and absolution, and also in the Sacrament. …For a Christian should be truly certain of the things pertaining to him.\(^1\)

Embedded in these words from his 1533 sermon on John 14:6—“I am the way, the truth, and the life…”—is the spectrum of Luther’s thinking regarding the body and mortality: inevitable death confronts the poor body—a “maggot sack”—, weak because of sin and yet deservedly subject to death as a consequence of sin; the body thus culpable, yet also a victim of sin and Satan; pitiable, yet dismissed as transitory and ephemeral; the body “sown in dishonor,” yet trusting to be “raised in glory” as a result of Christ’s work. This gamut of tensions about the body raises a distinction between Luther’s formal

\(^1\)Reihenpredigten über Johannes 14-15, 1533 (1537). WA 45:501; LW 24:44-45 on John 14:6: “Ich bin ja jn Christum getauft und glewbe, das er mein Heiland ist und der weg, dadurch ich gen himel komen sol, Darumb ob ich wol nicht weis, wie lang ich hie bin oder wenn ich diesen maden sack ablegen sol, doch weis ich, das ich mit jm ewiglich leben werde, ob nu der alte sack die augen und alle sinne zuthut und nicht weis, wo er bleibt, da ligt nicht an, Denn er sols auch nicht wissen noch fulen, Sondern sich auff dem rucken zum kyrchhoff tragen und unter die erden scharren lassen und zu pulver werden, bis so lang jn Gott wider auff erwecken wird, Aber doch als ein Christen weis ich (Gott lob) wol, wo ich hin faren und bleiben sol, Denn es ist mir zugesagt durch die Tauffe und Absolutio, item jm Sacrament. …Denn ein Christ sol ja seiner sachen gewis sein.”
theologizing and his thinking that needs to be observed as we turn to look at the matters of mortality, death, and resurrection. Luther speaks frequently about mortality and death, particularly in connection with illness. While he often does so as an integral theme or issue within a particular theological work, many of his more arresting statements occur in less formal or deliberated texts, such as sermons, letters, and (especially) the *Tischreden*. Moreover, it is plain that these latter references often reflect on—or are engendered by—his own experience or the experiences of others,² so that the tensions outlined above often are expressions of Luther’s personal reaction to particular situations. These reactions are certainly rooted in Luther’s theology, but they are not necessarily worked out in any systematic sense. This leads to the result that what he says in any one place may not always cohere well with what he says in another. This is not to accuse Luther blithely of inconsistency. Most often in his various tensions about the body he is reflecting the same dynamic of that paramount of all Luther-tensions: the tension between law and gospel. For just as Luther viewed these two doctrines as intertwined “opposites,” that is, as separate manifestations of the divine message that apparently contradict each other, but which find their resolution in the *eschaton*, so also the body, the venue of spiritual life, is subject now to condemnation and dismissal, then to cherishing and ultimate glorification.³


³ Cf. this quintessential statement regarding the relationship of the law and the gospel in Luther: “Sic pulchre distinguuit Paulus tempus legis et gratiae. Discamus et nos recte distingue utriusque tempus, non verbis sed affectu, id quod est omnium difficillimum. Quanquam enim distinctissima sunt illa duo, tamen etiam coniunctissima
We will explore a representative sampling of what Luther said about the body—his own and others—with regard to mortality, death, and the hope of the resurrection. Our explorations will look at Luther, his body and illnesses, and his view of human morbidity using his letters and entries in the *Tischreden*. We will look at death and the body from his sermons and the *Trostbriefe*, and finally, we will listen to Luther on the resurrection of the body through his sermons on 1 Corinthians 15, the “great resurrection chapter” of St. Paul.

5.1 – Luther and His Body

In her April 2010 article for the *American Historical Review* titled “Martin Luther’s Body: The ‘Stout Doctor’ and His Biographers,” Lyndal Roper notes that the “iconic” power of images of Luther painted by the Cranachs was such that the image of

\[ \text{sunt etiam in eodem corde. Nihil magis coniunctum est quam timor et fiducia, Lex et Evangelium, peccatum et gratia; tam coniuncta enim sunt, ut alterum ab altero absorbeatur. Ideo nulla Mathematica coniunctio potest dari quae esset huic similis.} \]

(“Thus beautifully does Paul distinguish between the time of law and of grace. Let us learn also rightly to distinguish the times of both, not in words but in our feelings, that which is the most difficult of all. For although these two are most distinct, nevertheless they are completely joined in the same heart. There is nothing more closely joined than fear and trust, Law and Gospel, sin and grace; so joined together are they that each is swallowed up by the other. For that reason no Mathematical conjunction is able to be given that is similar to this.”) *Galatervorlesung*, 1535. WA 401:527; LW 26:343 on Galatians 3:23. For a discussion of Luther’s concept of law and gospel, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 267-276, especially page 269.

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\[^4\] Lucas Cranach the Elder [1472-1553] and Lucas Cranach the Younger [1515-1586], a father and son duo, were the court painters for Frederick the Wise, John the Steadfast, and John Frederick. In particular, Cranach the Elder was a friend and supporter of Luther’s. Because Luther’s legal situation kept him relatively constrained from travel,
Luther’s “broad shoulders and fleshy face make him instantly recognizable.” Indeed, as Roper goes on to say,

The Cranachs’...standard representation of Luther fused two different iconographic modes into a powerful and novel synthesis. Cranach the Elder’s images of the rulers of the Saxon house [Luther’s princes] show them as massive, bull-headed figures, whose impressive solidity underlines their secular power. They stand erect with their feet apart, bestriding their realms; in bust portraits, their heads and shoulders cram the visual space. The images of Luther used the same means to present an individual who possessed unassailable religious authority. ...In a woodcut design that regularly appeared in his collected works, Luther and Elector John the Constant kneel on either side of the cross like two giant counterweights.

This style of depicting Luther found its epitome in Cranach the Younger’s full-length woodcuts from 1546 (the year of Luther’s death) and 1548, images that the modern viewer may find it hard to comprehend: the large body sits almost comically on the delicate feet. But for contemporary viewers, this monumentalism probably evoked Luther’s powerful presence, all the more poignantly because he was no longer with them. His garb marks him out as a doctor and cleric, while the small, expressive hands meet across the massive chest to hold the tiny, precious Bible: when he died, casts were taken of his hands and face. The folds of the talar that he wears create strong downward lines that reinforce the sense of authority, rooting him firmly to the ground. His stance is erect, the shoulders set powerfully back, the neck bull-like, yet the bearing is not that of a man of the sword. The head, with its trademark wayward curl, tilts slightly forward as the eyes gaze into the middle distance.

Roper is correct in noting that the popular (and durable) image of the “Stout Doctor” created and maintained by these familiar depictions of Luther was one of power and solidity. Indeed, this “monumental Luther” became so fixed in biographies published after Luther’s death that—as Roper notes—“they, too, conveyed a surprisingly strong

the Cranachs were the only artists who had access to him for portraiture and produced the “iconic” portraits Roper refers to.


6 Roper, “Martin Luther’s Body,” 353, 357-358.
sense of their hero’s body." To use today’s terms, the image of the stout Luther, so robust, forceful, and strong was the “Luther brand,” or at least the one pushed by later Lutheran hagiography. Stefan Zweig’s (dated) claim in his analysis of the Luther-Erasmus debate that Luther “possessed an overplus [sic] of health” in contrast to the “sluggish and anaemic frame” of Desiderius Erasmus reflects exactly the kind of misperception regarding Luther that the “iconic” Luther has fostered. But the real body of Luther, however rotund and robust it was depicted in later life, was frail and often ill. Indeed, in a lecture to his students in 1539, Luther, then in his mid-fifties, remarked off-handedly, “God gave me a healthy body until I was fifty years old,” but in actual fact, Luther appears to have enjoyed only relatively good health up until 1524 when he was forty-one. After that, the deprivations of his earlier years in the cloister combined with the stresses of his (over)work and the tumults of the preceding decade to produce in him

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7 Ibid., 362.


10 Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 204; Walter von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work*, trans. Lawrence W. Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986). Von Loewenich reminds his readers: “By nature Luther had a healthy constitution. While still in the monastery he survived more than a few severe physical strains without great injury. We need only recall his journeys by foot to Rome, to Heidelberg, and to Augsburg” (375). Prior to 1524 when Luther was 41, it is known that he had suffered a dangerous accidental puncturing of his femoral artery in 1503, and that as a youth at school in Magdeburg (1497) he may have had rheumatic fever (WA Tr 1:46, (Nr. 119); LW 54:14-15 (No. 119) and Julius Köstlin, *Life of Luther*, anon. trans. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 14, respectively). Otherwise, his recorded serious illnesses arose mainly after 1524.
chronic health problems and insomnia. Already in 1518 Luther had mentioned his “poor worn body,” which was exhausted by constant hardships (imbecille et assiduis fatigatum incommodis corpusculum) to Staupitz. And he reminisced to his students about his early days in the cloister that “[b]y fasting, abstinence, and austerity in the matter of work and clothing I nearly killed myself. My body was horribly tormented and exhausted.” The earliest known likeness of Luther—a medallion struck with his image (ca. 1519/1520)—corroborates this as does a description made at the time of the Leipzig Debate (1519)
which noted how Luther was “emaciated from care and study” to the point that “you can almost count his bones through his skin.”

The health problems that affected Luther later in life as a result of his monastic rigors are well-chronicled. His surviving letters contain numerous references to his health as do the Tischreden, the record of informal comments and remembrances Luther made at mealtimes. As that record shows, Luther was never reticent to say what was on his mind. The Tischreden were first recorded in 1531 and continued (through a series of self-appointed amanuenses) until Luther’s death in 1546 thus covering the majority of his life when his health was progressively in decline. Moreover, Luther’s physician later in life, Matthäus Ratzeberger (1501-1559), left a record of Luther’s life and health history.

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14 Peter Mosellanus to Julius Pflug, 7 December 1519. See Luther’s Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters, Preserved Smith, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), vol. 1, 261 (letter on pp. 257-262). Cited in Bainton, Here I Stand, 113; E.G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 573. Mosellanus, a professor at the University of Leipzig, attended the debate and provided a report, including physical descriptions of the major protagonists—Eck, Karlstadt, and Luther—to his former pupil, Julius Pflug. Regarding the medallion, see Paul Schreckenbach and Franz Neubert, Martin Luther: Ein Bild seines Lebens und Wirkens (mit 384 Abbildungen, vorwiegend nach alten Quellen) (Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1916), 100. Cited also in Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, 573. The medallion is in the possession of the Lutherhalle, Wittenberg.

15 Luther’s frankness about his health in his correspondence and before the poised pens of those taking notes at the Luther table led Heiko Oberman to observe: “Illnesses were never so private to [Luther] that he would have wanted to suppress the details.” Oberman, Luther, 328.

16 On the creation and history of the Tischreden, see the introduction by Theodore Tappert in LW 54, here, p. xiii.

17 Ratzeberger was educated in Wittenberg and became an early acquaintance and admirer of Luther. A physician, in 1538 he entered the service of John Frederick, elector of Saxony and was a medical adviser to Luther, with whom he was apparently connected by marriage. After Luther’s death, Ratzeberger was one of the guardians of Luther’s children.
that corroborates much of information in the Tischreden (along with some unique material). On the basis of these sources it is possible to review the course of Luther’s health-life. Doing so allows us to reflect on his comments about sickness and the body against the backdrop of his own life and experiences and sheds light on his comments to others.

5.1.1 – LUTHER IN SICKNESS

To begin with, Luther suffered from a variety of infections during his life— infection and infectious diseases being endemic to late medieval life. Of particular note is a 1523 episode in which Luther complained that he “caught a fever from a bath (febris e balneo contraxi)” that some have conjectured may have been rheumatic fever. Although this cannot be known for certain, historically, Luther’s mention of this fever is of interest.

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18 Matthäus Ratzeberger, Die handschriftliche geschichte Ratzeberger’s über Luther und seine zeit mit literarischen, kritischen und historischen Anmerkungen zum ersten Male, ed. D. Chr. Gotth. Reudecker (Jena: F. Mauke, 1850). The 1850 Jena edition is available as a facsimile reprint by Nabu Public Domain reprints (no publication information is included in the reprint). An example of Ratzeberger’s unique contributions to Luther’s biography is that he is the lone source of the “Magdeburg illness” reported in footnote 10 above, but his “life of Luther” is thought to also include embellishments. Pace Ratzeberger, von Loewenich opines that “The book Dr. Martin Luthers Krankengeschichte (Leipzig:1881) by the physician Friedrich Küchenmeister still provides the best information on Luther’s illnesses” (von Loewenich, Martin Luther, 375) (Küchenmeister is available online at Google Books). Naturally, the biographers of Luther include information about his health passim in their various treatments of Luther’s life. Unsurprisingly, the most thorough is Brecht who includes specific sections on Luther’s health in his three-volume biography. See especially Shaping and Defining, 204-211, and The Preservation of the Church, 185-188; 229-235; 369-377. In addition, also see von Loewenich, Martin Luther, 375-384, and Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530, ed. Karin Bornkamm, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 553-554.
because it was used to support the otherwise unsubstantiated accusation that Luther suffered from “the French disease (morbus Gallicus),” syphilis.  

Less sensationally, infections of his upper respiratory tract at various times led to bouts of coughing so violent that they made him too hoarse to lecture. In January 1541 an inflammation of his nasal cavity spread by March into his left middle ear creating an infection so severe that it ruptured the eardrum. The rupture, while relieving Luther’s pain by freeing the trapped material behind it—“a truly foul, ghastly, and bloody discharge (sane foeda, lurida et cruenta sanies)”—nonetheless left him functionally deaf for months afterward; even after it healed he complained that “in my head are blowing the winds of all the seas and forests, so that I hear nothing… I can’t sleep as I used to.”

19 John Wilkinson, “The Medical History of Martin Luther,” Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 26 (1996): 122. See Luther’s letter to Spalatin, 25 April 1523, WABr 3, Letter 609. The suggestion that Luther suffered from syphilis is in Hartmann Grisar, SJ, Luther, ed. Luigi Cappadela [pseud.], trans. E. M. Lamond (London : K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1913-1917), vol. 2, 161-164. Grisar makes the claim on the basis of an ambiguous report made about this episode of illness. While Grisar’s “diagnosis” is no longer considered credible by most Catholics, it still finds hearers. See, for example, E. Michael Jones, “Luther: the First Modern,” Fidelity, May 1991: 37-46. Syphilis was the scourge of the late medieval era. It was called the “greater pox” (in comparison to smallpox), and was largely a fearsome mystery. Like other diseases of the period, syphilis’ etiology was explained primarily as a flagitium Dei, “God’s scourge.” Since it struck down rich and poor alike, it was greatly feared in this capacity. For a fascinating, but gruesome discussion of syphilis, Reformation society’s thinking concerning it, and the stigma it bore, see Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 247-270.

20 See, for example, WABr 5: 60, Letter 1414 [Luther to Amsdorf, 4 May 1529]: “Catarrhus et tussis mea vix tandem inceperunt mihi reddere vocem.” (“My sinusitus and cough are just beginning to return my voice to me.”) See also WABr 5, 63-64, Letter 1417 [Luther to Justus Jonas, 6 May 1529], where Luther repeats the same information.

Other infections included an abscess reported first in January 1525 in his lower left leg. It appears never to have completely healed: in the summer of 1543 Ratzeberger used the site of the abscess to create a fontanella—literally, a “little fountain”—for the purpose of relieving Luther’s headaches and dizziness by allowing the “noxious humours” to drain off by means of a constant, slow oozing. Despite the determined advice of the Countess

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*Preservation of the Church*, 231): “Valetudo mea proficit. Quem tu prophetasti fluxum esse capitis, vere nunc intellexi, quid sit fluxus capitis. Nam tantum phlegmatis, rheumatis et pituitae per collum et nares descendit, ut mirer vehementer, quomodo caput iam senio et labore fractum ista monstra apud se intus ferre potuerit... Denique collectis viribus in pus versi fluxus in aurum laevam die Palmarum caput, imo vitam meam ita invaserunt, ut prae dolore intolerabili magnis lacrimis (quod non facile soleo, etsi minus fluebant, quam vellem) dicerem Domino: ‘Aut ista desinant, aut ego desinam.’ Neque enim erat biduo ferenda ista acutissima pugna naturae, sed sequenti die soluto ulcello auris prodtit sane foeda, lurida et cruenta sanies neque ab hac hora cessat fluere. Interim in capite sunt marium omnium et arborum venti, ut nihil audiam, nisi quis me fortiter inclamet. …nondum somno frui licet, quo solem.” (“My health has turned. I now truly understand what you had said beforehand the “flux of the head” is, because there is a “flow” of the head. For such mucous, rheum, and slime from my neck and nostrils flowed that I wondered greatly just how a head now broken by old age and work could bring such monsters from itself... The flux at length reached my left ear with its collected pus-y strength on Palm Sunday [23 March] [and] attacked my head, no, my very life, so hard that I said to the Lord because of intolerable anguish with great tears (although not easily nor often do I weep): “Either these cease or may I.” For I could not have borne such harsh blows of nature for two days, but on the following day the ulcer in my ear put forth a truly foul, ghastly, and bloody discharge that has not ceased to flow from that hour. In the meantime in my head are blowing the winds of all the seas and forests, so that I hear nothing unless one shouts at me loudly. …I can’t sleep as I used to.”)


23 Ratzeberger, *Luther und Seine Zeit*, 136. See also Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, 231; Oberman, *Luther*, 328. Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 129, notes: “Blood letting was [sometimes] achieved by means of a fontanella. ...[T]his refers to a wound or ulcer artificially produced by incision, cautery or the application of some caustic substance to the skin. This wound or ulcer was then kept open to permit chronic blood-letting by oozing. This was believed to counteract fainting and dizziness.”
of Mansfeld to the contrary, \(^{24}\) Luther followed Ratzeberger’s prescription until his death in 1546, even expressing dismay at finding the wound closed over during his January 1546 final journey from Wittenberg to Eisleben. Indeed, at that time he wrote Melanchthon to send “some of that caustic with which my calf is usually kept open.”\(^{25}\)

During Luther’s lifetime late medieval Europe was awash with infectious diseases that visited the continent in epidemic proportions. In addition to the “French disease” that arose in the 1490s,\(^{26}\) another ethnically-monikered morbus, the sudor Anglicus, or “English Sweat,” made its appearance on the northern continent in 1528 setting off widespread panic in the Hanseatic cities of Germany.\(^{27}\) In late July 1529 Luther reported

\(^{24}\) Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 129. Dorothea, Countess of Mansfeld, wrote Luther a long letter advising against the fontanella and urging that he use a “sneezing powder” (niess pulfer) instead. See WABr 10:373-374, Letter 3905 [Dorothea, Gräfin von Mansfeld to Luther, 26 August 1543]. See also LW 50:306, footnote 14.

\(^{25}\) WABr 11:301-302, Letter 4208; LW 50:314-315, Letter 325, [Luther to Melanchthon, 14 February 1546]. Wilkinson notes that Luther found relief from the fontanella for the then-not-understood reason that it likely lowered his high blood pressure. Luther died of a heart attack pointing—in combination with the obvious high stress he experienced and his increasing stoutness later in life—to chronic, acute hypertension. “…blood-letting or phlebotomy was practised on a quite empirical basis because the physiology and pathology of blood pressure were not understood. All that was known was that some patients benefitted by having blood taken off” (Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 128).

\(^{26}\) In the Genesishvorlesung, Luther remarks: “When I was a boy, syphilis was unknown in Germany. It first became known when I was about fifteen years old [ca. 1498].” LW 1:207. See also fn. 52 on that same page.

\(^{27}\) Cunningham and Grell, Four Horsemen, 272-273. The “English Sweat” took its name from its country of origin (appearing in 1485 after Bosworth) and from the fever that engulfed its victim in a “profuse, thick and vile smelling sweat.” The Sweat, while not as widespread as other plagues of the period, was especially feared because of the extremely high and rapid mortality rate: “virtually everyone who suffered the disease died from it, and within a day” (273).
that “that English plague (pestis illa Anglica)” was feared to be in Wittenberg. Luther himself remained skeptical. Awakening on 27 August to find himself bathed in sweat he attributed it not to the Sweat, but to Anfechtung:

Grace and peace in Christ. I did not want the bearer, my Nicholas, to go to you without my letter even though I have nothing of import to write. It is said that the nefarious English plague is moving among you also in Zerbst. Many think that it is moving among us also here; however I do not believe it. Our prefect has made himself ill with his own imagination although he was suffering nothing besides his own thinking. For if these are the real beginnings of that disease I should have had it often during these last three years or more; for last night I broke out in a sweat and awoke in distress, and my thoughts also began to trouble me, to which, had I given way, I should have fallen dead, as others who make martyrs of themselves have fallen. I write this so that you may with me tell the people so that they are not thus afraid and that they not imagine by their thoughts a disease which is not present. We have aroused, almost by force, many who had already lain themselves down in sweat, so that Aurogallus, Bleikard, Dr. Brück, Master Christian, and others, who laughing say now that perhaps they would be fallen if they had not been aroused. Not that this disease should be made light of, but that it needs to be distinguished carefully because we see that more people contract the sickness from imagination and fear than from actual contagion. Imagination brings on the attack, and the spirit affects the body. But pray for me, a sinner, and if your guest is still there, greet him in my name. The Lord Christ be with you. Amen. 27 August 1529. Yours, Martin Luther.

28 WABr 5:125-126, Letter 1456 [Luther to Johann Brießmann, 31 July 1529].

29 WABr 5:138-139, Letter 1468 [Luther to Nicholas Hausmann, 27 August 1529]: “Gratiam et pacem in Christo. Nolui hunc bajulum, mi Nicolaë, literarum mearum inanem ire ad vos, etiamsi nihil magni haberem, quod scriberem. Pestis illa Anglica dicitur apud vos et in Zerbst grassari. Multi putant eam et hic apud nos grassari; ego autem non credo. Praefectus noster se ipsum imaginatione fecit infirmum, cum nihil pateretur mali praeter cogitationes. Nam si ea principia essent vera istius morbi, ego tribus istis annis vel ultra eum saepius habuissem; nam et hac nocte sudavi cum angustia expergefactus, et coeperunt me quoque vexare cogitationes, quibus si cessissem, iacerem, sicut iam alii iacuerunt martyrisantes se ipsos. Haec scribo, ut memorem horteris populum, ne sic pusillanimes sint, et ne cogitationibus suis accensant morbum, qui nondon adsit. Nos multos veluti per vim excitavimus, qui se in sudorem iam posuerant, ut Aurogallum, Blichardum, D. Bruck, M. Christiansum et alios, qui nunc ridentes dicunt, se adhuc forte iacere, nisi essent excitati. Non quod contemnendum esse ducam hunc morbum, sed quod discernendum sit, quando videmus plurres imaginatione et pavore quam re ipsa et contagio in illum cadere, et imaginatio facit casum, animique affectus in corpus redundant. Caeterum ora pro me peccatore, et si hospes tuus adhuc adest, salutes eum
However, Luther could not dismiss as mere fear-mongering the most dreaded of all infectious diseases, the plague, the disease against which all others were measured for their proper level of terror. Depicted in medieval art as an arrow sent from God, the “Black Death” had begun in the fourteenth-century and between 1378 and 1670 “raged in Europe every year, sometimes across vast regions, sometimes only in a few localities, but without omitting a single annual link in this long and mournful chain.” The plague loomed large in medieval life. In personal terms, Luther lost two brothers to the plague that struck the Eisleben region in 1505, the year he had entered the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt. Indeed these deaths, and a false report that Martin also had died of plague had chastened old Hans, Luther’s father, and had led him to repent of his anger over his son’s “defection” to the cloister: Hans reversed his sanction against Martin’s decision “as a sort of thank offering.”

During Luther’s tenure in Wittenberg, the plague struck the town at least four times. In the tumultuous year of 1527 the plague appeared suddenly in early August


30 Cunningham and Grell, Four Horsemen, 274. Cunningham and Grell include plates which show the arrow motif, 275.


32 Brecht, Road to Reformation, 58.

33 There were (at least) four instances of the plague in Wittenberg during Luther’s years there: 1527, 1535, 1538, 1539. After Luther’s death in 1546, Katie Luther was forced to flee to Torgau to avoid the plague in 1552. It was on this trip that she suffered
forcing the University to employ the only effective known preventative: flight. On 10 August Elector John ordered Luther and the University faculty to relocate temporarily to Jena some 100 miles (160 km) away to the south and west.\(^{34}\) However, Luther refused to leave Wittenberg in order to continue to assist Johannes Bugenhagen, the town pastor, and the university chaplains in serving the sick and those frightened. By 19 August eighteen deaths had occurred. The burgermeister’s wife died “almost” in Luther’s arms: a letter the same day from Luther to Spalatin gave the sad details.\(^{35}\) In Luther’s own house an accident and subsequently died on 20 December of internal injuries. See Martin Treu, “Katharina von Bora, the Woman at Luther’s Side,” Lutheran Quarterly, 13 (1999): 174.

\(^{34}\) The University moved first to Jena and then again to Schlieben, some 40 miles to the east of Wittenberg where it remained until April 1528. In 1535 it was again forced to flee to Jena. See LW 43:115; Brecht, Shaping and Defining, 207.

\(^{35}\) WABr 4, Letter 1130, Luther to Spalatin, 19 August 1527: “Hodie Tilonis Denixorum sepeliuimus, quae fere inter brachia mea expiravit heri, atque hoc primum funus in media vrbe. Ila xviii funera circum me am Elsterthor habita sunt. Inter que & Barbara soror Eberhardine vestre fuit iam nubilis, Id quod M. Eberhardo dices, Sed & Iohannis Gronebergi filia perit. Hans Lufft resurrerixit & vicit pestem, ac multi alii resurgunt, si utuntur medicina; Sed tam barbari sunt multi, vt medicinam contemnant, Et moriuntur sine causa. Iusto Ione filiolus Johannes etiam defunctus est. Ipse cum domo profectus in patriam. Ego maneo, Et necessarium est propter monstrum pauoris istius in vulgo. Itaque Pomeranuus & ego hic soli sumus cum Capellanis, Christus autem adest, ne soli simus, qui & triumphabit in nobis serpentem illum serpentem illum antiquum, homicidam & peccati artificem, vtcunque mordeat calcaneum eius. Orate pro nobis & valete!” (“Today we buried the wife of [Burgomeister] Tilo Dene, who died yesterday almost in my arms, and this was the first funeral in the town center. There have been 18 funerals held around me at the Elster Gate. Among them also was Barbara, the sister who was of marriageable age of your relative, Eberhard; this you should tell Master Eberhard, but also the daughter of John Gronenberg has perished. Hans Lufft has risen and conquered the plague, and many others are recovering if they use the medicine. But there are many so ignorant (barbari) that they spurn the medicine and die without need. Justus Jonas’ little boy John is also gone. [Justus] himself together with his household have gone to his hometown. I am staying, and it is necessary on account of the terrible fear among the plain folk. And so “Pommeranus”[i.e., Bugenhagen] and I are here alone with the chaplains; however Christ is present too, lest we be alone, who will also triumph over the serpent in us—that old serpent, the murderer and author of sin, however he might wound his heel. Pray for us and farewell!”)
Katie was expecting their second child amidst the wrack of two sick houseguests while Luther’s little son (filiolus), two-year old Hans, worried his father because of his vulnerability. Luther believed that God was punishing the town by sending the plague, yet he wrote to his colleague Amsdorf, “It is a comfort that we can confront Satan’s fury with the word of God, which we have and which saves souls even if [Satan] should devour our bodies.” When a Dominican in Leipzig mocked the Wittenbergers who had fled, Luther set forth what he saw as the proper balance between Christian compassion and personal safety during the plague in an open letter to Johann Hess, the acknowledged reform leader in Silesia whose region was also suffering. Luther’s little pamphlet, *Ob man vor dem Sterben fliehen möge*—“Whether One may Flee from a Deadly Plague”— was printed and reprinted some nineteen times in Wittenberg by the grateful plague survivor Hans Lufft.

Although Luther survived the plague unscathed, Wilkinson notes that Luther manifested symptoms suggesting he suffered from “infective intestinal conditions,” although, while an accompanying fever would be anticipated, he notes that such a fever is

36 Elizabeth Luther was born 10 December 1527, but died the following August.

37 Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 561. During the fall the Luther home had become something of a hospital: Margaretha von Mochau—Karlstadt’s sister-in-law—and Hanna, the wife of Augustinus Schurff the physician, who were both staying in the house, became ill with the plague. Both survived. WABr 4, Letter 1164 [Luther to Amsdorf, 1 November 1527]. On Hanna see WABr 4:275 note 8; on Margaretha see WABr 4:37 note 1.

38 WABr 4: 274-275, Letter 1164 [Luther to Amsdorf, 1 November 1527]: “Unum solatium est, quod Satanae furenti opponimus, scilicet verbum saltem Dei nos habere, pro servandis animabus credentium, utcunque corpora devoret.”

not mentioned.\textsuperscript{40} An example of this that predates Luther’s later-in-life morbidity occurred already during his journey to the Diet of Augsburg in October 1518 to meet with Cardinal Cajetan. Luther’s own report to Spalatin is that he became ill with a “troublesome stomach (incommodo stomachi)” after walking most of the way to Augsburg and had to complete the journey in a cart.\textsuperscript{41} A similar malady appears to have struck him in April 1521 while on his way to the Diet of Worms.\textsuperscript{42} In August 1535 Luther suffered a probable bout of dysentery. The University having again removed to Jena due to the presence of the plague, Luther reported in a letter to Melanchthon:

Today Doctor Brück arrived. I shall visit him tomorrow if I can, for yesterday and today I have been vexed by diarrhea, and I have been weakened physically: sleep eludes me and I want no food, and we have nothing to drink. I hope to feel better tomorrow. In the last two days I have had fifteen “sit-down sessions.”\textsuperscript{43}

The Tabletalk records another round of dysentery in July 1538 which prompted this story from Luther:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{40} Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 122.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{41} WABr 1:209-210, Letter 97 [Luther to Spalatin, 10 October 1518]: “Venimus autem fessi, & ego per viam pede defecerim, hausto nescio quo gravi incommodo stomachi.” (“Moreover, we came worn out, and I was exhausted through traveling on foot, worn out, I know not why, by a seriously troublesome stomach.”) Cited in Brecht, \textit{Road to Reformation}, 251.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{42} WABr 2:298, Letter 396; LW 48:197, Letter 71 [Luther to Spalatin, 14 April 1521]. WABr 2, Letter 396, includes this note, 298: “On the way to Eisenach Luther became very ill, so that it was feared his life was in danger. However, after he permitted a vein to be opened and Joh. Oswald, the sheriff, and later mayor of Gotha, gave him medicine to drink and he fell asleep, it was better. He resumed his journey the next day.”
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
On July 10, when his illness became more serious, he [Martin Luther] took an enema on the recommendation of the physicians. Afterward he said, “Such an act puts an end to modesty, for physicians play with their patients as mothers do with their infants, although they deceive themselves mutually. For example, Dr. Sturtz was unwilling to give anything to a certain bibulous peasant in Erfurt and told him to take coriander. Since he was quite uninformed, the peasant bought four calendars bound in parchment and gulped them down four times after they had been chopped up. He asked that he be permitted to drink too. The physician, recognizing the reason for this request, ordered that the peasant drink as much as he pleased. …It’s with such things that physicians are occupied.

Mention has already been made to Luther’s ear problems. Luther apparently suffered concomitantly from headaches and ear problems so that it is suspected that he might have suffered from Ménière’s disease, an episodic disorder involving the ears and affecting balance and hearing. Prior to the problems attributable to his ruptured eardrum in 1541, Luther had complained of ringing (tinnitus) and buzzing (bombus) in his ears. Yearning to return to Wittenberg at the end of his long stay at Veste Coburg in 1530 he lamented to Konrad Cordatus, “Such vehement and obstinate ringing and buzzing rather like rushing winds oppress and trouble my head.”

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44 The original is coriander and calendar, that is, an account book.

45 WATr 4:6, (Nr. 3912); LW 54:293-294 (No. 3912): “10 Iulii ingravescente morbo medicorum consilio recipiebat clysterium. Postea dixit: In illo actu hat verecundia ein ende. Nam medici cum patientibus tanquam matres cum infantibus ludunt, quamvis sese mutuo decipiunt. Sicuti Doctor Stortz Erphuriae cuidam bibulo rustico nihil dare voluit: Solde coriander eßen! Ille vero indoctus emit quatuor calender cum pergamenis et illos corrosos deglutit usque ad quartum; petit, ut etiam liceret bibere. Medicus comperta causa iussit eum bibere, quantum vellet. …Circa illa obiecta versantur medici” (Theodore Tappert, trans.).


47 Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 123. WABr 5:632-633, Letter 1724 [Luther to Konrad Cordatus, 23 September 1530]. See also Peter Manns, Martin Luther: An
July 1527 (just before the onset of the plague that year) and its recurrence throughout the rest of his life caused him great distress, sometimes forcing him to stop working and lie down.\textsuperscript{48} It was in connection with an effort to treat his headaches in 1543, that the previously mentioned \textit{fontanella} was created in Luther’s left leg which he was obliged to keep open. In addition to ringing in the ears and headaches, Luther’s eyesight declined to the point that he needed reading glasses after 1530.\textsuperscript{49} He wrote Katie from the Coburg: “Tell Master Christian [Düring, a craftsman in Wittenberg] that in all my days I haven’t seen worse glasses than those which arrived with his letter. I couldn’t see a stitch through them.”\textsuperscript{50} In his later years, Luther’s eyesight in his left eye deteriorated to the point that he called himself \textit{“monoculus (one-eyed).”}\textsuperscript{51}

Luther died of an eventual heart attack, but during his later life his gravest, chronic health problem was recurring attacks of kidney stones. Ratzeberger reported that Luther suffered one such serious attack in June 1526. Luther complained of being dizzy

\textit{Illustrated Biography}, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 212, who reports Luther as complaining at this time, “My head is like a cathedral chapter.”

\textsuperscript{48} See, for example, WATr 3:138 (Nr. 3006a); LW 54:189 (No. 3006a) (recorded, significantly, by Cordatus). LW 54:189, footnote 52 notes that Luther had been complaining about tinnitus for over a month.

\textsuperscript{49} Brecht, \textit{Shaping and Defining}, 347; Oberman, \textit{Luther}, 328.

\textsuperscript{50} WABr 5:347-348, Letter 1582; LW 49:311, Letter 211 [Luther to Katie Luther, 5 June 1530]: “Sage meister Christannus, das ich mein tage schendlicher brillen nicht gesehen habe, denn die mit seinem briefe kome. Ich kund nicht ein stich dadurch sehen.”

\textsuperscript{51} WABr 11:263-264, Letter 4188 [Luther to Jakob Probst, 17 January 1546]: “Senex, decrepitus, piger, fessus, frigidus, ac iam monoculus scribo…” (“I am writing as an old man, decrepit, sluggish, tired, cold, and now one-eyed…”) See LW 50: 284, note 1 regarding the information that it was Luther’s left eye that was problematic.
and that he had lost all appetite for food. His doctors were unable to diagnose his problem; an anxious Katie offered to bring him whatever he wanted, just so long as he would eat. Luther replied by asking for a fried herring (*Bratthering*) and cold peas with mustard (*kalter Erbtze mit senff*). “Yes, I’ll eat that, but bring it quickly before my appetite [for it] disappears,” Luther replied. Luther’s doctors at the time—August Schurff and Melchior Fendius—were nonplussed by Luther’s desire for and tolerance of this unorthodox meal which he ate with apparent relish. Their shock was increased when it evidently catalyzed the desired effect: Luther passed a large stone (*ein grosser Calculus*) and was able to resume his normal activities the next day.\(^{52}\) However, a more acute attack came (somewhat famously) in Schmalkald in 1537 while Luther was there in preparation for the promised church council in Mantua later that year. He had experienced discomfort already on the trip from Wittenberg to Schmalkald passing stones on 8 and 14 February, but became completely blocked on 18 February and remained unable to urinate for the next eight days.\(^{53}\) An enema was administered by a flummoxed physician, but the resulting diarrhea only made Luther weaker. The patient himself was convinced that this was the end and repeatedly commended himself to God.\(^{54}\) Another doctor was called to

\(^{52}\) Ratzeberger, *Geschichte*, 61-63; see also Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 554.

\(^{53}\) See the accompanying notes in LW 50, Letter 280 (pp. 165-169) [Luther to Katie Luther, 27 February 1537] for these and other details concerning Luther’s Schmalkald illness.

\(^{54}\) See the account recorded in WATr 3:388-390, (Nr. 3543A); LW 54:225-228 (No. 3543A). This account is based on the eyewitness report of Viet Dietrich. WATr 3:391-394, (Nr. 3543B) is a parallel account reported by Friedrich Myconius. Nr. 3543A is witnessed to by more surviving copies than version B, and thus is generally accorded more prominence. See WATr 3:387, note 1.
Luther’s bedside from nearby Waltershausen who joined the Landgrave’s physician in administering further “treatments” to the agonized patient. These included giving him more water (“They gave me as much to drink as if I had been a big ox; Sie gaben mir trenck, wen ich ein grosser ochse wer gewesen”)\(^{55}\) in a quixotic attempt to flush the stone out. When that failed, they turned to a treatment prescribed by Dreckapotheke: a “tonic” brewed by boiling garlic and fresh horse manure together.\(^{56}\) Luther refused further treatment by the doctors.

In his agony Luther did not want to die away from home outside electoral Saxony. But when the elector, John Frederick, arranged for a wagon to take him home,\(^{57}\) the bumping and jostling on the road, while excruciating (“Would that some Turk would fall upon me and kill me!”\(^{58}\)), managed to do what the doctors and their treatments could not.

Proceeding from Schmalkald to the village of Tambach some nine miles away, the

\(^{55}\) WATr 3:578, (Nr. 3733); LW 54:266 (No. 3733). This is from Luther’s recollection of his illness about a year later, 5 February 1538.

\(^{56}\) Brecht, The Preservation of the Church, 185. See the account in WATr 5:96-97, (Nr. 5368): “Lutherus Schmalkaldiae laborabat ex calculo, maximo vitae periculo. Aderant multi medici et chirurgi, ex quibus quidam medicus dixit: Jr habt wol zuzusetzen; man mus euch starck angreiffen! Quare dederunt ei allium et stercus equinum ad potandum. Ibi dixit: Kompt nicht wider! Ich wil lieber sterben! Medici desperabant de vita.” (“In Schmalkald Luther was suffering from the stone, in extreme danger of life. Many doctors and surgeons were present, from among whom one doctor said: You have strength; one must treat you aggressively! Whereupon they gave him garlic and horse manure to drink. At this point [Luther] said: ‘Don’t come back! I would rather die!’ The doctors had no hope for his life.”)

\(^{57}\) Brecht reports that Melanchthon was in tears over Luther’s condition, but that he “postponed [Luther’s] departure for a day because, for astrological reasons, he thought the new moon was an unfavorable date for this undertaking.” Brecht, Preservation of the Church, 185-186.

\(^{58}\) Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther, 2d ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 310.
blockage shifted allowing Luther to relieve himself. He wrote Katie (and others) in the early hours of the next morning:

I myself left Schmalkald yesterday and traveled up to this place [Tambach] in my gracious Lord’s private carriage. This is the reason: I had not been healthy there for more than three days, and from the first Sunday to this night not one little drop of water passed from me; I had no rest nor did I sleep, and I was unable to retain any drink or food. In summary, I was dead; I commended you, together with the little ones, to God and to my gracious Lord, since I thought that I would never again see you in this mortal life. I felt great pity for you, yet had resigned myself to the grave. But many people prayed to God so hard on my behalf that their tears moved God to open my bladder this night, and in two hours about one Stübig\footnote{LW 50:167, note 16, suggests on the basis of WABr 8:51, note 4, that Luther claimed he passed between 3 and 4 liters (!). However, “[a]ccording to a different decimal equivalent of the Stübig the amount would be about 1 liter, and this figure seems more probable.” Whatever the case, “[filled] with gratitude to God, Luther…was so happy that he collected it in a jug—‘completely worthless to others, but of the greatest value to me.’” von Loewenich, \textit{Martin Luther}, 377. The citation is from a letter Luther wrote to Philipp Melanchthon that same morning, 27 February 1537, WABr 8:48.} passed from me. I feel as if I were born again.\footnote{WABr 8:50-51, Letter 3140; LW 50:166, Letter 280 [Luther to Katie Luther, 27 February 1537]: “Denn ich selber gestern von Schmalkalden aufgebrochen auf M. G. H. eigenen Wagen daher fuhr. Jst die Ursach, ich bin nicht uber drei Tage hie gesund gewest, und ist bis auf diese Nacht vom ersten Sonntag an kein Tröpflin Wasser von mir kommen, hab nie geruget noch geschlaffen, kein Trinken noch Essen behalten mögen. Summa, ich bin tot gewest, und hab Dich mit den Kindlein Gott befohlen und meinem gnädigen Herrn, als würde ich Euch in dieser Sterblichkeit nimmermehr sehen; hat mich Euer sehr erbarmet, aber ich hatte mich dem Grabe beschieden. Nu hat man so hart gebeten fur mich zu Gott, daß vieler Leute Thränen vermocht haben, daß mir Gott diese Nacht der Blasen Gang hat geöffnet, und in zwo Stunden wohl ein Stübigen von mir gangen ist, und mich dünket, ich sei wieder von neuen geboren.”}

Luther’s deliverance was not complete: he continued to pass stones well into mid-March after which he began slowly to improve.\footnote{Brecht, \textit{Preservation of the Church}, 188.} The stone returned several times throughout...
his remaining years, but not as severely as in Schmalkald. Wilkinson suggests on the basis of his reading of Luther’s descriptions of his affliction and the plaster casts of Luther’s hands that were made at his death in February 1546, that “my enemy, the stone (hostis meus calculus)” was the result of gout.

Luther showed other classical features of gout [in addition to kidney stones] with attacks of acute pain in the small joints of the feet which are specifically mentioned in the years 1533 and 1538. In 1538 he began to use a walking stick because of the pain caused by the gout. The plaster casts of his hands made after his death show the typical deformities of gouty arthritis.

No account of Luther’s health would be complete without mention of his frequent distress because of constipation and hemorrhoids, although Heiko Oberman warns against the embellishments and inventions of history in this regard. While the privations of the early years in the cloister—as evidenced by Luther’s gauntness before 1520—undoubtedly portended future digestive trouble, it was not until he was at the Wartburg that he began to suffer chronic constipation and its offspring, hemorrhoids and anal fissures. Luther had arrived at the Wartburg on the fourth of May 1521 and complained almost immediately about his problem. His letters to his circle of friends in Wittenberg from “my Patmos” related his problem frankly and forthrightly in German—“Latin was dropped after the attack at Schmalkald, Luther is known to have had recurring attacks of the stone in November 1537, Summer 1538, April 1539, July 1541, August 1543, October 1544, and June 1545. See Edwards, Luther’s Last Battles, 9.


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62 After the attack at Schmalkald, Luther is known to have had recurring attacks of the stone in November 1537, Summer 1538, April 1539, July 1541, August 1543, October 1544, and June 1545. See Edwards, Luther’s Last Battles, 9.


64 Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 126.

65 Oberman, Luther, 327. Oberman’s warning is made especially in connection with invented stories connecting Luther’s “Reformation breakthrough” with “the end of an agonizing bout of constipation.”
too far removed from a scream of pain.”  

Luther’s blunt manner is both personally characteristic and culturally consonant and needs to be understood in context. Secluded as he was at the Wartburg, the letters to and from the small band of correspondents permitted him for safety’s sake, especially at the outset of his exile, should be remembered for what they were: a lifeline to which he attached information of importance for things both high and low as he grappled with his isolation and the swirl of news and events following his disappearance after the Diet of Worms. As it was, it took nearly six months until Spalatin was able to provide medicinal relief through the services of the Elector’s court physician. Luther wrote gratefully to him:

Greetings. Thank-you for the things you sent. My backside and belly are at last reconciled with me so that I have no need of more medicine—[I am] completely healthy as before, thank God.  

But, as with the stones, it turned out to be but a single battle won in a war that would go on for the balance of his earthly life.

Luther’s final illness was dominated by his overstressed heart. His death on 18 February 1546 was preceded by classic symptoms of heart disease: palpitations, shortness

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66 Oberman, Martin Luther, 328.

67 WABr 2:334-335, Letter 408; LW 48: 218, Letter 78 [Luther to Amsdorf, 12 May 1521]: “My ass has become wretched.”

68 See the discussion of Luther’s “anality” in Roper, “Martin Luther’s Body,” 378-380.

of breath, pain radiating down his left arm.\textsuperscript{70} The death story itself is well-known:\textsuperscript{71} in mid-January 1546 Luther made the difficult trip to Eisleben, the town of his birth, to conclude the mediation of a dispute between the counts of Mansfeld.\textsuperscript{72} The journey, proceedings, wranglings, and lawyers all exhausted him. On Monday 15 February Luther preached for the last time to a large crowd in St. Andrew’s \textit{Kirche} using as his text Matthew 11:25-30 which included the apropos words of Jesus: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened…” He became weak and dizzy while preaching and made an abrupt ending, “This and much more might be said about this Gospel, but I am too weak; we will let it remain here.”\textsuperscript{73} Luther retired to his place of lodging off the main square of the town. It appears from the careful report of Luther’s final hours prepared for Elector John Frederick by Justus Jonas that Luther suffered two attacks to his heart in the evening of 17 February. A final, fatal attack struck early on the morning of 18 February. Because of the importance to both friend and foe alike of \textit{how} Luther died, Luther’s death—like so much of his life—was a fairly public affair. His death was witnessed by the Eisleben city

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{70}] See WABr 11:277-278, Letter 496; LW 50:292, Letter 317 [Luther to Melanchthon, 1 February 1546]. In his letter, Luther ticks these symptoms off one-by-one apparently suspecting what they portended. Already in 1540 Luther had complained of pain in his left arm. See Edwards, \textit{Luther’s Last Battles}, 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{71}] See the eyewitness account in \textit{Justus Jonas und Michael Cölius, Bericht vom christlichen Abschied aus diesem tödlichen Leben des ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri 1546}. WA 54:487-496. For a full account by biographers, see Brecht, \textit{Preservation of the Church}, 377-378, and E. G. Schwiebert, \textit{Luther and His Times}, 748-750.
\item[\textsuperscript{72}] For the history of the dispute and Luther’s involvement in its mediation see Brecht, \textit{Preservation of the Church}, 369-375; James M. Kittelson, \textit{Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 292-296.
\item[\textsuperscript{73}] WA 51:194; LW 51:392: “Das und viel mehr were von diesem Euangelio weiter zu sagen, Aber ich bin zu schwach, Wir wollens hie bey bleiben lassen.”
\end{itemize}
clerk and his wife, two physicians, Count Albrecht von Mansfeld and his wife, Anna—who was recognized as knowledgeable in pharmacology—Michael Coelius, the Mansfeld castle preacher, and Justus Jonas, Luther’s long-time associate and friend. Luther died around 2:45 A.M. after answering with a solid “Ja” Jonas’ question, “Reverend father, are you willing to die in Christ and the teaching as you have preached it? (Reverende Pater, Wollet jhr auff Christum und die Lehre, wie jhr die gepredigt, bestendig sterben?).”

5.1.2 - Luther on Sickness

This litany of Luther’s illnesses sounds extreme to modern ears, but in the context of the sixteenth century it was well-within the curve of normal experience: sickness and disease simply played a large part in the lives of the people of Luther’s day. Theodore Tappert notes:

It would be possible to make a list of the specific diseases that assailed the people to whom [Luther] ministered. Tuberculosis took a heavy toll. Luther referred to outbreaks of ulcers, boils, and abscesses. Some of these may have been venereal diseases, but he also made direct reference to syphilis. Other ailments mentioned by Luther were scrofula, smallpox, inflammation of the eyes, fever, dysentery, epilepsy, apoplexy, jaundice, colic, dropsy, and stone. The prevalence of such

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74 See Justus Jonas und Michael Cölius, Bericht vom christlichen Abschied aus diesem tödlichen Leben des ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri 1546, WA 54:492; and Brecht, Preservation of the Church, 376. Also of value is Heiko Oberman’s discussion about Luther’s “last words” recorded by Jonas in 1527 when it was feared at that time that Luther was dying. Jonas, who was present at Luther’s actual death in 1546, again was careful to record Luther’s words for the reasons observed by Oberman, Luther, 321-322.

75 WA 54:492.
diseases, aggravated by poor sanitation and diet, was made worse by the fact that their origin and treatment were largely unknown.\textsuperscript{76}

Tappert’s final comment above raises the pertinent question of Luther’s understanding of the etiology of disease and illness.\textsuperscript{77}

As we have seen, Luther was a late medieval man in terms of his science and understanding of human physiology. The same is true in many ways of his understanding of sickness. Although he lived in a time when traditional, mainstream understandings of the human body rooted in Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen were beginning to be questioned and revised, Luther, like most people who were laymen in these matters, tended to hew to an essentially traditional point of view.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, for example, in his 1526


\textsuperscript{77} Regarding Tappert’s analysis, Cunningham and Grell, \textit{Four Horsemen}, 299, sound a valuable caution against adopting a point of view that so easily dismisses medieval morbidity as “the direct result of hygienic ignorance and sanitary defects on their part, and no more than that” and that the medievals’ perceptions of disease were really misperceptions—“the real truth is and was germ truth.” Likewise, it would be tempting “to conclude that if they had had the scientific knowledge that we have, then they would have not needed to resort to explanations in terms of divine anger… Disease would have been seen as something wholly natural, not supernatural.” Such cavalier thinking “would not only be deeply patronizing about the intelligence of our predecessors, but would also be based on a misapprehension about disease identity. For the identity of an infectious disease, even today, does not consist solely of its causative microorganism, its pathogen. A significant part of its identity is constituted by how it is experienced by those who suffer it.”

exposition of Ecclesiastes 12 with its description of the debilities of advanced age, Luther attributes senectitude’s typically poor sleep patterns—“when one rises up at the voice of a bird” (Ecc. 12:4)—to the “drying up” of the humours, the four basic fluids considered central to the human body and health in the Hippocratic/Galenic paradigm—black bile, yellow (or red) bile, blood, and phlegm. That tradition held that disease was a mixture of environmental factors, including pollutions and impurities affecting the body from without, and *humoralism*, the view that balance between the vital fluids of the body directed the health (or illness) of the body from within. In other words, disease was a *state* arising from humoral disequilibrium which could be affected or manipulated by outside influences. What is important to note is how this paradigm viewed disease functionally: it was something unique to a particular person arising from his or her own constellation of humoral imbalances and environmental influences. Disease was not conceived of as an ontologically-specific entity born of pathogens as in most modern, western paradigms. Luther would not have understood, in other words, the plague as an etiology of pathogens beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a postscript it should be noted that as important as Luther’s view about sickness is, the fact that Katie Luther, who acted as her husband’s primary care-giver and nurse, held to this view is also significant! Her son, Paul, a physician, called her “half a [medical] doctor.”

79 *Annotationes d. Martini In Ecclesiastes Salomonis, 1526*. WA 20:195; LW 15:180: “Non solum graviter loquuntur sed etiam aegre dormiunt: Quia exiccatis humoribus, id quod fit in senibus, deest radix et causa somni. Somnus enim habet suum pabulum ex ipsis humoribus. Excitatur ergo ad omnem vocem volucris, cum iuvenes secure stertant...” (“Not only do [the elderly] speak ponderously, they also sleep badly: since on account of their dried up humours—this being what happens in oldsters—the root and cause of sleep is absent. For sleep gets its nourishment from these humours. Therefore they are stirred by every bird call, while the young snore securely...”) On the four humours and for an instructive diagram showing the characteristics of the humours—hot, dry, wet, cold—and their relationship to the four basic elements of the universe—earth, air, fire, water—see Atkins, *Fever*, 340.
specific disease caused by the *Yersinia pestis* microbe or any such “bug,” but as a
diseased state of the whole body caused by out-of-whack humoural balances under attack
by environmental conditions conducive for the plague. 80 Such a point of view placed
each human person on a continuum of healthy-to-sick in which an overabundance or
insufficient amount of one or another of the humours tilted the matter quickly to the side
of illness. Corruption or other putrefaction, any change or imbalance of one (or between)
the humours likewise meant illness. Moreover, perceived fluctuations had to be countered
quickly to avert sickness. Practically speaking, “most people hung forever between health
and illness” because of the difficulty of maintaining equilibrium versus the sheer number
of possible dysfunctional combinations between the humours. 81

From the history of Luther-the-patient we have already heard of some of the
standard therapies and prophylactic measures used by medieval medicine to address the
perceived problems of the sick. Most often they involved some sort of reduction of the
offending humour accomplished by bleedings, purgings, emetics, and drainings such as
was used on Luther’s abscessed calf. But, it should be emphasized that symptoms of

80 Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*, Second
dition (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13. Lindemann notes: “Changes in the
environment broadly conceived—a condition of air or water, an especially hot or wet
summer, or an unfavorable conjunction of the planets, for instance—could upset the
body’s internal hydraulics with pernicious results” (13). Compare Luther’s remark in the
*Tischreden*: “Yesterday I was fine; today it’s completely turned around. It is due to a
change in the weather. Men are the best and most natural mathematicians; they feel anon
in their members the conjunction and opposition of stars and a change of weather.”
(“Gestern war ich hubsch, heut ist es gantz vmbgewand. Es ist mutatio aëris. Nam
homines sunt optimi et naturalissimi mathematici; mox sentiunt in membris
coniunctionem et oppositionem ac aëris mutationem.”) WATr 3:428 (Nr. 3580); LW
54:237 (No. 3580).

81 Ibid.
sickness, particularly those involving bodily excretions (such as diarrhea), were interpreted as the body working to reestablish balance and so were hailed as good and necessary and to be encouraged. Recognizing this allows us to grasp more easily the reasoning behind many of the “cures” of Luther’s day that would otherwise be opaque. Within the humoral paradigm, they have a certain logic that can be understood rather than appearing as simply “ineffective, superstitious, counterproductive, or just plain silly.”

Late medieval people believed that health was linked with what flowed through the bowels, bladder, skin, and veins. Luther certainly thinks this way and brings this understanding into his exegesis and sermons. Indeed, as Lyndal Roper notes, “Luther thinks through his body. For him the spiritual and the somatic are always intertwined.”

So, in a sermon on John 15:2—“Every branch of Mine that bears no fruit He takes away”—we hear Luther inveighing against the charge that heresy comes from the church and Scripture by invoking the natural purgings of the body as analogous to the purgation of the poison of heresy by the church and Scripture.

It is just so with our own bodies: [The body] is a beautiful, noble creation of God, but what else does it let out of itself than eye discharges, sweat, dung, piss, snot, pus, and heaviness (schweren)? So must I also say: heaviness and pus are surely in the body, yet the body is not thereby evil, even though such come from it, for where something is good, then it remains within like other things do, but since the body in all its members is good and healthy, the filth has to separate itself and let itself be tossed away. But if you want to therefore reject the body, because it produces snot, pus, and uncleanness, then cut your own throat [lit., neck]. In the same way Christendom is a living, healthy body of the devout little flock, who are

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83 Roper, “Martin Luther’s Body,” 376.
God’s children, yet also filth and stink are found mixed in, which things must be cast out.84

A few lines later he continues in the same vein:

“Yes,” you say, “but there are many wicked among the crowd [i.e., in the church] and they do harm.” That pertains to your body as well, and yet it remains a good body with its members, in respect to which they do much good: the eyes see and lead, the ears hear, the hands do all sorts of tasks, the feet carry it here and as far as it wants. In short, they bring every pure, precious, good fruit, which cannot be counted, and totally serve the entire body for good, also in this that they sweep out what is foreign [and] unhealthy for the body and get rid of it. For it is good for [the body], that it be well-swept and what is bad go away swiftly, even though it serves up a stink, [and] that the body has to put up with the annoyance and trouble of washing and cleaning itself again. So also here: just because filth comes out of the holy body of the true Church, should therefore the whole of it be condemned?85

84 Reihenpredigten über Johannes 14-15, 1533. WA 45:648; LW 24:206: “Jst es doch an unserm eigen Leibe also: Der ist ein schone, edle creatur Gottes, Was lesst er aber von sich denn butter, schweis, mist, harn, rotz, eiter und schweren? Da mus ich auch sagen:schweren und eiter sind ja jm leibe, noch ist darumb der leib nicht boese, ob solches draus kompt, Denn wo es gut were, so bliebe es darin wie andere glied, Weil aber der leib sampt seinen gliedern gut und gesund ist, mus sich der unflat absordon und weg werffen lassen, Wiltu aber den leib darumb verwerffen, das er rotzet, eitert und unrein machet, so stich dir selb den hals abe. Also ist auch die Christenheit ein lebendiger, gesunder leib des fromen heufflin, die Gottes kinder sind, doch findet sich auch unflat und stanck darunter gemenet, der da mus aus geworffen werden.” [The WA includes a note suggesting “Augensekret” for “butter” as Luther’s meaning.]

85 Reihenpredigten über Johannes 14-15, 1533. WA 45:649; LW 24:206-207. “Ja, sprichstu, Es sind dennoch viel boese unter dem hauffen und thun schaden. Das ist an deinem leibe auch. Und bleibt dennoch ein guter leib mit seinen gliedern, welche dagegen unzelic viel guts schaffen, die augen sehen und leiten, die ohren horen, die hende thun allerley erbeit, die fusse tragen jn, wohin und wie weit er wil, Summa: sie bringen alle eitel kostliche, gute fruecht, die nicht zu erzelen sind, und dienen alle dem gantzten leib zu gut, auch eben jnn dem, das sie das frembde, ungesunde am leibe ausfegen und von sich geben, Denn es ist jm gut, das er nur wol gefegt werde und das bose flugs hin weg gehe, ob es gleich einen stanck anricht, das der leib den unlust und verdries leiden und sich jmer wider waschen und reinigen mus, Also auch hie, ob unflat aus dem geistlichen leibe gehet der rechten Kyrchen, solt darumb der gantz hauffe verdampst sein?”
Understanding the purpose of bodily excretions through the lens of the humoral paradigm may help the modern reader of Luther to understand his emphasis—at least in some contexts—on the less-than-savory aspects of the body, particularly excrement.\textsuperscript{86} When, for example, Luther contrasts the pre-lapsarian body of Adam with that of human beings after the fall, he is emphatic in noting “there was no stench to excrement,” but the observation is not made gratuitously. Rather, in keeping with the humoral paradigm, such offensive aspects of bodily functioning—the product of the body’s wrestling to expunge pollutions and restore humoral equilibrium—were viewed as the result of the fall into sin.

Moreover it is an amazing thing for us today for there to be a natural life without death, with all the attending things of death, such as diseases, poxes, loathsome overflows in the body, etc. For no part of the body was unclean in the state of innocence, there was no stench to excrement nor other disgusting things, but everything was very beautiful without any offense to the sense organs, and nevertheless it was a natural life. Adam ate, chewed, digested; he would have done the other things—if he would have thus remained—that natural life requires, until at last he would have been translated to spiritual and eternal life.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{86} The physiological thinking of the day notwithstanding, it is helpful also to remember Roland Bainton’s comment about Luther’s vulgarity: “There is no denying that [Luther] was not fastidious, nor was his generation. Life itself stank. One could not walk around Wittenberg without encountering the odors of the pigsty, offal, and the slaughterhouse. And even the most genteel were not reticent about the facts of daily experience. Katie, when asked about the congregation on a day when Luther was unable to attend, replied, ‘The church was so full it stank.’ ‘Yes,’ said Luther, ‘they had manure on their boots.’ …Luther delighted less in muck than many of the literary men of his age; but if he did indulge, he excelled in this as in every other area of speech.” Bainton, \textit{Here I Stand}, 298. For the exchange between Luther and Katie, see WATr 2:525 (Nr. 2563a).

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Genesisvorlesung 1535/37}. WA 42:84; LW 1:110 on Genesis 2:17: “Mira autem Hodie nobis res est, esse animalem vitam, sine morte et sine omnibus accidentibus mortis, qualia sunt morbi, pustulae, foetidae superfluitates in corporibus etc. Nulla enim pars corporis fuit sordida in statu innocentiae; non fuit foetor in excrementis, non aliae foeditates, sed omnia fuerunt pulcherrima, sine ulla offensione organorum sensuum, et tamen fuit animalis vita. Comedebat Adam, concoquebat, digerebat, fecisset alia, si sic permansisset, quae animalis vita exigit, donec tandem esset translatus ad spiritualem et aeternam vitam.”
This allows us to segue to Luther’s theological etiology of sickness. For Luther, the spiritual disaster of Genesis 3 was the mother of the human condition: sickness was one of her primary offspring. In creating humankind, God had made them male and female and they were, along with all of creation, “very good”—a declaration that affirmed the perfection of human health. In original innocence, “Adam loved God…[and] lived among the creatures of God in peace, without fear of death, and without any fear of sickness,”88 but original sin spawned “hideous lust, depravity, troubles, sicknesses, and other evils (In causa autem est peccatum originale, ex quo nata est foeda libido, turpitudo, molestiae, morbi et alia mala).”89 Thus, although the medical orthodoxies of Luther’s day might indict humoral dysfunction or the weather or the stars as the source of human illness, Scripture, Luther intoned, has declared sin as the cause.

Sin and Satan, that is. In his response to Erasmus on the matter of the freedom of human choice, De servo arbitrio (1525), Luther famously states—using a borrowed simile—that human beings are positioned between God and the devil like a beast of burden and will be ridden either by one or the other.90 Thus, although humanity is volitionally passive, it is nonetheless intimately involved in the struggle between God and the devil. In this struggle, Luther accorded Satan broad ownership of the range of human


89 Genesisvorlesung, 1538/42. WA 43:139; LW 4:5 on Genesis 21:1-3 (emphasis added).

90 De servo arbitrio, 1525. WA 18:635; LW 33:65-66. For the source and a discussion of Luther’s simile, see LW 33:66, footnote 71.
ills and misfortunes, culminating in death: “Whatever pertains to death is the handiwork of the devil (Quidquid pertinet ad mortem, Diaboli artificio est).” A 1537 Tischreden entry recorded this observation from Luther (who was ill):

The devil is the kind of fellow who can serve up sickness as Peter says in Acts [2:38]: the sick are in bondage to the devil. Besides, not only from [men’s] own constitutions does [sickness] arise, and so we see this: that various medicines against a single disease have been devised. If once or twice these medications assisted, soon they don’t work anymore so powerful is the devil. He can change every medicine and treatment and what is in the apothecary’s tins. Therefore, let us pray to the true physician, Christ! When our narrow hour comes—for there must be such a time that throttles us at some point—God give a cheerful end. Amen!

The fact that Luther accorded Satan such a “strongly accented” level of power makes some of his statements smack almost of dualism. However, as Lohse notes,

“Luther…held to the idea that ultimately God alone has the power, even to the point of

91 Das 15. Capitel der Ersten Epistel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1532. WA 36:679; LW 28:203 on 1 Corinthians 15:54-55: “Denn Gott hat den menschen nicht also gemacht, das er solt sundigen und sterben, sondern das er lebete, aber der Teuffel hat den schendlichen unflat vnd flecken an die natur gehengt, das er mus soviel seuche, stanck und ungluck am hals tragen, weil er gesundigt hat.” (“For God did not make mankind in such a way that he should sin and die, but that he should live, but the devil hung on nature such shameful filth and blemishes that he must bear about his neck so many epidemics, stench, and misfortune because he sinned.”)

92 WATr 1:347 (Nr 722).

93 WATr 3:428 (Nr. 3580); LW 54:237 (No. 3580). “So ist der Teuffel ein gesell, der die kranckheit kan anrichten, wie Petrus in Actis sagt morbos esse vincula Diaboli. Et non tantum ex ipsis constitutionibus oritur, et hoc videmus, quod tam varia medicamenta contra unum morbum sint inventa. Si semel aut bis illae medicinae succurrent, mox nil operantur; also krefftig ist der Teuffel. Er kan alle ertznei vnd apotecken wandeln vnd in die buechßen thun. Ergo oremus ad verum medicum, Christum! Wen das stundlein kumpt, so wirds doch ein mal etwas sein, das vns wurget. Gott geb ein frölichs ende, Amen!”
drawing the devil into the divine plan. Luther thus avoided an actual dualism…”\(^94\) For this reason, one of the most frequently cited passages in Luther’s numerous “Comfort Letters” (*Trostbriefe*) to those undergoing suffering from serious or fatal illness is John 16:33—“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (NAB). Luther drew comfort personally from this passage and extended it frequently via this passage to his correspondents: Christ was greater than the enemies of the flesh, the world, and especially, the devil.\(^95\) Nonetheless, Luther saw the devil’s hand directly involved in certain cases of illness. In general terms, Luther shared the common perception of the time that “sudden, inexplicable diseases were most often thought to require magical or supernatural intervention.”\(^96\) But, as in the case of Job of old,\(^97\) Luther believed that Satan was permitted to follow his desires to afflict the faithful, himself


\(^95\) See, for example, Luther’s letter of comfort to Caspar Müller, 24 November 1534 in Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 39. Müller, the chancellor of Mansfeld, was an old friend of Luther’s and was seriously ill. “In short, it is written, ‘Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’ What should we do but glorify and bear in our bodies Him who gained the victory over the world, the devil, sin, death, flesh, sickness, and all evils.” See also WABr 7:117-119, Letter 2147.

\(^96\) Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, 15. See also WATr 1:150 (Nr. 360); LW 54:53 (No. 360); “Sic existimo, quod in omnibus gravibus morbis Diabolus adsit autor et effector” (“I believe that in all grave illnesses the devil is present as the author and cause”); and, “Sic generaliter existimo, das alle fahrliche morbi sind des Teuffels schlege” (“Thus I generally hold that all dangerous illnesses are the Devil’s blows”).

\(^97\) See, for example, *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42*, WA 43:68-69; LW 3:270, on Genesis 19:14: “Nam quid possit Sathan, et quid cupiat maxime, satis certum documentum ex Hiobis historia sumi potest. …immittit hostes, etiam ipsum corpus corruptit, et replet ulceribus.” (“For what Satan is capable of and what he most desires, we are able to be sufficiently assured of from the history of Job. …[He] sends enemies, and infects the very body and fills it with boils.”) See also the *Genesisvorlesung 1543/45*. WA 44:70; LW 6:95 where Luther again adduces Job’s history in this regard.
included. In this he saw the devil’s rage against the evangelical cause as well as the Father’s chastening hand.

Satan vexes and plagues me not merely with a single sickness, but with many. He is especially fond of me! But, God be praised, who has torn us from the power of the devil and has taken us for his Children. Once we were well under the control of the devil; but now are we free through Jesus Christ. All the same, God-fearing hearts in body and goods are yet subject to the Devil, Sicknesses, and Tyranny and are plagued by them, even though such things happen for our good, in that we learn to trust God in our Weaknesses, Foolishness and Sins, in which God desires to show and produce in us his Power, Wisdom and Righteousness. Let us be under God’s Wrath, and let God avert his gaze [lit., look now and then through his Finger], when we are anxious and tempted, then Mercy by and by breaks through again, conquers, and keeps the victory. Thus he deals with me according to his Will!

I know that my sickness is not like other people’s, but is always sharpened by the Devil whom I have infuriated. That hurts him.98

The body was thus the locus for spiritual warfare often fought on the battlefield of the body’s infirmity. For the faithful in Christ such warfare-in-the-body should be viewed as serving the Christian’s ultimate good, a divergence in Luther from certain trajectories of medieval Christianity. While sin and God’s just judgment of it is at the root of human

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98 WATr 4:13 (Nr. 3923), 1538 [The entry notes that Luther was ill with kidney stones and was troubled by an arthritic knee (Doctor Martinus Luther krank lag am Steine und am Reißen in Knesichien]): “Der Satan vexirt und plaget mich nicht schlecht mit einerley, sondern vielerley Krankheiten. Er ist mir sonderlich hold! Aber Gott sey Lob, der uns aus der Gewalt des Teufels gerissen und zu seinen Kindern angenommen hat. Etwan waren wir gar unters Teufels Gewalt; nu aber sind wir erlöst durch Jesum Christum. Laß gleich seyn, daß gottfürchtige Herzen an Leib und Gut noch dem Teufel, Krankheiten und Tyrannen unterworfen sind und von ihnen geplaget werden, doch geschicht solches uns zum Besten, auf daß wir Gott lernen vertrauen in unser Schwachheit, Thorheit und Sünde, in welcher Gott seine Macht, Weisheit und Gerechtigkeit in uns beweisen und erzeigen will. Laßt uns gleich unter Gottes Zorn seyn, und daß Gott bisweilen durch die Finger siehet, wenn wir angefochten und versucht werden, doch bricht die Barmherzigkeit bisweilen wieder herfür, überwindet und behält den Sieg. Also macheht ers mit mir nach seinem Willen!” WA 3:320 (Nr. 3448): “Jch weiß, das meyne krankheit nit ist wie ander leutt, sondern ist allzeit gespitzt durch den Teuffel, den ich hab in erzurnet; das thut ihm wehe.”
ills, nonetheless Luther does not let that message “eclipse the kindness made known in Christ and transform the Savior into a judge.” 99 So, in the Genesis lectures in connection with Abraham’s trials in Egypt (Gen. 12) Luther posits five aspects of the story that serve to instruct and comfort the Christian in illness and other trials. First, there is the comfort of God’s promise to care for his own who seek him in times of trouble. Second, the faithful are comforted by the deliberateness with which God acts thereby dispelling the perception that illness and trouble are merely random, senseless events in their lives. Third, such troubles are permitted often for the sake of testing faith and engendering patience and true humility. Fourth, earthly afflictions help “cleanse and improve us (ut purgemur seu emendemur)” by leading one in repentance and bringing forth the fruits of repentance. Fifth, such things serve the glory of God in their own mysterious way, for “God does nothing that does not reveal his glory and majesty (Deus nihil aliud facit, nisi quod gloriam suam et Maiestatem ostendit).” 100 Thus, in a sermon (1528) on the words


100 Genesisvorlesung, 1535/37. WA 42:488-492; LW 2:316-322. In its discussion, Luther’s lecture at this point parallels in brief what he had written long before (1519) in his Fourteen Consolations For Those who Labor and Are Heavy-Laden (Tessaradecas Consolatoria pro laborantibus et onerantibus) written for the ailing Frederick the Wise. See WA 6:104-134; LW 42:121-166. The Fourteen Consolations has received particular attention in the detailed analysis by Neil R. Leroux, Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and by Jane E. Strohl, “Luther’s Fourteen Consolations,” The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009): 310-324.
of the petition, “Hallowed be Thy name,” Luther says, “Let me gladly bear poverty, sickness; only let my heavenly Father have his glory.”101

What can serve for good in the body and faith-life of the faithful, however, is not true for the unredeemed, fallen world. In tracing the degradation of the world due to sin—“The world is deteriorating from day to day (Mundus enim de die in diem magis degenerat)”102—Luther opines in the Genesisvorlesung that as time moved forward from the fall through the Flood to the post-flood world to Luther’s day, human depravity continued to increase with the result that “just as in bodies more serious diseases demand more powerful cures, so also penalties more severe and more frequent had to be inflicted (sicut in corporibus graviiores morbi asperiora remedia postulant, etiam poenas oportuit aut graviores aut frequentes magis infligi).”103 Among the foremost of these penalties is the growing number of illnesses:

I spoke earlier about the damages suffered by the products of the earth. I am also convinced that the human body was healthier then than it is now. Proof of this lies in the length of life among people before the Flood, which seems incredible to us. For the Lord does not threaten Adam with apoplexy, leprosy, epilepsy, and other pernicious evils.

When I was a boy, syphilis was unknown in Germany. It first became known when I was about fifteen years old. Now even children in the cradle are stricken with this evil. In those days everyone was terrified by this disease, but now so little is thought of it that even friends who are bantering among themselves wish each other a case of syphilis.

Until my adult years the sweating sickness was an endemic disease, as the physicians call it. Just as individual areas have their particular advantages, so,


102 Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:154; LW 1:206.

103 Ibid.
after they misuse them against God, they are also troubled and stricken with particular hardships. But this disease became common also in parts of inland Germany, far distant from the ocean. It is awful to hear that some have snakes in their bellies and worms in their brains. In my opinion these sicknesses were unknown to the ancient physicians, although they counted almost four hundred kinds of diseases.\textsuperscript{104}

5.2 – “POOR MAGGOT-SACK THAT I AM”

In speaking of the body—his body for that matter—Luther’s comment above regarding snakes and worms evokes that quintessentially Luther-an sobriquet for the body: “maggot-sack (Madensack).” Perhaps the most familiar instance of its use occurs in Luther’s 1521/22 Sincere Admonition to All Christians.\textsuperscript{105} Written at the time of the mob actions in Wittenberg in 1521, Luther implored in it:

I plead that [every]one should nevermind my name and not call himself “Lutheran,” but Christian. What is Luther? The teaching is certainly not mine. In the same way I was not crucified for anyone. St. Paul, 1 Corint. 3, would not allow it that the Christians [in Corinth] be named “Pauliners” or “Peterans,” but

\textsuperscript{104} Genesisvorlesung 1535/37. WA 42:154; LW 1:207 (George V. Schick, trans.). It should be noted that the diseases Luther names—apoplexy, leprosy, epilepsy—were considered diseases that were the result of intemperate living. For instance, apoplexy (stroke or brain aneurysm), was thought to be the result of abuses of the nonnaturals in the Galenic paradigm—air, sleep/waking, food and drink, rest/exercise, excretion/retention, and the passions (sex and the emotions). Moderation in these was thought to be crucial for health. To die, therefore of apoplexy was a sign of likely gluttony and of excessive passion in life. Thus, when Luther died on 18 February 1546, speculation that he had died of apoplexy as conjectured by the Eisleben town apothecary, Johann Landau, a Catholic, was quickly and strongly countered by the death account prepared by Justus Jonas. On apoplexy, see Lindemann, Medicine and Society, 14, 27. On the account of Landau see von Loewenich, Martin Luther, 384; Brecht, Preservation, 376; Wilkinson, “Medical History,” 134, note 94.

\textsuperscript{105} Eyn trew vormanung Martini Luther tzu allen Christen. Sich tzu vorhuten fur auffruhr und Emporung (“A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion”), WA 8:676-687; LW 45:57-74.
Christian. How comes it then that I, a poor stinking maggotsack at that, should have someone call the children of Christ by my awful name? Not so, dear friend. Let us erase partisan names and be called Christians, whose teaching we have.¹⁰⁶

At first blush, *Madensack* seems to be simply the kind of evocative language Luther is known for. As it is, Luther uses the term over one-hundred twenty-five times in his writings, but its distribution among them is not what one might guess.¹⁰⁷ Only a handful of instances are in the *Tischreden*, that treasury of (sometimes outrageous) “Lutherisms”; the vast majority occur in Luther’s sermons. In those contexts, Luther does not intend that the term serve as a flippant reminder to his hearers that when they die and are buried, they will become “food for worms.”¹⁰⁸ Rather, Luther uses the term in all seriousness to underscore the theological issue of the “flesh,” the understanding that the corruption of sin is literally embodied in the sinner as a result of the fall. Thus Luther says in a 1522 sermon on New Year’s Day:

Hereditary sin or natural sin or personal sin [is] the real cardinal sin. If it did not exist, then also no actual sin would exist. This sin is not committed as all other


¹⁰⁷ This data was obtained using the search utility on the “Luthers Werke im WWW” electronic version of the WA.

sins are, but rather it is, it lives and does every sin and is the fundamental sin, which does not commit a sin for an hour or a time, rather, wherever and however long a person lives, there is this sin as well.\textsuperscript{109}

For Luther, “persons are ‘flesh’ not merely in the sense that lower forces influence them in their willing and acting,”\textsuperscript{110} but that sin adheres in their flesh. Thus the term “sinful flesh” is not simply speaking of concupiscence as a result of the fall, but of an ontological reality: sin indwells the person also in terms of the body. With the term Madensack this theological concept becomes linked with a curious facet of Luther’s medieval understanding of nature: the corruption of indwelling sin expresses itself through the body’s excretions and corruptions, ultimately in terms of bringing forth “maggots and worms” in its decomposition in the grave! Luther espouses this view in connection with a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:43 (“[the body] is sown in dishonor”):

St. Paul now reverts to the first illustration, which relates to sowing. He himself interprets it. And thereby he removes another great object of offense which severely agitates also the heathen. For they argue or raise the objection mentioned earlier: In the first place, the Christians must themselves admit that the bodies of even the greatest saints, such as patriarchs, prophets, apostles, are long decomposed completely, with not as much as a speck of dust left of them.” That is the way man is sown. When he dies and lies in his coffin longer than a day, he begins to smell and stink. And beyond this time maggots and worms grow in his body. This is so awful that no one can see or endure it. Therefore man has to be buried quickly or be consumed in fire or water and gotten rid of, for he is simply unendurable on earth. Well, such a spectacle is most offensive, and one is forced to think: “How might something come of such a body, which stinks so offensively

\textsuperscript{109} Euangelium am Newenn Jars tage. Luce. ij, 1522. WA 10\textsuperscript{1}:508-509; LW 52:152: “die erbsund, odder natursund, odder personsund, die rechte hewbtsund; wo die nit were, ßo were auch kein wircklich sund. Diße sund wirtt nitt gethan, wie alle andere sund, ßon dern sie ist, sie lebt und thutt alle sund und ist die weßenlich sund, die da nitt eyn stund odder tzeyttlang sundigt, ßon dern wo und wie lang die person ist, da ist die sund auch” (emphasis added for clarity).

\textsuperscript{110} Eerdman Schott, Fleisch und Geist nach Luthers Lehre: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Begriffs “totus homo” (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1928), np; quoted in Lohse, Martin Luther’s Theology, 251.
and putridly, and which, as those who experienced it say, turns into the vilest worms, adders, toads, and snakes?"  

Thus Luther evidently believed that maggots and worms (and adders and toads) were spawned *by the body* from its sinfulness in decomposition, just as he held to the medieval notion that rot spawned mice. Luther is not alone in this, of course. Philippe Ariès relates that the fifteenth-century French poet Pierre de Nesson [*ca. 1383-1440*] saw a similar relationship between the decomposition of the body and sin within. In his poem, “Vigile des morts, paraphrase sur Job,” de Nesson writes that the corruption that sweeps over the dead does not come from the ground, but from within their own bodies:

*Those worms that live in the earth*

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111 *Das XV. Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1532.* WA 36:654; LW 28:185.  
“Da rueret er widder das erste gleichnis von dem seen und legt es selbs aus, Und wirfft hie mit aus den augen noch ein stueck eines grossen ergernis, das die Heiden auch seer bewegt, Denn das sind jr Argument odder einrede, wie droben auch beruert ist, Erstlich, das die Christen selbs muessen bekennen, das auch der aller groessten heiligen leib als Patriarchen, Propheten, Aposteln lengest so gar verweset sind, das nicht ein steublin mehr davon zu spuere were, Da seet sichs dahin, wenn der mensch stirbt und uber einen tag jm sarck ligt, so reucht und stincket er, und wo es lenger wehret, so wuchsen da zu maden und wuerme darinn, und wird so schendlich wesen, das niemand sehen noch leiden kan. Darumb mus man flugs mit jm unter die erde odder jm fewr odder wasser verzeren, das man sein los werde, Denn auff erden ist er kurtz umb nicht zu leiden, Nu solch anblick machet ein gros ergernis, das man mus dencken: Wie solt aus solchem leib etwas werden, der so ubel stincket und faulet? und wie die sagen, so es erfaren haben, die aller boesesten wuerme, ottern, kroten, schlangen draus werden” (Martin H. Bertram, trans.).

112 *Genesisvorlesung 1535/37.* WA 42:38; LW 1:52: “Sed de muribus Aristoteles sic disputat, quaedam animalia esse ὀμοιόμορφα, quaedam ἑτερομορφή. Sicut mures sunt ex genere ἑτερομορφή, quia mures non nascentur ex muribus tantum, sed etiam ex putredine, quae consumitur et paulatim in murem vertitur. …Atque idem de muscis dici potest.” (“But concerning mice, Aristotle states that certain animals are *like-produced*, others *unlike-produced*. So, mice are from the genus of *unlike-produced*, since mice are not only born from mice, but also from decay, which is used up and little-by-little is turned into a mouse. …And the same thing can be said about flies.”) See also Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Autumn, 1995): 24.
Ariès’ commentary on de Nesson’s poem notes that “the corruption is there from the beginning. Man is born and dies in a state of ‘infection’":

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ most foul conception}, \\
O \text{ vile, fed on infection} \\
\text{In the womb before your birth.}
\end{align*}
\]

And in a passage worthy of Luther, de Nesson declaims:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{There is naught but filthiness,} \\
\text{Mucus, spittle, rottenness,} \\
\text{Stinking, rotten excrement.} \\
\text{Consider the products of nature...} \\
\text{You will see that each man brings} \\
\text{Stinking matter, loathsome things} \\
\text{From his body constantly.}^{113}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus Luther’s epithet of Madensack, far from being simply a disparagement of the body’s future in the grave, was used by him to convey the hopelessness of the body in death because of sin. Yet it was through death that his “maggot sack” would rise to new life in the resurrection. It is to these concerns that we next turn our attention.

5.3 – THE BODY AND DEATH

It is a commonplace to say that Martin Luther thought and wrote a great deal about death and the Christian. Richard Marius’ biography of Luther, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (1999) states as its thesis that Luther’s whole theology was catalyzed by his fear of death and the need to answer two questions, “Can I believe

\[\text{\textsuperscript{113} Philippe Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 120-121. The translation is by Ariès/Weaver.}\]
that God has the power to raise us from the dead?” and, “How does the Christian deal with the terror that death evokes while reaching for a faith that the triumph over death is possible?” Marius’s assessment is that Luther doubted the first and was unsuccessful with the second. Marius’s interpretation of Luther as the “Christian between God and death,” of Luther being terrified by death—“death in itself”—and driven by that terror was met with skepticism by reviewers of his book and thoroughly discredited by Neil Leroux’s lengthy study, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (2007). Yet, Marius was right about this: Luther was often focused personally on death in all its complexity and theological significance. For our purposes, however, the complex of Luther’s full theological thinking about death exceeds the focus of this study: indeed, how Luther viewed the *body* and death can be set forth fairly concisely.

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115 Marius’ book was peer-reviewed by various church historians and generally found lacking. See, for example, Mark U. Edwards in *Christian Century*, 17 November 1999; Scott Hendrix in *Theology Today* 56 (Oct. 1999); and Martin Brecht in *Church History* 69 (2000). Heiko Oberman in his scathing review, “Varieties of Protest,” *The New Republic* 16 August 1999:40-45, says of Marius’ work: “Bad books are written all the time.…Marius’ book is what the Romans called a pia fraus, a ‘pious fraud.’ After all, its motivation is openly admitted: the intense fervor of the lapsed believer [*i.e.*, Marius] who is intent on rejecting his past. Just as the televangelist inserts Greek and Hebrew terms to lend wings to his desperate message, so we find here all the trappings of high scholarship, purporting to show that the sources have been consulted and the secondary literature has been considered. [Marius’] old pulpit rhetoric continues to shine through, but it has now reached a higher and richer pitch in the eloquent indictment of…Luther,…reduced to…crass psychological causality” (45). Neil Leroux’s study of Luther’s writings on death presents an extensive rhetorical analysis of Luther’s primary writings on the matter and concludes—contra Marius—that they “take [death] out of the realm of the dreary and depressing and onto something of infinite promise, because, for the dying believer, death provides the best opportunity to redeem the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection.” Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death*. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 278.
First, Luther held that the human person is comprised of soul and body—the conventional theological formulation about human nature. While some have appraised that Luther believed that human nature was trichotomous (body, soul, and spirit), this does not appear to be actually the case, but seems to be based on a misreading of what Luther really says. Commenting on the Blessed Virgin’s words, Luke 1:46, “My soul magnifies God, the Lord,” Luther says,

Let us take one word after the other: the first: “My soul.” The Scripture divides people into three parts as St. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, the last chapter [5:23]. …The first part, the spirit, is the highest, deepest, noblest part of a human being, whereby he is called to take hold of incomprehensible, invisible, eternal things. And it is in short the house where faith and God’s word indwell. …The second, the soul, is precisely the same spirit with respect to its nature, but yet in a different work, namely in this, that it makes the body alive and works through it… And it is its nature not to take hold of incomprehensible things, but those which reason can know and appreciate.116

One sees that while Luther uses the terms “spirit (geist)” and “soul (seele),” he does so to demarcate two activities of the same “soul-substance,” not to divide the human person into more than two parts—the non-material and material—of his/her being as in a true trichotomy. Luther unequivocally expresses the dichotomous view in the fragmentary Disputation Concerning Man (1536) where he posits as his twentieth and twenty-first theses: (20) “Theology surely from the fulness of its wisdom defines the human being as complete and perfect: (21) That is to say, that the human being is a creature of God

consisting of body and living soul, in the beginning made in the image of God, without sin, in order that he should procreate and rule over things, and never die.”  

Second, Luther understood death in a similarly conventional fashion, *viz.*, as the separation of the soul from the body. Speaking on the matter of Abraham’s testing in the *Akedah* (Gen 22), he notes, “Natural death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, is a simple death.” Simple perhaps, but death is decidedly not natural. This is true, Luther says, even though death comes to everyone and its predictability renders it comparable to the growing and withering of grass.

The Scripture teaches us that our death and dying come not in a natural way, but is a fruit of and the penalty for the sin of our father Adam who offended the exalted Majesty so greatly that he and all who come from him and are born on earth must die eternally. And no one on earth can escape or ward off this calamity.

People may push away the reality of death, or dismiss it, but the Christian cannot do so because he or she cannot dismiss from consciousness the just judgment of God that is at the root of death.

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118 Cf., *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42*, WA 43:218; LW 4:115: “Mors naturalis, quae est separatio animae a corpore, simplex mors est.”

119 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther*, 1534. WA 36:557; LW 28:116: “Uns aber leret die Schrifft also, das unser tod und sterben nicht natuerlicher weise her komet, sondern eine frucht und straffe ist der sunde unsers Vaters Adam, welcher hat sich so hoch vergriffen an der hohen maiestet, das er und alles, was von jm kompt und auff erden geborn wird, mus ewiglich des tods sein und niemand auff erden dem unglueck entgehen noch wehren kan.” See also the *Reihenpredigten über Johannes 3-4*, 1537/40, WA 47:98; LW 22:375 on John 3:17.
The heathen have wisely said: *Qui mortem metuit, quod vivit, perdit id ipsum,*
“That one is a fool who fears death, for thereby he loses his own life”… However, Christians cannot do that, and they cannot dismiss this so from hearts which would gladly believe. Rather this [fear] is felt all the more strongly the more faith struggles and would strengthen itself. Thus there is not a moment in life that is certain, and it always has God’s judgment and the hellish pit before its eyes.\(^\text{120}\)

Luther thus posits an inverse relationship concerning fear and death for the Christian.

“Simple death”—that which occurs to the body—pales in comparison to “real death”—the pangs of judgment and hell. The fear of real death, however, is assuaged by faith so that death “is but a sleep, as Christ says: ‘He who believes in me shall not see death.’

When the fear of death has been removed, the death of the soul has been removed.”\(^\text{121}\)

Understanding this makes transparent Luther’s denigration of the body in certain contexts, particularly his sermons. Since the death of the body is inevitable because of sin, let it go!\(^\text{122}\) The body is just a “sack of maggots,” a “decomposed rascal (*faulen schelmen*)” anyways.\(^\text{123}\) Pursued to the death by the devil, Satan does the Christian no

\(^{120}\) *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:539-540; LW 28:104-105: “Die Heiden haben weislich gesagt: *Qui mortem metuit, quod vivit, perdit id ipsum,*

Der ist ein narr, wer sich fur dem tod furchtet, denn damit verleurt er sein eigen leben,…Aber das konnen die Christen nicht thun, und lesset sich nicht so wegwerffen aus dem hertz, das da gerne gleuben wolt, sonderrn fulet sich nur je stercker, je mehr der glaube kemppfet und sich stercker wil, Also das er keines augenblicks des lebens sicher ist, und hat jmer fur augen Gottes urteil und die hellische gruben.”

\(^{121}\) *Genesisvorlesung 1538/42.* WA 43:218; LW 4:115 on Genesis 22:11: “*Sed sentire mortem, hoc est, terrorem et pavorem mortis, ea demum vera mors est. Sine pavore mors non est mors, sed somnus, ut inquit Christus: *‘Qui credit in me, non videbit mortem,’ ablato pavore, ablata est animae mors.*”

\(^{122}\) Both the content and the language Luther uses is reminiscent of stanza 4 of his *Ein feste burg ist unser Gott:* “Nemen sie den leib/gut, ehr, kind und weib./las faren dahin./sie habens kein gewin./das reich mus uns doch bleiben.” (“Take they the body/goods, honor, child, and wife,/let them go./they have nothing won./the kingdom must surely remain ours.”) In WA 35:455; LW 53:284-285.

\(^{123}\) *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:549; LW 28:110.
harm by killing the body: “The only thing you [i.e., Satan] effect thereby is to help this poor sack of maggots out of its misery and arrive at its destination, where the head, the heart, and everything is, except all misfortune.”¹²⁴ Luther’s use of denigration disarms his hearers’ concern over the body’s physical ailments and the rigors of death. By minimizing the body in this way, Luther turns ears to listen to the hope of the body in the resurrection at the Last Day. Until then, “we are guests at an inn whose keeper is a villain (Das wir geste sind und ynn solcher herberge liegen da der wirt Ein schalcks ist).”¹²⁵

Luther’s language in his letters written to comfort the sick and the dying offers a strong contrast to his pulpit bravado about bodily death. It is a contrast appropriate to pastoral ministry—an aspect of Luther’s work that is often overlooked.¹²⁶ The record of his personal contacts through reports in the Tischreden and his Trostbriefe written to

¹²⁴ Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534. WA 36:550; LW 28:112. “Was schadet uns denn, das du uns itzt leiblich wuergest? denn damit thustu nichts, on das du diesem armen madensack aus dem elend hilffst, das er auch hinach kome, da er hin solt, da das heubt, hertz und alles ist, ausser allem ungluck.” The citation is part of a long taunt against Satan’s ultimate impotence in harming the Christian by attacking and devouring (fressen!) the body.

¹²⁵ Tröstung an die Christen zu Halle über Herr Georgen ihres Predigers Tod, 1527. WA 23:403; LW 43:146. Luther wrote this open letter to the evangelical congregation in Halle whose pastor, Georg Winkler, had been murdered. It was suspected that Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz was behind it. The murder took place in May 1527 and contributed to Luther’s severe depression later that summer. Luther uses the inn-with-Satan-as-innkeeper metaphor also in his 1 Corinthians 15 sermons. See WA 36:550; LW 28:111-112.

¹²⁶ Timothy J. Wengert, “Introducing the Pastoral Luther,” The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI: 2009), 2. “Martin Luther was, more than anything else, pastor and preacher for his Wittenberg flock. This simple, almost innocuous commonplace holds one of the most important, yet virtually unexplored, keys to understanding Luther’s impact on the history of the Christian church.” See also Tappert, Letters of Spiritual Counsel, 13.
persons high and low show Luther’s empathy as a “fellow traveler” in the body with those experiencing sickness or dying. An example to the “high” is Luther’s letter to Frederick the Wise who was gravely ill in September 1519. Luther wrote his prince a small devotional book, *The Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and Are Heavy Laden* and in the accompanying letter said,

When, therefore, I learned, most illustrious prince, that Your Lordship has been afflicted with a grave illness and that Christ has at the same time become ill in you, I counted it my duty to visit your Lordship with a little writing of mine. I cannot pretend that I do not hear the voice of Christ crying out to me from your Lordship’s body and flesh saying, “Behold, I am sick.” This is so because such evils as illness and the like are not borne by us who are Christians but by Christ himself, our Lord and Saviour, in whom we live, even as Christ plainly testifies…

With regard to the “low,” an example is the comfort Luther extended to a certain woman whose husband had died after a failed suicide attempt. (Concerning suicide, Luther did not hold the common opinion that suicide meant certain damnation, but entertained the view that, “like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber (wie einer yn eim walt von einem latrone ermordet wurdt),” the devil could have overpowered the mind.) Writing to “widow Margaret” in this vein, he said:

Honored, virtuous Lady: Your son N has told me of the grief and misfortune that have befallen you in the death of your dear husband… It should comfort you to know that in the hard struggle in which your husband was engaged, Christ finally won the victory [and]…that when he died he was in his right mind. …That your

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127 *Tessaradecas Consolatoria pro laborantibus et onerantis, 1520.* WA 6:104-134; LW 42:121-166. Although intended originally for the Elector’s sole use, the *Fourteen Consolations* went through numerous printings and editions during Luther’s own lifetime. See LW 42:119-120.

128 Quoted and translated in Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 27. For the original see WA 6:99-106.

129 WATr 1:95 (Nr. 222); LW 54:29 (No. 222).
husband inflicted injury on himself may be explained by the devil’s powers over our members. He may have directed your husband’s hand, even against his will. For if your husband had done what he did of his own free will, he would surely not have come to himself and turned to Christ with such a confession of faith. How often the devil breaks arms, legs, backs, and all members! He can be master of the body and its members against our will... God the Father comfort and strengthen you in Christ Jesus. Amen.130

Readers of the Tischreden are given a poignant view of Luther, death, and the body in the accounts surrounding the sickness and death of Magdalena, Luther’s thirteen-year-old daughter, on 20 September 1542.131 Magdalena—“Lenchen”—was taken ill suddenly in late August and quickly slid towards death. As her life ebbed, Katie Luther wept loudly and Luther is reported to have consoled her, saying: “Think where she is going. She will come there right well. Let the flesh be flesh and the spirit be spirit. Children don’t question: what one tells them, so they believe. Everything is simple with children; they die without distress, complaint, without the fear of death, with little physical pain, like they were falling asleep.”132 Going to Lena’s bedside, Luther continued, “I have such love for her. But even so, if it is your will, dear God, that you take her, I will gladly know that she is with you.” Then he said to his daughter lying

130 Quoted and translated in Tappert, Letters of Spiritual Counsel, 59. For the original see WA 4:624-625.

131 Magdalena was Luther’s third child. She was born 4 May 1529 and named after Katie’s aunt who lived with the family in the Blackcloister. Caspar Heydenreich wrote down the account of “Magdalenichen’s” illness and death. From that account, it appears that present (at least) at the bedside were Luther, Katie Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, Georg Rörer, and Heydenreich himself.

there, “My Lenchen, my little daughter, you would stay gladly here with me, with your father, and would you also gladly go to your Father?” The sick girl answered, “Yes, dear father, as God wants.” Her father said, “You dear, little daughter! The spirit is strong, but the flesh weak. I have such love for her. If the flesh is so strong, how strong must the spirit be?” Katie stood away from the bed overcome with grief as Luther took his daughter in his arms: she died in them. “I am joyful in spirit, but after my flesh I am so sad,” Luther said as he wept. “The flesh wants none of this. Parting [with her]troubles one way beyond all measure. It is a strange thing to know that she is surely in peace; [she is] well there, even better—and still to be so sorrowful!” Magdalena was buried the same day she died, the university community escorting the grieving family to and from the funeral. As the coffin was lowered into the grave Luther cried out, “Est resurrectio carnis!”


134 WATr 5:193 (Nr. 5498); LW 54:432 (No. 5498): “Ich bin frolich im geist, aber nach dem fleisch bin ich ser traurig. Das fleisch wil nicht heran. Separatio vexiret einen vber die massen ser. Mirabile est scire illam certo esse in pace, ibi bene et optime esse, et tamen sic dolere!”

135 WATr 5:194 (Nr. 5500); LW 54:433 (No. 5500): “There is a resurrection of the flesh!” For the details about the funeral itself see Brecht, The Preservation of the Church, 237-238.
The account of his daughter’s death underscores the centrality of the hope of the resurrection of the dead in Luther’s faith and thinking. Ten years before Magdalena’s death, her father had stepped into his pulpit and announced that he was beginning a series of sermons that day on St. Paul’s fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians—the “great resurrection chapter” of the epistle. The series was necessitated, Luther said, because the doctrine of the resurrection—Christ’s and the Christian’s—demands to be preached with fidelity and integrity in order that “we not allow this article to be taken from us or perverted (das wir uns diesen Artikel nicht lassen nemen noch verkeren).” Ultimately, Luther needed seventeen sermons to expound Paul’s text; Luther preached the final sermon on 27 April 1533. Recorded by Georg Rörer and edited by Caspar Cruciger, the sermons were published as a commentary (in German and dedicated to Elector John Frederick) on the chapter in 1534. Because *Das XV Capital S. Pauli an die Corinther* is Luther’s most comprehensive (and concentrated) discussion of death and resurrection

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136 The first sermon was preached in the afternoon of 11 August 1532, the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

137 In keeping with Paul’s emphases, Luther does not discuss at any length from the pulpit the matter of the resurrection to condemnation or discuss the body of the damned. He does affirm in Sermon XV in connection with Paul’s declaration that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50) that “Judas, Caiaphas, and all the damned will rise physically” (“Judas, Caiphas und alle verdampten werden auch leiblich aufferstehen”), but does not elaborate. See WA 36:673; LW 28:198.

138 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534*. WA 36:486; LW 28:63.

139 See the introduction to the sermons in WA 36: iii-v and LW 28:x.
anywhere in his writings, we will explore Luther’s thinking about the resurrected body primarily on the basis of it.¹⁴⁰

Luther’s preaching is in the manner of a *Reihenpredigt*, a “running sermon” that traverses the text in the manner of a verse-by-verse exposition. Thus, in keeping with St. Paul’s development of the credibility of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15—“If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”—Luther began his exposition of the chapter by acknowledging the challenge “this article” posed to human reason:

This article, that I should believe in the resurrection of the flesh, that all people on one day will again become alive and our body and soul will come together, united as they are now—[to believe that] is surely not a skill or ability of man. For reason does nothing more in this situation than to take a dim view of the situation as it strikes the eye, [namely] that the world has stood for so long, and that one person after another continues to die, and everything remains dead and decomposing and surely crumbling in the grave, and there is yet not a single thing that has returned from there. In that regard, so man always dies and decays, worse and more wretchedly than any animal or louse. Moreover, he is burned or crumbles to dust with a legbone in England, an arm in Germany, his skull in France, and is thus fragmented into many thousand pieces—like they commonly display the bones of the saints. When [reason] now rides in on this article and wants to consider it, so is it surely lost. For there comes before [reason] so many strange, peculiar, illogical ideas that it has to say that there is nothing [credible] in [this article].¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ See Gerhard Sauter, “Luther on the Resurrection,” *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 99. Sauter’s article assesses the 1 Corinthians 15 sermons in their entirety and presents their theological argumentation over the range of issues raised by St. Paul’s words.

¹⁴¹ *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:493; LW 28:69. “Jnn diesem Artikel, das ich sol gleuben die aufferstehung des fleisches, das alle menschen auff einen tag sollen widder lebendig werden und unser leib und seele zu samen wird komen, wie sie jzt baynander sind, das ist warlich nicht menschen kunst noch vermoeugen, Denn die vernunfft ist da und thut nicht mehr, denn sihet schlecht jnn das werck, wie es fur augen ist, das die welt so lang gestanden, und stirbt jmer einer nach dem andern, und bleibt alles tod und verwesen und gar zu pulvert jm grab, und ist noch nie keiner widderkomen, Dazu der mensch so jemerlich hin stirbet und verdirbet, elender
Because of this, Luther rejected any attempt to resort to philosophical reasoning or biological speculation as a ground for the hope of the resurrection. He intended his approach to be entirely theological and thoroughly vested in the words of St. Paul and the rest of Scripture. Affirming the resurrection of Christ as “the chief article of the Christian doctrine (das heubstueck Christlicher lere),” Luther declared that it is incumbent on the Christian preacher to proclaim it in such a way as to implant hope in the heart of the hearer. Gerhard Sauter assesses Luther’s argument that follows as an example of—in his parlance—“eschatological rationality.” That is to say, Luther is concerned that his hearers listen to Paul’s message intensely aware of the connection between hope in the resurrection and the preaching of that hope. For “if Christ is not risen, then our proclamation is in vain and your faith, too, is vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). They must understand that if Christ is not risen then preachers are not messengers of God. And if that is the case, then it was not God who authorized such preachers to proclaim, “Christ is arisen!” Indeed, God himself is not then truly God and both preacher and hearer have been deceived. Thus, Luther does not argue using a series of logical proofs or by appealing...

\[142\] Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534. WA 36:524; LW 28:94.

to recognized authorities. The resurrection is not to be believed on the strength of its plausibility. Rather, Luther shadows Paul’s words carefully, leading his hearers along Paul’s path of thinking by means of clarifications and by making deductions that allow them to come to the right conclusions. However, for our purposes (and respecting the parameters of our topic), Luther’s sermonic *tour de force* expounding on the eschatological reality of the resurrection—it takes him eleven of the seventeen sermons to do this—can be distilled down to a full-throated affirmation of the words he uttered over his daughter’s grave: “There is a resurrection of the flesh!” But what would that flesh be like and with what kind of body will the Christian rise?

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144 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:527-528; LW 28:97: “Also bindet sichs alles jnn einander, der Apostel und Christus wort, der Christenheit glaube und bekentnis und Gottes warheit und Maiestet, das man keines on das ander luegen straffen kan, Und weil das gewis stehet und war bleibt, so mus das auch gewis sein, das die todten aufferstehen werden, weil es jnn Gottes wort und der Christen glauben gefasset ist, Und machet also eine ketten, das alles jnn einander henget und aus einander gehet, das man mus sagen: So gewis das war ist, das Gott lebte und Christus lebt und der Christenheit glaube und predigt recht und gewis ist, so gewis ist auch dieser Artikel. …Sihe, also streittet dieser Text gewaltig und ist die rechte weise unser lere zu verteidigen.” (“So all these things bind themselves together, the Apostle’s and Christ’s word, Christian faith and confession, and God’s truthfulness and majesty, so that one cannot deny one without the other. And because that stand certain and remains true, so must that also be certain that the dead will rise because it is in God’s word and confessed in the Christian faith. And thus it creates a chain that everything hangs together or mutually falls apart, so one must say: As certain the truth is that God lives and Christ lives and the faith of Christendom and preaching are right and certain, so certain, too, is this article. …See, thus this text strongly fights and is the right way to defend our doctrine.”)
Luther begins to take up specific matters about the resurrected body in Sermon XII of his *Reihenpredigt* having arrived at Paul’s words in verses 35-38:

35 But if someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? 36 You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 145

Luther begins with the notation that Paul is making a transition in these verses from instructing the Corinthians to refuting “their objections spun from the shrewdness of their reason (*jre einrede zu stopffen, aus der vernunft klugheit gesponnen*).” 146

Luther gives verbal shape to the Corinthians’ obvious misconception of the resurrected body as a mere carnal and physical restoration of their first-century lives and world by means of another inventory of bodily functions and social stations.

But St. Paul refutes their foolishness with clear words and rejects all such questions and ponderings about what we will have for bodies and how to make sense of things if the body has to therefore eat and drink, spit and spew, be scabby and scratch, digest and emit stench, be sick and infirm like now, and that each one again is a man, woman, a servant, or maid as he was before. 147

145 Sermon XII was preached on 8 December 1532 (Advent 2).

146 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:632; LW 28:170.

147 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:633; LW 28:171: “Aber S. Paulus verlegt jren unverstand mit klaren worten und verwirfft alle solch fragen und kluegeln, was wir fur leibe sollen haben und wie sichs reimen werde, so der leib sol also essen und trincken, sputzen und aus werfen, grinde und kratzen, dewen und stanck machen, kranck und gebrechlich sein wie itzt, Und ein jeglicher widder ein man, weib, knecht, magt, fuerst sein, wie er vor gewest.”
In the resurrection God will not change his creation: the resurrection body will remain a true human body in keeping with the promise manifested in Jesus’ risen body. And, since God made human nature male and female in the beginning, Luther parses Paul’s answer to the Corinthians to affirm that “whatever a person was created to be, that is what a person will remain, either a man or a woman (was ein mensch geschaffen ist, das sol ein mensch bleiben, beide, man odder weib).”

But the nature of the body must be distinguished from its use. Thus, social stations such as lord, servant, father, mother will no longer pertain because they are not part of the created nature. Moreover, while the “different members” of the body will remain,

> it will rather be so, that a person will have no need to eat, drink, digest, do household chores [lit., sweep up], live with a husband or wife, raise children, farm land, manage house or a city. In short, everything will stop that is part of this temporal life and existence. Just as Christ teaches in Matthew 22 where he says, “They will neither marry nor allow themselves to be married, but they will be just like the angels of God in heaven.”

In the same sermon Luther notes that while the resurrection will bring all, whether male or female, into the same “estate and position (jnn einem gleichen stand und wesen),” nonetheless there will be a distinction between persons, “a distinction in glory.” Thus, Paul, Samuel, and Isaiah will shine before God in greater glory on the basis of their works; and “pious Sarah or Rachel (frome Sara odder Rahel)” will similarly shine. “For

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148 Ibid.

149 *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534*. WA 36:634; LW 28:172: “Sondern so werden, das man der keines beduerffen wird, wedder essen, trincken, bewen, ausfegen noch bey man odder weib wonen, kinder zeugen, acker bawen, haus odder stad regieren, Und Summa, alles auffhoeren, was dieser zeitlichen gueter und wesens ist, so zu vergenglichen leben und wercken gehoeret, Wie auch Christus Matth. xxij. leret, da er spricht: ‘Sie werden wedder freien noch sich freien lassen, sondern sie sind gleich wie die Engel Gottes jm himel.’“
God did not do through St. Paul what he did through Isaiah, and vice versa. Therefore everyone will bring his works with him by which he will shine and praise God.”

Luther found great utility in St. Paul’s metaphor of the seed contained in verse thirty-seven for demonstrating the continuity of the body across the divide of death and resurrection: the seed of the body is sown in death and decays only to bring forth the new plant of the body “endowed with a more beautiful and better form than the present one (mit einer schoener und bessern gestalt denn jetzt).” Sermon Thirteen preached on 22 December 1532, focused entirely on this metaphor yielding this description of the resurrection body and how a Christian must view death:

The body of a person must perish and its form will not be retained as it now has it; only what belongs to its essence [will remain]. Thus nothing will remain which is of this transitory life, and yet the same body and soul will be and remain just so with all its members present. But each person must leave everything behind which he had to have in this world: husband, wife, child, house, courtyard, master, servant, maid, food, drink, clothes, etc. [People will need these only] so long, until we all after each other are yonder [and] this world has ended and disappeared and another, more beautiful life has appeared that will last eternally. Therefore the subject is not at all whether in the resurrection you should all have such an existence or occupy a position as you do now or where you may obtain food, drink, clothes, etc. For even in connection with these [God] wants to make such a new life [where] everything perishible is no more…

Thus, like a seed, the body is sown and perishes with respect to everything belonging to earthly life, but is still in its essence, the body. With this understanding, Luther says that death, too, is changed from its fearsome aspect into a porter who urges and ushers the body into the grave so that it may changed when it sprouts in the resurrection:

…thereunto Death must serve in that it comes and says: Cease eating, drinking, digesting, etc., and lay yourself down and decompose, so that you may obtain a new, more beautiful form, just as the grain which grows anew out of the ground.\textsuperscript{151}

\section*{5.4.2 – Sermon XIV: I Corinthians 15:39-42}

In Sermon Fourteen—preached on 19 January 1533 (Epiphany 2)—Luther left behind the metaphor of the seed and began his exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:39-42 in which St. Paul adds two further illustrations from creation to that of the seed.\textsuperscript{152} Luther explains that these two illustrations are used by Paul to indicate how each body in the resurrection will have its own peculiar clarity and each member will have its own

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{151} Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534. WA 36:650; LW 28:182: “Das des menschen leib mus verendert werden, und die gestalt nicht behalten, so er itzt hat, on was gehort zu seinem wesen, Also das nichts bleiben sol, was dieses vergenglichen lebens ist, und doch der selbige leib und seele sey und bleibe, so ein jgllicher gehabt hat, mit allen gliedmassen, Aber das mus er alles allhie lassen, was er jnn dieser welt hat muessen haben, man, weib, kind, haus, hof, herrn, knecht, magd, essen, trincken, kleider &c. so lang, bis wir alle nach einander dahin sind, das dis leben gar auffhoere und vergehe, und ein ander schoener leben angehe, das ewig bleiben sol. Darumb ist die rede nichts uberal, ob sie jnn der aufferstehung alle sollen solch wesen oder stand fueren wie itzt, und wo sie alle werden essen, trincken, kleider nemen &c.. Denn eben dazu wil er solch new leben machen, das dis vergenglich alles abe und nichts mehr sey, Dazu mus der tod dienen, das er kome und sage:Hoere auff zu essen, trincken, dewen &c., und lege dich nidder und verwese, auff das du ein newe, schoener gestalt kriegest, wie das korn aus der erden auffs newe daher wechst.”

\textsuperscript{152} I Cor 15:39-42: “For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies, and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for stars differ from stars in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead.”
\end{footnotesize}
particular glory. These differences underscore what the person will be in the resurrection: a true body and soul, “but in a new essence or form of the body and its members (aber inn einem newen wesen oderder gestalt des leibs und seiner gelieder).”

It is also in Sermon Fourteen that Luther explicates Paul’s words in verses 42-44 which were considered earlier regarding the body in death, viz., “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, etc.” Luther’s strong descriptions of the body in death, its “dishonor” and repugnance—“He must be a bold man indeed, who can remain alone with a dead corpse (Und muesst gar ein kuener man sein, der allein bey dem todten leichnam bleiben kuende)!”—are all made for the sake of heightening the contrast with the body in the resurrection. The promise of the body raised imperishable, raised in glory and power should guide the Christian past incredulity and skepticism about the future of the body that comes from the lowliness of the body in death. After all, the body in life has obnoxious aspects and yet these do not make one hate the body:

For you do not allow yourself to be troubled or dismayed because you yourself have a nose under your eyes which makes itself quite dishonorably filthy with snot and impurities (schnodeln), leaving aside what [comes from] the belly and the whole body with its sweat, scabs, and filth of all kinds. Nor are you your body’s opponent for that; you don’t despise it for that, rather it is not noticed that it is such a dishonorable stinker (stanksack): you dress it up with all diligence with velvet, gold, and pearls, and the like. Therefore learn to think here, too, that this article is not necessarily in error because the body is treated so shamefully and dishonorably. No matter how dishonorable or worthless it is at present, it will

153 Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534. WA 36:651; LW 28:183; “das ein jglicher an seinem leibe seine klarheit, item auch ein iglich glied seine sonderlich ehre haben wird.”

154 Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534. WA 36:653; LW 28:184.
return in a form so honorable and precious that its future honor and glory will surpass the present shame and dishonor many thousand times.\textsuperscript{155}

Paul’s words “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (v. 44) elicit another discussion by Luther about the nature of the “spiritual body.” We should note that in terms of the chronology of Luther’s writings, this discussion preceded the presentation Luther made in connection with the great Genesis lectures a few years later discussed above in chapter three. Since we have already looked at the description of the body Luther makes there, we have already heard that discussion regarding the \textit{animale corpus}, or “natural body.” However, in his 1533 sermon, Luther suggests to his hearers that one might call the natural body “in good clear German” \textit{ein viehischen Leib}, “an animal body” because it refers to the whole person as the person exists biologically with the five senses and maintains life through food and drink, etc. “In short, a natural body is nothing other than physical life as it is lived by every animal.” Again, it is this natural body that is “sown” at death and burial. The spiritual body that emerges from it leaves behind that animal life in that it does not require food and drink, house and home, husband, wife, and the like to sustain it. In other words, the qualifier “spiritual” does not mean that the resurrected body “no longer has physical life or flesh and blood.” In this Luther is emphatic: such a body would not be a true human body at all. Rather, the

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534}. WA 36:656; LW 28:187. “Denn du must dich doch auch itzt nicht lassen anfechten noch jrren, das du selbs unter augen die nasen hast, die sich schendlich gnug unfletig machet mit rotzen und schnodeln, on was der bauch thut und der gantze leib mit schweissen, grinden und allerley unflat, Noch bistu jm nicht darumb feind, verachtest jn nicht daruemb, sondern unangesehen, das so ein schendlicher stancksack ist, schmueckestu jn auffs aller vleissigst mit sammet, gold und berlen &c.. Also lerne hie auch dencken, das darumb dieser Artikel nicht mus falsch werden, ob gleich der leib so schendlich und unehrlch gehandlet wird, Sondern so unehrlch und unwerd er itzt ist, so ehrllch und koestlich wird er widder komen, das die kuenfttige ehre und herrligkeit viel tausent mal diese schand und unehre ubertreten wird.”
difference will be that the spiritual body will be truly alive “and yet be no longer an eating, drinking, digesting body, but spiritual, nourished and preserved by God and have its life quite so in Him.”¹⁵⁶ This thought leads Luther to envision the resurrected life of the body in enraptured terms sparked by Paul. The body will

also go forth into heaven and earth, play with the sun and moon and all other creatures and also have its joy and pleasure in this. And it will be thereby so sated and blessed that it will never more think of any eating or drinking. And so it will be indeed a spiritual existence or life—meaning the whole person, body and soul, which will spring forth from the Spirit and will proceed without means from or through God, so that we will be illumined by Him and know Him, not just in connection with the soul, but rather it will also go through the whole body which will be so clear and light like the air, so keen of seeing and hearing, as wide as the world. We will not be in need of anything else to sustain us and life, and yet we will have a true body.¹⁵⁷

Thus Luther’s conception of the resurrected body is really one of restoration: what was lost by Adam in the fall—translation from physical life to eternal, spiritual life—will be accomplished in the bodies of the blessed by God in the resurrection despite the harm inflicted by the devil. The physical life of the body will be shed at the death of the body like a garment the person wears in this life, but which is discarded and replaced with a

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¹⁵⁶ *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:660; LW 28:189: “also das er sein leben sol haben und doch nicht mehr ein essender, schlaffender, dewender leib sein wird, sondern geistlich von Gott gespeiset und erhalten werden und das leben gar an jm haben.”

¹⁵⁷ *Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.* WA 36:660; LW 28:189: “Darnach aber, wenn er also geistlich jnn Gotte lebet, wird er auch eraus gehen, jnn himel und erden, mit sonn und mond und allen andern Creaturn spielen und auch seine freud und lust daran haben, Und davon so satt und selig sein, das er nimer mehr an kein essen noch trincken dencken wird, Und also gar ein geistlich wesen odder leben sein und heissen des gantzen menschens mit leib und seele, welchs aus dem geist entspringen und von odder durch Gott on mittel gehen wird, das wir nicht allein nach der seele von jm erleuchtet werden und jn erkennen, sondern wird auch durch den gantzen leib gehen, das er so klar und leicht wird sein wie die luftt, so scharff sehen und hoeren, so weit die welt ist, das wir keines andern notdurfftig sein werden, des wir uns erhalten und leben und doch warhafftigen leib haben.”
“beautiful new garment called immortalitas (einen schonen, newen rock, welcher heisst jmmortalitas)”: 

For God did not thus make man that he should sin and die, but that he should live, but the Devil hung shameful filth and stains on human nature which it had to bear because it had sinned. But because now through Christ sin has been taken away, so should we also be rid of the same, so that everything will be clean and nothing evil or irksome will ever be felt on earth. But [this will happen] by no other way that that we first take off this old, evil garment through death.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Das XV Capitel S. Pauli an die Corinther, 1534.} WA 36:679; LW 28:203: “Denn Gott hat den menschen nicht also gemacht, das er solt sundigen und sterben, sondern das er lebete, aber der Teuffel hat den schendlichen unflat und flecken an die natur gehengt, das er mus tragen, weil er gesundigt hat. Weil aber nu durch Christum die sunde jst weg genomen, so sollen wir auch des selben widder los werden, das alles rein und nichts boeses noch verdrieslich mehr auff erden empfunden werde. Aber nicht anders, denn das wir zuvor durch den tod dis alte, bose kleid lassen auszihen.”
CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have attempted to isolate and listen to the voice of Martin Luther in the variegated conversation about the body in the sixteenth century. We have listened to his voice in his lecture hall, in sermons from his pulpit, read his mail, and listened in at his table. In some ways, this effort has been similar to trying to engage with someone in conversation about one thing while he or she is intent on talking about other things believed to be more compelling. As we have seen, Luther’s theological thinking, whether in the classroom, pulpit, or at the writing desk, was focused on the church of his day and on the many theological issues raised during the Reformation. While the body was certainly integral to many of these matters, it nevertheless almost always played a supporting role, rarely (if ever) the main character in the theater of his mind.

What we can suggest by way of conclusions, then, must be derived from questions arising in the present and addressed to and about the material from Luther’s writings that we have examined. Just such a series of questions was proposed in the introduction; those questions will serve here to conclude this study.

How did Luther show continuity/discontinuity with the medieval church about the body?

Here we need to note that Luther’s subordination of the body in the ways noted above was not merely a function of the historical context in which he did his work. It was also consonant with the theological understanding of the body that was his heritage from the medieval Catholic church. Indeed, Luther exhibited great continuity in his view of the
human body with theology already developed in this regard: with respect to his foundational understandings about the body, Luther was no innovator. His understanding of the human person was “traditional” in that he defined the person as body and soul\(^1\) and understood their relationship in late medieval terms: the soul provided the “whatness” of the self in combination with the material of the body, as it did in Aquinas.\(^2\)

In keeping with the theology of his time, Luther did not discuss anything like the Cartesian “mind/body problem”—no one in the sixteenth century did. Indeed, many of the questions about the body debated currently—questions about the body and personal identity, organ transplants and the possibility of personal survival via them, gender issues and the body, whether pain is in the body or the mind, to name but a few\(^3\)—were not part of the intellectual or theological landscape of the sixteenth century. For Luther, his concern was with the body that dies, and yet will be raised again.

Moreover, as a layman in his scientific understandings of the body, we have seen how Luther tended to hold to “traditional” understandings of physiology, gender and reproduction issues, and health and disease. While he approved of the kinds of new thinking that were beginning to be applied at the University of Wittenberg by the medical faculty, these things were not his province and they did not inform his extra-theological understandings of the body. As a result, Luther tended to operate theologically from an

\(^1\) See the discussion in chapter 5, p. 221.

\(^2\) See ST I, Q75, Art. 4, “Whether the soul is man.”

understanding of the natural world that, from our current perspective, provided some of his more remote statements about the body.

Noting all this serves to corroborate on the basis of this specific issue the general view of Luther urged by Lutherstudieren of the last thirty years, viz., Luther, as Heiko Oberman puts it, “can only be understood as a late medieval man.” While he lived in a time of great transition and change, and was himself an agent of some of that change, nonetheless, he was solidly a child of his time and in many ways, a conservative one at that. In this regard, Oberman warns against the pressure to make Luther something he was not:

We [Luther scholars]…have made him an élite figure, we have spiritualized his language, moved it to a higher level and stripped it of its bodily origins. The historical flesh-and-blood Luther, the cantankerous, food-stained, earthy Luther has been cleaned up in high-flown academic prose, made presentable in good society (salonfähig)—as well as in the lecture hall—then fitted to the Procrustean bed of a previously-defined modernity…

If the purpose of our study is to see Luther in his own context, then it has been important not to assess him and his views about the body somehow in accord with the concerns of our own century vis-à-vis the body, but truly as a sixteenth-century theologian and man. To paraphrase Caroline Bynum, Luther is to Luther’s context with regard to his writings and sayings about the body as Pope John Paul II is to his context in his writings and sayings about the body in Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body.

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And when it comes to the body, Luther’s context and outlook is decidedly that of a late medieval Catholic. As a result, “the past is seldom usefully examined by assuming that its specific questions or their settings are the same as those of the present.”

What did Luther see as the theological meaning of gender differences?

In chapter three we examined Luther’s exegesis of Genesis 1-2 with particular focus on the “body texts” surrounding the creation of Adam and Eve. As we saw there and in connection with some of the texts and contexts of his discussions surrounding man and woman in marriage (chapter four), Luther hewed to the general superiority of the male and his headship in the marriage relationship as a function, in part, of his body. However, we also need to note his somewhat contradictory view about Eve. On the one hand, he accorded Eve—that is, created womanhood—equal status with Adam in terms of her full possession of the image of God and her stature and position with man over creation. Spiritually, he saw her in tandem with Adam. “Nevertheless she was a woman (tamen fuit mulier),” something he saw also in terms of her created “weaker constitution” in comparison to Adam, as well as being less than Adam in terms of glory and dignity. Luther thus viewed the gender differences as significant theologically in that they indicated a created order and relationship of greater to lesser that was intensified in the wake of the fall into sin.

Once again, we also see how Luther’s exegesis and conclusions in this regard were supported by his medieval understandings of physiology and human reproduction. In Luther’s thinking, Eve, and her daughters after her, supply a role over against the male that is essentially passive, something mirrored by the woman’s sexual make-up and

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
function in procreation. But, it is important to note that Luther sees this as being the case before the fall as part of God’s divine plan and creation of the male and female body for the sake of being “fruitful and multiplying.”

**Did Luther’s marriage to Katherina change his views of men and women’s bodies?**

Here we must conclude that Luther exhibits a certain ambiguity in answer to this question. In his lecture hall speaking to his male students, Luther tended to maintain the conventional view of men and women noted above. But the experience of marriage did change him, enrich him, and give him a more sympathetic view of women that does exhibit itself also in the *Genesisvorlesung*. This is even more the case in his informal speaking. For example, although Luther expressed exasperation at times with Katie, the overriding impression and effect of the many interactions between Luther and his “Rib (mea costa)” recorded in the *Tischreden* is one of genuine love for his wife and gratitude for her as a tremendous gift of God. “I would not give up my Kate for France or for Venice (Ich wolt mein Ketha nit vmb Frankreich noch vmb Venedig dazu geben),” he said in 1531.⁸ This corroborates what others have noted about the older Luther and women:

Later in his life Luther deviated remarkably from his attitudes toward women as laid down in his sermons on marriage and other texts from his early period. …He acknowledges them for the most part as partners with men in both political and theological matters. He considers them worthy of his responses and his detailed analysis of various problems which [certain] women had presented to him. …Focusing on his sermons alone, one would get the impression that Luther tried very hard to place women in the household and to deny them any access to public roles. In his conversations with [certain women], however, Luther reveals the considerable respect he holds for them and his much less ideological/dogmatic approach to the other sex. …It is interesting to observe that Luther’s contact with

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⁸ WATr 1:17 (Nr. 49); LW 54:49 (No. 49). On Luther’s relationship with his wife see Albrecht Classen and Tanya Amber Settle, “Women in Martin Luther’s Life and Theology,” *German Studies Review*, 14, no. 2 (May 1991): 231-260.
women over the course of his life altered his view of women’s capabilities and roles considerably.  

With regard to human sexuality, like Aquinas, Luther affirmed the goodness of human sexuality as a created capacity and purpose of the male and female body. He was sharp in his critique of sexual sins as an attack upon God’s purpose for sexuality in marriage. Luther’s understanding of the created body for procreation undergirded his critique of medieval celibacy as contrary to created nature and led him to express extreme pessimism about the capacity for true chastity among both males and females in this fallen world. (Indeed, Luther did not espouse the view that women were by nature more sexually promiscuous held by many late medievals.) But our examination of Luther and sexuality in chapter four did not lead us to ascribe to him the “grim negativity” about sexuality that some have leveled at him. Luther viewed sexuality-after-the-fall as he did every other aspect of human activity: infected by sin, but redeemed in Christ. His frankness about his own sexuality vis-à-vis Katie scandalized some, but really is a testimony to his security in the blessedness of sex within marriage as part of creation and the vocation of husband or wife. For that, Katherina Luther’s role and impact cannot be

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9 Ibid., 254.

10 Luther’s marriage to Katherina—a priest marrying a nun—was considered by Catholic polemists as sacrilegious and nothing less than incest. Criticism was widespread and vitriolic with one of the most vocal critics being the English humanist, Thomas More. See Thomas A. Fudge, “Incest and Lust in Luther’s Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics,” Sixteenth Century Journal 34, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 319-345.
overestimated as Luther’s many surviving letters to her attest, especially in their signature lines.\(^{11}\)

**In a society where death was ubiquitous, how did Luther’s experiences with death show themselves in his theologizing about the body?**

We saw that Richard Marius’ thesis positing that Martin Luther was possessed by an unmitigated fear of death was untenable in the light of Luther’s writings about death. At the same time, the poignant record of Magdalena Luther’s death couples with Luther’s grief at the death of friends and family—particularly the death of his father in May 1530—to show that Luther was deeply impressed and affected by these losses.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) See, for example, Luther’s letter to Katherina of 1 February 1546 from Eisleben less than three weeks before his death. The greeting and the farewell show Luther’s admiration—couched in playful language in the greeting: “To my dearly beloved *Hausfrau*, Katherina Luther, doctor, Mistress of Zülsdorf [i.e., Katie’s farm] and the Pigmarket, and whatever in addition she may be…” (“Meiner hertzlieben hausfrawen, Katherin Lutherin, Doctorin, Zülsdorfferin, Sewmarckterin, vnd was sie mher sein kan”)—and sincere love, poignantly expressed by his farewell: “Here I commend [you] to God with all the household; and greet all the table companions. The vigil of the purification 1546 [1 February]. M. Luth. your old love.” (“Hie mit Gott befolhen samt allem Hause, vnd gruss alle Tischgesellen. Vigilia purificationis 1546. M. Luth. dein altes liebichen”) emphasis added.

\(^{12}\) See, for example, the report of the death of Luther’s longtime friend, Nicholas Hausmann on 3 November 1538, in WATr 4:124 (Nr. 4084); LW 54:319 (No. 4084). Regarding Luther’s father, Hans Luther died 29 May 1530 after an extended illness. Luther had written his father a letter of consolation in February that is extant (see WABr 5:239-241; LW 49:267-271) and which is a premier example of his *Trostbriefe*. His father’s death was made known to him while at the Coburg at the time of the Diet of Augsburg. Luther wrote to Philipp Melanchthon on 5 June mentioning the news and commenting, “This death certainly has thrown me into grief, recollecting not only [the bonds] of nature, but also his sweetest love, since from that very one my Creator gave to me whatever I am and have; and although it consoles me that he [i.e., John Reinecke, who told Luther of his father’s death] wrote that he fell gently asleep strong in his faith in Christ, nonetheless his compassion and the reminiscences of his most gentle dealings have shocked me to the core, so that I have never so strongly despised death [as I do now].” (“Ea mors sane me in luctum coniecit, recordantem non solum naturae, sed et charitatis suavissimae, quia ex ipso mihi creator meus dedit, quicquid sum et habeo; et quamquam me solatur, quod scribit, fortem in fide Christi suaviter obdormisse, tamen misericordia et...
result, Luther inveighed against death and the devil as the enemies of the Christian who, because of sin, had to surrender the body to death. But the death of the body was not to be feared because the death of Christ was the death of Death, and dealt a deathblow to the power of the devil. Thus, in his sermons Luther would disarm his hearers’ fear of death by a seeming denigration of the body, that mortal husk. It is in this context that we heard him speak of the body as a “maggot sack (Madensack).” Yet such terms are only a seeming denigration of the body used to quell the fear of death: Luther was no Manichean with respect to the body. Rather, the physical resurrection of the body is the great hope of the Christian in Christ guaranteeing the life of the person—body and soul—for eternity.

In speaking of death and resurrection, we saw that Luther was determined to maintain close connection in his words with the words of Scripture. In keeping with his characteristic reticence to use philosophic language to express what Scripture says, he did not engage in the kind of interpretation of Paul’s fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians that can be found in the high scholastic discussions of the decades around 1300. Rather, he engaged in the kind of “eschatological rationality” (Sauter) that led his hearers to the comfort and assurance of the Pauline text in affirming, “There is a resurrection of the flesh!”

How did Luther’s own illnesses shape his understanding of the body?


13 For a summary and analysis of the debates of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries about the resurrection, see Caroline Walker Bynum, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 229-278.
Luther’s many illnesses and maladies certainly underscored for him the reality that this is a “fallen world” in which the body is subject to the ruinations of sin. Luther, we have seen, made a direct connection between the advent and multiplication of human sickness and disease and the fall. While we can point to statements of his in his lectures affirming this and decrying its reality, the greater impact his own personal situation appears to have had is in the area of his sermons and letters of comfort (Trostschriften) preached at the occasion of funerals or sent to suffering individuals. In this regard, Luther’s pastoral ministrations at death set in motion a “reformation of dying” via such writings as the Fourteen Consolations (1520) in which the medieval ars moriendi was replaced on Reformation soil by evangelical funerary practices.\textsuperscript{14} In this regard, Brecht sees Luther’s own death as instructive:

The accounts of Luther’s death show again how deeply piety had been altered by him. All sacramental elements were missing. Of course, there was no extreme unction, but neither did Luther make any last confession, although he treasured the practice of confession itself. Understandably, no last communion was offered, for Luther had otherwise had great reluctance about this practice. He had received the Lord’s Supper the Sunday before. Thus there were no priestly ministrations at all at his death. …His last statements consisted primarily of brief, confident prayers to God and Christ, including the traditional deathbed prayer from Ps. 31:5. The recitation of Bible passages served to reassure him. His confidence corresponded to the confession of God and Christ that was his life’s work. Jonas and Coelius asked him expressly to confirm this at the end. Unlike the earlier situations when his life was threatened [\textit{e.g.}, 1527, 1537], nothing is known about any word to his sons, who were present, or a final greeting to Katy. For the dying man, that was obviously not as important as his relationship to God and his vocation.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{What did Luther bequeath to emerging Lutheranism in terms of its understanding of the human body?}

\textsuperscript{14} See Neil R. Leroux, \textit{Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death} (Leiden: Brill, 2007), passim.

Varying assessments are made within and without Lutheranism as to the impact and influence of Martin Luther on the confession that bears his name (despite his desires to the contrary) in whatever connection this question is asked. Lutheranism in the aftermath of Luther’s death in 1546 naturally felt his influence and claimed adherence to his teaching, but fidelity to Scripture, not Luther per se was the filter through which such claims were made.\(^\text{16}\) The systematization of evangelical doctrine that followed after Luther in the persons of Melanchthon, Chemnitz, Gerhard, et al., certainly differed from Luther himself in the manner and method it went forward for good or ill—a judgment that is usually made in accord with the “eye of the beholder.” However, once again, the human body as an independent subject cannot be claimed to loom large in the age of Lutheran confessionalism and (later) orthodoxy. Lutheran theological anthropology dealt with the body in much the same way as Luther had: seeing the body as integral with the soul/spirit for the nature of the human person, and in need of redemption. Lutheran orthodoxy, however, tended to focus, as Luther did, not on the body, but on such matters as the nature of the image of God in humanity, the propagation of the soul, the implications of the fall vis-à-vis the image, and the spiritual powers of the human will. Nonetheless, two abiding “Luther emphases” about the body may be proposed.

First is Luther’s conviction that sin adheres in fallen humanity firmly and demonstrably so that the body is easily led away by inherent concupiscence to lust, avarice, unfaithfulness—all the s – i – n – s that mark the presence of the sinful flesh. This pessimism about the weakness of the body is bound inextricably to the Lutheran view of original sin and its effects.

\(^{16}\) See the introduction to Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, eds., *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), xvii-xix.
Second, and perhaps in seeming contradiction to that pessimism due to sin, Lutherans after Luther nonetheless consider the body *per se* as the good creation of God. While the body is the venue in which spiritual warfare is undertaken because of sin, and although the body is subject to Luther’s troika of “sin, death, and the devil,” the body is not denigrated for its own sake by Lutherans, just as Luther did not denigrate it. Redeemed by Christ, the body is ever God’s good creation awaiting the fullness of his redemption in the resurrection. As a result, Lutherans have generally been a “body people”—when they have remained true to their theology—in that the gifts of “body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my abilities” are celebrated as “First Article truths” in accord with Luther’s *Small Catechism* formulation, together with the blessings from God’s hand that sustain the body: “clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life.” Despite the troubles that come to the body in this world, Lutherans express a certain *joie de vivre* in terms of the body that is discernible in and attributable to Luther. Despite the body’s lowliness under sin as a “poor maggot sack,” the body is beloved for Christ’s sake who has redeemed the body. “This,” says Luther, “is most certainly true.”
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