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CONTENTS

<i>Michael D. O'Neil</i>	2
Editorial	
<i>Brian Harris</i>	4
Luther as Leader	
<i>Peter Elliott</i>	15
The Pastoral Roots of Luther's Reformation	
<i>Michael D. O'Neil</i>	24
Freeing Salvation: Luther's Pastoral Theology	
<i>Matthew P. Bishop</i>	37
Caring for the Depressed: Lessons from Luther	
Reviews	52

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EDITORIAL

On 30 October 2017 Vose Seminary in Perth, Australia, hosted a Luther@500 conference to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and the commencement of the Protestant Reformation. The theme of the half-day conference was *The Pastoral Luther*, picking up a comment made in 2009 by Luther scholar, Professor Timothy Wengert:

As Luther fans the world over are already gearing up for the celebration in 2017 of the 500th anniversary of their posting [i.e. the Ninety-Five Theses] on 31 October 1517, too often the celebrations will focus on Luther's break with Rome or his Reformation breakthrough rather than on Luther's own stated reason for the dispute: pastoral care for his flock in Wittenberg.¹

Rationale for such a conference was not difficult to find. The historical significance of Luther's life and legacy, not only for the church but for western society and culture generally, was sufficient reason in itself. That the anniversary achieved so little attention in the secular sphere—incredible, given the historical significance just mentioned—was another. Further, it is appropriate for Christians to reflect on their own history, to think again with and learn from those exemplars of Christian faith and theology who have preceded them, to dig once again into the theological and spiritual resources of their traditions in order to revitalise their own faith, thought, and practice. As such, the Conference was intended as an act of (Protestant) *ressourcement*, which involves a return to the authoritative sources of Christian faith, for the purpose of rediscovering their truth and meaning in order to meet the critical challenges of our time. Finally, the Conference provided the Seminary an opportunity to serve the local Christian community with the unique gifts that a theological institution offers to the church.

The Conference was an ecumenical and collaborative affair with participants attending from many different denominations and backgrounds. In accord with a focus on the *pastoral* Luther, most attendees were ministers rather than academics, although students and laypersons also gathered for the event. As organiser of the conference, I was particularly grateful for the participation of Dr Peter Elliott from Perth Bible College, and Pastor Matthew Bishop from Bethlehem Lutheran Church, both of whom brought their own particular expertise and passion to the conference. Without their generosity of spirit and time, the conference would not have been the success that it was. It was and is a privilege to work with friends old and new across denominational and institutional lines as we seek to bear witness to our common faith and Lord.

The papers in this edition of *PJBR* reflect this orientation and context, though we also hope that those engaged professionally in the fields of church history, historical theology, and pastoral studies will find further food for thought in these essays. Let me express, finally, my gratitude to each of the contributors

¹ Timothy Wengert, "Introducing the Pastoral Luther," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. T. Wengert Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 5.

and to the editors of this journal for working in haste to bring these essays to print, as close as possible in time, to the anniversary. Each of us work in pressured environments and completed this work at a very demanding time of year.

Michael O'Neil
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LUTHER AS LEADER

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Relatively little has been written on Luther as leader.² Given that it is reasonable to argue that Luther impacted the world more than anyone bar Jesus and the Apostle Paul, this is surprising. After all, you don't change the world without having at least a bit of a flair for leadership, which suggests that this topic is worth exploring.

But is the claim of Luther's importance valid? Cite any of the big topics of twenty-first century life—politics, economics, media, family, education, religion, individualism, human rights—and if you track the discussion back, you will find that each has taken a different course as a result of the Reformation, and thus, in some way, must be attributed back to Luther.³ On this 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, there are many things we can learn from the man who sparked the Reformation—but in this paper I plan to focus on Luther as leader, and the leadership insights we can gain from him.

Let me make it clear that this is not an attempt to demonstrate that Luther is your typical twenty-first century hero or charismatic leader, larger-than-life, and driven to constantly achieve more—the sort of person you would always predict would do incredible things. To the contrary, James Kittleson calls Luther an “accidental revolutionary”, one who initially simply wanted to settle certain theological truths for his own benefit and the benefit of the academic community in Wittenberg of which he was part.⁴ The unanticipated spread of his ideas compelled him to broaden his vision and led him to hope that the reform of the church might be possible, but in the end it sparked the Protestant Reformation—a decisive divide in the life of the church, and one which went on to impact almost every area of life. It is quite something to be an “accidental revolutionary”—finding that each step of your journey has consequences more dramatic than envisioned, and yet not backing away from the path as a result. Perhaps Luther's greatest leadership attribute was his sheer tenacity. Though he never set out for a fight, he did not back away when one arose, for he was a convictional leader, certain that the truths he upheld mattered, and should the need arise, that they mattered enough to die for.

¹ Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology. This essay was originally an oral address and much of the orality of that presentation has been kept in this published form.

² My Google search “Luther as leader” produced many suggestions for leadership lessons from the life of Martin Luther King Jr., but virtually nothing on Martin Luther.

³ Though contested, one example of this is found in Max Weber's allegation of the close link between Protestantism and the rise of Capitalism. Comparable claims can be made for each of the areas cited. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Classics edition; Abingdon: Routledge, 2001 [1904]).

⁴ James M. Kittleson, “The Accidental Revolutionary,” *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 14–20.

A fair amount of my research into leadership has been in the area of quiet leadership, where people you would not automatically pick for their leadership would surprise you by their contribution.⁵ Most commonly their achievements are a result of strongly held convictions, which flow from powerful ideas, carefully thought through, and tenaciously and resiliently held. The changes that Luther brought flow from this kind of leadership. It is my conviction that this is the kind of leadership that is needed. Today we are often dazzled by a shallow cult of personality, where towering and idiosyncratic individuals spring to prominence as a result of the sheer force of their personality. It is that same personality that after a while appears jaded and leaves us bored and disappointed. Personality without substance eventually fails. Important though Luther was, the Reformation was not primarily about Luther, but about the ideas he and the later Reformers proposed, and their flow-on effects over the centuries.

Not that Luther should be painted in pastel shades. His *Tabletalk* simply will not allow it. This was a man who was willing to provide sex tips to a recently married friend, and who would enthusiastically update you on his endless struggle with constipation. He could be funny, compassionate, and caring, but also cantankerous, emotive, crude, sarcastic, and vulgar—this other side of his public persona reflecting all too closely the polemical style of his era. Take, for example, his oft cited description of the Jews as “a defiled bride, yes an incorrigible whore and an evil slut”, or as a “whoring and murderous people”. Luther was no tame academic, content to quietly score the occasional clever point.⁶ He lived at a forceful time, and was a forceful figure.

For all that, Luther is a refreshing reminder that the most significant changes are not brought about by overgrown personalities, but by individuals captured by meaningful ideas—ideas with sufficient substance to stand up in different historical eras and cultural settings. In the end, the Reformation was not about a handful of intelligent and powerful personalities, but about a cluster of simple but revolutionary theological concepts which resonated with their time, and have continued to resonate to this day.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Martin Luder (he later changed his surname to Luther) was born in Eisleben, Saxony on 10 November 1483, the eldest son of Hans and Margarethe (sometimes known as Hannah) Luder. Birth order theorists note that first born sons are the most likely family member to rise to leadership—the sheer weight of family expectations willing them forward to high achievement.⁷ His parents, who started as domestic servants but climbed in their social status, were indeed ambitious for him, and Hans was determined that his son Martin should become a lawyer. It was an era of strict discipline, and Luther was not exempt from it, his family believing it would help him to reach his potential. He recalls his father whipping him so badly that he ran

⁵ See Brian Harris, *The Tortoise Usually Wins: Biblical Reflections on Quiet Leadership for Reluctant Leaders* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013).

⁶ Christopher Probst, “Martin Luther and ‘The Jews’: A Reappraisal,” *The Theologian*. See: <http://www.theologian.org.uk/churchhistory/lutherandthejews.html> [accessed 25 October, 2017]

⁷ Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was the first to do work in this area. See Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean to You: The Psychology of Personal Development* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009 [1931]).

away and that his mother caned him so severely that he bled. However, this was common in his day, and in its own strange way simply demonstrates that his parents wanted him to succeed. Luther was one of 9 children, only 5 of whom survived to adulthood, a statistic not uncommon for that time, and a reminder that Luther's was a world where death and tragedy were never far from anyone's mind or experience.

The Big Blocks of Luther's Life

In 1505 when walking back to law school, he was trapped by a ferocious thunderstorm and fearing death promised St Anna that if she spared him from the storm he would become a monk. His life was spared, and he kept his vow, joining the order of Augustinian Hermits that same year in spite of his father urging him to see his vow as non-binding in the light of the emotional circumstances. He became the most conscientious of monks, driving himself on relentlessly, willing to subject his body to the severest of treatment to attain the discipline and merit he desired.

A trip to Rome in 1510 proved a major disappointment. At the time it was noted that the closer one got to Rome, the less spiritual and more corrupt the clergy became. Though unimpressed with what he saw, Luther, who in 1511 was transferred to the Augustinian house in Wittenberg and became a doctor of theology in 1512, threw himself into his role as a theological and Bible teacher at Wittenberg. Surrounded by academically impressive peers, this was an enormously productive period and saw his knowledge of scripture deepen dramatically. Though he said he had never seen a Bible until he was 20, this changed quickly as he conscientiously lectured from the Psalms in 1513, Romans in 1515, Galatians in 1516, and Hebrews in 1517.

Deeply discontent at his spiritual state and unsure that his life was genuinely pleasing to God, his spiritual angst at times perplexed his mentor Johann von Staupitz, who was dean of the theological faculty at the University of Wittenberg. Staupitz had to regularly reassure Luther that his perpetual confessions were not required, once exclaiming to Luther, "Man, God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don't you know that God commands you to hope?"⁸ This telling quote reflects Luther's early belief in an angry God whom he needed to, but could not, appease. Parsons notes that Luther "knew, only too well, about God's holiness and majesty, and this terrified him. What he didn't know in his own experience was God's grace and mercy."⁹ The turning point is often cited—the breakthrough moment when Romans 1:17 spoke to him of a passive righteousness not earned by endless effort, but imputed by Christ. In truth, the realization is more likely to have dawned on Luther progressively—a growing conviction that saw him start to read scripture with a very different lens to the one he had previously used.

It was only a matter of time until this led to a growing discontent and questioning of the practices of the church of his day—especially over the sale of indulgences. Today we remember his 31 October 1517 nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. To twenty-first century ears it sounds

⁸ Cited in Paul Thigpen, "Friends and Enemies," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 39.

⁹ Michael Parsons, *Praying the Bible with Luther: A Simple Approach to Everyday Prayer* (Abingdon: BRF, 2017), 15.

wonderfully dramatic, but in his time it was simply seen as an invitation from an academic to debate and explore some new ideas, outlined in the document that followed. It seems as though this was all that Luther initially intended, a debate amongst the academic community at Wittenberg, in part to sharpen and test his own thinking. He did not factor in the impact of the relatively new printing press and its ability to disseminate ideas quickly and widely. Matters escalated rapidly and are well documented, so I will stick to only the briefest of details. 1521 saw him excommunicated by a papal bull. In April at the Diet of Worms he refused to recant his writings, this was followed by an edict in May condemning him as a heretic and an imperial outlaw. Kidnapped for his own protection and kept in seclusion at Wartburg Castle from mid-1521 to March 1522, Luther set about translating the Bible into German and writing two significant works; *Monastic Vows* and *Postil*, as well as mobilizing his supporters.

What, then, can we learn about Luther as leader at this point? This “accidental revolutionary” quickly shows himself as someone of deep conviction and courage. Challenging the authority of the Pope was no small matter, but Luther did not back away. He had not initially set out to pick a fight with the Roman authorities, but nor was he willing to ignore his conscience. He was a convictional, rather than a directional leader. In other words, he did not start out with a clear plan in mind. Directional leaders have a clear sense of where they are going and why. They often have timelines of what they wish to achieve by when, and in the early stages usually see their task as recruiting followers to respond to their lead. By contrast, the early Luther simply stuck to his convictions and followed where they led. The path was unanticipated, dangerous, and challenging, but he never seriously contemplated backing away. Along the way, more and more followed his lead.

His convictions launched him into prominence. He might have started as a reluctant leader, but having weathered the storms faced from 1517-1522, he moved into a second stage. In this stage, his own theology was to take clearer shape and form, and at times the dispute moved to his own circle. A movement of reform was underway, but as more and more joined it, the contest of ideas as to just what form it might take, grew.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

The dominant leadership lessons we learn from Luther are of the importance of discipline, courage, and clear convictions, Luther once wrote “Faith is the ‘yes’ of the heart, a conviction on which one stakes one’s life.”¹⁰ And he did. There are, however, many other insights about Luther and leadership that are worth noting.

¹⁰ Mary Ann Jeffreys, “Colorful Sayings of Colorful Luther,” *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 27.

Luther the Time Manager

After being declared a notorious heretic at the Diet of Worms, and with an order put out for his capture, Luther was hidden by Prince Frederick at Wartburg Castle. In poor health and in a room with little light, Luther used the time to translate Erasmus's Greek New Testament into German. It was perhaps his most important work and laid the cultural foundation for what later became a unified Germany. At the Wartburg he complained that he was "drunk with leisure", an astonishing comment given how productive this period was, and a reminder that pace of life is a matter of perspective.¹¹ Those used to a disciplined life find a slower pace a challenge, and in Luther's case we can delight that he filled it so constructively—even if he considered the pace leisurely.

Luther the Savvy Leader

As his popularity grew, Luther showed himself to be insightful about leadership—we could perhaps even call him a "savvy" or a strategic leader. An example is his ability to spot the importance, indeed the strategic value, of the press. The press in Luther's time meant the printing press, and its ability to spread ideas more quickly than had been possible in any earlier era.

Luther spoke of printing as "God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward." He also wrote: "God hath appointed the Press to preach, whose voice the Pope is never able to stop with all the puissance of his triple crown."¹²

Without printing, there might well not have been a Protestant Reformation. Brown has commented, "Martin Luther spoke to Europe from two pulpits – one in the church, and one in the print shop."¹³ Though both John Wycliffe and John Hus wrote prolifically, the restricted technology available at the time meant their ideas could not be widely disseminated. Not so with Luther, and it was an advantage he was to grasp fully—though initially he did not realize the potential in the printing press. Indeed, the original printing and spread of his Ninety-Five Theses throughout Germany and later Europe, was without his permission—a point sometimes overlooked.¹⁴ Luther truthfully said to Pope Leo X, "It is a mystery to me how my theses... were spread to so many places. They were meant exclusively for our academic circle here."¹⁵ "Here" was Wittenberg, and it is a reminder that famous though the Ninety-Five Theses are, their initial intent was modest, and there was no intention to have them circulated. Had they not been, history might have taken a different turn.¹⁶

¹¹ Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 26.

¹² Perry Brown, "Preaching from the Print Shop," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴ Charlotte Methuen, *Luther and Calvin: Religious Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Lion, 2011), 28–29.

¹⁵ Cited in Brown, "Preaching," 33.

¹⁶ However, given the mood for change, it seems probable that something akin to the Reformation would still have taken place. Ideas are not accidentally born, but come in eras which are ripe for their growth.

Later however, Luther grasped the power of print in capturing grass-root support. Between March 1517 and the summer of 1520 thirty of his pamphlets ran through a total of 370 editions. Though most of the writing in his era was in Latin (in which Luther was fluent), it was the preserve of the scholarly elite. Wanting a wider audience, Luther also wrote many of his works in German, the result being, as Perry notes, that “shoemakers, tailors and peasants could read the Scriptures and Luther’s writings in their own tongue.”¹⁷

He not only spoke the common language, but used a common format, that of the pamphlet (which could be available at a very low cost), and ensured they were illustrated with the best woodcuts and engravings of the time, so that even those who were barely literate could follow the message. Luther also watched the quality of what was printed, often complaining about the poor job that certain unskilled printers did, and once writing; “I cannot say how disgusted I am with the printing... John the printer is always the same old Johnny. Please do not let him print any of my German homilies, but return them to me to send elsewhere...”¹⁸ In short, he fired his printer for doing an inadequate job. His instincts went further. When working with what he dubbed his “Sanhedrin” in translating the Bible into German, Luther insisted that before any word or phrase could be put on paper, it had to pass the “ear test,” and not merely the “eye test.” Luther would not simply read what was being written, but would listen to it, insisting that it had to sound right. Zecher comments that “because it sounded natural when spoken as well as read, its cadence and readability have made it popular in Germany to this day.”¹⁹

Luther the Popularist

In spite of his formidable intelligence, Luther understood ordinary people well. It was reflected in the way he championed congregational singing. In an era where congregations passively listened to complex musical arrangements professionally performed by choirs, Luther encouraged ordinary peasants to sing their faith—both to connect with it at a deep emotional level and to understand its teaching through singing the great truths of the faith. Luther wrote many fine hymns, “A Mighty Fortress is our God” usually considered to be his best. Christopher Brown has argued “that congregational singing, perhaps more than any other single factor, secured the survival of Protestantism in Europe.”²⁰ Luther must receive a great deal of the credit for this as he argued not just for the priesthood of all believers but for the musical priesthood of all believers. In other words, he argued that if God’s grace is for all, all should sing.²¹

Luther was down to earth and practical. Though as a younger man he disciplined his body ruthlessly, the later Luther was to reflect happily, “If our Lord is permitted to create nice large pike and good Rhine wine, presumably I may be allowed to eat and drink.”²² He had moved a long way from the young monk

¹⁷ Brown, “Preaching,” 34.

¹⁸ Cited in Brown, “Preaching,” 34.

¹⁹ Henry Zecher, “The Bible Translation That Rocked the World,” *Christian History* XI, no. 34 (1992): 37.

²⁰ Cited in Mark A. Noll, “Singing the Word of God,” *Christian History and Biography*, No. 95 (2007): 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Jeffreys, “Colorful Sayings,” 28.

ever anxious to win God's approval by refusing all pleasures, and this common touch had great appeal for ordinary people.

He was also a pragmatic preacher, and though his advice is still often ignored, it remains wise: "It is not necessary for a preacher to express all his thoughts in one sermon. A preacher should have three principles: first, to make a good beginning, and not spend time with many words before coming to the point; second, to say that which belongs to the subject in chief, and avoid strange and foreign thoughts; thirdly, to stop at the proper time."²³ Most of Luther's sermons remain, and a warm pastoral heart able to connect with ordinary people is apparent. You see it in his sermon on Ephesians 3:14-21: "To believe inwardly with the heart and to demonstrate that faith outwardly are in essence one thing, the result of which is acting, not just talking and living, not just chattering."²⁴

Luther was not a systematic theologian but was, as Hendrix has noted, an "occasional theologian." Of course, Luther did not engage in theology erratically, but pondered theological topics which related to specific situations he encountered or opponents he faced.²⁵ His was not a theoretical theology, divorced from reality. In itself this was refreshing, but it is an essential for those whose leadership makes a difference. His theology arose from his reforming agenda. Though his involvement was initially more by accident than design, from the time of his protective custody in the Wartburg a new purpose for the fledgling evangelical movement was birthed. He knew that deep changes in church life were required, and started to articulate what they were.

One dramatically significant breakthrough was Luther's decision that clergy could marry—a freedom Luther availed himself of in 1525 when he married Katherina von Bora. It was a natural result of his conviction that all believers are priests, and that while there is a role for clergy, they should not be viewed as otherworldly, devoid of the natural drives, needs, and hopes of ordinary people. The man was matter of fact and realistic. If the church was to reform, the clergy needed to be moral. This was far more likely to be achieved if they were allowed to marry.

There was in Luther also the restlessness that usually goes with high levels of leadership. He once wrote, "Next to faith, this is the highest art: to be content in the calling in which God has placed you. I have not learned it yet."²⁶ It kept him pressing on, constantly learning and growing.

Leadership theorists note that most leaders have a guiding principle or motto for their life. While some would say for Luther it was Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith," I am inclined to agree with Hendrix that a better choice would be Luther's oft cited paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."²⁷

²³ Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 27.

²⁴ Hendrix, *Luther*, 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 28.

²⁷ Hendrix, *Luther*, 6.

Certainly the later Luther lived in the light of these two colliding truths, and as is so often the case with colliding truths, they led to a rich and wonderfully nuanced understanding of life.²⁸

Eight Formative Leadership Principles

Gayle Beebe's research into leadership has seen him conclude that there are eight formative principles of leadership, and he manages to get them all to start with C.²⁹ This paper has pointed to Luther meeting at least seven of them, namely:

- 1) Character
- 2) Competence
- 3) Culture and context in appropriate interplay
- 4) Compatibility and coherence between gifts, convictions and life setting
- 5) Convictions
- 6) Connections
- 7) Contribution

The one missing principle that Beebe sees as being essential is 8) Chemistry.³⁰ Those on the same side of a movement need to view each other as friends, and to work together closely. The Reformation turned out to be a fractious movement, with many conflicts and schisms. This continues to be reflected in Protestant churches to this day, and new denominations continue to be birthed with monotonous regularity.³¹ It would be unfair to blame Luther for this. He simply unleashed a process whereby views about the Christian faith were to be tested against scripture. The method remains, but the conclusions are often strongly contested, and this has led to one split after another.

All leaders face opposition. Luther felt it perhaps most keenly when his mentor Johann von Staupitz, released Luther from his vow of obedience to his monastic order shortly after Luther was declared a heretic in Augsburg. It is unclear if Staupitz wanted to distance himself from Luther or set him free, but if it was the latter, it was not how Luther experienced it, and he felt abandoned by Staupitz, later writing, "I was excommunicated three times, first by Staupitz, second by the pope, and third by the emperor."³² Allender in his powerful book, *Leading with a Limp*, notes that one of the inevitable prices of leadership is betrayal.³³ It is one that leaders often feel the most keenly, and Luther was no exception.

However, though Luther felt the pain of betrayal, it would be unrealistic to ignore the fact that Luther could himself be a ruthless opponent. Within a short while it seemed as though the Reformers were fighting

²⁸ For some of my own work on colliding truths see Brian Harris, "Colliding Truths: Embracing Paradox in Ministry," *Ministry Today* 38 (Winter 2006): 17–21.

²⁹ Gayle D. Beebe, *The Shaping of an Effective Leader: Eight Formative Principles of Leadership* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011).

³⁰ Beebe cites this as his third principle in Beebe, *Shaping*, 64–80.

³¹ Wikipedia suggests that there are approximately 41,000 different denominations, but acknowledges that the actual number is impossible to establish with any certainty, and that much depends on how you define a denomination.

³² Thigpen, "Friends and Enemies," 39.

³³ Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Turning Your Struggles into Strengths* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2006), 95–108.

as much amongst themselves as with Rome. Two of Luther's major conflicts were with Zwingli over the nature of the Lord's Supper and Erasmus over the freedom of will. There was nothing subtle about Luther's disagreement with Erasmus, Luther writing his book *Bondage of the Will* in direct opposition to Erasmus's *Freedom of the Will*. For Luther, this was undoubtedly a matter of strong theological conviction, but it did make for a movement that from its earliest days was fighting battles within as much as without.

Not that Luther could not be philosophical and accept that things would never be just as he would like. He could be pragmatically realistic, once writing; "Farewell to those who want an entirely pure and purified church. This is plainly wanting no church at all."³⁴ Part of this sentiment was against what Luther perceived to be the naïve idealism of the Anabaptists, who Luther viewed as a serious threat to peace and order.

LUTHER'S SHADOW SIDE

This leads us inevitably to something of the shadow side of Luther's legacy, the niggling questions that remain over Luther, and especially over some of his later work. All leaders make controversial decisions, and it is common for leaders to lament that only hindsight allows twenty-twenty vision. We will look briefly at two of Luther's more controversial reactions—to the Peasants' War in 1524-1525, and to the Jews.

The Peasants' War

In the Peasants' War from 1524-1525 Luther, after initially supporting the peasants' cause and condemning the princes, changed his stance and exhorted the princes to crush the revolt. He sided with power and the status quo, and as a result is frequently accused of serving as a lackey of the princes. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms whereby God rules the worldly or left-handed kingdom through the secular authorities (whom he puts into power) and the heavenly right-handed kingdom through the gospel, has seen him accused of quietism in the political realm, thereby implicitly supporting those in power. Certainly, Paul Althaus used this argument to disallow resistance to the Nazi regime in the 1930s,³⁵ and first-hand I saw similar arguments used in the Apartheid South Africa in which I grew up, in which Romans 13 was quoted with tiresome regularity to justify non-criticism of the government. However, to suggest that Luther's belief that the secular authorities have been put in place by God, meant that they therefore can never be questioned, is to misunderstand Luther. Luther spoke of three estates in which people live out their baptism—ministry, household relationships, and the public realm. Luther taught that above each of these was the order of Christian love which was to determine the way one acted in each of these realms. Each was a sphere in which one could perform "good and holy works."³⁶ True, Luther did indeed side with power in the Peasants' War, but it was because he feared total chaos was the alternative, and that greater harm

³⁴ Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 28.

³⁵ Hendrix, *Luther*, 40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

would result from this path. We may view him as misguided, but Luther himself saw his opposition as being a good and holy work.

The Jews

Even more tragic than Luther's support of the suppression of the Peasants' War is his 1543, sixty-five-thousand-word treatise *On the Jews and their Lies*.

Luther's attitude to the Jews went through various stages. The earlier Luther had been sympathetic to their plight, and hoped the reform of the church would lead to their conversion, but his attitude seemed to harden after 1537, and by this 1543 publication he is urging their persecution, a call that was later noted by Hitler and partially used as justification for the Nazis' ultimate solution. The Nazis went so far as to display *On the Jews and their Lies* during their Nuremberg rallies. Luther lived in a forceful time and mirrored it. Luther's use of vulgarity was typical of the polemical style of his era, and used for effect as much as anything else. The language Luther uses against the Jews is not fundamentally different from that he uses against the "Turks" (Muslims) and Roman Catholics. He urged that Jewish synagogues and schools be set on fire, prayer books be destroyed, rabbis forbidden to preach, and Jewish property be confiscated. If there is any defense of Luther, it is that in this he did not shape his time, but essentially reflected it.³⁷ What was the exception was the earlier Luther who in his 1523 essay *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* had condemned unfair treatment of Jews and argued that Christians must treat them kindly. Indeed, in this work he reminds Christians that when they want to boast of their position as Christians that they should remember that they are Gentiles, while Jews are of the same lineage as Jesus. If Luther had held that line, he would indeed have been a reformer in this area—but the later Luther, when it came to the Jewish question, reverted to the status quo. It is almost impossible to quantify the tragedy of this shift.

What does this say about Luther the leader? Though he lived at a time long before theories of leadership were being formulated, he instinctively embodied most of the qualities and attributes of the good leader. The very best leaders have a prophetic edge, where they are able to see the long term ethical implications of their decisions. Certainly, when it came to the Jewish question, Luther fails this test.

THE RELUCTANT LEADER

But let us not finish on a negative note. Luther, the "accidental revolutionary," in spite of starting as a reluctant leader, accomplished much, and reminds us of the importance of convictional leadership. Supplementing strong convictions with personal courage, he seized the opportunities afforded by a period of history in which the rapid spread of ideas had just become possible. Instinctively understanding ordinary people and their needs, he was often an unashamed populist. He used contemporary issues to develop his

³⁷ See Probst, "Martin Luther and the Jews" for an exploration of this and alternate explanations for Luther's views on the Jews.

theological framework, committed himself to hard work and the disciplined use of time, and birthed a movement that has helped shaped the modern world. He had his flaws, and was the first to acknowledge them, having noted wryly, “Nothing is easier than sinning.”³⁸ In the deepest part of his being he knew that he was saved by grace, declared righteous not by his own works, but by the work of the Christ he loved, and attempted to faithfully serve.

³⁸ Jeffrey, “Colorful Sayings,” 27.

THE PASTORAL ROOTS OF LUTHER'S REFORMATION

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Five hundred years have passed since Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church.¹ Although it was primarily his three publications of 1520 that represented a definitive departure from the theology of the Roman Catholic Church, it is this image of Luther at the church door that has captured the public imagination more than any other. It is also the definitive act that brought Luther to widespread attention amongst his contemporaries. Yet Luther was certainly not the first person to write against indulgences; John Wycliffe did so, nearly two hundred years earlier. So, what was it about Luther's protest that made it distinctive? Answering this question will lead us to reflect on the pastoral roots of Luther's Reformation through an examination of the theological and historical context of Luther's early thought.

95 THESES

The theses are ninety-five short sentences declaring a point of view, or posing some very pointed questions, and their more formal title is "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences." Essentially, indulgences were a mechanism linking several concepts: the role of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ; the belief that most Christians (other than the very holy) needed to spend very long periods of time after death in the intermediate state of purgatory before entering heaven; and the belief that there was an accessible celestial "treasury of merit" created by the superfluity of holiness of collected saints.

Purgatory

Purgatory was a concept that had developed over time. Augustine had speculated about the concept in his *Enchiridion*, written sometime after 420.² Just before 600, Pope Gregory the Great taught that there was a post-mortem "cleansing fire before judgment, because of some minor faults that may remain to be purged

¹ I am aware that there has been debate about the nature of this posting, but as the exact circumstances aren't crucial to the subject matter of this article, the traditional version is being utilised.

² Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, chapter 69 in P. Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 260.

away.”³ By the thirteenth-century, Aquinas was definite that purgatory was a reality, necessary to deal with non-mortal sin: “the penalties of purgatory [were] due to personal defects.”⁴

Indulgences

Indulgences came to prominence during the First Crusade of 1095. Pope Urban II announced a plenary indulgence for participation in the crusade, which would guarantee immediate entry into heaven for any crusader who died in a repentant state. The Crusaders were offered indulgences in advance of the sins they may commit in reclaiming the Holy Land for Christ. Plenary indulgences were very rare, and were seen as the Pope’s particular privilege.⁵ Normally, indulgences were only partial, and were the means by which the Pope offered anyone access to this treasury of merit under certain conditions, with the promise of shortening time in purgatory, either for themselves or a loved one. The action of seeking an indulgence was linked with the attitude of penitence.

Later Popes broadened plenary indulgences to include acts of significant service, and later, to allow people to buy a plenary indulgence as they were about to die.⁶ Later still, it was broadened to include visits to Rome. Suffice to say, by the fourteenth century, there was a well-established system in place linking financial contribution, personal effort, and reducing or eliminating time in purgatory. The church’s need for finance met the people’s need for assurance in the mechanism of indulgences.

When Wycliffe wrote against indulgences in the fourteenth century, his approach was forthright, but predominantly focused on what he saw as Christological error and blasphemy. In a supposed dialogue between Wisdom and Truth, which is aimed especially (but not exclusively) at the friars, Wycliffe puts the following words in the mouth of Wisdom:

I confess that the indulgences of the pope, if they are what they are said to be, are a manifest blasphemy, inasmuch as he claims a power to save men almost without limit, and not only to mitigate the penalties of those who have sinned, by granting them the aid of absolutions and indulgences, that they may never come to purgatory, but to give command to the holy angels, that when the soul is separated from the body, they may carry it without delay to its everlasting rest.... They suppose, in the first place, that there is an infinite number of supererogatory merits, belonging to the saints, laid up in heaven, and above all, the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, which would be sufficient to save an infinite number of other worlds, and that, over all this treasure, Christ hath set the pope. Secondly, that it is his pleasure to distribute it, and, accordingly, he may distribute therefrom to an infinite extent, since the remainder will still be infinite.... Moreover, it appears that this doctrine is a manifold blasphemy against Christ, inasmuch as the pope is extolled above his humanity and deity, and so

³ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 7

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1989), III, 14, 534

⁵ Richard W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 136.

⁶ Southern, *Western Society*, 137.

above all that is called God—pretensions which, according to the declarations of the apostle, agree with the character of Antichrist...⁷

In Luther's day, the fundraising aspect of indulgences had become more obvious, and the methods crasser. The previous Pope, Julius II, had initiated an indulgence in 1510 to raise funds to build the basilica of St Peter's in Rome. This was revived in 1513 by his successor, Leo X. Leo appointed Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz, to sell the indulgence in his sees and Albrecht, already in debt, subcontracted out the sale of the indulgence to a banking house. In the final arrangement, Albrecht and the bankers kept half of the money raised, with the other half going to Rome.⁸ The end result of this arrangement was that their appointed indulgence preacher Tetzl was preaching a very direct link between paying money and release from purgatory in Luther's vicinity.

Luther's Protest Against Indulgences

When we turn to Luther's protest against indulgences, at first glance, it seems quite similar to Wycliffe's, if somewhat less blatant. A closer reading, though, shows beneath his comments on the actual mechanics of the indulgence system (and the display of the spiritual gifts of disingenuity and sarcasm), Luther's abiding concern is for genuine contrition and repentance. Consider, for example, the following theses:

- 32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
- 35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges preach unchristian doctrine.
- 36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.
- 37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters
- 39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.⁹

This concern is made even more explicit in a letter Luther wrote to Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz, whom he was aware had authorized the most recent indulgence sale, even though Luther was unaware of the background financial dealings. This letter was written on the very same day he posted the Ninety-Five Theses, and accompanied a copy of the theses.

Under your most distinguished name, papal indulgences are offered all across the land for the construction of St. Peter. Now, I do not so much complain about the quacking of the preachers,

⁷ John Wycliffe, "On Indulgences," *The Trialogus*, XXIV in H.E. Fosdick, ed., *Great Voices of the Reformation* (New York: Random House, 1952), 23–24.

⁸ Harold J. Grimm, "Introduction to the Ninety-five Theses," in *Luther's Works Volume 31: Career of the Reformer I*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 21.

⁹ Grimm, *Career of the Reformer*, 28-29.

which I haven't heard; but I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation. They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution into the chest. Further, they assume that the grace obtained through these indulgences is so completely effective that there is no sin of such magnitude that it cannot be forgiven – even if (as they say) someone should rape the Mother of God, were this possible. Finally they also believe that man is freed from every penalty and guilt by these indulgences.¹⁰

Luther continues that "... on no occasion has Christ ordered that indulgences should be preached, but he forcefully commanded the gospel to be preached. What a horror, what a danger for a bishop to permit the loud noise of indulgences among his people, while the gospel is silenced, and to be more concerned with the sale of indulgences than with the gospel!"¹¹ Luther's pastoral concern here is certainly taking priority over ecclesial diplomacy, even though he does at least *formally* assume that Albrecht has no real idea of what is occurring under his auspices.

Here then, on the very day that Luther nailed the theses to the door and hence became a very public figure, we see his pastoral concern. Other articles in this journal expand on his later pastoral theology in greater detail. However, having identified that pastoral concern was already a major theme for Luther on 31 October 1517, let us examine what lay behind that, both theologically and culturally, and for Luther personally.

Luther's World

As the Reformation era forms the bridge between the medieval and modern worlds, it manifests the characteristics of both. Germany—while still far from unified—was in many ways developing its sense of national identity within a larger (and often tense) relationship with the Holy Roman Empire. Diarmaid MacCulloch has made an appropriate warning, however, about adopting the term "nationalism" too readily of this period, as it implies a significant degree of shared language and culture which did not yet exist.¹² Nevertheless, it was in embryonic development, and over a long period of time the privileges and sovereignty of some of the German princes had risen to a point where they were only slightly less than the Emperor's.¹³ The tensions that existed between the German princes and the Holy Roman Emperor were primarily about power and money; interestingly, similar tensions surface in the Ninety-Five Theses.

While embryonic national identity was developing, possibly 85% of Germans still lived on the land, but there was a growing under-class driven to urban areas by increasing landlord fees. Those who stayed on

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "Letter to Albrecht of Magdeburg," 31 October 1517, in G.G. Kroedel, ed. *Luther's Works Volume 48: Letters I* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1963), 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹² Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 43.

¹³ C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation in Germany* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 7.

the land agitated against the gradual removal of long-standing privileges, such as access to common areas.¹⁴ In addition to the arrival of the printing press some decades previously, there were several universities in Germany by the beginning of the sixteenth-century, and a growing intellectual and cultural rivalry with (especially) Italy.¹⁵ This anti-Italian bias also resonated with secular criticism of the Papacy, which was seen as enriching itself at Germany's expense.¹⁶ Greenfeld has argued that German national feeling was particularly prominent amongst the upwardly mobile scholarly class—such as Luther himself—who had obtained their position in society through academic achievement, rather than inheritance. Education offered a pathway from peasantry to prestige.¹⁷ Many German clergy took this pathway and one estimate is that between one third and one half of them had some experience of university education, even if they had not completed a degree.¹⁸ There is evidence that there was an increasing emphasis on both preaching and pastoral care in the years before the Reformation, fuelled at least partly by competition between the friars and the secular clergy for the finances generated by these activities.¹⁹

At the same time that both friars and secular clergy appear to have been lifting their standards in these areas, there was also a noticeable increase in anti-clericalism. One argument is that this anti-clericalism was strongest amongst urban Germans who both resented the clergy's exemption from taxation and the imposition of payments for such services as only priests could provide, especially at the time of death.²⁰ So it appears then, that many of the German people were, in fact, highly suspicious that financial motivations were driving the increase in "pastoral care" activities. This resonated with broader concerns about the wealth and corruption of the clergy. Luther picked up this note of financial exploitation in thesis 50: "Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep."²¹

Luther's attack on the indulgence system of his day was, therefore, embedded in pastoral concern for the immediate context of the German people. His concern was for genuine repentance and contrition, and freedom from exploitation. It is important to note, though, that at this early stage of his career, Luther was not calling for the abolition of the indulgence system, simply an elimination of abuses. There was, however, another significant aspect of Luther's thought fuelling his concern about indulgences, and that was the nature of salvation itself.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9, 11-12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Dixon., 17-18.

¹⁷ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 282-283.

¹⁸ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33.

²⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 29-30.

²¹ Grimm, *Luther's Works Volume 31*, 30.

The Nature of Salvation

It is fair to say that during the Middle Ages, little progress had been made in clarifying the central question “what must I do to be saved?” In the early church period, this had surfaced in the contrast between the views of Augustine and Pelagius. In the centre of this debate several important questions played a role, for example: “how serious is the problem of sin, and how does it affect a person’s ability to respond to God?”; “how do God’s sovereignty and human will interact in salvation?” and “do our good works contribute to our salvation in any way?”. The theological ramifications of the answers to these questions are clearly immense. Augustine magnified the problem of sin and hence God’s response of grace; Pelagius saw the human will as essentially free from the bondage of sin. Although the Council of Ephesus condemned Pelagianism in 431, and the 529 Synod of Orange condemned the view that human works aid in salvation, thereby stamping Augustine’s position the more orthodox of the two, it is arguable that the Middle Ages saw a gradual drift towards Pelagianism.²²

Several factors combined to facilitate this. First, the church made no clear statement on the matter of salvation or justification for a thousand years between the Synod of Orange and the Council of Trent. Second, the latter Middle Ages saw the rise of varying theological schools with different approaches, producing differing conclusions.²³ Third, the development of penance and the character of lay piety muddied the waters further. In the early church period, penitential discipline was completely public, involving confession, a time of penance and exclusion from communion, followed by restitution. This was the church’s practice for some centuries, and was only seen as occurring once in a lifetime.²⁴ Later, a Celtic practice known as tariff penance was introduced to Europe, in which fixed penalties were prescribed for certain sins, and confession could be made as often as desired.²⁵ This was common by the eighth century and refined in the twelfth.²⁶ It was further codified within the sacramental system by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth-century. By Luther’s day, the rising theological school, was the *via moderna*, which primarily saw soteriology as covenantal: God had set certain conditions as necessary for salvation, and he accepted those individuals who met these conditions.²⁷ This became the point of contact with Pelagianism (even though those within the *via moderna* argued their view was distinct from Pelagianism). Both the University of Erfurt where Luther undertook his initial studies (1501-1505) and the Augustinians in Erfurt, had close links to the *via moderna*, so it was initially what he knew and accepted. However, also linked with the Augustinian order was what became known as the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, which, although keeping key features of the *via moderna*, also emphasised the thought of Augustine. This modern revival of Augustine’s

²² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 912.

²³ Alister McGrath clearly identifies 9 separate theological schools. *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 69.

²⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A&C Black, 1980), 216.

²⁵ Eric Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness as a Gift of God: Thomas Aquinas on the Sacrament of Penance* (Nijmegen: Peeters Leuven, 2003), 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 75.

thought was initiated by Gregory of Rimini at the University of Paris, himself a member of the Augustinian order. Emphasising the total inability of human nature to contribute anything to salvation apart from relying on grace, it disagreed with the more optimistic *via moderna* view of human capabilities.²⁸ Nevertheless, Luther initially approached soteriology from the *via moderna* perspective.

In this regard, most Germans of Luther's day were also well-accustomed to the idea that their acceptance by God was directly linked to things they needed to *do*, under the explicit direction of a priest. It has recently been claimed that it was the sacrament of penance that stood at the heart of medieval Christianity, rather than the Eucharist (because the laity watched the latter, rather than participating).²⁹ It is not surprising, then, that in the minds of many, their relationship with God, both present and future, was directly related to their level of participation in confession, penance, or related mechanisms, such as indulgences.

DEVELOPMENTS PRE-DATING THE 95 THESES

At this point, we will turn to consider relevant developments in Luther's thought before he posted the Ninety-Five Theses. Having progressed well in his university studies towards his law qualification, Luther abruptly joined the Augustinian Order in 1505.³⁰ The reasons proposed for this have been various, including the proximity of death in the forms of both thunderstorm and plague.³¹ Regardless of the immediate causes of this decision, it initiated a personal existential journey as Luther sought to find a peace with God that would assuage the fear of death. It was a quest that would prove decisive for his pastoral theology.

Luther himself admits that he did not join the Augustinians to study theology, but "...for the sake of my salvation..."³² He was therefore ideally placed to identify with all of those who were struggling with uncertainty over their relationship with God and eternal destiny. Luther's own words are the best description of his struggle for peace with God, taken from three different sources.

Thus formerly, when I was a monk, I used to hope that I would be able to pacify my conscience with the fastings, the praying, and the vigils with which I used to afflict my body in a way to excite pity. But the more I sweat, the less quiet and peace I felt; for the true light had been removed from my eyes.³³

I myself was a monk for twenty years. I tortured myself with prayers, fasting, vigils, and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me. It caused me pain such as I will never inflict on myself again, even

²⁸ Ibid., 77.

²⁹ Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness*, 20.

³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 36.

³¹ David M. Whitford, *Luther: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 23.

³² T.G. Tappert, ed., *Luther's Works Volume 54: Table Talk* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 338.

³³ J. Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works Volume 8: Lectures on Genesis chapters 45-50* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1966), 326.

if I could. What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life? I constantly walked in a dream and lived in real idolatry.³⁴

When I was a monk, I made a great effort to live according to the requirements of the monastic rule. I made a practice of confessing and reciting all my sins, but always with prior contrition; I went to confession frequently, and I performed the assigned penances faithfully. Nevertheless, my conscience could never achieve certainty but was always in doubt and said: “You have not done this correctly. You were not contrite enough. You omitted this in your confession.” Therefore the longer I tried to heal my uncertain, weak, and troubled conscience with human traditions, the more uncertain, weak, and troubled I continually made it.³⁵

Luther had joined a rigorous order in the Augustinians, enthusiastically pursued every available avenue advocated at the time for peace with God, but nothing satisfied. A trip to Rome, suggested by his mentor Johannes Staupitz, backfired as Luther returned appalled by the immorality of the eternal city. At this point, Luther was himself a metaphor for the *via moderna* covenantal model that linked salvation with individual effort. For at least the first decade of his time as a monk, this was Luther’s dilemma; then, a significant development occurred that would not only fuel the Reformation itself, but would also completely reframe Luther’s pastoral understanding.

What is often referred to as Luther’s “theological breakthrough” occurred in the context of his new lectureship at the University of Wittenberg from 1513 onwards. He began lecturing on Psalms and then progressed to Romans. During these lectures, Luther dealt with the concept of the righteousness of God, which he initially understood (through the *via moderna* lens) as expressing God’s impartiality in judging whether individuals have met his covenantal-based preconditions for salvation. Luther’s own struggle resonated with this concept, and he felt utterly unable to meet the conditions: the “righteousness of God” became a phrase of condemnation. Consider Luther’s own words as he reflected later in life:

For I hated that word “righteousness of God”, which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously... I was angry with God...

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous

³⁴ J. Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works Volume 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St John, chapters 14-16* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1961), 23–24.

³⁵ J. Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works Volume 27: Lectures on Galatians 1519, chapters 1-6* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1992), 13.

shall live.” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith.³⁶

This new perspective, that righteousness is a gift *from* God rather than a demand, facilitated partly by engagement with the Greek genitive form in Romans 1:16–17, aligned much more closely with the thought of Augustine than the contractual soteriology of the *via moderna*. Although there has been disagreement about the exact dating of Luther’s insight, Alister McGrath’s very detailed argument is in favour of 1515, two years before the Ninety-Five Theses.³⁷ While there is a contrary argument for a later date, other early evidence is to hand, such as this letter Luther wrote to fellow Augustinian friar George Spenlein, in April 1516.

Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ. For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible. While you were here, you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I, and I am still fighting against the error without having conquered it as yet.³⁸

This evidence supports McGrath’s claim that Luther had moved towards an Augustinian understanding of righteousness before the Ninety-Five Theses were posted: the process had definitely begun. Therefore, the Luther we meet at the Wittenberg Church door in October 1517 not only understood the prevailing issue of German resentment at financial exploitation at the hands of an Italian-based church, the errors of the mechanical indulgence system, and the Pelagian potential of both *via moderna* soteriology and penance; he was also essentially motivated by a pastoral concern to ensure people avoided the associated by-products of either self-righteousness or the despair he had experienced. As early as 1517, then, in his first very public act at the church door, it was Luther’s pastoral motivation that added a distinct tone to his protest and already revealed a new view, not only of Christian life, but of God himself.

³⁶ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings, 1545,” in L.W. Spitz, ed., *Luther’s Works Volume 34: Career of the Reformer IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 336–337.

³⁷ McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 110, 141–147.

³⁸ Martin Luther, “Letter to George Spenlein, Wittenberg, April 8, 1516,” in G.G. Krodel, ed., *Luther’s Works Volume 48: Letters I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 12.

FREEING SALVATION: LUTHER'S PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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MARTIN LUTHER, PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

By 1516 Luther had become extraordinarily busy, belonging, as Scott Hendrix has suggested, to the “senior management of the Reformed congregation” of his Augustinian order.² In a letter to long-time associate John Lang, Luther spoke of spending all day responding to letters. He regularly preached at the monastery, and was daily asked to preach in the city church. He was appointed reader during meal times, overseer of the programme of study at Wittenberg University, and vicar of eleven cloisters.³ Luther was not so much the introverted and troubled monk of popular imagination, as a busy professor, cleric, and administrator, deeply engaged in the affairs of his monastery, university, parish, and community. But he was not yet, and would not for several years become, the reformer we now remember him as. Still, his programme of renewal was underway.

Calls for reform were not uncommon in the late medieval west though Luther's idea of reform differed from that of some of his contemporaries. Some, like Erasmus, sought a reformation of morals, a return to apostolic simplicity amongst the clergy, and biblical forms of spirituality. Luther's reformation began as a reform of the theological curriculum at Wittenberg University, a turning away from the scholasticism of the high medieval period for a greater emphasis on the Scriptures and the writings of the church fathers.⁴ But it would soon become clear that Luther was not interested in the renewal of theology for its own sake, or from a desire for novelty. Rather Luther saw clearly and presciently that the failures and foibles of the late medieval church were the result of a deeper, theological malaise. From the start, Luther's intense theological interests were yoked to pastoral concern for the life of the church, and the faith and worship of the common people. This dual focus is clearly observed in Luther's Ninety-Five Theses where he canvasses both theological and practical matters. In 2009 Timothy Wengert asserted as much:

As Luther fans the world over are already gearing up for the celebration in 2017 of the 500th anniversary of their posting [i.e. the Ninety-Five Theses] on 31 October 1517, too often the celebrations will focus on Luther's break with Rome or his Reformation breakthrough rather than on Luther's own stated reason for the dispute: pastoral care for his flock in Wittenberg.⁵

¹ Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology.

² Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 46.

³ See *Ibid.*, 45. The letter, dated October 26, 1516, can be found in *LW* 48: 27–28.

⁴ See Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, Second edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 61–65. See also Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 106.

⁵ Timothy J. Wengert, “Introducing the Pastoral Luther,” in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 5.

According to Robert Kolb, Luther believed that the biblical message was given to the church for pastoral reasons, and that the connection of biblical confession and pastoral practice stood at the heart of the Lutheran enterprise.⁶ That this connection shaped Luther's own ministry is evident in the preamble to his Small Catechism. In 1528 Luther had undertaken a three-month "episcopal" visitation of congregations in Electoral Saxony and Meissen, and thus reported:

The deplorable conditions that I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty!⁷

Thus, Luther wrote his Large Catechism for pastors and teachers, his Small Catechism for lay persons and heads of households. He translated the Bible into the vernacular, and gave instructions on what to look for and expect in the gospels. His treatises include many examples of pastoral works such as his *Fourteen Consolations* (1519) written for his patron Fredrick the Wise during a time of serious illness.⁸ Also worthy of note are his *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519), *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519), *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague* (1527), *A Simple Way to Pray for a Good Friend* (1535), and *A Comfort for Women with Whom Things Have Gone Awry during Childbirth* (1542). It is evident that Luther was, especially, a preacher. He also baptised, celebrated the Lord's Supper, visited the sick, and comforted the dying. Martin Luther was "more than anything else," suggests Timothy Wengert, "pastor and preacher for his Wittenberg flock."⁹ His preeminent work was that of Christian formation. Before medieval Christendom could become truly Christian, old habits of thinking and acting had to give way to a new vision of what authentic Christianity implied. The medieval church was afflicted with a misguided and uncritical commitment to the wrong principles. What was required was not simply *Reformation* but *Re-Formation*.¹⁰

This paper explores Luther's work of pastoral re-formation and the theology underpinning this work by examining two important examples of his early expositions: his *Meditation on Christ's Passion* (1519), and his justly revered *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). Both these works set forth in positive terms, Luther's pastoral theology and vision.

⁶ See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 55.

⁷ Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 471.

⁸ See Andrew Towner, "Martin Luther, Reformer Pastor: The Pastoral Theology of the *Tessaradecas Consolatoria*," *Churchman* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 45–59.

⁹ Wengert, "Introducing," 1–2.

¹⁰ David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, Second edn. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 127.

MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST

In 1519 Martin Luther wrote a short “Meditation on the Passion of Christ” for Holy Week. His Good Friday sermon begins with three *wrong* ways by which to meditate on Christ’s passion. Some do it to vent their anger at the Jews or at Judas. Others do it superstitiously or blindly, carrying pictures, booklets, letters or even crosses on their person as a kind of talisman to ward off evil and misfortune. “Christ’s suffering is thus used to effect in them a lack of suffering contrary to his being and nature,”¹¹ as though Christ’s suffering on our behalf frees us from our own sufferings. Others feel pity for Christ, lamenting and bewailing his innocence.

The correct way to meditate on the passion, however, is to see his wounds as *our* sins, and so let our conscience be terrified and weighed down by the reality of human sin and divine wrath. For Luther, it is only at the cross that we gain true insight into the nature and consequence of sin, and so into our own nature and situation as sinners. The suffering and death of Jesus was the consequence of our sins, the price of redemption. Luther drives home the existential meaning of the cross in the strongest terms: “You must get this thought through your head and not doubt that you are the one who is torturing Christ thus, for your sins have surely wrought this.”¹²

We must give ourselves wholly to this matter, for the main benefit of Christ’s passion is that man sees into his own true self and that he be terrified and crushed by this. Unless we seek that knowledge, we do not derive much benefit from Christ’s passion. The real and true work of Christ’s passion is to make man conformable to Christ, so that man’s conscience is tormented by his sins in like measure as Christ was pitifully tormented in body and soul by our sins. This does not call for many words but for profound reflection and a great awe of sins.¹³

But Luther does not leave us in torment. Although the crucified Christ is an “earnest mirror” which does not “lie or trifle” but drives us to a true self-assessment, it is also and simultaneously the place where the divine mercy is seen in all its splendour and fullness. Having been fully awakened to our own sin, we must now also turn fully to Christ, “pouring” our sins, as it were, back onto Christ, casting them from ourselves and onto him in order to free our conscience from them. The believer is to “stake everything” on verses such as Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24, and 2 Corinthians 5:21, and tenaciously cling to them, all the more as conscience torments, for nothing else will secure peace of heart and mind.¹⁴ Further, we see in the resurrection of Christ his triumph over the wounds and sins by which he suffered. We see also his love, and

¹¹ Martin Luther, “A Meditation on Christ’s Passion,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 165.

¹² Luther, “A Meditation,” 166–67. “They contemplate Christ’s passion aright who view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience. This terror must be felt as you witness the stern wrath and the unchanging earnestness with which God looks upon sin and sinners, so much so that he was unwilling to release sinners even for his only and dearest Son without his payment of the severest penalty for them. ... You must get this thought through your head and not doubt that you are the one who is torturing Christ thus, for your sins have surely wrought this.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

that of the Father, in his bearing of sins on our behalf. True meditation on the passion of Christ must thus progress from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

If we allow sin to remain in our conscience and try to deal with it there, or if we look at sin in our heart, it will be much too strong for us and will live on forever. But if we behold it resting on Christ and [see it] overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot remain on Christ, since it is swallowed up by his resurrection. Now you see no wounds, no pain in him, and no sign of sin. Thus Paul declares that “Christ died for our sin and rose for our justification” [Romans 4:25]. That is to say, in his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it, but through his resurrection he justifies us and delivers us from all sin, if we believe this.¹⁵

Although this counsel may seem foreign to modern sensibilities, Luther’s advice was in accordance with medieval devotional practices. Markus Wriedt suggests that Luther learnt this approach to the cross from his mentor Johannes von Staupitz who taught him—when his own soul was in terror on account of his sense of divine wrath—to see in the suffering of Christ a revelation of the love and mercy of God.

We can be certain that Staupitz counselled Luther mainly along the lines of late medieval devotional practices strongly influenced by mysticism and a meditation on Christ’s wounds by Bernard Clairvaux. The deeply humane exhortations by the vicar general not to become lost in the examination of one’s own sinful nature, but to put confidence in God’s love and mercy, certainly touched Luther...deeply.¹⁶

Luther repeats his mentor’s counsel to his own hearers:

Unless God inspires our heart, it is impossible for us of ourselves to meditate thoroughly on Christ’s passion. ... You must first seek God’s grace and ask that it be accomplished by his grace and not by your own power. That is why the people we referred to above fail to view Christ’s passion aright. They do not seek God’s help for this, but look to their own ability to devise their own means of accomplishing this. They deal with the matter in a completely human but also unfruitful way.¹⁷

‘Correct’ meditation on the passion is not a religious work or something accomplished through our own (somewhat morbid) self-effort. There is no moral self-flagellation here, but good and necessary pastoral wisdom from Luther, which also went unheeded by some in the Puritan and Pietist traditions—and still today. Those who seek to uncover their own sinfulness, to convince themselves of their own moral filthiness, and dredge over sins and errors time and again, have, as St Paul has said, “to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but [such

¹⁵ Ibid., 170–71.

¹⁶ Marcus Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 89–90.

¹⁷ Luther, “A Meditation,” 169.

activities] are of no value against fleshly self-indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).¹⁸ Luther obviously understands true meditation on Christ’s passion to be a *theological* activity, interpreting his sufferings through the lenses of such Scripture passages as “Christ died *for our sins*” (1 Corinthians 15:3). We look only to Christ and not to ourselves. In him we see both our sin and its remedy, and in him the pattern and the source of strength for truly Christian life.

The depth of theological reflection and pastoral wisdom Luther has packed into this sermon is nothing less than remarkable. Multiple themes bristle in this short piece. Luther appeals seamlessly to penal and *Christus Victor* metaphors of the atonement—without seeking to “explain” the cross in terms of either.¹⁹ We see the very prominent focus on the *conscience* and so also on the *individual* before God. Of course, justification and faith are present in his discussion, as is his prominent focus on the *pro me, pro nobis*—for *me*, for *us*: “Of what help is it to you that God is God, if he is not God to you?”²⁰

This is obviously a message for Christians rather than non-believers, though non-believers also might benefit from it. Having come to Christ, we learn that we are sinners. It is from the cross that we learn this, and from the cross and resurrection that we learn we are forgiven and loved. And learning that we are thus loved and forgiven is the basis—the only basis—for Christian life and sanctification.

In this sermon, then, Luther’s *theology of the cross* comes to prominent expression, together with his distinction between the *two kinds of righteousness*—both central emphases which emerged in the Reformer’s theology in this period.²¹ Luther’s theology of the cross is an epistemological and hermeneutical principle forever at odds with every human attempt to know and describe God on our own terms. God—the hidden and true God—is known only in the cross. Luther is trenchant: *Crux sola est nostra theologia!* (“The cross alone is our theology!”).²² There, at the very place where his wrath against sin is poured out, God is revealed as the loving and merciful God who saves us and makes us new. Here, too, true humanity is also made known—as Luther notes in the citation above: “In his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it.”

Luther taught that God’s true righteousness—his true nature, his essence—is revealed in the cross, and it turns out that he is love and mercy. . . . Apart from his sacrifice of his own life as

¹⁸ Note that this is my comment rather than Luther’s.

¹⁹ See Forde’s comment: “Theologians of glory are always driven to seek transcendental meaning, to try to see into the invisible things of God, to get a line on the logic of God. They look at the cross and ask, “What is it all about?” they wonder what is “behind” it all. There is a reason for this, of course. If we can *see through* the cross to what is supposed to be behind it, we don’t have to *look at* it! It is, finally, a matter of self-defense,” in Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 76, original emphasis.

²⁰ Luther, “A Meditation,” 166.

²¹ The literature on Luther’s theology of the cross is voluminous. See especially theses 19–21 in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 in Lull, ed. *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 43–44. For an introductory essay, see Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Theology of the Cross,” in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Lull’s anthology also contains a copy of Luther’s *Two Kinds of Righteousness*. For a discussion of this work see Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness.”

²² Cited in Alister E. McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 152. The original appears in the Weimar edition of Luther’s works (WA 5.176.32–3).

the substitute for his people under the law's condemnation, there is no life. Exactly how and why it is so is never explained in Scripture. ... God's Word simply presents us the cross. The fury of God's wrath appears there in all its horror. God's anger reveals the horror of sin and how it has ruined the human creature whom he loves. But that very presentation of God's wrath appears at that place, Golgotha, where God has poured himself out in order to bury our sinful identity and give us new life.

The real and true work of Christ's passion, says Luther, is to make humanity "conformable to Christ": the sinner must die. Luther's theology of the cross is no sentimentalised reflection on Jesus' sufferings or the vulnerability of God, but an offensive theology that confronts us as much in our good works and religion as it does in our sin.²³ The cross spells the end to all human performance as an attempt at righteousness; we are rendered passive before God as Christ was passive on the cross. "The theology of the cross labels as a lie the idea that human performance can establish human identity as a child of God and a true human being."²⁴ True human righteousness exists in two distinct and inseparable forms.²⁵ First is the *alien* or *passive* righteousness which comes to us as a divine gift, from outside of ourselves and without any work on our part, reconstituting the original righteousness lost to us in the fall, and establishing the Christian's new identity as a beloved child of God. This is an "infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment," for Christ himself becomes our righteousness as we, through faith, become one with him.²⁶ This is a relational rather than substantive reality, the gift of right relationship with God, established and characterised by joyful trust toward God.²⁷ Inseparably connected to and deriving from this first form is *actual* righteousness, that by which we are righteous in relation to other creatures. This form of righteousness is active rather than passive, horizontally-oriented rather than vertical, and issuing in true human goodness through a life of good works. According to Luther, this righteousness is the "product, fruit and consequence" of the first type and goes on to complete the first kind.²⁸ The two forms belong together because both are the result of our union with Christ. Luther identifies three directions in which actual righteousness moves. First, it is directed toward the self in crucifying the flesh and sinful desires. Second, it is directed toward the neighbour in works of love, justice and service. Finally, it is directed in humble devotion, meekness and fear toward God.²⁹ Actual righteousness, therefore, comes to expression in these three domains of everyday existence.

Luther uses the analogy of marriage to explain how this occurs:

Therefore through the first righteousness arises the voice of the bridegroom who says to the soul, "I am yours," but through the second comes the voice of the bride who answers, "I am yours." Then the marriage is consummated; it becomes strong and complete in accordance

²³ Forde, *On Being a Theologian*, viii-x, 1-2.

²⁴ Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," 54.

²⁵ See Luther's "Two Kinds of Righteousness" Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 155-64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁷ Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," 42-43, 50-51.

²⁸ Luther, "Two Kinds," 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-58.

with the Song of Solomon [2:16]: “My beloved is mine and I am his. Then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others.³⁰

Luther’s use of the marriage analogy is famous in other contexts for emphasising the blessings that accrue to the believer through their union with Christ. Here, however, the analogy is used to speak of the reciprocal response of the bride, which answers to and reflects the self-giving of the groom. It is in this responsive self-donation that actual righteousness—sanctification—emerges. Only now is the marriage consummated, and now the bride lives from this union. Luther argues that Christian righteousness involves self-donation and servanthood not only towards God but to one’s neighbour. He insists that “each individual Christian shall become the servant of another in accordance with the example of Christ.”³¹ Actual righteousness is restorative, seeking to vindicate and pardon the other, serving them and taking their needs and cause as one’s own. Further, such self-giving is possible only because one has received the prior gift of divine righteousness that frees them from the need to establish their identity and relation with respect to God. The call to the Christlike life is grounded in the grace given us in Christ. Without the prior gift of God that frees us from self-seeking, we could not truly serve others.

This connection between the two forms of righteousness comes to clear expression in the third and final movement of Luther’s “Meditation on the Passion of Christ.” As already noted, these two forms of righteousness exist for Luther in indissoluble unity, but also in an irreversible order. Once the passive righteousness has done its work in us we may legitimately embark upon the active life.

After your heart has thus become firm in Christ, and love, not fear of pain, has made you a foe of sin, then Christ’s passion must from that day on become a pattern for your entire life. Henceforth you will have to see his passion differently. Until now we regarded it as a sacrament which is active in us while we are passive, but now we find that we too must be active, namely, in the following.³²

Having been conformed to the Crucified One in his death we are now conformed to him—the Crucified One—in our life. The cross now serves as the pattern for the entire life of the Christian. Luther goes on to discuss the nature of a cruciform life, using the image of Christ’s suffering to resist temptation and the despair or sloth that may issue from adversity.

THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN

1520 was a pivotal year in Luther’s career. On June 15, the papal bull of excommunication against him was published, though it would take some three months to reach Luther, and would be burnt publicly by Luther on December tenth. During this year Luther printed no fewer than five publications, the most

³⁰ Ibid., 158.

³¹ Ibid., 160–61.

³² Luther, “A Meditation,” 171.

important being his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and his *De Libertate Christiana—On Christian Liberty*, or as it is commonly known, *The Freedom of a Christian*.³³ Luther's *Freedom* was a bestseller, reprinted thirty times between 1520 and 1526, in two versions (Latin and German), and translated into other languages or dialects.³⁴ Although only a short treatise, it is rightly regarded as one of the classic texts of the Christian theological tradition. Due to constraints of space, only a brief outline of Luther's *Freedom* can be provided in this essay.

The treatise opens with a brief preamble in which Luther sets out two thematic propositions which he will go on to discuss. He explicitly notes that he has prepared this treatise “for the unlearned—for only them do I serve,”³⁵ and he indicates that the overall concern of his work has to do with the Christian experience and life of faith. The two thematic propositions structure the treatise with one major section devoted to each of the propositions. The work concludes with an appendix addressing a recurrent criticism directly related to the theme. It is worth noticing that Luther refers to *freedom* eighteen times in the treatise. By contrast, he refers to *faith* 161 times and *works* 189 times, which suggests that the tractate is largely concerned with the relation between faith and works.³⁶

Luther's thematic propositions are well-known:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.³⁷

Luther approaches his discussion of these seemingly contradictory propositions by means of an understanding of the constitutional nature of human being as body and soul, as outward and inward. He begins with discussion of the inward nature or soul which is coordinated with the first proposition, before continuing with discussion of the second proposition which is coordinated with a person's bodily and outward nature. For Luther, no external factors can touch the inner life with respect to producing righteousness and freedom: this belongs solely to the ministry of the Word of God, and the faith generated by that Word. Certainly, for Luther, the Word contains both law and gospel, commandments and promises. From the former we learn that we are sinners, unable in ourselves to do the good required of us. But here the word of promise contained in the gospel of Christ comes to our aid.

Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfil what the law prescribes so that all things may be God's alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments. He alone commands, he alone fulfils.

Since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness, the soul which clings to them with a firm faith will be so closely united with them

³³ See Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 83-98.

³⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, “Introduction,” in *The Annotated Luther Volume 1: The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 468.

³⁵ Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 596.

³⁶ Brett J. Muhlhan, *Being Shaped by Freedom: An Examination of Luther's Development of Christian Liberty, 1520-1525* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 50.

³⁷ Luther, “Freedom,” 596.

and altogether absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them. If a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this most tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word. . . . Just as the heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul.³⁸

Luther's "He alone commands, he alone fulfils" is a powerful affirmation of the divine grace which not only initiates but also accomplishes salvation. Through the divine Word of promise, this grace is communicated to the soul to such an extent that the believer becomes the possessor, as it were, of all of the grace of that Word. The soul, like the iron in the fire, begins to glow with the life and power, grace and freedom of the divine Word. If this is true, then the believer has all they need already in faith, with no further need either of works or law to justify them. In faith and by the Word of promise they are freed from all such works and laws.

Not only is the believer united by faith to the liberating and enlivening Word of promise, but the incomparable benefit of faith is that the soul is united to Christ as a bride is united with her groom. Here Luther utilises the marriage analogy to describe the blessed exchange whereby all that which belongs to the soul—sins, death, and damnation—is taken by Christ, while all that which belonged to him—grace, life, and salvation—is given to the soul. In its union with the risen Christ the soul is freed not only from sin, death and hell, but from every possibility or need to secure its own justification by means of human work and performance. In its union with the risen Christ the soul reigns as king with Christ over sin, death and hell. This is a spiritual and eschatological victory; Luther has no place for a prosperity gospel. In the world the Christian will endure evils, sufferings and death but these cannot touch the victory of Christ given to us by faith: in all these things we are, as Paul says, "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). A Christian, then, through their union with Christ by faith, is a perfectly free lord, subject to none. Through faith alone, they are united with Christ, risen with Christ, seated with Christ, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—free indeed (John 8:36).

The eschatological horizon of Luther's thought becomes clearer when he turns his attention to the second proposition. Were we perfectly and solely spiritual beings, or had we already inherited the eternal kingdom, works would be unnecessary. This, however, is not the case.³⁹ Although justified wholly by faith, our bodily and outward existence is still subject to an alien will which must be brought under subjection.⁴⁰ Further, the Christian must not confuse the various relationships in which they stand. When speaking of the Christian as lord, free and subject to none, Luther speaks of the soul in its vertical relationship to God. When speaking, however, of the Christian's relation to themselves or to others, he speaks of horizontal relations in this world. Confusing these relations results in Christians seeking to relate to God by way of works instead of faith, thereby neglecting the true works which should characterise their life in the world.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 601.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 610.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 610–11.

Luther identifies two such forms of works which should characterise the believer's life. The first refer to bodily disciplines which restrain its appetites and subject the flesh so that it will obey and conform to the new creation within. This first category of works must not be confused with justification. Rather they arise from justification towards the crucifying of the flesh out of a desire to please God. Luther insists, on the basis of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:18, that works do not make a person good or evil, but the person brings forth works in accordance with the kind of person that they are: the fruits do not bear the tree but the tree bears the fruits.

Luther's exposition reaches its climax as he discusses the second category of works which are concerned with the believer's interactions with others.

Lastly, we shall also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbour. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others.⁴¹

As was the case in his sermon on the two kinds of righteousness, so here Luther turns especially to Paul's account of Christ in Philippians 2, and its implications for Christian life. The truly Christian life is faith active in love, in works of "freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done."⁴² Just as Christ, rich in God and having no need of works or sufferings, humbled and emptied himself in order to serve us, so the Christian ought "in every way to deal with his neighbour as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him."⁴³

He ought to think: ... "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbour, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbour, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ." ... As our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbour through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.⁴⁴

With these remarkable and profound words Luther teaches that just as believers united to Christ by faith gain a share in his kingly reign, so also in their union with Christ they gain a share in his priestly ministry. United to Christ they become as Christ to others. This priestly ministry is the privilege and responsibility of every believer and not merely that of a priestly caste. Luther presents an astounding vision of Christian existence in terms of a spirituality of faith and love, or better, of faith active in love (Galatians 5:6). This is a faith that frees the self from its own self-possession, liberating it not *from* service but *for* service (Galatians 5:13). In this way Luther not only expounds his doctrine of justification by faith but defends it

⁴¹ Ibid., 616.

⁴² Ibid., 617.

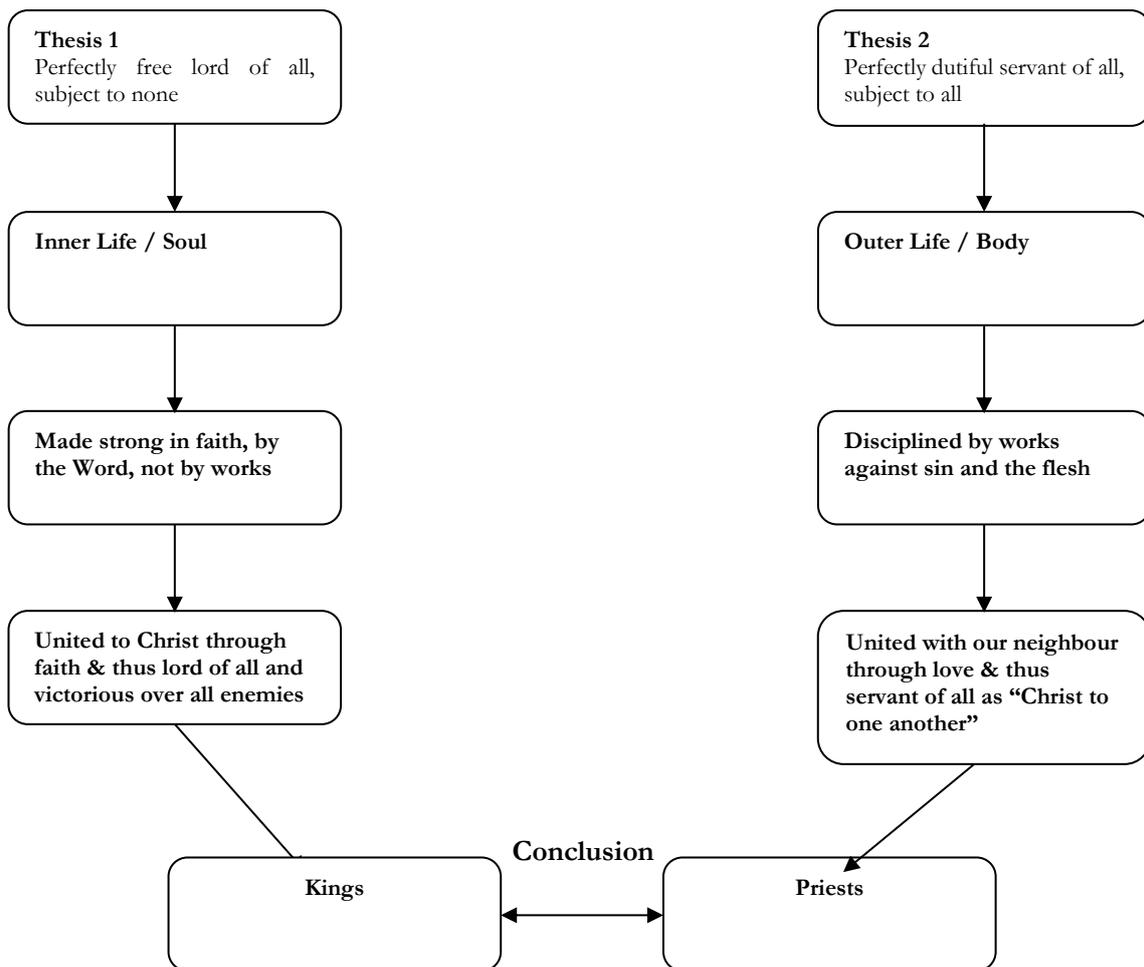
⁴³ Ibid., 618.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 619–20.

from the common accusation that his doctrine undermined Christian ethics by removing the need for good works.

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbour. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.⁴⁵

Luther’s argument in the *Freedom* tractate might be sketched as follows:



Sometimes the smallest facts provide the greatest illumination. Born—we think⁴⁶—late on November 10, 1483, and christened the next day on the feast of St Martin of Tours, Hans and Margarete *Luder* named their new son Martin. How and when did Martin *Luder* become Martin *Luther*? It is clear that the change had already occurred by the time Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses. Both the introduction to the Theses

⁴⁵ Ibid., 623.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of critical issues around the date of Luther’s birth see Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 17–18.

and his letter to Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz use the new name.⁴⁷ Historians note that it was not unusual for humanists to adopt a Greek form of their name to produce a scholarly pseudonym. For example, the brilliant young humanist Philip Schwarzerd, who entered the University of Heidelberg at the tender age of twelve, is better known by his Greek name: Philip Melancthon.⁴⁸ Martin Luder, too, adopted a Greek name and began signing his letters *Eleutherius*—the “free one,” the one who had been liberated, or the one who would liberate. Heinz Schilling, however, suggests that as Luder’s work took him out of the academy and into the world of the common folk among whom the Greek name would be meaningless, “he preserved a reminder of the freedom that was at the heart of reformed theology: the central *th* in the Greek form of his name was carried over into his family name. Martin Luder became Martin Luther.”⁴⁹ Luther’s very name is itself testimony to the heart of his theological and pastoral vision: a theology of freedom issuing from the free grace of the free God who makes his people free. Hendrix concurs: “From this point on, freedom for Luther meant living bound to Christ, and that freedom made him much more than a protester against indulgences or a critic of the pope. Now he was a man with a larger vision of what religion could be and a mission to realize that vision by making other people free.”⁵⁰

The exposition of these two documents from the early period of Luther’s career clearly show the theology that grounded, framed and supported his pastoral ministry. Fundamental to his pastoral theology is the theology of the cross and the associated doctrine of justification by faith. For Luther, the cross of Jesus declared the end of every human attempt at self-salvation, the futility of any and all self-assertion before God, and the utter incapacity of human good works to achieve reconciliation with God. Rather the human agent is reduced to passivity before God, crucified, annihilated—and reborn, for the cross is not only the locus of the divine judgement, but even more the revelation of loving mercy of God toward sinners. This cross is also the paradigm of Christian existence, as those united to Christ learn to share in his ongoing ministry through them in the world. Here clearly, we see also the two kinds of righteousness, and the ineluctable relation between justification and sanctification, both grounded in the reality of our union with Christ. The documents show the eschatological and anthropological dimensions of Luther’s theology, as well as the centrality and power of the divine Word of promise and its reception in faith. And of course, this is a theology of freedom. Luther was freeing salvation from the strictures of the medieval penitential system and the semi-Pelagian theology that had obscured the promise of the gospel and the free grace of God. He longed for Christians to be freed in their conscience from both the weight of sin and the fear of punishment. His doctrine of union with Christ freed believers from the power of sin, death and the devil.

⁴⁷ See Timothy J. Wengert, ed. *The Annotated Luther Volume 1: The Roots of Reform* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 34 and 55. Note that in the introduction to the Theses, the name is spelt “Luther.” Note further Lohse’s observation that the first evidence of this change of name occurs in Luther’s letter to Albrecht. See Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 101.

⁴⁸ Gill R. Evans, *The Roots of the Reformation: Tradition, Emergence and Rupture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 273.

⁴⁹ Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*, trans. Rona Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139. See also Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” 86. Wriedt also suggests that “Luder” bore the connotation as such words as ‘dirt’ or ‘garbage.’ Whether in the sixteenth century the word had the colloquial connotations it does in the modern period—i.e. as a reference to a “common” woman considered an immoral “hussy”—I cannot say.

⁵⁰ Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 115. See also Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 140.

His careful delineation of the relation between faith and works aimed at freeing the Christian life from legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other. Luther was both freeing salvation and proclaiming a salvation that frees.

CARING FOR THE DEPRESSED: LEARNING FROM LUTHER

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How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?

... But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.

(Psalm 13: 2, 5 NIV).

CONTEXT IN AUSTRALIA AND THE PARISH

Depression in the Australian community is a serious and whole-of-person issue. One in six Australians experience depression or anxiety or both at any one time.² Conservative estimates suggest one in five Australians will experience clinical depression in their lifetime.³ It strikes women at the twice the rate of men, but men represent seventy-five per cent of all suicides (clearly not all suicide is a response to depression).⁴ Tragically, as the sufferer suffers, so do their family, friends and colleagues.

Christians are not immune. Stone and Pietsch both note the prevalence of clinical depression in the parish and its attendant demands on the pastor's time.⁵ It is not without profile in the Lutheran Church of Australia, which has published specialist tracts,⁶ held occasional training seminars or classes⁷ and recently

¹ With thanks to Dr Michael O'Neil of Vose Seminary, Perth, WA, for assistance with editing and encouraging the publication of this paper. All errors and deficiencies remain the responsibility of the author (of course).

² *BeyondBlue*, 2015a. "Beyondblue celebrates Mental Health Week with a message for all Australians to make their mental health a priority," <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/media-releases/media-releases/beyondblue-celebrates-mental-health-week-with-a-message-for-all-australians-to-make-their-mental-health-a-priority> (retrieved 11 October 2015)

³ Stephen Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort: Analysing and Reflecting on Martin Luther's Pastoral Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today* (PhD thesis, Adelaide: Flinders University, 2014), 9. The thesis was recently published as Stephen Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort: Martin Luther's Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), and also includes twenty-one newly translated letters from Luther to his friends and associates who suffered with depression. Citations in this essay from the thesis are marked "(PhD)" while those from the book are left unmarked.

⁴ Howard W. Stone, *Defeating Depression: Real Help for You and Those Who Love You* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007), 30; Black Dog Institute (BDI), "Facts and Figures about Mental Health and Mood Disorders," <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/docs/Factsandfiguresaboutmentalhealthandmooddisorders.pdf> (retrieved 11 October 2015).

⁵ Howard W. Stone, *Depression and Hope: New Insights for Pastoral Counselling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 3; Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 9.

⁶ See, for example, Philip M. Bickel, *Dealing with Depression* (North Adelaide: Lutheran Media Ministry, n.d.) [available from www.lutheranmedia.org.au]

⁷ For example, a training seminar to tackle "being a spiritual physician in the face of epidemic spiritual diseases like compassion fatigue, depression and exposure to pornography" in August 2012 led by Rev Dr Harold Senkbeil and Dr Beverly Yahnke (Lutheran College of Australia (ALC), 2012) and "Light in the Darkness: Theological and Pastoral Reflections on Mental Illness, Suicide, Grieving, Life after Death and Hope, Peace and God's Grace in these Situations" by Rev Dr Mark Worthing in August 2013 (ALC, 2015a).

benefitted from one of its seminary lecturers undertaking doctoral studies in this area.⁸ While certainly there has been sustained ministry in the past, such as through the ‘pioneering’ ministry of Rev C. A. Zweck OBE⁹ in bringing the comfort of the gospel to the mentally ill. Nevertheless, as Pietsch observes of the LCA today, “despite the depression-awareness initiatives that have saturated the whole Australian community, there is low level of awareness about depression and it seems clear that this is the experience of other churches as well.”¹⁰

Accordingly, this essay addresses the concern that the comfort of the gospel be received by the depressed, and chiefly in the arena of pastoral care extended by the ordained minister.

Why the ‘Surge’ in Depression?

Our congregations are full of people who (thankfully) live out their Christian vocations in the world—yet also a world in which depression is on the rise.¹¹ Therefore some background on the increased prevalence of depression is in order.

Pietsch emphasises the drift “towards social isolation and disconnection” (identified by Blazer) for those unable to keep up with linear progress and improvement in society.¹² This drift sits within a meta-narrative of the postmodern rejection of truth and certainty that then undercuts “any substantive platform on which hope could be reconstructed.”¹³ This has resulted in a subsequent loss of, among other things, ‘story’, ‘language’, ‘self’ and ultimately ‘existence,’ thereby driving the hopelessness in which depression thrives.¹⁴ Grenfeld’s concept of ‘limitless self-realisation’ is also compelling which Pietsch summarises as follows; “We are expected to reach our potential; to be authors of our own unique and significant destinies. . . . For many, argues Grenfeld, this pressure is simply too much. . . . these people find themselves strangers in their own culture, left with no choice but to attempt life-styles that will make them mentally ill.”¹⁵

This is a frightening description for the way it so realistically describes the pressured everyday world of parishioners—and ministers. The end result is chiefly a loss of relationship and a turning in on the self.

⁸ Rev Dr S. Pietsch is lecturer in pastoral theology (ALC 2015b). His PhD thesis and subsequent book are key sources for this essay.

⁹ C. Albert Zweck (my grandfather) was awarded an OBE (Officer class) in 1956 for his work in taking the gospel to the mentally ill, including through “reaching out to Lutheran and non-Lutheran alike with a program of friendship, regular visits, services, devotions, concerts, bus outings, clothing and cheer distribution.” (See, Everard Leske, *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838-1996* (Bowden, SA: Friends of the Lutheran Archives, Bowden SA, 1996), 214-215). The individual nature of his OBE, as with other awards of this nature, belies that there was a massive infrastructure of support from the wider community behind him, in this case the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (See Paul A. Zweck, ‘When So Many Did Not Care: The Life and Pioneer Ministry of Pastor C. A. Zweck OBE’, *Journal of the Friends of the Lutheran Archives*, No. 12 (October) 2002, 41–58 (51–56). Moreover, while Zweck’s focus may have been on institutionalised mental illness, this does not take away mental illness as having been an important focus of Lutheran pastoral care in the Lutheran Church of Australia’s history.

¹⁰ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 170–171.

¹¹ Stone, *Depression and Hope*, 2.

¹² Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 148–149.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

It shows that pastors have a clear and certain need to be involved in active ministry to the depressed. Moreover, it shows too, the need for this ministry to help the depressed turn themselves outwards to both the creator and the creation he has given them, and focus on receiving the good things of God.

What Depression Is

Depression is, as Swinton labels it in an important and descriptive phrase, a “lived experience” which affects the whole person: physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.¹⁶ This section first looks at the clinical, then theological aspects of the depressive condition.

Stone provides a list of the psychiatric diagnostic criteria for *major* depression.¹⁷

1. Depressed mood, sadness, irritability part of each day, nearly every day.
2. Diminished pleasure or interest in daily activities
3. Considerable weight loss or gain, change in appetite
4. Significant change in sleeping patterns (early waking most common)
5. Marked increase or decrease in movement (slowing down is most common)
6. Fatigue and loss of energy
7. Feelings of worthlessness or guilt (beyond how people would usually feel)
8. Difficulty in concentration
9. Ideas of suicide or death

On this last matter, Stone warns: “*Every person who is depressed is at risk for suicide; there are no exceptions. Counselling the depressed is a serious business made more serious still by the ever-present possibility of suicide.*”¹⁸ Knowing the warning signs and knowing how to address them is frontline pastoral care.¹⁹

But more generally, one of the difficulties for pastors is that many of the symptoms on the above list are not directly observable. Indeed, some people may not even know they have depression. Sometimes the pastor will have to listen carefully for indications in the background of conversations or perhaps look out for slightly changed physical characteristics.

Moreover, depression differs in degree. Stone describes mild, moderate and severe forms noting that the latter “usually calls for therapy and medications.”²⁰ Apart from needing to have an awareness of the

¹⁶ John Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a ‘Forgotten’ Dimension* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 99–100, 167. Cf. Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 170.

¹⁷ Stone, *Depression and Hope*, 65–66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32, original emphasis. Suicide is a significant issue in Australia. *BeyondBlue* reports: “Australian Bureau of Statistics figures over the past five years showed there were more than 2,500 suicides per year. It is believed there are at least 75,000 suicide attempts each year and 370,000 people, or one in sixty-four Australians, think about taking their own life (see <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/media-releases/media-releases/beyondblue-launches-new-suicide-prevention-information-and-live-online-chat-to-help-people-on-this-world-suicide-prevention-day> [retrieved 13 October 2015]). Tragically, it is the leading cause of death for young people aged 15-24 (see Black Dog Institute).

¹⁹ The *BeyondBlue* website has excellent material in this area. For example, ‘What are the warning signs?’ at <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide/worried-about-suicide/what-are-the-warning-signs>.

²⁰ Stone, *Defeating Depression*, 18.

extent, at least in severe cases the pastor will need to keep in mind that they will likely be one of several ‘carers.’ Regardless, Pietsch’s distinction between clinical diagnosis and depressive symptoms is salient;²¹ the point being that, as with Luther, it is depressive symptoms that trigger the need for pastoral care (the extent of which will vary), not a clinical diagnosis.

It is also important not to confuse grief with depression.²² As Stone says, “[G]rief and depression are not the same. Grief is normal response to loss; it is not a mood disorder.” Grief may certainly incorporate bouts of depression, but they are generally different and manifest in quite different ways.²³ Notwithstanding, cases of “double trouble ... (d)epression plus grief should alert ministers to the risk of major psychological and/or spiritual challenges.”²⁴

Depression is deeply experiential and as such may be considered theologically in addition to clinically. Hopelessness and meaninglessness are key features, and *loneliness* is a common descriptor.²⁵ During depression sufferers lose their landmarks. They often feel abandoned by all the things they know that have previously given them meaning. Everything gets questioned.

It is literally an experience that sucks the meaning out of life... stranded deep within an abyss within which meaning, purpose, *hope* and possibility are banished and replaced with questions for which there appear to be no answers and no possibility of answers.²⁶

At this stage people may not necessarily accept this as a theological issue. But it is in two senses. First, as Christians we understand that in God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Second, depressed people lack hope. Stone captures the theological relevance and prescription well when he says:

Depressed individuals are likely to be stuck in the past, to sense little freedom in the present, and to see only a bleak future filled with more suffering. ... The primary symbol of hope in Christianity is Jesus Christ. Because of his life, death, and resurrection, we have a future hope. Possibilities have opened up to us.²⁷

Swinton’s findings reinforce and extend the notion that depression is a deeply spiritual issue.²⁸ The personal and theological foci intertwine, sometimes in contrasting ways. These foci include the feeling of abandonment (both by God and others), yet within an enabling tenacity (courtesy of their spirituality) for sufferers to cling on and thus relocate themselves within more meaningful experiences. Sufferers often speak

²¹ See Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 22. He made this comment in the context of determining the limits of his study in that it was not necessary to show clinical depression within Luther’s letters of consolation for them to be relevant because it was the depressive *symptom* which triggered the pastoral care.

²² See, for example, BeyondBlue, “Grief and loss” <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/grief-and-loss> (retrieved 15 October 2015).

²³ See, for example, Stone, *Defeating Depression*, 15–18.

²⁴ Stone, *Defeating Depression*, 19.

²⁵ See Stone, *Depression and Hope*, 47–48, and Swinton, *Spirituality*, 93, 113. Swinton augments his findings with reference to Frankl’s observations that “if a person has no meaning in their lives they have nothing to motivate them to the *future*. If they have no *hope*, then they will die, either physically or emotionally” (112, emphasis added).

²⁶ Swinton, *Spirituality*, 114, emphasis added.

²⁷ Stone, *Depression and Hope*, 62.

²⁸ See Swinton, *Spirituality*, 112–125.

of a disconnection from God and others (paradoxically they desire to relate but also experience a need to distance themselves). Then there is the sense of being ground down physically and psychologically, yet trapped into living.²⁹ And while depression is certainly not deemed desirable, there is nevertheless a sense for some sufferers that it is akin to a ‘crucible’ where life is refined and cleansed.³⁰

Spirituality and Depression

While this essay is predicated on the need for Christian pastoral care to the depressed, it is important to recognize that this understanding is by no means shared in the wider world in which depressed Christians work and receive care. At issue is that over the twentieth century, at least in the West, attending to the needs of the depressed increasingly became the domain of those operating out of Western culture’s deep affiliation with positivism and the scientific model which became embodied in the medical model.³¹ Spirituality was, and often still is, seen as soft form of knowledge that is “only allowed to eat at the table after the hard sciences have finished their meal.”³² At the least, this can make coordinating pastoral care with other carers of the depressed quite difficult, especially where different views or even unambiguous animosity undercuts the pastor’s approach. That said, the importance of spirituality to depressive illness is now better understood. Pietsch observes; “While medical and psychological approaches are still highly significant, there is a widening discussion taking place which shows a shift away from the dualism, rationalism and empiricism of the past century, and greater openness toward human narrative, affect, experience and spirituality.”³³

Indeed, Swinton (82-83) lists five primary ways in which spirituality contributes to the enhancement of mental health:³⁴

- well-being, including *connectedness* to others and God, and hope;
- spiritual supports, including knowledge of God’s presence, reading scripture and prayer;
- social support, including providing and *strengthening* family and support networks, and providing individuals with a sense of belonging and self-esteem;

²⁹ Here Swinton speaks of the struggle of a “strange tension between the positive benefits of spirituality that enable people to cling on in the midst of depressive experiences, and the restraining aspects of belief structures which at times frustrate suicidal intentions and prevent a person from taking their own life” (ibid., 121).

³⁰ Swinton comments on one of the participants of his study: “The metaphor of ‘crucible’ and the ‘refiner’s fire’ offers powerful images of the potential reconstructive process that can come about through the experience of depression. By relating his experiences to the image of the ‘refiner’s fire’ drawn from his spiritual tradition, the meaninglessness and hopelessness of his depression is reframed. ... using his spirituality as an interpretive hermeneutic which can enable him to make sense of his situation, he concludes that all suffering has a purpose...which whilst painful and deeply disturbing is nonetheless necessary in the grand scheme of things” (ibid., 123).

³¹ See ibid., 47. Here ‘positivism’ limits knowledge to observable facts and their interrelations. Positivism’s chief tool is empiricism (essentially: only what is measurable, or can be experienced, is reliable). The medical model employs both sets of underlying assumptions at the expense of spirituality, so that in relation to treatment of illness like depression, ‘in this worldview... there is no necessity for health carers to consider spiritual issues such as love, hope, meaning, transformation and growth’ (49).

³² Ibid., 47. The great irony enmeshed in the medical model as it relates to addressing depression is that in being so attached to ‘observing’ (measuring) reality, it is detached from incorporating it!

³³ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 140.

³⁴ Swinton, *Spirituality*, 82-83, emphasis added.

- cognitive realignment;³⁵ and
- comfort, hope, value and meaning, including the feeling of being valued and cared for, and finding hope in the midst of apparent hopelessness.

Spirituality therefore provides many handles onto which the means that address depressive illness can be attached.³⁶ Connectedness, support, spiritual growth and struggle with others opens up opportunity for genuinely therapeutic forms of understanding which become a key part of effective pastoral approach.³⁷

Effective Pastoral Care of the Depressed

As depression is a *lived experience*, it is vital the pastoral carer comes to terms with the depression *phenomenon* in the depressed person's life. But the goal is not just to examine the phenomenon for its own sake; rather the carer aims at the "healing power of understanding."³⁸ *Reframing*, a key technique in care ministry, "reinterpret[s] an experience cognitively or emotionally in a way that fits the facts of the situation well or even better, thereby changing its entire meaning."³⁹ It is part of broader, but related suite of measures, which includes searching for the exception, focusing on people's strengths, and creating future goals.⁴⁰ Reframing an issue is not an exact science, but requires interpretation of the phenomenon⁴¹—hence the need to *listen* carefully to understand the lived experience of the depressed properly, then work to find the right way to insert hope 'lifelines.'⁴² This requires the carer to become fluent in the 'language of spirituality' that "...focuses on issues of meaning, hope, value, connectedness and transcendence...all of which have a

³⁵ This includes "coping and positive cognitive mediation" (Swinton, *Spirituality*, 83) that provide frameworks for understanding events, 'emotion-focused coping' (83) that redefines and manages distressing affective motions, and 'problem-focused coping' (83) for taking positive action to alter the source of stress.

³⁶ For example, spirituality is at the heart of the connectedness encapsulated in this statement from Ian Watson (of the Christian *Shed Happens* movement): "Too many blokes are dealing with depression and anxiety and loneliness, because they're isolated from other blokes. When men get together for the same reasons in a good safe place, something happens that's amazing... through Shed-Happens, I've seen thousands of men being transformed by being able to talk out gut issue with other blokes." See Ian Watson, *Every Bloke's a Champion: Even You!* (Woody Point, QLD: Watto Books, 2012), 32. Certainly men's ministry is only a small fraction of the solution (Watson's statement begs the question regarding *isolation* from family and spouse). But the general point is that things like *Shed Happens* work because spirituality matters.

³⁷ Swinton, *Spirituality*, 95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁹ Stone, *Depression and Hope*, 53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴¹ Swinton used a specific research process called 'hermeneutic phenomenology' (*Spirituality*, 99). For those of us familiar with these terms, it makes for a good 'shorthand' way to think about what we are doing as we seek to understand the lived experience of the depressed so that pastoral care can be effective.

⁴² Stone is intriguing here. I like his focus on pastoral care being about action: "If the conversation helps people feel better for a while but does not lead them to see their situation differently or act differently, then it is not pastoral" (*Depression and Hope*, 70). Yet I do find it a little inadequate in the sense that 'comfort' sometimes might simply be just that. Swinton notes the way that comfort *in and of itself* enhances mental health (*Spirituality*, 82-83). Consolation is not a consolation prize (see, for example, Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 173). Within receptive spirituality, God can use consoling words in his speech act so that "this powerful theology-practice from the tradition of the church has rich possibilities for *enacting* God's redemption in the lives of those suffering the spiritual distress of depression" (173, emphasis added).

secondary role within the dominant medical paradigm but which...hold a central place within the experience of many people with mental health problems.”⁴³

LEARNING FROM LUTHER: A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR REFRAMING

At the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses it turns out that there is some authentic learning from Luther (even) in the pastoral care of depression sufferers. This in part is due to Luther’s own experience with depression. As Pietsch notes,

Luther himself is arguably Christianity’s most famous depressive... the historical sources show that Luther definitely did suffer from a serious depressive illness of some kind. Besides the depressive episodes of his youth and the ongoing struggles with it in his early adulthood, Luther suffered a serious and prolonged depressive breakdown between June 1527 and August 1528... He spoke often about [depression] in very honest personal terms. Most importantly, he spoke about how he had learned to live with this illness and its effects in the context of Christian faith and hope.⁴⁴

But beyond this is Luther’s deep commitment to both providing pastoral care and doing so in the firm grounding of the Scriptures.

Accordingly, a useful way for a contemporary pastor to listen to depression sufferers and help them reframe is with reference to six themes of Luther’s consolation to the depressed that have been identified by Pietsch. The themes are the product of a detailed assessment of how Luther’s pastoral care to the depressed, as expressed through a series of twenty-one letters Luther wrote to the depressed (but clearly not separate from his wider theology), can both *work with* and *transform* contemporary pastoral caring practices of the depressed.⁴⁵ Importantly for the pastor, these themes set up “theology as the proper frame of reference” and facilitate a much-needed engagement with the living tradition of the church’s *Seelsorge* in the conduct of pastoral care.⁴⁶ The following comments focus on their theological and personal foci, the various pastoral issues that might arise where employed in counselling, along with some reflection on my own practice.

⁴³ Swinton, *Spirituality*, 174. Swinton, reflecting his target audience, suggests proficiency for professional mental health carers in the language of spirituality in addition to the language of psychiatry and psychology (which he assumes). I have focused on the former (spirituality) on the basis that this is the focus of this paper. Clearly pastors are at an advantage when they have a working knowledge of the language of psychiatry and psychology, and can therefore be aware of its possible benefits and likely limits.

⁴⁴ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, xvi-xviii.

⁴⁵ To be sure, Pietsch also reviewed points of Luther’s approach that require modification because they no longer fit with contemporary context—see the excellent summary at Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 240-243. In particular, he finds Luther’s authoritative rhetoric, where he speaks to persons in declarative or definitive manner, while consistent with his times and personal standing, “creates problems when placed in the contemporary context” (240). Moreover, Luther’s medieval medical understanding of depression “must be disclaimed” (241) (notwithstanding that “[Luther’s] own pastoral engagement with depression sufferers did not in any way rest upon it. He was...far more interested in the spiritual and theological aspects of depression, and sought to offer his consolation and advice on that basis” (242).

⁴⁶ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 294-295.

1. Reaching the Heart: Cognitive-Behavioural Insights for Pastoral Care of Persons with Depression.⁴⁷

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has long been a favoured domain of psychotherapists, including Christian counsellors. Here Pietsch reminds the pastoral worker that faith needs to be more than ‘spliced’ into the use of secular therapies. Rather the gospel needs to be a ‘touchstone’ with the depressed person’s self-validation turned to “the objective external reality of God’s actions and words.” That is, CBT needs to be consciously adapted “to keep the external word of law and Gospel at the centre, as the dynamic transformative power.”⁴⁸

A good example can be seen in a 1544 letter to George Spalatin to whom Luther had been a close long-term counsellor and friend.⁴⁹ In this letter Luther invites Spalatin to “examine the evidence of the situation and revisit his interpretation of reality.”⁵⁰ “The Lord says, ‘I do not wish the death of the sinner, but rather than he repent and live’. Do you really think that in your case alone the Lord’s hand is shortened? Or has the Lord in your case alone ceased to be merciful?”⁵¹

2. Assailed by the Enemy: Interpreting Luther’s Demonology of Depression.⁵²

Pastoral carers should not dismiss the idea that this illness is an arena where Satan and his forces can be at their destructive worst. Often the secular world will put the devil’s activity down to mere superstition. But the medically depressed do report perceptions of contact with the devil and seem to gain relief in external reframing that does not ignore it.⁵³ Therefore, Pietsch’s question deserves to be taken seriously: “could this ‘overlap’ [between the biological, psychological or spiritual dimensions] ... be the very territory where the devil does his secret and destructive work?”⁵⁴

Critically, Pietsch reminds his readers that Luther’s view of the devil does not foster fear; “[r]ather it engenders resistance among the faithful and puts in their hands the weapons of faith and hope in Christ.”⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Ibid., 178–190.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 186–187, 190.

⁴⁹ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 77–78.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁵¹ See letter 15 in Ibid., 142, and 274. The letter is dated 21 August 1544. The original can be found in WA BR X, no. 4021, 638–640. The first sentence is based on Ezekiel 33:11 and the second on Isaiah 59:1. In part this demonstrates Luther’s command of and skill in the use of Scripture—see *The comforting Word: Luther’s use of Scripture as consolation for the depressed* following.

⁵² Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 190–207.

⁵³ Ibid., 195–196, 200–201. This is not simply a Lutheran focus. For example, Tan and Lyles, writing outside of the Lutheran tradition, list ‘demonic attacks’ as a cause of depression. See Tan, Siang-Yang and Michael Lyles, “Depression and bipolar disorders” in *Caring for People God’s Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief and Trauma* edited by Tim Clinton et al (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 149.

⁵⁴ Here Pietsch is referring to the work of John Peteet who says that as “...both mood states and spiritual experience have distinct but overlapping brain correlates... It is therefore misleading to assume that the biological, psychological or spiritual dimensions of self are immiscible.” See Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 197.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 204, emphasis added.

A fine example of Luther's use of this idea is found in his gentle letter to Elizabeth von Canitz, a young woman he is inviting to Wittenberg in order to teach young girls.

I hear too that the evil enemy is attacking you with depressive thoughts. O my dear young woman, do not let him frighten you, for whoever suffers the devil here will not have to suffer him later. It is a good sign. Christ suffered all this too, and so did many holy prophets and apostles, as the Psalms amply show. In view of this, therefore, be of good comfort, and willingly endure this, your Father's rod. He will relieve you of it in his own time. If you come, I will talk to you further about this. Herewith I commit you to God's keeping.⁵⁶

That said, this is an area the pastoral carer needs to be cautiously responsive and responsible, not least because depressed people are often spiritually vulnerable.⁵⁷ Out of sensitivity for this vulnerability, I seek to be aware of these matters, but do not overlay them.

3. All things in Christ: Justification by grace as comfort for the depressed.⁵⁸

Pietsch notes that although alien to some contemporary western sensibilities, Luther's justification teaching has an *experiential* dynamic which makes it very practical in addressing depression at a personal spiritual level in pastoral care.⁵⁹ Telling is Pietsch's conclusion that "the symptomology of depression today, as in Luther's day, often includes the experience of exaggerated or 'pathological' guilt and an overly-scrupulous or 'punitive' conscience."⁶⁰ Thus, the deeply experiential issue of depression needs to be addressed with a deeply experiential word. This Luther finds in the promise of the gospel received in faith. In a letter to Prince Joachim of Anhalt he writes; "What can distress us—apart from, perhaps, our sins and a bad conscience? Even so, Christ has removed these from us, even while we sin daily. . . . He prayed even for those who crucified him. Therefore, be of good comfort. In Christ's strength resist the evil spirit, who can do no more than trouble, frighten, or kill."⁶¹ Or see Luther's 1531 letter to Queen Maria of Hungary where Luther uses his own experiences of *Anfechtung* to comfort a fellow-sufferer.

I have heard...how distressed Your Grace has been, and I can only think that such distress does not come from a single cause, and as is often the case, misfortunes do not come alone. I myself know well from experience how the devil, when he finds an opportunity, gladly climbs over the fence—especially where it is lowest; and where it is wet already, there it pours. . .

⁵⁶ See letter 11 in Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 266–267. The letter is dated August 22, 1527. The original can be found in WA BR IV, No. 1133, 236–237.

⁵⁷ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 206.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 208–224.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁶⁰ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 178. See also pages 210–212 where Pietsch has an excellent description of the phenomenon and drivers of 'pathological' guilt.

⁶¹ See letter 10 in *Ibid.*, 265–266. The letter is dated Christmas day, December 25, 1535. The original can be found in WA BR VII, No. 2279, 335–336.

Therefore this is my humble request and warning, Your Grace: resist as far as possible your own thoughts, which actually are not your own, but most certainly those which the devil has stirred up. Our Lord is not so angry as we may be accustomed to think and feel ... And if he is our gracious God, whose pledge we have, namely his son, given through baptism, the sacrament and the Gospel, we should certainly not doubt, but rather rely completely on his grace, which covers everything. This is also God's will . . .

Therefore I now ask God the Father himself that he, through his dear Holy Spirit, would write on Your Grace's heart what is so richly found in Scripture, and keep you thinking about this. Moreover, I pray that it will go much deeper, *into* your heart, deeper even than your own life and the things Your Grace holds dear on this earth.⁶²

A major challenge can be to use the right *rhetorical disposition*. In this letter especially, we see Luther using language 'from alongside'—language of vulnerability rather than the language of power 'from above.' That is, "the right approach that will enable us to speak the heart language of those suffering depression today."⁶³

4. In His Good Time: Suffering, Patience, and the Cross.⁶⁴

It seems this area of engagement has a particularly profound resonance with the depressed. The theology of the cross tells sufferers that "it is only when we are weak that we can be truly strong." Pietsch's observation from extensive experience cannot be ignored: "For depression sufferers, this insight often comes as deep comfort and relief, since they are incapable of anything but weakness and need, and feel utterly spiritually bankrupt."⁶⁵

Importantly, the key distinction and "true comfort of this theology is not that God shares our pain ... but that our suffering is held within the embrace of Christ."⁶⁶ Christ holds the person's suffering, having bound himself to the depressive, and works on it. The task of the pastoral carer is to help people receive this work from God. For faith that focuses too much on doing sees receiving as a sign of weakness, which may further compound the hopelessness people are experiencing.⁶⁷ In 1527 Luther wrote to the wife of his good friend and associate John Agricola:

⁶² See letter 12 in Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 267–268, original emphasis. The letter is undated apart from the year 1531. The original can be found in WA BR VI, No. 1866, 194–197.

⁶³ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 222.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 224–250.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Pietsch observes of Christians in communities where there is a strong expectation of outward displays of faith and acts of service: "When their depression strips them of their capacity to do these things, they see this as reflection of the state of the faith, which reveals the spiritual problem that they understand faith primarily as doing than receiving" (*Ibid.*, 241n205).

My dear Elsa: ... You must not be so fearful and anxious. Remember that Christ is near and that he carries your troubles, for he has not abandoned you, as your flesh and blood would have you think. Just call out to him honestly, from the heart and you can be certain that he hears you, for you know that it is his way to help, strengthen, and comfort all who ask him. So be of good comfort, and remember that he has suffered far more for you than you can ever suffer for his sake or for your own. We also mean to pray; in fact we are already praying earnestly that in his Son, Christ, God will accept these prayers and strengthen you in this weakness of body and soul. With this, I commit you to God. Amen.⁶⁸

5. The Comforting Word: Luther's Use of Scripture as Consolation for the Depressed.⁶⁹

There are pitfalls here if Scripture is not used with theological and pastoral sensitivity, wisdom and discernment, and if trust and mutuality are not nurtured.⁷⁰ A particular issue is conflating Law and Gospel whereby depression sufferers receive “the message of the law as an impetus for change rather than the transformative news of God's unconditional forgiveness and love in Christ.”⁷¹ But used properly, that is, in a transformational and regenerative way, the benefit is that Scripture can repopulate narratives, with grace (gospel) directly addressing the *experience* of those who are caught in despair. Of key importance is that this is a performative word: “this transforming word [of the gospel] does much more than reform or rehabilitate; it resurrects and regenerates.”⁷²

Luther in part used the biblical narratives to minister comfort to the suffering by masterfully drawing them into the biblical narrative in order to hear God's Word of promise and using the Scripture to help his readers reframe their own depression stories. However, he did this in a way that is rarely seen today. Pietsch observes:

Recent research shows that the use of Bible in pastoral care is generally rather shallow, reflecting a low level of both biblical knowledge and *experiential biblical wisdom* among pastoral carers. On this score we have a lot to learn from Luther. His deep and comprehensive understanding of Scripture, particularly of its human-divine dimension, gave him an understanding of the human heart and conscience, as well as how to apply the biblical counsel to them. He looks into the ‘streets and alleyways’ of both Old and New Testaments and sees human beings who are, spiritually if not culturally, like himself, and like us. He sees God's law and judgement on human sin, and he sees Christ's mercy

⁶⁸ See letter 1 in Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 255. The letter to Elisabeth Agricola is dated June 10, 1527. The original can be found in WA BR IV, No. 1112, 210–211.

⁶⁹ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 250–267.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 266–267. This is not insubstantial as “Current research and experience show that biblical depth is lacking in many pastoral carers today, whose training and development has been more orientated towards relational skills” (266).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 254–255.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 256, 266.

and grace. . . . he is able, like an expert physician, to apply the right scriptural medicine for the healing of the soul.⁷³

We see a good example of Luther using scriptural narrative to reframe the sufferer's thoughts in a letter to Jerome Weller. There Luther writes, "Master Vitus told me that you are sometimes troubled by a spirit of sadness." Luther gives a variety of exhortations before continuing: "Let the people of Israel be an example to you. They conquered their serpents not by looking at them or struggling, but by turning their eyes in another direction, that is, to the bronze serpent. This is the true and certain victory in this fight. So, my dear Jerome, see to it that you don't allow these sad thought to hang around in your heart."⁷⁴

This care strategy provides comfort for the depressed from the highest order: the Holy Spirit! In my own practice I consider there is considerable utility, at a minimum, in resources such as the tract *Perfect Promises*.⁷⁵ But I also embrace the need to work on the 'pastoral-hermeneutical challenge' to bring scripture and situation together in a "faithful and creative challenge... as a word that has addressed us and found interpretive grounding in our life and practice."⁷⁶

6. Of Good Cheer: Luther's Practical Theology of Joy.⁷⁷

At the very heart of Luther's comfort for the depressed stands his practical theology of joy.⁷⁸ Two factors are critical. First, joy as described here is received—"an *extra nos* work of God"—rather than "subjective wellbeing, in which positive emotions and moods are seen to be linked to internal attitudes and values."⁷⁹ This is of great comfort for sufferers because joy is a gift received by faith. "If, in our despondency we act on God's promises and engage in joyful behaviour of some kind, this too is faith receiving and using God's gift."⁸⁰ For Luther, the sources of joy are many and varied. Foremost, of course, is the gospel itself which is God's grace and favour for sinners through his Son, and which gives a free conscience and the assurance of eternal life. Pietsch distinguishes between *internal* or *inward* comforts such as the divine grace given through the gospel, and the *external* or *outward* comforts, which being a gift from God, are to be enjoyed with good conscience and include such things as music, laughter, good company, food, drink, and sport.⁸¹ For Pietsch, Luther's counsel to participate in and enjoy the creaturely and material goods of life commends

⁷³ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 251.

⁷⁴ See letter 18 in Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 280–281. The letter is dated June 19, 1530. The original can be found in WA BR V, No. 1593, 373–375.

⁷⁵ See Lutheran Tract Mission, *Perfect Promises*, (North Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Tract Mission, n.d.). Available from http://www.ltm.org.au/product/view/357/perfect_promises. Also useful is *Give Me Strength Lord, In My Sickness* from the same publisher.

⁷⁶ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 260–261.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 267–285. It should be noted that there is also room for a theology of lament in Luther's general approach to pastoral care. See Stephen Pietsch, "Luther's Theology of Suffering and Pastoral Care," *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Volume 51, No 2 (August 2017), 98–107.

⁷⁸ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 267.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 284, 280.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

itself as an intentional strategy for pastoral care of depressed persons: “Behavioural Activation is a therapy with a proven track record in the treatment of depression today.”⁸²

Second, joy is a weapon to be deployed against depression and attacks of the devil. It is all the more effective because, just as depression affects every aspect of the person, joy is “not only felt at the intellectual, emotional and affective levels, but is also deeply connected with the physical senses and appetites.”⁸³

In 1534 Luther wrote a series of letters to the young Prince Joachim of Anhalt, exhorting him to find joy:

Your Grace has Master Nicholas Hausmann and many others there with you. Be joyful with them; for gladness and good cheer, when honourable and decent, are the best medicine for a young person—in fact for everybody. I myself, who have spent the better part of my life in sadness and negativity, now look for and find enjoyment wherever I can. Praise God, we now have enough understanding to be able to enjoy God’s gifts in good conscience and with thanksgiving, for he created them for this very purpose and is delighted when we do this.

If I am mistaken and have done Your Grace an injustice, I hope that Your Grace will be generous enough to excuse me. However, I truly think that Your Grace is reluctant to enjoy anything, as if this were sinful. This has often been my problem, and sometimes still is. To be sure, enjoying sin is of the devil, but participation in proper and honourable pleasures with good and God-fearing people—even if the talk and joking might sometimes go too far—is God-pleasing. So, be joyful, both inwardly in Christ himself and outwardly in his gifts and good things. This is what he wants. This is why he is with us. This is why he provides his gifts—that we may use and enjoy them, and that we may praise, love, and thank him forever and ever.⁸⁴

One risk is that such talk of joy and its power to act as a countervailing force to depression’s sadness and despair can come across as somewhat ‘simple.’⁸⁵ Another is that it might be hard for a pietistic ‘doer’ to receive this teaching, let alone actual ‘joy.’ But by definition, the receptive gift of joy is non-subjective. A gift is what it is. A chat over a decent coffee,⁸⁶ a visit to the zoo,⁸⁷ a drive in the country, good music, and a hearty laugh are all things I have found have helped those I have known who are depressed. The ‘trick’ is

⁸² Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 250.

⁸³ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 271.

⁸⁴ See letter 4 in Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort*, 258–259. The letter is dated May 23, 1534. The original can be found in WA BR VII, No. 2113, 65–67.

⁸⁵ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 267.

⁸⁶ A ‘proverbial’ coffee; caffeine, as with alcohol, might be one of those *outward* comforts that it is helpful for the depressed person to avoid for a while!

⁸⁷ In May 2014, my best friend found considerable comfort and joy during a time of rapidly declining mental health through a long visit to the Adelaide zoo with my brother (who works there but had the day off) who can point things out in the way that only the keen animal (and human) behaviourist that he is can! Joy addressed my friend’s distress through the animals, birds, gardens, silence, conversation, good food, and non-rushed presence of another.

to be gently intentional about making sure it is pointed out that this is God giving us his good things and helping us to see hope outside the depression.

DIVINE SERVICE, COMMUNITY, AND ‘LEANING OVER THE BOAT’

These six themes will help a pastor engage with much of the necessary spiritual phenomena to provide pastoral care to the depressed. Their utility is in part also because they provide many links to the classical spiritual disciplines as well as common ecclesial practices such as: “The pastoral care and counsel of the Christian community and its clergy; loving and faithful Christian friendship; the liturgy; symbol and ritual; the means of grace (the word and sacraments); prayer, and the devotional life.”⁸⁸

Such practices and the work of pastoral care need to be held together.⁸⁹ Moreover, to the extent that the routine of the pastor’s week, culminating in Divine Service, and the ebb and flow of parish life and the church year brings these practices into regular use, they have a reinforcing, reframing power all of their own in direct pastoral care of the depressed.

Risk-Taking in Gospel Consolation

Lastly, in Luther one sees responsible risk-taking in pastoral care of the depressed. With his “highly stable ‘biblical centre of gravity’... one has the sense that Luther knows exactly how far he can “lean out of the boat without tipping it over.”⁹⁰ This is not a matter of rigid systematics, but of tapping into the phenomenon of the lived experience of depression in a particular space, with a particular person. Such an attitude becomes a guiding factor for the pastoral carer.

The day that Rev. C. Albert Zweck OBE retired he recorded in his diary: “After 44 years and 5 months held farewell service at Glenside Hospital. Over the years was privileged to bring the *Gospel* regularly to hundreds of folks...⁹¹ Zweck went into psychiatric institutions at a time when the “[churches] too, as part of society, were generally unconcerned.”⁹² He was essentially “leaning a long way out of the boat.” That it did not tip over is because he had a *gospel* as his centre of gravity.⁹³ Likewise, we listen and *bring the gospel*

⁸⁸ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 175.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Lutheran Church of Australia, *Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care* (Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 1998) which has useful rites and notes for such matters as Sickness (52–57), Grief (84–90), Attempted Suicide (126–129), Anger (130–137), and Spiritual Oppression (138–145). Also included is excellent material in the Scriptures References (146–163) and Prayers (164–185) sections.

⁹⁰ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 300.

⁹¹ C. Albert Zweck, *Personal Diary of Key Life Events: 1923–1982* (Unpublished; property of M. P. Bishop).

⁹² Leske, *For Faith and Freedom*, 214.

⁹³ To be sure, I see Zweck’s ‘gospel’ *centre of gravity* as sitting within Luther’s ‘biblical’ *centre of gravity*, and as such is not a point of differentiation with Luther’s. Interestingly, in the context of Luther’s use of Scripture as consolation for the depressed, the *vital importance* of Zweck’s emphasis on the gospel as the foundational driver in this work has become much more apparent. And more generally, Luther’s emphasis on receiving joy in the midst of depression has helped to show the full therapeutic significance of Zweck’s tactics like distributing cheer and getting mentally ill people out on bus trips.

so the depressed person will know of Christ's embrace of their pain. For then the gospel can provide that 'experiential and practical' word of grace for use 'at the immediate level of daily life,' and also the ultimate transformation: to life eternal.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort* (PhD), 301.

REVIEWS

SCOTT H. HENDRIX. *MARTIN LUTHER: VISIONARY REFORMER*. NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. XXIV + 341PP. [ISBN: 978-0-300-16669-9]

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Scott Hendrix, Emeritus Professor of Reformation History at Princeton Theological Seminary, has written an articulate, detailed, and highly readable story of the remarkable life of Martin Luther. The book is divided into two parts. Part one, "Pathways to Reform," covers the period 1483–521, while part two, "Pursuit of a Vision" treats 1522–1546. The first part consists of eight chapters that introduce Luther and set him firmly in the context of late medieval Germany. Hendrix's Luther is very much a normal (sixteenth-century) man, "neither a hero nor a villain, but a human being with both merits and faults" (xi). Drawing on a lifetime of learning, and extensively referencing German, Latin, and English-language sources, Hendrix rejects the "popular version" of the "cliché" or "myth of Luther the hero" (33, 39). Luther did join the monastery against his father's wishes but whether solely as a result of the storm is doubtful. Although we know he posted his ninety-five theses to Archbishop Albert of Mainz, we cannot be quite as certain that he posted them on the doors of Castle Church. He was not a solitary or isolated figure, but embedded in communities and friendships which functioned as networks of support during the Reformation. Although he did struggle with his conscience, his psychological state must not be over-emphasised. His theological breakthrough was not simply the result of a monk's desperate search for a gracious God, but also of many years of intellectual and academic development, accompanied with pastoral reflection.

Although by 1517 Luther was "pushing reform on two fronts: academic theology and popular piety" (68), he was not yet the "visionary Reformer" he later became. Only in 1520 did he "turn a corner," believing that the time had come to "speak out" (89). The decisive change occurred while holed up in the Wartburg. Cast out of the church, released from his monastic vows, officially an outlaw, and in hiding for his life, Luther faced, to put it mildly, an uncertain future which neither he nor his friends nor his protector could fathom (112–113). It was in this liminal space, suggests Hendrix, that Luther became then a man possessed of a new identity, vision and purpose, based on a vision of what Christianity could become—a vision he was now intent on pursuing (115).

In the second part of the book the pace slows a little as Hendrix explores the developments of the Reformation's progress, and Luther's role and responses in them. Chapters nine and ten treat the early reforms at Wittenberg, initially without Luther, and later stabilised by his presence. Luther's reforming movement is presented as a "massive campaign of reeducation" (138), equipping the laity with sufficient theological and devotional frameworks, and knowledge so that *their* consciences and consequent religious practice were formed and reformed. He was concerned also for marriage as one of the goods of creation

given by God, and for the education of children and well-run schools. Thus Luther's vision included cultural as well as spiritual and ecclesial renewal. It was for these reasons that Luther resisted what he considered false initiatives and directions taken by some of his own associates such as Karlstadt and Müntzer. According to Hendrix, the tragedy of the Peasant's War arose because "Müntzer had his own vision of what Christianity should be" (151)—a radical, politicised and apocalyptic vision of the kingdom of God realised in a purified Christian state. Luther believed the movement stirred by Müntzer was threatening to undo not just the Reformation but the whole social order.

Hendrix identifies 1525 as a pivotal year during which the profile of the German Reformation began to change from a populist movement driven from the bottom up, to a more formal institutional movement of renewal with momentum coming from the top down. That is, after 1525 the civil authorities began to bring the reforming energies under control. "As a rule, historians have lamented the shift from populist movement to government-authorized reforms, but for the most part Luther did not" (173): the Reformation required the support and protection of the civil authorities if it were not to be put down by its powerful opponents.

Luther wanted release from hierarchical control and false beliefs, but not from worship, order, faith, sacraments, and word. Evangelical worship would be "informal and spontaneous," arising from the communal experience itself and not imposed from above. Religion would not be confined to churchgoing but would spill over into daily life. Hendrix acknowledges that Luther's vision resembled the ideal of monastic life stripped of celibacy and the demand for perfection: "Luther never completely abandoned the monastic ideal. The man left the monastery, but the monastery never left the man" (176).

Luther, of course, did not pursue his vision alone. Without Staupitz, Philip of Hesse, his many associates and those who took up the cause in other towns and regions, his Reformation would not have succeeded. In particular, Hendrix notes the crucial role played by Melancthon—even in Luther's mind:

For this I was born: to fight and take the field against mobs and devils. Therefore many of my books are stormy and war-like. I must pull out the stumps and roots, hack away at thorns and thistles, drain the swamps [!]. I am the coarse woodsman who must blaze a new trail. But Master Philip comes neatly and quietly behind me, cultivates and plants, sows and waters with joy, according to the gifts that God has richly given him (215).

"Luther was the bushwhacker willing to reject and condemn everything contrary to the gospel and let God take care of the consequences. Melancthon was the gardener willing to cultivate an agreement between opposing sides so long as it did not silence the gospel" (219). In the end, both were needed and both played their part.

The issue that dominated Luther's thought in the final years of his life concerned the identity of the true church. In Luther's view, the rise of Protestantism was not a split from the Roman Catholic Church, but the preservation of the true church which had always existed. It was the Roman hierarchy which had betrayed true Christianity and as such had become a false church (268). In reality, however, Hendrix argues that it was practical issues—the lived spirituality—of the different groups that hindered reconciliation, rather

than the politics or theology of the day. Even when some rapprochement appeared possible, neither Catholics nor Protestants were “willing to budge on the same practical issues that had divided them since the ninety-five theses of 1517: indulgences, celibacy of priests, enumerating sins at private confession, private masses, and so forth” (262). “Doctrines were discussable because they were concepts that mattered mainly to theologians; but religious practices were not negotiable because they gave access to the presence and power of the divine, and that access was the reason religion existed” (221). Where the divine is concerned, where everything is at stake, compromise becomes impossible.

In his *Martin Luther's Theology* Bernhard Lohse remarks that attempts to characterise Luther typically reflect the theology and values of the interpreter as much as those of Luther himself (3, 6). Hendrix locates the centre of Luther's theology and reforming vision in the idea of *freedom*. “Freedom for Luther meant living bound to Christ, and that freedom made him much more than a protester against indulgences or a critic of the pope. Now he was a man with a larger vision of what religion could be and a mission to realize that vision by making other people free” (115). While other interpreters might locate this centre elsewhere, Hendrix's proposal at least has substantial warrant from Luther's own works and words—not to mention his name. This is an excellent biography that not only introduces Luther the reformer but also humanises Luther the man. It is likely that all interested persons, from Luther scholars to laity, will find here much to consider, inform, and inspire.

GILLIAN R. EVANS. *THE ROOTS OF THE REFORMATION: TRADITION, EMERGENCE AND RUPTURE*. DOWNERS GROVE: IVP ACADEMIC, 2012. 528PP. [ISBN: 978-0-8308-3947-6]

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Gillian Evans, Professor of medieval theology and intellectual history at Cambridge University, has written a lively, almost rollicking history, tracing the theological, ecclesial and socio-political roots of the Reformation. The twenty-three chapters are divided broadly into three historical periods, although the treatment of the topic is thematic rather than chronological. In the first part (chapters two through nine, after a brief introductory chapter), Evans introduces the themes which emerged in the early years and centuries of the church and which will occupy the major part of the story: the ideas of church and faith, the Bible, becoming and remaining a member of the church, the recurring problem of sin, especially in the lives of those already baptised, sacraments, church organisation and decision-making, and the relation between church and state.

Part two, entitled “Continuity and Change in the Middle Ages,” explores issues of monasticism and monastic education, the invention of the universities, the beginnings of academic theology, the rise of the preaching orders and the arts of preaching, lay religious experimentation and the emergence of rebels and dissidents. Layered throughout the treatment of these matters, however, are notes on and discussion of the

themes introduced in the first part, clearly demonstrating the continuing presence and relevance of these central issues, while also highlighting how they developed, morphed and changed in the medieval period.

Part three, “Continuity and Change From the Reformation” (chapters sixteen through twenty-three), deals with the Reformation period itself, beginning with the Renaissance, and following the story of Luther and his heirs, Henry VIII and English Lutheranism, the Anabaptists, Calvin and the Puritans, and the Catholic Reformation, before two final chapters on new dimensions of the church and state issue, and new questions with respect to the Bible. Again, this part continues the exploration of the central issues raised in part one in these new social, political and religious landscapes. A brief conclusion is then followed by a thirty page “Handlist of Reformation Concerns and Their History” – a synchronic and thematic treatment of the key issues which students studying church history units will find very helpful indeed.

The central argument of the book is clear: those issues which were so important in the progress of the Reformation were not new. Their roots go back to the earliest days of the church, and indeed, the same issues had come to the fore, sometimes in differing form, time and again in the Patristic and Medieval periods – and would continue to do so in the post-Reformation period, right up to the present. They are perennial. Further, it becomes clear that it was not simply the issues or the personalities themselves which drove the “success” of the Reformation. Where previous attempts at reform had been effectively suppressed, the new social, political and educational realities of the early sixteenth century meant that Luther’s Reformation, and those of his associates, were given the opportunity to take root and become established.

The great strength of the book is not simply Evans’ identification and discussion of the central issues, but her mastery of the primary sources, and her artful telling of the story. Numerous characters are introduced through their memoirs and other writings, and interesting bypaths are explored, the whole picture becoming more and more detailed, coloured, and vibrant in the telling. The style is easy, deeply informed, and at times quite humorous – for example, Abelard’s shift into the profession of theology, “an obvious career move” (162), or the wry comment that “Henry...began to feel that there was much to be said for the Lutherans’ ideas, especially the view that the pope was antichrist, a usurper, and that the proper head of a local church was the Christian magistrate, in fact just such a magistrate as himself” (323).

Ultimately, the crux of the Reformation was salvation: how ordinary people might experience the grace of God in salvation and Christian life based solely on the saving efficacy of Christ’s work at the cross, and communicated through the Scriptures.

The essential complaint rising up from the grass roots...was that the institutional church had overextended itself and was making excessive claims, requiring the faithful to comply with human impositions which were not God’s requirements at all. So this was at root an ecclesiological challenge as well as a personal one. Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith was a bold attempt to cut through layers of complexity and detailed requirements, and to offer believers a simple promise. All they had to do was believe. They did not have to earn their way to heaven by doing penances or good works. Anyone could hope for heaven who had Christ

as his or her Savior. But to adopt that view was to reject much of the apparatus of the institutional church, by which it set much store and in which it had a large investment, financial as well as spiritual (466).

The book has not been without criticism, however, especially in its first edition, where a significant number of errors of historical detail were identified by scholars. The publishers acknowledged these faults and quickly responded by issuing a corrected second edition. This raises an interesting question concerning the value of the book overall. For me, Evans' book is valuable because of her wide-angle approach to the Reformation and its causes. It tells a large and complex story encompassing many centuries. The errors of factual detail are important, but concern the detail of the story at the micro rather than the macro level. Make no mistake: the errors were errors indeed, and needed to be corrected if the book was to retain its value. Nevertheless, it is at the level of the big picture, tracing the significant themes which weave through the centuries continuing and changing, that the book makes its contribution and by which it should ultimately be appraised. On this basis, I consider the book to be valuable indeed, but also counsel prospective buyers to ensure they obtain the revised edition. (This review is of the first edition.)

This work will reward anyone seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the Reformation, or indeed, the sheer scope and variety of western church history up to the Reformation. Students and ordinary Christians will benefit much from reading this story and thinking not only about the Reformation but about contemporary Christian life and church in the light of the many developments, events, personalities and conflicts that Evans has so masterfully detailed. Teachers will also appreciate Evans' work for its detailed exposition, her insightful argument concerning the key issues which lay deeply rooted in the history leading to the flowering of the Reformation, the abundant use of diverse primary sources, and the many byways and cameos which make the story so come alive.

For myself, I appreciated all this, and more besides: the careful nuance whereby Evans distinguished new and emerging developments help me understand and distinguish aspects of the story which previously had been hazy. Further, the many insights into everyday Christian life in these earlier periods of our own story, and the pastoral strategies employed for the care and development of God's people then, help me think about Christian life and pastoral formation now. There is much to appreciate and reflect on in this commendable text.