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# Hearer of the Triune God: Martin Luther's Reading of Noah

Mickey Mattox

Marquette University, [mickey.mattox@marquette.edu](mailto:mickey.mattox@marquette.edu)

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# HEARER OF THE TRIUNE GOD

## *Martin Luther's Reading of Noah*

MICKEY L. MATTOX

*"Sola autem experientia facit theologum."*<sup>1</sup>

So said Martin Luther, at table with friends and admirers in 1531, comparing the practice that makes a good jurist, to the experience that, "alone," makes a good theologian. Of course, Luther had a sometimes confusing habit of identifying different realities in the Christian faith as "alone" central: e.g., Christ alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, etc. Similarly, he sometimes identified different doctrines as the "chief article" (*der Hauptartikel*) of the faith: e.g., justification by grace through faith alone, the doctrine of the Trinity, or the two natures in the one Person, Christ the Lord. Confusing though these varying statements may sometimes have become, the best modern studies of Luther's thought have repeatedly confirmed that they hung together in a generally coherent and consistent manner within Luther's larger theological vision.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, varying emphases indicate not theological confusion on Luther's part, but, instead, varying judgments as to which truths needed to be emphasized in which situations. Luther really was, as has often been said, an "occasional theologian."

With both Luther's general theological coherence and these varying emphases in mind, one wonders just what he thought was at stake when he said that "*experientia sola*" makes the theologian. Indeed, unlike those other "solas," this one seems to stand in some tension with the others, particularly with the priority Luther assigned to Holy Scripture. In his opposition to the "enthusiasts" (*die Schwärmer*), for example, who claimed an immediate experience of God, Luther held fast to the revelation of God given, not in the immediacy of internal religious experience, but in

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1. "Experience alone, however, makes the theologian." WA TR 1:16.13.
  2. See, e.g., Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie: Eine Vergegenwärtigung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999). This consensus is long-standing, since at least the publication of Julius Köstlin's aptly-titled *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und ihrem inneren Zusammenhange* (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1863); ET, *The Theology of Luther in its Historical Development and Inner Harmony*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897).

the clear, and clearly external, Word of God given in Holy Scripture.<sup>3</sup> As Jaroslav Pelikan observed long ago, Luther hesitated to allow for instances of the direct experience of divine speech, even in the case of the heroic men and women of faith whose stories were told in the Bible. For example, lecturing through Genesis for the last ten years of his academic career (1535–45), Luther imagined the “holy patriarchs” hearing the Word of God not directly, as a voice from above or within, but indirectly, i.e., from their elders. The voice of God was mediated: Adam, for example, spoke for God to his progeny, Seth in turn to his progeny, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

Such a reading of the patriarchal histories surely reflected a certain reticence on Luther’s part to legitimate appeals to direct inspiration. At the same time, it firmly supported the ministry of the Word of God given to the church’s called ministers, including the students who gathered to hear those Genesis lectures. Following the paradigmatic example of the biblical patriarchs, Lutheran believers should expect to hear the Word of God from those given the ministry of the Word, i.e., the pastors. With Luther’s concern to bracket out direct inspiration in mind, one might well surmise that experience for him meant nothing more than being an attentive hearer of the Word of God, written and proclaimed. The theologian, then, is experienced in the ongoing task of faithfully attending to the Word of God given in the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

An important episode in the familiar story of the young Luther’s theological development confirms this understanding of experience. Elements of lived experience had been embedded centrally in the nominalist soteriology epitomized by the late medieval theologian Gabriel Biel, whose works the young Luther had studied diligently, and against which he had reacted strongly. Biel had confidently asserted that praxis—“*lectio, meditatio, oratio*” (reading [Scripture], meditation, and prayer)—makes the theologian. As the late Heiko Oberman observed, however, for Biel this sequence denotes not the experience of the Christian life properly so called, but of the preparation for grace that necessarily precedes the infusion of sanctifying charity, by cooperation with which the faithful afterward persevere toward the justice requisite to the *visio dei*.<sup>6</sup>

3. See Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 144–50.

4. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer’s Exegetical Writings*, Luther’s Works: Companion Volume (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), esp. 103–8.

5. See Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Luther on the Experience of Faith,” *Heythrop Journal* 21:1 (1980): 50–56.

6. Heiko A. Oberman, “‘Iustitia Christi’ and ‘Iustitia Dei’: Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification,” *Harvard Theological Review* 59:1 (1966): 1–26; esp. 6–13. The sequence in Biel is cited on p. 12, n. 22.

Against such ideas, Luther famously insisted on an alternative sequence of lived experience as constitutive for the theologian as one who knows God: "*Vivendo, immo moriendo et damnando fit theologum.*" "One becomes a theologian by living, by dying, and in fact, by being damned."<sup>7</sup> Living, dying, and being damned are for Luther central experiences in the Christian life, indeed ones with which he considered himself quite familiar. Later, in the preface to the 1539 edition of his German writings Luther offered a modified sequence. Authentic Christian experience, he said, includes a modified triad of elements: *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and testing).<sup>8</sup> One's reading and interpretation of Holy Scripture is ever to be tried and tested in the lived experience of the Christian life. Moreover, since in Luther's understanding the believer always comes to the Word of God as a sinner, he or she always experiences it as both judgment (Law) and grace (Gospel). The theologian, having been formed in the crucible of life and death, of judgment and grace, is experienced with how God is "wonderful in his saints," i.e., as one whose very life is marked by the alternating rhythms of Law and Gospel.

In what follows, I want not to challenge these well-established meanings of experience in Luther's theology, but to examine a further, mystical element of experience that, notwithstanding his reticence about direct revelation, Luther expects to shape the lives of at least some Christians. To do that, I offer a close reading of his interpretation of the story of Noah in the Genesis lectures. Luther offers a fascinating and perplexing reading of Noah, one in which we find not only the direct experience of divine speech, but also a curious and highly suggestive example of the simultaneity of God in his prophet. Because Luther's reading of the patriarchal histories is so thoroughly autobiographical, moreover, this exegetical episode underscores the importance for his broad theological outlook of the mystical experience of God, including Luther's own mystical experience of God. This is not to claim that Luther is to be understood as a self-conscious member of any particular late medieval mystical school. It is, rather, simply to agree with a broad consensus that mysticism of a very distinctive kind constitutes a vital and essential element in Luther's theology.<sup>9</sup>

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7. WA 52:113.28–9.

8. WA 50:659.4.

9. See, e.g., Volker Leppin, "Transformationen spätmittelalterlicher Mystik bei Luther," in *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar Erfahren*, ed. Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 165–85.

In the present case, this has to do not with the young Luther and his “evangelical breakthrough,” but with the old man, Dean of the Wittenberg theological faculty, a steady hand at the task of training ministers for the evangelical churches in the emerging Lutheran movement. In the thought of the elder Luther, too, we find a mysticism that is all his own, one that deeply informs his understanding of religious experience. Before we come to Noah however, I offer some further remarks about Luther’s understanding of *experientia*, particularly religious experience. Since any properly Christian mysticism must by definition be Trinitarian, I also include some introductory comments on Luther’s understanding of the relationship between the Trinitarian God of the Bible and the reading of the Bible itself.

### *I. Experience and the God of the Bible*

In a recent examination of *experientia* in Luther’s understanding, Markus Matthias helpfully draws out the understanding of the term in medieval Aristotelian philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Philosophically, Matthias notes, *experientia* denotes a middle ground between sense perception (*notitia*) and knowledge (*scientia*). Memory holds in store, so to speak, the various data of sense perception, and weaves them together to form the generalizations that constitute *experientia* per se. The physician, for example, generalizes from memories the sense perception of symptoms encountered in the past in order to reach generalizations, i.e., “practical knowledge,” on the basis of which to judge a particular set of symptoms encountered in the present. The art (for Aristotle, *teécnh*) of medicine thus takes *experientia* as the basis for action in the present.

Thus understood, *experientia* means the application of discursive reason to sense perception in order to gain practical knowledge. *Experientia* bridges the gap between the sense perception of particular things and a practical knowledge of things in themselves. As Matthias notes, this means that when Luther speaks about the “*experientia sola*,” we could say that he means only that the theologian proves him or herself in the application of past theological experience to problems faced in the present. Theology is an art (*teécnh*), the groundwork for which is laid in the painstaking study of Scripture and theology, and the good

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10. Markus Matthias, “The Epistemological Function of *Experientia* for Martin Luther (1483–1546)” (Paper presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, 2011). Cf. the Dutch original, “*Sola autem experientia facit theologum* (Maarten Luther),” *Alleen door ervaring word je theoloog* (Utrecht-Kampen-Leiden, 2009).

theologian, the *pastor bonus*, is an artist skilled in the application of this experience to Christian lives today. Surely Luther considered himself, too, skilled in just this way.

Importantly, the practical knowledge gained through experience is inferior to “real knowledge,” such as, for example, the knowledge of things in themselves that was characteristic of Adam and Eve prior to their fall into sin. This so-called *prisca scientia* consisted in the intuitive knowledge of things in themselves. Thus, for example, Adam named the animals in Genesis 2 not arbitrarily, but with a full knowledge of the general nature of each. Adam named them, in other words, not only to have something to call them, but because each was what its name said. This knowledge, according to Luther and a broad medieval tradition, has been lost.<sup>11</sup> Knowledge of things must now be gained the hard, and fallible, way, i.e., through sense perception and experience.

At the same time, as Matthias notes, there is also a tradition, associated perhaps most closely with Bernard of Clairvaux, of spiritual knowledge imparted immediately through internal experience. Luther’s relationship to Bernard has been the subject of a good deal of scholarly research in recent years. In the most recent contribution to this vibrant stream of scholarship, Franz Posset has argued in some detail that Bernard played a crucial role in the early Luther’s theological development.<sup>12</sup> For present purposes, the question is not Bernard and Luther per se, but the significance of inner knowledge of a theological sort for the later Luther. The notion of the inner knowledge of God suggests a real and certain knowledge, imparted directly, rather than one reached discursively through practical reason. As Bengt Hoffman suggests, “the mystic is persuaded that the seeking person can know in a way in which knowledge is not attainable by sensate experience

11. Matthias points the reader to WA 9,69.22, Luther’s marginal comments on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (1509). The point can also be supported from the Genesis lectures. For some highly suggestive reflections on the pristine, human knowledge of God in Luther’s exegesis of Genesis 1, see David S. Yeago, “Martin Luther on Grace, Law, and Moral Life: Prolegomena to an Ecumenical Discussion of Veritatis Splendor,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 163–91.
12. See his *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt and Wittenberg* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011). The literature on Luther and Bernard is extensive. See, inter alia, Theo M. M. A. C. Bell, “Luther’s Reception of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (1995): 245–77; Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, “The Significance of the Sola Fide and the Sola Gratia in the Theology of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Martin Luther (1483–1546),” *Luther-Bulletin, Tijdschrift voor interconfessioneel Lutheronderzoek* 18 (2009): 20–43; Franz Posset, *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999).

alone.”<sup>13</sup> Surely Luther does not envision the believer receiving direct, new revelation from God moment by moment. But as will be shown below, the inner witness of the Spirit, so dear to John Calvin, and a knowledge of God that is not mediated by sensate experience but given immediately, are by no means absent from Luther’s thought. This is particularly so when one comes to the question of what we might call the inner certainty of revealed truth.

In a wide-ranging new study, Susan Schreiner has argued convincingly that the certainty of religious knowledge is a central problem already in the Reformation-era theological controversies, long before the time of René Descartes.<sup>14</sup> The crucial element Schreiner identifies in Luther’s case is his experience of the certainty that one has God for a Father, i.e., the existential capacity to cry out, “Abba Father!” (Gal. 4:6). As an exegetical test case, she examined Luther’s understanding of the “angel of light” mentioned in II Cor. 11:14. The question posed by this text is both simple and profound: since the devil can disguise himself as an “angel of light,” how can the believer be certain about his or her own religious experience? The devil can quote Scripture, too. In light of that fact, how does one know that one has read the Scripture aright? In Luther’s case, this question was acute, for he was faced not only with testing the spirits of his own religious experience, but also with the contradictory claims and experience of his opponents. “How,” the asked, “can you alone be right?” Fully aware that the devil is capable of the most profound deception, and that he himself had become a central figure on the stage in which the great last battle between God and the devil was being played out,<sup>15</sup> Luther found refuge in the comfort of a certainty that could be given only by the Holy Spirit, what he called the “certainty of faith.” This is nothing less than the very faith that enables the believer to cry out “Abba Father!” and so to know God as benevolent Father. The assurance of God’s fatherly love,

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13. Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-Examination of Luther’s Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 15. Hoffman’s characterization of this knowledge as “non-rational” is misguided. Supra-rational would be a more appropriate term.
  14. Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); cf. idem, “Unmasking the Angel of Light: The Problem of Deception in Martin Luther and Teresa of Avila,” in *Mystics; Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler, and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
  15. On this motif in Luther’s thought, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).

according to Luther, cannot be gained through natural reason, but comes only through the Holy Spirit. In defending his conviction that the Christian may be certain of his or her salvation, Schreiner writes, "Luther was irresistibly drawn to the experiential, affective language of interiority and immediacy in order to describe the certitude of the Spirit." She concludes that "Luther's ultimate criterion for 'testing the spirits' became the experience of certitude itself."<sup>16</sup>

Considered in the light of Matthias's careful examination of the concept of experience, Schreiner's work puts us in a better position to recognize the crucial role of experience in Luther's theology, especially when we place both these studies alongside some of the results of recent research on his Trinitarian theology. The relationship between God and the believer, governed by the divine Word of promise and the God-given response of living faith, have long been held to constitute the center of Luther's theology. To be sure, there is much here that is central. Thanks to the pioneering work of scholars like Christine Helmer, however, we are now in a much better position to appreciate the importance of God as Holy Trinity in Luther's thought, and so to recognize the irreducibly Trinitarian structure and dynamic of his understanding of faith.<sup>17</sup> Luther interprets the Christian life, in short, armed with a robust sense for the myriad ways in which the real distinctions between the divine persons gives shape to authentic Christian experience. This corrects the common misperception that Luther's distinctiveness as a theologian can be neatly summed up in the stock observation that he was "Christocentric." Never mind for the moment that this is a term that could be applied to virtually the entire Christian tradition before Luther. More than merely Christocentric, Luther was in fact theocentric, with *theos* understood in a dynamically Trinitarian way.

As will be shown below, Luther's Trinitarian understanding of the experience of God is exhibited powerfully in his exegesis of the story of holy Noah. Here as so often elsewhere, Luther's exegesis is marked by an extraordinary capacity and willingness to enter into these texts

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16. "Unmasking the Angel of Light," 129–30. Emphasis mine.

17. Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship Between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther's Works (1523–46)* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1999). For some of the exegetical implications, see also her "Luther's Trinitarian Hermeneutic and the Old Testament," *Modern Theology* 18:1 (January 2002): 49–73. I offer my own analysis of Luther as a trinitarian reader of the Bible in Dennis Bielfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox, and Paul R. Hinlicky, *The Substance of the Faith: Doctrinal Theology in the Tradition of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), ch. 1.



imaginatively.<sup>18</sup> Luther's figural engagement with the patriarchal histories in particular is richly marked by his imaginative attempt to enter into the mind and skin of the other, precisely in order to find himself. In short, in Luther's reading of biblical narrative, tropology—the text as it applies to the believer, and as it edifies her, particularly in the virtue of faith—dominates over allegory proper. It has been rightly said of the young Luther that his figural reading of Scripture tends to reduce the three traditional allegorical levels of textual meaning (allegory, tropology, and anagogy) to one, namely, the tropological meaning as it applies to the virtue of faith.<sup>19</sup> The elder Luther's readings of the stories of men as diverse as Abraham and Paul only underscores that point.

### *Three Motifs*

One would be mistaken to infer from this, as many have done, that Luther's exegesis was subjective and, to that extent, anthropocentric rather than theocentric. To the contrary, recent research oriented toward identifying the distinctive elements in Luther's exegesis underscores its orientation *extra nos*, toward the God who forms the faithful through the testings exemplified in the lives of the biblical "saints." Luther's reading of biblical narrative, in short, is not just tropological but also properly theological, and solid research has enabled us more readily to recognize some of the daring theological motifs he employs when describing encounters with God. Examining cases of seeming divine abandonment or testing, for example, Michael Parsons has shown that Luther sometimes speaks of the *playfulness* of an untamed God who "sports" with the saints, which is something like a cross between the way a father plays with his infant child and the way a cat plays with a mouse she's just caught.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Further to this question, one may consult my own work, "Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs," *Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesis 1535–1545* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). See now also John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008). Interestingly, David C. Steinmetz finds in the exegetical employment of the imagination an unexpected common ground between Luther and Ignatius Loyola. See his "Luther and Loyola," *Interpretation* 47:1 (1993): 5–14.
19. See David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1980), esp. ch. 2.
20. Parsons examines the differences between Luther and Calvin in their readings of the moral and theological problems posed by the patriarchal histories, including notably the Akedah, in his *Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narratives: Reformation Thought and Narrative Text* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

This motif puts one in mind of a remark attributed to Steven Ozment, to the effect that Luther's deepest theological question is whether God is herbivorous or carnivorous. Wherever Luther deploys such a 'strategy' in his theological reading of Scripture, the reader finds there an edginess, an exegetical daring, rare in the history of interpretation. Faced with the divine command to sacrifice Isaac, the son of the divine promise, for example, Luther flatly declares that God now appears as the "enemy" of the patriarch Abraham. Just so, he figures, God is indeed the One against whom every believer struggles in the hour of extreme testing. This is a "strange work" (*opus alienum*) Luther admits, one that is not "proper" to God (*opus proprium*), i.e., that does not express God's true nature, character or intent. Indeed, Luther says, God "sports" with Abraham in a way that flatly contradicts God's own Word of promise. The only faithful way to resolve such extreme testing, Luther advises, is to cling to that Word, in this case through an active faith that, if necessary, God will raise Isaac from the dead (cf. Heb. 11).

A second distinctive exegetical motif prominent in Luther's exegesis, one that tends to evoke roughly equal parts wonder and consternation, is that of the mystery of a God who, again in the saints' extreme hour of testing, hides himself behind the form of the devil. This divine hiddenness is complemented, as Schreiner points out, by a devil who masquerades, with remarkable effectiveness, as God.<sup>21</sup> Thus, for example, in Luther's interpretation of the story of saint Joseph—whom he describes simply as "*homo perfectus*"—God hides and the devil masquerades, as Joseph's trial on the charge of rape results in his conviction and the sentence of death. The "light" of "God" shines on Potiphar and his wife, while the "darkness" of death hangs over righteous Joseph and "the devil" abandons him to certain death in an Egyptian prison: "We have God on our side," wicked Potiphar and his wife "screech out!" Experience in this case can be contradicted only on the basis of faith, i.e., what holy Joseph knows from the Word of God. But because Joseph knows God, and trusts in God, he is able to withstand even this extreme experience of divine abandonment, and to emerge, eventually, the victor.<sup>22</sup>

A third motif now well recognized in scholarship on Luther's exegesis, and crucially important for present purposes, is his attempt to deepen the patristic Trinitarian and Christological reading of the Old Testa-

21. "Unmasking the Angel of Light," 121.

22. For a fuller treatment of Luther's exegesis of Joseph, see Mattox, "Defender," ch. 7.

ment.<sup>23</sup> Here Luther's interpretation of Genesis 18, the appearance of the Lord to saints Abraham and Sarah at the Oaks of Mamre in the form of three angels, stands out. The experience of these great saints, Luther insists, was the experience of the triune God, present in the form of three men. Given what the Christian reader already knows full well, i.e., that the one God is a trinity of fully divine persons, he argues, it is right and good to "find" the Trinity in these three visitors. Using to his advantage a distinction common in sixteenth century humanist textual theory, he argues that the *res scripturae sacrae* holds the key to the right interpretation of the *verba scripturae sacrae*. Therefore, even if texts like Genesis 18 are not the best to "carry into battle" in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, nevertheless they are important for the rhetorical adornment of an argument best advanced against its critics by means of dialectical reason supported by other, "plainer" texts.

The prominence of these motifs in Luther's interpretation underscores the confidence with which he draws on orthodox, catholic theology, or, perhaps better, on the *regula fidei* in finding appropriate Christian readings for difficult texts. At the same time, however, one has to admit that there is a distinctive subjectivity at work here. Luther is drawing exegetically not only on good Christian teaching about God but also, and critically, on his own experience of how God is, and how God acts, in order to make sense of what he finds in the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Old Testament. Confidence in his own experience of God also puts us somewhere very close to the nerve center of Luther's Christianity, the crossroads, if you will, where theology, exegesis and lived experience come together.

It is significant, and it often goes unnoticed, that in many of his readings of the stories of the biblical saints Luther charts an exegetical course that runs from the Spirit through the Word to the Father.<sup>24</sup> Schreiner's work correctly draws attention to the significance of Luther's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, again a somewhat underappreciated element in Luther's theology, especially for his understanding of the experience that makes the theologian. As I will try to show in the following remarks, that point can be driven home even further, and radicalized in significant ways, when we examine Luther's readings of the experiences of the biblical saints.

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23. See Mickey L. Mattox, "Sancta Sara, Mater Ecclesiae: Martin Luther's Catholic Exegesis of Genesis 18:1-15," *Pro Ecclesia* X, no. 3 (2001): 295-320. See now also, Mattox, "Defender," ch. 3.

24. See *The Substance of the Faith*, 51-6.

This is particularly so in the case of Luther's reading of the story of the holy man Noah. Luther puts himself—his faith, his experience—at the center of his reading of the stories of the testings and trials of the biblical saints in a manner quite unlike, so far as I know, anything found in the antecedent exegetical tradition. That fact is more than a historical curiosity, for it presents a challenge, perhaps even a stone of stumbling, for those of us who would like to add Luther's voice to the contemporary project of theological exegesis. About that, more below.

## *II. Holy Noah*

Considering the role of experience in Luther's Genesis exegesis, I think immediately of his reading of the experience of saint Eve. As I have tried to show elsewhere, Eve's experience—her temptation and her fall into sin and unbelief, as well as her restoration through faith in God's promise—is for Luther a paradigmatic story that can be applied broadly to every Christian, male or female.<sup>25</sup> For present purposes, this helpfully reminds us of the broad range of typological and/or figural applications the ever-inventive Luther was able to find in the stories of the biblical saints. It also reminds us that he saw holy Eve as a properly experienced Christian, and therefore, as a theologian, and so it is not as jarring as it might otherwise have been when we hear him describe her as a careful student of the promise of God, and then go on to explain that she preached a spontaneous sermon to her household following the birth of Seth, who was given to her to replace the murdered Abel.<sup>26</sup>

Luther's reading of one saint also informed his interpretations of the stories of the others, and so Eve functions as an appropriate bridge to Luther's reading of Noah's story. Commenting his way through Genesis 6, not too long after he had finished his treatment of Eve, the seemingly senseless command God gave to Noah—"go build an ark!"—put Luther in mind of the first woman. Noah had the faith to obey the command given to him, Luther insisted, not because he thought the command made sense, but because he respected the one who had given it. Thus he contrasts Noah to Eve, who fell into sin, Luther reasons, because when faced with temptation she subjected the divine command itself to critical analysis rather than simply honoring it on account of its giver.

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25. See my "Defender," cited above, ch. 2-3.

26. The question of Luther and the preaching of Eve is examined further in Mickey L. Mattox, "Luther on Eve, Women and the Church," *Lutheran Quarterly* NS 17:4 (2003): 456-74.

Luther's neat connection of these two figures belies the exegetical difficulties he had faced when interpreting Eve's story. A crucial question there had been whether Eve had heard the divine *mandatum*—"Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!"—directly from God, or indirectly through her husband. Luther was ambivalent about the question, and in any case he thought the unfallen Eve was already "full of the knowledge of God," which, as shown above, means that she had direct, intuitive knowledge of God. But the question of what Eve had actually heard also provided an important *point de départ* for him. While some exegetes had been willing to allow that Eve might have been excused for disobeying a divine command she had heard only indirectly, i.e., from a human agent (her husband), Luther would hear none of it. Adam's word was the Word of God, Luther argued, and Eve was obligated to receive and obey it as from God. Luther insisted, in other words, that the authority of the ministry, first given by God to Adam and first exercised in his preaching to Eve, is the authority of the Word of God itself.

Luther's solution to this question informs his readings of the stories of the experience of God throughout the text of Genesis. Typically, moreover, he uses this solution to downplay the subjectivist or spiritualist potential of any text where God seems to converse with the biblical saints directly. In the case of Noah, for example, Luther struggled to attribute what would otherwise seem to be clear cases of direct divine address, and hence of direct experiences of the divine, to the mediating voices of the patriarchs. Thus, God and his prophets are closely identified. "God said" and "the Lord said" really mean that "Lamech said" or "Methuselah said." The Holy Spirit is somehow "in" the heart of the prophet, Luther insists, which makes him the "mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit."<sup>27</sup> With this mouthpiece function in view, Luther did not skimp on his praise of Noah. He "was the greatest prophet," Luther said, "worthy to be called the second Adam and the prince of the human race, through whose mouth God speaks and calls the entire world to repentance."<sup>28</sup>

27. LW 2:44; WA 42:193.18–19: "Quia enim Noah fidelis verbi minister est et organum Spiritus sancti . . .".

28. LW 2:26; WA 42:280.5–16: "Fuit igitur Noah summus Propheta, cuius similem mundus non habuit. Nam primum longissimo tempore docet: Deinde docet de poena universali totius Mundi, ac quidem annum definit, quo ventura sit. Christus quoque vaticinatur de extremo iudicio, quo universa caro peribit. 'Sed de hora illa, dicit, nemo scit, praeter Patrem, qui hoc sibi reservavit'. Jonas praedicit quadraginta dies Ninitis, Ieremias septuaginta annos captivitatis, Daniel hebdomadas septuaginta usque

This approach to the prophetic ministry of Noah had many advantages. The identification of God's voice with the voice of the minister provided, for example, a ready explanation for texts in which God seems to discover something he had not previously known and thus to "repent" of a judgment or course of action previously determined. That is to say, Luther locates the repentance spoken of here firmly on the human side of this divine-human relationship. Still, Luther's emphatic insistence on the presence of God in the prophet is striking. Talking his way through the text, Luther refused to reduce Noah himself to the status of a mere instrument. To the contrary, he read the commerce between God and the prophet as a two-way exchange. Thus, the voice of God is the voice of the prophet, while at the same time the prophet's eyes, the prophet's feelings are the eyes and feelings of God. In Genesis 6, for example, just before the great flood, God is said to have "seen" (i.e., become aware of) the wickedness of the human race and so to have been "sorry" for making them. The biblical phrases "the Lord saw" and "the Lord was sorry" mean, on Luther's reading, that Noah's eyes saw human wickedness, and that his voice announced God's sorrow at their creation. God is sorry, grieved and vexed, Luther says, in so far as Noah himself experienced sorrow, grief and vexation at the sight of human wickedness. The prophet and his God see and feel as one, but the action occurs in and through the human agent.

One should hasten to add that this is not just a strategy hastily adopted to avoid the error of anthropomorphism, about which, as we will see momentarily, Luther is not terribly concerned. To the contrary, it is a vivid (and mystical!) example of the real presence of God in the Christian, a divine-human intimacy that, in the peculiar form we find it here, seems distinctive to Martin Luther. Wilhelm Pauck insisted long ago that a vigorous 'Christ mysticism' distinguishes Luther's theology in a significant way from that of Philip Melanchthon and the later Lutheran theological tradition.<sup>29</sup> Could the divine presence in holy Noah be understood as an instance of this 'Christ mysticism?' Probably not, for Luther speaks repeatedly not of Christ but of the Holy Spirit

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ad futurum Christum. Sunt hae insignes Prophetiae, quibus certum tempus, locus, personae describuntur.

Sed haec Noah vaticinatio vincit omnes, quod per Spiritum sanctum praedicat tam certum numerum annorum, quo totum genus humanum perituro sit. Dignus, qui vocetur alter Adam, et Princeps generis humani, per cuius os Deus loquitur et totum Mundum vocat ad poenitentiam."

29. "Luther and Melanchthon," in *Luther and Melanchthon in the History and Theology of the Reformation*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 13-31.

in relation to Noah's preaching. Still, the simultaneity of the divine and the human in saint Noah does seem to suggest an 'interpenetration' of the divine and the human. Noah judges human sin in a divine way, while God sees and feels it in a human way. Because it suggests this duality, the trajectory of Luther's line of thought seems, not to put too fine a point on it, Christological rather than pneumatological. It seems to be, in other words, an instance of divine-human common action that relates at least by analogy to the union of the divine and the human in the one Person, Jesus Christ. God experiences the world, it seems, through his saint.

At the same time, however, Luther clearly recognizes that one cannot say that God's presence in holy Noah enabled God to know or see or experience something that God had not already known or seen or experienced. Seeing the world and grieving over its sin by means of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Noah effected no change in God, either in his purposes or in his being. To the contrary, Luther insists that God "sees everything from eternity."<sup>30</sup> "Therefore from eternity God is steadfast and unchanging in his purpose; he sees and knows everything. But he does not reveal this to the godly except at his own fixed time, so that they themselves should see it too."<sup>31</sup> Change in knowledge through the sense perception of the world is located firmly on the human side of the divine-human relationship in the prophet.

As mentioned above, questions related to presence of the Holy Spirit in Noah led Luther into a brief digression about the anthropomorphites, those who, in the long tradition of Christian heresiology, were said to have "assigned human form to the Divine Being."<sup>32</sup> Earlier in the Genesis lectures, he had defended the traditional answer to this problem and insisted that of course God "in His essence is altogether unknowable." At the same time, however, he also worried, especially in view of the possible misuse of papal authority, that the anthropomorphites had been unjustly condemned. They wanted to preserve the biblical way of speaking of God, Luther imagined, to accept the childlike language of Scripture rather than substituting the philosophical language pre-

30. LW 2:44; WA 42:293.21: "Non igitur ea sententia est, quasi Deus ab aeterno illa non viderit: vidit ab aeterno omnia."

31. LW 2:45; WA 42:293.25-7: "Est igitur Deus ab aeterno firmus in suo consilio et constans, videt et scit omnia. Sed haec non nisi suo certo tempore revelat Deus piis, ut ipsi quoque ea videant." I have slightly altered the LW translation here. Where I have "steadfast," the LW gives "immutable."

32. LW 2:45; WA 42:293.37-8: ". . . divinae substantiae tribuerent formam hominis."

ferred by the proud.<sup>33</sup> In his analysis of the presence of God in Noah, Luther again expressed sympathy with the anthropomorphites, and for the same reason. If they had claimed that the very *essentia divina* is in human form, he admitted, then they were rightly “found guilty of heresy.” But God, who by nature dwells in “inaccessible light”<sup>34</sup> (*lucem inaccessibilem*) always “lowers Himself to the level of our weak comprehension and presents Himself to us in images.”<sup>35</sup> Revelation, we might say, is accommodated to human capacity; directing the simple to Christ means directing them to the incarnate One. “It is better and safer,” Luther said, “to stay at the manger of Christ the Man.”<sup>36</sup> He pointed out that God stooped down to the level of human comprehension, at the baptism of Jesus, for example, and revealed himself in the incarnate Son, through the dove, and by the heavenly voice. The learned, too, are obliged to worship God in this revealed form.

Luther’s connection of the Holy Spirit to the voice of the ministry instituted by God thus functions not only to underscore ministerial authority, and not only to reinforce the connection of God to the world through those who truly know God, but also, and in very traditional fashion, to insist that Christian faith and worship are centered on the revealed God. The Spirit leads the Christian to “God as He has enveloped Himself and become incarnate,”<sup>37</sup> and, just so, to the loving heart of the Father. This point forcefully reminds us that as Luther understood the matter, the God with whom Noah was dealing was none other other than God the Holy Trinity. Luther can teach the *ad intra* distinctions in the Godhead with the best of the western tradition.<sup>38</sup> The God of authentic Christian experience is the God Who is One not only in the believer’s experience, but in His own undivided internal Life as well. Luther’s reticence here to skip over the revealed God and jump into apophatic theology with both feet reflects not only his much-vaunted Christocentrism, but also his realist convictions regarding the eternal distinctions between the divine persons in the one God.

Luther was also aware that the prophecies proclaimed could not be neatly reduced to the promise of the coming Seed that had been passed

33. LW 1:14–15; WA 42:12b.

34. LW 2:46; WA 42:294.26. The allusion is to I Tim. 6:16.

35. LW 2:25; WA 42:294.3–4.

36. LW 2:45; WA 42:293.30–1.

37. LW 2:47; WA 42:295.26–7.

38. On this point, see *The Substance of the Faith*, 33–7, as well as the three disputations translated in the Appendix, 191–210.



down from Adam to Seth, Enos, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech. Luther's Noah had something different, something more, something other to say than had his patriarchal forbears. Therefore in the end Luther was not able to rest content with his insistence that a minister such as Noah heard only the words that had been spoken to him by his elders, though he seems to have tried very hard to do so, probably in order to restrain any creeping "enthusiasm" present among his young auditors. How did Noah know when it was time to announce God's imminent judgment? God was at work within Noah, Luther explained. The great man had the Holy Spirit. "We maintain," Luther says, "that Noah's heart was moved by the Holy Spirit, so that he realized that God was angry with man and wanted to destroy him."<sup>39</sup> The notion of the internal movement of the Holy Spirit in holy Noah's heart suggests "groanings too deep for words" spoken of in Romans 8:26. Is this the inner experience of God?

When we examine closely Luther's remarks on the movement of the Spirit of God within Noah, we discover the limit of his usual solution to the problem of direct divine address, i.e., to interpret each as an instance of divinely inspired human address. First, as mentioned above, Noah seems to have had explicit knowledge of some things the prophets before him did not know, namely, that God was about to destroy the human race by a flood, and that he should build an ark. Luther recognized that this would seem to require that the Spirit had imparted this knowledge to him in some special way, apart from the mediation of another man. Secondly, he knew that there came a time in Noah's life when there just weren't any old patriarchs around to tell him things. Still, in his interpretation of Genesis 7:1—"The Lord said to Noah . . ."—Luther insisted yet once more that "the ministry should be given the honor where it can be rightly maintained that God spoke through human beings."<sup>40</sup> He cited with approbation Luke 16:29, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."

But in the end he conceded, "I do not deny that after Methuselah's death Noah heard God speaking."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Luther was clearly struck by how much God seemed to have had to say to the prophet. "It is obvious," he said, "that God enjoys talking to Noah."<sup>42</sup> The source of this

39. LW 2:47; WA 42:295.19–21.

40. LW 2:82; WA 42:320.6–8. On Gen. 7:1.

41. LW 2:83; WA 42:321.3–4. On Gen. 7:1.

42. LW 2:88; WA 42:325.35. On Gen. 7:2–3. Cf. LW 2.143: "On several previous occasions we have stated the reason for such an abundance of words. The Holy Spirit is prolix, but not without purpose."

divine enjoyment, Luther figures, is simply God's love, the "friendly and kindly" (*amicum et faventem*) disposition of God toward his elect instrument, the happy side, so to speak, of the divine "sporting" with the saints. It also suggests in Noah just the kind of subjective assurance—i.e., the feeling of assurance that he is in a state of God's grace and favor—that Schreiner identified as crucial in Luther's attempt to discern the Spirit of God from an angel of light.<sup>43</sup> Luther's Noah had been left, as was Joseph many years later, alone, with nothing but the Word of his talkative God. In hearing this Word he experienced the favor of God. As with the Spirit, however, the Word of God is never alone. As Luther insisted in the *Large Catechism*, the Spirit of God leads the believer to Christ, who reveals the fatherly heart of God.<sup>44</sup> Mediated to St. Noah by the Holy Spirit, the very Word that he heard opens up the way to the "friendly and kindly" heart of the Father. Noah's experience of God, in short, is thoroughly Trinitarian: he meets the "kindly and friendly" Father, given through God's own Word, and in the Holy Spirit.

Luther's exegesis of Noah also reminds us that there is in his theology an anthropological ground for the mystical experience of the Word of God, viz., the human capacity to hear. While Platonically-inspired notions of mystical union or ecstatic knowledge might locate this ground in, say, the likeness of the soul to God, Luther by contrast identifies it aurally, i.e., with the human capacity to hear the divine address. What we find in the case of Noah, in short, is consistent with Luther's confession in the *De servo arbitrio* (1525) that even the fallen human being retains a "dispositive quality" or "passive capacity" for being "seized by the Spirit and touched by the grace of God."<sup>45</sup> Even fallen men can hear the speaking God.

The composite picture of the holy man Noah as Luther paints it now begins to emerge. He was "righteous" and "perfect."<sup>46</sup> His faith answered the commands of the "First Table" of the Law, while he

43. "Unmasking the Angel of Light," 128–9.

44. On this point, one may consult *The Substance of the Faith*, 14–22. Cf. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 439, i.e., Luther's exposition of the third article of the Apostles' Creed.

45. WA 18:636.16–22: "At si vim liberi arbitrii eam diceremus, qua homo aptus est rapti spiritu et imbui gratia Dei, ut qui sit creatus ad vitam vel mortem aeternam, recte diceretur; hanc enim vim, hoc est, aptitudinem, seu ut Sophistae loquuntur dispositivam qualitatem et passivam aptitudinem et nos confitemur, quam non arboribus neque bestiis inditam esse, quis est qui nesciat? neque enim pro anseribus (ut dicitur) coelum creavit." For a brief analysis of this text, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 256–7.

46. LW 2:55, on Gen. 6:9–10.

“walked in the fear of God” and so kept the commandments of the “Second Table.” Alongside these qualities, he was filled with the Spirit, possessed of a Christian interiority marked most notably by the peculiar intimacy of an ongoing dialogue with a communicative God, one who apparently enjoys a good conversation. The triune God not only speaks to and through his “chosen instrument,” but also listens to him, and, even more importantly, hears, sees and judges the world through him. The divine-human mutuality, the reciprocity we see at work in Luther’s reading of Noah is all the more significant when we recall, with Pelikan, the strongly autobiographical character of Luther’s exegesis. Experience makes not only the theologian, but the exegete, the pastor/prophet, and the Reformer as well.

### *Conclusions*

The careful parsing of the ins and outs of spiritual experience we see in Luther’s reading of the story of Noah is also found in his interpretation of other biblical saints. Without going into any great detail here, it is noteworthy that, for example, in his reading of saint Rachel, the mother of Joseph, Luther focused his attention on the pneumatological aspects of this great woman’s struggle for faith. The deep spiritual anguish Luther detected in her wrestling with the disappointment of barrenness, particularly when the other women in her household seemed so fertile, is striking. In the end, her prayer for children was answered, Luther surmised, because when she prayed the Holy Spirit within her prayed. These spiritual “groanings,” Luther figures, though they seemed like nothing, were in fact omnipotent in their power. Again, then, the theological action in the story features prominently the interior presence of the Holy Spirit, in this case as the author of saint Rachel’s prayer. Filled with the Spirit, she had God on her side, and so God had no choice but to answer her.

More than the case of Rachel, however, that of Noah brings to the surface some of the elements that make Luther’s Genesis lectures at once so fascinating, and so historically distant. Shocked into an apocalyptic frame of mind by the Roman church’s persecution of the very Gospel of which she had been made—and remained!—the bearer, Luther came to see himself in his own day in very much the same position as Noah had been in his.<sup>47</sup> The verve, the fire, the striking *churzpah*

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47. Note well, however, that Luther clearly admits that Noah’s faith was much greater than his own. LW 2:87; WA 42:323.40–41.

of the experiential and subjective side of Luther's reading of this story was derived from just this shocking experience, when Luther found himself unexpectedly—and unwillingly—on history's center stage. The subjectivity inherent in his conviction that God was, as in the days of Noah, seeing and judging the world through him, may have been lost on the admiring students who listened as the old man lectured through Genesis. But a sense of apocalyptic urgency is now recognized as one of the distinguishing features of the Lutheran side of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>48</sup> Here we step into the headwaters of that epoch-making mentalité. Likely, too, Luther's distinctive apocalypticism was apparent to at least some of his learned readers.<sup>49</sup> This is not the place to explore the connection, but perhaps we glimpse here one of the reasons why Luther's Genesis lectures were received with caution, even by some of his admirers, especially John Calvin.

Thinking through these connections we also discover one of the reasons why the objective of bringing Luther's voice into today's exegetical conversation, even among practitioners of the so-called "theological exegesis," proves so difficult. The Christian, the one who has the Spirit, is on Luther's account God's agent in this world, an instrument through whom God sees and by means of whom the Holy Spirit acts upon and judges the world. Luther thought God was acting upon and, yes, judging the world through him. By his own reckoning, he was caught up in a struggle of cosmic proportions. He believed that he had been given a central role to play in that struggle, and he committed himself to it utterly. After all, hearing and, much more, speaking the Word of God is, on Luther's account, a matter of life and death, an eschatological task for which those alone are fit who are ready to say, "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's!"

### *An Epilogue*

That might have provided a fitting last line. But since I now teach Martin Luther in the very Catholic institution where Dr. Kenneth Hagen served so long and well, I offer a few brief concluding questions—each of them reflecting an aspect of the traditional Catholic criticism of

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48. For a review of recent literature on this topic, see Robin B. Barnes, "Review Essay: Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience in Reformation Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33:2 (2002): 261–74.

49. Maxfield insightfully portrays professor Luther as having recovered an imminent sense of the parousia, and having clearly communicated that to his students. See Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, ch. 5.

Luther—together with my own tentative responses. Taken together, these could be thought of as questions that suggest a program for Luther research at Marquette in the coming years, one that continues the work begun so well under Hagen's leadership.

The first question is occasioned by my reading of Robert Barron's 2007 book, *The Priority of Christ*. Barron, following both a venerable Catholic tradition (Etienne Gilson, et al.) as well as a steady stream of modern Catholic theological studies, situates Luther within a corrupt and corrupting late medieval context, viz., the broad stream of nominalist theology, inaugurated by Duns Scotus, that pits the freedom of the creature against the freedom of God. Do we not detect the echo of an authoritarian nominalism in Luther's insistence that Noah should have obeyed God's command even though it seemed senseless? Human reason, in the cases of both Noah and his maternal predecessor Eve, threatens to rise up and pass a false rationalistic judgment on the divine command. If Luther is to become, as many would like him to be, a fit conversation partner for Catholics, then what are we to make of the way he seems to pit reason and faith against one another? There are some fine candidates for a good answer to that question, from both the Lutheran and the Catholic sides, but for now it must suffice simply to note that Luther does not think that the knowledge of God given in saving faith is irrational. Nor does he think reason a bad thing. Indeed, on Luther's account reason is a great—even the greatest—natural gift given to humankind. But in a fallen human person it inevitably becomes the means through which the sinner seeks to justify herself before God, and insofar as it does so, on Luther's account, the "whore reason" must be considered an enemy of faith. Could a Catholic say that? To that it should be added that the reading of the later middle ages developed by Gilson and company, now revived with every good intent by Barron and others, is hardly self-evident. The tradition of contextual studies of Reformation theology, inaugurated by Hagen's late doctoral mentor, Heiko Oberman, worked hard to turn the "autumn" of the Middle Ages into a "harvest," and in the last generation that program seemed to have rescued the later medieval tradition from the slander that it was a period of decline and decay. Better historical theology will continue to follow Oberman's lead in this respect, and resist the impulse to re-pristiniate any age, be it the thirteenth century or the sixteenth.

A second set of critical issues that need further examination clusters around the question whether and to what extent Luther might be taken as an inspiration for contextual theologies, particularly those that draw on human experience. The God who so thoroughly identifies with

poor misunderstood Noah as to see and judge the world through his eyes and mouth does not seem to stand too far distant from the God of contemporary liberation theologies, who stands with the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed. Before we attempt to draw Luther into the struggle for social justice and make of him a theologian of liberation, however, we do well to remind ourselves that there is more to him than Old Testament exegesis. He was, as Harry Haile so forcefully reminded us a generation ago,<sup>50</sup> one of the most powerful men of his age, a patron and polemicist whose decisions—in relation to the Peasants' War, for example—have often disappointed his modern admirers. In his interpretation of Noah, moreover, Luther thought he was reading through the lens of universal, indeed trans-historical Christian experience, not through the particular experiences of distinctive groups of persons: male/female, black/white, Northern/Southern Hemisphere, African, Asian, South American, etc. Identity theology is utterly foreign to Luther. Is there room nevertheless for a reading of Luther that informs helpfully the Christian struggle for social justice for the poor and oppressed?

A third question may be nothing more than a gloss on the second. What are Catholics to make of Luther's subjectivism? The kinds of questions Catholics still ask about him are neatly encapsulated in the title of a 1966 book written by Paul Hacker, a Lutheran who had become a Roman Catholic: *Das ICH im glauben bei Martin Luther*.<sup>51</sup> Hacker's work, which identifies in Luther an un-Catholic subjectivistic individualism, has had a significant impact, shaping even Pope Benedict XVI's understanding of Luther. Hacker's treatment of Luther, however, was colored by the reading of Luther that had prevailed in liberal German Protestantism.<sup>52</sup> To answer that sort of criticism, the clock needs to be turned back through better historical study in order to rescue the historical and catholic Luther from the clutches of a tradition that reads him forward, so to speak, to make him a representative of modern, liberal Protestant thought and practice.

One final question: As mentioned above, Luther was confident in the Spirit based at least in part on his own experience. My reading of

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50. H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1978).

51. Full title: Paul Hacker, *Das ICH im Glauben bei Martin Luther: Der Ursprung der anthropozentrischen Religion* (Graz: Styria, 1966).

52. For a revealing introduction to modern German Luther scholarship, see James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

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Luther leads to the conclusion that the decisive event in his experience was the “Luther affair” of the late teens of the 1500s, leading up to his excommunication and condemnation as a heretic at the conclusion of the Diet of Worms in 1521. If that is so, then we have to take stock of the fact that Luther believed that God was with him, that the Holy Spirit was testifying internally to him in the hour of his most extreme testing. A Catholic acknowledgement of that conviction, the recognition of Luther as a separated brother in the faith, tentative though such things may be in this life, would seem to entail a recognition on some level that the Holy Spirit was at work in Luther even as he strove with all his considerable might and energy to defeat the forces arrayed against him within the Catholic Church. After Vatican II, we Catholics can see many signs of the Spirit at work among the separated brethren. But are we willing to see this sign, too? ✠