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Fortuita Misericordia: Luther on the Unchosen Figures in the Patriarchal History as shown in his Lectures on Genesis

Chan-U "Vincent" Kam
kamchanu@gmail.com

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LUTHER ON THE UNCHOSEN FIGURES IN THE PATRIARCHAL HISTORY AS SHOWN
IN HIS *LECTURES ON GENESIS*

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By
Chan-U "Vincent" Kam
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Approved by:	Erik H. Herrmann	Dissertation Advisor
	Robert A. Kolb	Reader
	Thomas J. Egger	Reader

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family:
Linda—wonderful wife, my better half
William & Anthony—awesome kids, my source of joy

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACS   *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture.* 29 vols, edited by Thomas Oden. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998–2014.

AL   *The Annotated Luther.* 6 vols., edited by Hans. J. Hillerbrand, Kirsi I. Stjerna, Timothy Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015–.

ANF   Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. *The Ante–Nicene Fathers*. 10 Vols. Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885.

CT   *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia, iussu impensaque Leonia XIII. P.M. edita* (*Corpus Thomisticum*). Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882–.

Glossa   *Bibliorum Sacrorum cum Glossa Ordinaria*, 6 vols. Venice, 1603.

LW   *Luther's Works, American Edition.* Vols. 1–30, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1976. Vols. 31–55, edited by Helmut Lehmann, Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Fortress, 1957–1986. Vols. 56–82, edited by Christopher B. Brown. St. Louis: Concordia, 2009–.

NPNF   Philip Schaff, ed. *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers*. 14 vols. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887.

OHMLT   *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther Theology*, edited by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomir Batka, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

PG   *Patrologiae cursus Completus, series Graeca*, 161 vols, edited by J. P. Migna. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866.

PL   *Patrologiae cursus Completus, series Latina*, 221 vols, edited by J. P. Migna. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1841–1855.

RCS   *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*. 14 vols., edited by Timothy George. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012–.

ST   *Summa Theologiae: Latin text and English translation, introductions, notes, appendices and glossaries*, 60 vols, edited by Thomas Gilby O.P. and T. C. O'Brien O.P. Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964–1981.

WA   *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Schriften,* 73 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993.

WA BR   *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1930–1985.

WA DB   *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bible*. 12 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1906–1961.

WA TR   *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1912–1921.

ABSTRACT

Kam, Chan-U "*Fortuita Misericordia*: Luther on the Unchosen Figures in the Patriarchal History as Shown in His Lectures on Genesis." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2021. 295pp.

In this study, we attend to Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* with a specific focus—Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* and his view of the unchosen figures in Genesis, including Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians. We suggest that Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia* and his treatment of the unchosen exemplify the highpoint of his evangelical theology.

Fortuita misericordia can be understood in two ways, one personal, and another salvation-historical. Regarding the person, *fortuita misericordia* is part of Luther's explanation for why God generously spared some from deserved punishment, and instead provided temporal subsistence and blessings. Regarding salvation-history, *fortuita misericordia* opens up the possibility for the inclusion of covenantal outsiders in the true church. We contend that there are four interpretive principles underlying Luther's dealing with the unchosen: the universality of the divine mercy, the distinction between two kinds of attachment to the promise, the porosity of the true and false church, and the holistic understanding of salvation history.

Furthermore, Luther's exposition of the unchosen contributes to the long-standing question in the history of Christian theology concerning the salvation of those who lived before the incarnation. Instead of asking whether and on what basis the pious and virtuous pagan may be accepted by God, Luther wondered whether the unchosen in the biblical narratives could be saved. This shift represents the way that Luther relativized the traditional requirement for objective knowledge of the revelation (*fides quae creditur*) in favor of the qualitative importance of one's subjective faith (*fides qua creditur*) in the promise.

CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON LUTHER'S LECTURES ON GENESIS

Introduction

This is a study on Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* (*Enarrationes in Genesin*, 1535–1545). The *Lectures on Genesis* provides a unique perspective on the way in which Luther confessed and delivered his evangelical insights in a specific context of his later life—the lecture hall. Throughout these lectures, Luther was presenting himself, not so much as a princely counsellor or notorious polemical writer as many would expect, but as a lecturer of his students and an interpreter of the sacred text. As John Maxfield observes, "In the classroom, the Reformer sought to shape his students and therefore the life of the church by letting the word of God be the principal speaker in an exercise of spiritual formation."[1] This classroom setting allows us to appreciate Luther's evangelical insights in a concrete and non-polemical context through his exposition of the Scriptures. From Luther's own perspective, this series of lectures was arguably one of the two most important biblical commentaries he ever produced in his late career, a series of lectures which lasted for almost a decade.[2] As Mickey Mattox observes, "As a preacher and professor, Martin Luther worked more and longer on the book of Genesis than on any other book in the Bible."[3] Heiko Oberman once remarked that these lectures "deserve to be used as an introduction to Luther's world of faith."[4] As such, the *Lectures on Genesis* was truly an

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[1] John Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 80 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 15.

[2] The other is Luther's greater Galatians Commentaries (1531–1535). See "Galatervorlesung," *LW* 26–27; WA 40.

[3] Mickey Mattox, "Luther the Iconographer of the Saints of Genesis," *Lutheran Forum* 52, no. 2 (2018): 36–41.

[4] Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1989), 166–67.

invaluable resource for the understanding of Luther's theology as a whole.

In this study, we attend to the *Lectures on Genesis* with a specific focus—Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* and his view of the unchosen figures in Genesis, including Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau and the Egyptians. We suggest that Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia* and his treatment of the unchosen exemplify the highpoint of his evangelical theology. In other words, Luther's exposition of the unchosen in Genesis provides an exegetical window through which one perceives how Luther understood God's working among his people of all ages. We suggest that there are four interpretive principles underlying Luther's dealing with the unchosen: the universality of divine mercy, the distinction between two kinds of attachment to the promise, the porosity of the true and false church, and the holistic understanding of salvation history. Finally, Luther's exposition of the unchosen contributes to the long-standing question in the history of Christian theology concerning the salvation of those who lived before the incarnation.

The Current Status of the Question

> God bestowed many personal blessings on Cain through all his descendants. Just as Christ was a servant of the circumcised (Rom. 15:8) because of the truth and trustworthiness of the promise given to the Jews, but a servant of the Gentiles because of God's mercy (for they had no promise), so also that accidental mercy (*fortuita misericordia*) was extended to Cain's descendants.[5]

> For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name" (Ps. 18:50).[6]

This study provides a careful investigation of Luther's interpretation of the unchosen in the

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[5] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 313; Martin Luther, *Genesisvorlesung Cap. 1–17,* vol. 42, *Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912), 230–31.

[6] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211.

book of Genesis as shown in his *Lectures on Genesis*.[7] More specifically, this study attempts to

provide a theological hermeneutic of Luther's understanding of the people of God in history

through his reading of the unchosen, covenantal outsiders in the book of Genesis. Luther's

evangelical insight manifests itself in two aspects, the individual and the communal. From the

individual aspect, Luther's redefinition of the religious identity of the human being reshaped not

only his concept of sainthood, but also the covenantal relation of the Old Testament individual.

From the communal aspect, Luther's evangelical anthropology profoundly transformed the

notion of the people of God from the medieval *Caritas*–Ecclesiology to the evangelical *Fides*–

Ecclesiology.[8] When he lectured on passages that featured the unchosen or covenantal

outsiders—such as Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians—Luther was often able to find

evidence of God's continued generosity to them, a *fortuita misericordia* (often rendered as

"accidental mercy" in *LW*). *Fortuita misericordia* can be understood in two ways—one personal,

and the other salvation-historical. Regarding the person, *fortuita misericordia* is part of Luther's

explanation for why God generously spared some from deserved punishment and instead

provided temporal subsistence and blessings. In this sense *fortuita misericordia* is an aspect of

God's preservative grace, which he extended even to those outside the covenantal promise.[9]

Regarding salvation-history, *fortuita misericordia* opens up the possibility for the inclusion of

covenantal outsiders in the true church. As such, Luther intensified the notion that faith in the

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[7] Luther, *Luthers Werke,* vol. 42–44; Luther, *Luther's Work*, vol. 1–8.

[8] Scott H. Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via: Ecclesiological Developments in the Medieval Psalms Exegesis and the Dictata Super Psalterium (1513–1515) of Martin Luther*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 8 (Leiden: Brill), 72–74, 198–215. See below discussion, pp. 19–21, 37–38.

[9] Jaroslav Pelikan, the editor of *Luther's Works* volume 1, used the term "common grace" to qualify what Luther meant by *fortuita misericordia*. See *LW* 1:301 n58. "Common grace" is a theological concept first coined by the 19th–century Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). It refers to the grace which God commonly and impartially bestows to all humankind. However, Luther's *fortuita misericordia* carries a sense different from the idea of common grace, namely, through God's merciful providence of the unchosen, they may have a chance of repentance by hearing the Word of promise and thus be saved.

promise, rather than physical attachment to the covenant, defines the people of God. Furthermore, the unfolding of God's salvific plan in Genesis often involved the rejection of the firstborn and the election of the second-born. For Luther, such election and rejection in Genesis possess a pedagogical dimension that expresses *theologia crucis*. This study contends that Luther's remarkable insight into God's generosity towards these unchosen was shaped by his understanding of divine mercy, the nature of promise and faith, the dialectical tension between the true and the false church, and his exegetical insights of salvation history.

The beginning of modern scholarship on Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1884, Otto Zöckler published his pioneer work, *Luther als Ausleger des Alten Testaments: Gewürdigt auf Grund seines Grösseren Genesis-Commentar*,[10] in which he sought to provide a systematic treatment of Luther's theology on the basis of the *Lectures on Genesis*. In the 1930s, a series of textual-critical works by the German scholars, Erich Seeberg and his student Peter Meinhold,[11] argued that the editors of the lectures might have corrected or improved the text in order to fit the concerns of later Lutheranism, in particular the disciples of Philip Melanchthon. In short, they argued that the printed *Lectures on Genesis* was a compromised text.

Seeberg and Meinhold's skeptical attitude toward the *Lectures on Genesis* dominated Luther scholarship for almost half a century, though not without criticism. For example, Jaroslav Pelikan, in his introduction to the first volume of American edition of Luther's exegetical works published in 1958, called into question Seeberg and Meinhold's criterion of evaluation. Pelikan

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[10] Otto Zöckler, *Luther Als Ausleger Des Alten Testaments Gewürdiget Auf Grund Seines Grösseren Genesis-Commentars* (Greifswald: J. Abel, 1884).

[11] Erich Seeberg, *Studien Zu Luthers Genesisvorlesung: Zugleich Ein Beitrag Zur Frage Nach Dem Alten Luther*, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 36 Bd., 1 Heft (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1932); Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers Und Ihre Herausgeber*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte 8 Bd (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936).

argued that they made an obvious anachronistic mistake by unfairly setting the theology of the

young Luther as the criteria to determine the authenticity of the older Luther's *Lectures on

Genesis*. This unfair assumption called the authenticity of some passages into question since they

failed to conform with the theology of young Luther. Against Seeberg and Meinhold's opinion,

Pelikan concluded, "The hands are sometimes the hands of the editors, but the voice is

nevertheless the voice of Luther."[12] Another scholar who reached a similar conclusion to Pelikan

was Martin Greschat. In his study on the development of the doctrine of justification in Luther

and Melanchthon between 1528 and 1537, Greschat suggested that Meinhold privileged an

abstracted "true" Luther—known from his own theological judgment—as opposed to the "false"

Luther found in the *Lectures on Genesis*.[13]

Following the lead of Pelikan, Greschat, and others, recent scholarship started to retrieve

their trust toward Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*,[14] as the text regained growing academic

attention among Luther scholars. In 1984, Finnish scholar Juhani Forsberg completed an

important work, *Das Abrahambild in der Theologie Luthers*, in which he examined Luther's

interpretation of Abraham in *Lectures on Genesis*.[15] A decade later, Jonathan Trigg engaged

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[12] *LW* 1: ix–xii. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, Luther's Works Companion Volume (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 89–108.

[13] Martin Greschat, *Melanchthon Neben Luther: Studien Zur Gestalt Der Rechtfertigungslehre Zwischen 1528 Und 1537* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965), 12–14. See also Bernhard Klaus. "Die Lutherüberlieferung Veit Dietrichs und ihre Problematik," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 53 (1988): 33–47.

[14] For a detailed discussion on the counter-argument of Seeberg and Meinhold, see Mickey L. Mattox, *"Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs": Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationesin Genesin, 1535–1545*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 263–73. Mattox confidently concludes that the current texts "preserve the authentic voice of Martin Luther as he wished to be heard." Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*, 273.

[15] Juhani Forsberg, *Das Abrahambild in der Theologie Luthers Pater fidei sanctissimus*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz; Abteilung für Abendländische Religionsgeschichte, Bd. 117 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner-Verlag Wiesbaden, 1984).

extensively with the *Lectures on Genesis* in his study of Luther's theology of baptism.[16] John Thompson discussed three sixteenth century views—that of Cajetan, Calvin, and Luther—on the tragic figure Hagar in Genesis.[17] In 1998, Ulrich Asendorf provided a comprehensive presentation of the *Lectures on Genesis* through the lens of a traditional doctrinal framework.[18] In 2003, Mickey Mattox published his study of matriarchs on the basis of *Lectures on Genesis*.[19] A year later, Michael Parsons provided a study on Luther's and Calvin's exegesis by comparing their ways of handling of Old Testament narratives, in which much of the attention was directed to their treatment of Genesis.[20] In 2008, John Maxfield examined the *Lectures on Genesis* by looking at the way it shaped the evangelical identity of Luther's students.[21] Robert Kolb discussed the role of Luther as storyteller and his way of nurturing Christian spirituality on the basis of Luther's treatment of narrative, including the *Lectures on Genesis*.[22]

From the above observation, we may generally categorize the recent research on Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* into three groups:

1) Studies that examine the *Lectures on Genesis* through a doctrinal lens or systematic framework—such as Trigg, Asendorf, Maxfield and Kolb.

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[16] Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[17] John Thompson, "Hagar, Victim or Villain? Three Sixteenth-Century Views," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997): 213–33.

[18] Ulrich Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia: Luthers Genesisvorlesung (1535–1545)*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie Bd. 87 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

[19] Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*.

[20] Michael Parsons, *Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narratives: Reformation Thought and Narrative Text*, Texts and Studies in Religion 106 (Lewiston: Mellen, 2004).

[21] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*.

[22] Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

2) Studies that take an individual or a group of biblical figures in Genesis as the target of investigation—such as Forsberg and Mattox.

3) Studies that compare Luther's treatment on a certain passage in Genesis with his opponents, his students, or other Reformers—such as Thompson's and Parsons's.

Many scholars study Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* in light of Luther's hagiology, namely, the study of the saints. The basic question examined by recent scholarship deals with the relationship between the Reformation and the transformation of the concept of sainthood. As Kolb observes, "Luther transformed the meaning of the term 'saint' or 'holy person' as a result of the general framework of his theology."[23] Luther redefined how God's power works in the world: not through the saints and martyrs, but through God's Word which bears on human life. Accordingly, true holiness was no longer assessed in terms of miraculous power or sacrificial works exercised by certain moral Christians. Rather, all believers are true saints of God, for the divine power of the forgiveness of sins is truly bestowed upon them.[24] Kolb goes on to comment, "Luther offered a reformulation of the framework in which the saints should be viewed, a rethinking of the relationship between the sacred and the profane."[25]

Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* played an important role in witnessing and confirming this evangelical "reformulation" of the idea of sainthood. In the first page of her dissertation on the hagiology in *Lectures on Genesis*, Sherry Elaine Jordon forcefully argues,

> Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* may be his preeminent writing on saints and sainthood. Luther's redefinition of saints and sainthood, his detailed repudiation of medieval notions of sanctity, and his distinctive treatment of male versus female saints may be determined through a careful analysis of the *Lectures on Genesis*. These lectures also

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[23] Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 14.

[24] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 16–17.

[25] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 18.

provide an unique opportunity to discover how Luther's understanding of sanctity shaped his interpretation of the biblical text. In Luther's hands, the Genesis narrative becomes the story of Christian saints and martyrs, and the patriarchs and matriarchs become example of faith for the Christian community.[26]

While Luther's view of sainthood shown in the *Lectures on Genesis* concurs with the position [27]

According to Jordon, the patriarchs and matriarchs were counted as saints for three reasons: (1) they are believers in Christ, (2) they are members of the church, (3) they are examples of faith.[28]

Jordon also linked Luther's view of hagiography with what the early twentieth-century sociologist Max Weber called "inner-worldly asceticism." For Luther, to live saintly is not to live ascetically in the cloister apart from all worldly obligations. Rather, a true saint is one who lives within his own situation in accord with the calling of the three divine-instituted orders, namely, church, household, and society. To live a holy life is to live a called life of serving others.[29] The patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis served for Luther to perfectly illustrate how the patriarchs and matriarchs as saints are examples of this-worldly holiness.[30]

Mattox observes that Luther's understanding of sainthood "was grounded not in a holiness inherent in the saint him [*sic*] or herself, but in the sanctifying word of God to which the saint's life gives expression."[31] The central figures of the Old Testament were saints, not necessarily because of their extraordinary gifts or lives of virtue, but chiefly because of their heroic testimonies to the Word of God as well as their living faith. In his study on Luther's *Lectures on*

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[26] Sherry Elaine Jordon, "The Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints: Luther's Lectures on Genesis," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1995), 1.

[27] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 13–14.

[28] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 18–19, 62.

[29] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 110–22.

[30] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 124–32.

[31] Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*, 26.

Genesis, Maxfield argues that "Luther's Genesis Lectures shed light on how he used scripture to instill in his students a worldview that reflected the ideals of the Lutheran Reformation."[32] While Mattox's study focused more on the traditional or catholic aspects of Luther's exegesis as shown in his interpretation of women in Genesis, Maxfield was more concerned with the evangelical or Reformational aspects of Luther's teachings as revealed in his *Lectures on Genesis*. For example, the longest chapter of Maxfield's work, "The Arena of God's Play—Christian Life and Holiness in the World," extensively discusses how the new evangelical identity in the domain of Christian life and holiness took shape in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*.[33] Similar to Jordon, Maxfield observes that, for Luther, evangelical holiness meant fulfilling divine callings in three holy orders, which are instituted by God, take place in the world, and are shared by every Christian.[34] This evangelical understanding of holiness is best illustrated in the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis. The rest of the chapter provides concrete evidence for how Luther's lectures on the narratives of Abraham and Sarah, Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Rachel, and Joseph and his brothers uphold and also unfold Luther's understanding of the three divinely instituted orders.[35] In sum, for Maxfield, Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* reveal the ways which the old professor endeavored to instill his students the evangelical understanding of holiness which is radically different from its medieval monastic counterpart.[36]

Two works penned by Robert Kolb engaged extensively with *Lectures on Genesis*:

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[32] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 2.

[33] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 75.

[34] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 77–80.

[35] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 81–112.

[36] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 114.

"Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures"[37] and *Luther and the Stories of God*. The former is the seminal study of the latter. Similar to Maxfield, Kolb's focus is on Luther's treatment of narrative in general, with his exposition of Genesis in particular, showing the way in which he can "reconstruct the worldview of his hearers and readers and to create for them a new identity as God's children and conversation partners."[38] This new identity is unpacked in the rest of the book under several headings. For example, in chapter three, Kolb explains why and how the first three chapters of Genesis became for Luther the key to understanding the definition and constitution of a human person. Faith as trust in God's Word of promise stands at the very center of Luther's theology and is best illustrated in his exposition of Gen. 2 and 3.[39] In chapter four, Kolb discusses how Luther's treatment of narratives, particularly the stories of the patriarchs, sheds light on Luther's understanding of affliction and repentance as inevitable parts of daily life. Suffering may be due to a variety of reasons. However, God ultimately brings affliction to the believers in order to mortify their flesh, uphold their faith, and call them to repentance.[40]

The Dissertation in the Context of Current Scholarship

After reviewing the recent discussion on Luther's understanding of sainthood as shown in his *Lectures on Genesis*, some brief observations can be made. First of all, the *Lectures on Genesis* may be read as an epitome of Luther's theology in narrative format, which helps us to see Luther's understanding of saints, sainthood, and holiness in a concrete way. Second, faith

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[37] Kolb, "Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures," *Lutherjahrbuch* 76 (2009): 193–220.

[38] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God,* 35.

[39] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God,* 68–70.

[40] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God,* 110–21.

and obedience to the Word of God, rather than virtue and good works, became the defining features of saints in Luther's understanding of sainthood. Thus, the patriarchs and matriarchs were the examples of faith. Third, the doctrine of justification by faith alone stands at the heart of Luther's understanding of sainthood in Genesis. The stories of Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, powerfully illustrate the point that "human righteousness in God's sight depends simply and alone on God's favorable disposition toward his people."[41] Fourth, suffering or spiritual struggle became an important aspect of understanding true holiness, as virtually every patriarch and matriarch is haunted by anguish and distress. Fifth and finally, to live holy is to live faithfully according to one's callings, which can further be understood under three divinely-instituted orders, namely, church, household, and society. True saints are those who live in the world and toil for the sake of their neighbors.

Not a few works in the recent decades dealt with Luther's biblical exposition of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis. However, concerning the unchosen in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, which also involved a significant share of the text, there seems to be little investigation in recent scholarship. Among the rare discussions on this topic, Mattox's essay, "*Fortuita Misericordia*: Martin Luther on the Salvation of Biblical Outsiders," proves insightful.[42] In his article, Mattox investigates how the idea of "*fortuita misericordia*" unfolded in two of the most important works of the mature Luther, first in his Galatians commentary, and second and more importantly in his Genesis Lectures. Luther only utilized the term *fortuito* in his 1531 commentary on Galatians to make sense of Paul's allegory in Gal. 4. Although Ishmael was born

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[41] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God,* 91.

[42] Mickey Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*: Martin Luther on the Salvation of Biblical Outsiders," *Pro Ecclesia* 7, no. 4 (2008): 423–41.

to Abraham *fortuito et casu* (by accident and error), Luther argued that Ishmael naturally shared his father's faith. Thus, despite the fact that Ishmael was "rejected according to the flesh, by faith he was engrafted through the promise."[43] However, in the *Lectures on Genesis*, *fortuita misericordia* became a term uniquely used by Luther to explain the positive and even optimistic assessment about the fate of those "less heroic figures in the patriarchal histories."[44] Mattox briefly discussed three cases in his article—Cain, Esau, and the Egyptians. In all three cases, Luther consistently was able to find the accidental mercy of God falling upon them. In Cain's case, this accidental mercy is but a conditional, "preserving grace" dependent on human response which preserved Cain's life and afforded him a wife.[45] In the cases of Esau and the Egyptians, the reprobate are not excluded from mercy, but again, it is the mercy of preservation. As Mattox concludes, Luther was standing in a missionary orientation that acknowledges that "the accidental mercy of God is at work to preserve the lives and prolong the histories of outsiders so that they, too, can one day turn to saving faith."[46]

Although Mattox's article informed the initial idea of this dissertation, it differs from Mattox's article in several important aspects. First of all, Mattox's chief concern in his article, as well as his monograph on the matriarchs of Genesis, appears to be his desire to make possible progress in Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical dialogues. Without neglecting the exegetical heritage to which Luther was indebted in this theological upbringing, this study seeks to understand Luther's exposition of the unchosen figures of Genesis on the basis of his overall theological and

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[43] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 430.

[44] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 427.

[45] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 434–35.

[46] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 439.

hermeneutical rationale. Second, Mattox's application of Luther's insight to the question of "salvation of biblical outsiders" is beyond the reach of my study.[47] This dissertation will limit its discussion to traditional aspects of Luther theology. Third, while Mattox's primary focus is the handful of appearances of *fortuita misericordia* in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, this dissertation will focus on the overall attitude of Luther toward the unchosen in Genesis, which can be expressed by, but is not limited to, the appearance of the term *fortuita misericordia*. Fourth, while Mattox in his article did not deal as much with the medieval exegetical tradition as he did in his monograph, this study will try to bring Luther's biblical interpretation in dialogue with the broader exegetical tradition.

The Method

In the previous section, we generalized the three approaches commonly applied to the study of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, namely, topical or doctrinal studies, studies of an individual or a group of characters, and comparative studies. This dissertation fits into the second group—studies which take an individual or a group of biblical figures in Genesis as the target of investigation—for it mainly focuses on the unchosen in the book of Genesis as shown in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*. However, from another perspective, this study might also fit into the first group—studies which examine *Lectures on Genesis* through a doctrinal lens—namely, the *fortuita misericordia* from God towards those outside the promise.

In achieving our end, Chapter Two will first outline some key elements of the medieval understanding of the people of God and the way that Luther reshaped the medieval notion of the people of God. Chapter Three will bring the Western church tradition into our conversation to

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[47] Mattox defines "biblical outsiders" as those who are outside of the Christian faith or never heard of the Gospel. See Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 424, 441. However, the focus of our study is covenantal outsiders.

see how the question of the unchosen was perceived and treated in a variety of ways. Chapters Four through Seven, the main portion of this study, contain a series of case studies in order to examine Luther's interpretation of the unchosen people in Genesis and in what ways they relate to the idea of *fortuita misericordia*. Cain, Hagar and Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians will be the four sets of targets of our investigation. In the concluding chapter, we seek to provide the theological and hermeneutical premises underlying Luther's understanding of the unchosen. This study contends that, on the one hand, Luther's remarkable insight into God's generosity towards these unchosen biblical figures was shaped by his understanding of divine mercy, the nature of promise and faith, the dialectical tension between the true and the false church, and the role of Gentiles in salvation history. On the other hand, Luther's interpretation of the unchosen in Genesis elucidates these theological concepts in an illuminative and concrete way.

Some clarifications are necessary before we turn to the next chapter. First, as the title of the dissertation indicates, our literary scope of investigation focuses chiefly on Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*. This does not mean that we exclude other works of Luther in our pursuit. This does mean, however, that the focus of the present study's attention remains on the way in which the idea of the unchosen and *fortuita misericordia* evolved as Luther delivered this series of lectures in a mostly continuous setting which occupied the last decade of his life. The study is thus intended as a constructive depiction of Luther's later theological and hermeneutical development as illustrated in his handling of a specific group of biblical figures—the unchosen.

Second, the most crucial term that provides the hinge of our study is *fortuita misericordia*. We choose to keep this term in original Latin instead of deploying an English equivalent of it, since the English translation of this term as used by the translator of *Luther's Works*, "accidental mercy," sometimes creates unnecessary or even misleading association for modern English

readers of Luther in their grammatical understanding of what "accidental" means. Yet "accidental mercy" can still be a fitting match with *fortuita misericordia* if we understand it properly. We will see more clearly the connotation of the term in Chapter Four as we encounter Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia* for the first time in his lectures.[48]

Third, we should be attentive to Luther's use of "promise" (*promisso*). Promise in the *Lectures on Genesis* conveys a variety of meanings, of which two are of chief importance. Sometimes promise is identified with the covenantal promise. In this case, Luther simply refers to the covenant that God made with Adam or Abraham concerning the coming of the Messiah. This sense of "promise" can only be enjoyed by Abraham's bodily descendants, the Jews. Luther often calls this the "temporal promise." Thus he can say, "the Gentiles lack the promise, but do not lack mercy" or "we have mercy without the promise; the Jews have mercy with the promise." I will qualify it as a physical attachment to the promise. In other times, promise is identified with the essence of the covenant, namely, the forgiveness of sins. This sense of "promise" can be shared by all people through faith, whether Jew or Gentile. Luther often calls this the "spiritual promise." I will qualify it as a spiritual attachment to the promise.[49]

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[48] See Chapter Four, pp. 128–32.

[49] For further understanding of the two kinds of attachment. See Chapter Six, p. 203; Chapter Eight, pp. 243–45.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RESHAPING OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY

Introduction

Luther's reading of the biblical figures, whether Jews or non–Jews, elect or non–elect, faithful or faithless, is related to his understanding of the people of God in history as a whole, which is in turn inextricably shaped by his understanding of human religious identity. As such, an examination of Luther's theological anthropology and his idea of God's people in history will prove indispensable to our understanding of Luther's interpretation of the unchosen in the Genesis narratives. This chapter will first outline some key elements of the medieval concept of the human being and the people of God respectively, then we will turn our attention to Luther's evangelical understanding of human identity and ecclesiology. Along these lines, this chapter will also highlight the relationship between Luther's theology of sainthood and his exposition of the unchosen in Genesis.

Key Elements of the Medieval Understanding of the People of God

In this section, we first deal with the medieval idea of the people of God in two aspects: individually as a human being, and communally as a group.

Medieval Concept of Human Being: Virtuous Life Formed in Love

The late medieval understanding of humanity, which Luther inherited in his theological upbringing, arose from the commentaries of Aristotle and Peter Lombard. In his *De Anima*, Aristotle set forth the ethical capabilities of the soul by focusing on the nurture of virtue via the recurrent practice of doing right and rejecting wrong. Human beings, as *animal rationale*, are marked by their persistent effort to tame the bodily inclination, the *animalitas*, in favor of the

spiritual good, the *rationalitas*.[1] In other words, without a theological vision in mind, human

identity in Aristotelian categories is the result or process of the enduring practice of virtue.

Lombard incorporated the insight of Augustine into his *Sententiae*, treating human beings

"as created for the purpose of finding their happiness in God, as the guilt–ridden but inescapable

failure to live according to this purpose, and as the reorientation of the human life to God as its

goal."[2] This reorientation is a lifelong journey, which manifests itself in the pursuit of virtue

through the provision of sacramental grace offered by the church. Therefore, human identity in

Lombard's category is the end goal of that spiritual journey, namely, the true happiness in God

or beatific vision. Although this journey has its beginning set by grace, nevertheless man must

actively strive for himself along the way. As one observes in later Aristotelian theologians such

as Aquinas, "virtue ethics" can be easily fit into this anthropological framework in its

potentiality–actuality understanding of humanity.

Furthermore, this anthropological framework had a profound impact on medieval

soteriology, especially in an Ockhamist context. In light of the understanding that human beings

are meant to strive in this life for virtue in order to find the beatific vision of God, grace was

understood as *habitus* through which the form of virtue takes shape in the believer's life. As

Oberman observes, in the theology of Gabriel Biel, "[t]he habit of grace is required as [the]

disposition for man's ultimate acceptation, that is, beatification by God."[3] According to

nominalist theology, God has established a covenant (*pactum*) with humanity, provided that

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[1] Notger Slenczka, "Luther's Anthropology" in *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212–32.

[2] Slenczka, "Luther's Anthropology," 213.

[3] Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*. 3rd ed. (Durham: Labyrinth, 1983), 167.

when one meets a certain precondition, God promises to grant him grace, which makes the

further cooperation of one's free will for his salvation possible.[4] The catchphrase for this idea is

"*facientibus quod in se est deus non denegat gratiam*" (God will not deny his grace to those who

do what is in them). Luther would have encountered this phrase during his university years in

Erfurt, and he even quoted it a number of times in his *Dictata Super Psalterium* (1513–1515).

For instance, in his comments on Psalm 113 (which in the Hebrew Bible is Psalms 114 and 115

together), Luther remarked,

> "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and it shall be opened to
> you. For everyone who asks, receives, etc." (Matt. 7:7–8) Hence the doctors of
> theology rightly say that God gives grace without fail to whoever does what lies
> within them [*quod in se est*].[5]

When one does what is best in him, an insufficient or congruent merit (*meritum de congruo*) will

be gained on behalf of his effort which makes him accessible to the divine grace. This grace in

turn provides the man assistance in the production of good works and a life of virtue, which in

God's eye is seen as authentic merit (*meritum de condigno*) because God has bound himself to

reward those who do his will.[6] As Oberman perceptively concludes in his discussion about

human will and grace in nominalist theology, "Without this gift of grace man is helpless; but it is

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[4] One classical example can be found in Gabriel Biel's 1460 sermon "De Circumcisione Domini" where Biel asserts time and again the meritorious nature of our work. "No doubt He [God] could have simultaneously made us His friends and accepted our work as meritorious without this gift of grace. But how could we have remained in friendship with God without the assistance of grace? Thus God has established the rule [covenant, *pactum*] that whowever turns to Him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship. As is written in John: Grace and truth came through Christ." See Gabriel Biel, *Sermones de festivitatibus Christi* (Hagenau, 1510), "De Circumcisione Domini," Sermo II, in ordine 14. Translation is quoted from Heike A. Oberman, *Forerunner of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 173. For a compact introduction of the late medieval theological background of the problem of justification, see Oberman, *Forerunner of the Reformation*, 123–50. For a longer treatment, see Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 146–84.

[5] WA 4:262. English translation is provided by McGrath. See Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 71. For comparison, see *LW* 11:396.

[6] Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 169–72.

just as true that without the full use of man's own natural powers, the offer of grace is useless."[7]

Grace makes salvation possible. Nevertheless, without the working out of a virtuous life aided by

this grace, man could still be lost. In short, medieval theology understood humanity chiefly in his

ability to live a virtuous life which is formed in love. Divine grace alone makes this love

accessible to humans, but without the voluntary assent of man, grace can make no use of him.

<div align="center">Medieval Concept of the People of God: Caritas–Ecclesiology</div>

The medieval concept of anthropology goes hand in hand with its ecclesiology. In his

comparative study on the ecclesiological development between medieval exegesis and Luther's

Dictata Super Psalterium (1513–1515), Scott Hendrix argues that, despite all the complexity of

medieval ecclesiology developed by different authors, the defining concept of medieval

ecclesiology is *caritas* understood in an Augustinian framework. In order to counter the Donatist

idea of the church as the community within which each individual possesses high personal

holiness, Augustine realistically admits that sins reside in the church and both good and bad

Christians remain in the church until the last judgement.[8] However, for Augustine, c*aritas* is the

decisive factor in determining whether one belongs to the true church, as he once suggested in

his sermons on 1 John, "Thus *dilectio* [Augustine used *dilectio* and *caritas* interchangeably]

alone distinguishes between sons of God and sons of the devil ... the sons of God are not set apart

from the sons of the devil by anything but *caritas*."[9] In other words, *caritas* alone distinguishes

whether one is among the *boni* (good) and *fideles* (faithful). The importance of *caritas* in

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[7] Heiko Oberman, "*Facientibus Quod In Se Est Deus Non Denegat Gratiam*: Robert Holcot, O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 317–42.

[8] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 17–18.

[9] *In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus decem* 3:10 (*Patrologia Latina* 35, 2014). English translation is provided by Hendrix. See Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 33.

Augustine's ecclesiology manifested itself in two themes in his medieval successors, Hendrix observes. The first theme is the dominance of *caritas* over *fides*, and the second theme is that the perseverance of *caritas* in a Christian's life is the chief mark indicating one is among the elect.[10]

Throughout the medieval period, this Augustinian ecclesiological structure of *caritas* was largely retained with only minor modifications.[11] Hendrix concludes his survey of medieval ecclesiology with Nicolas of Lyra's adaption of the Augustinian ecclesiological statement, "*Caritas* alone makes the division between the sons of perdition and the sons of the kingdom."[12] Hendrix goes on to comment, "The true *fideles* at the heart of the church are precisely the *iusti*, who have been rehabilitated through *caritas* and are now marching in virtue toward perfect wholeness in the kingdom of heaven."[13] This is where medieval anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology work together as a whole scheme. The ability to acquire and nurture virtue freely was seen in medieval anthropology, whereas from a medieval soteriological standpoint man was meant to cooperate with the grace infused to him and live out a life of virtue. True virtue for a Christian is no more and no less than living a life of *caritas*, to wholeheartedly love God and one's neighbors as himself. Finally, in the medieval ecclesiological setting, what makes the good and faithful distinguishable from the bad and condemned is still *caritas*, the manifestation of the love of God and one another collectively.

Since some form of virtue can be possessed by both Christians and pagans, the question of the relationship between pagans who possessed virtue and the church was sometimes posed.

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[10] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 35.

[11] A modification made to the Augustinian ecclesiological framework by Thomas Aquinas that Aquinas broadened the use of term *fideles* to include both the good (*boni*) and the bad (*mali*). But the overall Augustinian ecclesiological structure remains intact. See Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 52–58.

[12] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 72.

[13] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 73.

Could they be saved or at least be excused from more severe punishments? This question can be considered in two ways. Sometimes, the emphasis was on the personal piety of the pagan. How authentic or how "Christian" is the pagan? However, the second and more prominent way to consider the question was to ask whether a just and merciful God would deny grace to those who do what is in them (*facere quod in se est*)?[14] The medieval theologians all agree that salvation requires both *fides* and *caritas*, and the pagans undoubtedly lacked the fullest Christian sense of *fides* and *caritas*. Still, even though their *fides* and *caritas* were partial and incomplete, could God reward them with eternal blessings on the basis of their effort or his mercy? These questions are relevant to our study because it sheds important light on the way Luther treated the problem of the unchosen in Genesis. For Luther, although he was not uninterested in these questions, he understood the boundary of the church differently from the medieval tradition, and the problem shifted accordingly. Instead of asking whether and on what basis the pious and virtuous pagan be accepted by God, Luther wondered whether the unchosen in the biblical narratives could be saved. But in order to clarify why and how Luther came to focus on the unchosen rather than the pagan, we need first to unravel the anthropological and ecclesiological complexity behind this question in Luther's thought. To this we turn in the next section.

Luther's Reformational Understanding of the People of God

"At the heart of Martin Luther's call for reform lay a change in the definition of what it means to be a human being," suggests Robert Kolb.[15] For Luther, human beings are originally designed by God as creatures who are meant to put their trust, fear and love upon God their

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[14] For details on medieval concept of human being as living a virtuous life, see pp. 16–19.

[15] Robert Kolb, "Luther's View of Being Human: The Relationship of God and His Human Creatures as the Core of Wittenberg Anthropology," *Word & World* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 330–38.

creator above all, as Luther summarizes in the explanation of the first of the Ten Commandments

in his *Small Catechism*. Sin marked the breakdown of this pure trust between God and human.

Salvation is the way in which God restores the trust in himself through Christ's atoning death

and resurrection.[16] This anthropological insight has a profound impact upon Luther's

understanding of sainthood and the unchosen. Once this anthropological framework is in place,

the way in which Luther understood the nature of the people of God in history shifted

accordingly. In this section, we first outline some core elements of Luther's understanding of

human identity, and then more specifically discuss his redefinition of the saints and the

unchosen. After that we will put these anthropological insights into perspective by showing how

Luther's anthropology deeply shaped his perception of the people of God in history, especially

God's people in the pre–Christian or Old Testament period. We will conclude this section by

showing the source, purpose, and function of *fortuita misericordia* in Luther's thought.

Luther's Understanding of Human Identity: Righteous by Faith Alone

In contrast to the medieval understanding of a human being created to live a virtuous life

formed in love, Luther perceived humanity chiefly as created to live by faith and trust in God. As

Berndt Hamm remarks, there was a growing tension within the late medieval spirituality,

namely, "the tension between a heightened awareness of sin and the recently intensified

emphasis on striving for obedience and perfection,"[17] on the eve of the Reformation. People in

the late medieval period found themselves caught between two religious forces, one emphasized

our inability and powerlessness in the face of sin in order to make us humble, while the other

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[16] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God*, 66–67.

[17] Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 35.

focused on the imitation of Christ and the striving for selfless love of God. This is why many Germans in the 15th century discovered that meeting the conditions for the full reception of divine grace was so demanding and burdensome.[18] How do we know we have met the required "precondition" and become a worthy recipient of divine grace? This question haunted Luther.

In his decade-long years as an Augustinian friar, Luther gradually challenged the traditional understanding about the way God deals with humanity and reshaped his concept of grace, righteousness, and the meaning of being human. Luther came to realize that the scholastic distinction of congruent and condign merits merely disguises a quasi-Pelagian anthropology and soteriology. Grace ought not be regarded as a created reality in us. Rather, grace is God's favorable disposition to us, the *favor dei* exhibited through his promises culminating in God's Son.[19] For Luther, humanity is not primarily created for or perfected by the cultivation of virtue nor the arrival of beatific vision of God. Humanity, first and foremost, is simply the gift of God our creator and characterized by the complete trust of the human being toward his creator. In this state, the human being is free from guilt, shame, and doubt; this is what Luther denotes as humanity's "original righteousness." The creator of the universe has pledged that "I am his, and he is mine" (Song 2:16; 6:3).

Since trust lies in the very center of human identity, and sin marked the total breakdown of this pure trust between God and the human person, salvation must deal with the restoration of this trustful relationship. As Kolb contends, "Luther's new definition of being human centered on the trust that believers have in accepting God's promise, which gives assurance that God has applied this vicariously law-satisfying, victoriously liberating, life-givingly re-creating, family-

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[18] Kolb, "Luther's View of Being Human," 331.

[19] Denis Janz, *The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 69.

restoring work of Christ 'for me.'"[20] In sum, Luther reshaped the medieval understanding of humanity as the active process of formation of virtuous life into his definition of humanity as the passive reception of divine promise which resulted in the restoration of a trustful relationship between God and man.

The core of human identity for Luther is a trustful relationship between God and human beings. Four key tenets can be identified in Luther's understanding of human identity, relevant for this study: two kinds of righteousness, the distinction between law and gospel, *theologia crucis*, and finally, *simul justus et peccator*. Since these four tenets are all hermeneutically related in one way or another to Luther's reading of the unchosen in Genesis, we should give brief attention to each of them as follows.

First of all, for Luther, the trustful relationship between God and human beings manifests itself in the matrix of two principles that govern God's relationship with us and our relationship with others. These two principles, known as the two kinds of righteousness, are "two distinct ways in which every human creature pursues existence, two dimensions to what it means to be humans."[21] Robert Kolb and Charles Arand sketched the basic contour of the two kinds of righteousness as follows: since God created us as relational creatures who live in the presence of God and also communally with our neighbor, our identity (the equivalence of "righteousness") is determined by the ways we live before God and before other human creatures. Our relationship with God, also known as alien or imputed righteousness, or the righteousness of faith, is utterly passive, utterly dependent upon our creator's disposition to us. As Luther puts it, "[t]herefore this

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[20] Kolb, "Luther's View of Being Human," 338.

[21] Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 25. The doctrine of two kinds of righteousness was originated from Luther's sermon on the same topic, and then further elaborated in Luther's preface to Galatians commentary. See "Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519)," *LW* 31:297–306; WA 2:145–52; "Lectures on Galatians (1535): ch.1–4," *LW* 26:4–12; WA 40.I.16–32.

alien righteousness, instilled in us without our works by grace alone … is set opposite original

sin, likewise alien, which we acquire without our works by birth alone … For alien righteousness

is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end

through death."[22] On the other hand, our relationship with fellow human, which was known as

proper righteousness or the righteousness of the law, is active in essence for it is the outflow of

the first kind of righteousness. "The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness,

not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is

that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and

crucifying the desires with respect to the self."[23] The two kinds of righteousness are inseparable

from each other yet must be kept distinct. They are not alternative models of human existence

nor could one partly possess passive righteousness and partly possess active righteousness. No,

one must be righteous both before God and man. "To be a human being as God created us to be,

a perfect human specimen, involves being totally passive, as a newborn child of God, and totally

active, as a responsible neighbor to other people and to the whole God's world."[24]

As Kolb helpfully puts it, the two kinds of righteousness can be placed within the

framework of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our lives to God and to others. "God's

human creatures are right—really human—in their vertical relationship because their faith

embraces the God who loves them through Jesus Christ with the reckless trust … and reliance on

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[22] *LW* 31:299; WA 2:146. "Haec igitur iusticia aliena et sine actibus nostris per solam gratiam infusa nobis, trahente intus scilicet patre nos ad Christum, opponitur peccato originali, quod alienum similiter est sine nostris actibus per solam generationem nobis cognatum et contractum. Et ita Christus expellit Adam de die in diem magis et magis, secundum quod crescit illa fides et cognitio Christi. Non enim tota simul infunditur, sed incipit, proficit et perficitur tandem in fine per mortem."

[23] *LW* 31:299; WA 2:146. "Secunda iusticia est nostra et propria, non quod nos soli operemur eam, sed quod cooperemur illi primae et alienae. Haec nunc est illa conversatio bona in operibus bonis, Primo in mortificatione carnis et crucifixione concupiscentiarum erga seipsum."

[24] Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 26–30.

him.… They are right—really human—in their horizontal relationship with God's other creatures when they live a life which is active … through the deeds that deliver his care and concern."[25] Thus, Luther's anthropological insight in a nutshell lies in the proper distinction between the two kinds of righteousness, as Luther says, "This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused."[26] The chief abuse of medieval anthropology, in Luther's view, was the confusion or conflation of the two kinds of righteousness by its attempt to merit grace before God through the living of a virtuous life.

Related to the doctrine of two kinds of righteousness, the second important tenet which laid at the heart of Luther's understanding of human identity is the dialectic or distinction between law and gospel.[27] For Luther, the Word of God comes to human beings in twofold form, one the law and the other the gospel. The law in its original designation was expressed as the eternal will of God, and one can fulfill the law with a joyful and dedicated heart.[28] Yet after the fall of Adam, the law of God turns into our accuser. The law "reveals his sinfulness and increases it. It

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[25] Robert Kolb, "Luther on Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology." *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (1999): 449–66. For a detailed discussion about how Luther's understanding of two kinds of righteousness guided his reading of the book of Genesis, see Robert Kolb, "God and His Human Creatures in Luther's Sermons on Genesis: The Reformer's Early Use of His Distinction of Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Concordia Journal* 33 (2007): 166–84.

[26] *LW* 26:7; WA 40.1:45.

[27] One of the clearest expositions of the distinction between law and gospel can be found in Luther's sermon delivered on the festival of the Circumcision of Jesus in 1532. See "Afternoon Sermon for New Years' Day: How Law and Gospel Are to be Thoroughly Distinguished, Gal. 3:23–29, January, 1, 1532" *LW* 57:61–76; WA 36:8–42. For a systematic introduction to the topic, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 251–73; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 267–76; Osward Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 58–65. For a reflection on the distinction of the law and gospel in a modern context, see Collver III, Albert B., James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds., *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017).

[28] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 252–53.

constantly accuses him and delivers him up to God's wrath, to judgment, and to eternal death."[29]

Luther calls this accusing and condemning function of the law the "theological" or "spiritual"

use of the law.[30] By contrast, the gospel brings about the forgiveness of sins. As Paul Althaus

succinctly summarizes, "[t]he law demands that something be done or not be done; it accuses

and condemns us because we have acted or failed to act in a way contrary to its demands. The

gospel contains God's promise in Christ. It proclaims that all the law's demands have been met

in Jesus Christ, that is, it preaches the forgiveness of sins."[31] Just as the two kinds of

righteousness are inseparable yet distinct, the law and gospel are radically different from each

other yet they work hand in hand in one's justification. On the one hand, the proclamation of the

law is a necessary prerequisite for the preaching of the gospel. Without the law, we cannot

recognize our sin and would remain content in our own spiritual condition. On the other hand,

preaching the law without the gospel would lead either to spiritual numbness or despair.[32] Only a

full manifestation of the functions of the law and gospel—one is led to terror by the law and then

consoled by the gospel—would lead one to Christ. Luther's biblical lectures, of which the book

of Genesis stands prominently, "provided Luther with many opportunities to instruct students on

how to proclaim God's Word in terms of law and gospel."[33] In sum, for Luther, to restore the

trustful relationship with God, we need to receive the imputed righteousness which is made

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[29] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 254.

[30] In Lutheran category, this use of the law is known as the second use of the law. The first use of the law, conversely, is understood as the "civil" function of the law, which "preserves public peace and makes possible the education of the young, and particularly, the preaching of the gospel." Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 253.

[31] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 256.

[32] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 257.

[33] Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 122. We will see more clearly in later chapters the way which Luther applies the distinction of law and gospel as a hermeneutical lens through which he interprets God's handling with the biblical figures.

possible only by the merit of Christ for our sake. To fully appreciate what Christ has done for us, namely, the gospel, we need to be struck in our conscience by the law, knowing that we are unable to make up for ourselves the proper relationship with God and our identity can only be determined by what God says to us.

The third tenet constitutive of Luther's idea of human identity is *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross.[34] For Luther, *theologia crucis* exhibits much more than an abstract theological concept or principle. Instead, as Kolb notes, it is "precisely a framework that is designed to embrace all of biblical teaching and guide the use of all its parts. It employs the cross of Christ as the focal point and fulcrum for understanding and presenting a wide range of specific topics within the biblical message."[35] *Theologia crucis* captures the very nature of how God deals with human beings, and how human beings find God. There are two answers to the question of where to find God: one is through God's glorious creation and human reason, and another through the shameful cross. One who espouses the former answer, which Luther calls *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory), "does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have been

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[34] The basic theoretical contour of theologia crucis was outlined by Luther in his 1518's Heidelberg Disputation. See "Heidelberg Disputation (1518)," *LW* 31:35–70; WA 1:353–74. Some years later, Luther further extended his insights on the topic in his famous *De servo arbitrio*, especially in his articulation of *deus revelatus* and *deus absconditus*. See "The Bondage of the Will (1525)," *LW* 33:138–44; WA 18:684–88.

Theologia crucis was itself a concept with such a huge importance which, as expected, received a great deal of attention among Luther scholars. Here we can only briefly introduce a few among many. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 25–34; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 36–39; Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976); Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Klaus Schwarzwaller, *Kreuz und Auferstehung Ein theologisches Traktat* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 443–66. For the discussion of *theologia crucis* as shown in *Lectures on Genesis*, see Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 126–40; Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia*, 125–146; Vincent Kam, "Luther on God's Play with His Saints," *Lutheran Quarterly* 34 (2020): 138–51.

[35] Kolb, "Theology of the Cross," 444.

made [Rom. 1:20]."[36] By contrast, one who embraces the latter, which Luther calls "our theology," deserved to be called "theologian" because they comprehend "the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[37] The anthropological implications of these two kinds of theologies were significant. When driven by *theologia gloriae,* one tends to define one's relationship with God in terms of glory and power. As Althaus puts it, "[n]atural theology and speculative metaphysics which seek to learn to know God from the works of creation are in the same category as the work righteousness of the moralist. Both are ways in which man exalts himself to the level of God. Thus both either lead men to pride or are already expressions of such pride. Both serve to 'inflate' man's ego."[38] By contrast, *theologia crucis* views "man as one who has been called to suffer. Man's cross 'destroys man's self-confidence' so that now, instead of wanting to do something himself, he allows God to do everything in him. Such a man has been led from moralistic activism to pure receptivity."[39] Thus *theologia crucis* is the methodological basis underlying the principle of two kinds of righteousness and the distinction of law and gospel. Our perception of God needs to be refined (where to find God), then our attitude changes toward God (how to approach God), and finally changes the attitude toward ourselves (who we are before God and before the world).

As the methodological basis of Luther's thinking, *theologia crucis* deeply shaped how he approaches the Holy Scripture, in particular the biblical narratives. As Kolb notes, Luther "retold the biblical stories in order to recall and recount what human life is, as God initiates and

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[36] *LW* 31:40; WA 1:361. "Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit."

[37] *LW* 31:40; WA 1:362. "Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit."

[38] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 27.

[39] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 27–28.

sustains."[40] Seeing through the lens of *theologia crucis*, Luther discovered that the consistent pattern of sibling rivalry between the firstborn and the second-born exhibited in the patriarchal narratives turns out to be the best demonstration showing how God works in the world—he exalts the humble and denigrates the proud. Cain, Ishmael, and Esau as firstborn were rejected by God because of their arrogance and boasting of primogeniture. By contrast, Abel, Isaac, and Jacob were chosen by God because they represent the less prestigious, humble second-born. The phrase we design for this phenomenon is "*theologia crucis* pedagogy," namely, God's choice of the younger over against the firstborn in the patriarchal narratives pedagogically demonstrates God's rejection of the proud and his exaltation of the humble.

Finally, the theme of *simul justus et peccator* constitutes the fourth tenet of Luther's evangelical anthropology. As Althaus notes, neither passive nor active righteousness can be replaced or limited by one another in the Christian life. Throughout our whole life, a Christian remains a sinner and can only live before God through alien righteousness.[41] On the other hand, our faith in Christ also marks the beginning of new creation as God's Spirit was poured into our heart and brings forth new obedience to him. "Thus, the Christian's righteousness exists in the present and at the same time is still coming in the future. It exists in the present as the righteousness which man has through God's imputation. … The Christian righteousness comes in the future as the righteousness he will have when he is a completely new being."[42] This understanding of righteousness in the present and righteousness to come becomes the basis of Luther's famous anthropological articulation of *simul justus et peccator*, at one and the same

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[40] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God,* 31.

[41] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 229. See also Rudolf Herrmann, *Luthers These "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich."* 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960).

[42] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 234–36.

time a righteous man and a sinner. This double character runs through the life of a Christian till death.[43] Kolb and Arand succinctly expound Luther's idea of *simul justus et peccator* as that "in this life a person is a sinner in the eyes of the law, the world, and oneself, while at the same time completely a saint in the eyes of God on account of Christ." This is a *totus–totus* existence, completely and totally righteous before God yet completely and totally sinful in the eye of self.[44] The theme of *simul justus et peccator* helps locate the Christian identity in the proper context— this temporal life. As Luther beautifully explains this twofold nature of Christian life in his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521),

> [t]his life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.[45]

As we will see in the later part of this chapter, the theme becomes a key parameter in the formation of Luther's new understanding of the holiness of God's people, i.e. the saints.

An Evangelical Redefinition of the Saints: Luther's New Hagiology

Luther's new way of understanding human identity radically reshaped the way he viewed the saints in the Scripture. As Kolb succinctly states, "Luther transformed the meaning of the term 'saints' or 'holy person' as a result of the general framework of his theology."[46] By viewing saints under the framework of Luther's anthropology of two kinds of righteousness, we may highlight two important aspects of his transformation of the idea of sainthood. First, according to

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[43] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 242.

[44] Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 49.

[45] *LW* 32:14; WA 7:337.

[46] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 14.

passive righteousness, all believers are made holy and justified because of the bestowal of the

saving promise upon them. As such, believers in Christ can rightfully be called "saints" because

"God's forgiving Word bestowed full and complete holiness on all God's chosen believers."[47]

Second, according to the active righteousness, believers live out their holiness by serving their

neighbor.

Luther considered the cult of the saints of his time to be an abuse of the proper reverence of

the saints. For one thing, the cult of the saints denied God's saving power; moreover, it hindered

our attention to the everyday providence of God and our holy vocation on earth. In place of the

devotional practice of the cult of saints, Luther and his colleagues sought to reshape a new

evangelical piety of the saints, which began with a new concept of sainthood. In his comment on

Ps. 37:28 ("For the Lord loves justice, He will not forsake His saints"),[48] Luther gives a brief

definition of saints:

> Here "saints' does not mean those who are in heaven, about whom the Scriptures
> speak only rarely, but more generally those who live on earth, who believe in God
> and by their faith have the grace of God and the Holy Spirit. This is why they are
> called "saints," as we all are if we truly believe.[49]

In a 1539 sermon, Luther related sainthood to the idea of alien righteousness:

> We are all saints, and cursed are they who do not want to call themselves saints. You
> are far more saintlier than your names—Hans or Kunz—indicate. However, you do
> owe this not to yourself, but to the will of God, who would be your Father. To call
> yourself a saint is, therefore, no presumption but an act of gratitude and a confession
> of God's blessings.[50]

In brief, saints are simply synonymous with believers in Christ, as we quoted earlier in this

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[47] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 14.

[48] *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001). This is abbreviated as ESV. Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural quotations are taken from the ESV.

[49] *LW* 14:222; WA 19:565.

[50] WA 32:91–92.

section, "God's forgiving Word bestowed full and complete holiness on all God's chosen believers."[51] For Luther, first and foremost, saints are believers of God's Word of promise. It is through Christ's redemptive work made effective in us by the Holy Spirit who brings about true saintliness. Second, Luther in his teaching career continued to use "saints" in reference to some notable historical figures in the Bible and in church history, not because of the miracles they performed or intercessory power they possessed, but because of their bold confession of faith.[52]

Luther's transformative understanding of sainthood expressed itself in the way he taught the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament text. This can be unpacked in two ways. First, in Luther's decades-long preaching career, he repeatedly returned to the Psalter, for he was convinced that the psalms are the prayers of saints. As Luther notes in his preface to the German Psalter (1528), "over the years a great many legends of the saints, and passionals, books of examples, and histories have been circulated.… I hold, however, that no finer book of examples or of the legends of the saints has ever come, or can come, to earth than the Psalter … For here we find not only what one or two saints have done, but what he had done who is the very head of all saints."[53] Instead of preaching the miraculous deeds or outstanding behaviors of the medieval saints for the sake of edification, Luther chose rather to speak about the prayers of the people of God in the Old Testament, who, for him, were saints and believers in Christ. Second, when asked for a narrative account of the saints, Luther drew his attention to the first book of Moses among other narrative texts of the Scripture. In the last decade of his life, Luther deliberately chose Genesis as the standard text on which he lectured regularly to his students. In the words of John

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[51] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 14.

[52] Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 15.

[53] "Preface to the Psalter 1545 (1528)," *LW* 35:253–57 (here 253); WA DB 10.I, 99–105.

Maxfield, "Luther's Genesis lectures shed light on how he used scripture to instill in his students a worldview that reflected the ideals of the Lutheran Reformation and that, therefore, contributed to the break between Evangelicals and those who remained within the papal church."[54]

The patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis became the best lively illustrations of Luther's new "hagiography." Luther is convinced that the patriarchs and matriarchs believed and received the promise of Christ in faith. Therefore, they can rightfully be called "saints." The fact that they lived and died before Christ does not hinder their faith in Christ, for Luther believes the Old Testament attests to Christ everywhere. Heinrich Bornkamm helpfully suggests that, for Luther, the Old Testament is filled with secret references to Christ, and he always made direct application out of them. "The direct application of the Old Testament texts to Jesus Christ, his words and deeds, his death and resurrection, his church and his work in the believers was by far the strongest and most comprehensive theme in Luther's interpretation of the Old Testament."[55]

For instance, in commenting Gen. 3:15, Luther makes Adam's faith identical to our faith in Christ. Both Adam and we received Christ in his word, regardless of the physical advent of Christ. "Faith is the same from the beginning of the world to the end; therefore he [Adam] received by faith what I have received.… [H]e [Adam] received Him [Christ] in the Word, and so also we have Him. The only difference is that then it should happen, now it has happened."[56] Similarly, Abraham believed the divine promise and was reckoned righteous. Since every divine promise includes Christ, Abraham's faith is in Christ himself. The only difference between Abraham's faith and ours is that "Abraham believed in the Christ who was to be manifested, but

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[54] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis,* 2.

[55] Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 101.

[56] WA 24:100.

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we believe in the Christ who has already been manifested; and by that faith we are all saved."[57]

As Sherry Jordon observes, Luther "tends to collapse customary distinctions between the two

testaments by emphasizing the dynamic relationship between God's Word of promise and faith

as trust in the promise."[58] The medieval scheme that the Old Testament is merely the

prefiguration of the New is marginalized in Luther's thought. Instead, since the Old Testament

saints were holding the same promise as the New Testament people, their faith in Christ was

genuine and thus became the model for Christian faith.[59] This is not to say that the Old Testament

saints had the same knowledge of Christ as the New Testament believers possessed after the

incarnation. Rather, it is the character and justifying nature of faith in the Old Testament which is

congruent with faith in the New Testament because both hold to God's promise.

Finally, for Luther, saints are also sinners. In his comments on one of the seven penitential

psalms, Luther refers to saints, Christians, and sinners as synonyms. "For God's punishment is

not sent for the sake of righteousness. Therefore all saints and Christians must recognize

themselves as sinners and fear God's wrath, for this psalm [Psalm 6] is general and excludes no

one."[60] In commenting Gen. 26:6–7 where Isaac lied to Abimelech king of the Philistines about

his wife Rebecca, repeating what his father Abraham did many years ago, Luther notes that

"Abraham and Isaac, who were very great and saintly men" are still ridden by "completely

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[57] *LW* 2:26; WA 42:567.

[58] Sherry Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 27. Later Jordon goes on arguing that Luther did view "the promise of Christ became clearer and more specific as history progressed." This relatively obscure presentation of promise even made the faith of the patriarchs greater, since "the more obscure the revelation is, the greater the faith required to believe it." Sherry Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 30.

[59] James Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to Young Luther* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969), 199.

[60] *LW* 14:141.

disgraceful fear."[61] Even men as great as Abraham and Isaac who have the divine promises fall

so wretchedly. Luther insisted that this passage was written for our instruction in order that we

may "have hope, lest we think: 'I am not so saintly or so strong in faith as Isaac was or Jacob

was.' To be sure, those men were strong and steadfast when God was supporting them …; but

when He turned His face away, they were dismayed."[62] Luther concluded his thought with the

following beautiful exhortation:

> Therefore we should not cast hope aside in evil days. Nor should we be proud in good days. For Abraham and Isaac, who were very mighty in faith, fell into that disgraceful weakness as a hope and comfort for us, in order that we might learn the condition and the ways of this kingdom and King; for there one sees invincible strength and, if I may say so, highly vincible weakness. All this serves the purpose of glorifying God alone. For we do not glow in our own power; but because our King is sitting at the right hand of the Father, we glow in Him and richly exalt ourselves. His power is made perfect through our weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9), as can be seen again and again in all the examples of the fathers.[63]

These comments are noteworthy for two reasons. First, the strength and weakness of the saints

are in the service of the glorification of God. In other words, Luther shifted our attention from

the marvelous characters of the saints to the magnificent works of God, who alone is to be

glorified. Second, the patriarchs, as saints who are examples of faith, may comfort and

strengthen us in the time of distress, the evil days. On the other hand, the patriarchs, as sinners

who were yet overcome by fear and sin, became our admonition that we should not be proud in

good days. As we will discuss later in this chapter, for Luther, the unchosen figures can also be

examples set by God for our edification not only because of their sins or disobedience of which

we should be aware but because of the divine mercy which was made manifest to them.

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[61] *LW* 5:26; WA 43:447.

[62] *LW* 5:26–27; WA 43:447.

[63] *LW* 5:27–28; WA 43:447.

Luther's Understanding of the People of God: *Fides*–Ecclesiology

Now we move from an anthropological perspective to an ecclesiological one, examining the depth of Luther's redefinition of the people of God on the basis of his evangelical anthropology. This redefinition can even be observed in the early exegetical works of Luther. Hendrix notes that Luther's *Dictata Super Psalterium (1513–1515)* places a growing importance on *fides* as the defining characteristic of the faithful in contrast to the medieval concept of *caritas* as the chief marker of the *fideles*. "*Fides*, a different *fides* from the *fides formata*, is beginning to replace *caritas* as the mark of the true *fideles*."[64] Christ is present in the faithful through faith. Hendrix goes on comment: "Christ lives and reigns in the *fideles* through faith during the whole time of grace (i.e. between the incarnation and his second coming)."[65]

Also, Hendrix brings up another crucial ecclesiological aspect of Luther's view of the people of God. For Luther, Hendrix argues, the true *fideles* are those who live in faith and the spirit. The theme of *homo spiritualis* (spiritual man) was integrated into Luther's ecclesiological framework in understanding the nature of the true church. The spiritual man was understood by Luther as a synonym for the faithful. "The understanding of the *homo spiritualis* as the *fidelis* marked by faith and founded in the eternal, invisible things of God which only he is able to know is thus decisive for Luther's new ecclesiology—both in regard to the definition of the *fidelis* and in regard to its revolutionary implications for ecclesiastical authority."[66] What should be highlighted here is the term "invisible" read in the sense of unknown to man but known only to God. In contrast to the medieval understanding in which the invisibility of the church is the

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[64] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 164–65.

[65] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 165.

[66] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 187.

uncertainty as to whether one is in the state of grace, Luther perceives this invisibility in a far more positive way. This invisibility or hiddenness of the church belongs to the defining character of the *fidelis* for all the spiritual and eternal goods which God bestows to the *fidelis* are invisible and unknown to the world.[67] Paul Althaus has also noted that, for Luther, on the one hand, the church is visible because of the presence of the Word and Sacrament; but on the other hand, the church is invisible because it is the community of believers and no one can see faith.[68] Hendrix and Althaus have also observed that when Luther deliberately argued for the invisibility or hiddenness of the true church, he intended to counter the Pope's hierarchical claim to rule over the whole of Christendom. But there is also an exegetical consequence of Luther's ecclesiological insights, which shaped his reading of the biblical figures, including the unchosen people in Genesis.[69] As we will see more clearly in the next section, Luther's Reformational insights on human identity, sainthood and the nature of the people of God all had their share in the reworking of his theological interpretation of the unchosen in Genesis.

A Different Evaluation of the Unchosen: Luther's Unique View of the Rejected

Luther's radical understanding of holiness drove the image of the saints out of its central place in Christian piety as one sees in medieval Christianity. Instead, the word of forgiveness which the saints received in faith comes to the forefront and becomes the center of our attention in the formation of Christian living. There is still something worthwhile in learning about faith and love from the lives of the saints, Luther conceded; nevertheless, this is only of secondary

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[67] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 195.

[68] Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 291–92.

[69] Hendrix in *Ecclesia In Via* does have a brief section within his Chapter Seven entitled "The Church from the Jews and Gentiles." However, the main focus of that section, as well as his whole chapter, is Luther's twofold understanding of the Jews shown in *Dictata*. See *Ecclesia In Via*, 256–60.

importance. What is more important is God's justifying word which creates saints out of sinners. As noted above, the first kind of saintliness, the equivalence for the passive righteousness, should always be prominent. It is the saintliness which lies *extra nos*, outside of us. "It is a heavenly saintliness communicated to us through the Word, and indeed through the spoken Word."[70] This idea is perfectly in accord with Luther's famous distinction between Christ as gift (*sacramentum*) and Christ as example (*exampulum*) shown in his *Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels* (1521).[71] It is right to say that Christ is an example set for us to imitate; however, "this is the smallest part of the gospel, on the basis of which it cannot yet even be called gospel. For on this level Christ is of no more help to you than some other saints." What is more important, for Luther, is that "before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own."[72]

The same is also true for Luther's discussion of the saints. They are good examples of faith and love for us to imitate. But what is more important for Luther is that through reverence for the lives of saints, our pious attention will be directed to the most benevolent and merciful God who justifies sinners without merits. The most appropriate illustration for our discussion is still Abraham, the most holy patriarch and the father of faith. Gordon Isaac observes that in Luther's account of Abraham in his lectures on Genesis, Abraham is first and foremost an idolater. Neither his civil virtues nor the performance of good works are the basis of his calling. He was nothing and remains nothing when God called him. "The unilateral action of God in his mercy, and his speaking that reality into the lives of people, is the source for the new creation. It is the

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[70] *LW* 5:213; WA 43:575. "Sed coelestis sanctitas, communicata nobis per verbum, et quidem vocale."

[71] *LW* 35:113–24; WA 10. I. 1:8–18.

[72] *LW* 35:119; WA 10. I. 1:11.

God who speaks (*Deus dixit*) who addresses Abraham the idolater in mercy and pity. … As

Luther is pleased to point out, in the case of Abraham, the Divine Majesty through his word

transforms this idolater into a new human and into a patriarch."[73] Abraham, Luther bluntly

admitted in his comment on Gen. 12:1, is simply "a man who hears God when He calls him, that

is, a merely passive person and merely the material on which divine mercy acts."[74] For Luther,

Abraham is the best embodiment of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

> It is a great and inexpressible gift that Abraham is physically the father of the Son of
> God. But what is the beginning of this honor? That Abraham is an idolater and a very
> great sinner, who worships a God he does not know! The Son of God wants this
> ancestor in His line of descent to be exalted, just as other ancestors of Christ are
> noted for their great sins.
>
> Why should this be the case? In the first place, in order to show that He is the Savior
> of sinners. In the second place, to inform us of His limitless kindness, lest we be
> overwhelmed by our sins and plunged into despair. In the third place, to block the
> road to haughtiness and pride. For when Abraham has been called in this way, he
> cannot say: "I have deserved this; this is my work." Even though he was guiltless
> before men so far as the Second Table is concerned, yet he was an idolater. He would
> have deserved eternal death had it not been for the call by which he was delivered
> from idolatry and finally granted the forgiveness of sins through faith. Therefore the
> statement stands (Rom. 9:16): "It depends not upon man's will or exertion but upon
> God's mercy."[75]

From this perspective, Luther's understanding of holiness disintegrates the superiority of

saints in themselves and relativizes the concept of sainthood. A saint in the first sense is merely

an alternative way of saying a believer, that is, a Christian who is saved by grace through faith in

Christ. Still every believer remains a sinner throughout his whole life. In the second sense, saints

are champions of faith. Their faith is remarkable in the way that their examples may elicit our

thanksgiving to God, strengthen our faith especially in the time of distress and suffering, and

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[73] Gordon Isaac, *Prayer, Meditation and Spiritual Trial: Luther's Account of Life in the Spirit* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2017), 153.

[74] *LW* 2:246; WA 42:437.

[75] *LW* 2:248; WA 42:438.

encourage us to the imitation of their faith and good works. Yet the ultimate focus of our attention is the object of that faith, the justifying word of God, the word which alone can bring righteousness, i.e., saintliness. In the final analysis, the title "saint" lost its meritorious and intercessory power in evangelical piety.

With this new perspective, Luther now evaluates the unchosen people in Scripture in a different light, a topic which has not been discussed, at least not explicitly, in recent literature. The unchosen people refer to the non–Jews or covenantal outsiders recorded in the Old Testament, particularly the figures mentioned in the book of Genesis, such as Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians.[76] They were outsiders of the covenantal promise, since God established the covenant of circumcision with Abraham and tied the promise to him that one day the promised Seed would be raised among Abraham's offspring. However, as Luther deemphasized the heroic picture of the saints and reoriented Christian piety towards the word of God, his view towards these unchosen people of the Old Testament shifted accordingly. Although they were outsiders of the covenantal promise, nevertheless they were not outsiders of mercy.

This discussion returns us to the previously stated question regarding whether pious pagans can be saved.[77] Instead of asking whether and to what extent the pious pagan be accepted by God, Luther wonders whether and to what extent are the unchosen saved. With the shift from the medieval *caritas*–ecclesiology to Luther's *fides*–ecclesiology, virtue for Luther is no longer a crucial feature in defining one's relationship to God and to his own salvation. In his reading of Rom. 15:8–9, Luther realized that Christ was the servant of both the Jews and the Gentile even

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[76] Technically speaking, Ishmael is "circumcised" yet not counted among the covenantal people.

[77] See p. 21 for details.

during the time before Christ when the ministry of the Word had not yet been publicly revealed. Therefore, Luther probed carefully throughout the Scripture for an overarching theme of God consistently bestowing his favor towards the unfavorable. In Genesis Luther discovered that God treated these unchosen figures with mercy and blessings, which gave rise to his idea of *fortuita misericordia*.

We have now broadened our understanding of Luther's overarching anthropological framework with its relation to the unchosen people characterized by *fortuita misericordia*. However, many questions are left unresolved, such as: How does the concept of *fortuita misericordia* work out in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* as a whole? How does the idea of believing Gentiles relate to Luther's idea of the true and false church? What is the teleological function of *fortuita misericordia* with respect to salvation history? In order to grasp a comprehensive and holistic picture of Luther's theological hermeneutic of *fortuita misericordia*, starting from Chapter Four, we will examine more thoroughly Luther's exposition of a series of individuals and groups in Genesis, with a special focus on how *fortuita misericordia* plays out in Luther's storytelling account.

However, before we turn to Luther's exposition of the unchosen in Genesis, we should first provide a historical survey of how the problem of unchosen unfolded in church history. Such a survey is essential to our understanding of Luther's way of perceiving the problem for three reasons: First, to fully appreciate the significance of Luther's idea of the unchosen and *fortuita misericordia*, we must understand the *status quo* of the problem with which the theologians before him had already been wrestling. Second, such a historical survey offers invaluable insights on making sense of certain important expressions of Luther in his comments on the unchosen. Third, helpful background research of the unchosen question reminds us of the

complexity and multivalent nature of the problem. The church tradition before the time of Luther was never, as one might wrongly think, static and monolithic. A sober recognition of the complexity of the patristic and medieval tradition deepens our understanding of the way which Luther critically interacted with them.[78] To this end we now turn to the next chapter.

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[78] Erik Herrmann, "Luther's Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation and His Use of the Church Fathers," in *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomir Batka, 71–90 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72.

CHAPTER THREE

UNCHOSEN AS OUTSIDERS OF SALVATION IN CHURCH TRADITION

Introduction

Since the earliest days of the church, Christians probed the questions related to the doctrine

of election, the definition of the people of God, and the salvation of covenantal outsiders. In

general, three groups of questions were posed by various Christians in the patristic and medieval

period: the respective claims of Jews and Christians in their identification as the elect, the degree

to which the episcopal order and liturgical practices set themselves as the limits which contain

the elect, and whether pagans who died before the incarnation yet lived virtuously can be saved.

We may say the first problem is the identity question—who are the people of God?,[1] the second

is the boundary question—how did the church delimit itself?,[2] and the third is the problem of

paganism—can virtuous pagans be saved?[3] Since Luther was but one among many who wrestled

with such questions, it is beneficial and even essential to provide a historical sketch of how these

questions were navigated before Luther. As such, this chapter will focus on the church tradition

inherited by Luther and the idea of covenantal outsiders in relation to God's salvific plan.

Two notes should follow. First, instead of providing a thorough study of the idea of

outsiders developed through time, our goal here is only to outline the basic contour of how the

question of the outsider was perceived and answered in the church tradition, mostly of the Latin

West. Second, since the purpose of this chapter is to set Luther's notion of *fortuita misericordia*

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[1] The use of "identity question" is inspired by Springer's article on Cain and Abel in Jewish and Christian traditions. See A. J. Springer, "Proof of Identification: Patristic and Rabbinic Exegesis of the Cain and Abel Narrative." *Studia Patristica* 59 (2003): 259–71.

[2] The use of "boundary question" is inspired by Mark Lindsay's article on election and church boundary. See Mark R. Lindsay, "Ecclesiology and Election in the Early Fathers," *Colloquium* 49, no.1 (2017): 74–88.

[3] John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

into the broader theological context of the church tradition, our selection of works will not be limited only to the exegetical works produced by Luther's predecessors, nor even bound to the comparative reading of the relevant passages of Genesis. Instead, a group of questions is placed to guide and set the parameters of our selection of works: How did Luther's predecessors navigate the question of election and their identity as the New Israel? How did the visible, sacramental aspect of the church as the sole mediator of the means of grace come to terms with the invisible, pretemporal aspect of the church as the elect people of God? To put it more simply, what does the classic Cyprian axiom "outside the church there is no salvation" actually mean for Luther's predecessors? And finally, how did their understanding of election relate to the boundary of the people of God, especially concerning those who lived a virtuous life yet never heard the gospel?

The present chapter contains three sections according to these three sets of questions: the unchosen as Jews, the unchosen as schismatics, and the unchosen as idolaters. Our major focus will be on the third, namely, the problem of paganism, for its relevance to our study. In each of the sections, we present chronologically the answers and thoughts postulated by various authors along church history, as well as the ecclesiological context through which the theological ideas took shape. At the end of each section, we will summarize the general ideas made by the authors concerning that specific problem. We will also highlight some exegetical and theological issues which are important to our discussion of Luther as shown in the later chapters.

Unchosen as Jew: The Problem of Identity

The Early Church

The Christian church in the first and early second centuries was chiefly occupied by the question of identity. Markus Barth once thoughtfully asked, "Is the people of God in its New

Testament from the competitor, successor or partner of the elect people, the Jews?".[4] To put it another way, how does the church's self–identification as the elected community of God (1 Peter 2:9) align with Israel as the chosen people of God (Exod. 19:5–6)? Who are the "true" elect? This question can be approached in a variety of ways. From an exegetical point of view, early Christians often looked for clues in the narratives of biblical figures that would indicate that the election of the Jews as the chosen people was temporary, only to be succeeded by the election of the church in Christ. Since the problem of identity is relatively uncomplicated among the three problems, three examples from different periods of early church history are enough to illustrate the way which the early Christians answered the question: Justin Martyr on Abraham, Irenaeus on Cain and Esau, and Cyprian on Hagar.

The most prominent example that early Christians used to argue in their favor was, unsurprisingly, Abraham. In his study of the early Christian use of Abraham in their writings up to the middle of the second century, Jeffrey Siker recognizes two characteristic patterns:

> First, Abraham provides a focus for claims about the inclusion of people within God's salvation and the exclusion of people from God's salvation. Second, Abraham provides a focus for claims about Gentiles and Jews. In fact, various authors use Abraham to integrate these patterns around two issues…: Gentile inclusion and Jewish exclusion.[5]

In *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* (*Dialogue with Trypho*), Justin Martyr (100–165) appeals to Abraham over a hundred times in order to use "Abraham to render the Jews orphaned, without legitimate claim to Abraham as their father in any meaningful way."[6] A passage in chapter 119 of the *Dialogus* reads,

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[4] Markus Barth, *The People of God*, JSNT Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 12.

[5] Jeffery S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 190. We suggest in the summary of this section that "disinheriting the Jews" is the best term capturing the early Christians' attitude towards the Jews.

[6] Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 162.

But we [Christians] are not only a people, but also a holy people, as we have shown already. 'And they shall call them the holy people, redeemed by the Lord.' Therefore we are not a people to be despised, nor a barbarous race, nor such as the Carian and Phrygian nations; but God has even chosen us, and He has become manifest to those who asked not after Him. 'Behold, I am God,' He says, 'to the nation which called not on My name.' For this is that nation which God of old promised to Abraham, when He declared that He would make him a father of many nations; … What larger measure of grace, then, did Christ bestow on Abraham? This, namely, that He called him with His voice by the like calling, telling him to quit the land wherein he dwelt. And He has called all of us by that voice, … and along with Abraham we shall inherit the holy land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being children of Abraham through the like faith. For as he believed the voice of God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, in like manner we, having believed God's voice spoken by the apostles of Christ, and promulgated to us by the prophets, have renounced even to death all the things of the world. Accordingly, He promises to him a nation of similar faith, God-fearing, righteous, and delighting the Father; but it is not you, "in whom is no faith."[7]

In short, for Justin, Abraham is the paramount example whom Christians claimed as their ancestor of faith. By faith in Christ, Christians become the true heirs of Abraham, while the Jews, in their lack of faith in Christ, are not the children of Abraham at all.

In addition to Abraham, the unchosen figures in Genesis were used by the early Christians in their polemic against the Jews. In an illuminating article, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition in Christian Theology," Clark Williamson traced the anti-Judaic posture among the early Christians from the second through the early fifth century.[8] Irenaeus (130–200) was the first Christian theologian who explicitly associated Cain with the Jews.[9] In Book IV, Chapter 18 of *Adversus Haereses* (*Against Heresies*), Irenaeus argues,

For at the beginning God had respect to the gifts of Abel, because he offered with single-mindedness and righteousness; but He had no respect unto the offering of

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[7] J. P. Migne ed. *Patrologiae Graeca*, *vol.* 6 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857), 752–53. Hereafter as *PG*. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Ante–Nicene Father 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 258–59. Hereafter as *ANF*.

[8] Clark M. Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition in Christian Theology," *Encounter* 39 (1978): 273–96. Here we are not in the position of judging or even evaluating Williamson's overall argument, but merely to make use of Williamson's examples for the sake of our study.

[9] Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition," 285.

Cain, because his heart was divided with envy and malice, which he cherished against his brother, as God says when reproving his hidden [thoughts], "Though thou offerest rightly, yet, if thou dost not divide rightly, hast thou not sinned? Be at rest;" since God is not appeased by sacrifice. For if any one shall endeavour to offer a sacrifice merely to outward appearance, unexceptionably, in due order, and according to appointment, while in his soul he does not assign to his neighbour that fellowship with him which is right and proper, nor is under the fear of God; —he who thus cherishes secret sin does not deceive God by that sacrifice which is offered correctly as to outward appearance; …. Wherefore did the Lord also declare: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye are like whited sepulchres. For the sepulchre appears beautiful outside, but within it is full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness; even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of wickedness and hypocrisy." For while they were thought to offer correctly so far as outward appearance went, *they had in themselves jealousy like to Cain*; therefore *they slew the Just One, slighting the counsel of the Word, as did also Cain*. For [God] said to him, "Be at rest;" but he did not assent. Now what else is it to "be at rest" than to forego purposed violence? And saying similar things to these men, He declares: "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse that which is within the cup, that the outside may be clean also." And they did not listen to Him.[10]

Here Irenaeus made a twofold attack against the Jews. First, the Jews committed the same mistake as Cain in their common adherence to the outward appearance of sacrifice. Second, the Jews, in their jealousy and wickedness, "slew the Just One," just as Cain did his brother. As John Byron observes, the exegetical move Irenaeus made is to conclude what Jesus in Matt 23:35 seems to allude, namely, that the Pharisee is guilty of "all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah."[11] Since the Pharisees were guilty of shedding the blood of Abel, they were guilty of the same crime as Cain. In brief, "Jesus' insistence that the Pharisees are collectively guilty of Abel's murder … led Irenaeus to conclude that Cain was a type of the Jews."[12]

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[10] *PG* 7:1025–26; *ANF* 1:485 (*Against Heresies,* 4.18.3) (emphasis added). The biblical passage whih Irenaeus quoted comes from the LXX Gen. 4:7 (οὐκ ἐὰν ὀρθῶς προσενέγκης, ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλῃς, ἥμαρτες.) and is also reflected in the pre-vulgate *vetus latina*: "Nonne si recte offeras recte autem non dividas peccasti quiesce."

[11] John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in Biblical Narrative 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 237. For a longer discussion, see Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 233–43.

[12] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 237.

Rebecca's twins, Esau and Jacob, provided another common theme used by Irenaeus and other church fathers in their treatment of the identity question. In Book IV, chapter 21 of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus typologically linked Jacob to Christ and to the church, and Esau to the Jews.

> Thus, in the first place, at his birth, since he laid hold on his brother's heel, he was called Jacob, that is, the supplanter—one who holds, but is not held; binding the feet, but not being bound; striving and conquering; grasping in his hand his adversary's heel, that is, victory. For to this end was the Lord born, the type of whose birth he set forth beforehand, … In the next place, [Jacob] received the rights of the first-born, when his brother looked on them with contempt; even as also the younger nation received Him, Christ, the first-begotten, when the elder nation [the Jews] rejected Him, saying, "We have no king but Caesar." But in Christ every blessing [is summed up], and therefore *the latter people [the church] has snatched away the blessings of the former [the Jews] from the Father*, just as Jacob took away the blessing of this Esau. For which cause his brother suffered the plots and persecutions of a brother, *just as the Church suffers this self-same thing from the Jews.*[13]

For Irenaeus, there are two lines of similarity between Esau and the Jews. First, just as Jacob the younger snatched away the first-birth blessings of Esau the older from Isaac, the church has snatched away the blessings of the Jews from God the Father. Second, just as Jacob was despised and persecuted by Esau, the church was held in contempt and persecuted by the Jews. Thus we see both Cain and Esau were identified by Irenaeus as figures of "the Jews," which implied that their status as the chosen people of God was no longer valid. Instead, the church now legitimately claims to be the true elect community.

Elizabeth Clark once noticed that Hagar was employed by the church fathers in a variety of ways: as an anti–Jewish polemic, against the Gnostics, and as a defense of marriage.[14] In Book I, chapter 20 of his *Ad Quirinum testimonia adversus Iudaeos* (*Three Books of Testimonies against*

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[13] *PG* 7:1045–46; *ANF* 1:493 (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 4.21.3) (emphasis added).

[14] Elizabeth A. Clark, "Interpretive Fate amid the Church Fathers," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspective*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, 127–48 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

the Jews), Cyprian of Carthage (200–258) allegorically interpreted the long–barren women in the

Old Testament—Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah—as types of the church and their sons–Joseph,

Jacob, and Samuel—as types of Christ. Accordingly, their husbands' other wives—Hagar, Leah,

and Peninnah—are all types of the synagogue.

> In Isaiah: "Rejoice, thou barren, that barest not; and break forth and cry, thou that
> travailest not: because many more are the children of the desolate one than of her
> who hath a husband. …" Thus also to Abraham, when his former son was born of a
> bond-woman, Sarah remained long barren; and late in old age bare her son Isaac, of
> promise, who was the type of Christ. Thus also Jacob received two wives: the elder
> Leah, with weak eyes, a type of the synagogue; the younger the beautiful Rachel, a
> type of the Church, who also remained long barren, and afterwards brought forth
> Joseph, who also was himself a type of Christ. And in the first of Kings it is said that
> Elkanah had two wives: Peninnah, with her sons; and Hannah, barren, from whom is
> born Samuel, …and Samuel being born, was a type of Christ.[15]

Clark also observes that since Cyprian, the synagogue became more and more incompatible with

the church because "the former has been abandoned, not incorporated into the latter."[16] In sum, in

the eyes of the early fathers, the Jews were once the elect, but now they are outsiders of the true

faith because of their collective rejection of Christ the promised Messiah.

Augustine (354–430)

The historical survey of the problem of identity ends with Augustine. As the last great

theologian of the patristic period, Augustine represents both the culmination of Western theology

up until his time and the foundation of the Latin theological tradition for the next millennium.

Furthermore, Augustine's thought had a deep and extensive impact upon Luther's, which makes

him an indispensable figure in our study. Here we discuss Augustine's response to the identity

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[15] J. P. Migna ed. *Patrologiae Latina,* vol.4 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1844), 688–89. Hereafter as *PL*. *ANF* 5:512–13 (Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews*, 1.20).

[16] Clark, "Interpretive Fate," 129.

question in his treatment of the story of Cain and Abel.

Augustine's comments on the Jews and Judaism spread widely across many of his writings. For our interest of the unchosen in the exegetical tradition, we only turn to Augustine's *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (*Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*).[17] In Book 12 of *Contra Faustum*, since Faustus denied the prophecy of Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures, Augustine provides an allegorical reading of the story of Cain and Abel as an apologetic reply to Faustus. In the same way as Irenaeus understood the story, Cain was taken as a figure of the Jews while Abel was read as a figure of Christ.[18]

> As Cain's sacrifice of the fruit of the ground is rejected, while Abel's sacrifice of his sheep and the fat thereof is accepted. So the faith of the New Testament praising God in the harmless service of grace is preferred to the earthly observances of the Old Testament. For though the Jews were right in practicing these things, they were guilty of unbelief in not distinguishing the time of the New Testament when Christ came, from the time of the Old Testament. God said to Cain, "If thou offerest well, yet if thou dividest not well, thou hast sinned." If Cain had obeyed God when He said, "Be content, for to thee shall be its reference, and thou shalt rule over it," he would have referred his sin to himself, by taking the blame of it, and confessing it to God; and so assisted by supplies of grace, he would have ruled over his sin, instead of acting as the servant of sin in killing his innocent brother. So also the Jews, of whom all these things are a figure, if they had been content, instead of being turbulent, and had acknowledged the time of salvation through the pardon of sins by grace …—they would in confession have referred their sin to themselves, saying to the Physician, as it is written in the Psalm, "I said, Lord, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." And being made free by the hope of grace, they would have ruled over sin as long as it continued in their mortal body. But now, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and wishing to establish a righteousness of their own, proud of the works of the law, instead of being humbled on account of their sins, they have not been content; and in subjection to sin reigning in their mortal body, so as to make them obey it in the lusts thereof, they have stumbled on the stone of stumbling, and have been inflamed with hatred against him whose works they grieved to see accepted by God. The man who was born blind, and had been made to see, said to

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[17] *PL* 42:207–518; Philip Schaff ed., *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers 1.4: St. Augustine: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 151–345 (Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*). Hereafter as *NPNF* 1.4. Another main anti–Judaic writing of Augustine is his *Treatise against the Jews*.

[18] Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition," 290. See also Springer, "Proof of Identification," 262–66; Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 239–43.

them, "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man serve Him, and do His will, him He heareth;" as if he had said, God regardeth not the sacrifice of Cain, but he regards the sacrifice of Abel. Abel, the younger brother, is killed by the elder brother; Christ, the head of the younger people, is killed by the elder people of the Jews. Abel dies in the field; Christ dies on Calvary.[19]

Williamson proposes nine points of comparison between Cain and the Jews in Augustine's typological reading of the story:[20]

1) Cain's offering is rejected, Abel is accepted. Thus, faith of the New Testament is preferred to earthly observances of the Old Testament.

2) Cain offered well, but did not divide well. Likewise, the Jews offered sacrifices but were unable to distinguish the New dispensation from the Old.

3) Like Cain, the Jews did not confess their sins and killed the innocent brother, Christ.

4) Neither Cain nor the Jews can answer God's question: Where is your brother?

5) Like Cain who was cursed by the earth, the Jews received a curse from the church.

6) The ground no longer yields strength to Cain. Likewise, the strength of Christ did not yield to the Jews.

7) Like Cain, the Jews are blind to their situation.

8) Both Cain and the Jews were spared from the death penalty of their killing. Instead, both of them became wanderers on earth.

9) A mark was placed on Cain, the same as was done for the Jews, that they are separated from other peoples.

As Byron reminds us, "however strident his [Augustine's] exegesis may sound to modern ears, his remarks are not aimed at Jews but his Manichean opponents. His concern was not so much

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[19] *PL* 42:258–59; *NPNF* 1.4:186 (Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, 12.9).

[20] Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition," 290–91.

with Jews in the flesh, but with 'textual' or 'hermeneutical' Jews."[21] Nevertheless, Byron admits that Augustine's association of the Jews with Cain, especially in their curse of banishment from the land, became a "hallmark of Christian anti-Judaism" which had a profound impact upon medieval and even modern Christianity.[22] The Jews were henceforth deprived of any claims as the chosen people of God. Instead, the theological framework that Augustine introduced "helped to dictate not only the disastrous relationship between Jews and Christians, but also established the theological foundations for the exclusion and persecution of Jews."[23]

Against Byron's argument, however, Paula Fredriksen, in her *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*, contended that Augustine was not so much a destroyer as a defender of Jews and the Judaism of late antiquity.[24] In chapter nine of her book titled "The Mark of Cain," Fredriksen argues that, while Augustine retained the same framework of the *adversus Iudaeos* tradition in his typological construal of Cain as Jews and Abel as Christ, Augustine managed to display a rather sympathetic reading of the Jews by interpreting the mark of Cain in a positive way. Fredriksen observes, "The 'mark of Cain,' in colloquial English, often serves as a phrase synonymous with a 'mark of shame.' Neither in the biblical story itself nor in Augustine's reuse of it, however, does the phrase work that way. True, the one who bears it is a murderer. But the point of the sign is not to shame its bearer, but to warn anyone who comes upon him that the murderer stands under the protection of God."[25] Though their rejection of the

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[21] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 242.

[22] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 242–43.

[23] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 243.

[24] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[25] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 271.

gospel is deplorable, for Augustine "the Jews still perform a unique, and uniquely valuable, service to the church."[26] How so? "The ready identifiability of their customs, the antiquity of their nation and of their sacred texts, their extreme attachment to those texts [of the Hebrew Scriptures], and finally, their widespread dispersion: On account of all these factors, Jews everywhere serve to authenticate, even to vindicate, Christian beliefs."[27]

While Fredriksen's overall argument of Augustine's "defense" of the Jews may seem overstated, her nuanced reading of Augustine illuminates our study of Luther's *fortuita misericordia* in an important way. Like Augustine, Luther is often able to read the unchosen figures in Genesis with great theological acumen, which defied the conventional idea of the subject. As we will see in the following section, Augustine's insight on the boundary question had an even more profound and far-reaching impact upon later generations, including Luther.

As the idea of Christendom developed in the Middle Ages, the *corpus Christianum* started to identify itself as Augustine's *civitas Dei*. Lindsay pointedly remarks that "with the body of Christ thus politicized, citizenship of the empire was determined by adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy, with membership of the elect correspondingly determined and refused by imperial belonging."[28] The identity question was sometimes asked and genuine conversations did sometimes happen. Yet in a general perspective, the Jews, along with Muslims, heretics and pagans, were seen as the members of the *civitas diaboli*. Toleration was granted to the Jews to live side by side with the normal Christian citizens, yet it was largely impossible for the Jewish community to be seen as an integral part of the society.[29] They would never be recognized as the

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[26] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 276.

[27] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 276–77.

[28] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 75.

[29] G. R. Evans, *The Church in the Early Middle Ages: The I. B. Tauris History of the Christian Church* (New York: Tauris, 2007), 22.

people of God and full citizens within Christendom except through conversion. In other words, they were now unchosen by default. The key concern for medieval Christianity, as G.R. Evans remarks, was "whether there is a duty to capture territory for one's faith, a duty to 'convert the unbelievers,' to the truth, overturning a 'wrong' view whether held collectively or individually, and, if necessary, by the use of force."[30]

Summary: Disinheriting the Jews

"Disinheriting the Jews" is perhaps the most vivid catchphrase capturing the idea of how the early Christians navigated the problem of the Jews as the chosen people of God. Because of their collective rejection of Christ as the promised Seed, the Jews as a whole were disinherited from the prerogative of the chosen people of God and the inheritance of Abraham. Their place was now replaced by the Christian church, the new Israel. As such, the way the early Christians read the biblical figures simply reflected this overall polemic against the Jews. Cain and Hagar, among other negative figures, were all types of the Jews or synagogue, while Abel represented Christ and the faith of the New Testament. For Luther, however, his reading of the unchosen figures is far more nuanced. As we will see in the following chapters, Luther was, on the one hand, in line with the "*Adversus Judaeo*" tradition in his reading of the unchosen figures of Genesis. On the other hand, driven by his understanding of the nature of promise and the unfolding of the salvation history, Luther managed to interpret each individual in a subtly new way. Cain, Hagar, and Ishmael are also all recipients of divine mercy.

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[30] Evans, *The Church in the Early Middle Age*, 97.

Unchosen as Schismatics: The Problem of Boundary

Although the identity question continues to be a perennial and pressing issue among Christian writers of all ages,[31] it nevertheless gradually abated as a subsidiary concern as the Gentiles Christians drastically increased and became the majority of the church by the end of the first century. In place of the identity question, the church became preoccupied by the boundary question. In his sociocultural study of Christian origins, Howard Clark Kee suggests that the boundary questions were some of the most crucial sets of questions which the early Christian community posed to itself: What are the identifying markers of the community? How and by what standard do we determine someone is within the boundary? By what process could one be included within the boundary?[32] Drawing from Kee's observation, Mark Lindsay remarks that the boundary question produced two difficulties in the early church. First, since setting ecclesial limits by creedal statements was itself the result of controversy, on what basis can one tell which side is heretical or schismatic before a controversy broke out? Second and more importantly, a definitive understanding of the meaning of the church was still elusive.[33] These two difficulties can be distilled into the following question: How does one understand the axiom, (coined by Cyprian), "there is no salvation outside the church?"[34] In this section we present the works of Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, and finally Augustine.

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[31] Recall Williamson's article, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition."

[32] Howard Clark Kee, *Who Are the People of God? Early Christian Models of Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 13–14. In Kee's study, there is no distinction between identity question and boundary question. What Kee meant by "boundary questions" and other categories of questions are prompted by the insights from the sociocultural analyses. For our purpose, we narrow the questions posed by Kee to ecclesial limits of the visible church.

[33] Mark R. Lindsay, *God has Chosen: The Doctrine of Election Through Christian History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 40.

[34] An accessible introduction to the issue from a Catholic perspective remains Francis A. Sullivan S.J, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

The Early Church

The apostolic fathers of the second century "tended to lay heavy stress on more obvious institutional markers of the church's existence that spoke to communal order and ethical propriety."[35] In these formative decades of Christianity, Lindsay further remarks, we found "an increasingly sophisticated variety of organizational models" rather than a thoughtful articulation of creedal statements.[36] For instance, in his *Letter to the Philadelphians*, Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108) contends,

> For as many as are of Christ are also with the bishop; but as many as fall away from him, and embrace communion with the accursed, these shall be cut off along with them. For they are not Christ's husbandry, but the seed of the enemy, from whom may you ever be delivered by the prayers of the shepherd, that most faithful and gentle shepherd who presides over you. I therefore exhort you in the Lord to receive with all tenderness those that repent and return to the unity of the Church, that through your kindness and forbearance they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, and becoming worthy of Jesus Christ, may obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of Christ.[37]

Here Ignatius draws a strong bond between salvation and the authority of the bishop. Communion with Christ for him is identical to communion with Christ's bride embodied in the fellowship of bishops. As he famously puts elsewhere, "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (ὥσπερ ὅπου ἂν ᾖ Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, ἐκεῖ ἦ κανθλικὴ Ἐκκλησία)."[38] As Lindsay notes, throughout his epistles Ignatius "commends union with the bishop as being analogous to union

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[35] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 45.

[36] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 48.

[37] *PG* 5:699–700; *ANF* 1:80 (Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*, 3).

[38] *PG* 5:713–14; *ANF* 1:90 (Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans*, 8).

with Christ, with the bishop indeed standing 'in the place of' (εἰς τόπον θεοῦ) God himself and the presbyters delegating in the place of the apostles."[39]

The next example is Tertullian (155–240). Tertullian is a strong defender of the apostolic succession. Along with Ignatius, Tertullian insisted on the proper episcopal jurisdiction as constitutive of the church. In chapter 32 of his *De Praescriptionibus Haereticorum*, Tertullian accused the heretics of their lack of apostolic credentials which in turn proved them guilty of heresy, "we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [their] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles."[40] Tertullian sees the appointment and succession of the episcopal offices as the necessary condition of safeguarding and transmitting the apostolic and orthodox faith.[41]

The most prominent defender of episcopal continuity in the third century is, beyond doubt, Cyprian. Confronted by the problems of the lapsed and the schism of his days, Cyprian returned to the visible presence of the episcopal offices. Cyprian defined membership of the church "as being in communion with those bishops who were in the line of apostolic succession."[42] As Cyprian famously puts in his *Liber de Unitate Ecclesiae*,

> Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated
> from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain
> to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no
> longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If anyone

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[39] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 52.

[40] *PL* 2:44; *ANF* 3:258 (Tertullian, *The Prescription against Heretics*, 32).

[41] Ironically, with such a strong insistence on the succession of the episcopal offices, Tertullian in his later years chose to take himself out from under the authority of his bishop by joining the Montanist movement.

[42] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 62.

could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church.[43]

For Cyprian, the ark of Noah symbolically refers to the historic church of Christ. In his *Letter 64*, Cyprian makes a still stronger and even absolute bond between episcopacy, church, and salvation, which is reminiscent of the ecclesiology of Ignatius.

> Nor let them think that the way of life or of salvation is still open to them, if they have refused to obey the bishops and priests, since in Deuteronomy the Lord God says, "And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest or judge, whosoever he shall be in those days, that man shall die, and all the people shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously." God commanded those who did not obey His priests to be slain, and those who did not hearken to His judges who were appointed for the time. … For they cannot live out of it, since the house of God is one, and there can be no salvation to any except in the Church.[44]

Here we find the stronger expression closest to what Roman Catholicism later called "no salvation outside the church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*)."[45] As Lindsay concludes, for Cyprian, "episcopal succession was more than simply a sign and pledge of ecclesial unity; it was the very basis of the church's existence and continuing ministry. Cyprianic episcopacy provided for the first time a set of visible criteria by which membership of both the church and the community of the elect could be measured. …The boundaries of the church and of the elect were tied narrowly, and inextricably, to the historic episcopate."[46]

Augustine

As in the previous section, we will end our discussion of the problem of boundary with a

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[43] *PL* 4:503; *ANF* 5:423 (Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, 6).

[44] *PL* 4:389–90; *ANF* 5:538 (Cyprian, *Epistle LXIV*, 1).

[45] The most recent official statement concerning this doctrine as articulated in *Lumen Gentium* of Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) reads, "[w]hoever, therefore, knowing that that Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved." *The Documents of Vatican II* (Piscataway: New Century, 1966), 32–33 (*Lumen Gentium*, ch.14).

[46] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 64.

brief look at Augustine. The main ecclesiological and theological opponent of Augustine in his earlier career were the Donatists. Lindsay once noted that despite of the contextual similarities which Augustine shared with Cyprian in their conflict with their respective schismatics, the Donatists and Novatians, Augustine deviated from Cyprian in two important respects. First, Augustine benefited from the Council of Nicaea which clarified in its canons many of the ecclesial issues of his day. Second, Augustine's emphasis on original sin contributed much to his notion of the church as a mixed community.[47] We may add a third aspect in addition to the two listed above. Augustine lived in an age when Christianity had already become the established religion which made him able to impose legislative measures against the heterodox groups.

Facing the attacks of the Donatists, that the true church should be a spotless and pure community who could never readmit the lapsed, Augustine provided a powerful counterargument by highlighting two elements that the true church must possess, namely, the communion of the catholic church (*ecclesia catholica*) with the virtue of charity (*caritas*). According to Augustine, the Donatists were shamefully guilty in their transgression against these two elements. In his classic work against Donatism written around 400, *De Baptismo*, Augustine argues,

> But when it is said that "the Holy Spirit is given by the imposition of hands in the Catholic Church only," I suppose that our ancestors meant that we should understand thereby what the apostle says, "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." For this is that very love which is wanting in all who are cut off from the communion of the Catholic Church; and for lack of this, "though they speak with the tongues of men and of angels, though they understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though they have the gift of prophecy, and all faith, so that they could remove mountains, and though they bestow all their goods to feed the poor, and though they give their bodies to be burned, it profiteth them nothing." But those are wanting in God's love who do not care for the

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[47] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 66.

unity of the Church; and consequently we are right in understanding that the Holy Spirit may be said not to be received except in the Catholic Church.[48]

For Augustine, the distinguishing mark of the true church is love, not moral purity. Since the Donatists cut themselves off from the communion of the Catholic church, they violated the principle of love. Accordingly, they also cut themselves off from the Holy Spirit. As Augustine puts elsewhere,

> The Catholic Church alone is the body of Christ [*Proinde Ecclesia catholica sola corpus est Christi*], of which He is the Head and Saviour of His body. Outside this body the Holy Spirit giveth life to no one, seeing that, as the apostle says himself, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us;" but he is not a partaker of the divine love who is the enemy of unity. Therefore, they have not the Holy Ghost who are outside the Church.[49]

Here Augustine identifies the Catholic church with the body of Christ, recognized in the sharing of divine love, and excludes any possibility of the salvific work of the Holy Spirit outside this church. This is not to say, however, that Augustine's idea of the Catholic church is a perfect entity filled with divine love. Quite the contrary, Augustine realistically admits the presence of sin and imperfection in the church on earth. Backed by the parable of the wheat and tares and a strong awareness of the manifestation of original sin, Augustine forcefully argues that the church will remain a mixed community of both the good and wicked, elect and condemned until the final judgment. Scott Hendrix once labelled Augustine's reply to the Donatists as the "eschatological argument."[50] Since the good and wicked can only be revealed in the final judgment, we could not and should not artificially try to separate them in a coercive way, as the Donatists did. As Lindsay remarks, for Augustine, "the holiness of the church's members is a

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[48] *PL* 43:148; *NPNF* 1.4:442–43 (Augustine, *On Baptism, against the Donatist,* 3.16.21).

[49] *PL* 33:815; *NPNF* 1.4:651 (Augustine, *Letter CLXXXV,* 11.50). Letter *CLXXXV* is also known as *A Treatise concerning the Correction of the Donatists*.

[50] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 18.

process and not a status, with perfection made perfect at the final judgment of all things."[51] This is also true for Augustine's view of the sacrament. As opposed to the Donatists who contend that baptism and ordination was invalidated by the sins of priests, above all the sin of the lapsed, Augustine insists that the immorality of the priests does not affect the efficacy of the sacraments. For example, in his *Contra litteras Petiliani Donatistae Cortensis, Episcopi* (*In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta*), Augustine argues in Book One,

> Wherefore, whether a man receive the sacrament of baptism from a faithful or a faithless minister, his whole hope is in Christ, that he fall not under the condemnation that "cursed is he that placeth his hope in man." Otherwise, if each man is born again in spiritual grace of the same sort as he by whom he is baptized, and if when he who baptizes him is manifestly a good man, then he himself gives faith, he is himself the origin and root and head of him who is being born; whilst, when the baptizer is faithless without its being known, then the baptized person receives faith from Christ, then he derives his origin from Christ, then he is rooted in Christ, then he boasts in Christ as his head,—in that case all who are baptized should wish that they might have faithless baptizers, and be ignorant of their faithlessness: for however good their baptizers might have been, Christ is certainly beyond comparison better still; and He will then be the head of the baptized, if the faithlessness of the baptizer shall escape detection.[52]

In sum, for Augustine, the moral character of the baptizer can neither help nor harm the efficacy of the sacrament. This idea of the efficacy of the sacraments regardless of the moral integrity of the ministers in turn enhanced Augustine's high view of church authority as the mediator of the means of grace. In Augustine's view, although the sacraments one received outside of the Catholic church are deemed valid, as in the case of the Donatists, schismatics nevertheless violate the core principles of charity and peace. They are urged to return to the one true church of God.

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[51] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 62. See also Oakley, *The Western Church*, 160.

[52] *PL* 43:249; *NPNF* 1.4:521–22 (Augustine, *In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta,* 1.6).

Summary: Triumph of Catholicism

In this section, we examined several patristic writings and their understanding of the boundary of the church as set by the visible, continuous presence of the episcopal offices, namely, the Catholic church. The anti-Donatist writings of Augustine, which stress the efficacy of the sacraments independent of the dignity of the ministers, became the standard texts of the medieval church as represented by the idea that the sacraments work *ex opere operato*, not *ex opere operantis*.[53] Augustine's defense of the unity and catholicity of the church became another enduring legacy bequeathed to the medieval church against all forms of schism, including Luther and the Reformation movement. While Luther and the problem of boundary is a worthy topic in and of itself, for the purpose of our study, however, we are interested in another, even more unsettling legacy of Augustine left to the medieval Christianity, namely, the sovereignty of God and the salvation of the pagans.

Unchosen as Idolaters: The Problem of Paganism

The question of the salvation of virtuous pagans was actually an extension or offshoot of the boundary question. While Cyprian's axiom "no salvation outside the church" was originally oriented to the problem of schism, the same principle can naturally extend to the pagans. Those pagans who deliberately rejected Christ were, no doubt, guilty. However, for those ignorant pagans, namely, those who died before the incarnation or those who lived far beyond the reach of Christian mission even after the incarnation, and thus had no access to the knowledge of Christ,

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[53] See Artur Michael Landgraf, "Die Gnadenökonomie des Alten Bundes nach der Lehre der Frühscholastik," in *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik* 3, no.1 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1954), 19–60. The distinction between *opera operans* and *opera operatum* emerged from the consideration of nature of salvation in the Old Testament observance of the law as a way to highlight the distinction and perfection of the New Testament sacraments, i.e. the Old Testament sacaraments/sacrifices justified *ex opere operans*, but the New Testament sacraments justified *ex opere operato*.

is it fair to say that they justly deserved eternal damnation?[54] This question can further be recast in two ways, apologetic and exegetical. On the one hand, from an apologetic perspective: Are the pagans who lived before Christ and yet lived a virtuous life to be regarded as eternally damned? An exegetical perspective, on the other hand, might ask on what basis the patriarchs and pious pagans recorded in the Old Testament can be saved. Together this became the problem of paganism, which touches the very basis of divine sovereignty, justice, and mercy. Would this sovereign and almighty God leave himself unknown for so long? Would the God of justice punish people for not trusting him without providing them any viable access to himself? Would God save some "good" people, who lived a virtuous life, on the basis of his mercy despite of the fact that their knowledge of him is incomplete? Here three interrelated elements are at work in prompting the problem: saving knowledge, saving virtue, and the basis for salvation. Before the incarnation, in what way and to what extent can the pagans know about the one true God? Is the knowledge of God available to them sufficient for their conversion? How do Christians regard virtues possessed by the pagans? Although the *caritas* and *fides* which the virtuous pagans possessed were partial and incomplete, nevertheless could God reward them with eternal blessings on the basis of their effort or his mercy? Would a merciful God deny grace to those who do what is in them (*facere quod in se est*)?[55] In other words, could their virtues by any means be meritorious?

Given the sheer complexity of the problem of paganism, our scope of investigation has to be narrowed and selective. Our aim of this section is to provide a chronological sketch of the

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[54] John Marenbon once classified these people as "invincible ignorant pagan." See John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 281. In fact, the term can be found in Aquinas (*ignorantia invincibilis*) and became an official theological category in the 19th century by Pope Pius IX. For the sake of clarity, we simply use "ignorant pagans."

[55] Recall the discussion of nominalist theology and its soteriological impact in Chapter Two, pp. 17–19.

ways in which Christians wrestled with the problem of paganism, starting from the Hermetic

tradition, through the early church, to the medieval period, and finally the early 16ᵗʰ century. A

variety of figures will be involved in this survey, including well-known theologians such as

Origen, Augustine, Boethius, Abelard, and Aquinas, as well as humanist authors such as Dante,

Boccaccio, Ficino, Pico, and Valla. Our method is to lay out their answers with respect to the

three elements as mentioned previously: knowledge, virtue and salvation. We will sum up this

section by offering a synopsis of various options suggested by the patristic and medieval authors,

and orient them towards the chapters to follow. An important caveat should be added before we

proceed. The main goal here is to provide a historical sketch on how the problem of paganism

was perceived and handled. We are not claiming that Luther in his Genesis Lectures knowingly

interacted with all the patristic and medieval authors mentioned in the following section. Our

intention to draw these authors into discussion is to shed light on how the concept of *fortuita*

misericordia in Luther's idea of the unchosen, from a historical theological perspective, was

another way to answer the same problem with which these patristic and medieval authors also

wrestled, namely, how could the outsiders of faith be saved? As such, the answers posed by the

authors function as conceptual reference by which Luther's idea of the unchosen can be

measured and navigated.

<p style="text-align:center">Hermetic Tradition</p>

Hermes Trismegistus was a mysterious figure, thought to be a contemporary of Moses,

who channeled the Hebrew revelation to the Greek philosophers as he came in contact with the

Old Testament tradition.[56] A variety of writings, known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which

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[56] Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964), 26–27. Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 130.

showed a general monotheistic outlook, were attributed to him.[57] Some early Christians writers

such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Augustine briefly mentioned or discussed the

Hermetic writings in their works. For example, in his *De Vanitate Idolorum* (*On the Vanity of

Idols*), Cyprian made a passing reference to Hermes that while the Roman people were

worshipping idols and false spirits, some philosophers did know the one true God. "However, the

chief Hostanes both says that the form of the true God cannot be seen, and declares

that true angels stand round about His throne. Wherein Plato also on the same principle concurs,

and, maintaining one God, calls the rest angels or demons. Moreover, Hermes Trismegistus

speaks of one God, and confesses that He is incomprehensible, and beyond our estimation."[58]

However, it was not until the High Middle Ages that this so-called "Hermetic tradition" received

a wide range of appreciation among scholars, in particular Abelard. The Hermetic tradition was

sometimes known by the humanist scholars of the sixteenth centuries as *prisca theologia*

(ancient theology).[59] We will return to this theme as we narrate the historical development of the

question.

<center>The Early Church</center>

As we noted before, Ignatius draws a strong bond between salvation and the authority of

the bishop. This ecclesiological idea in relation to salvation shaped Ignatius' understanding of

election. In the preface of *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, Ignatius notes,

> Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which is at Ephesus, in Asia,
> deservedly most happy, being blessed in the greatness and fullness of God the Father,
> and predestinated before the beginning of time, that it should be always for an
> enduring and unchangeable glory, being united and elected through the true passion

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[57] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 75.

[58] *PL* 4:573–74; *ANF* 5:467 (Cyprian, *Treatise VI: On the Vanity of Idols,* 6)

[59] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 76.

by the will of God the Father, and of our Lord Jesus Christ our Savior: Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ, and His undefiled joy.[60]

Lindsay remarks that we can learn from this passage that Ignatius's concept of election "is communal, eternally willed, and actualized Christologically at the cross."[61] What Ignatius left unanswered, however, is the question of the possibility of salvation before the historical actualization of the church. On what basis is the eternality of the church made manifest before the establishment of the apostolic ministry? This question is reframed by Justin Martyr (100–165), the great apologist of the second century. In chapter 46 of his *First Apology*, Justin famously puts,

> We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and *those who lived reasonably are Christians* [οἱ μετα λόγου βιῶσαωτες Χριστιανοί εἰσι], even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious. So that even they who lived before Christ, and lived without reason, were wicked and hostile to Christ, and slew those who lived reasonably. But who, through the power of the Word, according to the will of God the Father and Lord of all, He was born of a virgin as a man, and was named Jesus, and was crucified, and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, an intelligent man will be able to comprehend from what has been already so largely said.[62]

For Justin, salvation outside of the visible church is possible because the eternal *logos* always dwells among the people of all ages. Those who lived according to the *logos* can rightfully be called Christians. All virtuous pagans were saved because they, in the most inclusive sense of the term, were partakers of Christ. Here Justin, in a very simplistic and reductionist way, makes the three elements working towards his apologetic purpose. For Justin, since the *logos* is intrinsically

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[60] *PG* 5:643–44AB ; *ANF* 1:49 (Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, preface).

[61] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 54.

[62] *PG* 6:397–98BC; *ANF* 1:178 (emphasis added) (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 46). "Lived reasonably" literally means "lived with reason or with *logos*."

implanted within all human beings (knowledge), those who lived according to their implanted

logos (virtue) can rightfully be called Christians (salvation).

Clement of Alexandria (150–215) approached the question in a way similar to that of

Justin. Through the implanted *logos*, the pagans can reach some knowledge of the one true God.

However, Clement proposes an ingenious way of settling the problem of how the pagans before

Christ could be saved. In his *Stromata*, Clement suggests that, on the basis of 1 Peter 3:19–20,

Christ in the day between his crucifixion and resurrection preached the gospel to the deceased

who died before the incarnation. "If, then, he [Christ] preached the gospel to those in the flesh in

order that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that he did not for the

same reason preach the gospel to those who had departed this life before his coming?"[63] Clement

never doubted the possibility of whether the pagans may have access to the knowledge of Christ.

The knowledge of Christ will come to them, eventually, after their death, and they can make up

their own mind whether to believe the gospel or not. This exegetical argument of Clement as the

basis of the salvation of ignorant pagans will be revisited time and again, positively and

negatively, in the subsequent centuries.

Origen of Alexandria's (185–253) approach to the question is typical of the Alexandrian

tradition. Different from Ignatius' strong adherence to the episcopal government, Origen stresses

individual belief as constitutive to one's relationship with God.[64] In his most famous apologetic

work, *Against Celsus*, Book IV, Origen wrote,

> There never was a time when God did not wish to make men live righteous lives; but
> He continually evinced His care for the improvement of the rational animal, by

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[63] *PG* 9:274C (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.6–7). Translation is quoted from Ralph Turner, "*Descendit ad Inferos*: Medieval Views on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Past," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 2 (1966): 173–94 (here 174).

[64] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 56.

affording him occasions for the exercise of virtue. For in every generation the wisdom of God, passing into those souls which it ascertains to be holy, converts them into friends and prophets of God. And there may be found in the sacred book (the names of) those who in each generation were holy, and were recipients of the Divine Spirit, and who strove to convert their contemporaries so far as in their power.[65]

For Origen, the wisdom of God can be perceived by certain people of every generation and was not limited to the Jews. Furthermore, Origen developed the idea of the church as a body of elect that existed before the historic beginning of the church and is only actualized after the incarnation.[66] As such, Origen maintained that many people were within the ecclesial limits even before Christ. For instance, Rahab and her house is "an iteration of the church that is present before Christ."[67]

> Therefore, if anyone wants to be saved, let him come into the house of this one [Rahab] who was once a prostitute. Even if anyone from that people wants to be saved, let him come in order to be able to attain salvation. Let him come to this house in which the blood of Christ is the sign of redemption.… Let no one persuade himself, let no one deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved. This is the significance of the blood, for this is also the purification that is manifest through the blood.[68]

The ecclesial language Origen uses here is similar to that of Justin. As Lindsay remarks, Origen "extends the idea of elected sociality beyond the boundaries of any church membership that can be readily accessed through authorized rites of baptism or recognized by virtue of a community's bishop-facing unity" by apprehending the church chiefly as an ecclesial existence being "constituted by those whose inward selves and beliefs have been vivified by the Word of God" even before the historic unveiling of the church.[69] In fact, Origen not only extended the ecclesial

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[65] *PG* 11:1037–38AB; *ANF* 4:500 (Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.7).

[66] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 59.

[67] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 58.

[68] *PG* 12:841C–42A; Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, trans. Barbara J. Bruce (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2002), 49–50 (*Homily* 3.5).

[69] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 59–60.

limits in terms of temporality, he even identified the body of Christ with the whole humanity. In the second homily on Psalm 36, Origen boldly claims,

> The body of Christ, therefore, is the whole of mankind, nay rather perhaps the whole of Creation, and each one of us is a member and part. If one of us who are called his members becomes sick and travails under some illness of sin, that is, if he is marked by the stain of some sin and is not subject to God, rightly he [Christ] is not yet said to be subject whose members are those who are not subject to God. But when he shall keep all those who are called his body and members in a state of health so that they labor under no disease of disobedience—all the members being healthy and subject to God—rightly it says that he is subject to him [God] when we his [Christ's] members obey God in all things.[70]

Nowhere in the works of Origen can we see a clearer expression of his universalistic vision of salvation. As Jerome Theisen remarks, the universalist notion that Origen promoted here "tones down considerably the ultimate seriousness of the stance taken in his *Homilies on Joshua*."[71] For Origen, the recovery of the health of all humankind is only a matter of time. All outsiders, be they virtuous or vicious pagans, would eventually become insiders. In sum, Origen and his Alexandrian predecessors, in their intellectual defense of Christianity against paganism, highlighted the invigorating power of the pre-incarnate *logos* among humanity and the Platonic notion of an ecclesial entity beyond temporality in a way that made them affirm the possibility of salvation outside the church.

Now we return once again to the great north African theologian of the third century. As a theological heir of Ignatian tradition, Cyprian emphasized the historical episcopal succession as the basis of ecclesial existence in his confrontation with the Novatian schismatic cult of his day. Outside the church there is no salvation. Nonetheless, Cyprian never seemed bothered by the apologetic inquiry of the discussion of salvation of pagans before the advent of Christ. Towards

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[70] *PG* 12:1330 (Origen, *Homily 2 on Psalms 36*). Translation is drawn from Jerome Theisen, *The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation* (Collegeville: St. John's University Press, 1976), 7.

[71] Theisen, *The Ultimate Church*, 7.

the end of his treatise, *Ad Demetrianum* (*An Address to Demetrianus*), Cyprian urged

Demetrianus, a Roman pagan who had persecuted Christians and was now approaching death, to

turn to Christ and obtain salvation. "The approach to God's mercy is open, and the access is easy

to those who seek and apprehend the truth. Do you entreat for your sins, although it be in the

very end of life, and at the setting of the sun of time; and implore God, who is the one and true

God, in confession and faith of acknowledgment of Him, and pardon is granted… and a passage

is opened to immortality even in death itself."[72] What is notable here is that, as Francis Sullivan

observes, "there is no mention of the absolute necessity for his [Demetrianus's] salvation that he

become a member of the Christian church before he died."[73] When the early Christians such as

Ignatius and Cyprian spoke of people being excluded from salvation by being outside the church,

Sullivan further concludes, "they were consistently directing this as a warning to Christians

whom they judged to be guilty of the grace sins of heresy and schism… But it is significant for

the history of this axiom [no salvation outside the church] that we do not find them applying it to

others than Christians at this time when Christians were still a persecuted minority."[74]

Augustine

As Christianity became the established religion after Constantine, the triumphalistic

understanding of Christianity shaped many of the leading theologians in the last decades of the

fourth century, including the way they approached the pagan question. Ambrose, Gregory of

Nyssa, and Chrysostom all insisted that not only heterodox groups but also the pagans and Jews

are guilty of their rejection of the gospel.[75] The ecclesiological climate seemed to move a step

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[72] *PL* 4:563–64AB; *ANF* 5:465 (Cyprian, *Treatise X. An Address to Demetrianus*, 25).

[73] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 23.

[74] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 23.

[75] Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church?* 24–27.

forward from Cyprian's vision of "no salvation outside the church." However, in his struggles with Donatism, Pelagianism, and in particular Roman paganism, Augustine transformed the problem of paganism into a different sphere and created one of the most important yet unsettling legacies of the church fathers. Medieval historian Francis Oakley once pointedly observed that Augustine left an ambivalent heritage to the medieval Christianity concerning the boundary question, namely, a theological and ecclesiological tension between Augustine's emphasis of the visible, sacramental church in the anti-Donatist writings and his preference of the invisible, predestined church of the elect exhibited in the anti-Pelagian writings. Oakley observes,

> while in the context of his writings on grace and salvation [against the Pelagians], Augustine was led to define the church as the invisible body of the elect, foreknown to God alone, in the context of his writings against the Donatists he was led to identify the visible church, with its saints and sinners, hierarchy and sacraments, as the true Catholic church and the sole ark of salvation. The medieval church did not attempt to reconcile these two positions.[76]

The tension that existed in different writings of Augustine between the visible church characterized by episcopal order and the invisible church of the elect posed a difficulty in understanding Augustine's approach to the problem of paganism. Would Augustine view the salvation of those ignorant pagans differently because of his high view of divine sovereignty? In fact, Augustine's response to the problem of paganism seems to differ in his different writings. We may call them optimistic and pessimistic responses.

Augustine's optimistic response to the question concerning the salvation of those who died before Christ is explicitly expressed in his letter to a friend and priest named Deogratias written in 409. When Deogratias asked him what has become of men who lived long before Christ if Christ is the only way to salvation, Augustine begins his discussion with the Israelites,

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[76] Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience: Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 23 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 64. See also Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 161.

Wherefore, since we affirm that Christ is the Word of God, by whom all things were made, and is the Son, because He is the Word, not a word uttered and belonging to the past but abides unchangeably with the unchangeable Father, … Therefore, from the beginning of the human race, whosoever believed in Him, and in any way knew Him, and lived in a pious and just manner according to His precepts, was undoubtedly saved by Him, in whatever time and place he may have lived. For as we believe in Him both as dwelling with the Father and as having come in the flesh, so the men of the former ages believed in Him both as dwelling with the Father and as destined to come in the flesh. And the nature of faith is not changed, nor is the salvation made different, in our age, by the fact that, in consequence of the difference between the two epochs, that which was then foretold as future is now proclaimed as past.… Wherefore the true religion, although formerly set forth and practised under other names and with other symbolical rites than it now has, and formerly more obscurely revealed and known to fewer persons than now in the time of clearer light and wider diffusion, is one and the same in both periods.[77]

Here we see that despite of his rigorous rejection of Donatism, Augustine's attitude towards the Israelites before the coming of Christ is far from harsh and denouncing. On the one hand, Augustine insists that salvation must be through Christ, which one receives in faith. On the other hand, Augustine remarkably holds that the Israelites were able to know and believe in Christ (knowledge) and live a pious life (virtue) according to the precepts of Christ even before the incarnation. Augustine even postulates that the true religion can be expressed and practiced under "other names and with other symbolical rites," namely, the Old Testament Levitical laws. A few paragraphs later, Augustine expands his scope from the Israelites to all nations,

And yet, from the beginning of the human race, He never ceased to speak by His prophets, at one time more obscurely, at another time more plainly, as seemed to divine wisdom best adapted to the time; nor were there ever wanting men who believed in Him, from Adam to Moses, and among the people of Israel itself, which was by a special mysterious appointment a prophetic nation, and among other nations before He came in the flesh. For seeing that in the sacred Hebrew books some are mentioned, even from Abraham's time, not belonging to his natural posterity nor to the people of Israel, and not proselytes added to that people, who were nevertheless partakers of this holy mystery, why may we not believe that in other nations also, here and there, some more were found, although we do not read their names in these authoritative records? Thus the salvation provided by this religion, by which alone, as alone true, true salvation is truly promised, was never wanting to anyone who was

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[77] *PL* 33:374; *NPNF* 1.1:417 (Augustine, *Letter CII*, 11–12).

worthy of it, and he to whom it was wanting was not worthy of it. And from the beginning of the human family, even to the end of time, it is preached, to some for their advantage, to some for their condemnation. Accordingly, those to whom it has not been preached at all are those who were foreknown as persons who would not believe; those to whom, notwithstanding the certainty that they would not believe, the salvation has been proclaimed are set forth as an example of the class of unbelievers; and those to whom, as persons who would believe, the truth is proclaimed are being prepared for the kingdom of heaven and for the society of the holy angels.[78]

For Augustine, thus, God spoke through his prophets to the people of Israel and other nations before the incarnation. The best evidence for him is that some "partakers of this holy mystery" are mentioned in the Hebrew Scripture. Since some beneficiaries of salvation are recorded in the Scriptures, Augustine postulates that there must be some more beneficiaries of salvation of other nations outside Israel. Another intriguing note here in this passage is Augustine's use of worthiness as a criterion of one's accessibility to the salvation. Salvation was not preached to certain people because they were unworthy of it. Even so, Augustine seemed to be aware of the potential theological vulnerability that this expression could render. Augustine in his *Retractations* (Book II, ch.31) clarified what he meant by "be worthy" on the basis of Rom. 9 and other Pauline passages: "Be worthy" simply means "called by God." Elsewhere in his *De Preadestinatione Sanctorum liber*, Augustine pointedly articulates, "if it should be discussed and question from what anyone is worthy, there is no shortage of those [the Pelagians] who will say, 'By human free will'. But I say: 'By divine grace and predestination.'"[79] This is an obvious instance that the mature Augustine made adjustment or at least clarification of his earlier works.

Earlier in this chapter, we examined that Augustine, in his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, identified Cain as a figure of the Jews and Abel as a figure of Christ. An important

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[78] *PL* 33:376; *NPNF* 1.1:417–18 (Augustine, *Letter CII*, 15).

[79] *PL* 44:974; *On the Predestination of the Saints* 10:19, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 33.

ecclesiological implication of using Abel as Christ is that Augustine can talk about the "church of Abel" as a pre-incarnate ecclesial community. Augustine once said in his *Sermon 341*,

> All together we are members of Christ and are his body; and not we who are in this place only, but throughout the world; and not at this time only, but—what shall I say—from Abel the just man until the end of time, as long as men beget and are begotten, whoever among the just made his passage through this life, whether now, that is, not in this place, but in the present life, or in generations to come, all the just are this one body of Christ, and individually his members.[80]

As Sullivan observes, while Augustine was not the first one to suggest the idea of the church as pre-existing before the Pentecost, he was the first "to describe all the just, from the beginning to the end of the world, as constituting the *ecclesia ab Abel*."[81] A similar expression can also be found elsewhere in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* in which he identifies the church of Christ as the city that includes all saints from Abel to the end of the world.

> The body of this head [Christ] is the church, which is found not only in this region, but is both here and extends throughout the whole world; nor does it exist only at this point in history, but it runs from Abel himself to the end of the world and includes all those who will be born and who will believe in Christ—the whole people of the saints belonging to one city. This city is the body of Christ, whose head is Christ.[82]

What Augustine did here, as Scott Hendrix notes, is to extend "the limits of the church as far as possible spatially and temporally."[83] Augustine was even willing to make a further assertion that since the Old Testament patriarchs believed in Christ, they can rightfully be called Christians. In this regard, there is no qualitative difference between believers in Christ before and after the incarnation. "All these *fideles* form one church, one city, one body of Christ reaching across the span of time."[84]

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[80] *PL* 39:1499–1500 (*Sermon* 341, 9.11), as quoted in Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 30.

[81] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 30.

[82] *PL* 37:1159 (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 90, 2.1), as quoted in Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 107.

[83] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 106.

[84] Hendrix, *Ecclesia In Via*, 108.

As the Pelagian controversy erupted and the sack of Rome by Visigoths happened in the 410's, Augustine's attitude toward the problem of paganism underwent a significant modification. One example is his clarification of the meaning of "be worthy." Without grace, men are destined for eternal damnation because of original sin. Augustine's pessimistic view of human nature in turn shaped his notion of how the pagans would make use of the knowledge of God granted to them, and also the nature of the pagan virtue.

John Marenbon summarized three themes of Augustine on Greek philosophy, in particular Platonism. The first two themes are: (1) some important truths about God are taught by the Platonists, and (2) the best Platonists did not deliberately believe in polytheism.[85] These positive comments on Platonism were all articulated before 410, and remained intact in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*).[86] However, a third theme, which was not known until the penning of *De Civitate Dei*, emerged: "those [Platonist] philosophers who rejected pagan gods and recognized the true God have erred, not by choosing the wrong sort of mediation, but by rejecting all mediation, even the true mediator, through pride."[87] Which is to say, even though the Platonist did know some important truths about the one true God (knowledge), the truths are of no use to them because of their pride (virtue). As Marenbon helpfully concludes Augustine's view of the Platonism in *De Civitate Dei*, "when he considers Platonism, Augustine changes the emphasis of Paul's comment on natural theology, putting ideas

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[85] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 27.

[86] See *City of God*, VIII.6–8, 11; X.1, 9, 11, 23, 26, 27, as mentioned in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 28.

[87] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 20.

of a reversion to polytheism into the background, and making a direct connection between pagan pride and the negative error of failing to see the incarnate Christ as the true mediator."[88]

In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine demonstrates his unreserved distaste for the Roman virtues. Augustine defines virtue as "the order of love" which manifests itself in actions.[89] Since the pagans had a wrong order of love, i.e., they directed their actions not towards God but towards their worldly glory, the Romans can never reach the true sense of virtue. Moreover, as Marenbon sharply observes, virtues for Augustine are simply means to an end.[90] Charity can only be good if it is oriented towards the right end, which is God. Thus, Augustine is adamantly critical of the idea of the Greek philosophers that virtues are intrinsically good because having virtues is to participate in the Highest Good.[91] For Augustine, however, the Highest Good is God whom we cannot approach simply by living a virtuous life with unaided reason.

Finally, we examine Augustine's view of the salvation of pagans in his later years. In his *On Nature and Grace* written in 415, Augustine firmly asserts that,

> This grace, however, of Christ, without which *neither infants nor adults can be saved*, is not rendered for any merits, but is given gratis, on account of which it is also called grace [*gratia*]. "Being justified," says the apostle, "freely through His blood." Whence they, who are not liberated through grace, *either because they are not yet able to hear*, or because they are unwilling to obey; or again because they did not receive, at the time when they were unable on account of youth to hear, that bath of regeneration, which they might have received and through which they might have been saved, are indeed justly condemned; because they are not without sin, either that which they have derived from their birth, or that which they have added from their own misconduct. "For all have sinned"—whether in Adam or in themselves— "and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).[92]

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[88] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 31.

[89] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 35.

[90] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 35.

[91] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 36.

[92] *PL* 44:249–50; *NPNF* 1.5:122 (Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 4) (emphasis added).

Here we see Augustine condemns the possibility of salvation of not only those who "are not yet able to hear," but also innocent infants without baptism. As Augustine continues to argue in his next chapter, the whole human race "incurs penalty and if the deserved punishment of condemnation were rendered to all, it would without doubt be righteously rendered."[93] The whole human race is rightly condemned because of original sin incurred from Adam, thus without the electing grace of God no one can be saved.

The story of the birth of Esau and Jacob also had a significant impact upon Augustine's doctrine of election, especially in his anti-Pelagian writings. In her study of Augustine on election in Genesis, Ellen Charry traces Augustine's Pauline reading of Rebekah's twins throughout his career.[94] In his anti-Pelagian writings, Charry observes, Augustine argued that Esau is predestined by God for destruction with a pedagogical purpose—to induce fear and inspire gratitude for we can see from the example of Esau the power of the divine wrath and what our destiny would have been had the divine mercy not come to our aid.[95] Another purpose is to teach humility. "Esau's predetermined rejection by God's wrath is to wipe out any whiff of hope that we can choose anything good of our own accord."[96]

Augustine's emphasis on election and grace also affected his reading of the story of Cain and Abel. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine famously set forth the dichotomy between the two cities having Cain and Abel its founders.

> Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men [*hominum civitatem*]; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God [*civitatem Dei*];. For as in the individual the truth of the

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[93] *PL* 44:250; *NPNF* 1.5:123 (Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 5). See also *NPNF* 1.5:476 (Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, 11)

[94] Ellen T. Charry "Rebekah's Twins: Augustine on Election in Genesis," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, ed. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill, 267–86 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

[95] Charry, "Rebekah's Twins," 281.

[96] Charry, "Rebekah's Twins," 282.

apostle's statement is discerned, "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual," whence it comes to pass that each man, being derived from a condemned stock, is first of all born of Adam evil and carnal, and becomes good and spiritual only afterwards, when he is grafted into Christ by regeneration: so was it in the human race as a whole. When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was the first-born, and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above.[97]

Here, Augustine's ecclesiology intersects with his doctrine of election and grace. The citizens of the heavenly city, for Augustine, are those who are "predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above." We cannot help but wonder whether the prominence Augustine gives to original sin, grace, and election is in accord with what he had said in his letter to Deogratias in 409 that "from the beginning of the human race, whosoever believed in Him, and in anyway knew Him, and lived in a pious and just manner according to His precepts, was undoubtedly saved by Him."[98] Surprisingly, Augustine addressed this question again in Book XVIII of *De Civitate Dei*, a passage worthy of quoting at length,

It is not incongruous to believe that even in other nations there may have been men to whom this mystery was revealed, and who were also impelled to proclaim it, whether they were partakers of the same grace or had no experience of it, but were taught by bad angels, who, as we know, even confessed the present Christ, whom the Jews did not acknowledge. Nor do I think the Jews themselves dare contend that no one has belonged to God except the Israelites,… they cannot deny that there have been certain men even of other nations who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above. Because, if they deny this, they can be most easily confuted by the case of the holy and wonderful man Job, who was… being bred of the Idumean race, arose there and died there too, and who is so praised by the divine oracle, that no man of his times is put on a level with him as regards justice and piety. And although we do not find his date in the chronicles, yet from his book,… we gather that he was in the third generation after Israel. And I doubt not it was divinely provided, that from this one case we might know that among other nations also there might be men pertaining to the spiritual Jerusalem who have lived according to God and have pleased Him. And it is not to be supposed

[97] *PL* 41:437–38; *NPNF* 1.2:284 (Augustine, *City of God*, XV.1.2).

[98] *PL* 33:374; *NPNF* 1.1:417 (Augustine, *Letter CII*, 11).

that this was granted to anyone, unless the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, was divinely revealed to him; who was pre-announced to the saints of old as yet to come in the flesh, even as He is announced to us as having come, that the self-same faith through Him may lead all to God who are predestinated to be the city of God, the house of God, and the temple of God.[99]

God's predestined grace was once again extended beyond Israel and before the incarnation to, among many others, Job the Idumean. As Lindsay observes, from this point we see "Augustine holds open the possibility, however remote, that there are members of the elect community outside the ecclesial boundaries."[100] Augustine's stance towards Job is the best example that God's predestined grace can, however rare it might be, overwrite his covenantal grace which pertained only to Israel. However, we should immediately add that, because of his doctrine of original sin and his definition of virtue, Augustine remained suspicious of the authenticity of virtues displayed by the so-called "virtuous pagans." For Augustine, Job's salvation is ensured not because of his virtuous living, but rather because he was predestined by God who chose to reveal himself to Job and other saints of the old era.[101] They are all members of *ecclesia ab Abel*. Overall, Augustine's view of the salvation of pagans in his later year is far more nuanced, if not altogether ambivalent. This reflects the perennial tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Without grace, the pagans, Jews, or infants are pitifully helpless and destined for damnation, regardless of their knowledge of God or their performance of virtuous lives. Yet God in his absolute and inscrutable sovereignty may choose to reveal himself explicitly to some people, who are unknown to us, before the incarnation, as he did to Job the Idumean. We as finite creatures have no right to question God's inscrutable acts as if God could not reveal himself to the people outside of the covenant.

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[99] *PL* 41:609–10; *NPNF* 1.2:389–90 (Augustine, *City of God*, XVIII.47.1).

[100] Lindsay, *God has Chosen*, 70.

[101] Colish, "The Virtuous Pagan," 58.

To summarize, in his different stages of life and on different occasions Augustine articulated fairly diverse responses to the problem of paganism. In his anti-Donatist writings, Augustine excluded the possibility of salvation outside the communion of the Catholic church on the basis of the principle of love. In some of his personal correspondence, Augustine welcomed the thought that one is able to know and believe in Christ and live a pious life according to the precepts of Christ even before the incarnation. Finally, in his anti-Pelagian writings and *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine shows a drastic negative penchant towards pagan virtues and the way in which the philosophers would make use of the knowledge of God. Yet even with all the negative and pessimistic comments on human nature, virtue and the use of truth of God, Augustine was still open to the possibility that, because of God's predestined grace, there are people of God outside the visible ecclesial boundaries. These optimistic and pessimistic responses to the knowledge, virtue, and salvation of the ignorant pagans together posed a perennial challenge to medieval Christianity concerning the problem of paganism.

Early Middle Ages

Augustine's different responses to the problem of paganism presented a long-lasting challenge to the medieval church. However, given academic and ecclesiastical conditions of the Early Middle Ages, the church of the early medieval period in general was not obsessed with the problem of paganism. As Marenbon remarks, the study of Christian doctrine before the twelfth century was unsystematic and as such little attention was devoted to the problem.[102] It is not until the High Middle Ages, the time when scholastic theology became the dominant form of doing theology, that theologians would again return to the unsettling legacy of the bishop of Hippo on

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[102] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 57.

the question of the salvation of pagans. However, some figures of the early medieval period

expressed the general contour of how Christians in that period perceived the problem. We

include three figures: Boethius, Gregory the Great, and Alcuin.

The year before Boethius' birth marked the end of Western Roman Empire and the

beginning of the medieval period. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (477–524) was an

influential figure who had a great impact on the medieval thinking of the problem of paganism.

Boethius was a Roman senator and philosopher of the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the time

when everyone in the empire was ostensibly Christian. His *De Consolatione Philosophiae*

(*Consolation of Philosophy*), a work Boethius composed while jailed and waiting to be executed,

dealt with the problem of paganism in a subtle and indirect way.[103] The work presents itself as an

imaginary dialogue between the author, Boethius the prisoner, and Philosophy, personified as a

lady. They converse about true good, happiness, chance, providence, human will, and God.

Overall, the expression of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is highly neutral. On the one hand, the

work shows no explicit mention of faith, revelation, or other strong Christian terminology. On

the other hand, there is no trace of polytheism.[104]

Given the neutrality of Boethius' language, interpreters are usually divided into three

groups: Hellenizers, Christianizers, and Syncretists. The Hellenizers read *De Consolatione*

Philosophiae as pagan and suggest that Boethius in the face of death had forsaken Christianity.

The Christianizers argue the opposite by saying that the Christian allusions are pervasive

throughout the work. Finally, the Syncretists suggest that since Boethius finds no tension

between Christianity and Platonic philosophy, he can be a Christian and still think and write in a

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[103] The analysis here is chiefly drawn from Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 42–53.

[104] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 46.

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Platonic way.[105] John Marenbon suggests a fourth option: *De Consolatione Philosophiae* should be read as a "genuine dialogue."[106] It is a genuine dialogue about the deep truth of God, which Platonic philosophy attempts to access but eventually fails. As Marenbon concludes, reading *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as a genuine dialogue "suggests that Philosophy can go a long way towards the truth, but there comes a point where it fails. It can devise excellent individual arguments, but cannot put them into a coherent whole, whilst in some areas, such as the compatibility between human freedom and divine preordination (as opposed to prescience), it fails almost entirely."[107] Boethius' work illuminates the "knowledge" aspect of the problem of paganism: philosophy is able to grasp some divine truths, but fails to provide a coherent answer to the mystery of life.

Gregory the Great (540–604) was a remarkable clergyman and shrewd governor rather than an able theologian. Though Gregory was a disciple of Augustine, he modified the teachings of his master in many ways. Two aspects are relevant to our study: his comments on Christ's descent to hell, and the famous anecdote attributed to him about his prayer for the pagan emperor Trajan. In one of his letters written to two officers of the church at Constantinople on the topic of Christ's descent into hell, Gregory teaches, "Only hold the true faith taught by the Catholic church: that the Lord on his descent into hell only released from its confines those who in their fleshly existence had been guarded by his grace in faith and in good works."[108] As Turner observes, Gregory insisted that Christ descended into hell in order to release those who had

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[105] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 48.

[106] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 50.

[107] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 52.

[108] *PL* 77:869B, as quoted in Turner, "*Descendit ad Inferos*," 178.

believed in him and performed good works. However, it is not clear who those are, those "guarded by his grace in faith."[109]

A story about Gregory and Trajan circulated widely in the Middle Ages, to explain "how the soul of the Emperor Trajan was comforted or baptized (*refrigeratam vel baptizatam*) by the tears of Pope Gregory."[110] A version of the story provided by Marenbon,

> One day Gregory was crossing the forum, which they say Trajan built with wonderful workmanship. As he was looking at it, he discovered that Trajan, a pagan, had done a deed so charitable that it seemed as if it could be more that of a Christian than a pagan'. He then goes on to tell how Trajan interrupted a military expedition in order to see that a widow whose son was killed was paid compensation by his murderers. The incident reminds Gregory of the biblical injunction to 'judge for the fatherless, defend the widow' (Isaiah i,17), 'And so through him he had Christ speaking within himself. He did not know what to carry out in order to comfort his soul, and entering St Peter's he wept floods of tears, as he often did, until he merited that it was divinely revealed to him that he had been granted what he wished (*sibi divinitus fuisse exauditum*), since he had never presumed that for any other pagan'.[111]

The anecdotal story received great attention among medieval authors. Some questions are worthy of mention here: On what basis was Trajan saved? His virtue, Gregory's intercessory prayer, or both? Was Gregory's prayer meritorious before God?

Alcuin (735–804) was an English scholar, clergymen, poet, and most famously, the teacher of Charlemagne. Alcuin began the medieval tradition of "linking an understanding of logic to a correct grasp of Christian theology, especially regarding the Trinity."[112] His way of harmonizing Christianity with pagan philosophy is illustrated from his identification of the lady of Philosophy in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophia* with Wisdom in the Old Testament. In commenting on Cicero's *De Inventione* (*On Invention*), Alcuin discusses the relationship between the Roman

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[109] Turner, "*Descendit ad Inferos*," 178–79.

[110] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 62.

[111] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 62–63.

[112] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 58.

concept of virtues and Christianity. By using a dialogue form between Charlemagne and himself, Alcuin reacts to the question of why we as Christians ought not turn away from the false virtues of paganism and follow instead Christ in faith and charity. Alcuin's answer is that "wisdom is that by which God is understood and feared and his future judgement is believed, whilst justice, courage and temperance are all argued to be identical with charity. The end for which the virtues should be followed is 'so as to love God and one's neighbor'"[113] What is notable here is that Alcuin is employing the Augustinian way of perceiving pagan virtues as expression of charity without judging them as false virtues as Augustine himself did. For Alcuin, "the virtues cultivated by the pagan philosophers are real ones, which Christians too need to observe, though in a special way."[114] Thus Alcuin, perhaps unintentionally, neutralized Augustine's negative penchant of the pagan virtues, but still left the question of pagan virtue and salvation unanswered.

High Middle Ages

As discussed previously, the scholars in the early medieval period tended to have a more positive view of the pagan values, whether knowledge or virtues. The anecdotal story of Gregory and Trajan even showed the aspiration of interceding for a deceased, virtuous soul. We are also reminded of the ecclesiology of *caritas* discussed in the last chapter. Virtue in the form *caritas* understood in an Augustinian framework was seen as one of the defining marks of being a member of the church in medieval theology.[115] When pagan virtue, as understood by Alcuin, was seen as respectable in and of itself, the problem of paganism again came to the surface during the

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[113] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 62.

[114] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 62.

[115] See Chapter Two, pp. 19–20.

High Middle Ages. The great masters of scholastic theology sought to wrestle with a series of questions: Before the incarnation, what kind of knowledge of God might the pagans have? What might be the source of their knowledge? Were the ignorant pagans held responsible for their damnation? Was the knowledge of God they possessed enough for them to turn to God? What is the relationship between pagan virtues and theological virtues? Could the virtuous pagans be saved or at least be spared from severe punishments? Although the *caritas* and *fides* of the virtuous pagans are partial and incomplete, could God still reward them with eternal blessings on the basis of their effort or his mercy? Would a merciful God deny grace to those who do what is in them (*facere quod in se est*)?[116] In this section we are going to briefly examine a broad range of scholastic theologians from the 11th to the 13th centuries who wrestled with these questions in exceptional ways. The figures include Peter Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, and finally Thomas Aquinas.

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was perhaps the most eccentric theologian of his time. His concern for the problem of paganism is integral to his overall theological vision of providing a Christian doctrine both rationally and morally acceptable. Abelard strongly held that the ancient philosophers, including Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Seneca, Plato, Virgil, among others, believed in only one God.[117] Abelard believed that these philosophers, each different from one another, had some true knowledge of the Triune God.[118] In fact, Abelard was a key contributor of the formation of what the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars called *prisca theologia* (ancient theology), though Abelard's own view was more complicated than the line of thinking which followed him would acknowledge. In his *Theologia Summi Boni*, Abelard promotes the

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[116] See Chapter Two, pp. 17–18.

[117] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 74–75. Turner, "*Descent ad Inferos*," 180–81.

[118] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 75.

idea that many philosophers and poets were like the Greek counterpart of the Old Testament

prophets. Their knowledge of God can be either from divine revelation or logical reasoning.

Through their effort, the Gentiles came to know the true faith. And Abelard believes many

Gentiles did follow the faith of the Trinity.[119] As Abelard affirms in his *Theologia Christiana*,

> In this manner, we consigned all those to infidelity and damnation, to whom, by the
> testimony of the Apostle, the hidden and deep mystery of the Trinity was revealed by
> their faith; and its works were wondrously preached by their own virtue and by the
> holy doctors…Who then would assert that faith in the Incarnation was not revealed to
> any of them, not even to the Sibyl, even if it is not expressly in their writings?[120]

Abelard's view of pagan virtues and salvation is basically a modified form of Pelagianism. As a

true admirer of the pagan virtues, Abelard deems many ancient philosophers as exemplars of

virtue.[121] However, at the same time Abelard insists that one cannot be saved without explicit

knowledge of Christ, especially his incarnation and passion.[122] His way of resolution is that true

pagan virtues do earn merit.

> If it seems to contribute less to merit for salvation that it says 'because of their love
> for virtue' and not 'because of their love for God'—as if we could have virtue or any
> good work which was not according to and for the sake of God himself—it is easy to
> find this too among the philosophers, who set up the Highest Good, that is, God, both
> as the principal—that is the origin and efficient cause—and as the end—that is the
> final cause—of all things, so that all things, which derive from his gift, might come
> into being from his good love.[123]

The virtuous pagans were not saved by virtues *per se*, but the virtues which they expressed did

make them worthy of obtaining explicit knowledge of Christ and accordingly salvation. Abelard

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[119] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 76–77.

[120] *PL* 178:1172AB, *Theologia Christiana* II., as quoted in Turner, "*Descent ad Inferos*," 181.

[121] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 85.

[122] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 88.

[123] *Theologia Christiana* II.28, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 89.

even extends the scope of salvation from pagans before the incarnation to people without access

to the Christian faith after the incarnation,

> Now, if these people, after the announcement of the Gospel, and without faith in Jesus Christ or the grace of baptism, obtained such things from God for the merits they had performed before in their lives, what compels us to doubt that the philosophers from before the coming of Christ, who were so outstanding in both their faith and their life, gained indulgence, or that their life and worship of the one God … did not acquire for them gifts from God both in this life and the future one and that God showed them the things necessary for salvation?[124]

The story of Gregory Great and Trajan, which we previously mentioned, was used by Abelard to

illustrate the meritorious power of good works.[125] Finally, in his *Problemata Heloissae*, Abelard

articulates most clearly his view of how one achieves salvation,

> It accords with piety and reason that whoever, recognizing by natural law God as the creator and rewarder of all, adhere to him with such zeal that they strive in no way to offend him through consent, which is the proper name for sin: such people, we judge, should by no means be damned; and what is necessary for them also to learn in order to be saved will be revealed to them by God before the end of their lives, either through inspiration, or through someone sent by whom instruction may be given about these things, as we read was done in the case of Cornelius about faith in Christ and receiving baptism.[126]

In short, Abelard holds the idea that whoever acknowledges God as creator and rewarder, and

lives a virtuous life, will be granted sufficient means of salvation, either through special

inspiration directly from God, or through a person for the instruction of salvation.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153),[127] Abelard's great opponent, refutes Abelard's entire

theological project, in particular Abelard's idea of the atonement.[128] Following the classic

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[124] *Theologia Christiana* II.115, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 91.

[125] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 91.

[126] *PL* 178:694a, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 92.

[127] Thus far, the most comprehensive work on Bernard's influence on Luther's thought remains Franz Posset, *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvoux* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1999).

[128] For a detailed account of the contentious relationship between Bernard and Abelard, see Constant J. Mews, "Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard," in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian Patrick

Augustinian tradition, Bernard insists that the knowledge of the Triune God can only be reached through divine revelation. Bernard did not directly tackle the problem of paganism, yet in one of his sermons he suggests that all pre-Christian saints had been in the bosom of Abraham as a comforting refuge until Christ descended into hell to bring them to the throne of heaven.[129] In fact, a passage from Bernard's sermon, (*Sermo 1 in annuntiatione domini*), strongly implies that it is impossible for one to be granted sufficient means of salvation on the basis of one's own merit. "First of all, we ought to believe that we cannot have forgiveness of our sins other than God's indulgence; secondly, that we are powerless to do any good work whatever except by his grace; thirdly, that by no works can we merit eternal life, unless it too is given to us freely."[130]

Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141), the founder of the Victorine school, was a leading theologian of the time. His main contribution to the problem of paganism is the idea that was later called "implicit faith." According to Hugh, the faith by which people are saved is the same in all time. However, while faith remains the same, the knowledge of God increases as salvation history proceeds. Before the incarnation, there were indeed a few people who had the full knowledge of the faith. However, for the majority of the simple people, the only thing they need to know was the so-called "Pauline minimum," a concept derived from his teacher, William of Champeaux (1070–1122),[131] based on Heb. 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those

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McGuire, 133–68 (Boston: Leiden, 2011). Mews notes that Bernard "considered Abelard dangerously naïve in his assessment of the human condition and, thus, our need for Christ" (164).

[129] *PL* 183:471c–72c, *Sermo* IV, Turner, "*Descent ad Inferos*," 183–84.

[130] Leclercq, Jean, C. H. Talbot, Henri Rochais, eds., *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 8 volumes (Rome: Cistercian, 1957–1977), 5:13, as translated in Posset, *Pater Bernhardus*, 166.

[131] PL 176:340a, *De Sacramentis* 2.7; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 169. William of Champeaux was the teacher of both Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, and perhaps most infamously, Peter Abelard.

who seek him." William suggests,

> It should be said that those who were saved before the coming of Christ believed that there is a just and pious judge who would repay the good with good things and the evil with bad things. There were also some who believed that someone would come from God who would redeem the people, but they did not know how he would do so. And there were a very few to whom the manner of the Redemption was known.[132]

While for William the Pauline minimum in and of itself is enough for salvation, for Hugh, the Pauline minimum is enough for salvation of the simple masses only if they trust the greater ones who had the fuller knowledge of God.

Peter Lombard (1096–1160), the great master of *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* (*Four Books of Sentences*), had his own proposal for the problem of paganism. Concerning the knowledge and salvation elements of the pagan problem, Lombard's opinion was similar to that of Hugh. Before the incarnation the faith was revealed clearly to the patriarchs and to the prophets, while the majority of the masses only received the faith obscurely.[133] To what extent was their knowledge of the faith sufficient? Lombard answered this question by insisting that while the Pauline minimum was never enough for salvation, the simple people (*minores*) who lived before Christ could be saved through their trust of the greater ones (*mairoes*), like Abraham and Moses, to whom the full knowledge of the faith was made known by God.[134] Concerning the pagan virtues, Marenbon observes, Lombard left no room for the idea that the cardinal virtues defined by the ancient Romans are acquired virtues which can be achieved through practice. For Lombard, even the cardinal virtues, in one way or another, are "infused" by God.[135]

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[132] *Sententiae* 261:38–42, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 66.

[133] *PL* 192:809–10, *Sententiarum* III, *d*.25, ch.2; Turner, "*Descent ad Inferos*," 184.

[134] *PL* 192:809–10, *Sententiarum* III, *d*.25, ch.2; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 169–70.

[135] "[A] good quality of the mind, by which one lives well and which no one can use badly, which God alone works in a human being." Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 162. See *PL* 192:713, 829–30 (*Sententiarum* II, *d*.27, ch.1; III, *d*.36, ch.1–2).

Roger Bacon (1220–1292) was an English theologian and Franciscan monk. Although his academic achievement was often outshined by his contemporaries Albert Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Bacon's contribution was impressive. Bacon's contribution to the problem of paganism is chiefly due to his theory of religions. Similar to *prisca theologia*, Bacon proposes that there is a hierarchy of the knowledge of God among all ethnic groups; some know more than the others.[136] While the patriarchs of the Old Testament possessed the "truth of philosophy," Christianity possesses the knowledge of God to its fullest. Since Christianity has the most prominent place in its possession of divine knowledge, Christian missionaries should be able to persuade other religious groups "to accept a set of philosophical views about God and salvation which accord with Christian doctrine, and also that revelation is necessary and has made to one sect, and finally this sect is Christianity."[137]

Albert the Great (1200–1280) wholeheartedly believed that a distinction must be made between the sphere of nature and the sphere of revelation. In the sphere of nature, humans make the best use of pagan philosophical reasoning.[138] Albert also believed that philosophical contemplation, which contemplates through acquired wisdom rather than divine revelation, can reach some certainty about the truth of God.[139] But this certainty is never sufficient for salvation. Albert insisted that, before the incarnation, it was impossible "that there should be someone who did what was in himself [*fuerit qui quod in se erat*] sufficiently to prepare himself, and who did not receive a revelation from God, or a teaching from men who had been inspired, or a sign of

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[136] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 130–31.

[137] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 130.

[138] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 133.

[139] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 134–35.

the mediator."[140] For the salvation of pre-Christian pagans, Albert espoused a modified version of "implicit faith" theory. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Albert suggested that the simple people, the *minores*, did not even need to have the Pauline minimum to be saved. All they needed was to follow what the greater ones, the *maiores*, told them to believe.[141]

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) produced the greatest synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy. Thomas' attitude toward the pagan knowledge of God stresses the unity and continuity of all knowledge. He believes a harmonious unity exists between reason and faith, and philosophy and theology. In commenting on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, Thomas remarks,

> Although the natural light of the human mind is insufficient to make manifest those things which are made manifest by faith, it is however impossible that the things which are divinely handed down to us by faith should be contrary to those which are within us by nature. For it would be necessary that one or the other be false, and since both are for us from God, God would be responsible for making us believe something false—which is impossible.[142]

Thomas is convinced that reason, when used rightly, can be of great help for Christianity to refute heresy and deepen our understanding of the Christian faith. However, Thomas' contemporaries, Bonaventure (1221–1274) among others, were more suspicious of the harmonious unity between reason and faith, what Marenbon calls a "selective rejection" of natural reason.[143] Bonaventure believes that the limitation of pagan knowledge of God and the use of reason is best shown in the example of creation *ex nihilo*. Even Aristotle, the philosopher of philosophers, cannot penetrate the mystery of creation *ex nihilo* and proposed instead that the world is eternal.[144] Marenbon argues that Bonaventure does not present creation *ex nihilo* as a

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[140] *Super Sententiarum* III, d.25, a.2, ad.6; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 173.

[141] *Super Sententiarum* III, d.25, a.4; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 170.

[142] *Super De Trinitate*, pars 1, q.2, a.3, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 137–38.

[143] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 137.

[144] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 141.

doctrine that can only be known through revelation, but rather that the pagan philosophers failed in their use of reason. In other words, Marenbon implies that Bonaventure did not despise the use of reason by pagan philosophers as such, but rather the improper use of reason. However, I suspect that this is exactly the point that Bonaventure and the selective rejectionists would highlight: because of sin and its corrosive power on human reason, there must be a disruption between reason and revelation.

A third view suggested by Marenbon as "limited relativism" should receive brief attention.[145] Limited relativism suggests an even greater disruption between reason and revelation. Reason is not only inadequate to address the truth of Christianity, at times it contradicts the Christian faith. For instance, Siger of Barbant (1240–1280), based on the Averroes' reading of Aristotle's *De Anima*, suggests that Aristotle's idea of one single potential intellect common to all humanity directly contradicts the Christian way of understanding human souls.[146]

Now we return to Thomas' idea of pagan virtues. Thomas maintained the possibility that unbelievers can do good deeds out of natural reason. He endeavors to balance the affirmation of the good deeds of unbelievers and the necessity of faith in salvation. In the second book of the *Summa Theologia*, in answering "is every act of infidels a sin," Thomas contends that "since infidelity is a mortal sin, infidels are indeed lacking in grace, yet some good of nature remains in them. Clearly they cannot do the good works which are of grace, that is meritorious works. Nevertheless they can to some extent do the good works of which the good in human nature is

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[145] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 142.

[146] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 142–43.

capable."[147] Thomas's view of virtues is inherited from the view of his predecessors that a distinction should be made between acquired and infused virtues. Thomas distinguishes between two kinds of virtues, each with different causes.[148] Human virtues are attainable through habituation according to human reason apart from grace, whereas infused virtues can only be acquired by the divine infusion of grace. Human virtues lead to the goal of good order and society; infused virtues lead to the beatific end.[149] The virtues that pagans produce are genuine and praiseworthy though they are non-salvific in essence. Unlike Augustine, who insists that pagan virtues are false virtues, Thomas considers them true but imperfect.[150] Through the distinction of acquired virtue and infused virtue, Thomas is able to make room for an Aristotelian notion of human nature without violating the traditional Augustinian concept of virtue.

Finally, we discuss Thomas' view of salvation of the pagans. In his *Expositio super primam et secundam Decretalem*, a commentary on Pope Innocent III's decree, *Caput Firmiter*, Thomas comments,

> He [Pope Innocent III] comes to the article about the effect of grace. First, he speaks of the effect of grace with regard to the unity of the church, saying: "There is one universal church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved." Now the unity of the church primarily depends on its unity of faith, for the church is nothing other than the congregation of the faithful. Since it is impossible to please God without faith, there can be no place of salvation other than in the church. Furthermore, the salvation of the faithful is consummated through the sacraments of the church, in which the power of Christ's passion is operative.[151]

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[147] *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia,* iussu impensaque Leonia XIII. P.M. edita (*Corpus Thomisticum*), Tome VIII. Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882–82 (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.10, A.4, R). Hereafter as *CT*. Translation is from Thomas Gilby O.P. and T. C. O'Brien O.P., eds., *Summa theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964–1981), 32:49. Hereafter as ST.

[148] David Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 132.

[149] Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity*, 133, 266–67.

[150] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 164.

[151] *Expositio super primam et secundam Decretalem*, 1, as quoted in Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*

Notable in this passage is Thomas' emphasis on the church as the channel for grace through the unity of faith and the sacraments.[152] Thomas further explains that the reality of the sacrament can only be found in the Catholic church, "the thing signified [*res*] is the unity of the mystical body of Christ which is an absolute requisite for salvation, because outside the Church there is no salvation; it is like Noah's ark at the time of flood."[153] For the medieval church understood the sacrament as the invisible reality enclosed in a visible sign, and the reality of the sacrament is a means of the efficacious grace which gives life and salvation. The necessity of the church in the role of salvation lies in its claim to the sacrament in which the reality of grace is enclosed.[154] Since the pagans before Christ had no access to the sacrament to which grace is conveyed, on what other basis they can be saved? Thomas' solution is the return to the idea of "implicit faith."

Thomas both inherited and further developed the idea of implicit faith in his discussion of the pagans' knowledge of God. Thomas understood the church as "nothing other than the congregation of the faithful" since "it is impossible to please God without faith,"[155] alluding to Heb. 11:6. The Pauline minimum again becomes the basis for Thomas' notion of implicit faith. According to Sullivan, for Thomas, all articles of faith are implicitly included in this short passage. "The truth that God exists implicitly includes everything that pertains to the divine being, and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him includes everything that pertains to the

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47. See also Theisen, *The Ultimate Church*, 19.

[152] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 48.

[153] *CT* 11:458; ST 58:11 (*Summa Theologiae*, III, Q.73, A.3, R). Thomas used the same image of Ark as portrayal of the Church in his exposition of the Apostles' Creed. See *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, A.9. Cyprian and Augustine had used the same image as well.

[154] For Thomas' view of the necessity of Baptism and Eucharist for salvation, see *CT* 12:92–115, 138–44 (*Summa Theologiae*, III, Q.68, 69, 73).

[155] *Expositio super primam et secundam Decretalem*, 1.

economy of salvation."[156] This point is expressed most clearly in *Summa Theologiae* where

Thomas answered "whether the articles of faith have increased with the passage of time,"

> The articles of faith are to the teaching of faith what the first principles are to a discipline evolved by natural reason. With regard to first principles there is a certain order discernible, namely some are implicit in others, even as all principles are reducible to the primary one: It is impossible simultaneously to affirm and to deny the same thing, as Aristotle puts it. In a like way, on the basis of Hebrews [11:6]: He that cometh to God must believe that He is,and is a rewarder to them that seek Him. All the articles are implicit in certain primary primary ones, namely that God exists and that he has providence over man's salvation. For the truth that God is includes everything that we believe to exist eternally in God and that make up our way towards beatitude. As to the remaining articles, some are implicit in others, e.g. faith in the Redemption implies belief Christ's Incarnation and Passion and all related matters.[157]

Thus for Thomas, faith in God's existence and providence over salvation functions like the first

principle that contains the economy of salvation, which implicitly includes the belief in the

Redemption of Christ. In another section of *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas gave a more detailed

account concerning the possibility of those who lived before the incarnation. In answering the

question of "whether explicit faith in the mystery of Christ is a matter of salvation for all

people," Thomas contends that "[t]he way for all to come to blessedness is the mystery of

Christ's Incarnation and Passion … Consequently the mystery of Christ's Incarnation was to be

believed in all ages and by all peoples in some fashion, but in ways differing with the differences

of times and of people."[158] Christ's incarnation was the critical moment in the history of

salvation. Before the time of incarnation, "both the leaders are the simple people are bound to

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[156] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 49; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 170–71.

[157] *CT* 8:20–21; ST 31:35 (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.1, A.7, R).

[158] *CT* 8:34; ST 31:89 (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.2, A.7, R).

have an explicit faith in Christ's mysteries."[159] Yet, for those who lived before the first advent of

Christ, Thomas believes that there is a possibility that they would have implicit faith in Christ.

> However, should may have been saved who had received no revelation, they were not
> saved without faith in the mediator. The reason: even if they did not have an explicit
> belief in Christ, they did have an *implicit faith* in God's providence, believing that
> God's is man's deliverer in ways of his own choosing, as the Spirit would reveal this
> to those who know the truth, according to the text of Job [35:11], who teaches us
> more than the beasts of the earth.[160]

Faith in Christ is the necessary condition for salvation, yet the content of faith could have

differed in a different dispensation. For those who lived before the incarnation, when Christ's

passion and resurrection was still veiled, the implicit faith that clings to divine providence would

be sufficient for salvation. However, as Marenbon adduces, Thomas' idea of implicit faith was

not fundamentally different from Hugh and Albert's idea of "implicit faith" as trusting the

greater ones. In his *De Veritate* (On Truth), Thomas qualifies implicit faith "as when someone

believes that the faith of the Church is true, in this he or she as if implicitly believes the

individual things which are contained in the faith of the Church."[161] In other words, implicit faith

must have a dimension of trust which clings to the faith of others, namely, the church. In short,

Thomas' idea of implicit faith became the dominating theory of salvation for those living before

the incarnation, including pagans and covenantal outsiders.

Late Middle Ages

The discussion of the problem of paganism in the Late Middle Ages was largely a

continuation of the same problem in the High Middle Ages. The authors of this age, each with

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[159] *CT* 8:34; ST 31:91 (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.2, A.7, R).

[160] *CT* 8:35; ST 31:93 (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.2, A.7, ad.3) (emphasis added).

[161] "sicut qui credit fidem ecclesiae esse veram, in hoc quasi implicite credit singular quae sub fide ecclesiae continentur" (*On Veritate*, Q.14, A.11, R.1), as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 171. Marenbon's translation can be improved as follows: As one believes the faith of the church is true, in this belief one implicitly believes the individual tenets contained under the faith of the church.

his own predilection for a certain tradition, furthered the discussion in a variety of ways. In this section, we examine a wide range of figures, including theologians such as Holcot and Bradwardine and the *literati* such as Dante, Ficino, and Pico. The relevance of this section for the study of Luther lies not in Luther's direct use of these authors. Instead, the purpose of such a historical sketch is to provide a conceptual reference by which Luther's idea of the unchosen can be measured and navigated, for both Luther and the late medieval authors were wrestling with the same problem, broadly speaking.

Literati of the 14th century (Dante, Boccaccio)

Because of his great poem, *Divina Commedia*, Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) treatment of the problem of paganism received great attention among late medieval authors. To fully appreciate his view, however, we need to expand our scope from *Divina Commedia* to his other works, especially *De Monarchia* (*On Monarchy*).

Dante's view of pagan virtues befits the category of "limited relativism." In *De Monarchia*, Dante articulates the notion of two kinds of happiness, one through the pursuit of philosophy, and another through spiritual teachings.

> Indescribable providence has therefore set before us two goals to aim at: the happiness of this life, which consists in the activity of our own powers and is represented figuratively by the earthly paradise; and happiness of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God (to which our own powers cannot ascend unless they are aided by God's light) and which is signified by the heavenly paradise. *We must reach these two kinds of happiness, which are like different conclusions, through different middle terms*. For we come to the first through the teachings of philosophy, when we follow them by acting in accord with the moral and intellectual virtues; whereas we attain the second through spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, when we follow them by acting in accord with the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity).[162]

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[162] *Monarchia*, III.15.7–9, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 203 (emphasis added).

Dante set the two kinds of happiness in separation or at least in sharp distinction of each other. The way we achieve earthly happiness is different from the way we achieve eternal happiness, and there seems to be no overlapping between them. David Thompson observes that the Dante in *Monarchia* saw the Roman virtuous heroes praiseworthy in their pursuing of the good for the community as their goal. This positive notion of evaluating pagan virtues is clearly different from the classic Augustinian notion that the pagan virtue is false because of their self-seeking glory.[163]

However, in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* section of *Divina Commedia*, Dante returns to the more strident Augustinian view of the salvation of pagans. Dante describes that a series of famous pagans were placed in Limbo, including Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, Euclid, Ptolemy, Virgil, among others.[164] In Dante's articulation, Limbo is a place where, as opposed to Hell, no physical torture can be experienced but rather they experience desire without hope. Dante considered a few groups of people as the inhabitants of Limbo: The Old Testament patriarchs and prophets who were temporarily placed there until Christ's descent and his liberation of them, unbaptized infants, and finally, the virtuous pagans who died before the coming of Christ.[165] Cindy Vitto once observed that Dante's conservative depiction of Limbo may serve two purposes, theological and artistic. While the theological purpose is to demonstrate "the chasm between the very pinnacle of human reason and Christian revelation," the artistic purpose is for Dante to show "his own worth as surpassing theirs [the virtuous pagans'] because it was dedicated to the service of God."[166] However, a more plausible reason in Dante's

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[163] David Thompson, "Dante's Virtuous Romans," *Dante Studies*, no.96 (1978): 145–62 (here 156–58).

[164] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 190.

[165] *Inferno* IV, 41–42, 52–63; *Purgatorio* VII, 31–33. See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 208.

[166] Cindy Vitto, "The Virtuous Pagans in Middle English Literature," (Ph.D. diss. Rice University, 1985), 68.

articulation of Limbo seems to be Dante's conscious movement away from Thomas' notion of implicit faith to a more Augustinian position. In sum, Dante's view of the salvation of the virtuous pagans lies somewhere between Augustine and Aquinas. Like Augustine, the virtuous pagans were condemned. Yet unlike Augustine, their condemnation was milder than those in Hell. Like Aquinas, the virtuous pagans were saved from Hell. Yet unlike Aquinas, they were not granted the beatific vision.

As a great admirer and biographer of Dante, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375)'s view of the problem of paganism closely adhered to Dante's. Noteworthy is Boccaccio's explanation to the question of "why the virtuous pagans were guilty of not knowing something, i.e. the incarnation and passion of Christ, that they cannot possibly know?" Here Boccaccio in his commentary on *Divina Commedia* proposes a legal distinction between ignorance of the law and ignorance of the fact. The former occurs when someone remains ignorant of a law even if the law has been promulgated. The latter occurs when a law is decided but not yet announced to the public.[167] The virtuous pagans before the coming Christ were subject to the category of ignorance of the fact since the old law was only made known to the Jews but not to them. As such, they were no more culpable than unbaptized infants and were thus placed in Limbo.[168]

Theologians of Different Persuasions (Holcot and Bradwardine)

One of the crucial philosophical markers that distinguished the late medieval period from the former is the clash between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna*. Roger Holcot (1290–1349), an English Dominican, theologian and biblical scholar, was a faithful follower of William Ockham and the *via moderna*. Holcot, on the one hand, holds that the existence of God cannot be proven

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[167] *Esposizioni* II.19–21; See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 212.

[168] *Esposizioni* II.46; See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 212–13.

by natural reason. However, Holcot also holds that the pagans were accountable for their denial of the existence of God because the knowledge of God was accessible to them since the beginning of the world.

> They accepted the faith, because of the fact that from the beginning of the world some people worshipped God—Adam and some of his children, for example, and Noah and his children after the flood. Also, there were without break prophets who taught divine worship, and their fame reached to the Egyptian, Arabic, Greek and Chaldaean philosophers. And so God's prophets preceded all human and earthly wisdom, as Augustine declares in the *City of God* XVIII, 47…. And so it is sufficiently established that knowledge of the worship of God had come through the patriarchs and prophets (and knowledge of their lives and observances) to the cognizance of the philosophers who lived many thousand years after them.[169]

For Holcot, God established a line of divine agents, from Adam, Noah, to the patriarchs and prophets, through whom the knowledge of the worship of God has reached to the pagan philosophers. Holcot apologetically highlights that his idea is merely an extension of thought based on Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and so nothing heterodox should be expected.[170]

However, it is wrong to conclude that Holcot has a purely pessimistic or skeptical view of natural reason. Holcot seems to hold two lines of opposing thought simultaneously. As stated before, Holcot maintains that it is impossible to prove the existence of God by reason alone. The existence of God is a belief *sola fide tenetur*.[171] However, Holcot by no means undermines the positive use of reason, especially in relation to one's salvation. In fact, his view of reason in relation to salvation is far more sanguine than any claimed Augustinian would openly confess. In his *Super libros Sapientiae (Commentary on Wisdom),* Holcot made the following comment,

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[169] *Quaestiones super libros Sententiarum* III, q.1 tertium dictum, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 158.

[170] We have quoted Augustine's passage earlier in this chapter. See pp. 79–80.

[171] *Quaestiones super libros Sententiarum* I, q.4, a.3. This observation is drawn from Heiko Oberman, "*Facientibus Quod In Se Est Deus Non Denegat Gratiam*: Robert Holcot, O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 317–42 (here 319).

God will communicate a sufficient knowledge of himself, enough for them to be saved, to those who behave innocently towards God and strive to use their natural reason, and do not offer an obstacle to divine grace. There are examples of this—the example of Cornelius, to whom Peter was sent, and Paul, to whom Ananias was sent, who so disposed themselves that they merited having a revelation or an inspiration of the one God. And so it should be said that it will never happen that a man who has the use of reason will, without fault, lack knowledge of God, at least as much as is necessary for salvation.[172]

Marenbon remarks that "this passage must refer just to some exceptional cases."[173] According to Marenbon, the special inspiration for Holcot is "to be designed to take care of special cases where, for some reason, a person was not taught externally about God."[174] However, it would seem that Marenbon's judgment is only partially right. Holcot's statement that "God will communicate a sufficient knowledge of himself, enough for them to be saved, to those who … do not offer an obstacle to divine grace" is not only applicable to some special cases such as Cornelius and Paul. Rather, it is Holcot's general belief that God would not deny grace to those who did what is in them (*facientibus quod in se est deus non denegat gratiam*). As Heiko Oberman argues, the Holcot shown in his *Super libros Sapientiae* seems to hold a different line of thinking than the Holcot shown in his commentary on the *Sententiarum*.[175] In *Lectio* 28 of *Super libros Sapientiae*, Holcot suggests that "God has so disposed nature that if man does what is in him [*facit quod in se est*], that is, uses his natural powers, he can acquire sufficient information about the articles of faith which are necessary for salvation."[176] The implication of Holcot's discussion of *facit quod in se est* seems to be that Holcot would not deny the possibility

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[172] *Super libros Sapientiae*, *lectio* 155, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 183.

[173] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 183.

[174] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 183.

[175] Oberman, "*Facientibus Quod In Se Est*," 322.

[176] *Super libros Sapientiae*, lectio 28A, as quoted in Oberman, "*Facientibus Quod In Se Est*," 322–23.

that the pagan philosopher can also acquire sufficient knowledge of God for their salvation

through their diligent use of natural reason. In fact, Holcot did believe that the distinguished

pagan philosophers like Socrates, Plate, Aristotle, and many of the Stoics were saved.[177]

Thomas Bradwardine (1300–1349), the *Doctor Profundus*, was quite different than Holcot

despite their common experiences and influences. Both Holcot and Bradwardine were

Englishmen, studied at Oxford, and were under the influence of Ockham. Yet, while Holcot was

a faithful proponent of Ockham and the nominalist theology, Bradwardine's contact with

Ockham led him to conclude that there were Pelagian errors in the writings of Ockham.[178] In this

regard, Bradwardine's doctrine of salvation is staunchly Augustinian. In his greatest treatise, *De*

causa Dei contra Pelagianos (*The Case for God against the Pelagians*), Bradwardine refutes the

idea of *meritum de congruo* as impossible.[179] As Oberman observes, for Bradwardine, "without

grace, the creature can no more proceed towards God *actualiter* than *habituliter*; he can only

oppose Him."[180] By the same token, since men without grace cannot move their will towards God

but rather only towards themselves, pagan virtues in the eyes of Bradwardine were deemed as

false. "No philosophical or moral virtue is true virtue, right without qualification, without being

perfected by charity and grace."[181]

When turning to the discussion of the salvation of the ignorant pagans, one might expect a

very negative answer from Bradwardine. Although Bradwardine's soteriological position is

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[177] *Quaestiones super libros Sententiarum* III, q.1; See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 183.

[178] Heiko A. Oberman, *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine, A Fourteenth Century Augustinian: A Study of His Theology in its Historical Context* (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1958), 42–43.

[179] *De causa Dei contra Pelagianos*, I:39.

[180] Oberman, *Thomas Bradwardine*, 151.

[181] *De causa Dei contra Pelagianos*, I:39, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 184. See also Oberman, *Thomas Bradwardine*, 152.

radically different from that of Holcot, his view of the salvation of ignorant pagans was as generous as Holcot's. Bradwardine notices that some non-Jews who received divine revelation are recorded in the Scripture, like Job, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cornelius.[182] This is clear evidence for him that the divine revelation was widespread throughout the world. Furthermore, Bradwardine managed to explain away the pagan idolatry. He has a charitable reading of pagan worship, seeing it as a form of true worship under the guise of idols. In any case, God accepted their sincere love even though their worship was deeply flawed. "I believe firmly that God, who is pious and just, reveals at some time to a person who loves him before all other things and who efficaciously wishes to venerate him through worship and through what is due, and who perseveres in offering the diligence which is due, the religion which is due and necessary for salvation, that is, the Christian religion, implicitly or expressly."[183]

Renaissance Humanists of the 15th century (Ficino, Pico, Marzio)

Since both Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) were great advocates of *prisca theologia* and the Hermetic tradition and share a similar view of the problem of paganism, they are treated together. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter,[184] the patristic authors had already known Hermes Trismegistus, among others, as a transmitter of the knowledge of the one true God among the pagans. There is a question behind this widely accepted belief, namely, from whom did Hermes Trismegistus and others receive the true knowledge of God? As James Heiser notes, there are two theories of inspiration for the adoption

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[182] *De causa Dei contra Pelagianos*, I:1. See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 158–59.

[183] *De causa Dei contra Pelagianos*, I:39—*corollarium*, 32, as quoted in Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 185.

[184] See pp. 65–66 for an introduction to the Hermetic tradition.

of *prisca theologia*, unilinear and multilinear.[185] The unilinear inspiration theory holds that "any truth found among the writings of pagans was somehow borrowed from the tradition of the Holy Scriptures."[186] This is the consensus upheld by the majority of patristic writings. Ficino, however, breaks this consensus in favor of the multilinear inspiration theory. In fact, Ficino seems to endorse the two theories at the same time. In *De Christiana Religione* (*On Christian Religion*), Ficino mentions the unilinear inspiration theory by saying that revelation was granted to the Jews and through them to the nations.[187] However, in his other works such as *The Philebus Commentary*, Ficino explicitly notes that God's ray purges and illuminates the soul and mind of those ancient theologians like Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, and Pythagoras.[188]

Finally, concerning the salvation of the ignorant pagans, the humanist authors follow either the Thomistic idea of implicit faith, Augustinian's divine inscrutable election, or Dante's Limbo. One notable exception is Marzio's relativism. Galleotto Marzio (1427–1490) was an Italian medical expert, poet and humanist. In his *De incognitis vulgo* (*What is Unknown to the Crowd*), a work later condemned by the Inquisition, Marzio proposes an impressively postmodern, though not necessarily doctrinally sound, case for the salvation of pagans. In Marenbon's description, Marzio suggests that God "values the act of placing trust in him, whether or not the testimony about him is in fact correct."[189] In other words, God is pleased with those who honestly trust a "God," whether the faith itself is true or not.

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[185] James Heiser. *Prisci Theologi and the Hermetic Reformation in the Fifteenth Century* (Malone: Repristination, 2011), 46. See also Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 241.

[186] Heiser. *Prisci Theologi and Hermetic Reformation*, 46.

[187] *De Christiana Religione,* XXVI; See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 241.

[188] Heiser. *Prisci Theologi and Hermetic Reformation*, 48.

[189] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 283.

Humanists of the 16th century (Erasmus, Zwingli)

As the prince of humanists, Desiderius Erasmus's (1466–1546) works represented the ripest fruit of Northern humanism from the century prior. Erasmus held a general admiration of pagan philosophers, and believed that the pagan ideas of wisdom and virtue should be adapted into Christian piety, an application that he called *philosophia Christi*. Erasmus never engaged directly and systematically the problem of paganism, but in one section of his *Colloquia* entitled *Convivium religiosum* (*The Godly Feast*), Erasmus, in the mouth of one of the characters, Eusebius, openly praises the virtuous pagans whose virtues seem to surpass many Christians to such a degree that Eusebius exclaims, "*Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis*" (Saint Socrates, pray for us). However, Erasmus insisted the superiority of Christ in Christian doctrine and living. In his *Paraclesis*, Erasmus distinguished his *philosophia Christi* from the pagan philosophy, asserting that only Christ was the true teacher.[190] Overall, Erasmus appreciated the usefulness and insights of pagan ideas in his proposal of *philosophia Christi*, but he also maintained that the use of pagan wisdom should be supplementary in nature and subject to traditional Christian belief. Judged from Erasmus' general humanistic outlook on the use of pagan philosophy and the words expressed *Convivium religiosum*, we suggest that Erasmus may have a welcoming hope for the salvation of virtuous pagans.

As a committed admirer of Erasmus, Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) also welcomed the salvation of virtuous pagans. In chapter 10 of his *Christianae fidei brevis et clara expositio* (*A Brief and Clear Exposition of the Christian Faith*) written in 1531, Zwingli gave many examples of those who were saved, including many biblical figures as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David,

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[190] John C. Olin, ed. *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus,* 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 102.

Josiah, and Paul, along with some ancients Greeks like Hercules, Theseus, Socrates, Aristides, and some medieval heroes as Louis the Pious and Pepins.[191] This generous attitude toward the salvation of ancient pagans received many critics, including Luther. However, Marenbon suggests that Zwingli retained the traditional Augustinian notion of divine inscrutable election, namely, that "God had extended his grace to the ancient world."[192]

Summary: An Unsettling Problem

In this section, we have tried to unravel the complexity of the historical development of the problem of paganism. We now summarize the variety of opinions on the three aspects of the problem (knowledge, virtue, salvation) held by different authors from the patristic through later medieval period.

Opinions concerning the Knowledge of God

The opinions held by Christians of various ages concerning the pagan knowledge of God can be categorized into three types: continuity/ancient theology, selective rejection, and limited relativism. We put "continuity" and "ancient theology" together not because they carry the same meaning, but because the two ideas both stress the basic compatibility of the knowledge of the pagan with Christianity. The proponents of the unity/ancient theology type included the Alexandrian theologians, Boethius, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Pico and Ficino. For Alexandrian theologians such as Clement and Justin, the knowledge of the pagans originated from the pre-incarnate *Logos*, whom Christians believe was made flesh in the person

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[191] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 294.

[192] Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 294.

of Jesus Christ. For them, paganism and Christianity are truth of a different degree, but not different truths. Theologians like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas believed a harmonious unity existed between philosophy and theology because God is the ultimate source of all knowledge. Humanists including Pico and Ficino believe a specific kind of *prisca theologia*, namely, a multilinear inspiration theory. According to the multilinear inspiration theory, God illuminated a couple of ancient theologians like Hermes Trismegistus with the divine light parallel to the revelation that God granted to the Hebrew prophets.

Bonaventure's view was typical of "selective rejection." Selective rejection regards suspiciously the harmonious unity between reason and faith. In general, the proponents of selective rejection, like Bonaventure, tend to be more Augustinian, insisting that the right use of reason can only come after a properly directed will. In other words, our will has to be enlightened by grace first, then comes the right use of reason.

Finally, the proponents of "limited relativism" included Siger of Barbant and other Arts Masters of the thirteenth century. Limited relativism suggests that the disruption between reason and revelation is great and irreconcilable. Reason is not only inadequate to address the truth of Christianity, it at times contradicts the Christian faith.

Opinions concerning the Virtue of Pagans

The opinions held by Christians concerning the pagan virtues can be categorized into three types: false virtue, true virtue in its own right, and true virtue that has meritorious effect. Augustine and the late medieval Augustinian Bradwardine were the steadfast proponents of the idea that pagan virtues are false virtues, since the virtues of the pagan, however noble it might be, were directed toward self-glory instead of the glory of God.

Since Augustine had such a great impact upon Western medieval Christianity, the

theologians after him who tended to view the virtuous pagans more charitably needed to find a way of bypassing the Augustinian legacy by understanding pagan virtues apart from the Christian virtues. Pagan virtues, they argued, can be true when interpreted in their own right, rather than according to the Christian value. As such, they distinguished the pagan virtues as acquired virtues, which can be obtained through habitual practice, and Christian virtues as infused virtues, which can only be obtained through the infusion of grace. Many scholastic theologians like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, along with Dante, espoused this second opinion.

The third opinion is the most controversial among the three. Peter Abelard seems to be the only advocate of this view, namely, pagan virtues as true virtue having a meritorious effect. According to Abelard, one must have explicit knowledge of incarnation and passion of Christ in order to be saved. The virtuous pagans were not saved by virtues *per se*. However, the virtues which they displayed did make them worthy of obtaining special inspiration from God which enlightens them with the explicit knowledge of Christ.

Opinions concerning the Salvation of the Virtuous Pagans

The patristic and medieval authors considered a variety of opinions concerning the salvation of the virtuous pagans, seven of which will be considered in this section: First, the universalistic idea, suggested by Origen, that everyone eventually will be saved; second, a stringent and rigorous Augustinian notion that all pagans will be damned; third, a moderate Augustinian opinion, which holds that God in his grace elected some pagans to be his people before the incarnation; fourth, a concessionary opinion embraced by many humanists that the virtuous pagans were in Limbo where there is neither physical pain nor beatific vision; fifth, the Hermetic tradition or *prisca theologia* which suggests that the ancients had access to the full

knowledge of God and the chance to believe; sixth, the idea of implicit faith that, for those who were ignorant of the explicit knowledge of Christ, the belief that God is the creator and rewarder of all would be sufficient for salvation; seventh and finally, the idea of special inspiration that the virtuous pagans can obtain enlightenment from God in order to be saved.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we examined the ways that Luther's predecessors tackled the problems related to the "outsider." Confronting the Jews, the Christian church, since the early days, effectively disinherited the Jewish claim to be the chosen people of God through a variety of ways, the most common one among them was the typological reading of the Old Testament. Confronting the schismatics, the Christian church espoused the idea that the boundary of the Church is inextricably tied to the visible, continuous presence of the episcopate. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. In contrast to these two problems, the problem of paganism, even after centuries of discussion, remained unsettling and received no decisive answer at the time of the Reformation. Christians of various ages wrestled with the problem in their own ways, pondering to what degree the pagans can be said to have true knowledge of God, true Christian faith, and to be saved. Only in this broader context we can fully appreciate the theological and ecclesiological significance of Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia*. As we will see in the following chapters, Luther's theology of the Word provides great insights to all of the three problems discussed in this chapter in general, and his articulation of *fortuita misericordia* bears an even greater significance of the problem of paganism. To appreciate concretely how Luther dealt with all three outsiders problems, we now turn to the story of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4, the beginning of our main discussion of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

CAIN: THE MURDERER WHO RECEIVED MERCY

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on Luther's exposition of Gen. 4, the story of Cain and Abel,

which sets forth one of the best examples of how Luther's theology and exegesis intertwine with

the first appearance of *fortuita misericordia* in Luther's Genesis Lectures. This chapter contains

three sections, each with a distinct featuring theme. First, we will examine Luther's view on

primogeniture in his comments on the birth of Cain and Abel. Next will be the discussion of

Luther's articulation of the true and false church as shown in the dichotomy between Cain the

murderer and Abel the victim. Luther's thoughtful analysis of the killing of Abel and the

punishment of Cain will be the third topic of discussion, with a special attention toward Luther's

treatment of the *fortuita misericordia* granted to Cain by God after the slaughter of Abel. Along

the way, we will bring these three themes into dialogue to better interpret Luther's understanding

of the people of God and salvation history. In fact, as the first of four chapters which constitute

the body of our study, the story of Cain and Abel provides something like an epitome of Luther's

theological interpretation of the unchosen in which almost all principles that underlie Luther's

idea of *fortuita misericordia* can be found.

The Birth of Cain and Abel: Luther's view on Primogeniture (Gen. 4:1–2)

According to Mateusz Oseka, Luther's interpretation of the birth of Cain is idiosyncratic in

the history of interpretation.[1] Neither Christian exegetes before Luther nor the Jewish tradition

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[1] Mateusz Oseka, "Reformation Exegesis Encountering the Jewish Legacy: Luther and Calvin Reading Genesis 4:1," *Reformed Theological Review* 74, no.1 (2005): 34–65.

interpreted the passage as Luther did here.[2] In commenting on Gen. 4:1, Luther suggests that

Adam and Eve misidentified Cain with the promised Seed who was to defeat the serpent (Gen.

3:15). Although this belief turned out to be wrong, it nevertheless gave proof that the first parents

held fast to the divine promise and thus should be called saints.[3] Luther based his suggestion on

three exegetical observations. First, Luther was convinced that Adam knew Eve not only for

bodily passion but also for the need for achieving salvation. Adam understood both the blessing

of procreation and the promise of the blessed Seed who would crush the serpent's head.[4] Second,

Eve's statement, "I have gotten the man of the Lord" (*Acquisivi virum Domini*) clearly indicates

her firm conviction that Cain would be the man whom the Lord promised to crush the head of the

serpent.[5] The third exegetical observation was that the name "Cain" was derived from the

Hebrew verb "to possess" or "to acquire" which clearly conveys the parental expectation of the

"winning of life and salvation through the Seed against the loss of life and salvation through sin

and Satan."[6]

While Luther's reading was new in the tradition, his interpretation of Gen. 4:1 against the

backdrop of Gen. 3:15 is exegetically reasonable. As Old Testament scholar Kenneth A.

Mathews notes in his Genesis Commentary, "seed" is the second of the three most programmatic

elements in Genesis (the other two are blessings and land). The rivalry between the evil "seed"

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[2] Oseka, "Reformation Exegesis Encountering the Jewish Legacy," 54–58.

[3] *LW* 1:242; WA 42:180. Luther's first comments on Adam's faith in the promised Seed can be found in his comments on Gen. 3:21. "Adam had used his wife's name as a means of finding comfort in the life which was to be restored through the promised Seed, who would crush the serpent's head and would slay the slayer himself." *LW* 1:221; WA 42:165.

For a detailed discussion of Luther's view on Eve as represented in *Lectures on Genesis*, see Mattox, *Defenders of Most Holy Matriarchs*, 67–108.

[4] *LW* 1:237; WA 42:176.

[5] *LW* 1:242; WA 42:180.

[6] *LW* 1:242; WA 42:180.

and the "seed" of the woman metaphorically represented in Gen. 3:15 permeates the whole book of Genesis. "This dual lineage of the serpent's family versus the woman's family has its history evidenced throughout the whole of human and patriarchal narratives as they reveal the approved line of descent versus the outcast—as early as Cain and as late as Esau."[7] The same idea is also observed in Luther's doctrine of the true and false church which Luther introduced in his treatment of Cain and Abel.

After the birth of both Cain and Abel, Luther turned to the discussion of primogeniture. Primogeniture is of utmost importance since it was a divine establishment pertaining to both God's people and the pagans concerning the privilege and responsibility that the heirs possess after the father's death. Yet, ironically, Luther observes that the actual experience from the history of God's people proves that the firstborn often failed their parents and those who were born after them would assume their rank and prestige.[8] The main reason underlying this irony is that the primogeniture granted to the firstborns often became the source of pride and boasting in their lives. Luther pointedly observes,

> The parents regarded their first-born sons as something distinguished. Then the first-born sons themselves were spoiled in this way by the indulgence of their parents. Relying on their right, they despised and lorded it over their brothers. But God is the God of the humble; He gives grace to the humble and resists the proud (1 Peter 5:5). Because they are proud, the first-born sons are deprived of their right, not because they did not have the right of primogeniture but because they begin to be proud of their gifts and become conceited. This God cannot bear.[9]

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[7] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. NAC (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1996), 57.

[8] *LW* 1:244; WA 42:181.

[9] *LW* 1:244; WA 42:182. "Parentes primogenitos habuerunt lautius. Deinde ipsi primogeniti sic parentum indulgentia depravati contempserunt et oppresserunt fiducia huius iuris fratres reliquos. Deus autem [Jak. 4, 6] est Deus humilium, qui 'humilibus dat gratiam et resistit superbis.' Primogeniti autem, quia superbi sunt, de suo iure deturbantur, non quod ius primogeniturae non habeant, sed quia incipiunt in donis superbire, et insolescunt. Id autem Deus non potest ferre."

As we will see in the later chapters, Luther's view of primogeniture bore a crucial theological significant in his interpretation of God's election of the second-born of the patriarchs. In light of Luther's anthropology, Cain's failure may be seen as the confusion of human identity. As Arand and Kolb observe, a robust understanding of human identity must keep the two kinds of righteousness, namely, passive and active righteousness, in the right places. Passive righteousness is a free gift from God granted to human being as the core of our identity, while active righteousness is the activity which flows from the former kind of righteousness in order to serve our neighbor.[10] However, in this case, rather than seeing himself merely as a recipient of the divine gift as the firstborn son of Adam and taking hold of the promise given to his father, Cain put his trust and identity in his primogeniture.[11] From this perspective, Cain is ranked among the theologians of glory because he seeks security and identity in things other than God the Creator. Human beings are so tempted to establish their identity on things or persons apart from God—be it primogeniture, wealth, or social status. As Luther observes in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531–1535), "Thus, human reason cannot refrain from looking at active righteousness, that is, its own righteousness; nor can it shift its gaze to the passive, that is, Christian righteousness, but it simply rests in the active righteousness. So deeply is this evil rooted in us, and so completely have we acquired this unhappy habit."[12] The result of such an act of self-reliance is inevitable self-destruction. As John M. Headley puts it, "If primogeniture were sufficient, then the Word would be of no use to men. Where there exists only the right of the firstborn, there can be only perdition." Whoever insists the claim of firstborn right is to rely on

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[10] Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 33–45. For a summary of two kinds of righteousness, see Chapter Two, pp. 24–26.

[11] *LW* 1:246; WA 42:182.

[12] *LW* 26:5; WA 40:1. See also Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 78–88.

the work of man instead of the promise of God.[13] Mathews shares the same insight as Luther by suggesting that it is Cain's "self-absorbed" attitude rather than the type of sacrifice which displeased God. "God's response toward Cain and Abel, therefore, was not due to the nature of the gift *per se*, whether it was grain or animal, but the integrity of the giver."[14] In the final analysis, Cain's boastful attitude in his primogeniture is just another example showing how one fails in letting go of his desire to be "like God."[15]

The Prototype of the True and False Church (Gen. 4:3–5)

Luther believed that Adam and Eve were pious parents who preached to their children about the will and worship of God. This is the very reason why Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. Since the first parents taught their children about the divine worship, Luther contends, they not only provided the material needs for their children but also performed the office of priest.[16] With this understanding in mind, the ways their children responded to their teaching became crucial. Both Cain and Abel received the same pious teaching from their parents, nevertheless the ways they react as a result of the teaching are diametrically opposed. Cain, who took pride in his primogeniture, acted hypocritically as if he wass really interested in

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[13] John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, Yale Publications in Religion 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 67.

[14] Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 268. While Mathews' comments echo Luther's reading of the text, this is by no means the only explanation offered in the history of biblical interpretation or in modern scholarship on Genesis. Given that the rationale for God's rejection of Cain's gift and preference for Abel's is not indicated in the text, there has been a handful of different explanations in the history of exegesis and in contemporary biblical scholarship. For a review of the major lines of interpretation on this question, see Mark R. Squire, "Falling Far from the Tree?: God's Rejection of Cain Outside the Garden of Eden," (S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2018). Squire's conclusion is that God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice cannot be determined from Genesis 4 alone. "While some point to Cain's sacrifice, some to Cain himself, and some to God in heaven, none will be able to prove his argument pointing to the ultimate reason for God's favor." See Squire, "Falling Far from the Tree?" 94.

[15] Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 94.

[16] *LW* 1:247; WA 42:184.

his parents' instruction and brought an offering. On the other hand, Abel, the one who hadno prestige, brought an offering out of his faith in the promise. Since then the true church of Adam began to divide into two churches, Luther remarks, one is true and under persecution, and another is hypocritical and bloodthirsty. "For Christ also calls Abel righteous and makes him the beginning of the church of the godly, which will continue until the end (Matt. 23:35). Similarly, Cain is the beginning of the church of the wicked and of the bloodthirsty until the end of the world."[17] In short, the lives of Cain and Abel marked the beginning of the true and the false church, and they also set the basic contours of the ways in which the two churches unfold themselves in the future.

Luther acknowledged the fact that Augustine, in *De Civitate Dei*, treated this story in a similar way. However, the differences between them are still obvious. Headley identified three key differences between the Augustinian framework of the two cities and Luther's duality of the twofold church: First, the two conflicting cities for Augustine are more of a result of election while for Luther the dualistic nature of truth and falsehood is inherent, rather than extrinsic, to the Church because of the nature of the Word and the hiddenness of the church. Second, Augustine's idea of two cities understands the distinction between the two cites by two opposing kinds of love, love for self and love for God, while the two churches for Luther are separated by their respective responses to the Word of God either in the form of faith or unbelief. Third, for Augustine, the cosmic notion of the city of God, not the church, remains the focus of his discussion; while for Luther, his main concern rests on the true church in history as a hidden

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[17] *LW* 1:252; WA 42:187. "Nam Christus quoque Habel vocat iustum et facit eum initium Ecclesiae piorum, quae erit usque ad finem. Sicut Cain initium est Ecclesiae malignantium et sanguinariae usque in finem mundi."

presence brought forth by the Word of God.[18] In short, Luther's idea of twofold church was a creative reformulation of Augustine's classical doctrine of two cities.[19]

The theme of the twofold church is of great importance in our study, since it provides the overall framework of Luther's thinking of *fortuita misericordia* and the place of Gentiles in salvation history. In other words, the idea of the twofold church sets the stage for the following chapters. Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* is the Old Testament church history, for in this book Luther was able to elaborate on his idea of the church in a biblical narrative context.[20] In his introduction to Luther's exegetical writings, Jaroslav Pelikan notes that, for Luther, biblical narratives were not just some historical accounts of the ancient events; instead, they are the "history of the church as the people of God."[21] Luther found the history of the church in every part of the book of Genesis.[22] One of the key exegetical principles that Pelikan identified in Luther's utilization of Genesis as the history of the people of God is that the true church always undergoes conflicts with the false church. "The conflicts in Genesis are representative of the continuing conflict between the true and the false church."[23] Judged from external conditions, the true church existed in sufferings and disgrace, while the false church flourished in number and power, and sought every chance to swallow the true church. However, illuminated by the patriarchal narratives, Luther confidently held that God will finally vindicate his people of the

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[18] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 67–68.

[19] Bornkamm shared the same idea by noting that "Although Luther appealed to Augustine's famous interpretation of the Cain and Abel history to prove this [the twofold church], in reality he made something else out of it. Whereas Augustine saw Cain as the founder of the 'earthly city,' Luther traced the 'hypocritical church' back to him." See Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 210.

[20] Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 209.

[21] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 89.

[22] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor,* 91.

[23] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 95. Pelikan also recognized two more principles that are important to Luther's thinking of the people of God in Genesis are theophany as appearance of the ministry of the Word of God, and promises and signs as proof of God's work through Word and Sacraments.

true church and condemn the hypocritical one.

Concerning the offerings of the brothers, Luther believed that God was not so much interested in the offering itself as to the person who makes offering. For him, the offerings of Cain and Abel manifest keenly the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which is "the essence of our teaching." As Luther noted, "This is the essence of our teaching. We teach and confess that a person rather that his work is accepted by God and that a person does not become righteous as a result of a righteous work, but that a work becomes righteous and good as a result of a righteous and good person."[24] This argument echoes Heb. 11:4, "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God bearing witness concerning his gifts." The very reason that God disregarded Cain's offering is not that his offering was inferior, but because "his person was evil, without faith, and full of pride and conceit." By contrast, God favored Abel's offering "because he is pleased with the person." Luther observed that the text reads as "the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering," because the person comes first and then his work, but not the other way around.[25] As Luther concludes later in his lecture, two issues are fleshed out in the action of offering. The first issue is that "nothing is pleasing to God unless it is done in faith." The second issue is that it is not sacrifices or other works which remove the enormity of sin, but "only through God's mercy, which must be accepted by faith."[26] This approach to the narrative illustrates what Kolb observes,

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[24] *LW* 1:257; WA 42:190. "Est autem haec doctrinae nostrae summa, quod docemus et profitemur personam prius Deo acceptam esse quam opus, et personam non fieri iustam ex opere iusto, Sed opus fieri iustum et bonum ex persona iusta et bona." The way which Luther uses a biblical figure as a type for justification can be found as early as his Roman lectures in 1515 and his letter to Spalatin in October 1516. See *LW* 25:279.

[25] *LW* 1:258; WA 42:190. In his 1523 sermons on Genesis, Luther has made mostly the same comment on this passage, "Cain was not condemned because of his works but because of his unbelief… God looks first at the person, the man, and then at the works that he does, not vice versa" (WA 24:127–28). Quoted from Kolb, "God and His Human Creatures," 178.

[26] *LW* 1:265; WA 42:195. See also William H. Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social*

namely, that Luther "used the biblical accounts as the framework for his own catechesis, repeating the text's story and then making clear its significance for his hearers or readers with a down-to-earth elucidation of the words and concepts."[27] For Luther, theology and exegesis are not two distinct intellectual endeavors. Instead, they are an inseparable and integrated whole.

The Killing of Abel and the Punishment of Cain (Gen. 4:6–9)

Cain was greatly upset by God's disregard of his offering and his preference to Abel, whom Cain despised as inferior and unworthy. Luther believed that what follows in this passage is the admonition addressed to Cain by his father. It is Adam who reproved Cain, and what Adam says was "in accordance with the Word of God and through the Holy Spirit" thus it is rightly to be said of God's own speech.[28] Pelikan suggests that Luther's preference of speaking of the ministry of men as God's mouthpiece in the theophany accounts of Genesis reflected his insistence on the importance of the mediatory role of ministers of the Word in order to counteract the radicals' claims of direct and immediate revelation from God.[29]

Ethics (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 113.

[27] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God*, 50.

[28] *LW* 1:262; WA 42:194.

[29] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 103. However, in a recent article on Luther's Genesis Lectures, Raphael Magarik suggests a different explanation in understanding what stood behind Luther's articulation. Raphael Magarik, "Free Indirect Revelation: Luther's Moses and the Narration of Genesis," *Reformation* 24, no.1 (2019): 3–23. With respect to Luther's comment on Gen. 4:6–7, Magarik observes, "in attributing 'God's' words to human speakers, Luther does not imagine these humans merely as vessels for the divine message. Rather, their circumstances and psychologies come to shape how they express divine messages, as well as how their interlocutors respond" (5). Magarik's main argument is that Luther identified two different revelatory modes in the Scripture as illustrated in Genesis Lectures, one is the direct, salvific Word and the other is indirect, ministered Word (14–15). Magarik labels this way of understanding the text as "free indirect style" to depict Luther's unique approach of bringing the psychological and circumstantial nuances of the narrator, the mediated minister and other biblical characters into his exegetical horizon.

While Margarik's thesis did shed some light on Luther's imaginative interpretation of the biblical narrative, Pelikan's argument has a stronger explanatory power as it takes serious consideration of Luther's theology of the Word. We will return to this topic in Chapter Seven. See pp. 257–58.

Two issues are worthy of mention in Luther's treatment of verse 7. First, Luther delved

into a brief discussion on the translation of this verse. Luther suggested that, according to the

best Hebrew text available at the time, the real meaning of this verse should be that "if you do

well, there will be forgiveness, or a lifting up; and if you do not do well, sin lies at the door."[30]

Since it is faith instead of primogeniture which is pleasing to God, the Hebrew term שְׂאֵת must be

understood as "to lift up" rather than "to accept."[31] Thus Luther paraphrased this verse in the

following way, "If you did well, or if you were good, that is, if you believed, you would have a

gracious God and there would be a true lifting-up, that is, forgiveness of sins. But because I see

that God had no regard for you, it assuredly follows that you are not good and are not freed from

your sin; but your sin remains."[32] This is another illuminating case showing how theology and

exegesis work hand-in-hand. What makes Cain's offering displeasing to God is that he did not

perform it by faith, even if the text itself did not explicitly speak of faith. Paul's statement in

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[30] Here Luther engages himself with his preceding exegetical tradition, including the Jews and church fathers. As John Maxfield notes, despite the fact that Luther in his early years developed a rich appreciation for the Hebrew language and utilized humanist philological studies in his lecture, nevertheless "in his last decade of life, Luther viewed with suspicion and even fear the influence that Jewish Hebrew studies were having on Christian scholars in his time." See John Maxfield, "The Enduring Importance of Luther's Exposition of the Old Testament as Christian Revelation," in *Defending Luther's Reformation: Its Ongoing Significance in the Face of Contemporary Challenges*, ed. John Maxfield, 123–54 (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 135.

Stephen Burnett also observes that on the one hand Luther and other Protestant scholars acknowledged the importance of engaging with Jewish sources for the sake of Hebrew learning, but on the other hand "they sharply disagreed among themselves about the degree to which they could trust Jewish biblical interpreters to understand the Hebrew Scriptures." See Stephen Burnett, "Jews and Judaism," in *Luther in Context*, ed. David M. Whitford, 179–86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 184. For a detailed discussion of Hebrew scholarship in the Reformation period, see Stephen Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). In the case of Luther, he often blames the Jews by merely understanding the terms without hitting the meaning.

[31] *LW* 1:263–64; WA 42:195.

[32] *LW* 1:265; WA 42:196. "Sententia igitur est: Si bene ageres, vel si bonus esses, hoc est, si crederes, haberes propicium Deum et vera esset levatio, hoc est, remissio peccati. Sed quia video Deum non respexisse ad te, certe sequitur te non bonum esse nec esse levatum peccato, sed tuum peccatum manet." It is worth noting that Luther's reading here is congruent with the Jewish Aramaic Targummim, e.g. Targum Jonathan on Genesis. I am thankful for Dr. Egger's comment here.

Rom. 14 is of utmost importance for Luther, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Guided by this theological principle, this passage cannot be interpreted otherwise, for it is the only way to apprehend the subject matter (*res*) of the text.[33]

The second noteworthy issue in verse 7 is that Luther understood "your sin lies at the door" as a rhetorical description of sin, indicating the fact that sin cannot remain quiet for a long time or stay hidden. In this way, Luther connected the admonition of Adam to Cain with all of his audience, "What happened to Cain happened to everybody … The wicked person believes that sin is quiet and hidden. But at the door it cannot be quiet, and in the end, it manifests itself and emerges into public view."[34] Faith is the only remedy against sin and temptation. As such, Luther remarked that, in spite of what is said in the latter part of verse 7, "and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it," the fact that we are tempted to sin does not follow that we have to carry out the act of sinning. Rather, "if sin entices you, rule over it through faith, and do not permit it to rule over you; otherwise you will perish." Finally, Luther applied the law and gospel dialectic in his exhortation about how to rule over sin, "the exhortation gives expression to two doctrines, one dealing with fear and the other with faith. We should fear God because sin lies at the door; and we should trust God because He is merciful."[35]

The murder of Abel recorded in Gen. 4:8 is astonishingly brief. Overcome by his wrath, Cain still disguised his wrath and spoke to Abel in a brotherly way, Luther conjectured. This

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[33] In his article, Saarinen discusses how Luther integrated theological truth (*res*) into his grammatical analysis (*verba*) of the biblical text. Saarinen argues that, for Luther, the meaning (*sensus*) and the subject matter (*res*) of the words are connected to the grammatical word-level. He calls this theological semantic "new grammar." See Risto Saarinen, "The Word of God in Luther's theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 4, no.1 (1990): 31–43.

[34] *LW* 1:267; WA 42:197. "Quod enim Cain accidit, idem omnibus accidit. …Impius enim putat peccatum quiescere et latere. Sed in foribus non potest quiescere, arguitur tandem et producitur in publicum."

[35] *LW* 1:270; WA 42:199. "Complectitur enim utranque doctrinam, timoris et fidei: Timere Deum debemus, quia peccatum cubat in foribus, Fidere Deo debemus, quia est misericors."

observation is supported by the unawareness of the first parents to what might be following. Hence, "Cain is a figure and image of all murderers and hypocrites who, under the guise of piety, kill good men."[36] Then Cain killed his brother. Luther reminded his audience that, without faith, we are in every way like Cain. "For this reason St. Paul calls men by nature children of wrath [*filios irae*], and declares that they are held captive to Satan's will. … When our nature is without the Holy Spirit, it is impelled by the same evil spirit by which Cain was impelled."[37] Here Luther expressed a typical Pauline understanding of human nature after the fall as one under the wrath of God. As Paul Althaus remarks, "[s]inful man, who is so bound to his sin that he cannot believe and because of this unfaith thinks of God as wrathful, really experiences the wrath of God."[38] Out of wrath, Cain murdered his brother. Now in the following lines his accursed conscience is about to experience the wrath of God, or more precisely, his accursed conscience cannot render God's confrontation as a call for repentance, but only as an expression the divine anger.

Luther suggested that, after the murder, it was the first parents who talk to Cain. The worried parents asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" Cain answered disrespectfully, "I don't know. I am not his keeper, am I?" By excusing himself, Luther observed, Cain accuses himself. He should be his brother's keeper. Also, by disclaiming himself, Cain's sin is doubled, adding a lie to a murder. This is how sins accumulate one upon another. Puffed up by his primogeniture,

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[36] *LW* 1:271; WA 42:200. "Cain igitur est figura et imago omnium homicidarum et hypocritarum, qui sub specie pietatis bonos occidunt."

[37] *LW* 1:273; WA 42:201–2. "Paulus Ephe. 2. ideo vocat filios irae, et 2. Tim. 2. dicit captivos teneri ad voluntatem Satanae. Si enim nihil nisi homines sumus, hoc est, si non fide apprehendimus Semen benedictum, omnes sumus Cain similes nec deest nobis aliud quam occasio. Nam natura destituta Spiritu sancto ab eodem malo Spiritu agitatur, quo agitatus est impius Cain."

[38] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 171.

Cain sins by believing that because of his merit he can obtain the approval of God. Built upon

the pride there followed envy and hatred of his brother. Hatred was followed by hypocrisy,

murder, and the denial of manslaughter. Finally came despair.[39] In this aspect, the sin which Cain

committed was much worse than what his parents had done. For Adam and Eve, though

reluctant, still acknowledged their sins and obtained forgiveness and milder punishment. But

Cain, in the denial of his guilt, committed a greater sin and was eventually expelled.

The lesson we must learn from this passage, Luther urged his audience, is repentance.

Luther saw a humble confession of our sins as the only remedy by which the arrogance of the

firstborn can be tamed.

> But these examples are useful for us, to keep us from contending with God. When you feel in your conscience that you are guilty, guard with your utmost effort against striving with God or with men by defending and excusing your sin. Rather do the following: Do not flee from God when He is pointing His spear at you, but flee to Him with a humble confession of your guilt and a request for forgiveness. Then God will draw back His spear and spare you. On the other hand, the farther you try to flee from God by denying and excusing your sin, the more closely and aggressively God pursues you and harasses you. Therefore there is nothing better and safer than to come with a confession of your guilt. The outcome of this is that while God triumphs, we also triumph through Him.[40]

For Luther, the greatest vice of all is unbelief, which manifests itself chiefly in the human

attempt to achieve righteousness on one's own and the denial of one's guilt. By contrast, the

greatest virtue of all is faith, which expresses itself in letting God be God and, therefore, in the

sinner's confession. Cain's failure of acknowledging his arrogance and unbelief led to his act of

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[39] *LW* 1:275; WA 42:203.

[40] *LW* 1:277; WA 42:205. "Prosunt autem nobis Exempla haec, ne contendamus cum Deo, Sed cum sentis in conscientia, te reum esse, hoc summo studio cave, ne vel cum Deo vel cum hominibus lucteris defendendo aut excusando peccatum. Hoc potius fac, ne a Deo intentanti hastam aufugias sed potius ad eum confugias cum humili confessione culpae et veniae petitione. Tum Deus hastam retrahet et parcet. Ubi contra, quanto per negationem et peccati excusationem longius a Deo conaris aufugere, tanto propius et hostilius te Deus persequitur et urget. Nihil igitur melius nec tutius est quam venire cum confessione culpae. Sic enim fit, ut, dum Deus vincit, nos quoque per eum vincamus."

murder, and his self-defense led to his denial. One sin can easily add up to another as they take hold of one's will. As sin and evil become a continuing presence in the lives of Christians, it is daily necessary to wage war ceaselessly against wickedness. What Luther wrote in 1517 remained true throughout his life: "the whole life of a Christian is a life of repentance."[41]

Fortuita Misericordia: Luther on Cain's Finale (Gen. 4:10–17)

As God's representative, Adam said to his son, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the earth" (v. 10). Luther noted that what Adam said is full of comfort against all murderers and enemies of the church, for "our God is merciful and loves His saints, takes care of them, and inquires after them, whereas He is angry with murderers, hates them, and is determined to punish them."[42] Luther regularly found consolation in passages like this, which depict God's verdict for his saints in the midst of their anguishes and distresses.[43] Abel was a saint unknown to his age, yet God himself remembered his blood and would not disregard his affliction. As Luther famously put it in his polemic against Erasmus, "The Church is hidden, the saints are unknown."[44] The church to Luther was always hidden and under persecution, only sustained and nurtured by the Word of God.[45] This true and hidden church is governed by the Holy Spirit, not any visible official authority, and Christ has promised to remain with it until the end of the world.[46]

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[41] Thesis 1 of the 95 theses. See Robert Kolb, "Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures," *Lutherjahrbuch* 76 (2009): 193–220 (here 195).

[42] *LW* 1:287; WA 42:212. "videamus Deum nostrum esse misericordem et diligere Sanctos suos eosque curare et requirere, contra autem homicidis irasci, eos odisse et punire velle."

[43] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor,* 95.

[44] *LW* 33:89; WA 18:652. "abscondita est eccesia, laten sancti."

[45] Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 217.

[46] Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 341–44. For a lucid discussion of Luther's view of the people of God, see Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 287–93.

God's judgment towards Cain was then announced: He was cursed from the earth. In contrast to Gen. 3:17 where the earth was cursed because of Adam's rebellion, Luther notices that here in Gen. 4:11 it was Cain himself who received the curse. Luther's explanation of the difference between the punishment of Adam and Cain introduced themes that were more fully taken up in his subsequent reflections on *fortuita misericordia.* Adam received a milder punishment, not because his sin was less grievous, but because Adam was the root of the blessed Seed. "This Seed is spared, and for the sake of this blessed fruit the curse is transferred from Adam's person to the earth."[47] In other words, God's merciful dealings with Adam is tied to the promise of salvation history. Correspondingly, when Cain was cursed, the real meaning is that Cain was cut off from the root of the blessed Seed. However, since Cain was cursed "from the earth" but not "from heaven," the descendants of Cain are not totally deprived of any hope of salvation.

> Now, because He [God] says 'from the earth,' He does indeed make the threat that they [Cain's descendants] have forfeited the promise of the Seed; and yet it might happen that by divine impulse (*instinctu divino*) some individuals of Cain's progeny might join Adam and be saved. And so it also happened later on. According to Ps. 147:20, "He has not dealt so with any nation," the Jews alone had the glory and promise of this Seed. Nevertheless, the Gentiles had, so to speak, the privilege of begging; and because of God's mercy they obtained the same blessing that the Jews had as a result of God's truth or promise.[48]

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[47] *LW* 1:290; WA 42:214. In his 1523 *Preface to the Old Testament*, Luther explicitly commends that Genesis is "an exceedingly evangelical book" on the basis that the seed of the woman was promised to Adam and Eve immediately after their rebellion to show that faith may be praised above all works. See *LW* 35:237.

[48] *LW* 1:291; WA 42:215. "Nunc, quia 'e terra' dicit, Minatur quidem, quod a promissione Seminis exciderit, et tamen potuit fieri, ut quidam privati homines ex generatione Cain instinctu divino se cum Adam coniunxerint et salvati sint. Sicut postea quoque accidit. Etsi enim soli Iudaei habebant gloriam huius Seminis et promissionem secundum Psalmum 147. 'Non fecit taliter [Ps. 147, 20] omni Nationi,' tamen gentes habuerunt, ut sic dicam, ius mendicandi, et consequebantur idem beneficium propter misericordiam Dei, quod Iudaei propter veritatem seu promissionem Dei habebant." In another case, *instinctu divino* was rendered as "divine inspiration." "Rebecca, by divine inspiration, had the understanding that the younger would be the elder." However, Luther warns us not to accept any inspiration uncritically, for the Word of God must be the foundation of it. See *LW* 4:389–90; WA 43:416.

Alluding to the possibility that some of Cain's descendants may be saved, Luther now moved a step further in his theological imagination by linking Cain's progeny with the Gentiles, a step which seems to breaks with the tradition which unanimously identifies Cain as a type of the rebellious Jews.[49] With this in mind, Luther began entertaining the idea that many of Cain's descendants before the flood eventually joined the faith of the patriarchs and were saved. Like the Gentiles, Cain's descendants were not prohibited from begging for mercy.

> But I submit this idea for consideration because in all likelihood many of Cain's descendants joined themselves to the holy patriarchs. But they were in the church as individuals and without office, as men who had completely lost the promise that the blessed Seed would be born from their body. It is a serious matter to lose the promise; and yet this very curse is made milder in this way, that the right of begging, as it were, was granted them, and heaven was not unconditionally denied to them, provided that they joined the true church.[50]

Though the term *fortuita misericordia* had not yet been employed, the concept behind the term was clearly present. In fact, this is the first incidence which we encounter in Luther's comments on Genesis that a group of unchosen people can be saved. From this incidence a significant insight, if not a paradigmatic shift, on the story of Cain and Abel in the history of exegesis emerged: In reflecting the possibility of salvation open to a condemned biblical figure and his offspring, Luther deliberately modified the traditional dichotomy between Cain and Abel as two parallel ecclesiological entities without overlapping.[51] The descendants of Cain may join the true

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[49] See Chapter Three, pp. 47–49, 51–53.

[50] *LW* 1:292; WA 42:215. "Ideo autem hoc admoneo, quia verisimile est, quod multi ex posteris Cain se coniunxerunt cum sanctis Patriarchis. Sed fuerunt in Ecclesia privati et sine officio, tanquam qui promissionem Seminis benedicti, ex suo corpore nascituri, penitus amisissent. Magnum autem est amittere promissionem, Et tamen haec ipsa maledictio sic est mitigata, ut concederetur eis ius quasi mendicandi, et non negaretur praecise coelum, modo se cum vera Ecclesia coniungerent."

[51] *Glossa Ordinaria* and Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla Litteralis super totam Bibliam* are two of the most influential biblical commentaries in the late medieval period which Luther consulted extensively in his Genesis lectures. However, these two works seldom, if ever, read Cain the same way as Luther did as the recipient of mercy. The comments of *Glossa* basically followed the traditional Augustinian interpretive framework, suggesting that Cain is cursed by the church who were persecuted by him. In commenting on 4:17 where Cain had a son, Enoch, and built the a city named after his son, *Glossa* recalled Augustine's *de civitate* with the assertion that this incident signifies

church when they beg and pray for mercy, and, as we will see later in the chapter, the members of the true church may also fall from their place when they brag and boast in their privilege.

Nevertheless, the divine punishment that fell upon Cain was severe. Luther observed that God pronounced a threefold judgment upon Cain. First, as shown previously in Gen. 4:11, Cain was cursed from the earth. This is a spiritual judgment which deprives Cain of spiritual glory. Second, a physical judgment was declared to Cain that his toil on the land will be unproductive because of his brother's blood. Third, another physical judgment was announced that Cain will become a wanderer and fugitive, which meant Cain had no secure place on earth to dwell.[52]

"My iniquity is too great to be forgiven," Cain bemoaned desperately in Gen. 4:13. Here Luther believed that Cain was accused by his conscience in the presence of divine judgment. "Therefore Cain acknowledges his sin, although he does not grieve over his sin as much as he does over the punishment that has been inflicted."[53] Cain continues to moan in Gen. 4:14, that he was being driven out, "from the face of the ground," which is his home and community. He was also hidden from the face of God, which for Luther means an ecclesiastical punishment with true

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the flourishing of the earthly city. Lyra's *postilla*, on the other hand, was largely shaped by his interest of probing into the details of each passage. In commenting on 4:13, Lyra wonders whether Cain's statement of "my punishment is more than I can bear" was a sincere expression of despair (the punishment is too great that I really cannot bear) or a flippant evaluation of his sins (my iniquity is not too great to be forgiven, is it?). Also, in commenting on 4:17, Lyra's primary interest is the question of "where did Cain's wife come from." Equipped with considerable knowledge of Hebrew language and the rabbinic commentaries, Lyra in his *postilla* seeks to to expound the exegetical details of the biblical account. In sum, both *Glossa* and Lyra's *postilla* were still working under the traditional interpretive framework in their comments on the story of Cain and Abel. See *Bibliorum Sacrorum cum Glossa Ordinaria*, vol.1b (Venice, 1603), col.117–18, 120. Hereafter as *Glossa*.

For a short comparative account of the hermeneutical principles as set respectively the *Glossa*, Lyra, and Luther, see James G. Kiecker, "Comparative Hermeneutics: The *Glossa ordinaria*, Nicholas of Lyra, and Martin Luther on the Song of Songs," in *Ad Fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther*. Edited by Timothy Maschke, Franz Posset, and Joan Skocir, 130–64 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). Kiecker notes that in Genesis Lectures Luther cited Lyra over a hundred times, generally favorably (124).

[52] *LW* 1:293–94; WA 42:216–17.

[53] *LW* 1:297; WA 42:219. "Agnoscit itaque peccatum Cain, quanquam de peccato non sic dolet, sicut de poena inflicta. Est ergo affirmativa sententia, quae desperationem horribilem ostendit."

excommunication. "Since Adam was in possession of the priesthood and of royal rule, and Cain is excommunicated by Adam because of his sin, he is at the same time deprived of the glory of the priesthood and of royal rule."[54] This twofold moaning corresponds to the threefold judgment he received. Luther then returned to the question he had previously raised. If Cain is told that he will be a wanderer and fugitive on earth, then why is Cain able to become the first city-builder (Gen. 4:17)? In answering this question, Luther again made his case by comparing the sending of Adam and the sending of Cain. For Adam, though he was expelled from Paradise, he was nevertheless assigned by God a work to do outside of Paradise. But for Cain, "he was sent away without any directive."[55] No promise was granted to Cain. He will live a life "without the Word and not to know what to believe, hope, or endure, but to do and undertake everything with no certainty as to the outcome."[56] In short, Luther understood "wanderer" and "fugitive" in a teleological way. To be a wanderer means to live without purpose and promise. In brief, Cain was bound to meaninglessness, not homeless. That is why Cain as a wanderer and fugitive is compatible with Cain as being the first to build a city.

Luther maintained that if any of Cain's descendants would come to Christ and join the true church, then it must be due to the pure mercy of God, not the result of covenant.[57] Furthermore, Luther identified a twofold favor granted to "this infamous murderer," namely, the protection of

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[54] *LW* 1:299; WA 42:220. "Quia enim sacerdotium et regnum Adae erat et Cain ob peccatum ab Adam excommunicatur, simul adimitur ei gloria sacerdocii et regni."

[55] *LW* 1:300; WA 42:221. "Quod igitur dicit Adam: 'Vagus et profugus eris in terra,' sic dicit, ut dimittat Cain sine ullo praecepto."

[56] *LW* 1:300; WA 42:221. "Haec vere fuit Cainica tentatio: carere verbo, et nescire, quid vel credas vel speres vel patiare, Sed omnia facere et suscipere in incertum eventum."

[57] The original term Luther used here is not "covenant" but "promise." However, Luther is comparing mercy which God's granted to Cain with the "promise" which God made with Adam. Therefore, "promise" should be better understood as "covenant." This kind of fluidity of language continues throughout the lectures.

life and the gift of having a family. Why? "Their purpose was that he might have opportunity and

time for repentance, although they are a matter of accident [*fortuita*] and not one of command

[*mandato*]."[58] The word *fortuita* (usually rendered as "accidental") was here first introduced in

Luther's discussion of the passage. This word, used in the expression *fortuita misericordia*

("accidental mercy" in *LW*), will be of great importance in the following comments.

For Luther, the resemblance between Cain's descendants and the Gentiles like himself was

noticeable. In this resemblance between Cain and the Gentiles that Luther found the idea of

fortuita misericordia of critical importance,

> But these two favors happened to Cain because of the elect; for it is very plausible
> that many of Cain's descendants who joined the true church were saved, just as later
> on among the Jews there was also room for proselytes and Gentiles.
>
> Thus there was a very strict Law that no one of the Moabites and the Ammonites be
> admitted to the services of the church (Deut. 23:3). And yet many Ammonites and
> Moabites who came to the kings of Judah and served them were saved. Thus Ruth,
> mother and ancestress of our Savior, was herself a Moabite (Ruth 1:4). This was, to
> express myself in this way, accidental mercy (*fortuita misericordia*), of which no
> assurance had previously been given through a promise.
>
> In this manner Naaman, the King of Nineveh, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, and
> others from among the Gentiles were saved by accidental mercy (*fortuita
> misericordia*). For they did not have the promise of Christ, as did the Jews.
> Accordingly, because of the elect who had to be saved by accidental mercy (*fortuita
> misericordia*), Cain was granted both protection of his life and a wife with offspring.
> Although his descendants had to live under the curse, just as we stated about the
> Moabites, nevertheless a few patriarchs took wives from among them.[59]

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[58] *LW* 1:301; WA 42:222. "Valent autem eo, ut possit habere locum et spacium poenitentiae, quanquam fortuita sint et sine mandato."

[59] *LW* 1:301–2; WA 42:222. "Contigerunt autem haec duo beneficia propter electos, valde enim credibile est, quod multi ex posteritate Cain salvati sint, qui se coniunxerunt cum vera Ecclesia, sicut postea apud Iudaeos etiam locus fuit proselytis et Gentibus.

Sic valde dura Lex fuit, Ne quis ex Moabitis et Ammonitis adhiberetur ad ecclesiasticas operas. Et tamen multi tum Ammonitae tum Moabitae salvati sunt, qui venerunt ad reges Iudae, et servierunt eis. Sic Ruth mater et proava Salvatoris nostri fuit ipsa quoque Moabitis. Haec fuit, ut sic vocem, fortuita misericordia non certificata prius per promissionem.

Sic Naaman, sic rex Ninivitarum, sic Nebucad Nezar et Evilmerodach, et alii ex Gentibus fortuita

The phrase "because of the elect" sounds perplexing at the first glace. Learning from a broader context, however, Luther seemed to imply that, in identifying Cain's descendants with the Gentiles, not all Gentiles were saved but only the elect. Election in this context simply refers to personal salvation. Acts 13:48 says, "and when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." What lay behind the twofold favor granted to Cain the undeserved murderer, for Luther, was God's heart for the salvation of all. Ruth, Naaman, the King of Nineveh, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach,[60] are examples among many other Gentiles who were saved by, what Luther called, *fortuita misericordia*.[61] Luther's reading of Cain as recipient of mercy is idiosyncratic in the history of exegesis for, as we have seen in the last chapter, the church fathers like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine unanimously identified Cain with the Jews and Abel with the Christians. This allegorical reading of Cain and Abel was no longer the main interpretive theme of Luther's reading of the story as the idea of *fortuita misericordia* emerged in Luther's comments on Cain's finale.

To strive for a fuller understanding of the meaning of *fortuita misericordia*, we must first consider the problem of Gentiles and promise in Luther's theology. For Gentiles, according to the definition of the term, are outsiders of the covenantal promise. Yet Luther himself acknowledged the fact that, even in the Old Testament, some Gentiles were among the true

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misericordia salvati sunt. Non enim, ut Iudaei, habebant promissionem de Christo. Ad hunc modum propter electos, qui fortuita misericordia salvandi erant, et vitae protectio et uxor cum posteritate contingit Cain. Etsi enim posteritas eius, sicut de Moabitis diximus, sub maledictione victura erat, tamen aliqui Patriarchae ex ista progenie uxores duxerunt."

[60] Avel-Marduk, son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, the king who released the imprisoned king of Judah, Jehoiachin, and invited him to his table (2 Kings 25:27–29).

[61] *LW* 1:302; WA 42:222. The Pharaoh at the time of Joseph is also among the saved Gentiles. See *LW* 1:314; WA 42:231.

church, as listed previously. How could anyone bypass the Jews to which the covenantal promise of the Seed is attached and be received into the true church? Through *fortuita misericordia*! Later, in his comments on Gen. 4:15, Luther even qualified *fortuita misericordia* as a special type of promise, the so-called "promises of the law" (*promissiones legales*) as opposed to the "promises of grace" (*promissiones gratiae*) which purely depend on the goodness of God.[62] Luther suggested that when the Lord said to Cain, "Whoever will kill Cain will be punished sevenfold," this was not a firm assurance that Cain would not be killed in any case. Rather, what God said to Cain was merely the promise of the law, a promise which rests on the activities of man. The use of "this promise of the Law" may seem at odd with Luther's general terminology, but Luther was trying to elucidate the idea that the "promise" which God bestowed to Cain was by nature unlike the promise bestowed to Adam and Eve concerning the coming of the Seed. Therefore, the promises of the law may also be called temporal or physical promises.[63] This temporal and physical promise is not comparable to the eternal and spiritual promise the church received in the promised Seed. Nevertheless, as Luther concluded, "it is better for Cain to have this promise of the Law (*legalem promissionem*) than to be without any promise at all."[64]

In the act of granting Cain a wife from his sisters, who was known as Calmana according to the Jewish tradition, Luther believed that, "because of his wife, … God bestowed many personal blessings on Cain through all his descendants."[65] This self-sacrificing act of Cain's sister mirrors what Christ did for the Gentiles. As Mattox summaries, "Just as Christ came to the Gentiles only

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[62] Again, we should notice the fluidity of Luther's language. Interestingly, the terminology of "promises of the law" and "promises of grace" only appears once, which is here, in Luther's Genesis Lectures.

[63] *LW* 1:304–5; WA 42:224–25.

[64] *LW* 1:307; WA 42:226. "Melius tamen est Cain habere hanc legalem promissionem, quam si prorsus sine promissione esset."

[65] *LW* 1:313; WA 42:230–31.

because of God's mercy, so also by means of this young woman's willingness to marry here

murderous brother the *promissio legalis* given to Cain bore unexpected fruit in salvation of

'some' of the Cainites."[66] In this sense, *fortuita misericordia* may be seen as a preserving grace

granted by God which might bear soteriological effect to its recipients. This grace is accidental in

nature and has no guarantee that its recipients would not abuse it. Here we start to understand

why Luther calls this "accidental" (*fortuita*) mercy. For in the language of contemporary logic,

"accidental cause" refers to something that is not the essential cause of a product but rather a

contributory cause of the same.[67] In the case of Cain and his descendants, preservational or

temporal promises are not essential causes of salvation, but are contributory causes of

salvation—which is to say, they provide a context, a sufficient cause, which allows for that

which causes salvation (faith in the promise) to happen. In other words, temporal promises are

the accidental cause of their salvation because they remove the immediate death penalty of Cain

and as such allow room for his repentance, as the father of the prodigal son did for his son in

Luke 15. This is perhaps the very reason why Luther found similarity between Cain and the

Gentiles. Finally, a teleological dimension is also present in the granting of *fortuita misericordia*.

In the provision of temporal promises, God seeks to give people the opportunity to be saved.

Thus the idea of *fortuita misericordia* turns out to be a constructive component of God's

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[66] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 435.

[67] In his *Physics,* 8.4*,* Aristotle distinguishes two types of causal series, one essential and another accidental. Accidental casual chain refers to a situation where the cause merely belongs to a thing that causes motion. The famous example which Aristotle made is that if one removes a pillar from a roof, then the roof will fall. In this case, the person is the essential cause of the removal of the pillar, but the accidental cause of the collapse of the roof. Aristolte's distinction of two types of causal series was utilized by Thomas Aquinas in his articulation of the doctrine of sin. In his *Summa Theologia*, I-II.Q85.A5, Aquinas explicates the cause-effect relation on the basis of Aristotelian logic, "one things causes another in two ways: first, by reason of itself; secondly, accidentally… Accidentally, one thing is the cause of another if it causes it by removing an obstacle: thus it is stated in Phys. Viii, text. 32, that 'by displacing a pillar a man moves accidentally the stone resting thereon.'" *CT* 7:115.

purposeful arrangement of redemptive history.[68]

The use of *fortuita misericordia* in Luther's comments of Cain's fate become all the more illuminating when we recall that earlier in the lectures, Cain was seen as the prototype of the false church. Mattox is right in his remarks on the "paradoxical element in Luther's ecclesiology." As Mattox observes, for Luther, "the distinction between the true and false church yields not stark contrast of black on white, but changing shades of gray." The false church is beyond doubt located in Cain's household. "However, the false church itself includes some—Calmana and some of her offspring—who within the false church retained true faith in the true God."[69] It might be appropriate to speak of the "mobility" of the twofold church. Or, in the words of Jonathan Trigg, what separates the two churches is a "porous boundary." Trigg notes, "The boundary between the two churches is permeable, in that it can be crossed by individuals. For instance, through God's uncovenanted mercies some of the Cainites were converted. Luther is also prepared to say this of some of the descendants of Esau."[70] Luther's lifetime struggle within and without the Mother church proves the fact that the church on earth is never altogether pure. As Trigg helpfully concludes,

> Not only is it impossible completely to detach the true church from the false; a
> boundary cannot confidently be drawn because ultimately such a boundary would
> pass within the individual Christian, and not between a discrete pure church and the
> rest of the world outside. One might go further and say that the mere act of drawing
> such a line constitutes the confidence in the flesh which Luther condemns; one would
> draw it only to find oneself outside it.[71]

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[68] See Chapter Eight, pp. 250–56.

[69] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 431–32, 36. Mattox even argues that, since Luther talks about "under papacy we obtained mercy only by accident," it seems that this "accidental mercy" carries more than preservative effect, but even to some degree of salvific impact of the word of God. See Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 435.

[70] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 50.

[71] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 51.

Trigg furthers his comments in a later chapter of this book titled, "A Church with No Boundaries? Baptism and Ecclesiology."[72] Shown in the Genesis Lectures, Trigg vividly puts that Luther's idea of the church resembles "a group of people assembled around a camp fire in the wilderness. All the attention is upon the focal point around which they gather, not upon the shadowy fringes of the group and the comings and goings at the margin."[73] Trigg rightly argues that, for Luther, the boundary between the true and the false church cannot be clearly and concretely marked. The reason behind this is that Luther used two different ways to consider the two churches theme, in which the second way is a corrective to the first. In his *Against Hanswurst* (1541),[74] Luther enumerated a list of marks (*notae*), including baptism, the Lord's Supper, the office of the keys, the office of ministry of Word, to name a few, by which one can identify the presence of the true church. This is the first way. However, as clearly shown in the Genesis Lectures, Luther repeatedly reminded his students of the danger against the presumption of fleshly confidence in the possession of any visible marks of the "true church."[75] As Trigg remarks, "one of the constantly repeated patterns Luther draws from Genesis is the way the 'true' Church imperceptibly becomes false through pride, and especially through glory in its birthright. … the claim to be the true church is one of the most dangerous claims to make; it is another instance of the peril inherent in the drawing of boundaries, which so often places the drawer on the wrong side."[76] Overall, the boundary between the true and the false church is permeable in

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[72] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 174–203.

[73] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 176.

[74] *LW* 41:179–256. A parallel set of marks can also be found in Luther's *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). See *LW* 41:3–177.

[75] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 190.

[76] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 191. Seeking pride in one's birthright is a characteristic which continually manifests in the biblical characters of our study.

nature which anticipates the inevitable crossing of individuals in both directions, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James. 4:7).

A serious question now arises from this conclusion: if the boundary between the two churches is so porous, how does one know that one is a member of the true church? The answer for Luther is disillusioning easy: we don't need to know. Here we should introduce Philip Cary's idea of "unreflective faith" into our analysis.[77] Shown in Luther's *The Sacrament of Penance* (1519), Cary speaks of "a double structure of God's Word" in Luther's mind, "first there is Christ's promise in Scripture…. secondly there is the sacramental word of absolution which it authorizes."[78] In other words, when the priest proclaims "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," it is Christ himself who speaks specifically to me, not others, through the priest. Cary goes on explaining why Luther's sacrament faith is unreflective in nature. Since faith alone means to believe what Christ said to me, all I need to do is cling to Christ's faithfulness instead of my knowledge or awareness of my belief. "To be justified by faith alone … is therefore to focus my attention on the word of Christ alone, and not on anything I do about it—not on the depth of my contrition nor even the firmness of my faith when I say, 'I believe.'"[79] In the same token, one doesn't need to have a personal knowledge of whether one is a member of the true church, for we cannot put our certainty of faith under the judgment of our inadequate and unreliable perception. Instead, one should always cling to the truthful Word of promise, placing hope in Christ's word and not in the flesh, showing love to

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[77] Phillip Cary, *The Meaning of Protestant Theology: Luther, Augustine and the Gospel That Gives Us Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 145–58, 239–68. Cary's main argument in this book is that Christian theology was led astray by Augustine's Platonist notion of spirituality and the wrong is righted by Luther's Sacramental understanding of the Gospel (4). See also Philip Cary, "Why Luther is Not Quite Protestant: The Logic of Faith in a Sacramental Promise," *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no.4 (Fall 2005): 447–86.

[78] Cary, *The Meaning of Protestant Theology*, 154.

[79] Cary, *The Meaning of Protestant Theology*, 156. See also Cary, "Why Luther is Not Quite Protestant," 452.

neighbors as the fruits of faith, and leaving all skeptical questions behind.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined some exegetical and theological aspects of Luther's comments on the story of Cain and Abel according to the flow of the narrative. What we found illuminating in Luther's comments on this passage is the way in which Luther applies the biblical insights gleaned from the text to his audience. Cain—in his boasting and the touting of primogeniture, his firstborn right—is identified by Luther with the Jews and Pope. "Therefore, God acted properly when He permitted Cain to fall this way as an example for the entire world, … as the Jews pride themselves on their father Abraham."[80] "Therefore, there is no doubt among us today that the church of the pope is the church of Cain. We are, however, the true church."[81] However, Cain—in the murder of his brother Abel—identified himself with our sinful nature. "Therefore, in this passage Adam is not only speaking of Cain's sin, but he is describing the nature of sin in general. What happened to Cain happens to everybody."[82] We are like Cain in every way except for the chance to prove it as Cain did. Lastly but no less surprising, Cain and his progeny—in their reception of *fortuita misericordia*—are identified with the Gentiles, who are given by God a preservative grace and the right of begging. "Heaven was not unconditionally denied to them, provided that they joined the true church."[83] We will encounter Luther's way of multiple representation in his treatment of biblical characters again in the following chapters. In fact, the basis of multiple representation in Luther's thinking is perhaps what Timothy Maschke

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[80] *LW* 1:256; WA 42:190.

[81] *LW* 1:254; WA 42:188.

[82] *LW* 1:267; WA 42:197.

[83] *LW* 1:292; WA 42:215.

called "Contemporaneity,"[84] one of Luther's most crucial hermeneutical principles. "The ancient, yet sacred text was still speaking to him [Luther] in his own time."[85] Luther was able to see "the contemporary relevance of the text as a present reality."[86] As such, even different aspects of a biblical figure—in this case, Cain—bear contemporary relevance to the readers in a variety of ways.

Furthermore, this chapter illustrated Luther's unique way of theological exegesis which will manifest still more and in various ways in the chapters to follow. For him, theology and exegesis were an inseparable and integrated whole. Repeatedly shown in his comments on the biblical text, Luther argued the meaning of several Hebrew terminologies on the basis of the "subject matter" of the Scripture. The reason why Cain's offering was unpleasing to God was not so much the offering itself as the attitude of the participant. Cain's offering was rejected because he had not done it in faith. Faith remains the subject matter of the Scriptures. Luther's insistence on faith as the subject matter of the Scripture was in turn backed by the Scripture itself illustrated most prominently in the words of the Apostle Paul, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23), and the author of the book of Hebrews, "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4).

Finally, the most important finding in Luther's reading of Cain and Abel is his view of the twofold church and its "porosity." The boundary between the true and the false church is never impermeable. Although Cain was seen as the prototype of the false church, nevertheless some of Cain's descendants could be saved by mercy of God. The flip side is also true for those who are

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[84] Timothy Maschke, "Contemporaneity: A Hermeneutical Perspective in Martin Luther's Work," in *Ad Fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther*, ed. Timothy Maschke, Franz Posset and Joan Skocir, 165–82 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001).

[85] Maschke, "Contemporaneity," 171.

[86] Maschke, "Contemporaneity," 180.

under the flag of the true church. As long as some descendants of Adam take pride in their attachment to the promised Seed and begin to brag about their prestige, they will break themselves out of the community and become part of the false church henceforth. This is part of the reason why Luther always urges the need for preaching the law and gospel through which God accuses and condemns our sinful nature and brings about a new creation of us in faith. To this we now turn to the next chapter, the story of Hagar and Ishmael. The story will shed a great deal of light on another aspect of the idea of *fortuita misericordia* and the unchosen—the way by which *fortuita misericordia* makes effect and bears fruit in the lives of the unchosen—as Luther evaluates the value of circumcision and its relation to the Jews and Gentiles, and integrates the idea of the twofold church and the function of the law and gospel altogether.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL: HEARD BY A MERCIFUL GOD

Introduction

The present chapter focuses on the role of Hagar and Ishmael in Luther's view of salvation

history. The discussion will primarily focus on Ishmael, with Hagar receiving less attention, due

to Ishmael's role in Luther's reading of salvation history as parallel to Cain, Esau, and the

Gentiles. Despite the fact that Luther never uses *fortuita misericordia* to directly refer to Ishmael

as he did to the other biblical figures, Luther did relate Ishmael to Cain and Esau, putting them

all under the same theological category—both in a positive and negative sense. Positively, for

instance, in his comments on Gen. 36:1, the genealogy of Esau, Luther observes, "Esau and

Ishmael lacked this promise, but they were not excluded from mercy, for the histories testify the

opposite."[1] Yet, in another case, Ishmael was related to Cain in a negative way. In his comments

on Gal. 4:29, Luther ponders what Ishmael persecuted Isaac for in Gen. 21. "I think that Ishmael

was a saintly man in outward appearance, like Cain, who also persecuted his brother and finally

killed him, not because of something physical but chiefly because he saw that God preferred his

brother to him."[2] A similar remark is also found in Luther's comment on Gen. 16:6, "Cain, Ham,

Ishmael, and Esau—these men all boasted of the title 'church' and sought to grab the promises

for themselves, as though they themselves were the heirs."[3] In brief, Cain, Ishmael and Esau

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[1] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211. "Hac promissione caruerunt Esau et Ismael, sed a misericordia non sunt exclusi, quia historiae diversum testantur." We have briefly examined Luther's attitude towards Ishmael as the recipient of *fortuita misericordia* in Chapter Two.

[2] *LW* 26:454; WA 40.I.2:680b "Sed puto Ismaelem in speciem fuisse sanctum virum, ut Cain, qui et ipse persecutus est fratrem ac tandem occidit, non propter rem aliquam corporalem, sed praecipue quia videbat eum a Deo praeferri sibi."

[3] *LW* 3:56; WA 42:588. "Cain, Ham, Ismael, Esau, omnes hi Ecclesiae titulo superbiebant, et promissiones ad se rapiebant, tanquam ipsi essent earum haeredes."

alike took pride in their primogeniture and persecuted their brothers, which God despised; and yet they all are the recipients of *fortuita misericordia*, not lacking of mercy in their temporal lives, and the opportunity of rejoining the true church was still open to them.

Ishmael's story is unique in our study, since he was given a kind of promise from God different from that of Isaac. In the following pages, we first briefly discuss the birth of Ishmael as the setting stage for the rest of chapter. We will then look closer at the institution of circumcision and its relation to Ishmael recounted in Gen. 17. Finally, we will examine the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's household in Gen. 21, along with a brief note of the blessings which Ishmael's family received recorded in Gen. 25.

The Repentance of Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael (Gen. 16:1–16)

Hagar's role in the history of exegesis is ambivalent, John L. Thompson remarks.[4] On the one hand, in the early church Hagar was read allegorically as a preliminary figure as Greek philosophy functions in Christian theology in comparison to the higher wisdom which we found in Christ prefigured by Sarah. On the other hand, during the late medieval and the Reformation eras a more sympathetic and complicated picture of Hagar emerged from a variety of authors.[5] In his comments on Hagar, Luther, among other Reformers, echoed much of the traditional opinions about "the weakness of women (both Sarah and Hagar), Hagar's servile nature, and Hagar's haughtiness and pride."[6] In her puffing up of pregnancy as the sign of divine favor and despise of her mistress Sarah, Hagar identified herself with the false church. "Just as Hagar acts

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[4] Thompson, *Writing the Wrong*, 17–99. A shorter adaption can be found in John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 13–32.

[5] Thompson, *Writing the Wrong*, 29–40, 60–94.

[6] Thompson, *Writing the Wrong*, 87.

haughtily toward her mistress and thinks she has a right to conduct herself in this way, so the false church—because it has more resources, prestige, and power—persecutes and condemns the true church, which does not have this protection and is afflicted."[7]

However, Luther's exegetical comment of Hagar is idiosyncratic. As Mickey Mattox observes, "Luther maximizes the social distance between her and Sarah, granting Hagar no more status than of 'a purchased maid and slave' (*empta ancilla et mancipium*)." Mattox further notes that in playing down Hagar's significance in the household, Luther is now able to tell his favorite story of divine grace which made something out of nothing.[8] Therefore, Luther read the story of Hagar's boasting, exile, epiphany and repentance in Gen. 16 through the lens of law and gospel. Luther thought that Hagar, having been driven out from Abraham's household and occupied with madness, "plans revenge and wants to deprive the mistress not only of her maid's body but also of the offspring."[9] Luther further remarked that this is exactly "the righteousness of the Law; for when only the law is present, it puffs men up and provokes them to anger."[10] The ministry of the law reaches its apex when the angel of the Lord called Hagar by name in the wilderness of Shur in Gen. 16:7–8. In her reply of "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarah," Hagar "accuses herself of disobedience and rapine, inasmuch as she admits her flight and acknowledges Sarah as her mistress… This, therefore, is a preaching of the Law; and the Law has the power to produce terror. For the frightened Hagar tells that truth, which she never would have done had she not

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[7] *LW* 3:56; WA 42:588. "Sicut autem Hagar occasione benedictionis inflatur contra Dominam, ac iure se id facere existimat: Ita falsa Ecclesia, quia opibus et dignitate ac potentia superior est, veram Ecclesiam destitutam his praesidiis ac afflictam persequitur et damnat."

[8] Mattox, *Defenders of Most Holy Matriarchs*, 154.

[9] *LW* 3:59; WA 42:590. "Inflata enim Hagar, et quasi in furorem versa de vindicta cogitat, et non solum suum corpus, sed etiam prolem vult surripere Dominae."

[10] *LW* 3:59; WA 42:590. "Talis est revera iustitia legis, lex enim cum sola adest, inflat et iracundos [Röm. 4, 15] reddit."

been frightened."[11]

After the ministry of the law was fulfilled, the ministry of gospel follows, "For these are the divine successions: Comfort follows affliction, hope follows despair, and life follows death."[12] According to v.10, a promise is made to Hagar by the angel of the Lord, "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." The descendants of Hagar, known as Saracens in Luther's days, were a great people in the East before the rise of the Turks, and finally became one nation with the Turks.[13] A further description of the promise made to Hagar is noted in v.11–12, "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he dwell over against all his kinsmen." Luther paraphrased these words of the angel: "God hears (*Deus audit*) that you resent being a maidservant and a slave, and that you have nothing of your own. But He has regarded your unhappy state and wants to bless you. Therefore be of good cheer, and do not despair."[14] These comforting words to the modest maidservant Hagar are also for our consolation, reminding us that "He is the God of all, and He wants us all to rely on His mercy and favor. The difference there is among people in this life does not make different persons before God. God hears all alike—you in your menial state and another in his free state."[15] In fact,

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[11] *LW* 3:62; WA 42:592. "Itaque ipsa se accusat inobedientiae et rapinae, siquidem confitetur fugam, et agnoscit Saram Dominam. …Est itaque haec concio legis efficacis in operando terrore. Territa enim Hagar veritatem dicit, quam non territa dixisset nunquam."

[12] *LW* 3:63; WA 42:593. "Hae enim sunt vices divinae. Afflictionem sequitur consolatio:Desperationem spes: Mortem vita."

[13] *LW* 3:63; WA 42:594.

[14] *LW* 3:65; WA 42:594. "Deus audit, quod graveris te servam esse et mancipium, nec quidquam habere proprium. Respexit autem miseriam tuam, et vult tibi benedicere: bono igitur sis animo, nec desperes."

[15] *LW* 3:65; WA 42:595. "Est enim omnium Deus, ac vult omnes nos niti sua misericordia et favore. Differentia, quae apud homines in hac vita est, non facit differentes personas coram Deo. Aeque audit te Deus in

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the very name "Ishmael" means "God hears" as told by the angel. From this passage we also

acknowledge that "God dispenses His best gifts even to the ungodly. God is so solicitous for the

distressed Hagar that because of her He seems to have forgotten Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, He

is not only solicitous for Ishmael, who was not yet born, but He even honors him with a very rich

blessing."[16] Concerning the future life of Ishmael, Luther on the one hand affirmed the words of

the angel that Ishmael was destined to be a wild man, namely, a man who "is fond of

wildernesses and is wild and roaming." But on the other hand, Luther fervently asserted that

"when the Gospel began to be spread abroad in the world, it also reached these parts (where the

Ishmaelites live), and the Lord had a large church there…. In this way a people that was born for

war and was wild eventually also became a partaker of the spiritual promise."[17] Thus many of the

Cainites and Ishmaelites alike would join the true church and become the partakers of Christ.

The final reason which makes Luther's image of Hagar idiosyncratic is his naming of

Hagar as "the saintly Hagar" almost in defiance of St. Paul's figurative interpretation of Hagar in

Galatians 4,

> "Therefore I certainly conclude that Hagar should be counted among the saintly
> women; for the fact that Paul (Gal. 4:30) compares her to Sarah and calls her a maid
> who has no place in the home is in no wise a hindrance.
>
> For in Scripture even the saints frequently symbolize [*gerant figuram*] the ungodly.
> Thus Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea symbolize the ungodly synagog, although they
> themselves are saintly and pious. I believe that Ishmael, too, was saved together with
> many of his descendants; nor does it do him any harm that his mother symbolizes the
> synagog.

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servili statu, atque alium in liberali statu."

[16] *LW* 3:65; WA 42:595. "Docemur autem hic quoque, quod Deus optima sua dona distribuit etiam in impios. Afflictam Hagar sic curat Deus, ut prae illa Abrahae et Sarae oblitus esse videatur."

[17] *LW* 3:66; WA 42:596. "Et tamen cum Euangelium in mundum spargi coeptum est, in has quoque partes pervenit, et habuit ibi Dominus Ecclesiam numerosam. Anachoritae enim fere in has solitudines secesserunt, de quibus multa Hieronymus. Sic etiam spiritualis promissionis populus ad bellum natus et ferus, tandem est factus particeps."

For the entire church symbolizes eternal damnation, since it is cruelly afflicted and slain by its enemies. Yet it is not abandoned.

Thus Simeon calls Christ a sign (Luke 2:34) on the basis of Is. 8:14, which calls Him "a stone of offense." Thus Hagar, justified and sanctified by the Word of God, symbolizes the ungodly without detriment to herself.[18]

As Thompson wittingly remarks, "Luther hereby initiates a radical rehabilitation of Hagar and Ishmael for which few precedents can be found … and it is all the more marvelous that he rescues them from no less a canonical threat than the Apostle himself. Never mind what Paul says, argues Luther: in her own person, Hagar belongs to God."[19] Here Luther makes a clear cut between the allegorical use of Hagar as the covenant of Sinai in the Pauline epistle and the literal understanding of Hagar as a repentant sinner and saintly woman in the Abrahamic narrative. For Luther, these two interpretations are compatible to each other. That is why Luther had no problem identifying Cain with the prototype of the false church and at the same time with the Gentiles who received mercy, as discussed in the last chapter. The underlying idea behind Luther's treatment, I believe, is the use of allegorical function in Luther's exegesis. For him, the allegorical function of a historical figure is detached from the moral or spiritual judgment of that historical personage. For instance, in his comments on Hosea's marriage, Luther insisted that Hosea's wife was called "wife of harlotry" not because she really committed harlotry, but instead only to signify that "the people [of Israel] now were committing harlotry and would do the same

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[18] *LW* 3:70; WA 42:598–99. "Itaque omnino statuo numerandam Hagar inter sanctas mulieres. Nam [Gal. 4, 30] quod Paulus eam cum Sara confert, ac ancillam vocat, quae non habeat locum in domo, nihil impedit.

Hoc enim in scriptura usitatum est, ut etiam sancti gerant figuram impiorum. Sic Esaias, Ieremias, Oseas gerunt figuram impiae Synagogae: cum tamen ipsi sancti et pii sint. Ismaelem quoque et multos ex ipsius posteritate salvatos credo, nec nocet ei, quod mater Synagogae figura est.

Nam tota Ecclesia gestat figuram maledictionis aeternae, affligitur enim et occiditur crudeliter ab hostibus: sed non deseritur tamen. [Luk. 2,34; Jes. 8,14] Sic Christum vocat Simeon 'portentum', ex Esaiae capite 8. Item 'scandalum in ruinam'. Ad hunc modum Hagar iustificata et sanctificata verbo Dei sine suo incommodo gerit figuram impiorum."

[19] Thompson, *Writing the Wrong*, 89.

by forsaking God in the future." Their sons are called "sons of harlotry" not because "harlotry is charged to the wife … but understand that the wife has allowed herself, her sons, and her husband to be so named because of the people and against the people."[20] The symbolic function of Hosea's wife as harlot signifying the people of Israel is detached from the moral judgement of whether she is really a harlot.

The saintliness of Hagar manifests itself chiefly in her reaction in response to the words of angel stated in Gen. 16:13, "Thou art a God of seeing." Thus Hagar is not merely a passive recipient of the divine promise, but rather a deliberative preacher of divine mercy. She joyfully praises God for his mercy and calls him with a new name. She calls God "the Seeing One because He had manifested Himself to her."[21] One who can praise the "God who sees me" in the midst of affliction must have true faith and can triumphantly overcome all things, Luther cheerfully remarked. This is why Hagar should be counted among the saints.[22] Luther concluded his comments on this passage: "You see that after this revelation Hagar, who had been rebellious and impatient of her yoke, has become an entirely different person. Accordingly, she returns home and obeys Sarah. She tells Abram himself the words spoken by the angel who gave a name to the son who had not yet been born. And Abram is pleased with what has happened. Therefore he does not change the name."[23] As we will see later in this chapter, what Hagar has experienced

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[20] *LW* 18:3–4; WA 13:3. "Nomine suo figurant infra filii populum, quales sint futuri Israhelitae. Ego existimo idem dicendum de fornicaria, quod vocata fuerit uxor fornicationum, ut significaret fornicantem iam et fornicaturum a deo populum. Sic etiam filii ex ea generati dicti sunt filii fornicationum. Non ergo intellige quod fornicatio adhaeserit uxori, id est: non accipe active sed intellige uxorem sic passam se nominari et pueros et virum propter populum et adversus populum."

[21] *LW* 3:69; WA 42:598. See also Mattox, *Defenders of Most Holy Matriarchs*, 157.

[22] *LW* 3:70; WA 42:598.

[23] *LW* 3:74; WA 42:601. "Vides rebellem Hagar et impatientem iugi post revelationem hanc prorsus aliam factam. Itaque redit domum, paret Sarae. Narrat ipsi Abram sermones Angeli, qui posuit nondum nato filio nomen: Ac placet Abrae factum. Ideo de nomine nihil mutat."

here will become paradigmatic in the life of Ishmael.

The Institution of Circumcision and the Role of Ishmael in Salvation History (Gen. 17:1–27)

Genesis 17 is one of the key passages in the life of Abraham. God appeared to Abraham, confirmed the promise to him for the second time and instituted circumcision with him and his household. Luther's comments on this twenty-seven-verse chapter occupied a total of 100 pages in American Edition of *Luther's Works*, a notable comparison to only 33 pages spent to expound the sixteen verses of chapter 16. This makes perfect sense since Luther saw the promise made by God to Abraham and his reception of it by faith as the cornerstone of Christian belief.[24]

Luther delved deeply and extensively into the exposition of circumcision, holding relentlessly that circumcision is only a temporal institution and not mandatory for Christians anymore. Armed with Pauline epistles, Luther insisted that circumcision is no longer obligatory for the people of God for two reasons. First, Christ is the end of the law, "the Law must keep silence when Christ preaches … whose Word is the Word of life."[25] Second, "Abraham was righteous before his circumcision and because of faith, without circumcision. Hence circumcision is of no avail for righteousness."[26] Circumcision is, after all, "Nothing but a work of obedience and an exercise of faith. … For this reason, Paul … calls it a sign of righteousness. For to be justified through works and to do works after being justified are not the same."[27]

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[24] Headley, *Luther's view of Church History*, 125.

[25] *LW* 3:77; WA 42:603. "Primum, quod finis legis sit Christus … Sequitur quod Christo praedicante lex tacere debeat, et qui antea legem audiverunt, tanquam doctrinam ad salutem non sufficientem, nunc Christu audiant, cuius verbum est verbum vitae."

[26] *LW* 3:77–78; WA 42:603. "Alterum est, quod Abraham est iustus ante circumcisionem, et sine circumcisione ex fide. Ergo circumcisio ad iusticiam nihil valet."

[27] *LW* 3:80; WA 42:605. "Quid igitur, inquies, est circumcisio? nihil aliud, nisi opus obedientiae et exercitium fidei, sicut immolatio Isaaci et alia similia, quae Deus certis hominibus imposuit. Ideo a Paulo non vocatur

Righteousness always comes first, then circumcision follows as an outward manifestation of that righteousness. For in Luther's eyes, God always places some visible signs along with his Word of promise so that we can be reminded of his kindness and mercy.[28] The problem here, therefore, is not circumcision in and of itself. Instead, the problem is the Jews' misidentification of circumcision with the promise and their insistence of circumcision as a prerequisite of being the people of God.

Luther painstakingly advanced his case against circumcision for all Christians with three interrelated arguments. First, circumcision and promise are related. "For circumcision serves the promise, and the promise is included in circumcision. Therefore when the promise has been fulfilled, what further need is there of circumcision?"[29] Circumcision is to serve the promise concerning the advent of Christ. Now since Christ has come, the purpose of circumcision was fulfilled and thus it is no longer applicable to the people of God.[30] There is a difference between Abraham's circumcision and the circumcision of Abraham's descendants, Luther postulated, which is parallel to the difference between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of believers. For Abraham, circumcision is given to him "in order that through him this sign [*signum*] of the covenant might be transmitted to his entire posterity."[31] But for Abraham's descendants, circumcision is "a symbol [*symbolum*] that they are the heirs of promise which had been given to Abraham before he was circumcised."[32] Which is to say, circumcision for Abraham himself is

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circumcisio iusticia, sed signaculum iusticiae."

[28] *LW* 1:248; WA 42:184. See also *LW* 3:29.

[29] *LW* 3:82; WA 42:607. "Circumcisio enim servit promissioni, et est inclusa promissio in circumcisionem. Cum igitur promissio impleta est, quid amplius opus est circumcisione?"

[30] *LW* 3:105; WA 42:622. See also *LW* 3:144; WA 42:651.

[31] *LW* 3:86; WA 42:610. "Respondeo, Abrahamo est data circumcisio, ut per eum propagaretur in omnem posteritatem hoc signum foederis, igitur longe alia ratio fuit circumcisionis in Abraha, et alia in eius posteritate."

[32] *LW* 3:87; WA 42:610. "Posteritati autem Abrahae circumcisio fuit symbolum, quod essent haeredes

only a sign; but for Abraham's descendants, circumcision is a symbol—a visible sign enjoined with an invisible reality.

Without ignoring their dissimilarities, here Luther drew an interesting yet profound parallel between circumcision and baptism. The difference between Abraham's circumcision and the circumcision of Abraham's descendant is parallel to the baptism of Christ and the baptism of believers. "Christ is baptized, not in order to be made righteous … but as an example [*exemplum*] … in order that He may precede us and we may follow His example and also be baptized."[33] Following the same line of argument, Luther was convinced that "circumcision is a sacrament [*sacramentum*] for the descendants of Abraham because, since they have the promise, they are made righteous by believing this promise and making use of the sacrament of faith."[34] As Jonathan Trigg notes, for Luther, "Circumcision and baptism are two different signs of one and the same covenant. There is no difference in the promise (forgiveness of sins) or in the significance (regeneration)."[35] It is always the divine promise that makes the signs valid, not the way around. Just as baptism has no power itself, but the promise to which baptism was added saves, the same is for circumcision. Circumcision saved not because of itself, but "faith in the promise which was attached to circumcision and … embodied in it."[36] God always establishes

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promissionis, quae Abrahae adhuc in praeputio erat facta."

[33] *LW* 3:87; WA 42:610. "Christus baptizatur, non ut iustificetur, est enim filius Dei, et aeterna iusticia ornatus, ut nos iustificemur per ipsum. Sed baptizatur, ut sic dicam, nobis in exemplum, ut praecedat nos, et nos eius exemplum secuti etiam baptizemur." *Glossa* also links circumcision with baptism, though in a way different from Luther. Circumcision, *glossa* notes, signifies our purification from sin and resurrection of glory through baptism. See *Glossa*, col.256, sec.b.

[34] *LW* 3:87; WA 42:610. "Ad hunc fere modum circumcisio sacramentum est posteritate Abrahae, quod cum promissionem habet, credentes huic promissioni, et utentes sacramento in fide iustificantur."

[35] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 217. For a longer discussion of Baptism and circumcision, see Trigg, *Baptism in Theology of Luther*, 38–46.

[36] *LW* 3:106; WA 42:624. "Extra baptismum enim non est salus, sicut tum ex circumcisione salus fuit non propter circumcisionem solum, sed propter fidem in promissionem, quae circumcisioni erat adiuncta, et quasi

outward and visible signs along with his word. The tree of knowledge of good and evil, the cloth the Adam and Eve, the rainbow, circumcision, baptism, and eucharist are all signs of grace.[37] In a few pages later, Luther reemphasizes his point, "For circumcision as a work had no validity per se, but faith in the promise that was added to circumcision did have validity."[38] Circumcision had validity only up to the advent of Christ.

Flowing from the first argument, secondly, Luther argued that circumcision is an outward mark with twofold purpose. Circumcision pertains particularly and exclusively to Abraham's descendants, specifically, Abraham's male descendants. Not even the Gentiles and Abraham's female descendants were to be circumcised. Circumcision served two purposes for the Jews. First, circumcision was "a document… for the purpose of acknowledging that the promise is true." Second, it was also for the Jews "a sacrament [*Sacramentum*] by which they were to be reminded that they were the people of God."[39] Put it more deliberatively, Luther suggested that circumcision was an outward mark laid on the bodies of the Jews reminding firstly that they are "a people set apart from all the nations… and the promise concerning Christ may be sure to those on whom it is conferred" and secondly "a sign of righteousness … that they are the people of God and that God has them in His care."[40] Circumcision, along with other Mosaic laws, is bound only the Jews and has nothing to do with Christians. As Luther famously argued in his 1525 *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, "Leave Moses and his people together; they have had their day

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incorporata."

[37] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor,* 106.

[38] *LW* 3:111; WA 42:627. "Non enim circumcisio, ut opus, per se valebat, sed fides in promissionem circumcisioni additam."

[39] *LW* 3:85; WA 42:609.

[40] *LW* 3:93; WA 42:614.

and do not pertain to me. I listen to that word which applies to me. We have the gospel."[41]

However, in a still more profound way, circumcision had an evangelical function in the old

dispensation. Abraham bore circumcision for the sake of his physical descendants, yet through it

the Gentiles would also be invited to faith, the faith of Abraham, and be saved.[42] Circumcision

was, therefore, "a reminder to the other nations and may give them the opportunity to believe the

same God—the God who had promised Abraham the Blessed Seed—and to hope for Christ."[43] In

sum, circumcision was a "public mark by which all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are

urged to follows in the footsteps of Abraham or to emulate the faith of Abraham."[44] Therefore,

circumcision had as a twofold result, "The Jews are set apart from and united with the

Gentiles."[45]

Luther's third argument against circumcision for all Christians was that the phenomenon of

believing Gentiles in the Old Testament proved that circumcision was not indispensable to one's

salvation even in the old dispensation. Clearly stated in Gen.17:5, since God promised and

established Abraham be the father of many nations, Luther insisted time and again, "the Gentiles

are also the people of God if they embrace the promise together with believing Abraham."[46]

Luther put forth this argument in two aspects, one *a priori* and another *a posteriori*. From the *a*

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[41] *LW* 35:171. WA 16:386a. "Quando ergo Mose **her feret** praeceptis et legibus, dic: facessat cum legibus suis et populo, non audio verbum tuum, sed audiam verbum quod me tangit, quod est nostrum Euangelium."

[42] *LW* 3:112; WA 42:628.

[43] *LW* 3:93–94; WA 42:615. "Facit autem hoc quoque ad circumcisionis mysterium ostendendum, quam gerunt Iudaei divinitus impositam in futurum Christum, et simul, dum Christus nondum exhibitus fuit, gerunt, ut caeterae quoque gentes ea admoniti haberent occasionem credendi eidem Deo, qui Abrahamo benedictum semen promiserat, et sperandi in Christum."

[44] *LW* 3:105–6; WA 42:623. "Haec est recta definitio circumcisionis, ut sit publicum insigne, quo invitentur omnes, sive circumcisi, sive non circumcisi, ad vestigia Abrahae, seu ad fidem Abrahae imitandam."

[45] *LW* 3:94; WA 42:615.

[46] *LW* 3:97; WA 42:617. "sed, quia videt a Mose vocari Abrahamum patrem multarum gentium, recte concludit gentes quoque esse populum Dei, si amplectantur cum fideli Abraha promissionem."

priori perspective, if Abraham is called to be the father of nations and God is the God of

Abraham's descendants, then God will be the God of the uncircumcised. The hope of eternal life

is granted not only to Abraham's physical descendants, but also to "all the Gentiles who believe

as faithful Abraham did."[47] Luther highlighted the fact that Gentiles can and are encouraged to

have the same faith as Abraham. To share Abraham's faith is more crucial than being

circumcised in order to be saved.

From the *a posteriori* perspective, the believing Gentiles before the advent of Christ

recorded in the Old Testament—the Pharaoh in the time of Joseph, King Nebuchadnezzar,

Darius, Cyrus, Job, the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman the Syrian, to name a few—are clear

evidence that circumcision is not necessary to be saved.[48] God is the God of both the Jews and

the Gentile. Even though the Jews were called the people of God because of the promise attached

to them physically, "God nevertheless does not exclude the Gentiles from the promise, provided

that they embrace it in faith."[49] As Mickey Mattox succinctly puts, "on Luther's account, salvific

inclusion in the people of God is based on one's sharing in the faith of Israel, not on one's blood

heritage. There are the children of Abraham who imitate Abraham's faith."[50]

This bring us to Luther's exposition of Ishmael. The symbolic function of Ishmael is

outstanding because he serves as a twofold representation in Luther's understanding of the Jews

and Gentile as the people of God in salvation history. On the one hand, Ishmael represents the

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[47] *LW* 3:118; WA 42:632. See also *LW* 3:106; WA 42:623.

[48] *LW* 3:88–89; WA 42:611.

[49] *LW* 3:96; WA 42:616. "Deus enim est Deus Iudaeorum et Gentium, et quanquam in eo discrimen est, quod Iudaei promissionem habent, et sua certa insignia, quibus noscuntur, quod sint Dei Populus, tamen Deus gentes a promissione non excludit, modo eam fide amplectantur."

[50] Mickey Mattox, "Luther's Interpretation of Scripture: Biblical Understanding in Trinitarian Shape," in *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Dennis Bielfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox and Paul R. Hinlicky, 11–58 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 32.

unbelieving Jews. On the other hand, Ishmael exemplifies the believing Gentiles. Putting it

plainly, Ishmael was excluded from the sign of the covenant, even though he was circumcised

and the firstborn, just like the Jews. Yet he is included in the promise by faith, like the Gentiles,

not because of circumcision. How would that be? Here Luther worked within a theological

hermeneutic of multiple representations similar to his treatment of Cain.[51] Different aspects of

Cain's life shines out different modes of theological representation for our edification. Cain—in

his boasting and puffing of primogeniture—identified himself with the Jews and Pope. However,

the same Cain—in the murder of his brother Abel—identified himself with our sinful nature.

Finally, Cain and his progeny—in their reception of *fortuita misericordia*—identified themselves

with the Gentiles. Luther interpreted Hagar in the similar light. For Luther, Hagar can

figuratively represent the ungodly synagogue and the false church in her boasting of pregnancy

as the sign of divine favor, yet at the same time Hagar can be called "the saintly woman" after

she was disciplined with the Word of God. The two pictures of Hagar flowed from Luther the

exegete are in no way incompatible to each other.

The same is true for Ishmael. Ishmael represents the unbelieving Jews because he was

excluded from the promise of Christ even though he was circumcised. The circumcision of

Ishmael serves as a marvelous example for Luther that circumcision itself would never guarantee

salvation. Genesis 17:19–21 was an important passage to Luther, for from this passage Luther

learned that there are two kinds of covenant, one physical and another spiritual, which God

establishes with Abraham's household. The way which Luther explained this is of critical

importance:

> Hence this text gives the Jews clear proof concerning the twofold covenant. The
> covenant of circumcision, which they value so highly, is solely a covenant of the Law

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[51] See Chapter Three, pp. 136–37.

and is temporal. Not only Isaac but also Ishmael and the descendants of Ishmael rejoice in it; but the other covenant, which excludes Ishmael and is made with Isaac alone, is spiritual and eternal. The covenant of circumcision is given for our performance before the Law of Moses and is established for a definite people, in a definite land, and for a definite time, namely, while the generations of Abraham are in existence. The covenant of Isaac, however, is not given for our performance; it is entirely free, without a name, without a time, and yet from the seed of Isaac, lest one look for the blessing from another source.[52]

The physical covenant is the covenant of circumcision, which includes Ishmael and every male slave in the household of Abraham. Yet the promise concerning Christ does not pertain to Ishmael and the slaves, but to Isaac only, since the second covenant, the spiritual one, is established only with Isaac. Here Luther found a direct connection between the Jews and Ishmael. Both of them cling to and rejoice in the covenant of circumcision, which for Luther was nothing but "a covenant of the Law" and "temporal." But the spiritual covenant which God established with Isaac is solely based upon promise. Therefore, "the Jews do wrong by clinging solely to the covenant of circumcision and not preferring to accept the other covenant. They are like the Ishmaelites, or even worse."[53] One may ask immediately, "Is that because Isaac has been circumcised once he was born?" Luther did not explicitly address this problem, but we can still find some clues from what he has said about the nature of the spiritual covenant. For him, "God always mixes and includes spiritual and eternal blessings with the physical blessings. The physical blessing is associated with a name, namely, that all the descendants of Abraham should be circumcised; but this second covenant is not associated with a name, nor is it marked by any

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[52] *LW* 3:162–3; WA 42:664. "Convincit igitur textus hic clare Iudaeos de duplici pacto. Circumcisionis pactum, quod tanti faciunt, tantum est pactum legis, et temporale. De eo non Isaac solum, sed Ismael quoque et Ismaelis posteritas gaudet, sed alterum pactum, quod cum solo Isaac, excluso Ismaele, feritur, est spirituale et aeternum. Circumcisionis pactum datur nostro operi ante legem Mosi, et confirmatur certo populo et in terra certa et ad tempus certum, dum scilicet sint generationes Abrahae. Sed Isaaci pactum non datur nostro operi, sed mere est gratuitum sine nomine, sine tempore, et tamen ex Isaaci semine, ne aliunde expectes benedictionem."

[53] *LW* 3:163; WA 42:664.

definite work. Yet it is a spiritual covenant concerning the future Savior."[54] In his recent monograph on theology of circumcision, Karl Deenick speaks of something strikingly similar to what Luther has said here.[55] In a chapter titled "Circumcision in Genesis," Deenick draws our attention to circumcision in relation to the theme of "Seed" in Genesis, "one cannot but notice the connection between the nature of the sign—circumcision—and the focus on a particular seed through whom the blessing promised to Abraham will eventuate." Circumcision is the divine instrument of procreation which "is bound up with the recollection of God's promise to Abraham of a 'seed,' and more particularly his promise to bless the world through Abraham's 'seed.'"[56] The circumcision of Isaac was an outward, physical manifestation of an invisible, spiritual covenant. The former is contingent whereas the latter is necessary. All of Abraham's male household members were commanded to be circumcision, but only Isaac carried the promise of Christ, the spiritual covenant that God includes with physical covenant (see Table 4.1 below).

However, Ishmael was not excluded from the promise provided that, like Gentiles, he embraced the promise by faith. This is the second aspect of representation, namely, Ishmael exemplifies the believing Gentiles who share the same faith of Abraham and are included within the true church. Luther was convinced that, along with many Cain's descendants, Ishmael "is admitted into the fellowship of the promise; for Abraham prays for him and has the promise that he will also be the father of many nations. Therefore Ishmael was not cut off from salvation and

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[54] *LW* 3:162; WA 42:664. "Atque hoc est, quod dixi, Deum semper promissionibus corporalibus admiscere et includere spirituales et aeternas: corporale pactum habet nomen, ut scilicet tota Abrahae posteritas circumcidatur, hoc secundum pactum non habet nomen, nec est certo aliquo opere insignitum, et tamen est pactum spirituale de futuro salvatore."

[55] Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*. New Studies in Biblical Theology volume 45 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 48–51.

[56] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 49.

eternal life; he was cut off from the glory of being the father of Christ. Yet Christ would be among his people."[57] Luther painstakingly argued that Ishmael's exclusion from the covenant of the promised Seed does not entail the exclusion of his salvation. The covenant that God made with Isaac is not a rejection to Ishmael but an assertion to the world that "one definite line of blood in which the church is to be found and of which Christ is to be born in due time."[58] It is a temporal arrangement prepared by God for a certain time. Since Christ has come and the church is established, the function of such "definite line of blood" is fulfilled (see Table 4:2 below).

Table 4.1 Ishmael vs. Isaac in terms of Covenant

	Ishmael	Isaac
Circumcision (Physical Covenant)	Yes	Yes
Promise of Christ (Spiritual Covenant)	No	Yes

Table 4.2 Ishmael vs. Isaac in terms of Covenant and Salvation

	Ishmael	Isaac
Covenant of the Promised Seed (Genealogy of Christ)	No	Yes
Salvation	Yes	Yes

The two tables above (Table 4.1 & 4.2) look incompatible at the first glance, but in fact they all can be incorporated into one scheme. They represent Luther's ways of understanding Old Testament missiology, or the definition of the people of God before Christ. We will treat this

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[57] *LW* 3:111; WA 42:627. "Hoc consilio Ismael quoque reiicitur, qui tamen in societatem promissionis admittitur. Orat enim pro eo Abraham, et habet promissionem, qui etiam Gentium multarum pater futurus sit. Igitur non est exclusus a salute et aeterna vita Ismael: ab illa gloria exclusus est, quod non sit futurus pater Christi, qui tamen in populo eius futurus erat."

[58] *LW* 3:161; WA 42:663.

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theme in a greater detail in the next section. Also, we will see more clearly in the next section, what Hagar and Ishmael experienced in their expulsion from Abraham's household to the wilderness was nothing other than a powerful manifestation of law and gospel, which made them the true heirs of Abraham.

The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:1–21)

Genesis 21:1–21 reports the tragic story of Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion from Abraham's household and their miraculous rescue by the angel of the Lord in the wilderness. Luther drew from the exegetical well of the story and explore the manifold aspects of this passage's theological implications, such as the divine calling at home, obedience to God's command in the midst of affliction, the true heir of Abraham, and the antinomian controversy, to name a few. For the sake of clarity and relevance, however, this section will chiefly examine two aspects of Luther's treatment of this passage, namely, the representation of Ishmael as the unbelieving Jews, and the function of law and gospel in the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. These two themes, together with what we have discussed before, shed a fuller and clearer light on Luther's understanding of the people of God in history.

Ishmael represents the unbelieving Jews because of the boasting of his primogeniture and mocking of his brother Isaac. In commenting on Gen. 21:9, "But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian… that he was a mocker," Luther observed, "Ishmael wanted to have the prerogative of primogeniture, and his mother Hagar was proud in a boastful manner because Abraham became a father through her."[59] In his arrogance due the promise granted to him to be the father of twelve

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[59] *LW* 4:17; WA 43:148. "Ismael voluit habere praerogativam primogeniturae, et mater Hagar magnifice superbivit, quod Abraham per ipsam sit factus pater."

kings (Gen. 17:20), Ishmael "dreamed of a kingdom for himself and despised Isaac in comparison with himself."[60] Luther understood Sarah's intolerance of Hagar's arrogance as evidence that Sarah understands much better than Abraham the crucial distinction between the temporal promise made to Ishmael and the spiritual/eternal promise made to Isaac.[61] "Therefore when Ishmael wanted to have the ascendancy, it was easy to decide that this must not be tolerated and that, as is recorded later (Gen. 25:23) about Jacob and Esau, the older should serve the younger in the eyes of the world."[62] Not surprisingly, this eventually caused a great quarrel between Sarah and Abraham, as Gen. 21:10–11 tells. The subject of the quarrel concerned how to bear the promises "in fear and obedience of God and in true humility."[63]

Luther probed a great extent into a short phase in Gen. 21:13, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named," for the sake of refutation of the Jews. Just like Ishmael, the Jews cling to the temporal promise and take pride in their ethnic right as the physical heirs of Abraham. The syllogistic argument that the Jews hold against the right of the Christian might have run as this,

> All the descendants of Abraham are also the heirs of Abraham. We circumcised Jews are descendants of Abraham. Therefore we are also heirs. On the other hand, those who are not Abraham's descendants cannot be Abraham's heirs. You Christians are Gentiles and are not descendants of Abraham. Therefore you boast in vain that you are the church. For this is what it means to be the heir of Abraham.[64]

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[60] *LW* 4:17; WA 43:148. "Somniavit igitur sibi regnum, et Isaacum prae se contempsit."

[61] *LW* 4:20; WA 43:149.

[62] *LW* 4:24; WA 43:153. "Promissiones erant duplices, temporalis Ismaeli, aeterna et spiritualis Isaaco contigerat: facile igitur iuditium fuit, cum Ismael vellet praedominari [1. Mose 25, 23] non esse ferendum, et sicut infra de Iacobo et Esau dicitur, maiorem coram mundo debere servire minori."

[63] *LW* 4:21; WA 43:151. See also Kolb, *Luther and Story of God*, 147. What Kolb focuses in his discussion, though, is Luther's comments of the reality of marriage derived from the disagreement between Abraham and Sarah.

[64] *LW* 4:25; WA 43:153. "Quicunque sunt semen Abrahae, sunt etiam haeredes Abrahae. Nos Iudaei circumcisi sumus semen Abrahae, igitur etiam sumus haeredes. Contra: Qui non sunt Abrahae semen, haeredes Abrahae esse non possunt. Vos Christiani estis gentes, et non semen Abrahae: Ergo frustra gloriamini vos esse Ecclesiam. Hoc enim est haeredem Abrahae esse.

Two parallel syllogisms can be developed in this statement, one for the Jews, and another for the

Christians and Gentiles.

Table 4.3 Two syllogisms held by the Jews which Luther assumed

	The Jews	Christians and Gentiles
Major Premise	All the descendants of Abraham are also the heirs of Abraham	
Minor Premise	We circumcised Jews are descendants of Abraham	You Christians and Gentiles are not descendants of Abraham
Conclusion	We are also heirs of Abraham	You are not heirs of Abraham

Luther rigorously argued against these two syllogisms. Armed with Rom. 9 and Gal. 3,

Luther believed that St. Paul would join his company maintaining that "the major premise in the

first syllogism is false, namely, that the universal proposition, that all who are the descendants of

Abraham are his heirs, is not true. And against this he adduces an instance which no Jew can

deny: Ishmael is a true descendant of Abraham—a descendant born of Abraham's own flesh;

nevertheless, he is driven out and does not share the true inheritance with Isaac."[65] Luther then

developed a threefold progeny of Abraham according to Paul,

> Accordingly, Paul's response to the major premise is this, that he postulates a threefold progeny of Abraham. The first is physical and without the promise concerning Christ. Ishmael, who was born of the flesh of Abraham, was an offspring of this kind.
>
> The second progeny, says Paul, is physical, but with the promise concerning Christ. Thus Isaac, too, was born of the flesh of Abraham; but he had the promise: "I shall establish My covenant with Isaac."

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[65] *LW* 4:25; WA 43:153. "Sed divus Paulus, … ac negat in primo syllogysmo Maiorem: quod scilicet universalis non vera sit: Omnes esse haeredes Abrahae, qui sunt semen Abrahae, ac opponit instantiam, quam nullus Iudaeus negare potest. Ismael enim est verum semen Abrahae, natum ex ipsius carne, et tamen eiicitur, nec est particeps verae haereditatis cum Isaac."

The third progeny, says Paul, is not physical but is the offspring only of the promise. Although it certainly does not belong to the flesh of Abraham, still it holds fast to faith and embraces the promise made to Abraham.[66]

Luther established the connection between Ishmael and the Jews, since they both belong to the first kind of progeny—circumcised without promise. For one thing, Luther concurred with the Jews that God established his covenant concerning Christ through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Jews, who are named "the people of God" or "the chosen people."

However, Luther disagreed with the Jews regarding the way one should interpret the salvation of Gentiles attested by the Scripture. For the Jews, God establishes the covenant of circumcision with them and through which they become the people of God. For them, one answer among many about the salvation of Gentiles is that they attach themselves to the teaching of Judaism. In any case, the Jews see themselves as the chosen people of God in an exclusive sense and often highlight the non–universalistic nature of Judaism. As Jewish scholar Shmuley Boteach once noted, one of the ten essential differences between Judaism and Christianity is that "Jews believe the covenant between God and the people of Israel embodied in the Hebrew Scriptures to be eternally valid."[67] Boteach goes on elucidating, "The covenant that God establishing with the Jews in the Torah entailed the observance of the commandments, as understood through Talmudic legislation, as the ultimate means by which man would connect with God."[68]

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[66] *LW* 4:25–26; WA 43:154. "Respondet igitur ad maiorem sic: ut faciat semen Abrahae triplex, unum carnale et sine promissione de Christo, tale semen fuit Ismael, natus ex carne Abrahae.

Alterum semen dicit esse carnale, sed cum promissione de Christo, sic Isaac ex carne Abrahae quoque natus est, sed habuit promissionem: 'Ego statuam pactum meum cum Isaac.'

Tertium semen dicit, non esse carnale, sed tantum promissionis, quod scilicet licet ad carnem Abrahae non pertineat, tamen retinet fidem, et promissionem Abrahae factam amplectitur."

[67] Shmuley Boteach, *Judaism for Everyone* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 408.

[68] Boteach, *Judaism for Everyone*, 409.

Given that circumcision is one of the key manifestations of the covenant that God established with the Jews, they would, by no means, accept Luther's statement that circumcision is only a temporal arrangement. However, from the perspective of the unfolding of salvation history, the covenant of circumcision as well as the "chosen–ness" of the Jews are all temporal arrangements for the sake of the establishment of a definite line of blood concerning the future savior, Jesus Christ, which God envelops his promise with these arrangements as the second progeny implied. The sacramental function of circumcision for the physical descendants of Abraham was only valid until the time of Christ. God's original and complete masterplan, throughout the two testaments, was and always is the salvation of all people. For Luther, the promise to Abraham's seed is none other than the promise in the Messiah, which is Jesus Christ. The Jews, as physical descendants of Abraham, were chosen for the sake of preservation of the promise. Yet the true descendants of Abraham were and always are those who believe in the promise, regardless of which dispensation they are in. In this regard, the "chosen–ness" that the Jews claims for themselves became "the quintessential example of what Luther means by 'boasting in the flesh.'"[69] As Jaroslav Pelikan once noted, the Genesis narrative reinforced Luther's idea that "externals did not guarantee the presence of the church. Noah was alone, yet the church was with him. … Ishmael was the first-born, but Isaac was the child of promise… Esau was also the first-born, but Jacob received the promise. … In the same way the Reformation party was the church, despite outward appearances."[70]

The two strongest scriptural warrants that Luther found in this passage to his own advantage are the naming of Abraham as the father of many nations, and the circumcision of

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[69] Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, eds., *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 7.

[70] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor,* 97.

Ishmael. First, since God promised Abraham be the father of many nations (Gen. 17:5), the Gentiles are also the people of God provided that they share the same faith as the faith of Abraham. Second, the circumcision of Ishmael provides a still stronger case for Luther that one's circumcision is unrelated to the question of whether one is saved or counted among the people of God. This remains the Achilles' heel for the Jews who attach themselves so staunchly to circumcision, for no Jews would admit that Ishmael and Esau are among the people of God even though they are Abraham's physical descendants and circumcised. On the other hand, however, Luther firmly believed that Ishmael attained eternal salvation because, as we will see shortly, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael bring to them a full manifestation of the law and gospel. In any case, this is a wonderful demonstration of the third kind of progeny. With all these in place, we can now integrate Table 4.1 & 4.2 into a more holistic scheme as follows,

Table 4.4 Luther's thinking of Ishmael and Isaac

	Ishmael	Isaac
Circumcision (A)	Yes	Yes
Inclusion of Genealogy of Christ (B)	No	Yes
Salvation (C)	Yes	Yes
Implication	(1) The Jews have no boast of their status (2) The Gentiles are not excluded from salvation	

Assume circumcision as statement A, the inclusion of genealogy of Christ as statement B, and the salvation of each individual as statement C. In Ishmael's case, the implication of A and B is that the Jews have no boast of their spiritual status, for without faith in Christ, their circumcision is of no avail, even though they carry the name "the people of God." However, the implication of

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B and C in Ishmael's case is that the Gentiles are not excluded from salvation provided that they believe the Word of promise.

In this way, Luther viewed the outstanding role of Ishmael as both a warning and a consolation. It is a warning for the Jews, the papal church and also for us if we attach ourselves solely to the visible, external sign or sacrament and remain negligent of setting our faith in the promise to which the external sign is added. Yet it is a consolation for the Gentiles and for us, reminding us that one should not attach himself to the external matters as the assurance of God's favor. Rather, one should say, "'God gives a promise, and it deals with eternal life. Consequently, He is truly propitious.' Therefore the text before us should be used as a proverb: Through Isaac shall your descendants be named; that is, he who has the promise and believes shall be the heir."[71] As Heinrich Bornkamm repeatedly writes, the Old Testament for Luther is a mirror of life, which manifests the outer and inner worlds of human beings.[72] The role of Ishmael in salvation history has a direct and immediate application for us.[73]

We now turn to the second aspect of Luther's treatment of this passage relevant to our study—the function of law and gospel manifests itself in the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael which made them true heirs of Abraham. After Abraham had been convinced by Sarah the crucial distinction between the two promises, he decided to send away Hagar and Ishmael his first–born son, an act out of the obedience to God's command. Luther believes Abraham "did not

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[71] *LW* 4:30; WA 43:156–7. "Deus dat regna, Dat opes: Ergo habeo propitium Deum. Sic potius dicendum est. Deus dat promissionem, eamque de aeterna vita: Ergo vere est propitius. Proverbii igitur vice praesens textus debebat usurpari: 'In Isaac vocabitur tibi semen,' hoc est, haeres sit ille, qui promissionem habet et credit."

[72] Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 11–35.

[73] Interesting enough, while Bornkamm admits the fact the "Luther made his sympathy for him (Ishmael) … and hope that he as well as many of his descendants had nevertheless been converted," what is more prominent for Bornkamm's reading of Ishmael is that God denied him from the promise and finally his church became superstition." See Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 213.

do this without a very great struggle and very heavy sorrow, for he was not a stone or a rock. But

he sent his very dear wife away with loud sobs and many tears."[74] From the example of Abraham

we must learn that "when God gives an order, one must not delay or argue. God wants

obedience, but delay displeases Him."[75]

The whole account of Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion (Gen. 21:15–16) is brief yet

horrifying. The mother and lad wandered in the wilderness of Beer–sheba with no clue where to

settle, and the water that Abraham provided for them ran out. "Therefore death is imminent for

both, and from thirst at that, which is unbearable for our nature."[76] What makes the scene more

tragic is that the mother has to lay her son in the grass under the bush and walk away for a

distance because she could not bear to watch her son die with her own eyes. This is the most

crucial moment in the lives of Hagar and Ishmael for their presumptuousness of primogeniture

right was totally destroyed in such a harsh expulsion.[77] This incident is parallel to, but also

outweighs, the story of Hagar's exile and repentance in Gen. 16. Luther was certain that "this

passage before us gives us instruction concerning the exercise and function of the Law.

Therefore Paul (Gal. 4:30) calls these words of Sarah, 'Cast out the slave woman,' words of the

Law."[78] The law must go before the gospel of solace. Those who feel themselves "in the state of

grace because of some physical prerogative" must be "struck with the hammer of the Law and

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[74] *LW* 4:37; WA 43:162. "Non igitur sine maxima lucta et gravissimo dolore haec fecit Abraham, non enim lapis fuit aut saxum. Sed cum magno singultu et multis, lachrymis carissimam coniug em dimisit."

[75] *LW* 4:38–39; WA 43:163.

[76] *LW* 4:40; WA 43:164.

[77] *LW* 4:42–43; WA 43:166.

[78] *LW* 4:49; WA 43:170. Here Luther seizes the opportunity to launch his attack over the antinomians. See *LW* 4:49–51; WA 43:170–71. For background discussion about Luther and Antinomianism, see Mark U. Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 156–79.

broken into pieces. Yes, they must be reduced to nothing."[79] Luther therefore interpreted the

expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael as the best demonstration of how the law functions in our sinful

flesh. This passage is also for our edification.

> But whatever there is of the Law, whatever there is of the will of the flesh and of
> man—of this it is said: "Cast it out!" For God cannot bear the presumption of
> Ishmael; that is, He does not want us to glory in our physical birth, in our strength, in
> the freedom of our will, in our wisdom and righteousness. All this must be mortified;
> all this must be despaired of, just as Hagar despairs in this place. … This is the reason
> why Ishmael and his mother are cast out, namely, that the horrible and ungovernable
> evil of presumption of their own righteousness may be killed.[80]

For Luther, what Hagar and Ishmael experienced is paradigmatic for all proud people. "They

cannot be saved unless they are reduced to death and despair; for all of them, because of their

physical birth and the powers this brings with it, take grace and the forgiveness of sins for

granted."[81] The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael shows all humanity "that the first birth does not

concern the kingdom of God and that without faith in the promise concerning Christ nobody can

be saved."[82]

 "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven"

(Gen. 21:17). Luther read the cry of Ishmael as parallel to the prodigal son in the parable of

Jesus, knowing that he is unworthy of his father's house. The groaning of Ishmael is like a music

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[79] *LW* 4:49; WA 43:170.

[80] *LW* 4:50; WA 43:171. " Sed quicquid ex lege est, quicquid est ex voluntate carnis et viri, de hoc dicitur, eiice: non potest enim Deus ferre praesumptionem Ismaelis, hoc est, non vult gloriari nos de carnali nativitate, de viribus nostris, de libertate arbitrii nostri, de sapientia et iustitia nostra, omnia haec mortificanda sunt, et de omnibus his desperandum est, sicut hoc in loco desperat Hagar. …Haec causa est, cur Ismael cum matre eiiciatur, ut scilicet horribile et indomitum malum praesumptionis de propria iustitia occidatur." See also Maxfield's observation of this passage concerning Luther and the antinomian controversy. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 20–26.

[81] *LW* 4:52; WA 43:172. "In summa haec historia tales omnes depingit, quod, nisi redigantur in mortem et desperationem, salvari non possunt: omnes enim praesumunt gratiam et remissionem peccatorum ex nativitate carnali et viribus, quas secum adfert."

[82] *LW* 4:53; WA 43:173. "Sic Ismael eiectus argumentum est, quod includit omnes homines, et praeteritam Ecclesiam usque ad finem mundi coniungit, quod prima nativitas ad regnum DEI non pertineat, quod sine fide in promissionem de Christo nemo possit salvari."

"which seems to us very sad and mournful," but "pleases God more than any other form of worship, as He says in Isaiah [57:15]: I shall dwell with a contrite spirit."[83] Again, Luther thought we should learn the lesson from the moaning of Ishmael and the appearance of Angel, which proves the mercifulness of God is with those mourn in despair. God hears the lament of Ishmael, likewise he will hear those cry like the lad,

> Therefore this is a very great comfort for all those who feel that they have been cast out, that is, acknowledge their sins and tremble before the judgment of God. For He does not want to cast such people aside, nor can He do so; and if such people were without solace from men, it would sooner be necessary for an angel to descend from heaven to bring them comfort. Accordingly, God is called the God of the humble and afflicted who does not quench a smoldering wick (Matt. 12:20). But after the self-reliance of the flesh has been mortified in Ishmael, he becomes a true son of the promise; and what he first demanded on the basis of right, but did not obtain, he now, in his utmost need and despair, receives by grace.[84]

This is the rule of salvation. "Only those who are contrite become children of Abraham, and this takes place out of extraordinary and pure grace."[85]

As Luther famously commented on *Seven Penitential Psalms*, "[i]t is God's nature to make something out of nothing; hence one who is not yet nothing, out of him God cannot make anything. … God accepts only the forsaken, cures only the sick, gives sight only to the blind, restores life only to the dead, sanctifies only the sinners, gives wisdom only to the unwise. In short, He has mercy only on those who are wretched, and gives grace only to those who are not

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[83] *LW* 4:56; WA 43:175.

[84] *LW* 4:57; WA 43:176. "Maxima igitur haec consolatio est omnium istorum, qui sentiunt se eiectos, hoc est, qui agnoscunt peccata sua, et trepidant a iuditio Dei. Non enim vult, nec potest tales abiicere, etsi talibus solatia hominum deessent, potius Angelum de coelis descendere necesse esset, qui afferret consolationem. Vocatur igitur Deus humilium Deus et afflictorum, qui linum fumigans non extinguit. Postquam vero fidutia carnis in Ismaele mortificata est, fit verus promissionis filius, et quod iure prius postulabat: non autem consequebatur, hoc nunc ex gratia ei contingit in extrema necessitate et desperatione."

[85] *LW* 4:57–58; WA 43:176.

in grace."[86] One should neither be presumptuous according to his possession nor despairing according to his calamity. Instead, one should always trust in God's mercy and call upon him.[87] Luther summarizes the lesson,

> This is the purpose of such a pitiful expulsion: God wants to teach us that we are saved by grace alone or by faith alone. Faith takes hold of the grace that is set before us in the promise. For the natural children are to be regarded as equal with those who are not natural children and yet believe. So there is one God of the Jews and of the Gentiles. The Jews should not boast of their prerogative according to the flesh, and the Gentiles should not despair because of their sins.[88]

Luther suggested that, since the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar and Ishmael, the bush or little tree under which Ishmael was lying became a sanctuary for the mother and son. The angel must have said to Hagar something like,

> "Before God you must make no distinction between Abraham's house and that tree under which your son is lying. Even though you are not in Abraham's house, nevertheless beware of doubting that you and your son belong to the same church. …, this place in which you now are is not inferior to Abraham's house. For here God is speaking with you; here He hears the prayers of your son. Therefore He has a sanctuary here."[89]

The powerful manifestation of law and gospel not only made Ishmael the true heir of Abraham, but also transformed him into a learned preacher. In commenting Gen. 21:20–21, the growing up and marriage of Ishmael, Luther suggested that Ishmael brought his wife and her family the true knowledge of God and thus established a church comparable to Abraham's

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[86] *LW* 14:163; WA 18:197–98.

[87] *LW* 4:58; WA 43:176.

[88] *LW* 4:60; WA 43:178. "Hic finis tam miserabilis eiectionis est, ut doceat Deus sola gratia vel sola fide, quae gratiam in promissione propositam apprehendit, nos salvari. Exaequandi enim sunt naturales filii cum illis, qui naturales filii non sunt, et tamen credunt, ut sit unus Deus Iudaeorum et gentium, ut Iudaei glorientur de praerogativa carnis, et gentes propter peccata non desperent."

[89] *LW* 4:64; WA 43:181. "non debes facere distinctionem coram Deo inter domum Abrahae et istam arborem, sub qua filius tuus iacet. Etiamsi non es in domo Abrahae, tamen cave dubites te et filium pertinere ad eandem Ecclesiam…. Quantum enim ad conditionem loci attinet, non inferior est hic locus, in quo nunc es, ipsius Abrahae domo. Hic enim Deus tecum loquitur, hic exaudit preces filii tui: Ergo hic templum habet, etc."

church. "Among the uncircumcised heathen he [Ishmael] established a church like Abraham's church, different indeed with respect to persons and places but one that acknowledged and preached the same God and the same Offspring that was promised to the house of Abraham."[90]

Finally, the family of Ishmael recorded in Gen. 25:12–16 provided Luther with further evidence about the abundant blessings that Ishmael received. From this passage, Luther affirmed that Ishmael possessed a twofold blessing, carnal and spiritual. The carnal blessing concerned the sizable and significance of his family. "But Ishmael, who is the brother born of a slave woman, is honored by a blessing so great and glorious that in a short time he begets 12 princes, and both Abraham and Isaac saw that all these were living and flourishing."[91] The physical flourishment which God brought to Ishmael became a spiritual trial for Isaac, who had not yet had offspring in those years. This was, according to Luther, God's play with Isaac out of his love.[92] Moreover, Ishmael received spiritual blessing as well. Luther explains Ismael's spiritual blessing in great detail,

> Besides, it is apparent that Ishmael was a great theologian who carefully unfolded the force and grandeur of the promises, which are certainly great and magnificent; ... Therefore Ishmael carefully impressed the promises made to him and was able to say: "I see that the Lord is with me and He has blessed me even spiritually." At the same time he also retained and enriched the outward worship he saw in his father's house, and through ceremonies of that kind some of his domestics and sons came to the knowledge of godliness, just as many of the family and descendants of Cain were joined to the true church of Adam, and in our day very many are gathered into our little church.

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[90] *LW* 4:69; WA 43:185. "Hac occasione, postquam maritus factus est Ismael, perduxit ad Dei notitiam etiam uxorem, et uxoris cognatos ac parentes, instituit Ecclesiam inter gentes non circumcisas in similitudinem Ecclesiae Abrahae, divisam quidem personis et locis, sed agnoscentem et praedicantem eundem Deum, et idem semen promissum domui Abrahae."

[91] *LW* 4:325; WA 43:370. "Ismael autem qui frater est ext serva natus, tanta et tam ampla benedictione ornatur, ut mox generet duodecim Principes, quos omnes vederunt vivere et florere uterque."

[92] *LW* 4:326; WA 43:371. For more discussion on this topic, see S.J. Munson. "The Divine Game: Faith and the Reconciliation of the Opposites." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, no.1–2 (2012): 89–116; Kam, "Luther on God's Play," 142–44.

In the same way many from the house of Ishmael joined the church in the house of Abraham, especially Ishmael himself, who, I believe, after repenting, returned and became a member of the true church—not from the flesh but from the spirit, because according to the flesh he was rejected. But in the text he is also praised spiritually. Furthermore, Moses has related above that he buried his father Abraham with reverence. This proves that he was not estranged from the church in the house of Isaac.[93]

For Luther, the evidence of Ishmael's spiritual blessing is threefold. First of all, Ishmael took hold of the promise made to him and his mother in the wilderness of Beer–sheba. Second, Ishmael became a preacher, a "great theologian" who brought forth the promise to and established the outward worship in his household. Third, Ishmael, together with Isaac, buried their father Abraham in the cave of Machpelah as suggested in Gen. 25:9. This proved that Ishmael is soteriologically close to the house of Abraham and Isaac. However, after many generations Ishmael's descendants retained the outward worship but lost the true faith. Luther believed that they started to show superstition and hypocrisy, as the Turks and Arabs did in his days.[94] Overall, Luther remained realistic about our sinful predilection of taking outward performance in preference to faith.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have brought Hagar and Ishmael into the discussion of Luther's

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[93] *LW* 4:327; WA 43:371–72. "Caeterum apparet Ismaelem fuisse magnum Theologum, qui vim et dignitatem promissionum, quae certe ingentes et magnificae sunt, diligenter evolverit, idque imprimis, …. Ideo Ismael diligenter inculcavit promissiones sibi factas, et potuit dicere: Ego video, quod Dominus apud me est, et benedixit mihi etiam spiritualiter. Simul quoque cultum externum, quem vidit in domo patris, retinuit et auxit: Ac quidam ex familia et filiis ipsius per eiusmodi ceremonias pervenerunt ad cognitionem pietatis. Sicut multi ex familia et posteritate Cain ad Ecclesiam veram Adae congregati sunt, et hodie plurimi ad nostram Ecclesiolam aggregantur.

Ad eundem modum es Ismaelis domo multi adiunxerunt se Ecclesiae, quae fuit in domo Abrahae, praesertim Ismael ipse, quem credo post poenitentiam reversum, et participem factum verae Ecclesiae non ex carne, sed spiritu. Quia secundum carnem reiectus est, sed in textu etiam spiritualiter laudatur. Item Moses narravit supra sepeliisse eum cum reverentia patrem suum Abraham, quod argumento est, non fuisse eum alienum ab Ecclesia, quae fuit in domo Isaac."

[94] *LW* 4:328; WA 43:372–3.

understanding of the people of God before Christ. Luther's thinking of the relationship between circumcision and baptism advances our understanding of the unity and continuity between the Old and New dispensations in his thought. For him, circumcision and baptism are two different signs to which the same promise is attached. Clinging to the promise behind the sign makes one true heir of Abraham, a member of the true church. This essential idea profoundly shaped Luther's ecclesiology, which, on the one hand, relativizes (but not nullifies) the role of Jews as the "chosen people" and, on the other hand, downplays the role of Gentiles as the "unchosen, covenantal outsiders."

We have also shown why Hagar and especially Ishmael are outstanding figures for Luther in their twofold representation. On the one hand, coupled with Cain, Ishmael represents the unbelieving Jews in his boasting of primogeniture. On the other hand, Ishmael represents the believing Gentiles because, through the exercise of law and gospel in his expulsion, Ishmael humbled himself before God and turned himself to the promise in faith. In this sense, Hagar and Ishmael are also recipients of *fortuita misericordia* as were the descendants of Cain.

Here an important piece of theological insight is added to our picture of *fortuita misericordia*. If we say the significance of the story of Cain and Abel provided for Luther the archetype of the twofold church with its porous nature, then the story of Hagar and Ishmael exemplified for Luther the ways by which the mobilization between the true and false church takes place. Taking pride in and puffing with one's superior status in the true church guarantees one's depravation and falling to the false church. By contrast, being humble and groaning before God gives rise to the opportunity for him to join the true church regardless of one's current external status. Now we turn in the next chapter to the study examining the story of Esau and Jacob to bring another important exegetical piece to the construction of Luther's theological

hermeneutics, namely, the relation of election, faith, promise, and salvation.

CHAPTER SIX

ESAU: MERCY EXTENDED TO THE REPROBATE

Introduction

In the beginning of the last chapter, we introduced Luther's exposition of the birth of Esau and Jacob. In his comments on the birth of Esau and Jacob, Luther suggested that Cain's descendants and Ishmael's descendants altogether with the Edomites were rejected by God. Through this humiliating rejection, however, they were humbled and led to repentance and salvation. These three people are alike for Luther in their status as recipients of *fortuita misericordia*. Yet each individual has his own theological significance in Luther's view of salvation history. Just as the life of Cain shone forth Luther's understanding of the twofold church, and the life of Ishmael set forth Luther's definition of the people of God framed by the Jews and Gentiles relationship under the rubric of two kinds of attachment to the promise, the life of Esau gives occasion for Luther to unpack the meaning of election from the perspective of the preservation of messianic promise, instead of double predestination—God's hidden decree concerning the eternal salvation and damnation of the elect and reprobate.

In this chapter, we begin our discussion with the birth of Esau and Jacob, and Jacob's trade for primogeniture in Gen. 25. This passage is of critical importance in our study due to the way Luther's reading provided the archetypal story of divine election which, on the one hand, continued the conversation of this topic in the exegetical tradition before him and, on the other hand, offers an interpretive key to his previous writing, namely, *De servo arbitrio*. We then turn to Luther's observation of the transferal of firstborn blessing from Esau to Jacob in Gen. 27, combined with his remarks on the reunion between the brothers in Gen. 33. These two passages together formed Luther's view of Esau as one who experienced the function of law and gospel

with the consequence of benign attitude toward his deceitful brother.[1] The final section examines

the account of Esau's descendants in Gen. 36, in which Luther linked Christ's messianic ministry

written in Rom. 15:8–9 with the blessings Esau received. This linkage reinforces Luther's idea of

fortuita misericordia manifest among the Gentiles.

The Birth of Esau and Jacob and the Trade for Primogeniture: Gen. 25:19–34

Luther's examination of the story of Esau and Jacob begins his observation of Isaac's inner

struggle before and after his marriage. Isaac diligently worked in the field and meditated on the

Word of God in prayer to protect his chastity against the fleshly lust in the first 40 years of his

life.[2] Maxfield correctly notes that Luther set Isaac as the most prominent example of chastity for

his students to imitate.[3] However, another trial, which came after Isaac's marriage, was even

more burdensome. Rebecca had been barren for 20 years before she finally gave birth of Esau

and Jacob. Luther noted that, since his marriage, Isaac "longs for offspring, in accordance with

the promise; and he certainly has no slight hope. … But Rebecca does not bear a child; nor does

she have a promise that she will be a mother, just as Sarah, too did not have a promise at first."[4]

Luther praised the virtues of patience, perseverance, and faithfulness shown in the lives of Isaac

and Rebecca in the midst of their affliction caused by the mockery of their neighbors and

household servants. Luther urges us to "remember that we must persevere and boldly overcome

everything that puts our patience to the test, just as Rebecca learned to disdain the insults of other

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[1] Luther understands Esau's repentance was a devilish one at first, but later he truly repented.

[2] *LW* 4:334–35; WA 43:377–78.

[3] Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 118.

[4] *LW* 4:337; WA 43:379. "In coniugio desiderat prolem secundum promissionem: neque sane exiguam spem habet, cum sciat praeparatam sibi et adductam uxorem divino consilio. Sed Rebecca non parit, nec habet promissionem, quod sit futura mater, sicut nec Sara primum habebat."

women and of her own domestics until eventually she prevailed over God through her own prayers and those of her husband."[5] Luther especially praised them for their persistence in prayer, as noted in Gen. 25:21. "It is something great for Isaac to have the courage to lift up his eyes and hands to the Divine Majesty and to beg, seek, and knock; for it is something very great to speak with God."[6] Isaac's prayer is truly fervent and earnest, neither out of presumption nor doubt, and finally the Lord granted his request; Rebecca conceived.

Luther dedicated a fairly long passage to the little phrase, "and Rebecca, his wife, conceived." He first brings Paul's doctrine of election in Rom. 9:10–13 under the spotlight,

> This passage is outstanding and noteworthy to the highest degree. Paul discusses it in an excellent manner in the Epistle to the Romans (9:10–13): "And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of His call, she was told: 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"[7]

There are two kinds of birth taught by Paul in this passage, birth out of flesh and the spiritual birth. God preserved the former for the sake of procreation of all humankind but wanted to point out that "over and above the birth that remained in nature the rebirth and renewal of regeneration through the Holy Spirit is necessary." The passage concerning Esau and Jacob as well as Isaac and Ishmael is hitting right to the point.[8]

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[5] *LW* 4:339; WA 43:380. "Sed meminerimus durandum esse, et fortiter vincenda omnia, quae tentant nostram patientiam. Sicut Rebecca aliarum mulierum et familiae propriae convicia didicit contemnere, donec tandem expugnavit Deum suis et mariti precibus."

[6] *LW* 4:340; WA 43:381. "Magnum igitur est, quod audet Isaac oculos et manus attollere ad divinam maiestatem, quod petit, quaerit et pulsat: Maxima enim res est, cum Deo loqui."

[7] *LW* 4:342; WA 43:383. "Hic locus maxime insignis et memorabilis est, quem Paulus in Epistola [Röm. 9, 10–13] ad Romanos egregie tractat: 'Non solum autem illa: Sed et Rebecca, quae ex uno conceperat patre nostro Isaac. Cum enim nondum nati fuissent, aut aliquid boni egissent aut mali, ut secundum electionem propositum Dei maneneret: non ex operibus, sed ex vocante dictum est: quia maior serviet minori, sicut scriptum est: Iacob dilexi: Esau autem odio habui.'"

[8] *LW* 4:343; WA 43:384. "Hoc tantum significare voluit, non satis esse nasci in hunc mundum ex carne, sed

Here, Luther interpreted Paul's doctrine of election through the lens of the twofold church and the promised Seed, which draws us back to the last two chapters of the study. Luther addressed the question of chosen or unchosen from the viewpoint of God's covenantal grace. The chosen were simply the Jews and the unchosen the Gentiles. We may also say that Luther recast the doctrine of election in terms of salvation history rather than personal salvation. Put another way, election for Luther was more of a salvation-historical category of a group than a soteriological judgment of an individual. It is worth noting that this recasting of Luther here in his Genesis Lectures stands in stark contrast to what the young Luther said in his lectures on Romans a few decades earlier. In his study of Augustine and Luther on Romans, David Steinmetz observes that while Luther in his comments on Rom. 9, "embraces that most severe statement of Augustine's position on predestination," he developed his own way of interpretation which also "reflects his own personal relationship to the text and his own experience of the anxieties which the text creates."[9] The key difference between Augustine and Luther's r view of the doctrine of election lies in the fact that while Augustine was preoccupied with the psychological motive of the individual to perform morally good deeds, Luther was mainly concerned with the pastoral question of certitude of salvation.[10] Steinmetz rightfully argues, "neither Augustine nor Luther is particularly concerned about the problem which is uppermost in Paul's mind," namely, "what place in the history of salvation remains for Israel, especially in view of the new and astonishingly successful mission to the Gentiles?"[11] In this regard, what Luther in his mature years did in his Genesis Lectures would be viewed as an important

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requiri ultra nativitatem relictam in natura etiam renascentiam et renovationem regenerationis per spiritum sanctum."

[9] David Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 21.

[10] Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 18.

[11] Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 20.

exegetical supplement to the doctrine of election which drew closer to Paul's original concern of the problem of salvation history.

In the case of Jacob, his chosen-ness can be understood primarily in terms of how God uses him in his unfolding plan that culminates in Christ. Paul put this text in his epistle not so much about God's hidden decree concerning the salvation of Esau and Jacob *per se* as to "stop the arrogant mouths of the Jews and to dispose of their argument concerning their birth according to the flesh. For this birth is in no wise adequate. No, regeneration is necessary over and above that birth."[12] Since the beginning of the world the conflict between the firstborn and the second continues to happen. Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, all are but representing the everlasting strife between the descendants of the serpent and the Seed of the woman.[13]

As John Headley comments on Luther's idea of the twofold church—a topic which we touched upon in Chapter Four, the twofold church reflects "this opposition between a reliance on outward possession and a trust in the concealed promise of God."[14] In order to oppose the hubris of the firstborn, therefore, God made a distinction between the two sons in which the promise always belongs to the second. "The seed of the promise, which has the call and, over and above the first birth [i.e. firstborn], has the second and regeneration, is given the preference."[15] Esau the firstborn, who relied on the fleshly glory as the Jews, Turks and the Popes did, represents the false church, while Jacob the second-born, who solely relied on God's call, namely, the Word of

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[12] *LW* 4:343; WA 43:383. "Ideo [Deus] voluit hanc cautionem in textu ponere, ut obstrueret os superbum Iudaeis, et argumentum eorum solveret de nativitate carnis. Ea enim neutiquam sufficit, sed requiritur ultra illam nativitatem renascentia."

[13] *LW* 4:344; WA 43:384.

[14] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 60.

[15] *LW* 4:345; WA 43:384. "Sed semen promissionis, quod habet vocationem et ultra primam nativitatem secundum et regenerationem, praefertur."

promise, represents the true church.[16] The true church follows the divine call and takes hold of the concealed promise in faith without relying on works. God's preference for Jacob is integrated to the grand scheme of the triumph of true church over the false church unfolded in the salvation history. "Why is Jacob preferred to Esau? I answer that the call came to Jacob. On the basis of the first birth Esau presumes that the inheritance of the kingdom falls to him. God is displeased with that presumption and wants the renewal of his nature, apart from which no right to the kingdom or inheritance is left to be added."[17] God always despises the proud and exalts the humble. Accordingly, God's election of Jacob in preference to Esau is nothing but the display of God's working in the world, his *theologia crucis* pedagogy.[18]

Interestingly, after setting the paradigmatic understanding of election framed by the true and false church polarity embodied in the patriarchal narrative, Luther turned to the discussion of several individuals of the first birth. On the one hand, Luther noted that the twelve sons of Jacob all became murderers, even to the degree of patricide as they "sadden the very pious old man to such an extent that he wants to die."[19] On the other hand, Luther contended that both Ishmael and Esau would eventually repent and give assent to the call.[20] The idea of multiple representation is again at work here.[21] Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, and in this instance Esau, represent the boastful sinners and self-absorbed firstborns whom God utterly rejected. Nevertheless, they are also

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[16] *LW* 4:346–9; WA 43:385–7.

[17] *LW* 4:349; WA 43:387. "Sed quare Iacob praefertur Esau? Respondeo. Ad Iacob venit vocatio: Esau praesumit ex prima nativitate, redire ad se haereditatem regni, illam praesumptionem odit Deus, et vult, ut accedat renovatio naturae, extra quam nullum ius regni aut haereditatis reliquum est."

[18] See Chapter Two, pp. 29–30.

[19] *LW* 4:350; WA 43:388.

[20] *LW* 4:350; WA 43:388.

[21] See Chapter Four, pp. 136–37; Chapter Five, p. 151–52.

recipients of *fortuita misericordia* to whom the opportunity of repentance is open. Hagar, Ishmael, and here Esau, in Luther's opinion, repented and thus attained salvation. In their role as firstborn, Ishmael and Esau represent the false church; in their person as repentant sinner, they are saved.

Luther's multi-layered approach to election can be compared to a recent study by Old Testament scholar Joel E. Kaminsky.[22] One of the key contributions of Kaminsky's probing of the theme of election unfolded throughout the Hebrew bible is Kaminsky's differentiation of three states regarding one's covenantal relationship with God: elect, non-elect, and anti-elect. Cain, Ishmael, and Esau are among the non-elect. According to Kaminsky, "one should not confuse the status of being non-elect with that of being an enemy of God or what I prefer to call the anti-elect. Most important, some of the non-elect actually receive promises of special divine blessing."[23] The patriarchal stories of Genesis show that "the righteous non-elect are not only not damned, but are also recipients of God's blessing."[24]

Kaminsky's category of non-elect is helpful for two reasons: (1) Kaminsky's idea of election echoes that of Luther, that election in the Scripture is not mainly a soteriological category; (2) Kaminsky shares with Luther that the non-elect obtain great temporal blessings and (in the case of Ishmael) even "receive some of the elements of the original Abrahamic promise delivered in Gen.12."[25] As Nathan MacDonald notes in his comments on Kaminsky's work, "the place of unelect [non-elect] in Genesis underlines that election in the Old Testament is not a

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[22] Joel E. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

[23] Kaminsky. *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 34.

[24] Kaminsky. *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 189.

[25] Kaminsky. *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 40.

triumphalistic theology" although Israel's special status in salvation history is still upheld.[26] In

sum, both Luther and Kaminsky read the unchosen figures in Genesis in a subtler way than

simply casting a soteriological bifurcation between the elect and the non-elect. This subtler

reading shaped their overall attitude towards the doctrine of election and salvation history.[27]

Luther furthered his comments on the hidden and revealed God in the passage to follow.

The inconvenient fact that Rebecca was woefully afflicted in her divinely blessed pregnancy

gives Luther the opportunity to unpack the doctrine of the hiddenness of God. From a worldly

perspective, "nothing in the world seems more uncertain than the Word of God and faith, nothing

more delusive than hope in the promise. In short, nothing seems to be more nothing than God

Himself. Consequently, this is the knowledge of the saints and a mystery hidden from the wise

and revealed to babes (Matt. 11:25)."[28] Paul Althaus distinguishes two kinds of the hiddenness of

God in Luther's works. The first kind of hiddenness, shown in Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*

(1518),[29] is that "God is hidden in his revelation and is revealed to us not directly but

paradoxically in the cross and in suffering." And the second kind of hiddenness, found in his *On

the Bondage of the Will* (1525),[30] describes "God's hiddenness behind and beyond revelation in

the mystery which forms the background of his almighty double-willing and double-working of

salvation and damnation."[31] Except for a very few instances, Luther deliberately avoided the

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[26] Nathan MacDonald, "Did God Choose the Patriarchs? Reading for Election in the Book of Genesis," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, ed. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 253.

[27] We will further our discussion on this topic in the concluding chapter.

[28] *LW* 4:355–6; WA 43:392. "Ideoque in mundo apparet nihil esse fallacius verbo Dei et fidei, nihil vanius spe promissionis. Denique nihil magis nihil esse videtur, quam Deus ipse. Haec igitur est scientia sanctorum et mysterium absconditum a sapientibus et revelatum parvulis."

[29] *LW* 31:35–70; WA 1:350–74.

[30] *LW* 33; WA 18:551–787.

[31] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 276–77.

discussion of the second kind of God's hiddenness in his Genesis Lectures, which perhaps seems counterintuitive because for us the lecture hall or classroom setting is an apt occasion for speculative theological discussion.

Here we digress from the current passage and direct our attention to Luther's most extensive discussion on the topic of divine predestination or the second kind of God's hiddenness in the Genesis Lectures. Robert Kolb once remarked that Luther, in his comments on Gen. 26, addressed the concern that "his words about absolute necessity in *De servo arbitrio* might have given a false impression" in the extent that "pastoral problems that might arise from a false reading of his work on bound choice."[32] Kolb also observes that late sixteenth-century Lutherans understood *De servo arbitrio* in the context of Luther's own "correction" or clarification shown in his comments on Gen. 26.[33]

In commenting Gen. 26:9, the lie which Isaac made to Abimelech about his wife Rebecca, Luther devoted himself to the topic of the hidden and revealed God as a response to the fact that "there among the nobles and persons of importance vicious statements are being spread abroad concerning predestination or God's foreknowledge."[34] Those "vicious statements" go like this, "[i]f I am predestined, I shall be saved, whether I do good or evil. If I am not predestined, I shall be condemned regardless of my works."[35] Against this statement, Luther urged a distinction with the subject of divinity, namely, the hidden and revealed God, a topic which he taught in his *De*

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[32] Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 27–28.

[33] Kolb, *Bound Choice*, 9.

[34] *LW* 5:42; WA 43:457. "Audio enim spargi passim sceleratas voces inter nobiles et magnates de praedestinatione, sive praescientia divina."

[35] *LW* 5:42; WA 43:458. "Si sum praedestinatus, sive bene, sive male egero, salvabor. Si non sum praedestinatus, damnabor, nulla ratione habita operum."

servo arbitrio.[36] The hiddenness of God is not something we should ponder, otherwise we would "plunge ourselves into destruction."

> With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God, are altogether devilish. With them nothing more is achieved than that we plunge ourselves into destruction; for they present an object that is inscrutable, namely, the unrevealed God. Why not rather let God keep His decisions and mysteries in secret? We have no reason to exert ourselves so much that these decisions and mysteries be revealed to us.[37]

God appeared to Moses by showing his back instead of his face (Ex. 33:23). In the same token, God forbids all speculations about his hidden decree.[38] After all, Luther was uninterested in the discussion about the God's hidden decree concerning personal salvation. Even in *De servo arbitrio*, a work in which Luther treated the doctrine of election extensively, he insisted, "It is our business, however, to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone, for we must be guided by the word and not by that inscrutable will. After all, who can direct himself by a will completely inscrutable and unknowable?"[39] In one of his counsel letters, Luther suggested, "We should rely on these and say: I have been baptized. I believe in Jesus Christ. I have received the Sacrament. What do I care if I have been predestined or not?"[40] The revealed will of God in

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[36] For example, *LW* 33:138–44; WA 18:684–88.

[37] *LW* 5:44; WA 43:458–59. "De Deo, quatenus non est revelatus, nulla est fides, nulla scientia et cognitio nulla. Atque ibi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos. Eiusmodi enim cogitationes, quae supra aut extra revelationem Dei sublimius aliquid rimantur, prorsus Diabolicae sunt, quibus nihil amplius proficitur, quam ut nos ipsos in exitium praecipitemus, quia obiiciunt obiectum impervestigabile, videlicet Deum non revelatum. Quin potius retineat Deus sua decreta et mysteria in abscondito. Non est, cur ea manifestari nobis tantopere laboremus."

[38] *LW* 5:44; WA 43:459.

[39] *LW* 33:140; WA 18:685–86. "Verbo enim nos dirigi, non voluntate illa inscrutabili oportet. Atque adeo quis sese dirigere queat ad voluntatem prorsus imperscrutabilem et incognoscribilem?"

[40] WA *TR* 2631b.

Jesus Christ is what Luther took refuge in, for God determinedly reveals his gracious will

towards us through the incarnation and crucifixion of his Son.

> [God said] This is how I will do so: From an unrevealed God I will become a
> revealed God. Nevertheless, I will remain the same God. I will be made flesh, or send
> My Son. He shall die for your sins and shall rise again from the dead. And in this way
> I will fulfill your desire, in order that you may be able to know whether you are
> predestined or not. Behold, this is My Son; listen to Him (cf. Matt. 17:5). Look at
> Him as He lies in the manger and on the lap of His mother, as He hangs on the cross.
> Observe what He does and what He says. There you will surely take hold of Me." For
> "He who sees Me," says Christ, "also sees the Father Himself" (cf. John 14:9). If you
> listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely
> predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word,
> then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).[41]

What is notable is Luther's insistence of the reliability of God. The hidden God and revealed

God remain one and the same God, not a Manichaeistic idea of divinity. This God made himself

known by sending his Son to the world for the sake of our salvation. "The only thing you have to

do is to receive the Son, so that Christ is welcome in your heart in His birth, miracles, and

cross.… If you want to escape despair, hatred, and blasphemy of God, give up your speculation

about the hidden God, and cease to strive in vain to see the face of God."[42]

God made himself known through his word and instituted the holy sacraments so that we

may completely certain about our salvation. If you say, "I cannot believe," Luther replies, "if you

do not doubt that the Son of God died for you, you surely believe, because to believe is nothing

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[41] *LW* 5:45; WA 43:460. "Sic faciam: Ex Deo non revelato fiam revelatus, et tamen idem Deus manebo. Ego incarnabor vel mittam filium meum, hic morietur pro tuis peccatis, et resurget a mortuis. Atque ita implebo desiderium tuum, ut possis scire, an sis praedestinatus, an non. [Matth. 17, 6] 'Ecce, hic est filius meus: Hunc audito', hunc aspice iacentem in praesepio, in matris gremio, pendentem in cruce. Vide, quid is faciat, quid loquatur. [Joh. 14, 9] Ibi me certo appraehendes. 'Qui enim me videt, inquit Christus, videt et patrem ipsum.' Si hunc audieris, et in nomine eius baptisatus fueris, et diliges verbum eius, tum certo es praedestinatus, et certus de tua salute. Si vero maledicis aut contemnis verbum, tum es damnatus. Quia, qui non credit, condemnatur."

[42] *LW* 5:45; WA 43:459. "Id unum age, ut suscipias filium, ut placeat in corde tuo Christus in sua nativitate, miraculis et cruce… Si vis effugere desperationem, odium, blasphemiam Dei, omitte speculationem de Deo abscondito, et desine frustra contendere ad videndam faciem Dei."

else than to regard these facts as the sure and unquestionable truth."[43] If you say, "I don't know whether I remain in faith," Luther urges us to accept the present promise and do not inquire the secret counsels of God.[44] Recalling Cary's discussion of Luther's twofold structure of word and unreflective faith is helpful.[45] The twofold structure of word is Christ's promise in the Scripture and the sacramental word of absolution. When the priest proclaims absolution to me, it is Christ's word spoken in the mouth of the priest. This faith is unreflective, for all one needs to do is cling to Christ's promise enclosed in the sacrament instead of our psychological awareness of our faith. In sum, what Luther said in his comments on Gen. 26:9 provides an interpretive key to *De servo arbitrio*, and in turn the interpretive key that Luther provided can further be qualitied in his comments on the election of Jacob and rejection of Esau as stated in Gen. 25 and Rom. 9. In this way, our study of *fortuita misericordia* not only sets forth Luther's theological hermeneutics of the unchosen for its own sake but also in a fair extent contributes to the modification of Luther's former statement on election as formulated in his 1525's *De servo arbitrio*.

Hence there are two kinds of hiddenness of God in Luther's thought. But in whichever case, clinging to the revealed God in his Word by faith remains the only remedy to counteract the spiritual trials, be it uncertainty of salvation or bodily affliction, set before us. Resuming our discussion of Gen. 25:22, Luther continued on to the discussion of God's hiddenness behind the suffering of the saints. He encourages us to cling to the word of God with faith and hope in a notable passage to quote as follows,

> But we have nothing from God except the pure Word, namely, that the Lord Jesus sits
> at the right hand of the Father and is the Judge of the living and the dead, and that

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[43] *LW* 5:46; WA 43:460. "Sed dices: Non possum credere. … Dicebam igitur, si statuis ista omnia vera esse, nihil est, cur de tua incredulitate quereris. Si enim non dubitas filium Dei pro te mortuum esse, certe credis. Quia credere nihil aliud est, quam habere ista pro certa et indubitata veritate."

[44] *LW* 5:44; WA 43:460.

[45] See Chapter Four, p. 135.

through Him we are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6). But where can this be discerned? Not in the indicative mood, but in the imperative and in the optative. Why He hides Himself in this way we shall see on that Day, when all enemies will have been put under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25). Meanwhile we should believe and hope. For if one could see it now before one's eyes, there would be no need of faith. But no matter how false our faith seems and how vain our hope, I know in spite of this that we shall tread the Turk under our feet and that those who now lie buried and whose blood he shed will tread him underfoot and thrust him down into hell. All the rest of the martyrs who were burnt by the emperor, the pope, the French, and others will do the same thing. For it is the wisdom of the saints to believe in the truth in opposition to the lie, in the hidden truth in opposition to the manifest truth, and in hope in opposition to hope.[46]

When Rebecca felt despair, doubtful and hopeless, she turned to prayer. God answered her prayer with an oracle about the future of her two sons, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." In this oracle, God revealed himself to his people in order to show that the prayer that relies on the divine promise would never disappoint.[47] Luther then closely examined the oracle announced to Rebecca by breaking it down into four statements. The first clause, "two nations are in your womb," indicates that Rebecca's two sons will become two strong people. The second, "two people shall be divided," implies that the people will be separated according to the flesh, each has its own household, government and church, for Luther believed that Esau later "brought with him from Abraham's house circumcision and some sacrificial rites. Thus his

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[46] *LW* 4:357; WA 43:393. "Nos vero nihil aliud habemus a Deo, nisi purum verbum, quod Dominus Iesus sedet ad dextram patris, et est iudex vivorum et mortuorum, per quem sumus reges et sacerdotes. Sed ubi possunt haec discerni? Non in indicativo: sed imperativo et optativo modo. Cur enim se ita abscondat, cernemus in illo die, cum fuerint inimici omnes subiecti pedibus ipsius. Interim credamus et speremus. Si enim iam oculis coram intueri liceret, nihil opus esset fide. Utut vero fides falsa, et spes vana esse videatur: tamen futurum scio, ut Turcam pedibus nostris proteramus, et qui nunc sepulti iacent, quorum sanguinem effudit, hi conculcabunt eum et deturbabunt in infernum. Idem facient et reliqui martyres omnes, qui a Caesare, Papa, Gallo et aliis exusti sunt. Quia haec est scientia sanctorum, credere contra mendacium in veritatem, contra veritatem manifestam in veritatem absconditam, contra spem in spem."

[47] *LW* 4:360; WA 43:395. Luther suggests it is Shem who proclaimed the oracle to Rebecca, see *LW* 4:362–63; WA 43:397–98.

people had its own government, rights and church."[48] The last two clauses bear the most weight: "The one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." This prophecy, Luther remarked, was not fulfilled in the lifetime of Jacob but fulfilled only when David's general, Joab, defeated the Edomites (2 Sam. 8:13–14; 1 Kgs. 9:15–16).

Concerning the spiritual promise disclosed in this oracle, Luther again related the oracle to the development of the salvation history that culminated in the Son of God. From Mal. 1 and Rom. 9, Luther suggested that we can relate the oracle to the spiritual and true account. Jacob the younger will become the heir of spiritual promise concerning Christ. "For from that weak part the Son of God had to be born, in order that salvation might not be from the Gentiles and from the Edomites but might be from the Jews, as is stated in John 4:22. Everything has been written on account of Christ, who came from that line of the smaller people."[49] Election in this sense is not something about God's hidden decree concerning personal salvation, but rather the way in which God unfolded his grand salvation scheme in history concerning the physical birth of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ.

This observation lead to the crucial observation that, since election or chosen-ness has nothing to do with personal salvation, the non-elect or unchosen-ness was by no means soteriologically condemned. As Luther boldly claimed,

> I have stated about the church of Cain and the church of Ishmael that they were rejected, but in such a way that the rejection would lead to their humiliation, in order that they might relinquish the inheritance which they presumed they would have as a result of their flesh. *Yet they were saved through repentance and through faith in the promise*. Thus the text gives evidence that many descendants of Edom were saved, not because they were the children of Edom—for that line was rejected—but because

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[48] *LW* 4:365; WA 43:398. "Habebunt etiam institutas oeconomias, politias et Ecclesias, sed erit aliqua differentia. Dividentur enim in diversas religiones, politias, iura et leges."

[49] *LW* 4:367; WA 43:400. "Nam ex illa infirma parte debuit nasci filius Dei, ut salus non ex gentibus, non ex Edomaeis esset, sed ex [Joh. 4, 22] Iudaeis. Ut Ioannis 4. dicitur 'Omnia propter Christum scripta sunt, qui venit ex linea illa minoris populi.'"

they took hold of the promise by faith, in accord with Paul's statement (Rom. 9:8): "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise." Accordingly, they joined the Ishmaelites and said: "Sarah is our grandmother, and Abraham is our ancestor. But this will not save me, for the carnal procreation is of no benefit at all. But I believe in the Seed promised to the fathers, just as Isaac and Jacob believed and were saved." *All who had this faith obtained the inheritance of eternal life, but of those descendants who persisted in presuming that they were greater because of the flesh all perished.*"[50]

Salvation is a matter of faith in the promise, whether or not you are among the "chosen people"—the people through which Christ will be born physically—does not really matter, for the children of God are always the children of promise instead of children of flesh. The descendants of Cain, Ishmael and Esau are excluded from the spiritual covenant bound to the future birth of Christ, which God established with Abraham, but by the mercy of God they have the opportunity to repent, provided that they cling to the promise in faith.

Election, covenant, and promise relate in this way: God established his covenant with Abraham and his bodily descendants in order that the promised Seed, Christ, will be born out of this line of progeny. This establishment is known by Luther as divine election. However, Luther tenaciously rejected the idea that being ethnically preserved in the Abrahamic covenant as the "chosen people" guarantees salvation of every individual, or that being ethnically rejected from the Abrahamic covenant as the "unchosen" must lead one to damnation. The way of salvation counts on one's faith in the promise instead of one's ethnic identity. This concept is best illustrated in Luther's comment on Gen. 17, the institution of circumcision, as discussed in the

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[50] *LW* 4:367; WA 43:400 (emphasis added). "Sicut autem de Cainica et Ismaelitica Ecclesia dixi: quod fuerint reiecti: sed ita, ut abiectio illa ad humiliationem ipsorum faceret, ut resignarent haereditatem, quam praesumpserunt habituros se ex carne. Per poenitentiam autem et fidem in promissionem salvati sunt. Ita textus testatur, quod multi ex Edom salvati sunt, non ideo, quod essent filii Edom: quia illa linea est reprobata, sed quia promissionem fide appraehenderunt, [Röm. 9,8] iuxta sententiam Pauli: 'Non qui filii carnis, hi filii Dei, sed qui filii sunt promissionis.' Coniunxerunt igitur se cum Ismaelitis, et dixerunt: Sara avia nostra, et Abraham pater noster est, sed in hoc non salvador, nihil enim prodest carnalis generatio, se credo in semen, quod promissum est patribus, sicut Isaac et Iacob crediderunt, et salvati sunt. Hanc fidem quicunque habuerunt, haereditatem vitae aeternae nacti sunt, sed qui ex illa posteritate manserunt in praesumptione maioritatis ex carne, illi omnes perierunt."

previous chapter. Like baptism, circumcision has no validity itself, but "faith in the promise that was added to circumcision did have validity."[51] A circumcised Jew won't be saved if he kept his heart uncircumcised, and an uncircumcised Gentile won't be damned if he embraces the promise in faith.[52] This concept befits what Christ and Paul said about Abraham's faith, as Luther recalled,

> We must all come to this knowledge, just as in Rom. 4:12 Paul calls Abraham the father of the circumcised, 'who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.' Thus Christ says in John 8:39: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did;' for he believed God, and through the promised Seed he obtained righteousness and salvation. Thus those who believe God become children of Abraham and children of God."[53]

The rest of the Gen. 26 (v. 24–34) reports the birth and childhood of the two sons, and also the Jacob's trade for primogeniture with Esau. The birth of Esau and Jacob reinforces Luther's idea that "the elder shall serve the younger," undermines all fleshly glory and upholds God's calling. In speaking of God's judgment of the two sons, Luther insisted that he is "not speaking about the judgements of God a priori, which He has with Himself in His innermost and secret counsels."[54] Rather, he is speaking about "God a posteriori, as He calls, speaks and manifests Himself, just as He says to Moses (Ex. 33:23): 'You shall see My back.'"[55] Luther said that we

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[51] *LW* 3:111; WA 42:627. "Non enim circumcisio, ut opus, per se valebat, sed fides in promissionem circumcisioni additam."

[52] *LW* 3:107; WA 42:624. "Multi igitur ex gentibus crediderunt. Iudaei autem retinuerunt corda incircumcisa, sic circumcisio etiam gentibus occasio salutis et utilis fuit."

[53] *LW* 4:367–68; WA 43:400–401. "Sicut Paulus Rom⌊anorum 4. Abraham patrem circumcisionis appellat, 'non iis tantum, qui sunt ex circumcisione, sed et iis, qui sectantur vestigia fidei, quae fuit in praeputio [Joh. 8, 39] patris nostri Abrahae'. Sic Christus Ioan⌊nis 8. ait: 'Si filii Abrahae essetis, opera Abrahe faceretis', Is enim credidit Deo, et per promissum semen iustitiam et salutem consecutus est. Ita qui credunt Deo, filii Abrahae et filii Dei fiunt.'"

[54] Jerome's Vulgate reads "you shall see my back" in Ex. 33:23 as "videbis posteriora mea faciem." Accordingly, "God a priori" should be understood as "the face of God" in this context. See the following footnote.

[55] See *LW* 4:371; WA 43:403. "Non loquor de iudiciis Dei a priori, quae habet apud se in intimis et arcanis consiliis suis: Quare sic vel aliter consultet, agat, regat, salvet, perdat etc. sed de vocante, loquente, manifestante [2.

can learn two things we can learn from the birth of Esau and Jacob. First, the shaggy and ruddy appearance with which Esau was born with gave rise the impression that this firstborn infant is destined to be extraordinary. Yet in God's sight these glorious signs—being shaggy and ruddy—are totally unfavorable.[56] Second, like his father Abraham, Isaac misinterprets the oracle concerning his two sons by thinking that the oracle has already been fulfilled in Rebecca's womb before her delivery. The lesson we should learn here is that one should always pay attention to the word of God instead of any humans, regardless of how saintly they are.[57]

The childhood of Esau and Jacob provides for Luther an opportunity to highlight the observation that Esau deprived himself by puffing up in his primogeniture, as well as the way which Jacob lived a pious and faithful life before God. Esau went astray in several ways. First, by presumptuously thinking that he would never lose his firstborn blessings, Esau takes a wife from the Canaanites.[58] Second, Esau arrogates the leadership position of the church of Abraham without obeying his mother in the trivial household errands. He "occupied himself in the fields with hunting, riding horseback, and waging war."[59] Furthermore, as Esau's wealth accumulates, he lapses into arrogance and eventually the riches become an idol for him.[60] On the other hand, Jacob is simple and steadfast. He a man with no political and carnal ambitions. Although Jacob is capable of properly administering the earthly affairs, he "dwelt exclusively in tents; that is, he

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Mose 33, 23] se a posteriori. Quemadmodum ad Mosen dicit: 'Posteriora mea videbis."

[56] *LW* 4:374–5; WA 43:405.

[57] *LW* 4:376–77; WA 43:407. Luther's theory is that Jacob was the elder in the womb but became younger at birth because he was overcome by his brother Esau.

[58] *LW* 4:379; WA 43:409.

[59] *LW* 4:380; WA 43:409. "Esau exercebat se in agris venando et equitando et bellando."

[60] *LW* 4:381; WA 43:410.

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remained at home with his father and mother, and served them."[61] In sum, Esau "sought the

kingdom of the world" and "lost both, namely, the worldly and the spiritual kingdom" while

Jacob's "heart and trust clung completely to God, and he was a pious and godly young man."[62]

With this polarity of virtuous and vicious life between the two brothers in mind, one may

ask, how would Luther understand the apparently deceitful behavior of Jacob that he purchased

his brother's birthright with the price of red pottage? Surprising as it might be, Luther believed

that the two brothers both sinned. Luther explicitly rejected Lyra's opinion, who was convinced

that Esau sinned by selling the birthright while Jacob did not sin because he knew he was the

firstborn by divine decree.[63] After a long discussion on the nature of simony, Luther agreed that

Jacob "cannot be excused and freed from the offense of simony; for he states plainly: Sell me

your birthright."[64] On the other hand, Esau was also a simonist because he despised he spiritual

blessing and sold his birthright "for the goods and pleasures of the present world" and therefore

"before God he was deprived in reality of his primogeniture and all his possessions."[65] Luther's

overall attitude toward Esau in this chapter was harsher and more unsympathetic than his

disposition toward Jacob. Yet a notable comment of Luther at the end of the chapter concerning

the rejection of Esau alludes that Luther still affirmed Esau's salvation. "The Epistle to the

Hebrews (12:17) bears witness that later on he was rejected [*reprobatum*], and although he tried

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[61] *LW* 4:383; WA 43:412. "Quanquam politica possunt pie et recte administrari, sed fuit totus et frequens in tabernaculis, id est, mansit domi apud patrem et matrem, et iis serviit."

[62] *LW* 4:384; WA 43:412. "Econtra Esau quaerebat mundi regnum, ideo utrunque amisit, mundanum et spirituale. … Ergo Iacob ad tempus fuit minor et inferior fratre. Sed haesit eius animus et fiducia tota in Deo, et fuit bonus et pius iuvenis."

[63] *LW* 4:395; WA 43:420.

[64] *LW* 4:401; WA 43:424. "Apparet Iacob ursisse emptionem: ita ut non possit excusari et liberari crimine Simoniae, quia aperte dicit: 'Vende mihi primogenita tua.'"

[65] *LW* 4:402; WA 43:424–25. "Non intellexit Esau magnitudinem benedictionis, ideo pro praesentis saeculi bonis et voluptatibus eam vendidit: ita ut coram Deo revera primogenitura et omnibus bonis privatus sit."

to recover his birthright—because he repented of having sold it—yet that repentance did not accomplish anything at all, *not that he was not saved*, but that he was unable by means of any tears to obtain the blessing he had once lost."[66] Luther interpreted the rejection of Esau as his failure of recovering the birthright, not that he was rejected from eternal salvation. Put it bluntly, for Luther, Esau is a saved reprobate. As we have early indicated, Luther was convinced that Ishmael and Esau repented and their personal salvation was secured.[67] One may immediately raise the question, "How did the salvation of Esau occur?" The next section will explore Luther's answer.

The Transferal of the Blessing and the Reunion of the Brothers: Genesis 27 and 33

Genesis 27 records the transferal of firstborn blessing from Esau to Jacob through the deceiving act of the younger. Luther began his comments with the computation of years. How would the divine prophecy fulfill, Isaac ponders in his old age, that Jacob remained single for the last 77 years while Esau has taken two wives for himself for 37 years and bore many children with him?[68] As mentioned earlier, Luther suggested that Isaac misinterpreted the oracle by thinking that it has already been fulfilled in Rebecca's womb before her parturition.[69] Rebecca, on the other hand, held the opposite opinion. Therefore there is "friendly disagreement" between the couple. In the eyes of Luther, Isaac "clings to the literal sense of the prophecy" like the Jews

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[66] *LW* 4:409; WA 43:430 (emphasis added). "Sed Epistola ad Hebraeos testatur eum postea reprobatum esse, et quanquam conatus sit recuperare primogenituram, quod poeniteret eum venditionis, tamen nihil profecisse poenitentia illa: Non quod non sit salvatus, sed quod nullis lachrimis benedictionem semel amissam consequi potuerit."

[67] *LW* 4:350; WA 43:388.

[68] *LW* 5:100–1; WA 43:497–98.

[69] *LW* 4:376–7; WA 43:407. See p. 188 above for Luther's comments on the birth of Esau.

while Rebecca "the very saintly matron … is enlightened by the Holy Spirit to support Jacob."[70] Moreover, for Luther, Esau's obedience to his father in hunting out for game is simply superficial and all he wanted was his primogeniture blessing. Thus, Esau is "an outstanding hypocrite who deserved well of his father … and yet deceived him with this hypocrisy."[71] This dual opinion concerning the couple and the hypocrisy of Esau set the stage for Luther's later treatment of Jacob's scheme of deception.

Luther's explanation for Jacob's deceptive act with the help of his mother against his father appears quite convoluted and confusing. At first, after asserting that Esau is an outstanding hypocrite, Luther opined that it is God who "judges justly and transfers the blessing from the wicked hypocrite Esau to the pious and guileless Jacob."[72] Later, when Luther addressed the question "Did Rebecca and her son Jacob have the right to lie?" he plainly admitted that we have to guess since he has nothing from the exegetical tradition to help.[73] On the one hand, Luther acknowledged that the lie is "rashness and boldness coupled with extraordinary deception."[74] On the other hand, Luther insisted that Rebecca did not come to this scheme on her own but from the advice of other, namely, Eber, the great-grandson of Noah and father of Peleg (Gen. 11:10–17).[75] Apparently Luther was trying to let Rebecca off the hook in her deceptive act against her husband. Furthermore, since Luther already set the dual opinion concerning the husband and

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[70] *LW* 5:104; WA 43:500. "Deinde haeret in literali sensu oraculi. Perinde ut Iudaei in carnali intellectu scripturae, horum enim Isaac gerit imaginem cecutiens et senex. Contra sanctissima matrona offensa acerbitate uxorum Esau et filii superbia, illustrante spiritu sancto, fovet Iacob."

[71] *LW* 5:108; WA 43:503. "Ideo Moses describit Esau insignem hypocritam, qui singularibus officiis demeruerit patrem, et tamen hypocrisi ista ei imposuerit."

[72] *LW* 5:108; WA 43:503. "Etsi igitur Isaac, qui cecus et senex est, illuditur a filio in speciem obedientissimo, Deus tamen iuste iudicat, et transfert benedictionem ab improbo hypocrita Esau ad bonum et simplicem Iacob."

[73] *LW* 5:110; WA 43:504.

[74] *LW* 5:110; WA 43:504. "Magna haec temeritas et audacia est cum insigni fraude et damno maximo."

[75] *LW* 5:111; WA 43:505.

wife and concluded that it is God who transfers the blessing, he was now running one step further by saying that Rebecca and Jacob "were bound to disregard the law and rule [of primogeniture] and to follow the exception by which God transferred the primogeniture from Esau and Jacob."[76] In sum, because of the God-sanctioned motive behind the whole plot, "Rebecca and Jacob did not sin. No, they acted in a godly and saintly manner. They had every right to despoil Esau and to deprive him of that fief of the primogeniture."[77]

However, in his comments afterwards, Luther seemed to back off from his bold claim that Rebecca and Jacob acted in a saintly manner. In commenting on Gen. 27:11–14, the dialogue between Jacob and Rebecca concerning the risk of cheating Isaac, Luther admitted that while proceeding in faith, Rebecca "does many rash things and involves herself and her son in very many dangers."[78] Yet God pardons the mistake she made and grants the plan success. "Although Rebecca's plan was rash, it had a fortunate outcome, because God brings the plans of the ungodly to nothing but honors and helps His saints."[79]

Still more complicated, in his comments on Gen. 33:9, Luther seemed to forget his former harsh words about Esau:

> But I think that Esau was truly changed in his heart, although he had a very just cause
> for hatred and indignation. *For the blessing rightfully belonged to him as the*
> *firstborn*, but he was a great man, a fine, brave man, undoubtedly instructed in the

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[76] *LW* 5:113; WA 43:506. "Cum igitur essent certi Iacob et Rebecca pertinere primogenituram ad Iacob ex oraculo et ex malis fructibus ac moribus Esau, debuerunt contemnere legem et regulam, et sequi exceptionem, qua transtulit Deus primogenituram ab Esau ad Iacob."

[77] *LW* 5:116; WA 43:508. "Proinde non peccarunt, sed pie et sancte fecerunt Rebecca et Iacob, atque omni iure spoliaverunt Esau, et rapuerunt feudum illud primogeniturae."

[78] *LW* 5:117; WA 43:509. "agitur quidem a spiritu sancto, et procedit in sua fide, sed tamen multa temere facit, et plurimis periculis se et filium involvit."

[79] *LW* 5:121; WA 43:511. "Erat sane temerarium consilium Rebeccae, sed foeliciter successit: quia Deus dissipat consilia impiorum. Sed sanctos suos honorat et adiuvat."

doctrine and sermons of Isaac and the other fathers among whom he was brought up, and he learned to curb his evil desires.[80]

Granted that Esau's change of heart happened years after the transferal of blessing, how would one understand the rest of Luther's comment? If the firstborn blessing rightfully belonged to Esau, doesn't it imply that it is sinful for Rebecca and Jacob to appropriate the blessing for themselves? How would Esau simultaneously be an evil hypocrite and a fine brave man? Three observations emerge when examining Luther's ambivalent attitude toward Esau.[81]

First, Luther's ambivalent attitude toward Esau may simply reflect the fact that he was engaging with the text as the narrative unfolds. After all, Luther's Genesis lectures were reproduced from the notes of his students which, except for the first few chapters, Luther never had a chance to revisit and revise. Second, in justifying Rebecca and Jacob in their deception of Isaac, Luther was incorporating his *theologia crucis* pedagogy—God despises the firstborn in favor of the second birth—as fitting into the Esau-Jacob relation. Since God favors the second-born, Luther may have pondered, Jacob must be humble and godly. Also, since Luther saw the change of Esau shown in Gen. 33, his attitude towards Esau changed accordingly. Luther no longer saw him as the despicable brother of Jacob, but a "fine, great, brave man" who rightfully possessed the firstborn blessings. These two statements concerning Jacob and Esau are simply contradicting, but Luther could live with that. Third, on a deeper level, though, I suspect Luther's inconsistent comments on Esau reflect his understanding of God's working at times. God is faithful. Still, in the words of Kolb, "God seems not to be acting according to human

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[80] *LW* 6:170; WA 43:126 (emphasis added). "Sed ego existimo Esau vere et ex animo mutatum esse, tametsi iustissimam causam odii et indignationis haberet. Debebatur enim ei benedictio tanquam primogenito. Sed fuit magnus vir, ein feiner, dapfferer man, instructus haud dubie doctrina et sermonibus Isaac et aliorum patrum, apud quos educatus est, et didicit frenare cupiditates."

[81] I am indebted to Dr. Erik Herrmann and Dr. Robert Kolb for their insights in the following comments.

expectations when he permits Rebekah to deceive Isaac and cause him to transfer the blessing from Esau to Isaac." [*sic*].[82] As Luther commented in his 1523 sermon on Gen. 27, "In all stories of the Bible, God is faithful and at the same time presents himself as unfaithful so that we can be smart enough to learn to know him truly and how he carries out what he has to do on a level beyond our imagination and reason."[83] In short, Luther was troubled by God's permission to the deception which Rebecca and Jacob performed. The seemingly unfaithful act of God was the underlying basis of all comments of Luther concerning the characters involved in this story.

Since Esau remains our primary focus of this chapter, we will not delve into Luther's comments on the whole story, including the theological and ethical difficulty behind Luther's explanation, namely, is it fair to say a deceptive act is godly in the eyes of God? Instead, before we turn to Luther's comments on Esau's reaction to Jacob's "saintly, legitimate, and pious fraud,"[84] a brief comment is needed concerning the blessings that the twin brothers received. Luther identified a threefold blessing in Isaac's words to Jacob in disguise: the first pertaining to the body and family, the second pertaining to authority, and the third pertaining to priesthood.[85] The blessing Esau received, though, has only a domestic aspect. It cannot even be called a blessing, for Luther noticed that the text (Gen. 27:39–40) does not mention "blessing" but is only about the fatness of Esau's future dwelling.[86]

Seeing his blessing was taken from him by deceit, Esau cried out to his father with exceeding bitterness (Gen. 27:34–35). In Luther's eyes, Esau's tears are just signs of false

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[82] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God*, 121.

[83] WA 14.365–66; WA 24:660–61, as quoted from Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God*, 121.

[84] *LW* 5:150; WA 43:532.

[85] *LW* 5:138–39; WA 43:523–24.

[86] *LW* 5:159; WA 43:538.

repentance. Luther read Heb. 12:16–17[87] in a way that Esau is rejected, not from salvation, but from the repossession of his blessing. Besides, Luther understood the statement "he found no chance to repent" in Heb. 12:17 as Esau's false repentance, for there is no way true repentance could not find room before God.[88] The best evidence for Esau's false repentance was his reaction after his blessing was announced—Esau's hatred towards Jacob. Esau hated his brother to a degree that he swore himself to kill Jacob once his father is about to die (Gen. 27:41). Luther believed that here Esau is angry "not only with his brother but also with his parents and with God Himself."[89] Esau wants to kill his brother with the sword, kill his parents with sorrow, and in doing so the blessing of the church attached to Jacob will also be deprived.[90] Finally, when Esau's evil plan was exposed to Rebecca, she decided to send Jacob off to her brother Laban. Here Luther made an interesting connection between Rebecca's plan with divine predestination. Although Rebecca was sure that neither Jacob will be killed nor will the blessing be revoked, she nevertheless worked on her best to secure the safety of her son.[91] Rebecca's knowledge of divine providence does not prevent her from fulfilling her obligation of taking care of the household.

At the end of the previous section we depicted Esau as a "saved reprobate" because in Luther's eyes the statement that Esau is rejected in Heb. 12:17 is more of the impossibility of regaining the firstborn blessing than the rejection from salvation.[92] Through the end of Gen. 27,

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[87] (Hebrews 12:16–17) "That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears."

[88] *LW* 5:151–52; WA 43:533.

[89] *LW* 5:162; WA 43:540. "Pulchram vero poenitentiam, irascitur non solum fratri, sed et parentibus et Deo ipsi."

[90] *LW* 5:163; WA 43:540–41.

[91] *LW* 5:173; WA 43:548.

[92] *LW* 4:409; WA 43:430. See pp. 189–90 for the full discussion.

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however, Esau was still obsessed with his evil plot of killing his brother and not showing any evidence of true repentance. When, in Luther's opinion, did Esau turn from a counterfeit penitent to true believer? The answer lies in Luther's comments on Gen. 33, where Luther affirmed Esau is conquered by the goodness of God and his will is changed [*Quia voluntas eius mutantur*].[93] From this example, we learn that God alone can change hearts.[94]

Genesis 33 narrates the fascinating story of the reunion between Jacob and Esau after years of separation. In the beginning of his lecture on this chapter, Luther asserted that, while by faith Jacob become a conqueror of God and men (Gen. 32:22–32), Esau "has experienced such a change that he not only does not want to harm him but even wants to help, love, and be good to him. His anger has been changed into brotherly kindness."[95] Through faith and prayer, Jacob was able to conquer the wrath of Esau, a truly "beautiful victory by which man's will is changed of its own accord."[96] Luther did not go through much concrete details about the ways Esau's will was changed, for the main protagonist of this passage remains Jacob and his humble act of reconciliation. Nevertheless, it seemed plain to Luther that Esau did show the fruit of a changed heart. "No one can doubt that Esau is doing and saying everything from his heart and that he is really changed. He rushes up to his brother, embraces him, falls on his neck, and kisses him, and neither of them can contain his tears for joy."[97]

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[93] *LW* 6:156; WA 44:117.

[94] Kolb, *Luther and Stories of God*, 72–73.

[95] *LW* 6:156; WA 44:116. "Deus benedixit ei. Frater autem Esau ita mutatus est, ut non solum non velit nocere, sed etiam iuvare, amare et benefacere. Ira eius mutata est in fraternitatem suavissimam."

[96] *LW* 6:158; WA 44:118. "Nulla violentia, sed suavissima et pulcherrima victoria, qua voluntas hominis sua sponte mutatur."

[97] *LW* 6:164; WA 44:122. "nemo dubitare queat, quin Esau ex animo faciat et loquatur omnia, et revera mutatus sit. Adcurrit enim ad fratrem, amplectitur, ruit in collum eius, osculatur, nec temperat sibi uterque a lachrimis prae gaudio."

Luther believed that Esau probed carefully the Word of promise given to him by his father, and worked diligently according to the promise.[98] The splendid material blessings brought forth from his firm conviction and diligent work did create a sense of vainglory in Esau's mind. However, Luther remains confident of Esau's salvation. Below is a key passage from Luther on Esau's final spiritual status,

> It is also likely that *in the end Esau was saved*. God made this distinction between Jacob and Esau and likewise between Isaac and Ishmael to show that His kingdom is purely spiritual. There is no doubt that many of the offspring and posterity of Esau were saved. For many of the Edomites were joined to the people of God in Israel and circumcised, and many came up annually to Jerusalem for the appointed celebration of the festivals and worshiped there. Accordingly, Esau hoped that he would participate in the grace of God and the spiritual blessing, and he noticed that he was also being blessed and enriched in a material way. Then he saw the humiliation of his brother, and all of this served to soften and mitigate his heart so that he became truly reconciled to his brother from the heart and came to this conclusion: "Why should I kill my brother? Why should I vent my anger on his lovely children and wives? God forbid that I should become a parricide!" Esau was just as delighted with the wealth and good fortune that had fallen to Jacob's lot as if they belonged to himself.[99]

In Luther's eyes, the distinction made by God between Jacob and Esau was not so much God's inscrutable will concerning the salvation of individuals as to the demonstration of the nature of God's kingdom. With this in mind, Luther could approach the story of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau in a different manner. The present passage provided Luther with clear evidences that Esau underwent a genuine change of heart. Luther saw further proof for Esau's fruit of

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[98] *LW* 6:165; WA 44:123.

[99] *LW* 6:166; WA 44:123–24 (emphasis added). "Et est verisimile Esau tandem salvatum esse. Ideo autem Deus discrimen hoc inter Iacob et Esau, item inter Isaac et Ismael constituit, ut ostenderet regnum suum esse simpliciter spirituale. Nec dubium est, quin multi ex progenie et posteris Esau sint salvati. Multi enim ex Edomitis populo Dei in Israel adiuncti et circuncisi sunt, multi quotannis ad festorum celebrationem solennem Ierosolimam ascenderunt, qui ibi adorarunt. Speravit igitur Esau se participem fore gratiae Dei et benedictionis spiritualis, et sensit etiam se corporaliter benedici et augeri. Deinde fratris humilitatem vidit, quae omnia profuerunt ad leniendum et mitigandum ipsius animum, ut vere et ex animo fratri reconciliaretur, et sic secum statueret. Cur fratrem meum occidam? cur in liberos suavissimos et coniuges saeviam? Avertat Deus, ne fiam parricida. Ac delectatur Esau non aliter opibus et fortunis, quae obtigerunt Iacob, ac si ad sese pertinerent."

repentance in his inquiry about Jacob's family in Gen. 33:5. Luther was convinced that Esau asked this question in a sincere heart and friendly manner, for his will had changed, and all suspicion and pretense between the brothers were thus cast away.[100] Next, when Jacob sought to find Esau's favor with his gifts, Esau simply refused, as stated in Gen. 33:9, "I have plenty, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." Luther suggested that this was yet another sign of Esau's friendly manner arisen from a changed heart as opposed to the Jews' opinion that Esau's goodwill was pretentious and he remained arrogant with his material abundance.[101]

Luther's comments on Isaac's burial in Gen. 35:27–29 bring this discussion to a close. Luther noticed that the two brothers were present at Isaac's burial, with Esau's name ahead of Jacob. "This is a sure sign that he [Esau] returned into favor with his brother and attached himself to the true church so that he might become a partaker of the spiritual promise from grace, if not from the promise. Similarly, we heathen are received into favor not as a result of a promise but from mercy."[102] In sum, along with our brief note on Gen. 35:27–29, Gen. 33 is the fascinating story of the reconciliation between the two rival brothers, where multiple signs exist evincing to us that Esau's heart has changed. Therefore, Luther was willing to indicate that "in the end Esau was saved." Here Luther connected Esau's salvation with the heathen who obtained God's favor because of mercy. Luther probed this topic in greater detail in the account of Esau's descendants in Gen. 36.

Esau's Descendants and the Blessings They Received (Gen. 36)

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[100] *LW* 6:167; WA 44:124.

[101] *LW* 6:170–71; WA 44:127.

[102] *LW* 6:281; WA 44:209. "Et est signum certum rediisse eum in gratiam cum fratre, et se adiunxisse verae Ecclesiae, ut fieret particeps promissionis spiritualis, si non ex promissione, tamen ex gratia. Sicut nos gentes recipimur in gratiam, non ex promisso, sed ex misericordia."

The final section of this chapter concludes the discussion of Esau as an individual, and paves the way for the next chapter, which focuses on Egyptians as a people. While this section focuses on people descended from Esau, the focus will shift from the individual to the communal in the following chapter, scrutinizing specifically the ways which Luther presented the role of Gentiles or unchosen people in salvation history in relation to Christ's messianic ministry of the pre-Christian era.

From a compositional perspective, the place of the account of Esau's descendants in Genesis is noteworthy. Kenneth Mathews observes that, although all the genealogical records for the excluded "seed" are found in Genesis, "the excluded family tree is usually presented first and passed over so as to pave the way for the appointed line that supersedes in the narrative sources." In the case of Esau's family, however, "this pattern is altered with the Jacob-Esau rivalry, where the record of Esau's offspring, the Edomites (36:1–43), follows Jacob's twelve-son genealogy (35:22b–26). But after dispensing with Esau's family, the narrative interest is sustained on the twelve sons, particularly Joseph, in the remainder of the book."[103] This intentional literary twist seems to foresee, on the one hand, God's propensity for blessings even among the unchosen and, on the other hand, God's providential act in the land of Egypt during the time of famine. Mathews further notes that the inclusion of Esau's descendants in Gen. 36 is the corollary of divine blessings in order to remind us that "God's blessing then reached outside the line of Jacob, … and the proliferation of Edomite tribes typified God's intention to bring salvation to the nations also (e.g., [Gen.] 12:3; 26:4; 28:14)."[104]

Luther notably connected Cain, Ishmael and Esau in his opening comments on Gen. 36:1,

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[103] Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 57.

[104] Mathews, *Genesis 12–50*, 631.

which in fact puts the whole chapter into perspective,

> At the beginning of Genesis mention was made also of the generation of Cain. Although he was a reprobate, excommunicated and cursed in the land, God nevertheless left him an opportunity for repentance so that he himself and his posterity could obtain the blessings of the spiritual promise. Likewise, in Esau there is commended the example of divine patience also in the reprobate. For there is no doubt that Esau and Ishmael took the instruction of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with them, and likewise the sacrificial rites and especially those connected with circumcision. Many illustrious men, therefore, were born from Esau's blood. But they differed in this, that they did not have the promise of the Messiah. They were not promised mercy and the blessed Seed, the Virgin's Son and the Savior of the world, but for all that they were still not cast off, neither themselves nor their posterity, like the other heathen.[105]

Esau bears similarity to both Cain and Ishmael. Like Cain, he was a cursed reprobate who received divine merciful patience. Like Ishmael, he was instructed under the holy patriarchs in his upbringing and underwent the rite of circumcision. Yet the common denominator shared by all three persons is that they were unchosen—not having a place in the line of the Messianic promise—yet were not cast off from the possibility of salvation. Just as they themselves were not cast off from salvation, nor had their posterity been rejected.[106] According to Mathews, the inclusion of Esau's descendants in the Genesis narrative implies that they are divinely blessed and typifies "God's intention to bring salvation to the nations."[107]

Luther highlighted several heathen groups who were the beneficiaries of *fortuita*

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[105] *LW* 6:283; WA 44:210. "Initio Genesis etiam de generatione Cain dictum est, qui, etsi erat reprobus, excommunicatus et maledictus in terra, tamen Deus reliquit ei spacium poenitentiae, ut ipse et posteri possent consequi beneficia promissionis spiritualis. Ita in Esau commendatur exemplum divinae pacientiae, etiam in reprobis. Non enim dubium est, quin Esau et Ismael secum traxerint doctrinam Abrahae, Isaac et Iacob, ritus item sacrificiorum et praecipue circumcisionis. Ideo multi illustres viri ex sanguine Esau nati sunt. Sed in hoc differunt, quod non habuerunt promissionem Messiae, non est eis promissa misericordia et semen benedictum, filius virginis et salvator mundi. Sed tamen propterea non sunt abiecti nec ipsi, nec posteri, sicut alii gentiles."

[106] Here a brief note on how *glossa* and Lyra's *postilla* touch on the the passage should be informative. While *glossa* simply skipped over 36:1-6, Lyra's remark is about how the names Edom and Seir also became the name of a place. See *Glossa*, col. 373.

[107] Mathews, *Genesis 12–50*, 631.

misericordia and had a place in God's salvific plan. "Many Ethiopians, Ammonites, and

Edomites attached themselves to the confession and worship of the God of Israel in accordance

with God's call. Many of the Ninevites and Babylonians were saved by accidental mercy

[*fortuita misericordia*]."[108] Here Luther provided a short but fully developed manifestation of the

salvific benefit of *fortuita misericordia* in various heathen groups. Still, the bottom line is their

attachment to the true confession and worship. This seems to be the aspect which Mickey Mattox

overlooked in his article "*Fortuita misericordia*: Martin Luther on the Salvation of Biblical

Outsiders."[109] For Mattox, the idea of *fortuita misericordia* "signals that for Luther one 'dares to

hope' [the salvation of all] because the word of God has always been active, even among

'reprobate' peoples who have become foreigner to the promise."[110] However, this bold statement

should be (counter)balanced by another crucial component of Luther's *fortuita misericordia*

formula, namely, the response of the reprobate in their attachment to the true confession and

worship. Shown in the lives of Hagar and Ishmael as discussed in Chapter Five, the function of

the law and gospel must first be brought forth to them before the fruit of salvation is bore. Also,

what Esau first displayed after his blessings were stolen by his brother is false repentance, not

goodwill. Luther holds back his words of favor on Esau's salvation until he gave proof the fruits

of a changed heart in Gen. 33. Esau was not rejected from salvation, nor he was saved without

repentance. "For an approach to fellowship with the true church was always open to him [Esau],

provided only [*si mode*] that he humbled himself."[111] In short, the descendants of Cain, Ishmael,

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[108] *LW* 6:283–84; WA 44:211. "Multi Aethiopes, Ammonitae, Edomitae adiunxerunt se confessioni et culti Dei Israel, secundum vocationem Dei. Multi ex Ninivitis et Babiloniis salvati sunt fortuita misericordia. Quanquam gentibus non est promissus Christus, sicut semini Abrahae, nec credita eis sunt oracula Dei."

[109] Mattox's article is the prompt of this dissertation. See Chapter One, pp. 11–13.

[110] Mattox, "*Fortuita Misericordia*," 441.

[111] *LW* 6:284; WA 43:211 (emphasis added). "Semper enim patuit ei aditus ad societatem verae Ecclesiae, si

and Esau can be saved "through repentance and through faith in the promise."[112] What these instances elucidate about Luther's view on covenantal outsiders is that while *fortuita misericordia* made salvation accessible to the them, it did not necessitate their salvation. In the case of Cain, Luther clearly maintained that Cain "had completely forfeited the promise concerning the blessed Seed."[113] In the case of Ishmael's descendants, even though Ishmael diligently taught the word of God to his household, Luther sadly noted that after many generations his descendants lost the true worship and discarded the First Commandment.[114] The same is true for Esau's descendants. After all, the idea of universal accessibility of the Word, which we may deduce from this study of Luther, is diametrically different from the universalistic idea of salvation.

Does the fact that many pagan groups are recipients and beneficiaries of *fortuita misericordia* nullify the role of the Jews in salvation history? Not at all. For Luther, the Jews *had* an exclusive role in salvation history parallel to none other ethnic groups.[115] The following is perhaps the single most important passage in *Lectures on Genesis* that illuminates Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* in relation to the messianic promise and salvation.

> Christ was not promised to the heathen as He was promised to the seed of Abraham, and the oracles of God were not entrusted to them." For we must concede this honor to the seed of Abraham which Ps. 147:20 praises: "He has not dealt thus with any other nation." This people of Israel has patriarchs, prophets, and the sayings of God, and Paul says in Rom. 15:8–9: "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is

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modo humiliavit se."

[112] *LW* 4:367; WA 43:400. The quote can be found earlier in this chapter (pp. 185–86) where we were making the point that the unchosen for Luther does not entail soteriological condemnation.

[113] *LW* 1:314; WA 42:231.

[114] *LW* 4:328; WA 43:372–73.

[115] Notice a past tense "had" is used here.

written, 'Therefore I will praise Thee among the Gentiles, and sing to Thy name'"
(Ps. 18:50), but Christ did not come from Gentile seed.

It is necessary to distinguish between the promise and truth and accidental mercy
[*fortuita misericordia*]. We have mercy without the promise; the Jews have mercy
with the promise. Salvation is of the Jews, John 4:22 tells us. From the tribe of Judah
comes the Conqueror of death and the devil. Esau and Ishmael lacked this promise,
but they were not excluded from mercy, for the histories testify the opposite. Nor did
all who had the promise attach themselves to the church. For not the sons of the flesh
are the sons of God, but the sons of the promise. …

Therefore to say "We have the promise, and therefore we shall all be its heirs" does
not follow; neither does "We do not have the promise, and therefore we have been
rejected." From all peoples God has taken some, so that we should not boast. But he
who boasts, let him boast in the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 10:17), both he who has the promise
and he who does not have it, so that He Himself may be righteous and may make
righteous those who are of faith.[116]

A few observations: First, Luther, with no hesitation, conceded the honor to the Jews for

their possession of the promise. They had a special role in the divine masterplan because Jesus

Christ the conqueror of death and evil must physically come from "the tribe of Judah." Despite

the fact that Luther, whether consciously or inadvertently, limited his use of "the Jews" and

employs "the seed of Abraham" instead. This statement concerning the Jews becomes all the

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[116] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211. "Quanquam gentibus non est promissus Christus, sicut semini Abrahae, nec credita
eis sunt oracula Dei. Nam hanc gloriam necesse est nos concedere semini Abrahae, quam praedicat [Ps. 147,
20] 147. Psalmus 'Non fecit taliter omni nationi'   . Hic populus Israel habet Patriarchas, Prophetas, eloquia Dei. Et
Paulus inquit Romanorum [Röm. 15, 8] 15: 'Dico enim Christum Iesum ministrum fuisse circumcisionis propter
veritatem Dei et confirmandas promissiones patrum.' Gentes autem super [Röm. 15, 9; Ps. 18, 50] misericordia
honorare Deum, sicut scriptum est 'propterea tibi confitebor in gentibus, Domine, et nomini tuo cantabo' etc. sed ex
semine gentili non venit Christus.

Distinguendum est igitur inter promissionem ac veritatem et misericordiam fortuitam. Nos habemus
misericordiam sine promissione, Iudaei [Joh. 4, 22] cum promissione. Salus enim ex Iudaeis Ioannis 4. Ex tribu Iuda
venit victor mortis et Diaboli. Hac promissione caruerunt Esau et Ismael, sed a misericordia non sunt exclusi, quia
historiae diversum testantur. Sicut nec omnes, qui habuerunt promissionem, se adiunxerunt Ecclesiae. Non enim filii
carnis sunt filii Dei, sed filii promissionis. Imo in illa parte populi multa tetra portenta scelerum extiterunt, qualia ne
in gentium quidem historiis leguntur, ut David eiicitur a filio e regno. Tota domus funestissima est et calamitosior,
quam Tantali aut Pelopidarum in Graecia.

Non igitur sequitur: Nos habemus promissionem, igitur eius haeredes sumus omnes, sicut nec illud: Non
habemus promissionem, ergo sumus reiecti. Ex omnibus populis aliquos assumpsit Deus, ne gloriemur. Sed [2. Kor.
10, 17] 'qui gloriatur, in Domino glorietur', tam ille, qui habet promissionem, quam qui non habet, ut sit iustus ipse
et iustificans eos, qui sunt ex fide."

more striking when we know that, according to the editor of *Luther's Works* volume 1–8, the time which Luther gave lectures on Gen. 31–37 (late 1542 and late 1543),[117] he also composed his notorious *On the Jews and Their Lies*.[118] Accordingly, one can easily find some hostile expressions of Luther on the Jews throughout his lectures.[119]

Second, Luther distinguished two kinds of attachment to the promise, the physical one and the spiritual one. The former attachment does not entail the latter, nor that the lack of the former drives out the possibility of the latter. Here we wonder whether Luther was restating his comments on the life of Ishmael.[120] Luther saw the life of Ishmael as both a warning and a consolation. It is a warning for the Jews, the papal church and also for us if we attach ourselves solely to the external sign at the expense of taking hold of the promise by faith. It is a consolation for the Gentiles and for us that the merciful God is willing to grant his favor to those who trust him, even though they are covenantal outsiders.

Third and more importantly, since the distinction between the two kinds of attachment to the promise is made, Luther restated what he had spoken in his comments on Gen. 17 about the true heirs of Abraham,[121] but in a more concise and effective way: "Therefore to say 'We have the promise, and therefore we shall all be its heirs" does not follow; neither does "We do not have the promise, and therefore we have been rejected.' From all peoples God has taken *some*, so that we should not boast."[122] While the idea of *fortuita misericordia* did not minimize or nullify

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[117] *LW* 5: xi.

[118] *LW* 47:121–306; WA 53:417–552. This work is written in 1543.

[119] For instance, *LW* 6:291–93; WA 44:217.

[120] See Chapter Five, p. 162 for details of how Ishmael becomes simultaneously a warning for the Jews and a consolation for the Gentiles.

[121] See Chapter Five, p. 147 for Luther's refutation of the Jews' idea that they are Abraham's true heirs.

[122] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211 (emphasis added).

the role of the Jews in salvation history, this idea did problematize the Jews' definition of the true heirs of Abraham. Luther stated explicitly that "the sons of promise [namely, the Jews] lose the blessing when they are proud…. [by contrast] there are many excellent men full of the Holy Spirit among the posterity of EDOM."[123] In pride, the sons of promise as the Jews would lose the blessings; in humility, the unchosen as the Edomites would be blessed. Luther suggested that this is the reason "why Moses inserted the generation of Esau in the number of the saints and joined him and some of his posterity with the holy church: they became participants not in the promise but in the mercy which the promise shows forth."[124]

Although we will not delve deeper into Luther's comments on the whole chapter, several notes of Luther related to our subject matter are worth stating in brief. Throughout the rest of his comments on Gen. 36, Luther recurrently stated two facts about the Edomites: the blessings they received, and the true worship of Abraham they retained. In commenting the family of Esau in Gen. 36:6–8, Luther remarked that Esau's bodily blessing was great and he retained "the circumcision and the doctrine of the fathers and of the promise."[125] Later, Luther noted in his comments on Gen. 33:15–19 that Esau's possession of Mount Seir is a clear evidence of his bodily blessing. Eliphaz, the firstborn of Esau, retained circumcision and the true doctrine passing from the fathers. "For Isaac preached illustrious sermons to his grandsons, and Esau even functioned as a priest in his father's place while Jacob was absent. Therefore one should not regard all of them as having been rejected. For although they lost the promise of the coming

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[123] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211. "Econtra filii promissionis, cum superbiunt, amittunt benedictionem. … Ita puto multos excellentes viros et plenos spiritu sancto fuisse in posteritate EDOM."

[124] *LW* 6:285; WA 44:212. "Ergo innuit Moses non omnes esse damnatos, qui oriundi fuerunt ab Edom, licet reiectus esset a promissione et primogenituram amisisset."

[125] *LW* 6:289; WA 44:215. "Retinuit etiam circumcisionem et doctrinam patrum et promissionis."

Seed, they nevertheless obtained accidental mercy [*fortuitam misericordiam*]."[126] Next, when

commenting Gen. 33:31–39, Luther again mentioned the bestowal of Mount Seir as God's bodily

blessing for Esau and from the bodily blessing "an approach has also been made to the spiritual

blessing. Although Christ was not to be expected from the seed of Esau, yet he and his sons were

not denied the enjoyment of the common blessings of the promise along with the people of

Israel."[127] However, one should not be overenthusiastic about the spiritual blessings received

among the Edomites. Even though God left the room of salvation to those Edomites and

Ishmaelites who realized the honor which God established with the blood of the patriarchs, "the

greater part were ungodly and proud and therefore perished."[128] This is another example of

theologia crucis pedagogy set forth by the patriarchal narratives:

> [T]he sons of the promise lose the promise when they are proud. For this is what
> GOD means when Peter says: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand
> of GOD" (1 Peter 5:6), and for this reason He humbles and disciplines His saints so
> that they should not be proud. So I think that there were many excellent men full of
> the Holy Spirit among the posterity of EDOM, although there was no shortage of
> those who were aflame with an inordinate and bitter hatred against ISRAEL.[129]

Conclusion

In this chapter, we studied Luther's comments on the long rivalry between Esau and Jacob

the twin brothers, with a special focus on his handling of the change of Esau and his descendants.

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[126] *LW* 6:294–95; WA 44:219. "Isaac enim praeclaras conciones habuit ad nepotes, quin et Esau functus est pontificatu loco patris, absente Iacob. Ideo non sunt omnes pro reiectis habendi. Etsi enim amiserunt promissionem de semine venturo, tamen fortuitam misericordiam consecuti sunt."

[127] *LW* 6:303; WA 44:225. "Describitur igitur hoc loco benedictio Esau corporalis, unde factus est aditus etiam ad spiritualem: licet de semine Esau non esset expectandus Christus, tamen non fuit ipsi nec filiis negatum, quin fruerentur communibus beneficiis promissionis, una cum Israelitico populo."

[128] *LW* 6:306; WA 44:227. "Maior autem pars fuit impia et superba: ideo perierunt."

[129] *LW* 6:285; WA 44:211. "Econtra filii promissionis, cum superbiunt, amittunt benedictionem. [1. Petri 5, 6] Hoc enim vult DEUS, quod ait Petrus: 'Humiliamini sub potenti manu DEI'. Et ob hanc causam humiliat et exercet sanctos suos, ne superbiant. Ita puto multos excellentes viros et plenos spiritu sancto fuisse in posteritate EDOM, quanquam non defuerunt, qui ingenti et acerbo odio arderent adversus ISRAEL."

Luther explicitly elaborated on the doctrine of election in his exposition of the story. The key finding of this chapter is that Luther relocated the question of chosen or unchosen in terms of God's covenantal people as opposed to the traditional approach of God's hidden decree concerning the salvation of individuals. As shown in the lectures, the dichotomy between the chosen Jews and the unchosen Gentiles for Luther was not so much the divine salvific disposition toward a certain group as the sacred masterplan of the preservation of an ethnic group for the sake of messianic promise. Esau is unchosen in a sense that he was not a sharer of the covenant. Yet Luther taught that Esau was eventually was saved as his life displayed the fruit of repentance in his reconciliation with Jacob.

With the idea of election in place, we now achieve a better picture concerning Luther's theological hermeneutics of *fortuita misericordia*. If the story of Cain and Abel addresses the question of "what"—the basic mechanism of *fortuita misericordia,* and the story of Hagar and Ishmael deals with the question of "how"—the way by which *fortuita misericordia* bears fruit in the lives of the unchosen, then the story of Esau and Jacob answers the question of "why"— Luther's rationale for God's election of the patriarchs. The final component in Luther's theological hermeneutics of *fortuita misericordia* is the question of "whom"— the Christ-like figures in Genesis through whom the Word of promise was carried to the unchosen. To this we now turn.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOSEPH AND THE EGYPTIANS: THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD WHO CHANNELED GOD'S MERCY TO THE UNCHOSEN

Introduction

So far in our study, we have considered three sets of characters in Genesis, namely, Cain, Hagar and Ishmael, and Esau, whom Luther understood as both the unchosen or covenantal outsiders and the beneficiaries of divine mercy. In so doing, we have explored a series of questions about *fortuita misericordia*: What is *fortuita misericordia*? How does *fortuita misericordia* work out in the lives of the unchosen? Why did God choose the patriarchs and grant his *fortuita misericordia* to the unchosen? Now we reach the final chapter of the main part of this study, wherein we will explore "whom"— the mediators of mercy as God's ambassadors through whom the Word of promise was bridged to the covenantal outsiders, just as Christ did to the Gentiles in the New Testament. In other words, this chapter is an investigation of Luther's typological exposition of the ministers of the word, who channel the divine mercy and carry the divine promise to the unchosen. To this end, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of Luther's emphasis on the prominence of the ministry of the Word—not in the sense of the ordained *ministerium* of the New Testament, but rather the human agents that speak the promise. Then we will examine several figures in Genesis who, for Luther, functioned as ministers of the Word, who instructed the true doctrine to and maintained the true worship among their households and neighbors. The figures being included in this section are Cain's wife, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Finally, we will draw our attention to the last section of the book of Genesis and see the way that Joseph, the most explicit figure of Christ for Luther in Genesis, brought salvation to the Egyptians.

The Prominence of Ministry of the Word

Throughout his commentary on Genesis, Luther highlighted the prominence of the godly as ministers of the Word. Jaroslav Pelikan once remarked that "one of the most remarkable exegetical feats in the whole *Lectures on Genesis* was the consistency with which Luther's exegesis related the manifestations and revelations of God to the ministry."[1] Aided with the knowledge of Old Testament chronology, which Luther reaped in his preparation of *Reckoning of the Years of the World* (1541),[2] he was able to attribute whatever God spoke in Genesis to a patriarch alive to speak on behalf of God.[3] One of the best examples exists in Luther's Genesis lectures on Gen. 7:1, where God commanded Noah to go into the ark with his family and all animals. Luther postulates that Methuselah spoke the command.

> In this passage Moses adheres to his way of speaking when he says: "The Lord said." I find it particularly pleasant to think that these words of God were not spoken from heaven but were said to Noah through a human agency. Although I do not deny that this could have been revealed by an angel or by the Holy Spirit Himself, nevertheless the ministry should be given the honor where it can be rightly maintained that God spoke through human beings. Thus we have shown above that many things which Moses says were spoken by God were spoken by Adam. The Word of God is truly the Word of God even when it is uttered by a human being.

> Since Methuselah, Noah's grandfather, died during the very year of the Flood, it would not be improper to assume that this was the last statement of Methuselah ... Thus, in my opinion, these words were spoken by Methuselah himself; but they are attributed to God because the Spirit of God spoke through him.[4]

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[1] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 103.

[2] WA 53:22–184.

[3] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 103.

[4] *LW* 2:81–82; WA 42:320. "Retinet autem Moses hic quoque phrasin suam, quod dicit: 'Dominus dixit'. Atque ego peculiariter ista cogitatione delector, ut statuam ista verba Dei non quidem de coelo sonuisse, sed per ministerium humanum ipsi Noah dicta esse. Quanquam enim non negem potuisse fieri, ut per Angelum haec revelarentur aut per ipsum Spiritum sanctum, Tamen, ubi commode dici potest, quod per homines Deus sit locutus, ibi ministerium honorandum est. Sic multa, quae Deum Moses locutum dixit, nos supra per Adamum dicta esse ostendimus. Nam verbum Dei etiam cum ab homine pronunciatur, vere est verbum Dei.

Quia autem Methusalah avus Noah in ipso Diluvii anno mortuus est, non ineptum fuerit, si sentiamus hanc Methusalae … Ad hunc modum existimo haec verba ab ipso Methusalah dicta esse, tribuuntur autem Deo, quia

This passage is notable for two reasons. First, Luther found pleasure in the idea that the word of God spoke through a human agent, in this case, Methuselah. Because Luther knew from his computation of the Old Testament chronology that Methuselah died in the year when the flood came, he concluded that it was Methuselah who spoke to Noah on behalf of the Lord, or Lord spoke through Methuselah, concerning the forthcoming judgement of the earth.[5] Second, Luther plainly asserts that "the ministry should be given the honor." For him, God would not directly speak with men when a mediatory ministry is available. "It is sure that God does not make a practice of speaking in a miraculous way and by means of special revelations, particularly where there is a lawful ministry that He has established in order to speak with men through it, to teach them, instruct them, comfort them, rouse them, etc."[6] Speaking through a human agent is God's ordinary way of communication in the world, and this is the reason why we should listen to our parents, teachers of the church, and governors.[7] Still, Luther maintained the possibility that, in some special and rare situations, God would speak with men "through inner revelation or through the Holy Spirit."[8]

As one might expect, Luther's insistence on the prominence of the ministry of the Word was inextricably related to his support for the priority of the word of God and the necessity of external forms constitutive in the church. As Pelikan remarks, one key exegetical principle of

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Spiritus Dei per ipsum locutus est."

[5] *LW* 2:82; WA 42:320. In a recent article, Raphael Magarik proposes a different interpretation of how to understand Luther's attribution of God's words to the patriarchs. See Chapter Four, p. 119n29.

[6] *LW* 2:82–83; WA 42:320. "Certum enim est Deum non solere miraculose et per revelationes singulares semper loqui, praesertim ubi adest legitimum ministerium, quod ideo instituit, ut per id cum hominibus loquatur, eos doceat, instituat, consoletur, excitet etc."

[7] *LW* 2:83; WA 42:321. For further discussion of Luther's idea of holy orders expressed in Genesis Lectures, see Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 73–140.

[8] *LW* 2:83; WA 42:321. This is the aspect Mattox explores in his article on Luther's reading of Noah. See Mickey Mattox, "Hearer of the Triune God: Martin Luther's Reading of Noah," *Luther Digest* 20 (2012): 49–70.

reading *Lectures on Genesis* is "to interpret the promises and signs in Genesis as proof that God had always worked through both Word and Sacrament to call the church into being."[9] Here promises refer to the word of God while the signs refer to the external forms. This is what William Lazareth called "Luther's incarnational and sacramental realism." Lazareth observes that Luther

> learned from the Hebrew Scriptures to oppose all human attempts to sever the spiritual from the material, the sacred from the secular. All authentic spirituality was grounded in the Holy Spirit's work in personally embodied creatures of God. Luther's incarnational and sacramental realism led him to assert that 'the church cannot exist without the constant use of the Word, and the church has always had its sacraments, or tokens of grace, and its ceremonies.'"[10]

In this regard, the ministry of the Word performed by through a human agent is an external form through which the word operates and embodies itself.

The prominence of the ministry of the word not only manifests itself in the proclamation of God's judgment. More importantly, God spoke through his human agents to proclaim his precious Word of promise, even to the undeserved. As we shall see below, the prominence of the ministry of the word is evident through Luther's exposition of multiple figures in Genesis who served as the ministers of the word to the unchosen, non-covenantal people.

Ministers of the Word before Joseph: Cain's wife, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Cain's wife was mentioned in passing in Chapter Four.[11] Luther unreservedly praised Cain's wife for her piety and obedience even comparable to Christ.

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[9] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 102.

[10] Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 41.

[11] See Chapter Four, pp. 131–32. There was a diverse opinion on whether Cain's marriage happened before or after the murder. Luther himself, though never in a conclusive way, prefers the Jewish suggestion that Cain was married before his murder of Abel. See *LW* 1:312–13; WA 42:230.

I have no doubt whatever that because of his wife, who married her bloodthirsty brother in holy trust in God and out of obedience to her parents, God bestowed many personal blessings on Cain through all his descendants. Just as Christ was a servant of the circumcised (Rom. 15:8) because of the truth and trustworthiness of the promise given to the Jews, but a servant of the Gentiles because of God's mercy (for they had no promise), so also that accidental mercy [*fortuita misericordia*] was extended to Cain's descendants.[12]

A few lines later, Luther made another extended comment on Cain's wife,

Furthermore, his wife was obliged to follow him [Cain]. Adam was unwilling to separate them, because wife and husband are one body (Gen. 2:24). Moreover, the wife is compelled to bear part of her husband's misfortunes just as, in contrast, Cain's descendants received part of the blessings which fell to his guiltless wife. Pharaoh, king of Egypt at the time of Joseph, was saved, and the king of Nineveh was saved, even though they were not part of the people of God. In the same way, I believe, some of Cain's descendants were saved, although Cain had completely forfeited the promise concerning the blessed Seed.[13]

We may draw a few observations from these two comments of Luther. First, Cain's wife becomes a vehicle of blessings through her trust and obedience to God Cain's descendants may receive mercy and blessings. Second, the blessings that Cain's descendants received bear salvific effect for some. In this regard, Cain's wife is the second minister of the Word in human history following her father Adam. Third, the self-sacrificing act of Cain's sister typologically mirrors what Christ did for the Gentiles, as Rom. 15:8 attests. Fourth, the salvation some of Cain's descendants attained is similar to Pharaoh at the time of Joseph and the king of Nineveh, who, according to Luther, were also saved.

Throughout the biblical history, for Luther, God always prepares ministers who carry the Word of promise and channel the divine mercy to the uncovenanted people. In the case of Cain's

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[12] *LW* 1:313; WA 42:230–31. "Nec mihi sane dubium est, quin propter uxorem in sancta fide erga Deum et obedientia erga Parentes Fratri sanguinario nubentem Deus multas privatas benedictiones Cain in omnem posteritatem contulerit. Sicut enim Christus minister circumcisionis fuit propter veritatem et certitudinem promissionis Iudaeis factae, Gentium autem minister fuit propter misericordiam [Röm. 15, 8] (nam promissionem nullam habuerunt), ita quoque posteritati Cain fortuita illa misericordia contigit."

[13] *LW* 1:313–14; WA 42:230.

descendants, they have their mother, Cain's wife. This is the "who" aspect of *fortuita misericordia*, namely, the way by which Luther understood the meaning of Christ as a servant of the Gentiles before the historical advent of Christ as told in Rom. 15:8. To verify this argument, the similar pattern of thought must occur in Luther's treatment of other biblical figures in Genesis.

Noah

In her study of the patriarch and matriarch in Luther's Genesis Lectures, Sherry Jordon discusses the role of Noah under the title "Minister of the Word and Martyr."[14] For our interest, we focus primarily on Noah's role as minister of the Word. In an age when godliness faded and godlessness increased, "God stirred up Noah to exhort to repentance and to be an everlasting example for his descendants, one whose faith, persistence, and diligence in preaching his descendants might admire and imitate."[15] Luther deliberatively depicted Noah as the greatest prophet of all time worthy to be called "the second Adam and the prince of the human race."

> Thus Noah was the greatest prophet, whose like the world has not had. In the first place, he preached for the longest time; in the second place, he preached about the universal punishment of the entire world and even designated the year in which it would occur. Christ also prophesies concerning the Last Judgment, at which all flesh will perish. However, He says (Mark 13:32): "But of that hour no one knows besides the Father, who has reserved this for Himself." Jonah foretells to the Ninevites the forty days; Jeremiah, the seventy years of the captivity; Daniel, the seventy weeks till the advent of Christ. These are outstanding prophecies; they designate a definite time, the place, and the persons.

> But this prophecy of Noah surpasses all the others [prophets] because through the Holy Spirit he foretells a definite number of years when the entire human race will

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[14] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 186–203. Much of our discussion of Luther's comments on Noah is drawn from Jordon. See also Mattox, "Hearer of the Triune God."

[15] *LW* 2:27; WA 42:281. "Labentibus itaque paulatim piis et invalescente impietate Deus Noah suscitat, ut hortetur ad poenitentiam et ut sit posteritati suae aeternum exemplum, cuius fidem ac in docendo diligentiam et assiduitatem admirentur et sequantur posteri."

perish. He is 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.[16]

Here again we see a Christological dimension was added to Luther's understanding of Noah's role as the minister of the Word. For Luther, Noah was "the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit."[17] Therefore, Noah is the vessel of the Triune God, who spoke through Noah to proclaim repentance and judgment to the unbelieving world. Luther's typological connection places Noah as the second Adam and prince of human race, namely, the Christ-like prophet of his age who bravely preached the word of God, or whom Christ spoke through, to the evil world. Luther even saw himself as a Reformation Noah who stood against the evil world as he did in against the church in apostasy.[18]

Abraham

Pelikan once observed that, either viewing from sheer length or theological scope, Luther's exposition of the life of Abraham was "the most extensive 'biography' he ever produced."[19] As such, Luther's commentary on Abraham deserves its own monograph.[20] For the sake of our

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[16] *LW* 2:26; WA 42:280 (emphasis added). "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 [Mark. 13, 32] vaticinatur de extremo iudicio, quo universa caro peribit. 'Sed de hora illa, dicit, nemo scit, praeter Patrem, qui hoc sibi reservavit'. Ionas praedicit quadraginta dies Ninivitis, Ieremias septuaginta annos captivitatis, Daniel hebdomadas septuaginta usque ad futurum Christum. Sunt hae insignes Prophetiae, quibus certum tempus, locus, personae describuntur."

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

[17] *LW* 2:44; WA 42:293.

[18] Parsons, *Luther and Calvin*, 121–42.

[19] *LW* 4:ix.

[20] See, for example, Juhani Forsberg. *Das Abrahambild in der Theologie Luthers Pater Fidei Sanctissimus*. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag, 1984. For another succinct yet thoughtful discussion of Luther's portrayal of Abraham, see Gordon Isaac, *Prayer, Meditation, and Spiritual Trial: Luther's Account of Life in the Spirit* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2017), 153–77. Jordon also includes a useful summary of Luther's insight on Abraham, see Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 186–203.

study, though, a much narrower focus will be employed, namely, Abraham's role as the priest

who preached the Word of promise and instructed the true worship to his household and even to

the Gentiles. In his exposition of Gen. 12, Luther pondered how blissful the household of

Abraham were to believe Abraham's preaching,

> Therefore we shall call these companions of Abraham not simply his household but
> the true and holy church, in which Abraham was the high priest [*Pontifex*]. He
> instructed it concerning God's mercy, which would be revealed through His Son, who
> would first rule and bless the descendants of Abraham and all who allied themselves
> with him, and secondly would take on flesh in His time and transfer the wrath and
> curse from His people to Himself, so that they would be rid of all their sins and
> escape the punishment of eternal death. Sarai, Lot's wife, Lot's daughters, and the
> servants of both believed this preaching of Abraham. Therefore they followed the
> holy head of the household with the utmost joy, preferring to endure want, danger,
> and all kinds of harm to forfeiting the possession of such great promises—even
> though the possession was not yet a reality but merely a hope.[21]

Abraham is God's channel of mercy to his household. Through Abraham, God's blessings were

bestowed upon Abraham's descendants and allies, which included the Gentiles. Notably, in

talking about the mediatory role of divine blessings which Abraham performed in his household,

Luther explicitly included a Christological notion of Abraham's ministry. While Abraham was

instructing his household about God's mercy, Christ "would first rule and bless the descendants

of Abraham and all who allied themselves with him, and secondly would take on flesh in His

time and transfer the wrath and curse from His people to Himself."[22] In other words, it was the

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[21] *LW* 2:280; WA 42:462. "Non igitur familiam simpliciter, sed veram et sanctam Ecclesiam hos Abrahami comites appellabimus, in qua Abraham fuit summus Pontifex, docens eam de misericordia Dei, exhibenda per filium, qui primum gubernaturus sit ac benedicturus posteritatem Abrahae, et omnes, qui cum ea se coniungunt: Deinde suo tempore assumpturus carnem, et iram ac maledictionem a suo populo in se translaturus, ut ipsi, peccatis omnibus exuti, etiam mortis aeternam poenam evadant. Huic praedicationi Abrahae credidit Sarai, uxor Loth, filiae Loth et utriusque servitia: itaque summa cum voluptate sanctum patrem familias secuti sunt, potius inopiam, pericula et damna omnia passuri, quam tantarum promissionum possessionem amittant: quae tamen nondum in re, sed in nuda spe erat."

[22] *LW* 2:280; WA 42:462.

pre-incarnate Christ who worked through Abraham in his ministry to the benefit of his

household.

In his comments on Gen. 20, where Abraham sojourned in the land of Gerar and dealt

with Abimelech the king of Gerar, Luther evinced a remarkable understanding of how the

patriarchs served as preachers and priests in the primeval period of history.

> At that time Shem, Shelah, Serug, and Terah were living. Shem had seen the original
> world before the Flood. But we should not think that the saintly men lived in idleness;
> they publicly maintained the worship of God and gave instruction to the people of
> their households concerning the will of God, His promises, His Law, etc.
> Undoubtedly the neighboring households saw and heard this, and because of this
> opportunity Gentiles also arrived at the knowledge of the true God and were saved,
> even though they had not been circumcised. Thus at that time *there were many well-
> established churches in the world*. Yet there happened what we, alas, experience
> today too: at that very time there existed the greatest licentiousness and very wicked
> men, as the example of the people of Sodom proves. Nevertheless, in the
> neighborhood they had Abraham as a most excellent teacher, through whose kindness
> they had been delivered from the wrongs and the yoke of foreign kings.[23]

The longevity of patriarchs and their pious diligence in preaching the word and performing the

true worship formed the basis of Luther's confidence that the Gentiles were able to hear the word

of God and be saved. Yet we should never be too overenthusiastic about the salvific significance

which the holy patriarchs could produce in their preaching. There were still wicked and impious

people living at that time, like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

A similar observation can also be found in Luther's comments on Abraham. Luther saw

Abraham "a most excellent teacher" not only to his own household, but also among those with

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[23] *LW* 3:319; WA 43:104 (emphasis added). "Vixerunt eo tempore Sem, Salah, Serug et Thare: quorum Sem
viderat originalem mundum ante diluvium. Non autem existimabimus sanctos viros vixisse ociosos, retinuerunt Dei
cultum publice, domesticos suos erudierunt de voluntate Dei, de promissionibus, de lege, etc. Haec sine dubio
viderunt et audiverunt vicinae domus, atque per hanc occasionem etiam gentes ad veram Dei notitiam pervenerunt et
salvatae sunt, etiamsi circumcisae non essent. Fuerunt igitur tum multae Ecclesiae, praeclare institutae in mundo,
et tamen accidit, quod etiam hodie, proh dolor, experimur, ut eo ipso tempore maxima licentia et pessimi homines
essent: Sicut Sodomitarum exemplum probat, qui tamen in vicinia habuerunt praestantissimum
doctorem Abrahamum, cuius beneficio liberati ab externorum regum iniuriis et iugo erant."

whom he came in contact. In his comments on Gen. 20:6–7, Luther expounded how Abraham

was chosen by God as prophet, teacher and bishop in the presence of Abimelech, a lengthy yet

important passage which we ought to quote in full:

> At that time Shem, Shelab, and other patriarchs were still living, but it was Abraham alone whose house God had chosen to be the church and to whom He had given the promise that through his Seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. Hence it is God's voice which declares that he is the high priest in whose house would surely be found the Word of God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.
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> Accordingly, we can imagine how great Abraham's standing with this king was from now on, for Abimelech hears God Himself call Abraham a prophet. Therefore the king received him most courteously and heard from him heavenly wisdom about the Son of God, who would be born from Abraham's house and would redeem the human race, and thus, after removing the curse, would bring everlasting blessing.
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> Thus Abraham is appointed bishop and teacher by God's voice; but the king, together with his citizens, is a pupil and hearer. Moreover, God blesses that place by letting Isaac be begotten and born there; and the Holy Spirit—but not circumcision—is given to the Gentiles, although those Gentiles, who had been taught by the Word, knew and believed that there is no other God than the One who would be born from Abraham's circumcised people.
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> These, of course, are the great benefits that result from the true doctrine: God's glory, fulfillment of the Decalog, and redemption from death and hell. Therefore the godly understand why Moses recorded these facts, namely, to confirm the promise of faith that the Gentiles also belong to the church of Abraham, even though they have not been circumcised. Accordingly, these changes continue in the world: the unrepentant people of Sodom fall to their destruction, but Gerar is converted. Thus today some become obdurate and utterly blind. On the other hand, some believe the Word and are enlightened by it.[24]

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[24] *LW* 3:338; WA 43:117–18. "Vixerunt eo tempore adhuc Sem, Salach et alii Patriarchae, sed solus erat Abraham, cuius domum elegerat Deus, ut esset Ecclesia, cui promissionem dederat, futuram, ut per ipsius semen benedicerentur omnes familiae terrae. Declaratur igitur divina voce, quod sit summus Pontifex, apud quem certo inveniatur verbum Dei, remissio peccatorum et vita aeterna.

Cogitare itaque possumus, in quanta posthac authoritate apud regem hunc Abraham fuerit, siquidem ab ipso Deo Prophetam appellari audit. Ergo humanissime complexus est eum, et audivit ex eo sapientiam coelestem de filio Dei, ex Abrahae domo nascituro, et redempturo genus humanum, sicque, sublata maledictione, aeternam benedictionem allaturo.

Ita constituitur Abraham Episcopus et Doctor divina voce, Rex autem cum suis civibus est discipulus et auditor, ac benedicit Deus ei loco, ut concipiatur et generetur in eo Isaac, et spiritus sanctus communicetur gentibus, non autem circumcisio, quanquam gentes istae edoctae verbo norant et credebant non esse alium Deum, quam qui ex Abrahae gente circumcisa nasciturus esset.

Abraham is God's appointed servant—priest and prophet, bishop and teacher—who carried the Word of promise and channeled the divine mercy to the people of Gerar. Just as Cain's wife was a medium of God's blessings to her descendants, so also God blesses Abimelech and his subjects because of Abraham. Luther also noted a stark contrast between the people of Sodom and the people of Gerar. Both received the ministry of Abraham, yet their respective destinies were diametrically opposite.[25] This again is a reminder for us that while the word of God was accessible to the Gentiles through the diligent effort of God's ministers like Cain's wife, Noah, and Abraham, this accessibility of the word would never be an endorsement of the universalistic salvation of the Gentiles regardless of their reaction to the word. Repentance and faith in the promise, or the law and gospel manifestation, remain two key elements in Luther's formula of salvation of the unchosen.

Luther's comments on Isaac's role as minister of the Word took place in his lectures on Gen. 26, where Isaac sojourned in the land of Gerar because of the famine. Luther commended Abimelech, the king of Gerar, for his "remarkable goodness, justice, and godliness" like Cornelius in the book of Acts.[26] Also, like Peter who was sent by God to proclaim the gospel to Cornelius and his family, Isaac came to Abimelech and instructed him the word of God, for God shows no partiality of nation. "Therefore Isaac came to him just as Abraham came to the earlier Abimelech, and from Isaac he receives instruction concerning true godliness and the knowledge

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Haec scilicet sunt ingentia illa bona, quae sequuntur veram doctrinam, scilicet gloria Dei, impletio Decalogi, redemptio a morte et inferno. Vident igitur pii, cur haec scripserit Moses, nempe ad confirmationem promissionis fidei, quod etiam gentes pertineant ad Ecclesiam Abrahae, etiamsi non sint circumcisae. Manent igitur vices istae in mundo: Sodomitae impoenitentes ruunt et pereunt: Gerar autem convertitur. Sic hodie indurantur et excaecantur aliqui: contra aliqui verbo credunt, et eo illuminantur."

[25] See also *LW* 3:344; WA 43:122.

[26] *LW* 5:51; WA 43:463.

of God. For Isaac undoubtedly preached the Word of God at that place."[27] A few lines later, Luther praised God for providing his church such "godly hosts" as Abimelech. "It was a great kindness that at that time God gave the church such saintly and godly hosts. …. Such a man was this Abimelech, who befriended Isaac, the saintly apostle and prophet of God. Therefore I think that he was one of the saintly kings. Even though he was not a son of the promise, yet he became a sharer in it, just as at that time many Gentiles were also saved."[28] Working within the framework of two kinds of attachment to the promise, which we laid out before,[29] we may identify "son of promise" with the physical attachment to the promise where "sharer of promise" with the spiritual attachment to the promise. Abimelech was not a son of Abraham in flesh, namely, no physical attachment to the promise; yet in faith he attached himself to the Word of God and became a sharer of promise—the spiritual attachment to the promise. In sum, Isaac, as the minister of the Word like Cain's wife and Abraham before him, instructed Abimelech the true knowledge of God and paved the way of salvation for this king.

One last observation about Isaac's role as minister of the Word should be drawn before we turn to our next figure. In his comments on the descendants of Esau in Gen. 36, Luther entertained the possibility of how the posterity of Esau, who lived in Mount Seir, would access the word of God:

> For it was not a long way from Seir to Hebron, therefore there was easy access to
> Father Isaac and to his church; and when the Word is revealed at one place, it scatters

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[27] *LW* 5:51; WA 43:463. "Ideo venit ad eum Isaac, sicut ad priorem Abimelech Abraham venit, et ab Isaac eruditur de vera pietate et cognitione Dei. Quia praedicavit ibi haud dubie verbum Dei."

[28] *LW* 5:52; WA 43:464. "Fuit ergo magnum beneficium, quod eo tempore dedit Deus tam sanctos et pios hospites Ecclesiae. Sicut supra Abraham habuit Escol, Aner et Abimelech. Oportet enim, ut Ecclesia et Apostoli habeant angulum, ubi vivant. Talis fuit Abimelech iste, qui fovit sanctum Apostolum et Prophetam Dei Isaac. Ideo existimo eum fuisse unum de regibus sanctis. Etsi enim non fuit filius promissionis, tamen particeps eius factus est. Sicut eo tempore etiam multi gentiles salvati sunt."

[29] See Chapter Six, p. 203 for a brief summary of the two kinds of attachement to the promise.

abroad its rays and is everywhere spread abroad to neighbors. Therefore Moses intimates that not all who were to originate from Edom were damned, although he had been rejected from the promise and had lost his birthright.[30]

The word of God that emanated from Isaac's church was so powerful and illuminating that it reached those around it and bore fruits of salvation among the Edomites. This is the reason why Moses arranged the account of Esau's descendants in such a detailed and orderly way.

Jacob

Luther's comments on the life and deeds of Jacob, though comparatively fewer than his comments on Abraham, were still extensive.[31] Our discussion of Jacob as minister of the Word chiefly focuses on Luther's comments on a single verse, Gen. 35:2. "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him: Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." At the beginning of the chapter, God commanded Jacob to build an altar to God at Bethel. Before he set his foot to Bethel in doing what God commanded, Jacob admonished his household and all who were with him to forsake idols and purify themselves. Here Luther was very attentive to the little phase "all who were with him." For him, Moses set forth the distinction between Jacob's household and all who were with him with an important purpose.

> Moses, moreover, says that Jacob spoke to his household and all who were with him. Here he distinguishes between members of the household and outsiders. The members of the household were his wives, children, servants, and maids. By others "who were with him" he means those whose hearts God had touched so that they joined themselves to Jacob's house, either because of the hope of intermarriage or because they were added from the booty and spoils of the Shechemites. For I have often stated that it is quite credible that when the patriarchs were teaching, many of

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[30] *LW* 6:285; WA 44:212. "Non longe enim abfuit Seir ab Hebron, ideo facilis fuit aditus ad Isaac patrem et eius Ecclesiam, et quando uno aliquo loco revelatur verbum, spargit radios et divulgatur passim ad vicinos. Ergo innuit Moses non omnes esse damnatos, qui oriundi fuerunt ab Edom, licet reiectus esset a promissione et primogenituram amisisset."

[31] Luther's commentary on Jacob ranges from *LW* 4:223 to 6:281 (Gen. 25:19–35:29), adding up to more than 700 pages.

the heathen flocked to them, for they saw that the patriarchs were godly and holy men and that God was with them, and therefore they heard and embraced their doctrine.

For when ambassadors and preachers were sent by God into the world, we must not think that their ministry passed away without fruit. Not only were those joined to them who were of the blood of the patriarchs but also outsiders such as those who were confederates of Abraham above, Eshcol and Aner, who all undoubtedly heard the Word, and likewise Abimelech. Later on, Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Jonah in Nineveh taught the doctrine of God. Therefore God gathered a church in the world not only from the one family of the patriarchs but from all nations to which the Word made its way.[32]

God always gathers his church in the world as his Word always finds its way to it. Notice here that Luther made an explicit allusion to the pattern he found in the lives of patriarchs, that because of their diligence in preaching the Word of God, the heathen attached themselves to the true doctrine and could be saved. The similar pattern can be found throughout the Scriptures, Luther suggested, in Abraham and Isaac in Gerar, Jacob in Shechem, Daniel in Babylon, and Jonah in Nineveh. In Luther's view, the redemptive activity of God, as Headley puts, "knows no limits but occurs wherever Christ and that which proclaims Christ are present. Wherever in the world the word of Christ is effective through the instrument of the Word, there world history assumes the character of redemptive history."[33] In short, "the arena of its [the Word's] redemptive action is the entire world; the fruit of its redemptive action is the Church."[34]

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[32] *LW* 6:227; WA 44:168. "Ait autem Moses locutum esse Iacob ad domum suam, et omnes, qui cum ipso fuerant. Ubi distinguit inter domesticos et extraneos. Domestici fuerunt uxores, liberi, servi et ancillae. Alios vero, qui cum ipso fuerunt, intelligit, quorum corda tetigerat Deus, ut adiungerent se domui Iacob, sive connubiorum spe, sive quod ex preda et spoliis Sichimitarum accesserant. Saepe enim dixi maxime credibile esse, quod, docentibus Patriarchis, multi ex gentibus confluxerint ad eos, qui viderunt Patriarchas esse viros pios et sanctos, et Deum cum ipsis esse, ideoque doctrinam eorum audiverunt et amplexi sunt.

Cum enim essent legati et precones verbi divinitus in orbem missi, non cogitabimus ministerium eorum sine fructu abiisse. Nec illi tantum adiuncti sunt, qui de sanguine Patriarcharum erant, sed etiam extranei, quales fuerunt supra confoederati Abrahae, Eschol et Aner, qui omnes haud dubie audiverunt verbum, item Abimelech. Et postea Ioseph in Aegypto, Daniel in Babilone, Ionas in Ninive tradiderunt doctrinam de Deo. Collegit igitur Deus Ecclesiam in mundo non ex una tantum familia Patriarcharum, sed ex omnibus gentibus, ad quas pervenit verbum."

[33] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 17.

[34] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 55.

Luther explained how the covenantal outsiders tied themselves together with the patriarchs and the Jews and how profitable their testimony is to the world.

> In this manner many of the Canaanites attached themselves to Jacob and believed his word, and these were rescued by God from impending evils and idolatry. Thus when Rahab the harlot in Joshua 2 saw that the whole city was in danger, she attached herself to the spies and begged that they might save her and her family. For the hearts of some to whom the godly come in the world are always touched, and such I think were those whom Jacob brought with him. For the Word is not taught without fruit, but it gathers a congregation in the world not only from those who hear it by word of mouth and who are in the church of the patriarchs, but it also brings in outsiders and strangers who have been preordained [*praeordinati*].
>
> An additional factor was the connection with the Canaanites because of the marriages of the 12 patriarchs who married heathen women. Judah married Tamar, a Canaanite woman, and Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest. This was a union of Gentile and Israelite blood, so that Ruth the Moabitess also became the mother of Christ. For God is not only the God of the Jews but also the God of the Gentiles, although He has published His grace and Word in the world through the Jews. Finally, there were also commercial ties between the patriarchs and the heathen, and from this there often arose the opportunity to speak about God and religion. For they were not dumb pieces of wood and stones, but in their conversation with men they invited strangers to themselves with special friendliness so that they might become associates of their doctrine and religion.[35]

A few observations can be made. First, the effective Word of God gathered a congregation for itself which comprises of both the household of the patriarchs and the outsiders who for Luther were "preordained" to be included. Second, the union of the Jews and Gentiles in marriage has a

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[35] *LW* 6:227–28; WA 44:168–69. "Ad hunc modum multi ex Cananaeis adiunxerunt se Iacob, et crediderunt verbo eius, qui sunt divinitus erepti ex malis impendentibus et idolatria. Sicut Rahab meretrix Iosuae 2. cum videret totam civitatem in periculo esse, adiungit se exploratoribus, et petit, ut se et familiam suam servare velint. Semper enim aliquorum corda tanguntur, ad quos veniunt pii in mundo. Et tales existimo fuisse eos, quos Iacob secum duxit. Quia verbum non docetur sine fructu, sed colligit coetum aliquem in mundo, non tantum ex iis, qui vocaliter audiunt, et qui sunt in Ecclesia Patriarcharum, sed etiam exteros et alienos, qui sunt praeordinati, adducit.

Deinde accessit adfinitas Chananaeis propter connubia duodecim Patriarcharum, qui duxerunt gentiles. Iuda duxit Thamar Chananaeam. Ioseph sacerdotis Aegyptii filiam. Haec fuit coniunctio sanguinis gentilis et Israelitici. Ita ut etiam Ruth Moabitis fieret mater Christi. Non enim Iudaeorum solum, sed et gentium Deus est: licet per Iudaeos tanquam ministros invulgarit gratiam et verbum suum in orbem. Postremo fuerunt etiam commercia Patriarchis cum Ethnicis, inde saepe occasio nata est colloquendi de Deo et de religione. Non enim fuerunt ligna et saxa muta, sed in conversatione cum hominibus singulari comitate invitarunt ad se alienos, ut fierent doctrinae et religionis socii."

genetic effect on the bloodline of Christ, which for Luther was another proof of God's inclusiveness in his salvation plan involving not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. Third, Luther credited the ties between the patriarchs and the Gentiles as "commercial," namely, namely, through trading in goods that business people conduct, the Israelites will have the opportunity of giving witness to the covenantal outsiders. In sum, Jacob is the minister of the Word who paved the way of salvation to the Gentiles in Shechem.

Joseph, the Minister of the Word Par Excellence

No typological connection between the patriarchs and Christ can be seen more evidently than in Luther's exposition than the story of Joseph. Jordon has noticed that Luther employed two ways of comparison between Joseph and Christ, Joseph to Christ or Christ to Joseph.[36] But upon examination, this difference proves trivial, since these ways are all related to Luther's understanding of Joseph's role as Christ in the Old Testament. The life events of Joseph provided one of the best examples of what Heinrich Bornkamm called "prophetic application of the Old Testament to Christ."[37] Luther was firmly convicted that, Bornkamm suggests, the Scripture

> is filled with secret references to Christ. … The Old Testament idea of kingship, priesthood, and sacrifice, the stories of the patriarchs, and the witness of the prophets, the spiritual ideas and images of nature in the Psalms suggested an anticipation of the coming glory of Christ and his kingdom.[38]

In the life of Joseph, for instance, the fact that Joseph was cast into a pit by his brothers in Gen. 37:23–24 indicates Christ's descent into Hell. "For Joseph is a figure of Christ, and His descent into hell is indicated in this passage."[39] The selling of Joseph for twenty shekels of silver in Gen.

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[36] Jordon, "Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 204–12. Many of the observations in this paragraph are drawn from Jordon.

[37] Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 96.

[38] Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 96–97.

[39] *LW* 6:379; WA 44:284. "Est enim Ioseph figura Christi, et significatus est hoc in loco descensus ad inferos"

37:28 was understood typologically by Luther as referential to the selling of Christ. In fact,

Luther was convinced that the prophecy in Zech. 11:12 about the selling of Christ for thirty

shekels of silvers was derived from this very passage.

> Joseph was sold for a smaller price than Christ was, and I think that the price was
> about 20 thalers. I am not inclined to engage in rather minute discussions on silver
> coins. But from this passage Zechariah undoubtedly derived his prophecy concerning
> Christ (Zech. 11:12): "They weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. For
> facts and circumstances agree excellently, and there cannot be a greater similarity
> than that between Christ crucified and Joseph; the selling and death of both are in
> agreement. For as Isaiah (53:8) says of Christ, 'He was cut off out of the land of the
> living,' so also Joseph is removed from the land and sight of his father, just as if he
> would never return to his father or see him again. [40]

Reading the calamity of being sold to the Ishmaelites that Joseph faced, Luther reflected the way

that Joseph's suffering mirrors the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ. God allowed such calamity

to happen to Joseph because he "wants us to consider and learn how great the love of parents

towards children is, that we estimate from this the magnitude of God's love by which He

embraced us when He was willing to let His only-begotten Son suffer and be crucified for us. For

Joseph is the image of God's Son."[41] The way Joseph treats his brothers in Gen. 42:18–20

reflects the way Christ treats sinners. "In this manner the example of Joseph should be applied to

the kingdom of Christ, who punishes, not to cast off or disinherit but to preserve the inheritance

which He has acquired for us with His blood."[42] Finally, in his comments on Jacob's last words

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[40] *LW* 6:391–92; WA 44:293. "Ioseph minori precio venditur, quam Christus, Et puto precium fuisse circiter viginti Taleros: non enim libet subtilius de argenteis disputare. Ex hoc autem loco haud dubie Zacharias prophetiam suam de Christo [Sach. 11, 12] sumpsit: 'Appenderunt mercedem meam triginta argentis.' Conveniunt enim res et circumstantiae pulcherrime. Nec potest maior similitudo esse quam Christi crucifixi et Ioseph, congruit venditio et mors utriusque. Ut [Jes. 53, 8] enim de Christo Isaias dicit: 'excisus est e terra viventium,' ita Ioseph tollitur e terra et conspectu patris, non aliter ac si nunquam rediturus, aut patrem visurus sit."

[41] *LW* 6:384–85; WA 44:288. "Deus vult nos considerare et discere, quantus sit amor parentum erga liberos, ut inde aestimemus magnitudinem amoris divini, quo nos complexus est, cum voluit filium suum unigenitum pro nobis pati et crucifigi. Nam Ioseph est imago filii Dei."

[42] *LW* 7:255; WA 44:488. "Ad hunc modum applicandum est Exemplum Ioseph ad regnum Christi, qui punit, non ut abiiciat aut exhaeredet, sed ut servet haereditatem, quam acquisivit nobis sanguine suo."

in Gen. 47:28–29, Luther again remarked that "Joseph is a figure of Christ, who although He is the Son of Jacob, is nevertheless adored by His father."[43] In sum, Luther's teaching that Joseph is a figure of Christ corresponds to his prophetic-Christological reading of the Old Testament as a whole.[44]

Joseph as the minister of the Word to the Egyptians.

Luther explained that the divine purpose in Gen. 46:2–4, when God spoke to Jacob in a vision and told him to go down to Egypt with his family, was to convert the Gentiles in Egypt.

> For God is Lord over the whole earth. And it was certainly a wonderful plan of God that the Gentiles should be gathered through the dispersed Jews. For in this way Daniel converted the kings of the Persians. In this way Joseph converted Egypt, and Christ and His apostles converted the whole world. Thus Paul says in Rom. 11:11–12: "Through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles," and "their failure means riches for the Gentiles." As often as God chastised them on account of their trespasses, that very punishment and sin of theirs led to the salvation of many Gentiles.[45]

Like the other passages discussed above, Luther here noted the soteriological benefits that the Gentiles would attain through the action of the Jews. After all, "when ambassadors and preachers were sent by God into the world, we must not think that their ministry passed away without fruit."[46] This is the way in which the Word of God is made effective in the human history. From

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[43] *LW* 8:140; WA 44:681. "Ioseph vero hic est figura Christi, qui, cum sit filius Iacob, tamen adoratur a patre."

[44] Bornkamm argues that Luther's prophetic-Christological reading of the Old Testament was guided by his understanding of Christ as the eternal word, God's historical guidance by his promise, the veiling of the Spirit in the letter, and the appointment of the law as preparatory to Christ. See Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 96. For a detailed discussion, see 87–114. For a similar yet briefer discussion, see Headley, *Luther's View of History*, 139–43.

[45] *LW* 8:81; WA 44:639. "Deus est Dominus universae terrae. Ac fuit sane hoc mirabile consilium Dei, ut per Iudaeos disiectos congregarentur gentes. Sic enim Daniel reges Persarum convertit, sic Ioseph Aegyptum, Christus et Apostoli totum mundum. Sicut inquit [Röm. 11, 12] Paulus Rom anorum 11: 'Illorum delicto salus est gentibus, item diminutio eorum divitiae gentium.' Quotiescunque Deus ipsos propter delicta castigavit, illa ipsa poena et peccatum eorum fuit occasio salutis multarum gentium."

[46] *LW* 6:227; WA 44:168.

Cain's wife to the patriarchs, from the patriarchs to the time of exile, from the time of exile

through the time of Christ and his apostles, God unwaveringly places his preachers in different

corners of the earth for the conversion of the world.

Luther read the prophetic role of Joseph in light of Ps. 105:20–22,[47] where Joseph was

praised for his wisely ruling and teaching. Luther believed that Joseph assiduously taught the

Egyptians the true doctrine of God, and consequently many Egyptians were saved.

> In this manner David, filled with the Holy Spirit, praises Joseph and appoints him
> teacher, priest, and prince of princes. And this is very important testimony concerning
> Joseph—who, because of his kindness and goodwill, had influence among the
> people—that he freed such a large number from imminent destruction. But there is far
> greater glory in the fact that he was a teacher of princes, elders, and priests.
>
> But he did not teach astronomy or astrology, as the Jews dream. No, he taught how to
> know and worship the true God. And he had an excellent opportunity to do this
> because of the very illustrious miracle God had performed through him during the
> seven years of the famine. For experience was added to teaching, and the people saw
> this wonderful preservation of the whole kingdom and of several neighboring nations.
> All wondered from what source he had such wisdom that he predicted the famine so
> exactly and prepared so diligently for the necessities of life.
>
> To this Joseph added the many outstanding sermons which the priests heard from
> him. They embraced the doctrine concerning God and spread it throughout the world.
> For he taught them the true religion and the wisdom of God. Yet he did not force
> ceremonies on them, circumcision or the observance of other rites. But he was careful
> to impress on them that they should believe in God, who had promised the Seed that
> was to come. And perhaps he also tolerated some of their own ceremonies—
> ceremonies which were not altogether godless and which he did not condemn but
> applied to the true service and worship of God.
>
> Accordingly, Joseph was a great man, especially in spiritual matters, although he was
> by no means inferior in political matters. David praises both qualities (cf. Ps. 105:20–
> 22). Nor was Joseph lazy; but wherever he had opportunities to do so, he taught and
> exhorted the people to embrace the pure doctrine. And there is no doubt that through
> him very many Egyptians were led to the true knowledge of God and were saved.[48]

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[47] (Ps. 105:20–22) "The king sent and released him, the ruler of the peoples set him free; he made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to instruct his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom."

[48] *LW* 8:129–30; WA 44:674. "Ad hunc modum David plenus Spiritu sancto praedicat Ioseph, et creat ipsum doctorem, sacerdotem et principem principum, estque gravissimum testimonium de Ioseph, qui gratia et favore

Backed with Ps. 105:20–22, Luther maintained that Joseph was not only a great ruler of Egypt who saved the Egyptians from the seven years of famine, but also a diligent preacher of the word. Joseph instructed the Egyptians in the true worship and pure doctrine of God. As a result of Joseph's faithful ministry "many Egyptians were led to the true knowledge of God and were saved." Of note is Luther's high regard for Joseph as "teacher, priest, and prince of princes," and his adaptive use of the Egyptian ceremonies. Joseph, on the one hand, did not enforce circumcision and other rites upon the Egyptians. On the other hand he tolerated some of the Egyptian ceremonies and transformed them to the use of true service of God. This seems inconsistent with Pelikan's observation that Luther's exposition of Genesis gave rise for Luther the opportunity "to combine a prophetic warning against externalism and ceremonialism with a priestly concern for the need for externals and ceremonies—both at the same time."[49]

Finally, Luther added an important caveat following the passage cited above, that we should not be too overenthusiastic about the number of converts Joseph made all over Egypt.

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valuit apud populum, eo quod liberavit tantam multitudinem a praesentissimo exitio. Sed longe maior gloria est, quod fuit doctor principum, seniorum et sacerdotum.

Neque vero astronomiam aut astrologiam docuit, ut somniant Iudaei, sed rationem agnoscendi et colendi verum Deum tradidit. Et habuit praeclaram occasionem ex illustrissimo miraculo, quod Deus per ipsum operatus fuerat septem annis famis, accessit enim experientia ad doctrinam, et incurrit in oculos hominum miranda haec conservatio totius regni, et aliquot vicinorum populorum. Omnes mirati sunt, unde haberet tantam sapientiam, ut tam exacte famem praediceret, et ea, quae ad victum necessarium pertinerent, tanta industria praepararet.

His addidit Ioseph multas insignes conciones, quas audiverunt ab eo sacerdotes, et doctrinam de Deo amplexi sunt, ac per totum orbem sparserunt. Docuit enim veram religionem et sapientiam Dei, neque tamen coegit eos ad ceremonias, ad circumcisionem aut observantiam aliorum rituum. Sed hoc diligenter inculcavit, ut crederent in Deum promissorem futuri seminis. Ac tulit forte etiam ceremonias aliquas ipsorum, quae non prorsus fuerunt impiae, quas non damnavit, sed adhibuit ad verum usum et cultum Dei.

Fuit igitur magnus vir praesertim in spiritualibus, quanquam in politicis nihilo esset inferior, sicut utrunque celebrat David. Nec fuit ociosus, sed ubicunque potuit per occasiones, docuit et exhortatus est populum ad sinceram doctrinam amplectendam. Nec dubium est plurimos Aegyptios per ipsum ad veram notitiam Dei perductos et salvatos esse.

[49] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 100.

Yet we must not think that Joseph converted all Egypt and all the princes and citizens. For nowhere is there an example where one kingdom with all its subjects was improved and regulated in such a way that no vestiges of godless people and of idolatry remained. Look at the kingdom of Judah and Israel even under David and the best kings and prophets! While they ruled and taught, many evil and godless people were mingled in. Nevertheless, it was a saintly and godly kingdom because of the church, which at that time was among the people of Israel.[50]

In the course of human history, Luther plainly noted, evil people always reside among the good, and the false mixes with the truth. Subsequently, "when a godly nation and one that acknowledges God has come to an end, another nation far worse and more godless takes its place."[51] The same is the case for the Egyptians. After Joseph's death, the Egyptians neglected the true essence of faith and added horrible ceremonies for themselves, which led to their punishments. In the final analysis, faith in the Word of promise can only distinguish the people of God in history, not the external institution mixed with it.[52]

Luther's concluding remarks concerning the salvation of the Gentiles through the service of the minister of the Word serve aptly as our closing reflection of this section. These remarks are of great importance in our study because Luther here qualified what he meant by salvation through *fortuita misericordia* as opposed to what Luther thought of Zwingli's view of the possible salvation of the pagans. Before we turn to the discussion of Luther's criticism of Zwingli, however, some notes on the textual reliability of Luther's comments on Zwingli should be added here. A paragraph among Luther's comments reads:

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[50] *LW* 8:130; WA 44:674–75. "Neque tamen cogitabimus eum totam Aegyptum, et singulos principes aut cives convertisse. Nullum enim usquam exemplum extat, ubi unum aliquod regnum cum omnibus subditis ita emendatum et constitutum sit, ut nulla superessent vestigia hominum impiorum, et idololatriae. Vide regnum Iuda et Israel, etiam sub Davide et optimis regibus et Prophetis, quibus regnantibus et docentibus multi mali et impii admixti fuerunt, et tamen fuit sanctum et pium regnum, propter Ecclesiam, quae erat eo tempore in populo Israelitico."

[51] *LW* 8:131; WA 44:675. "Hoc enim solet fieri, ut testatur experientia omnium temporum, quod finita generatione pia et agnoscente Deum, succedit alia longe deterior."

[52] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 59, 61.

Therefore this is an exceedingly pernicious error which we can by no means approve of or support. And yet I hear that Zwingli refers to my commentary on Genesis, where I stated that some of the generation of Cain were saved. I still teach this. But I do not say that they were saved as Cainites or Egyptians but as those who were incorporated in and attached to the church of the godly.[53]

Since Zwingli died in 1531, how could it possible for Zwingli to criticize Luther's commentary on Genesis which had not published until 1545, or at least 1536 when he began his lectures on Genesis? Concerning this problem, the editor of *Luther's Works* remarks, "this comment appears in a section [of the Genesis Lectures] which Luther discussed in 1545. But Zwingli had already died in 1531 at the battle of Kappel. The treatise being referred to, according to the context, is Zwingli's *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, which Bullinger published in 1536."[54] In fact, Peter Meinhold concluded that this passage has to be the editorial product of Luther's students.[55]

Is Meinhold's conclusion an inevitable one? Mickey Mattox suggests that the answer is no. Different from the opinion suggested by the editor of *LW*, Mattox notices the fact that Luther said he "heard" (*audio*) that Zwingli referred to his commentary on Genesis implied the "possibility that Luther was responding not to something Zwingli had written, but only to what Zwingli was reported to have said, perhaps by one of Luther's students or colleagues."[56] If this is the case, Mattox argues, this passage "is more consistent with an accurate record of classroom lectures than with an 'improved' version of the lectures"[57] In any case, Mattox believes that there

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[53] *LW* 8:134–35; WA 44:677. "Itaque valde perniciosus error est, quem nos neutiquam probare aut tueri possumus. Et tamen audio Zuinglium allegare Commentarium meum in Genesin, ubi dixi aliquos de generatione Cainica salvatos esse, idque etiamnum doceo, sed non dico, quod salvati sint, ut Cainitae aut Aegyptii, sed ut incorporati et coniuncti Ecclesiae piorum."

[54] *LW* 8:134 n40.

[55] Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers*, 125.

[56] Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*, 268.

[57] Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*, 268.

are a couple of plausible alternatives abound which Meinhold never discussed, and that

Meinhold's idea of a direct editorial addition to the lectures is far from inevitable.[58] In fact, an

even more plausible suggestion is that *Commentarium meum in Genesin* was not *Lectures on*

Genesis, not rather his sermons on Genesis which Luther preached in 1523–1524 (published in

1527) and was accustomed to call them *Commentarium* even that they were not so titled.[59]

Now we return to Luther's criticism of Zwingli. Luther first reasserts that since God is the

God of the Jews and the Gentiles, the Gentiles can share the same promise by hearing the word

of God. Abimelech, some Canaanites, many nations from the line of Cain, and many Egyptians,

were converted by *fortuita misericordia*.[60] However, Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* was

radically different from the Zwinglian idea that a pagan is saved when he does what is in him. In

Luther's view, Zwingli downplayed the necessity of the Word.

> Thus Zwingli wrote some time ago that Numa Pompilius, Hector, Scipio, and
> Hercules are enjoying eternal blessedness in Paradise along with Peter, Paul, and the
> other saints. This is nothing else than an open acknowledgment that they think that
> faith and Christianity amount to nothing. For if Scipio and Numa Pompilius, who
> were idolaters, have been saved, why was it necessary for Christ to suffer and die,
> and to what end is it necessary for Christians to be baptized and for Christ to be
> taught? So horribly do men fall when the Word has been neglected and laid aside, and
> they know nothing about faith, but set up and teach that very thing, namely, "that a
> man who does what is in him is saved [*Homo faciens, quod in se est, salvatur*]."[61]

In reproaching Zwingli, Luther also criticized the late medieval tradition behind him concerning

the salvation of virtuous pagans. Luther insisted that the Gentiles were saved only through their

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[58] Mattox, *Most Holy Matriarchs*, 269.

[59] I am indebted to Dr. Robert Kolb for his input here. See Otto Zöckler, *Luther als Ausleger des alten Testaments: Gewürdigt auf Grund Seines Grösseren Genesis*, reprint ed. (Syndey: Wentworth, 2018), 74.

[60] *LW* 8:133–34; WA 44:677.

[61] *LW* 8:134; WA 44:677. "Sicut Zuinglius nuper scripsit Numam Pompilium, Hectorem, Scipionem, Herculem frui aeterna beatitudine in Paradiso cum Petro et Paulo et aliis sanctis. Quod nihil aliud est, quam aperte fateri, quod sentiant nullam esse fidem, nullum Christianismum. Si enim Scipio et Numa Pompilius, qui fuerunt idololatrae, salvati sunt, cur oportuit Christum pati et mori, aut quorsum opus est baptizari Christianos, aut doceri Christum? Adeo horribiliter ruunt neglecto et omisso verbo, neque quicquam sciunt de fide, sed illud ipsum statuunt et docent: Homo faciens, quod in se est, salvatur."

attachment to the promise in faith through the preaching of the patriarchs, not because they were

virtuous. The key difference between Luther and Zwingli lies in the centrality of the Word.

> For we heard above as often as Moses related it that altars were erected by Abraham and the other fathers, that they taught their household, that others also attached themselves to the household, heard the sermons, embraced the Word that was handed down by the fathers, and also joined their wishes and prayers to the praying of the godly. I did not say that the Gentiles were saved through or of themselves or by means of their own rites. No, I said that *they were saved through the word of the fathers*. This is what Ps. 105:22 praises so highly about Joseph: "He instructed the king, the princes, and the elders of Egypt." …

> Therefore I do not declare with Zwingli that the Cainite church or Numa Pompilius and men like him were saved and became heirs of the kingdom of heaven, but I do declare that some good men and women of the race and household of Cain heard the Word and the doctrine of the fathers and that by this faith they came to the fellowship of the heavenly kingdom together with the church of the patriarchs.[62]

Luther's refutation of Zwingli's understanding of salvation of the pagan can be summarized as

follows: While Zwingli downplayed the necessity and centrality of the word of God, Luther

thoroughly asserted that the Gentiles can only be saved by responding to the Word of promise in

faith through the ministers of the word.

> To be sure, I do not exclude the heathen; but I say that they are saved in no other way than through the Word of Christ. Jethro, the priest of Midian, got his knowledge of God either through Moses or through Joseph; for Joseph was not idle but taught diligently and sedulously, and brought many households with which he lived to the knowledge of God. The Word does not come from the Gentiles; but, as Christ says: "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). But it did not remain among the Jews alone but was also spread to the Gentiles, who received it from the Jews.[63]

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[62] *LW* 8:135; WA 44:677–78. "Supra enim audivimus quoties narravit Moses excitata fuisse altaria ab Abrahamo et aliis patribus, docuisse eos familiam suam, et ad eam alios quoque accessisse, audivisse conciones, et verbum traditum a patribus amplexos esse, adiunxisse etiam vota et preces suas ad invocationem piorum. Non hoc dixi, esse gentes per se, aut ex se ipsis, aut per suos ritus salvatas, sed per verbum patrum, id quod tantopere praedicat [Ps. 105, 22] Psalmus 105. de Ioseph: "Erudivit regem, principes, et senes Aegypti', etc. …

Non igitur hoc adfirmo cum Zuinglio, Cainicam Ecclesiam aut Numam Pompilium et similes servatos, et factos esse heredes regni coelorum, sed aliquos bonos viros et mulieres ex genere et familia Chain audivisse verbum et doctrinam patrum, et ea fide pervenisse ad societatem regni coelestis cum Ecclesia Patriarcharum.

[63] *LW* 8:136; WA 44:679. "Non excludo quidem gentes, sed dico eas nulla alia ratione servari, quam per verbum Christi. Iethro, sacerdos Midian, vel per Mosen, vel per Ioseph notitiam Dei adeptus est, quia Ioseph non fuit ociosus, sed diligenter et sedulo docuit, et multas familias, cum quibus vixit, ad agnitionem Dei perduxit.

Again, Luther forcefully maintained that the attachment to the Word of God through the ministers of the word is the necessary condition for the salvation of the Gentiles. This insistence of the attachment to the Word makes Luther radically different from the medieval discussion of the problem of paganism. Instead of looking for what conditions the pagans can meet in order to be saved, Luther turned to the invigorating power of the Word of God. The Zwinglian idea that a man is saved when he does what is in him, whether based on the Thomist idea of "implicit faith" or not, directly violated the two principles of Luther—the priority of the word of God and the necessity of external forms constitutive in the church.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we examined a variety of cases by which Luther expounded the importance and function of the ministers of the word who channeled God's mercy to the unchosen. Cain's wife, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and above all, Joseph, are the minsters of the word who instructed the pure doctrine and true worship to the Gentiles, as Christ did in the New Testament. We argued that, as shown in the *Lectures on Genesis*, God always prepared human agents who carried the Word of promise of divine mercy to the uncovenanted people. The salvation of the unchosen is always related to their attachment to the Word of promise in faith through the ministers of the word. This is the "whom" aspect of *fortuita misericordia*, namely, the way by which Luther understood how Christ worked through his servants for the benefit of the Gentiles before the historical advent of Christ as told in Rom. 15:8.

This leads to the final component of the discussion of *fortuita misericordia*. In the story of Cain, Luther first coined the term *fortuita misericordia* to depict God's merciful favor toward

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Verbum non est ex gentibus, sed ut Christus inquit: [Joh. 4, 22] 'Salus ex Iudaeis est'. Veruntamen non solum apud Iudaeos mansit, sed propagatum est ad gentes, quae a Iudaeis acceperunt."

Cain by sparing him from death penalty and providing him a family. Accordingly, Cain's wife served as the minister of the Word who instructed the true worship to her family. Later in the story of Hagar and Ishmael, Luther continued to affirm that Hagar and Ishmael, along with Cain and Esau, were not exclude from mercy. Terrified by the law and consoled in the gospel, Hagar and Ishmael took hold of the true faith which Abraham assiduously exhorted. In the story of Esau, Luther went on claiming that Esau was a saved reprobate because of the mercy extended to him. In this sense, the chosen and reprobate are more of historical–salvation category than of personal salvific description. As Esau received the pure doctrine from his father Isaac—the doctrine which he once despised but eventually embraced, his descendants were also exposed to the Word of promise through their contact with Isaac's church at Hebron.

Since all textual elements relevant to the idea of *fortuita misericordia* are now in place, the next and final chapter of this study will weave all the textual material together into Luther's theological hermeneutics of *fortuita misericordia* in his *Lectures on Genesis*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF *FORTUITA MISERICORDIA*

Introduction

Throughout the last four chapters, we have examined the validity of the following statement: Because of God's *fortuita misericordia*, Luther found the possibility of salvation for the unchosen in the biblical narrative. We have also assessed what the term "unchosen" meant in his Genesis Lectures. Our central argument remains: Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* exhibits important features of his theological hermeneutics and the core of his doctrinal structure as shown in his *Lectures on Genesis*. The story of Cain and Abel answers the question of "what"—the basic mechanism of *fortuita misericordia*. The story of Hagar and Ishmael deals with the question of "how"—the way by which *fortuita misericordia* bears fruit in the lives of the unchosen. The story of Esau and Jacob answers the question of "why"—Luther's rationale for God's election of the patriarchs. The story of Joseph and the Egyptian reacts to the question of "whom"—through the ministers of the Word, the promise was mediated to the unchosen.

Since the last four chapters gave an account of various biblical narratives in the book of Genesis in a descriptive and analytical way, this final chapter we provides an integrated, well-developed theological treatment of the interpretive principles that informed Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia*. To achieve this, the present chapter contains three parts. First, we provide a compendious account of the way in which Luther's idea of the unchosen related to his theological anthropology. Second, we offer a systematized contour of Luther's *fortuita misericordia* hermeneutics, which is based upon four key elements: the nature of Divine mercy, the relation of promise and faith, the idea of the twofold church, and the unfolding schema of salvation history. Third, we examine the connection between our findings and other writings of

Luther concerning the people of God.

Luther's Evangelical Anthropology in Relation to the Unchosen

In Chapter Two, we examined the reshaping of the idea of the people of God in Luther's theology. This chapter will link that examination to the reshaping of the anthropological framework regarding the unchosen. How would an evangelical redefinition of the saints have anything to do with the unchosen, unfavorable figures of the Scripture?

Two key concepts are related here. The first is the dismantlement of the saints' superior status as reflected in the late Middle Ages teaching that saints were superior beings who acquired a power of intercession with God because of their merits. They could exercise intercessory and propitiatory power before God and became for laypeople the focus of honor in Christian piety. Luther's evangelical anthropology critically relativized the superiority of the saints as suggested in late medieval piety. With this insight in place, Luther viewed all human beings equally. None are inherently superior than others, and none are inherently inferior. In his comments on Gen. 6:5, Luther lamented the fact that without the grace of the Holy Spirit, human beings can do nothing but sin.[1] In this sense Abraham, Cain, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Esau are all sinful mortals, no more and no less. The second key concept is that, for Luther, God always despises the proud and cares for the humble—the *theologia crucis* pedagogy. "God takes pleasure in strengthening the weak and in weakening the strong. For His name is Creator, who makes all out of nothing and then again makes nothing out of all."[2] God shows his mercy to the one who is contrite in heart and repents, even though he is not, according to the flesh, tied to the promise. But if one takes pride in his superiority and boasts, God turns away from him.

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[1] *LW* 2:40; WA 42:290.

[2] *LW* 23:215–16; WA 33:340a.

How do these two concepts contribute to Luther's anthropological redefinition of the unchosen? In short, they blur the conceptual boundary between saints and sinners, or chosen and unchosen. Saints such as Abel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are also sinners, and Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, and Esau can be recipients of mercy. A good illustration is Luther's treatment of Cain and Abel, a passage which examined in Chapter Four. After Cain had committed the first murder, God announced his judgment upon Cain. Cain was cursed from the earth. However, Luther observed that "God grants this murderer a twofold favor," namely, "God promises him protection of life and gives him a wife… Their purpose was that he might have opportunity and time for repentance, although they are a matter of accident and not one of command."[3] In short, Cain is an outsider of covenantal promise, but not an outsider of mercy.

Luther's treatment of Ishmael provides another illuminating example, as discussed in Chapter Five. Ishmael once took pride in his status as the first-born of Abraham, just as Cain did before.[4] But after God disciplined Hagar and Ishmael by casting them out from Abraham's household, Hagar and Ishmael repented and were saved. For Luther, such an expulsion was good for them, a merciful wrath (*ira misericordiae*). "There was no other remedy for crushing the pride in merits and prestige unless Ishmael, together with his mother, were cast out of the holy church of God, which was in the house of Abraham. But if this did not take place without great grief and many tears, yet the fruit which resulted was far greater; for in this way they attain grace

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[3] *LW* 1:301; WA 42:222.

[4] However, as opposed to his clear affirmation of Ishmael's salvation, Luther's attitude towards Cain's eternal destination is far more ambiguous. On the one hand, Cain was seen as the prototype of the false church; but on the other hand, since Cain was cursed "from the earth" rather than "from heaven," many descendants of Cain might join the true church and be saved. Throughout his discussion, Luther neither affirms nor rejects the possibility of Cain's salvation. However, it seems to me that Cain was not saved, for in Luther's final comments on Cain, Cain, in his construction of a city, "is puffed up by the accidental mercy and … seeks an occasion to become prominent." *LW* 4:18; WA 43:232.

and are saved."[5] In other words, Hagar and Ishmael were saved because they experienced the power of law and gospel as intended in the *theologia crucis* pedagogy. In sum, Luther's evangelical anthropology not only transformed his view of saints and holiness, but also reshaped the idea of the unchosen figures in Scripture. The unchosen are outsiders of covenantal promise, but not outside of mercy.

Luther's anthropological reshaping of the unchosen can be extended communally to the understanding of the Jews as chosen people of God. Luther admitted that God established the covenant of circumcision with Abraham's descendants, specifically the Jews, through whom the promised Seed, the Messiah, would one day be born. However, his Genesis Lectures show that Luther painstakingly argued that not all who had the covenantal promise will be saved, nor that all who do not have the same will be rejected.

> Therefore to say "We have the promise, and therefore we shall all be its heirs" does not follow; neither does "We do not have the promise, and therefore we have been rejected." From all peoples God has taken some, so that we should not boast. But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 10:17), both he who has the promise and he who does not have it, so that He Himself may be righteous and may make righteous those who are of faith.[6]

The Jewish people have both mercy and promise. The Gentiles are those who have mercy without the promise. However, the fact that the Jews possessed the covenantal promise was no guarantee of their eternal salvation, nor was the fact that the Gentiles did not have the covenantal promise destine them to be the sons of perdition. The essential character of the people of God is their sheer trust in the promise of the faithful and merciful God, instead of the superiority of one's ethnic or social status. This is where Luther's idea of the invisibility or hiddenness of the

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[5] *LW* 4:60; WA 43:178. See also Mattox, "Defenders of the Holy Matriarchs," 163–64.

[6] *LW* 6:283–84; WA 44:211.

faithful comes into play.[7] The invisibility or hiddenness of the true church was not only a polemical weapon against the Pope's hierarchical claim to rule over the whole of Christendom, but it also played out exegetically in Luther's understanding of the people of God in history. For instance, in commenting on the occupation of Abel as shepherd, Luther remarked that the humble and despised Abel typified the nature of the true church,

> Therefore the true church is hidden; it is banned; it is regarded as heretical; it is slain. … The true church is not regarded as the church; but, in harmony with the name Abel (who is not only a figure of the true church but its beginning), it is considered so worthless that its slayers believe that God does not care about it.[8]

> God approves the suffering church as he accepts Abel, and condemns the hypocritical church, as he rejects Cain. Luther applied the same principle to the unbelieving Jews. Because the Jews took pride in the fact that they are the sons of Abraham, they identified themselves with Cain. This identification of Cain with the Jews places Luther partially in line with the *adversus Judaeos* tradition that saw the Jews as a type of Cain, as explored in Chapter Three.[9]

> Therefore God acted properly when He permitted Cain to fall this way as an example for the entire world, so that no one might boast of the nobility of his blood, as the Jews pride themselves on their father Abraham or the Greeks on their wisdom. God wants to be feared; He wants us to be kept humble. But His desire to achieve this is almost without result; for neither the manifestations of His great wrath nor the corruption and the annihilation of the first human beings and of the first nations have an effect on us.[10]

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[7] See Chapter Two, p. 38 above for Hendrix's discussion of the hiddenness of the true church.

[8] *LW* 1:253; WA 42:187–88. In fact, the idea that Abel marks the beginning of the true church originates from Augustine's *The City of God* Book XV Chapter Seven, where he treats Abel and Cain as the prototype of the heavenly and earthly cities. See Chapter Three pp. 78–79; Chapter Four, pp. 116–17.

[9] See Chapter Three, pp. 47–49. At the same time, in identifying Cain with the Gentiles, Luther displayed some new insights which are unprecedented in the exegetical tradition.

[10] *LW* 1:256; WA 42:190. Fairly speaking, Luther in this paragraph is not solely speaking against the Jews. Both the Jews and the Greeks are his targets of admonition. But this makes our argument even stronger: that the Jews and the Greeks are on the same page in their spiritual status and none would be able to boast of themselves.

The idea of the invisible, hidden church plays a crucial role in the abolition of the superior status that the Jews claimed for themselves due to their possession of the messianic promise and other divine institutions. As John Headley remarks, the hidden church "does not lack organized expression but it is never coterminous and identical with the institutional framework. ... Faith alone gives unity to the people of God and provides the common study of the Church; anything else is sectarianism."[11] The faithful remain invisible and hidden and can only be "seen" through faith. Without faith, neither the Jewish temple nor the papist Masses are of any use.

> Therefore of what importance is it that the Jews boast (Jer. 7:4): "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord"? Of what importance is it that the papists extol their Masses, their sackcloth garments, their hardships, their toils, and the size, the quantity, and finally the value of their works? God is not interested in works, not even in those which He Himself has commanded, when they are not done in faith, as the passage of Jeremiah just quoted shows. He is even less interested in the works which have been invented by men without a Word of God; He is interested in faith alone, that is, the reliance on His mercy through Christ.[12]

By drawing a comparison between the Jews and the Papacy, Luther abolished their bases for boasting, just as he set aside the medieval notion of sainthood. Once Luther replaced the Jewish claims of advantage and papal claims of primacy with faith in the Word of promise as the defining element of the true church, the call for the reevaluation of those outside the Abrahamic covenant became theologically reasonable. Although the unique role of the Jews in the unfolding of salvation history is not undermined, Luther reevaluated the inclusion of the Gentiles in a different light. Having reshaped the understanding of the people of God, Luther attempted to leave room for God's mercy to them. In God's sight, faith is the only vital element that counts in one's salvation. "He is interested in faith alone, that is, the reliance on His mercy through

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[11] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 60.

[12] *LW* 1:258–59; WA 42:191.

Christ."[13] Table 8.1 illustrates the concept as follows.

Table 8.1 Luther's Reshaping of the Understanding of the People of God

Perspective	Dismantlement	Refocusing/ Replacement	Reevaluation
Individual	The Medieval notion of Sainthood	Word of forgiveness	The Unchosen
Communal	The Superiority Status of the Jews and Papacy	Faith as Trust	Pagan/Gentiles

The Contour of Luther's *Fortuita Misericordia* Hermeneutics

Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* can be understood in two ways—one personal and another salvation historical.[14] From a personal aspect, *fortuita misericordia* is the way that Luther elucidated God's benevolence towards the undeserved, covenantal outsiders. This mercy carries two types of benefits—temporal and soteriological. Temporally, the unchosen were spared from immediate punishment and provided tangible goods for their earthly life. Soteriologically, the possibility of association with the true church is still open to them, given that they respond to the Word of promise in faith. Second, *fortuita misericordia* also conveys a salvation-historical meaning. It also carries a twofold benefit—the unfolding of the divine masterplan and the *theologia crucis* pedagogy. On the one hand, the idea of *fortuita misericordia* explains how God's salvific plan unfolded in history to include the Gentiles or covenantal outsiders within the true church, i.e. all people of faith in Christ. Certain covenantal outsiders were preserved for the sake of the promised Seed, who is Christ, for God in his sovereignty determined to include some

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[13] *LW* 1:259; WA 42:191.

[14] See Chapter One, pp. 3–4.

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individuals, who by birth are outside the covenant, in the genealogy of Christ. On the other hand, the unfolding of God's salvific plan in Genesis often involved the rejection of the firstborn and the election of the second born. This reflects God's way of dealing with the world, namely, *theologia crucis*, his *modus operandi* that seems weak and foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1–2). Luther found the *theologia crucis* best illustrated by the patriarchal narratives where God's choice of the younger over against the firstborn signifies his casting off of the proud and his exaltation of the humble. Within this twofold aspect of *fortuita misericordia* and their respective benefits in mind, we turn to the analysis of the four interpretive principles upon which Luther's idea of *fortuita misericordia* and the unchosen was built.

Divine Mercy: The Source of *Fortuita Misericordia*

The first principle involved as a constitutive form of *fortuita misericordia* is the universal nature of divine mercy. The mercy of God extends to all human beings, regardless of their moral or covenantal status. He is the one who makes "the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). This universal nature of divine mercy manifests itself most prominently in the life of Cain after his notorious crime. In fact, the basic contour of Luther's *fortuita misericordia* can be found in his treatment of the Cain narrative. The mercy bestowed upon Cain carries two types of benefits—temporal and soteriological. Temporally, God grants him the protection of life and the gift of having a family.[15] Soteriologically, Cain's innocent wife became for Cain and his descendants a minister of the Word so that the opportunity for repentance was still open to them. Therefore, in Luther's mind the physical and spiritual blessing were correlated. The physical blessing often paves the way for

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[15] WA 42:222; *LW* 1:301. See Chapter Four, pp. 128–29.

spiritual blessing, though not by necessity.[16] For Luther, however, in addition to the temporal

benefit, the idea of *fortuita misericordia* always carries a soteriological *telos*, for the Word of

God is always invigoratingly active in all human history. In this regard, *fortuita misericordia*

serves and remains an integrated part of Luther's theology of the Word.

The Egyptians in the time of Joseph were another example of the mercy of God extended to

covenantal outsiders. Joseph served the Egyptians as the ruler who provided temporal goods and,

at the same, time, the preacher of the Word. Joseph's role as an excellent ruler and powerful

preacher was clearly shown in Luther's comments on Gen. 47:13–14. "Thus at that time the

kingdom of Egypt had a highly distinguished prophet who arranged everything most beautifully

so far as the priesthood and civil offices were concerned. He [Joseph] taught the whole kingdom

to call upon God and delivered laws of discipline and good conduct."[17] During the time of

horrible famine, Joseph maintained the good order of the Egyptian society because of his

outstanding wisdom and kindness. Quoting Ps. 105:20–22, Luther praised that Joseph, "because

of his kindness and goodwill, had influence among the people, that he freed such a large number

from imminent destruction."[18]

Yet the mercy of God towards the Egyptians was made all the more manifest in Joseph's

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[16] As we mentioned in p.3n8, Jaroslav Pelikan used the term "common grace" to qualify what Luther meant by *fortuita misericordia*. "Common grace" is a concept coined by Abraham Kuyper. It refers to the grace which God commonly and impartially bestows to all humankind so as to explain why many moral, academic or technological achievements can be made by unbelievers. The implication of the idea is to make room for a public sphere in which Christians and believers of other faiths can freely engage with each other. However, Luther's *fortuita misericordia* carries a sense different from the idea of common grace, namely, through God's merciful providence of the unchosen, they may have a chance of repentance by hearing the Word of promise and thus be saved.

[17] *LW* 8:118–19; WA 44:665–66. "Sic regnum Aegypti eo tempore habuit excellentissimum Prophetam, qui pulcherrime omnia ordinavit, quo ad sacerdotium et officia politica attinebat, docuit universum regnum invocationem Dei, et leges disciplinae et bonorum morum tradidit."

[18] *LW* 8:129; WA 44:674. "Ioseph, qui gratia et favore valuit apud populum, eo quod liberavit tantam multitudinem a praesentissimo exitio."

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role as the minister of the Word. As noted in Chapter Seven, in Luther's mind Joseph was the minster of the Word *par excellence*.[19] As early as his comments on Gen. 4, Joseph and Pharaoh had already made their appearance in Luther's lectures. Just as Cain's descendants received some blessings because of his innocent wife, Luther contended that Joseph became the benefactor who diligently spread the Word of God among the Egyptians. "Cain's descendants received part of the blessings which fell to his guiltless wife. Pharaoh, king of Egypt at the time of Joseph, was saved…, even though they were not part of the people of God."[20] Because of Joseph's faithful ministry, many of the Egyptians were converted to the true faith.

> To this Joseph added the many outstanding sermons which the priests heard from him. They embraced the doctrine concerning God and spread it throughout the world. For he taught them the true religion and the wisdom of God. Yet he did not force ceremonies on them, circumcision or the observance of other rites. But he was careful to impress on them that they should believe in God, who had promised the Seed that was to come.[21]

Joseph is the best illustration available in Genesis that shows how the mercy of God was extended to the Gentiles. Through Joseph's prudent administration, the temporal lives of the Egyptians were preserved at the time of famine. Through his effective preaching, many of the Egyptians, probably including Pharaoh himself, came to the true faith and worshipped the true God.

There is no explicit mention of the Hermes Trismegistus in Luther's Genesis Lectures. However, a comparison between Luther's reading of Joseph and the Hermetic tradition may deepen our appreciation of Luther's idea of ministers of the Word, as the two lines of thought represent two different responses to the same problem, namely, from whom did the pagan

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[19] "Joseph is a figure of Christ, who although He is the Son of Jacob is nevertheless adored by His father." *LW* 8:140; WA 44:681. See Chapter Seven, pp. 222–27 for details.

[20] *LW* 1:314; WA 42:230.

[21] *LW* 8:130; WA 44:674.

receive the true knowledge of God? While Hermes Trismegistus was for some late medieval humanists (like Pico and Ficino) an ancient pagan who channeled the knowledge of the Hebrew God to the Greek philosophers through his writings, for Luther, the transmission of true doctrine of God was accomplished by Joseph, a biblical figure whose time even predated Hermes. In this regard, we may even say Joseph was Luther's "Hermes."

Three points can be made here. First, while the proponents of the Hermetic tradition addressed the problem of paganism by drawing attention to the theistic idea they found in extrabiblical sources, namely, the Hermetic writings, Luther exclusively based his discussion upon the canonical literature, namely, Genesis. From a biblical perspective, Luther's exegetical case carried a stronger force than the Hermetic tradition in explaining how the ancient pagans received the salvific knowledge from God. Second, Luther's emphasis on the role of ministers of the Word through whom the pagans received the Word of God broadened the understanding of how God has worked among the pagans before the incarnation. God did not deprive even the first murderer of the chance of receiving his Word. Third, the unbroken chain of ministers of the Word which Luther learned from Genesis provides a way of understanding how divine mercy displayed in the human society differed from the late medieval notion of divine mercy as manifested in God's acceptance of those who do what is in them (*facere quod in se est*). The universal nature of divine mercy not only manifested in God's provision of tangible goods for all people, but also in his provision of ministers of the Word among them.

Promise and Faith: The Rationale for *Fortuita Misericordia*

Luther's unique understanding of the nature of promise and the necessity of faith is the second interpretative principle which informs the use of *fortuita misericordia*. Clearly shown in his exposition of the stories of Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob, Luther pointedly

distinguished two different kinds of attachment to the promise of the Seed—one physical and another spiritual. Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and the Jews all have the physical attachment to the promise in the form of circumcision. Similar to baptism, for Luther, circumcision was a visible sign enjoined with an invisible reality, namely, the divine promise.[22] The use of circumcision, the physical attachment to the promise, provided an outward mark laid on the bodies of Abraham's descendants in order to remind them that they are the people of God set apart from all other nations until the advent of Christ.

In addition to the *exclusive* function of circumcision, Luther also emphasized the *inclusive* or evangelical function of circumcision. Circumcision can be regarded as an invitation through which the Gentiles would be invited to the faith of Abraham and saved. Circumcision, as an expression and confirmation of the promise of salvation, is not a problem in and of itself. For Luther, however, the mere outward form of circumcision is not sufficient without faith. Circumcision saves not because of the act itself, but "faith in the promise which was attached to circumcision and … embodied in it."[23] As such, the exclusive, preparatory role of the physical attachment to the promise that set God's people apart from all nations should always pave the way for the more prominent, inclusive role of the spiritual attachment through which even the Gentiles would be able to share the Abrahamic promise in faith. Overall, circumcision is "a reminder to the other nations and may give them the opportunity to believe the same God—the God who had promised Abraham the Blessed Seed—and to hope for Christ."[24]

The idea of two kinds of attachment to the promise is of utmost importance in our study because it helps clarify Luther's view of the people of God in history. The designation of the

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[22] See Chapter Five, pp. 147–48.

[23] *LW* 3:106; WA 42:624.

[24] *LW* 3:93–94; WA 42:615.

"people of God" in Luther's lectures contains two overlapping yet distinct notions, one physical and another spiritual. The Jews can legitimately be called "the people of God" because of their physical attachment to the promise through circumcision. Yet this physical notion of "the people of God" had to give way to the more essential, spiritual notion of "the people of God" when Luther talked about one becoming a partaker of the promise through faith. These two notions of "the people of God" sometimes overlapped, yet they must be distinguished from each other for two reasons. First, the distinction was a polemical tool for Luther against the Jews, that the mere practice of circumcision (physical attachment) never guarantees personal salvation (spiritual attachment). Second, the distinction provides comfort for the Gentiles that the unchosen may find salvation through faith in the promise. In the final analysis, for Luther, each of the two notions of attachment to the promise has its own role in God's salvific plan. Only the spiritual attachment results in personal salvation, but the genealogy of the promised Seed bound by the physical attachment is indispensable for the sake of salvation history.

Instead of following the outward practice of circumcision, or sharing the blood heritage of Abraham, what matters for one's incorporation into the people of God is to share the faith of Abraham. John Headley once remarked that, for Luther, the cornerstone of Christian faith is the divine promise given to Abraham who received it in faith.[25] Luther understood the promise as the "permanent fact of Church history [that] alone pertains to justification."[26] This idea of promise in turn reshaped his thinking of the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. "Christ is therefore always active in history, and man's response [in] faith remains at all times the same with respect to its content and nature."[27] The promise given to the patriarchs of the Old

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[25] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 125.

[26] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 126.

[27] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 126.

Testament and to the disciples of the New Testament remained the same, and as such "Church history moves on the permanent basis of God's promise and manifests itself in the transmission of signs of the promise and in the preservation of a people that believes in the promise."[28] Our study not only confirmed but further extended the implication of Headley's observation. Not only did the patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph share the same faith in the promise as the disciples in the New Testament, but also the covenantal outsiders such as Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians who became partakers of the same faith. In a more precise sense though, for Luther, the covenantal outsiders of the Old Testament bear greater similarity to the Gentiles of the New Testament, like Luther and his fellow Germans. As Luther acknowledged in his comments on Gen. 36:1, "It is necessary to distinguish between the promise and truth and accidental mercy [*fortuita misericordia*]. We have mercy without the promise; the Jews have mercy with the promise. … Esau and Ishmael lacked this promise, but they were not excluded from mercy, for the histories testify the opposite."[29] Notice here in using "promise" Luther simply refered to the promise in its bodily notion that one day the Messiah will be born out of the line of the Jews in the flesh. Both the covenantal outsiders and Luther's Germans are in the same dilemma because they both lacked this "promise"— born apart from the consanguinity of Christ in flesh. Yet this lack of "promise"—the bodily sense of the term—would never be a hindrance for Gentiles to be partakers of the promise—the spiritual sense of the term—if they share the same faith of Abraham. This is why the distinction between the two kinds of attachment to the promise remains crucial in understanding Luther's notion of the people of God.

A secondary, yet closely related, component of Luther's notion of promise and faith is the

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[28] Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 127.

[29] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211. See Chapter Six, p. 202.

dialectical function of law and gospel.[30] One must experience the full force of law and gospel before one becomes a true heir of Abraham. The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from the house of Abraham in Gen. 21 best illustrates this. Luther interprets the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael as a demonstration of how the law functions in our sinful flesh. "But whatever there is of the Law, whatever there is of the will of the flesh and of man—of this it is said: 'Cast it out!' For God cannot bear the presumption of Ishmael; that is, He does not want us to glory in our physical birth, in our strength, in the freedom of our will, in our wisdom and righteousness."[31] Only in this despair and hopeless situation would we turn wholeheartedly to the saving promise of Christ. "This is the purpose of such a pitiful expulsion: God wants to teach us that we are saved by grace alone and by faith alone. Faith takes hold of the grace that is set before us in the promise."[32] Luther made the same case for Esau. Although the repentance of Esau was not explicitly recounted in Genesis, Luther viewed Esau's benign attitude towards his brother in Gen. 33 as strong evidence that his heart was changed through his repentance because of God's grace.

Luther's insight on human identity and his idea of faith and promise illuminate the discussion of the problem of paganism. As discussed in Chapter Three,[33] the dominant opinion in the Middle Ages concerning the salvation of the virtuous pagans was the role of "implicit faith." Before the incarnation, the only requirement for salvation was the "Pauline minimum" of Heb. 11:6, namely, the belief that God exists and he is the rewarder of faith. However, for Luther, implicit faith and virtues are no longer constitutive of one's salvation. First, Luther relativized the idea of implicit faith by deepening the nature of faith. Faith for Luther is to adhere oneself

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[30] By "secondary" we are not to imply that it is unimportant to Luther's theology. Instead, the discussion of the function of law and gospel is of secondary importance with respect to our topic of interest.

[31] *LW* 4:50; WA 43:171.

[32] *LW* 4:60; WA 43:178.

[33] See Chapter Three, pp. 89, 92, 96–98, 106.

wholeheartedly to the promise of God. As such, faith transcends both ethnic boundaries (Jews or Gentiles) and temporal boundary (before or after the incarnation) because faith remains the same for all people since the beginning of the world. The traditional requirement for objective knowledge of the revelation (*fides quae creditur*) is replaced by the qualitative importance of subjective faith (*fides qua creditur*) in the promise. Second, Luther problematized the connection between virtues and salvation. Under the framework of two kinds of righteousness, human virtues for Luther were simply the manifestation of the active, horizontal righteousness between man and his neighbors (*coram hominibus*) which cannot affect or alter one's passive, vertical relationship with God. Virtuous living is replaced by sole trust to the God who promises to bring forth new life. As a result, in Luther's soteriological articulation, both the degree of knowledge in divine revelation and virtuous living are relativized in relation to one's righteousness or identity before God (*coram deo*). Since the conditions by which one's salvation are measured have shifted, the nature of being an "outsider" has correspondingly shifted as well. This is the very reason why Luther no longer asked "to what extent can the virtuous pagans be saved" but that "to what extent are the unchosen saved."

<center>The Porosity of the True and False Church: The Basis of Fortuita Misericordia</center>

Luther understood church history as the ongoing conflict between the true and the false church. As discussed in Chapter Four, Luther creatively reformulated Augustine's classic doctrine of two cites into his dialectic of the twofold church.[34] For Luther, the book of Genesis reveals the concrete unfolding of the twofold church from its beginning. The true and false church began to divide in Adam's two sons, Cain and Abel, since each respectively exemplified

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[34] See Chapter Four, pp. 116–17 for the discussion of the difference between Augustine's framework of the two cities and Luther's duality of the twofold church.

all the characteristics which the true and false church may possess. Cain, who abused his primogeniture and persecuted his brother to death, became the prototype of the false church. Abel, who offered his sacrifice by faith and suffered the persecution of his brother, became the prototype of the true church.

> The conflict between the true and the false church was initiated
>
> since the beginning of the world, just as the conflict between the brothers began in the womb of their mother [Rebecca]. And the end of this war is not yet, because it is the same strife that took place between Cain and Abel and between the descendants of the serpent and the Seed of the woman. … This is the source of the hatred between Cain and Abel, between Ishmael and Isaac, between Esau and Jacob, and between the church of God and that of the devil.[35]

Therefore, Genesis gives a series of concrete examples of the continuing conflict between the true and false church where Abel and all the patriarchs represent the true church and Cain, Ishmael, and Esau exemplify the false church.

The reasonable conclusion from this observation ought to be that since Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and all of their descendants were all members of the false church of the devil, they could never be saved. Yet Luther said the exact opposite. One of the most astonishing findings in this study is that the boundary between the two churches can never be rigorously marked. Instead, as Jonathan Trigg argues, the dividing line between the two churches is only a "porous boundary."[36] Only in this idea of porosity of the true and false church can we make sense of the soteriological function of *fortuita misericordia*. Although Cain, Ishmael, and Esau were *de facto* the firstborn of their family, they only embodied the arrogant and self-righteous firstborn. Yet because of *fortuita misericordia*, the possibility of salvation was still open to them as individuals provided that they cling to the Word of promise by faith and repent.

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[35] *LW* 4:344; WA 43:384.

[36] Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 50. See Chapter Four, pp. 133–35.

As shown in the previous chapters, Luther believed that Ishmael and Esau were finally saved through experiencing the dialectic of law and gospel that brought them to true repentance and faith. This conceptual framework of the porosity of the true and false church is of great importance in Luther's ecclesiological thinking because it reflects Luther's pastoral sensitivity to the psychological nuances of a believer's self-image. On the one hand, the porous boundary reminds those who are in the state of spiritual well-being that they should not take pride and boast in one's status of "true" church membership, lest one may fall from grace. On the other hand, the porous boundary reminds those who are undergoing spiritual struggle that they should not be desperate and yield to the fact that they belong to the "false" church.

In this regard, the porosity of the true and false church works perfectly within the perimeter of the law and gospel dialectic, reminding us that one should always humble himself and take hold of the Word of promise, or more accurately, let ourselves be humbled by confessing that there is nothing that we can do for ourselves except obtain passively the grace from God through faith. In the words of Dennis Ngien, "We have no 'active capacity' to humble ourselves but only a 'passive capacity' to be humbled. Thus we obtain grace not by 'doing what is in us,' but by humbly accepting what is being done *to us* within the law–gospel distinction."[37] In sum, the boundary between the true and the false church is permeable in nature which anticipates the inevitable crossing of individuals in both directions.

Gentiles and the Salvation History: The Purpose of *Fortuita Misericordia*

The final piece of Luther's interpretive principles enshrining his use of *fortuita misericordia* is the role of the believing Gentiles in salvation history. We begin our discussion

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[37] Dennis Ngien, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 9. See also Forde, *Theologian of the Cross*, 60–61.

with Luther's view of the unfolding of salvation history in general, and then his view of the believing Gentiles in the Old Testament in particular.

Luther's notion of the unfolding of salvation history shows that he both inherited the theological tradition before him and transformed certain elements within that tradition according his evangelical insights. As discussed in Chapter Six, Luther was well aware of the fact that the Jews had a prominent role in salvation history as they were the people who carried the covenantal promise of the Seed. Luther also recognized that the people in the Old Testament, the Jews and Gentiles alike, possessed only a general idea of the coming of a "Seed" who is going to be savior, and that their knowledge of the coming Messiah came gradually as the promise progressively became more explicit throughout the history of the Old Testament. The medieval ideas of implicit faith and Christ's descent into Hell for the liberation of the patriarchs were the traditional response to this problem.

Nevertheless, Luther handled the problem of paganism differently. First, Luther prioritized the subjective aspect of faith as trust over the objective aspect of faith as belief. While the traditional concepts of "implicit faith" and "Christ's descent into *limbo* in order to liberate the holy patriarchs" were attempts to account for the gradual development of revelation and the imperfection of one's knowledge of it, Luther prioritized the subjective faith (*fides qua creditur*) in the promise over the progressive, historical unfolding of the objective content of that promise (*fides quae creditur*). For Luther, historical belief, however important it might be, is only the basis for the trust that is the heart of the relationship. It is the subjective faith that really counts in determining one's soteriological disposition before God.

Second, Luther's prioritization of subjective faith to objective faith in turn transformed his notion of salvation history. In Erik Herrmann's doctoral dissertation he argued that "[t]he

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uniqueness of Luther's interpretation … consists of a distinction of law and gospel that is set in existential rather than historical categories."[38] The unity of the two testaments is found not in the historical continuity between the old era of prophecy and the new era of fulfillment, but in "this existential *separation* of the law from the gospel. … The testaments are therefore united by the one God who deals with this people in two distinct ways, and by the one faith which arises from this twofold word of God."[39] The shift in Luther's understanding of law and gospel is also applicable to his notion of salvation history. The nature of subjective faith remains the same throughout the two testaments. In this regard, the two testaments are united by the same God who speaks to his people with the expectation of their active, trustful response. As such, the whole history recounted in the Scriptures is the history of the people of God.

Accordingly, since the church is present at the beginning of creation, even before the institution of family, the entire history in the Old Testament narratives, including the book of Genesis, is church history. Here the "church" and the "people of God" are synonyms. As Jaroslav Pelikan points out, one of Luther's exegetical concerns in Genesis was how the title "people of God" may legitimately befit the Christian church rather than the Jewish nation.[40] Sherry Jordon made the same observation. For Luther, "the people of God was never identified with a particular nation, racial group, or institutional structure. It was defined by the Word of God—the promise of Christ—and identified with hearers of the Word. 'In short, there is no people of God unless it has the promises and believes them.' Those who heard and believed the promise—in any time, of any nation—were members of the Church."[41] One should never

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[38] Erik H. Herrmann, "'Why Then the Law?': Salvation History and the Law in Martin Luther's Interpretation of Galatians, 1513–1522," (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2005), 6.

[39] Herrmann, "'Why Then the Law?" 7 (emphasis original).

[40] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 92.

[41] Jordon, "The Patriarchs and Matriarchs as Saints," 334; The quote is from *LW* 4:32, WA 43:158.

identify the people of God with a certain ethnic group or institution, for no ethnic group or hierarchal institution on earth, be it the Jewish nation or the papal church, has the right to privatize the kingdom of God to his own. It is the Word who begets his church, not the other way around. The true church is present whenever the Word of promise is proclaimed and received by the people of God in faith regardless of which ethnic group or to which dispensation they belong.

This holistic understanding of salvation history also sheds light on the problem of paganism. Since Luther understood salvation history in a holistic way, namely, that there is only one salvation plan for all people of all ages, the discussion of either implicit faith or special inspiration turns out to be trivial and of secondary importance. For Luther, there was no longer any need to make the distinction between implicit knowledge and explicit knowledge of Christ when considering one's sufficient knowledge for one's salvation.

Luther's view of the believing Gentiles in the Old Testament was inextricably related to his idea of election as shown in his Genesis Lectures. As noted in Chapter Six,[42] Luther interpreted Paul's doctrine of election through the lens of the twofold church and the promised Seed. Luther reframed the question of the chosen or unchosen from the perspective of God's covenantal grace. The Jews as a whole were the "elect" and "chosen" while the Gentiles as a whole were "non-elect" or "unchosen." As such, for Luther, election was more of a salvation-historical category than a purely soteriological predisposition of God towards a certain group of people.

An important theological implication follows from this: there is a conceptual relationship between a member of the chosen and a member of the true church, but they are not synonyms. For Luther, as shown in his commentary on the birth of Esau and Jacob, the election of Jacob over Esau served two related purposes. On the one hand, Jacob's chosen-ness is about how God

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[42] See Chapter Six, p. 184.

uses him in his unfolding plan which culminates in Christ. The promised Seed is preserved

through Jacob, not Esau. On the other hand, God's election of Jacob over Esau is nothing but the

display of God's working in the world, his *theologia crucis* pedagogy.[43]

Through his election of Jacob over Esau, God taught that he despises the proud and exalts

the humble. As Richard Bauckham once noted in God's election of David, the ignored youth of

his family, "David the mere shepherd boy was God's surprising choice, though perhaps not so

surprising when one gets to know the biblical God who characteristically chooses the least

important, the least qualified in the eyes of the world."[44] God's way of choosing may appear

surprising, yet this is his way of dealing with the world—to choose what is foolish to shame the

wise, to choose what is weak to shame to strong (1 Cor. 1:27). Whoever takes pride in his fleshly

glory represents the false church, and whoever follows the divine call and takes hold of the

promise represents the true church. In sum, the chosen and the true church have a twofold

salvation-historical connection—the chosen represent the true church in their bearing of the

Messianic promise in the flesh and displays God's way of dealing with the world.

However, there is a crucial difference between being a member of the chosen and being a

member of the true church. When "chosen" and "unchosen" are salvation-historical categories,

they are not designations of soteriological destiny. In other words, for Luther, the chosen are not

necessarily saved whereas the unchosen are not inevitably condemned. Members of the unchosen

can become members of the true church through faith in the Word. This is perhaps the single

most valuable finding in this study.

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[43] See Chapter Two, pp. 29–30.

[44] Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World: Hermeneutical Ventures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 147.

Therefore to say "We have the promise, and therefore we shall all be its heirs" does not follow; neither does "We do not have the promise, and therefore we have been rejected." From all peoples God has taken some, so that we should not boast. But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 10:17), both he who has the promise and he who does not have it, so that He Himself may be righteous and may make righteous those who are of faith.[45]

Three points should be made in order. First, Luther did not understand "promise" as an intellectual concept disconnected from the bodily, physical means. God made a covenant with Adam, Abraham, and the Israelites as they were entrusted with the promise of the Seed that one day the Messiah would be from the Jews according to the flesh. Thus, the promise is from the beginning wedded to the physical generation of Adam, culminating in Christ, the son of David, who was the Word incarnate, i.e. in the flesh. This incarnational understanding[46] of *promissio* is further reinforced by Luther's treatment of the ministers of the Word as the intermediary agents through whom the *promissio* was delivered from the preachers' mouths to the receivers' ears. Luther's incarnational notion of *promissio* also accounts for his envisioning of the theophany accounts of Genesis as ones by which the voice of God was put in the mouths of the patriarchs. There is more at stake than the insistence of the mediatory role of the ministers.[47] For Luther, it is God's accustomed way to work in the world, namely, to deliver his will and promise through a bodily, physical means. This incarnational notion of *logos* was so deeply ingrained in Luther's

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[45] *LW* 6:284; WA 44:211.

[46] Recall Lazareth's use "incarnational and sacramental realism," p. 211.

[47] As mentioned in Chapter Four (p. 120), two explanations have been offered in the last decades concerning Luther's preference of speaking of the patriarchs as God's mouthpiece in the theophany accounts of Genesis, one by Pelikan and another by Magarik. While Pelikan highlights the importance of the mediatory role of ministers of the Word, Magarik turns his focus on the psychological and circumstantial nuances of the narrator. We are more in line with Pelikan's argument as it takes serious consideration of Luther's theology of the Word. However, what Pelikan implicitly indicates but never states explicitly here is the incarnational notion of the Word. The closest expression of Pelikan to what we are articulating here is his statement that one of Luther's exegetical principles is to interpret "the promises and signs in Genesis as proof that God had always worked through both Word and Sacrament to call the church into being." See Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 102.

thought that it even became a hermeneutical principle as he read the theophany accounts of Genesis.

Second, since the beginning of salvation history, the unchosen are not excluded from mercy. For Luther, the phenomenon of believing Gentiles in the Old Testament provided the strongest evidence that God's salvific power extended far beyond the covenantal boundary. They are not merely exceptional cases of God's salvific work before the incarnation. Rather, they represent God's original scope of salvation for all human beings.

Third, the existence of believing Gentiles in the Old Testament also shows that faith in the promise, not in external ceremonies (even those divinely instituted), is the necessary and sufficient condition of being the people of God. Luther relativized the soteriological significance of the bodily attachment to the promise. The promise is of no use to the Jews if they boast in themselves. By contrast, the Gentiles who believed in the promise, though they themselves are covenantal outsiders, can rightfully be called heirs of Abraham and become members of the true church. In short, faith in the promise gives a definitive unity of the people of God between the two testaments, and relativized the significance of the outward markers of the people of God in the Old Testament. In the words of William Lazareth,

> God's gracious Word was addressed to the one faithful people of God, whether in God's Old Testament with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or in God's New Testament as centered in the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:23). In promise and curses, as well as in prefigurative incidents and declarations, Gentiles Christians could rightly read the inaugurated gospel of Genesis through the realized gospel of Romans and conclude that "we are the people of God and the true church," as the spiritual (even though not physical) descendants of Abraham, who trust in Jesus as God's long-promised Messiah.[48]

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[48] Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 40.

Coherence and Development of Luther's Idea of Election and Salvation History

Thus far we have sketched the contour of the hermeneutical presuppositions governing Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia*. A question worth pursuing remains: How does Luther's handling of the unchosen and *fortuita misericordia* in Genesis provide further insight into Luther's broader doctrine of election? Given the complexity of the doctrine of election in Luther's thinking and in Protestant theology, our discussion is necessarily selective and perhaps provisional. We can only provide some preliminary observations concerning Luther's theological and exegetical treatment of Rebekah's twins in Rom. 9 and Gen. 25. What we seek to argue is that, shown from his *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516),[49] *On Bound Choice* (1525),[50] and his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), Luther's idea of election underwent several stages of development in which points of convergence and divergence can both be found.

In his *Lectures on Romans*, Luther's idea of election operated under the classic Augustinian framework, while his interpretation reflected his own spiritual struggle and personal relationship to the text. As briefly discussed in Chapter Six,[51] the key difference between Augustine and Luther in their wrestling with the doctrine of election is that while Augustine was preoccupied with the psychological motive of the individual to perform morally good deeds, Luther was mainly concerned with the pastoral question of certitude of salvation. Luther's modified Augustinian treatment of the doctrine of election is expressed well in his summary of method right before his exposition of Romans 9,

> We shall deal with this matter in three ways. First, we shall collect the proofs of an immutable predestination from the words of Scripture and from the works of God. Second, we shall analyze the objections, the exceptions, the arguments, and the

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[49] "Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia," *LW* 25; WA 56.

[50] "The Bondage of the Will," *LW* 33; WA 18:600–787.

[51] See Chapter Six, pp. 174–75. See also Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 18–20.

motives of those who shift the guilt to God. Third, we shall give consolation to those who are frightened by these things and show the pleasant aspects of this matter in order to inspire hope.[52]

Both the first and the second way are traditional Augustinian modes of treating the problem of predestination while the third way reflects Luther's pastoral concern of offering consolation and hope to those spiritual weak. Here our focus is on Luther's pastoral care for the souls afflicted by the terrifying doctrine of predestination. The concern of spiritual comfort can be found in his *scholium* on Rom. 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy,"

> He [God] seems by these words to be rebuffing those who are anxious and curious about the predestination of themselves or of others, as if to drive them away from thoughts and questions about predestination. As the common saying goes: to whom it comes it comes, and whom it hits it hits. It is as if He were saying: "No one will know to whom I will be merciful and to whom I will be gracious, nor can anyone be certain about it because of his merits or his works or anything else." Thus this word is one of fear and humiliation.[53]

> Another notable passage showing Luther's pastoral concern for the weak is his *scholium* on

Rom. 9:16, where Luther urged us not to rush into speculation, lest we may fall into horror and desperateness. Instead, one should

> purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. [The doctrine of predestination] is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most excellent theology, …. But I am a baby who needs milk, not solid food (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2). Let him who is a child like me do the same. The wounds of Jesus Christ, 'the clefts of the rock,' are sufficiently safe for us.[54]

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[52] *LW* 25:373; WA 56:383. "Tria Circa Hanc materiam faciemus. Primo probationes immutabilis predestinationis ex Scripturę verbis et Dei operibus colligemus. Secundo Obiectiones et exceptiones eorum, qui in Deum culpam transferunt, et argumenta eorum | et motiua | soluemus. Tercio Consolationes eorum, qui ex iis terrentur, et huius materię dulcorationes ad spem inducendam moliemur.

[53] *LW* 25:387; WA 56:397. "Videtur istis verbis repellere || quasi a cogitatione et inquisitione predestinationis repellendo || Curiosos inquietosque de predestinatione sui Vel aliorum. Vt et vulgo: **Wem es wirt, dem wirt es, wen es trifft, den triffts,** q. d. Nemo sciet, cui miserebor et ignoscam, Nec meritis nec operibus nec vllis aliis poterit id certum esse vlli. | Et ita est verbum timoris et humiliationis. |"

[54] *LW* 25:389; WA 56:400. "Hic tamen Moneo, Vt in istis speculandis nullus irruat, qui nondum est purgate mentis, Ne cadat in barathrum horroris et desperationis, Sed prius purget oculos cordis in meditatione Vulnerum Ihesu Christi. Neque enim ego ista legerem, Nisi ordo lectionis et necessitas cogeret. Quia hoc est robustissimum

In the *scholium* on Rom. 9:19, Luther again uttered his concern for the spiritually weak. "For our God is not a God of impatience and cruelty, even toward the ungodly. I am saying this for the comfort of those who are perpetually troubled by thoughts of blasphemies and are in great anxiety."[55] The terrifying thought about whether one is doing anything evil against God turned out to be the clearest sign of a sincere heart agreeable to God.

Another aspect of Luther's doctrine of election was its use as a weapon against the arrogance of the unbelieving Jews who continued to claim to be the legitimate heirs of Abraham. In his *scholium* on Rom. 9:6, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel," Luther applied this passage against the "presumptuousness" of the Jews. The very existence of Ishmael and Esau as children of Abraham in the flesh yet without deserving to be the heirs of the promise is the strongest evidence that "the flesh does not make sons of God and the heirs of promise, but only the gracious election of God."[56] In fact, Luther made the same use of Ishmael and Esau in his comments on the circumcision of Abraham's family (Gen. 17) and the birth of Rebekah's twins (Gen. 25) as the proof of God's disregard for the flesh.[57]

In sum, in Luther's treatment of Rom. 9, the election of Jacob over Esau is one example showing God's immutable and predestined plan concerning the salvation of individuals. "Jacob was loved by God because he had been elected, and he obtained mercy because it thus pleased God from eternity."[58] Yet Luther's pastoral sensitivity and personal struggle with anxiety often

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vinum et perfectissimus cibus, solida esca perfectorum i.e. excellentissima theologia, de qua Apostolus: 'Sapientiam loquimur inter perfectos.' Ego vero paruulus sum, lactis indigens, non esca. Ita faciat, qui mecum paruulus est. Tuta satis sunt nobis Vulnera Ihesu Christi, 'foramina petrę'. Discutiant primum Sententiarum Robusti et perfecti, Qui merito non primus, Sed nouissimus liber esset. In quem multi hodie temere ruunt et mire etiam excçcantur."

[55] *LW* 25:390; WA 56:401. "Quia non est Deus noster Deus impatientię et crudelitatis, etiam super Impios. Quod dico pro Consolatione eorum, qui vexantur Iugiter cogitationibus blasphemiarum et trepidant nimium."

[56] *LW* 25:385; WA 56:394.

[57] See Chapter Five, pp. 161–62 and Chapter Six, p. 186.

[58] *LW* 25:391; WA 56:402.

drove him back to the promise of God in Christ.

De servo arbitrio (*On the Bondage of the Will* or *On Bound Choice*) is arguably one of the

most influential and controversial works which Luther produced in his life. This highly

polemical treatise against the idea of free will posed by Desiderius Erasmus has had a significant

impact upon the Christian West since its publication. While it is beyond our intention to provide

a thorough overview of this treatise, it may prove helpful to outline an observation concerning

the method of this work. Robert Kolb reminds us of the importance of recognizing that *De servo*

arbitrio

> is an "occasional" work, a polemical work, a somewhat narrowly focused work set in
> the larger framework of Luther's thought within its historical development, a work
> fashioned by Luther's scholastic rhetorical training, and a work that emerged within
> the engagement of two great thinkers who did not summarize their entire theological
> point of view.[59]

Kolb's reminder is of great help in putting our observation of Luther's comment on the election

of Jacob over Esau into perspective.[60]

Luther addressed the question of God's election of Jacob over Esau in the fourth part of the

treatise, "Defense of Arguments against Free Choice." Luther employed the story of Esau and

Jacob in defense of his notion of necessity and God's omnipotence. It serves as the second of the

three cases which Luther provided in defense of the thesis, "If God foreknows anything, it

necessarily occurs."[61] Luther begins his discussion of the election of Jacob and Esau with the

divine oracle, "The elder shall serve the younger." Erasmus' explanation, that the oracle is not

about eternal salvation, is for Luther egregious and erroneous.[62] The meaning of the oracle is

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[59] Kolb, *On Bound Choice*, 15–16.

[60] We have discussed the idea of the hidden God in *De servo arbitrio*. See Chapter Six, pp. 179–82.

[61] *LW* 33:188; WA 18:717. "Si Deus praescit, necessario fit." The other two cases are the hardening of
Pharaoh's heart, and the potter and the clay.

[62] *LW* 33:197; WA 18:722.

clear and direct,

> The oracle in Moses runs thus: "Two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" [Gen. 25:23]. Here it is plain that two peoples are distinguished. One of them is received into the grace of God although he is the younger, so that he overcomes the elder, not indeed by his own strength, but by the favor of God. How else could the younger overcome the elder if God were not with him? Since, therefore, the younger is the future People of God, it is not only external dominion or servitude that is implied here, but everything that belongs to the People of God, i.e., the blessing, the Word, the Spirit, the promise of Christ, and the eternal Kingdom.[63]

Here Luther refuted Erasmus' suggestion in the *Diatribe* that the phrase "the elder shall serve the younger" is only of temporal significance. Rather, by the favor of God, the younger became the future people of God and took possession of all the spiritual blessings including the Word, the Spirit, the promise, and the eternal kingdom. The inevitable implication led by Luther's argument is that Esau, the one whom God hates, shared none of the blessings. "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Mal. 1:2; Rom. 9:13) is not merely about temporal misfortune, as Erasmus argued. Rather, it is about the destinies of two peoples, "one of which was accepted as a people and preserved, whereas the other was abandoned and at length destroyed."[64] As Kolb remarks, one of the key theological themes articulated in *De servo arbitrio* is that "God chooses his own." Luther steadfastly affirmed "God's unconditional predestining of his own people."[65] However, one should always be reminded that, as Kolb continues, in the years after 1525 Luther tended to be more cautious in using the term "predestination." In his correspondence, Luther often sought

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[63] *LW* 33:198; WA 18:724. "Sic enim habet oraculum in Mose: [1. Mose 25, 23] Duo populi ex utero tuo dividentur, populusque populum superabit et maior serviet minori. Hic manifeste duo populi discernuntur. Alter in gratiam Dei recipitur, licet minor, ut vincat maiorem, non quidem viribus, sed favente Deo. Alioqui quomodo vincat minor maiorem, nisi Deus sit cum eo? Cum igitur minor sit futurus populus Dei, non sola ibi dominatio externa tractatur aut servitus, sed omnia, quae pertinent ad populum Dei, id est benedictio, verbum, spiritus, promissio Christi et regnum aeternum."

[64] *LW* 33:201; WA 18:726. "illum susceptum in populum et servatum, hunc vero relictum et tandem destructum."

[65] Kolb, *On Bound Choice*, 39.

to direct those spiritually afflicted to the means of grace and Word of promise.[66] In fact, even in

such a highly polemical work as *De servo arbitrio*, Luther often managed to express his pastoral

concern regarding the abuse of the idea of election. In the second part of the treatise Luther

warned not to ponder the inscrutable will of God, lest one may be overwhelmed in despair and

doubt. We should direct our attention instead to the preached God, the God who is clothed in his

Word,

> God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have
> nothing to do with him, nor has he willed that we should have anything to do with
> him. But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in
> his Word, through which he offers himself to us and which is the beauty and glory
> with which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed. In this regard we say, the
> good God does not deplore the death of his people which he works in them, but he
> deplores the death which he finds in his people and desires to remove from them. For
> it is this that God as he is preached is concerned with, namely, that sin and death
> should be taken away and we should be saved.[67]

The preached God is the God who "speaks and therefore delivers his message of new life in oral

written, and sacramental forms."[68] This is another key theological theme of *De servo arbitrio*

noted by Kolb. This remains one the key themes in Luther's overall theology.

We now return to the *Lectures on Genesis*. Without the need of repeating every detail we

have discussed on this topic in Chapter Six, we summarize our discussion of Luther's comments

on Gen. 25, the birth of Jacob and Esau, in his Genesis Lectures in three points:

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[66] Kolb, *On Bound Choice*, 41. One example quoted by Kolb can be found in WA Br 10:492 (#3956).

[67] *LW* 33:139–140; WA 18:685. "Relinquendus est igitur Deus in maiestate et natura sua, sic enim nihil nos cum illo habemus agere, nec sic voluit a nobis agi cum eo. Sed quatenus indutus et proditus est verbo suo, quo nobis sese obtulit, cum eo agimus, quod est decor et gloria eius, quo Psalmista eum celebrat indutum. Sic dicimus: Deus pius non deplorat mortem populi quam operatur in illo, Sed deplorat mortem quam invenit in populo et amovere studet. Hoc enim agit Deus praedicatus, ut ablato peccato et morte salvi simus."

[68] Kolb, *On Bound Choice*, 44.

1. Election is more of a salvation-historical category of a group than a soteriological judgment of an individual. Jacob was chosen to be the bearer of the covenantal promise in flesh. Esau was unchosen but did not lack mercy.

2. God's election of Jacob in preference to Esau is to display his way of dealing with the world, the *theologia crucis* pedagogy. God chooses the humble and despises the proud.

3. While God's inscrutable will is surely in effect, this is beyond our grasp. We should leave the hidden God alone and cling instead to the revealed God and his Word.

With these three points mind, we now provide a few observations showing the points of convergence and divergence developing across these three works of Luther. The most prominent point which all these works share is the spiritual comfort for the weak. From the beginning of his career through the end, Luther expressed his deep pastoral concern for the spiritually afflicted. Concern for the spiritually weak and afflicted becomes the penetrating theme identifiable in Luther's articulation of the doctrine of election.

On the other hand, these three works all have unique elements distinguishable from one another. First of all, the remedies that Luther offered for the weak who are troubled by the question of predestination differed from each other. Not yet having reached a full understanding of the Word of promise and the law and gospel distinction, Luther's prescription for the weak in *Lectures on Romans* was to meditate upon the wounds of Christ, the same pastoral advice brought to him by Staupitz at the time. On the other hand, the powerful language of taking hold of the Word and the insistence on the distinction of law and gospel surfaced in both *On Bound Choice* and *Lectures on Genesis*. Second, the different life settings in which Luther lived gave a different dynamic to each of these works. The monastic and conventional Augustinian temperament of Luther can easily be diagnosed in in his comments on Rom. 9 in *Lectures on*

Romans. This is the Luther who was preoccupied with traditional Augustinian vocabulary, yet at the same time deployed his own spiritual insights due to his nominalist and monastic upbringing. The passionate and uncompromising Luther was at work in his exchange to Erasmus. *On Bound Choice* is polemical in nature and narrow in focus, which profoundly shaped the way Luther articulated the doctrine of election. Delivering his message in a classroom setting as a mature professor, the Luther in *Lectures on Genesis* was less polemical in tone and more nuanced in content. Being aware of the false impression which *De servo arbitrio* had produced since its publication, Luther sought to clarify, if not rectify, himself in some significant ways. Election in *Lectures on Genesis* is not something about God's hidden decree concerning personal salvation, but rather the way which God unfolded his grand salvation scheme in history concerning the birth of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ. As such, the term "unchosen" refers to those not included within the bloodline of the promised Seed. Concerning one's eternal destiny, God forbids all speculation on his hidden decree. As finite creatures, God's inscrutable remains far beyond our grasp of reason.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the many aspects related to Luther's use of *fortuita misericordia* in his *Lectures on Genesis*. We sought to provide the theological and hermeneutical framework which informed Luther's understanding of the people of God in history through his reading of the unchosen, covenantal outsiders in the book of Genesis. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and the Egyptians, are all covenantal outsiders but not outsiders of mercy. Luther's evangelical anthropology, his understanding of the nature of God's mercy, his notion of promise and faith, his concept of the twofold church, his idea of salvation history, and his doctrine of election were all at work in his comments on the unchosen figures. As such, the concept of *fortuita misericordia* provides an outstanding vantage point by which one is able to appreciate Luther's skillful way of crafting his exegesis together with his theology so that the two mutually inform each other. This study also sets forth several constructive clarifications and implications of Luther's theology as a whole, such as the porosity of the true and false church and the development of Luther's doctrine of election in different stages of his career. Above all, the *Lectures on Genesis* remains a captivating and profound text of Luther worthy of deeper and fuller appreciation, a series of lectures that, when treated with hermeneutical seriousness, produces great insights into Luther's theology as a whole.

Finally, this study leads to further areas for investigation. First, one can extend the scope of investigation of the topic from *Lectures on Genesis* to other writings of Luther, such as his *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), *Lectures on the Twelve Prophets* (1525), *Lectures on Isaiah* (1527), and his sermons on the Gospel pericopes. Second, Luther's transformational way of handling the problem of paganism, in particular his reading of the biblical figures as ambassadors of God who spread the Word of promise among the pagan nations, deserves a more

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thorough and comprehensive treatment. Third, the difference between Luther's *fortuita misericordia* and more modern theological conception, such as Abraham Kuyper's "common grace," may merit further theological articulation. Putting together *fortuita misericordia*, law and gospel, the two kinds of righteousness, and two realms to give a detailed account of a Lutheran public theology may be a welcome counterpart to the Kuyperian tradition. Fourth, Luther's reading of the theophany accounts and his other imaginative ways of reading Genesis deserve more attention and analysis. Fifth, since the doctrine of *theologia crucis* was deeply ingrained in Luther's exposition of the text, one is encouraged to explore more on this aspect of Luther's theology in one's handling of *Lectures on Genesis*. Sixth and lastly, one can bring Luther's idea of salvation history into conversation with the medieval and modern schemes of salvation history, such as supersessionism and dispensationalism.

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VITA

Chan-U "Vincent" Kam

October 28, 1981

Macau (S.A.R.), People Republic of China

Collegiate Institutions Attended

National Cheng Kung University, Tainan City, Taiwan (R.O.C.), Bachelor of Engineering, 2000–2004

Graduate Institutions Attended

China Evangelical Seminary, Taipei City, Taiwan (R.O.C.), Master of Divinity, 2006–2009
China Evangelical Seminary, Taipei City, Taiwan (R.O.C.), Master of Theology, 2012–2014

Previous Theses and Publications

Ecclesiology of the Word—The Characteristics and Contributions of Luther's Ecclesiology. Th.M thesis. China Evangelical Seminary, 2014. (Written in Chinese)

"Confronting the Contradictoriness of God—Luther and Calvin on Abraham's Trial (Genesis 22:1–19)," *China Evangelical Seminary Journal*, 10 (Dec. 2019): 44–66. (Written in Chinese)

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American Society of Church History