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*Consolation as Theme in Luther's Sermons and
Correspondence: Insights into his Theological Ethics*

I. Introduction

Various themes have been identified as foundational for Luther's ethical program. Hegel praised Luther asserting that "the essence of the Reformation [is]: Man is in his very nature destined to be free."¹ He also stressed, "Freedom of the spirit had its beginnings in Luther."² Peering through this set of lenses, freedom is the theme with which Luther leaves behind the late Middle Ages and ushers in the modern era and with it a relentless religious individualism, part of maturing *Geist*. Harnack had the same idealistic, historicist mindset, seeing in Luther a new "evolution" to disposition ethics.³ Althaus, along with a host of theologians, has identified the theme of justification as central to Luther's ethical thought and break with the Medieval Church.

Luther's ethics is determined in its entirety, in its starting point and in all its main features, by the heart and center of his theology, namely, by the justification of the sinner through the grace that is shown in Jesus Christ and received through faith alone. Justification by faith determines Christian ethics because, for the Christian, justification is both the presupposition and the source of the ethical life.⁴

Antecedent to centering the reformer's ethics on his doctrine of justification, recent Luther scholarship involves the scrupulous and wide-ranging activity—one beyond the scope of this study—of establishing where the reformer's theological pedigree begins. The debate of this crucial question will be largely set aside; but suffice here to add that eminent church historian, the late Heiko Oberman, of Tübingen and Arizona State Universities, was an innovative and influential proponent of situating Luther within the context of late medieval Christian theology by attempting to show important lines of continuity between the reformer and his medieval heritage.⁵ Dr. Berndt Hamm,

who focuses on the intellectual history of late medieval and Reformation Germany at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, has been another high-profile advocate making an even stronger case for this continuity.⁶ In this same vein and after a close study of the theology and rhetorical style of Luther's letters of consolation, Dr. Ute Mennecke-Haustein at the University of Bonn, concludes in explicit terms:

The consolation needs of the people of this time is almost limitless, it arises out of the situation of the existence of disease and death, economic and social insecurity, the arbitrary mercy of various authorities, and the religious uncertainty concerning the state of grace and one's eternal fate. The late-Medieval Age suffering, *Anfechtung*, and consolation literature variously consider this. While Luther accepts this theme, and indeed the consolation letters explain the most important task of theology, it is to be seen as an element of "continuity" in the "break" between the late-Middle Age and reformation. The consolation letters of the reformer can be principal witnesses when it comes to accurately describing this.⁷

I will discuss suffering, *Anfechtung*, and consolation soon enough, but instead of using Luther's correspondence to track his trajectory between the late medieval church and the Reformation, I instead want to investigate the theme of consolation⁸ contained in a broad selection of his sermons and letters from the standpoint of theological ethics.⁹ First, I contend that the special, inseparable connection between God's work of justification and Luther's treatment of consolation is that God's love for the hurting soul is operative in both. Second, that while each consoling sermon or compassionate letter is inadequate on its own to serve as a basis for understanding the reformer's moral framework, we can instead look at a "whole" these pieces may construct. Thus, my focus will be more upon the ethical norms contained in Luther's consolatory homiletical practice and correspondence, to gain insights into his theological ethics from a correlation of component parts, as it were, than to assess his struggle against the spirit of the late medieval church as he encountered it. The goal of this essay is not to analyze the continuity between the reformer and the late medieval church nor is it to emphasize a revolutionary nature of his ideas and pastoral approach. Instead, it is to indicate how his theme of consolation is a principal witness to his ethical commitment that takes on the appearance of an ethic of responsibility. Some may question if this assessment is possible or they may say this results in imposing a modern category of ethics onto the reformer. After all, he wrote little about such questions as "What is the structure of the responsible self?" or "by what moral calculus shall I determine my personal responsibility in this situation?" His focus was instead on the more practical and theological features of Christ, salvation, sin, and the sacraments. Despite that, in investigating Luther's

theme of consolation and questioning the presence of an ethic of responsibility one has to reconstruct Luther's line of thought from scattered writings that do not explicitly deal with issues of responsibility.

The Reformation, as Luther occasionally called it in reference to the entirety of his work,¹⁰ was a reassertion of the Christian estimation of the supreme importance of the individual. In large part it marked a return to the interiority of Christianity and a reassertion of the essentially spiritual character of its point of view, more so than some movements within medieval piety and mysticism were able to achieve and imbue into the masses. The Protestant doctrine of "justification by faith alone" is a theological application of the ethical principle that the moral situation hinges not upon what one does, but upon what one is; upon the attitude of one's will and the bent of one's character. It is what one is that needs to be justified by grace through faith. Luther's continuity with this point of view and his attempts to restore a more consistent spiritual ethos with the New Testament imperative cast him as the theological radical of the sixteenth century. Undergirding the reforming and ministerial activities in which Luther participated were his theological ethics. Before beginning to investigate this, we must first stop to consider the ministerial task he took on that gave expression to his ethics. In order to understand the theme of consolation embedded in Christian ethical texts it is necessary to comprehend the complex religious and cultural circumstances in which they are formed.

II. The Culture of Distress, Death and Care in Sixteenth Century Western Europe

Prior to Sigmund Freud, the study of suffering and death belonged primarily to theology and philosophy. It was not until the nineteenth century that the experience and portrayal of dying and despondence entered into conversation with psychology and the interpretation of theology as anthropology began. In so doing, consolation faced as much modern hostility as religion itself, giving rise to the ideas that "[i]n religion man seeks contentment"¹¹ and that religion essentially finds its basis in the human need for consolation.¹² What must be remembered with regard to the nineteenth century's experiential and psychological *Zeitgeist* and its projection of religion as consolation is that these views were the result of investigations into what the common person understood by religion and his or her very narrow internal expressions of religion. Moreover, this era failed to produce evidence to sustain the claims that God/consolation is a psychological crutch to support people's inability to cope with life's disappointments, or that belief in God arises from the common person's incapacity to understand physical phenomena. It offered no convincing proof to explain how the religious consolation offered at the religious intersection of the individual and pestilence-

ridden society in the early sixteenth century was a contrivance or failed.

Long recognized as one of the watersheds in European history, historians blame the cycle of plague epidemics (bubonic, septicaemic, and pneumonic) as the cause of various divergent consequences ranging from despondence and an obsession with the macabre to economic restructuring and the birth of Renaissance humanism. The great social, religious, and personal disruption associated with plagues makes the late Middle Ages population's desire for advance warning about death and the need for consolation very understandable. Nearly a third of Western Europe perished, and many cities experienced a loss of almost half their people. Transfers in choice of burial site, bequests to new religious groups, and questions of how one manages oneself upon diagnosis are dramatic evidences of social and religious changes in this period. In this culture of distress and death, what were the contours of the pre-reformation ministry of care to which Luther responded?

A. Ars moriendi

French medievalist and cultural historian, Philippe Ariès, summarized the sophisticated preparations associated with the *ars moriendi* (the art of dying) literature and iconography that provide unique insights into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' experience of death and suffering.¹³ Nearly 300 *ars moriendi* manuscripts survive, 20 percent of which are block books that suggest the great consolatory importance of this subgenre of conduct literature in late medieval and early modern thought.¹⁴ The greatest fear of this era was that once the pestilence was contracted, one would die alone and abandoned. Devout folk considered sudden death to be one of many evils from which they should pray for deliverance.¹⁵

The catechetical questions posed to the dying person and traditional prayers of the Medieval Church acknowledge a link between warning, preparation, and consolation.¹⁶ People wanted to prepare and to have a "good death" (not to be confused with euthanasia). This required very specific preparations. Dying followed prescribed gestures routinized by old customs: one awaited death lying down with various hand postures, sometimes the head oriented to the east (facing Jerusalem), the hands crossed, and the face turned up to heaven. The *ars moriendi* then gave instruction on grieving and reconciling oneself with loved ones, relatives, companions, and helpers. Grief occurred for both sides; those about to be bereaved needed to express their grief over imminent loss, and the dying person needed to mourn his or her loss of the world. A measure of suffering was an acceptable part of human dying, was short-lived, and not to be denied or obscured. But the Black Death, *per se*, was not the primary impetus behind the *ars moriendi*. The exceedingly high mortality rates among the clergy necessitated a more prominent participation of the laity in the preparation for death, that of a friend, and their own. Dying was

a very public preparation and ceremony took place in the bedchamber of the dying which was entered freely, by relatives, friends, servant, and children. In essence, the *ars moriendi* facilitated the process for the dying, for the priest and pastor, and the laity.

Nonetheless, Dr. Carter Lindberg, Professor Emeritus of Church History at Boston University, avers that the traditional symbols of security for the people of the late Middle Ages were rocked at their roots. He emphasizes, “[t]he shortness of life was never far from people’s minds,” which is an echo of Johan Huizinga, “[N]o other epoch has so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death.”¹⁷ In effect, to borrow a recent thesis from Princeton Theological Seminary’s Dr. Scott Hendrix, people in this era were primed to listen to the “re-Christianizing” message of the Reformation in a new way.¹⁸ Comparing Luther with other late medieval *ars moriendi* contributors, Jared Wicks, S. J., concludes that,

Luther did not first discover such interior trials, but he presented them with more depth and refinement than was the case in existing pastoral guidance. One’s worthiness and disposition is a marginal matter, perhaps a snare, for what matters is to believe true what God declares and shows forth in sign. Will one trustingly accept God’s veracity and let Him make one safe from enemy attacks? The malignant images of death, sin, and hell have just one remedy. They are dissipated by him who is for us sheer life, grace, and election. The sacraments reveal and apply, not Jesus’ offering to God, but God’s astounding gift to individual believers. All in all, in 1519 Luther laid the basis for renewing the Christian service of the dying. Most significantly he would ground this ministry in the central saving work of Jesus Christ and in his sacramental gift, which does not exclude the company of those whom he has already drawn into his sphere of life and love.¹⁹

Arguing more recently, and after an extensive analysis of the *ars moriendi* and German Reformation authors’ books on dying (*Sterbebuscher*), religious studies professor Austra Reinis of Missouri State University acknowledged, “The emphasis on the sacraments, in particular, on theological discussion of the sacraments in the context of instruction on the art of dying, is Luther’s most significant departure from the late medieval *ars moriendi*.”²⁰ It is from within this framework that the reformer ministered to and encouraged the dying and despondent to receive the sacraments with joy and confidence, assuring them of their salvation and that their death, sin and hell are overcome in Christ’s passion. Dr. Reinis finishes her work stressing that this certainty of one’s salvation “represents a radical departure from the *ars moriendi*, which taught that only through proper preparation could one receive the forgiveness of sins offered in the sacraments.”²¹

B. *The Cura Animarum as an Ethic of Care*

To say that pastoral care (*cura animarum*—cure of souls²²) was essential for Luther is as incisive as saying that mathematics is essential for Cambridge theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking. The reformer's books and tracts, sermons and commentaries and letters were hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility. While some may presuppose a "pestilence ethic"²³ serving as a moral-action-guide for Luther's cure of souls, his ministry of consolation extends far beyond situations involving plague and the care of people facing immanent death. His pastoral contact included those caught in the grips of suffering and distress, many of whom felt abandoned to their own weaknesses and the onslaught of desperate feelings of woe, and many who felt the pangs of conscience and questioned the authenticity of their new faith as Protestants. Lutheran theologian Dr. Oswald Bayer's characterization of Luther's ethics as an extension of his pastoral care is spot on the mark: "For all the differences in his addresses, forms of address and ways of expression, for all the different themes and issues, one thing remains certain: in everything, including his ethics, Luther was a pastoral counselor."²⁴

The reformer observed individuals who were without any great measure of confidence in the effectiveness of penitential piety and/or in divine aid; penitents were anything but consoled and God seemingly withdrew himself.²⁵ He held priests responsible for this in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), "Therefore, as the priests are, so let their ministry and duty be. For a bishop who does not preach the gospel or practice the cure of souls—what is he but an idol in the world [I Cor. 8:4] who has nothing but the name and appearance of a bishop?"²⁶

Others, of the most ardent pastoral concern to Luther, were those whose consciences were ravaged by unbelief and absolute dread with regard to their status before God. These lacked an assurance of salvation and thus faced—to borrow from Otto's classic discussion of numinous (religious) feelings—the "awefulness," the *tremendum* [of God], for which 'Wrath,' 'Fire,' 'Fury,' are excellent ideograms.²⁷ To describe such a conscience in havoc, Luther employed the term *Anfechtung* referring to, on the one hand—from the heavenly standpoint—a trial sent by God to test and strengthen the believer's faith, or an attack by the devil to destroy the believer. On the other hand—from the human standpoint—it is analogous to Kierkegaardian "*Angst*"²⁸ but without any specific English equivalent. It is a "feeling response," whose content is terror and structure is dread toward God. One discerns it as a tormented experience of a guilty conscience. It is all of human doubt, panic, and desperation that drive the soul to believe that one's guilt is greater than God's desire to forgive.²⁹

This is where Luther demonstrates the cure of souls *par excellence*. In his estimation, only "the sure and certain Word" of the Gospel was able to save

one from such distress and despair and bring peace.³⁰ Moreover, the restoration of peace was evidence of God's affirmation of his grace and the effectual power of the means of grace. For the reformer, the care of souls was the shepherding, interpreting, enabling love of God—all in the context of bible-based care—revealed in Jesus Christ, represented pastorally, and lived out in Christian community.³¹ Reformation scholar Dr. James Kittelson of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, elevated this as Luther's most important motivation when he said, "[a]bove all . . . the care of souls, but not the church as such, was the driving force in Luther's personal development and in his career as friar, professor, theologian, and even reformer."³²

In Luther's including the medieval conscience as a central territory of spiritual battle, he targets a new dimension of spiritual care, a new breadth and depth in the cure of souls. Notice how he unpacks Paul's argument in *Lectures on Galatians*. Here he refers to those who have committed themselves to the cure of souls at the deepest level as "instructors of conscience." These are primarily preachers and teachers who understand the Law/Gospel dialectic and those among the priesthood of believers who come into contact with human life with the desire to lead the afflicted to the place of healing and full realization of God's grace.³³ Luther's ministry of the cure of souls was a ministry of consolation and encouragement that carried forward his theme of justification by grace.

The reformer also knew that life-and-death situations reveal what people really believe. He equally knew that the Scriptures and orthodox doctrine have the possibility of giving what they describe. The function of consolation is also to give to people what *it* describes. "In order to comfort . . . timid, dismayed, troubled consciences, [Christ says] 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' Here we are called to come to this consolation, to the gospel."³⁴

To take stock a little, the account I have been developing suggests that the reformer's response to the sixteenth century culture and experience of suffering and death was for the disturbed conscience of the sinner to hear the comforting word of the Gospel. The ancient consolation literature gave comfort with the firm and constant reference to the immortality of the soul and the unvarying reminder that death had no penal character to it.³⁵ The Greeks drew comfort from the hope of a noble death, Judaism in the nearness of God as expressed by the Psalter.³⁶ Luther saw that consolation placed the petrified soul on the receiving end of care and hope, he also saw that the doctrine of justification provided the mind with a clear resolution between law and gospel; both served to construct a defense against the perennial spiritual terror of his age. The "re-Christianization" and awareness that Luther helped to bring about—that God's name comforts³⁷—also had a comparable effect upon the perception of death. Whereas death was once a Stygian foe in the medieval

church, the reformer made it into a friend, or at least something that need not be feared as much.

When plague hit Wittenberg, Elector John urged the professors to leave. Instead of going to Jena, Luther stayed on insisting that, "when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death,"³⁸ a person "is thus responsible before God for his neighbor's death."³⁹ To be sure, Luther's stay communicates an indelible message. It expresses in the strongest terms possible that the cure of souls as an ethic of care requires unwavering moral responsibility. Dr. Theo Boer of the Protestant Theological University, The Netherlands, recently put forth, "Through justification by faith alone human beings are freed to become ethical subjects and to bear true moral responsibility."⁴⁰ However, before we can reflect on the relation between Luther's doctrine of justification and the concept of responsibility, we will be well served to consider his theme of consolation in his sermons and correspondence and to discern how they may elucidate an ethic of responsibility.

III. Luther's Ministry of Consolation

It need scarcely be said that the theological issue of a spiritually salutary death has always been a central characteristic of pastoral concern. After the end of the Middle Ages, instructions for Christians preparing for death continued to be written either as a subsection of larger theological and pastoral manuals, or, less frequently, as individual treatises. In Luther's writings, his instruction on consolation primarily appears in various sermons and letters; it is not confined to any one particular section of his collected writings. Here is where he had an impact upon individual Christian inwardness. This is where a spiritual leader strives to form a Christian people; here is where the pastor/theologian influences the moral qualities possessed by a person, a group, or community, where people are directed toward moral excellence and the good. Again, my interest is to investigate the reformer's theme of consolation as it carries forward his theology of justification and to identify what insights the theme provides into his theological ethics.

A. Sermons

The funeral sermon was a public declaration that the departed had obtained salvation. Lutheran funeral sermons of the sixteenth century intended for both clerical and popular audiences to receive instruction and to console the grieving. "In this way their vivid accounts of sickbed and death continued the tradition of the *ars moriendi* of the late Middle Ages, which had also stressed the importance of a blessed death."⁴¹ Unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed rejected most funeral ceremonial, including the preaching of funeral sermons.

“A Sermon On Preparing to Die”⁴² (1519) contains several preparatory stages (twenty points) for death, has a quasi-vigil tone about it, and forms a practical, guided imagery or a final mental construct much like the *ars moriendi* for the soon-to-be-departed. Whether the “closeness of death” refers to the plague and to the fact that people have come to a point of desiring a sudden death which was formerly a source of great fear—or perhaps to an atmosphere of anxiety that surrounds death and the gruesome block renderings depicting death in the *ars moriendi* and architecture that may have taken hold of the culture—is unclear.⁴³ What is clear is that Luther wants to make sure that the focal point of death is Christ.

You must look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven, permitting nothing to divert you from that view. You must not view or ponder death in yourself or in your nature, nor in those who were killed by God’s wrath and were overcome by death. If you do that you will be lost and defeated with them. But you must resolutely turn your gaze, the thoughts of your heart, and all your senses away from this picture and look at death closely and untiringly only as seen in those who died in God’s grace and who have overcome death, particularly in Christ and then also in all his saints. In such pictures death will not appear terrible and gruesome. No, it will seem contemptible and dead, slain and overcome in life. For Christ is nothing other than sheer life, as his saints are likewise. The more profoundly you impress that image upon your heart and gaze upon it, the more the image of death will pale and vanish of itself without struggle or battle. Thus your heart will be at peace and you will be able to die calmly in Christ and with Christ, as we read in Revelation [14:13], “Blessed are they who die in the Lord Christ.”⁴⁴

Notice Luther’s use of the imperative *must*. Not only did he want to provide some practical evangelical pastoral assistance at the deathbed, he also wanted to impart a sense of responsibility to maintain one’s gaze upon Christ. This is also accomplished in his first *Invocavit* sermon, March 9, 1522 (the first of eight exhortations preached at Wittenberg to school his hearers in the understanding of how they are responsible to live now that God had made them Christians); it too places responsibility on the Christian to prepare for death and to focus on Christ. Luther underscores that:

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his [or her] own battle with death by himself [or herself], alone. We can shout into another’s ears, but everyone must himself [or herself] be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore, everyone must himself [or herself] know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian. And

these are what you, my beloved, have heard from me many days ago.⁴⁵

Systematic and ecumenical theologian, Dr. Gerhard Sauter, at the University of Bonn, also senses the Christian responsibility to console others in his treatment of the sermon. He paraphrases the reformer's thrust, "Have you forgotten your responsibility for your weaker brothers and sisters? We must prepare others to stand before God and to account authentically for themselves. This very responsibility before God forbids us from living in such a way that we withdraw into ourselves, behaving in an isolated, self-enclosed manner."⁴⁶ True, Luther is constantly turning people outside of themselves into the world.

Funeral sermons focus on the resurrection of Christ and its promise to Christians, who in the sleep of death await the resurrection. Luther preached funeral sermons for Frederic the Wise in 1525 and his brother, the Elector, Duke John of Saxony in 1532. The sermons have a self-sustaining, pragmatic component; one that relies on a future "fact" of the resurrection and which thereby provides consolation rooted in hope.

Learn to comfort yourselves with these words and instill in your hearts the fact that it is far more certain that Duke John of Saxony will come out of the grave and be far more splendid than the sun now is than that he is lying here before our eyes. This is not so certain as the fact that he will live again and go forth with Christ because God cannot lie. But take it to heart! For he who does not have this comfort can neither comfort himself nor be happy, but the more the Word escapes him the more the consolation also escapes him.⁴⁷

Luther preached that the believer must cling to the Word of God and Christ since belief was haunted by the possibility of unbelief. In his style and the style of the faith he represented, he counseled, "If you give yourself to Scripture, you will feel comfort and all your concerns will be better, which otherwise you cannot control by any act or means of your own."⁴⁸ The assertion of trust in Christ was itself a kind of worship, a litany intended to comfort. "This then is the true art, that in suffering and cross we should look to the Word and the comforting assurance, and trust them, even as He said, 'In me you shall have peace, but in the world, tribulation' [cf. John 16:33]."⁴⁹ "To be sure, also the faithful are suffering tribulation, but they are consoled in it, as we read in Ps. 4:2: 'Thou hast given me room when I was in distress,' and in 2 Cor. 1:4: 'Who comforts us in all our tribulation.' This comfort hope and trust in God have given us."⁵⁰ "Therefore when something terrifies or harms you it is most comforting that you speak up, confess Christ, and say: *Omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius*, all things are under his feet, who can be against me?"⁵¹

Luther's homiletic foci were no different from other sermon writers in this era: the cure of souls and orthodox teaching was the twofold emphasis. Not only were parishioners repeatedly clued-up to the finer points of doctrinal orthodoxy, but sermons also signified that the maintenance of theological principles never had an intrinsic value. These homiletic samples, and many more could be drawn from, also illustrate Luther's sense of Christian obligation—responsibility. While the impact of preaching upon individual hearers may appear negligible, sermons, with all their limitations, were the best available device for forging corporate confessional identity, for creating doctrinal uniformity, and building a more responsible character in God's people. As we can see from this sample of Luther's sermons, he placed a high value on his audiences' responsibility for their spiritual interests. The prominent feature on which this selection of sermons focuses—just as in his letters—is Luther's emphatic establishment of Jesus as the object and basis of all consolation.

Him who comes to Me I shall equip, not only to be refreshed and satisfied and to quench his own thirst but also to become a sturdy, earthen vessel, endowed with the Holy Spirit and with gifts that enable him to give consolation and strength to many other people and to serve them, as he was served by Me. Thus Christ proposes to transform the man who comes to Him into a person different from the one Moses is able to make of him.⁵²

B. Letters and Occasional Writings

Just as in his sermons, Luther's correspondence provides continuous opportunities to perfect his consolatory exaltation of God in life and death. Luther's reputation for mordant and forceful language obscures his opposite predilection for tender-hearted words of human sympathy and humor. His letters to and about his children demonstrate this, especially those in reference to the death of his children, where though grief-stricken he still praises God and considers the feelings and concerns of others. On the one hand, because of his own anguish, he is able to write powerful letters of consolation to others. On the other, Dr. Mennecke-Haustein explains that his letters of consolation have their basis in his own comfort and joy, in Luther's faith-experience that Christ is near to human beings and gives himself to them: "This comforting and joy-inspiring ('tröstliche und freudigmachende') experience Luther sought to convey with his language making use of the capacity of language to express emotion."⁵³

Either way, his pastoral reputation for assisting individuals became so widespread that many wrote him asking him to send them in writing either counsel or consolation if he was unable to come in person.⁵⁴ His epistolary

practice has a paradoxical feel of an “absent presence” intrinsic to his direct style. For example, with his removal of Friar Michael Dressel, the prior of the Augustinian monastery at Neustadt/Orla who was unable to maintain unity and peace in the cloister, he states, “And being absent, I want this letter to do to you, who are not available to me now, [precisely] what I would have done to you, could I be with you.” He then consoles Dressel with the reminder that leaders cannot be good and pious in and of themselves, they are responsible to be peacemakers.⁵⁵

Note also the death of Benedict Pauli's only son. Luther advises mourning but commands Pauli to “leave room for consolation. And this consolation is that the Lord gave you and now has taken away your son. Why do you torment yourself so much about this? God is omnipotent. He who has given you one son can also give you more.” Citing John 14:19, Luther then bumps up against theodicy and attempts to curb any notion that God is the cause of evil, insisting that “Why he permits this or that evil to befall us should not trouble us at all.”⁵⁶

And upon the death of Catherine Jonas, Luther writes to Justus Jonas—the surviving husband—a note of shared consolation. He mentions that his own daughter (thirteen year old Magalena Luther, who had died just three months earlier) “fell asleep on Jesus' bosom with so many godly and blessed expressions of faith in him and this is my great and only consolation.”⁵⁷ Another instance where Luther invokes the loss of his dearest, devoted daughter was in his correspondence to Andrew Osiander who suffered a double measure of grief with the loss of his wife and daughter.

But the language appears to shift ever so slightly in the letter to Osiander. I find in it a bit of the language of an ethic of responsibility. The fact that Osiander had “been visited by a cross and indeed a twofold cross” implies a responsibility to bear it. And while God's evidential love toward Luther was manifest in his dearest daughter, he is responsible to crucify his own corresponding “natural love which asserts itself too powerfully in us” in order that “the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God may be done.”⁵⁸ Both Luther and Osiander are responsible to offer up their natural emotions as if to replicate the *Akedab Yitzchak* (Gen. 22:2), “for the Lord this burnt offering is necessary, for us it is a consolation.”⁵⁹ Thus, if Luther is espousing a nascent ethic of responsibility, and I believe he is, then he is working with the issues of integrating faith and ethics, or responsible living as an outworking of his theology.

Besides the “crises” of death, other crises can strike the believer, be it illness, financial woes, domestic difficulties, etc.; these too can result in a crisis of faith and were not uncommon among Protestants. Salvation and its assurance, peace and joy in one's life, as well as security in eternity, are issues on which the conscience primarily suffers. These can serve as a sourcing mechanism

for our investigation of the theme of consolation. For Valentine Hausmann and his chronic unbelief, Luther consoles him with the words, “How many there are who have less faith than you have!” Hausmann’s awareness of his condition is an affirmation that God wants to help him. Luther seems to say “hang in there!” “Cling calmly to God, and he will cause everything to turn out well.”⁶⁰ Four months later, Luther writes again insisting that Hausmann should not be impatient with regard to achieving the strength of faith he feels he ought: “You should not worry too much about it,” implores the reformer. Furthermore, additional instructions and responsibilities are given to assist in the situation:

You must pray powerfully, cry out against your terror, and repeat the Lord’s Prayer in a loud voice. Above all, you must take to heart that there is no doubt that your terror comes from the devil. God wants you to resist, and it is on this account that he allows this to happen. And you may be sure that he will hear fervent prayers and help. [H]ave something from the Psalms or the New Testament read to you in a clear voice, and listen attentively to the reading.⁶¹

Examples of “other crises” include Matthias Weller’s and his bouts of melancholy. He was encouraged by Luther to avoid his own thoughts and to listen to what others (presumably Christians) say to him. It is a divine command that they are to comfort one another, and he needs “to learn to believe that God is speaking to you through them.”⁶² His brother, Jerome Weller, lived in Luther’s home, tutored the Luther children, and served as amanuensis for much of the table talk. For his depression Luther encouraged him to “rejoice in this temptation of the devil because it is a certain sign that God is propitious and merciful to you.” When the temptation to become depressed appears, Jerome ought not dwell on “those deadly thoughts,” but instead “joke and play games” in order to “drive out [the] diabolical thoughts and take courage.”⁶³ The stratagem for Weller was “more merriment!” and for Jonas Von Stockhausen, police captain of Nordhausen, the prescription was “sweat it out!” “For the darts of the devil cannot be removed pleasantly and without effort when they are so deeply imbedded in your flesh. They must be torn out by force.”⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the foundational similarities between these are Luther’s reminder of Christ’s unpleasant sufferings and believers’ responsibility to bear them like him.

The preceding references can be re-read through the lenses of “personal responsibility” as each case required an action or Luther prescribed a duty. In his “A letter of consolation to the Christians at Halle”⁶⁵ (1527) occasioned by the murder of his friend, follower, and young pastor—George Winkler—and written to console his parishioners, the reformer’s primary points include a call for them to pray for their enemies. They are responsible not to retain any

feelings of bitterness or thoughts of revenge, but to pity and pray for his murderers. In the midst of this calling to act responsibly, he bids them to accept suffering as natural and inevitable for Christians.

The final correspondence we will consider concerns George Spalatin who wrote to Luther requesting that he prepare a book or letter of spiritual consolation for Elector Fredrick who was bedridden with a serious illness. Luther refused him, exclaiming to Spalatin—who was also the elector's chaplain and secretary—that he did not see the necessity of it since he had already written a modest exposition of spiritual comfort entitled *Tessaradecas consolatoria*, “The Fourteen of Consolation.”⁶⁶ “Even better,” responds Luther, “why don't you urge him to read the Gospels and the Passion of Christ, for there is no better consolation than that?”⁶⁷

In sum, Marius relates “[t]here was always in Luther a powerful sense, paradoxically terrifying and comforting at once, of the individual standing alone before God.”⁶⁸ On the part of Luther's sermon hearers or recipients of his letters, he consoled them with the good news of justifying grace. Theirs' was a responsibility to labor hard through the suffering and grief, being responsible before God and relying solely on Him for the results of His plan as they had come clear in the death and resurrection of Christ as well as by the means of grace in their own lives. As Dr. Jane Strohl of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary fittingly contends, “Although he gives his own particular cast to the art of dying, death remains the final test, and one is not wholly secure until it has come and gone and found one steadfast. While proclaiming faith to be a gift, Luther still holds the dying person responsible for remaining constant in the conviction that he is saved by grace alone.”⁶⁹

These representational selections of the Luther canon reveal his pastoral concern and demonstrate his intentionality of calling people to live and die responsibly in the context of the Word, to rely on the mercy of God and His justifying grace, and to accept salvation and the consolation of God by faith. The exemplarism contained in these sermons and correspondence was directed primarily, although not exclusively, to sustaining a Christian attitude rather than providing concrete examples of the Christian life and its good works. The emphasis is not on an external act which is to be dutifully emulated, but an internal mind-set which is to be evident to others. Specifically, in their responsibility to imitate the paradigmatic pattern of Christ's life, Christians are to have faith in the midst of bearing the cross and faithfully serving the needs of the neighbor, not as it is displayed in Jesus, but because it is displayed in Jesus. Christians are to be obedient, humble and loving, not as Jesus was—which would present an overwhelming challenge since we live in vastly different cultures and under immeasurably different circumstances—but because he was.

IV. Luther's Theology of Justification and Theological Ethics

The continuity between Luther and late medieval culture segues into a new quality of the experience of God where God actively assails passive humanity in order to bestow joy and courage to life. "This is the comfort that preserves us. Our hearts are full of joy and courage despite the persecutions and raging of the world. For we have the kind of Lord who does not merely redeem us from sin, God's wrath, and eternal death, but who also protects and saves us in suffering and persecution so that we do not perish."⁷⁰ And where the former response to human suffering, death, and the cure of souls was culturally hidebound, Luther's response, and the content and shape of his consolation—I am arguing—find its grounding in theological ethics and its source in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Before we investigate this, we are once again in a better position to understand Luther and his theological ethics if we first understand his *Sitz im Leben* and the contours of the theology and philosophical ethics to which he responds.

A. Justification By Grace Through Faith

In his lectures through the Psalms (1513-15), Romans (1515-16), and Galatians (1519), and in his working out his theology in controversy with Eck and his other detractors, Luther emphatically rejected the medieval notion of progressive justification and its Aristotelian source that "we become just by doing just acts."⁷¹ He came to see that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*) and that "by the righteousness of God we must not understand the righteousness by which He is righteous in Himself but the righteousness by which we are made righteous by God. This happens through faith in the Gospel."⁷²

In his sermon *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519), Luther exclaims that it is this righteousness, an "alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, [which is] instilled [into us] from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith."⁷³ The justification of sinners is not due to their sanctification, but due to Christ's fulfillment of all righteousness. His righteousness has been imputed or credited to us.⁷⁴ Proper righteousness is the outgrowth of Christ's alien righteousness (*justitia Christi aliena*). It is proper "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."⁷⁵ The Reformation, like Paul, articulated the liberation of humanity by faith from the obsession of works. Thus, the correct sequence in Luther's mind was "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works."⁷⁶ Along this line, Luther insisted that genuine faith does not serve the self, but is active in love toward the neighbor.⁷⁷

Luther's juxtaposition of justification and consolation by faith is most evident in his *Lectures on Galatians* where they appear as a sequential progression

in the life of the believer that begins with justifying grace, gains momentum by faith, and—like the concluding crescendo of a Bach fugue—ends with the victorious climax of consolation. Justification—reception of forgiveness by faith—gladdened and consoled conscience—triumph over troubles, including the ultimate trouble, death. The doctrine of justification, for Luther, brings assured “consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors.”⁷⁸ He professed, “Thus when a man is consoled and encouraged by the grace of God—that is, by the forgiveness of sins and the peace of conscience—he can bravely endure and overcome all troubles, including even death itself.”⁷⁹ In Luther’s thinking, justification vouchsafes the experience of consolation. Again, the reformer carries forward consolation as a conclusion to justification when he insisted, “If He gave Himself into death for our sins, then undoubtedly He is not a tormentor. He is not One who will cast down the troubled, but One who will raise up the fallen and bring propitiation and consolation to the terrified. Otherwise Paul would be lying when he says ‘who gave Himself for our sins.’”⁸⁰ It is in Luther’s theology of justification we see what Christ’s love has done for us, in the theme of consolation we see theological ethics embodying justification, both of which are grounded upon God’s unmerited love for humankind.

B. Theological Ethics and the Ascription of Responsibility

Luther cut his ethical teeth, so to speak, while lecturing several times weekly on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* during his first year at Wittenberg (1508-09). Here he saw firsthand the amalgamation and domination of the Aristotelian system in scholasticism. Aristotle’s seminal doctrine of *ἔξις*, where humanity’s moral virtue is incrementally realized, perfected, and made permanent (on the order of skill or musical expertise achieved by continual practice or *ἐθισμός*)⁸¹ was baptized by the scholastics who Christianized the notion as an added sense to human nature, the vehicle by which good works done in imitation of the example of Christ prepare for the reception of grace, righteousness and, inevitably, salvation.

Against this thrust of most scholastic moral theory and anthropology Luther asserted,

[t]he common saying that human nature in a general and universal way knows and wills the good but errs and does not will it in particular cases would be better stated if we were to say that in particular cases human nature knows and wills what is good but in general neither knows nor wills it. And this is in agreement with Scripture, which describes man as so turned in on himself that he uses not only physical but even spiritual goods for his own purposes and in all things seeks only himself. This curvedness is now natural for us, a natural wickedness

and a natural sinfulness. Thus man has no help from his natural powers, but he needs the aid of some power outside of himself.⁸²

It was the scholastics and their Aristotelian method of basing “sin and righteousness on works, both their performance or omission,”⁸³—the scope of their actualization on what a person does—that troubled Luther. He thought that this was to place action in ascendancy over being; and to be turned into the self (*incurvatus in se*) instead of being absolutely dependent upon God. Faith is not to look “within,” but “outside of,” to Christ. If we believe that what a person is, is the result of what a person does, then the matter of sin and grace are in point of fact removed from any discussion of human nature; it consigns them solely to the realm of works. This, Luther believed, is the underlying reason why,

[o]ur theologians. . . have deflected the discussion of sin to the matter of good works only and have undertaken to teach only those things by which works might be safeguarded but not how through much agony men should humbly seek healing grace and confess themselves to be sinners. Thus of necessity they make men proud and cause them to think that they are already entirely righteous when they have performed certain outward works.⁸⁴

And this is why Luther reasoned that “[v]irtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This in opposition to the scholastics.”⁸⁵

Luther concluded that the Aristotelian person seeks his/her own good in everything, and therefore human fulfillment comes in self-love. Furthermore, inasmuch as the medieval ethic sought after justification and reduced to a basic mechanistic imitation⁸⁶ of Jesus’ life-style, both of which are primarily ethical concepts, through pious works, the most we can say is that it was this theological ethic which brought about the reformer’s failure as a monk.⁸⁷ The focal point of medieval Christology was the archetypal and paradigmatic nature of the life, work and death of Christ, the *Christus exemplum*.⁸⁸ Luther rejected medieval piety’s placement of the *Christus exemplum* before the *Christus sacramentum*, works before faith, and the *imitatio Christi* before *conformatas Christi*. This is not to say that he rejected good works or the imitation of Christ. In fact, it is faith in Christ’s sacrifice which in turn obliges or “behooves” us to imitate and live according to the example of Christ.⁸⁹ This reversal of the traditional medieval order, rather than the compulsion of an existential choice, is the truly revolutionary aspect of Luther’s Christological and ethical thought. It was the realization that in imitating Christ we cannot hope to become a contributor to the divine activity of assimilating a copy of the *exemplum*. It is the reformer’s theological ethics that make the believer responsible to perform good works and it is her maintaining the imitation

Christ that gives guidance and direction for those works to be performed.

Underlying this seemingly straightforward dichotomy is a profound theological insight. The transformation of humanity is a prerequisite for its reformation. The art of living authentically for God and for others, what we may refer to as *ars vivendi*, is the spontaneous, responsibly responding action of that transformed character participating in acts of beneficence as unto God, not out of obedience to a discipline of law imposed from without. Yet here, in a manner of speaking, is the proverbial rub in the reformer's theological ethics.

Luther first worked out some of the main contours of his theological ethics in his 1520 tract, "The Freedom of a Christian."⁹⁰ His undertaking was to create a context in which people could become the kind of Christians envisioned in this tract, introducing the seemingly complementary theses that the Christian life was one wherein the Christian is "a perfectly free lord, subject to none" and "a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all."⁹¹ It makes clear that a believing Christian is free from sin through faith in God, yet bound by love to serve his neighbor, and Luther sees these as correlative truths. Nonetheless, his ethics—based as it is on the law of love—contains his famous ambivalence. On the one hand, it is free from the law; on the other hand, deontologically, it really is God's command, and the Christian is responsible, even duty-bound to follow it. Is this not in fact a new formulation of law standing in the way of true morality? How does Luther advocate freedom from law and resolve this apparent love legalism?⁹²

Systems of ethics are inclined to discuss moral acts in terms of their goal (teleological), duty (deontological), or fittingness (*cathöckontic*). A theological ethical system based upon the doctrine of justification by faith tends to discuss moral acts in terms of what they presuppose or are intended to express. From this standpoint, Luther asserted that the Christian is free inasmuch as the Word of God and the forgiveness of sins in Christ liberates her from sin, death, hell, and the devil. Such a liberated Christian does not scorn good deeds but does them willingly. Joined with Christ in justification the Christian lives as Christ in the world, a life of consoling service to others.⁹³

As to its outworking, Luther presented his theological ethics in the context of his recommendations for practice. "Why, the whole Scripture is concerned with provoking us to faith; now driving us with commands and threats, now drawing us with promises and consolations. In fact, everything in Scripture is either a command or a promise. The commands humble the proud with their demands, the promises exalt the humble with their forgiveness."⁹⁴ In other words, the task of theological ethics is to present the claims of the Word of God to humanity. Theological ethics must, therefore, remain grounded in the Word of God; otherwise it is untrue to its charge and disintegrates into a theoretical enterprise at best or—at worst—a metastatic escapist *gnosis*. Luther elevated this new ethical context within the theological

confines of his age and lived it out—lived it as a demonstration of consolation and *cura animarum*—reflecting the Gospel working through the Christian individual, penetrating whatever it touches as it serves others.

The fine, theological point of it—a harmonizing of his alleged ambivalence seen through today’s theological spectacles and wrapped in the parlance of responsibility—is this: the task set before the Christian is more a responsibility, and less a duty. It is discretionary, filled with problems left to one’s moral sensitivities and decision-making abilities. The norm is not simply a law to be obeyed, but a job as a faithful, responsible steward to be done well (Mt. 25:21). Just as the reformer responded in love to the real world of his experience, the responsible Christian responds to God by responding in love to the exigencies and people found in each situation with which experience is shared.

The authentically Christian ethic for Luther is based on an experience of what God has given and makes possible, not on some absolutized perception of what God demands; it therefore deals more with *doers* than with specific deeds (the parable of the Good Samaritan is really about being a neighbor, not just loving one’s neighbor). This is an ethics, then, that consists not of Christian actions, but always of “Christian acting,” not in the sense of role-playing, but as a people who have been shaped by God whose Christian responsiveness grows out of the response to God’s love and responds to others.⁹⁵ Therefore, in the theological attribution of responsibility, the Christian is made, not held, responsible. Casting this in terms of the reformer’s notion of conscience—the key to his mature theological understanding of the self, and a key insight into his theological ethics—our union with Christ⁹⁶ makes us conscious of responsibility, the self as being before God and responsible toward God.

V. Consolation and the Moral Economy of Christian Responsibility

In this article I have brought together Martin Luther’s theology of justification with his theology and ministry of consolation, and found them to be compatible, based, as they are, on the love of God as revealed in Christ. I have shown that the theme of consolation, while temporally conditioned, affirmed, and established in the lives of people, is to be seen in the light of Luther’s theology of justification and theological ethics. Consolation was no mere theoretical model; it was effectively used as a spiritual resource in his personal experience.⁹⁷ It was also understood to be biblically determined, as Paul announced to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:3-7),

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we

ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.⁹⁸

Accordingly, consolation begins with transcendence and turns to human responsibility to fortify others, the same as loving one's neighbor. From its place in the divine economy, consolation is to be injected by the Christian into the lives of people when they need it most as part of the moral economy of Christian responsibility.

We identify Luther as a reformer, yet his pastoral ministry was far more extensive than is generally recognized. He never lost sight of the individual soul, which he cared for and consoled with God's Word. And perhaps chief among his contributions in the history of Christian thought was the notion that the redeemed/justified do not need to be overwhelmed by sin, distress, and death. Looking at the present-day religious scene, we may conclude that he greatly contributed toward this achievement. Not in the sense that psychotherapeutic religion has prevailed over cultural conceptions of death or in the prolonging of biological survival over any cost in suffering, but in the reformation sense; one that calls us, above all else, to protest our own sin and insouciance toward God, to be open to God's love in life and death and to be responsible to see the neighbor as Christ sees her, to be—in Luther's words—"a Christ to the other."⁹⁹

Against those who insist that "the stakes of evangelical spiritualism that continue to be raised are at constant risk of having their bluff called,"¹⁰⁰ or a Nietzschean narcissistic assertive, "If it was the central purpose [of the Protestant Reformation] to make people—all people—think, feel, and act as Christians, to imbue them with a Christian mind-set, motivational drive, and a way of life, it failed,"¹⁰¹ Luther would hurl his inkpot and offer his Christological wager.

Why are you seeking and looking for other ways? Look to Me, and reject all other thoughts regarding ways to heaven. You must expunge these completely from your heart and think of nothing but these words of Mine: "I am the Way." See to it that you tread on Me, that is, cling to Me with strong faith and with all confidence of the heart. I will be the Bridge to carry you across. In one moment you will come out of death and the fear of hell into yonder life. For it is I who paved the way and the course. I walked and traversed it Myself, so that I might take you and all My followers across. All that is necessary is that

you unhesitatingly set your foot on Me, wager boldly on Me,
go cheerfully and happily, and die in My name.¹⁰²

The imperatival tone in the reformer's wager tells us again that the reformation ethic of responsibility is a theological ethic—more so, a Christian ethic—insofar as it confesses Christ to be the participatory center of the church and her ethics. Thus, it is Christological. In affirming this, we must step back from our usual grounding of our ethics implicitly or explicitly in various human experiences with respect to how we define morality. The appeal to experience alone does not substantiate an ethical position. Nor can the philosopher and theologian simply identify the state of affairs that must obtain in human existence (i.e., the need of consolation) for persons to have such experiences (i.e., being consoled). The ultimate and best evidence for Christian ethics and justification lies in God's Word in its tripartite sense of Christ, the gospel he made known, and the Scripture that reliably communicates this and consolation to us (e.g., "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your word has revived me," "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.")

I have also demonstrated that a suitable context for consolation is the moral economy of Christian responsibility. The responsibility to console emerges from Christ's vicarious sacrifice into a world that is God's, yet fallen. It is a mature ethic of care, of respect, and enhancement to the integrity of life. The theme of consolation in Luther's correspondence and sermons not only demonstrates but gives us the insight into his theological ethics that there is a moral economy to Christian responsibility: Christians are to structure the basic forms of human relationships in which they live in such a way that God may be glorified and people might receive God's gift of consolation. For Luther, the characteristic of this Christian life is life lived in response to redemption. It is decisively rooted in one's responsibility to God for the actions made in life, in one's faith, hope, and love. In so doing, the anxiety and ritual of death are replaced by the ethics of life, through Jesus Christ; through his life, death, resurrection, and reign in power. This was how Luther reinterpreted his era's interpretations of life and death.

Indeed, the fundamental part of the Christian art of living (*ars vivendi*) is the recognition that life takes place in the presence of God, and the challenge to take responsibility for the whole of our lives, religious and secular, is as stewards obedient to God. While we cannot simply repeat the reformer's consolatory insights and inject them into our age, we can ask of what might this ethics and ministry consist and where does it begin in light of the terrors of our day. The starting point of a genuinely Christian ethics in Luther's system of thought and its relation to the realities of our world today

lies in the recognition that the conversion of the individual leads to a new faith and obedience, a new lifestyle of being bound to the God who commands, and a personal ethic of responsibility to the commands of God. All too often Christianity today avoids responsibility when entering the realm of love, and avoids love when entering the realm of responsibility. To the extent that the people involved in the cure of souls are a Christ rooted people, they must remember that the love and beneficent care offered to others is implicit in their responsibly-responding relationship to God. As such, a ministry of consolation may be the most effective way to promote a renewed sense of Christian responsibility for today, because it emphasizes the inner resources of faith and a redeemed life rather than any external incentives that our world may offer.

What, then, does consolation in the moral economy of Christian responsibility require? It is the responsibility for the Christian to be, on a one-to-one basis, a companion and encourager of him or her who is in distress, in desperate need, or alone, to be spontaneously near him or her and absolutely, genuinely present with someone whom hardship—of whatever nature it may be—has placed in critical need or solitude. It includes loving our neighbors (Rom. 13:8-10), caring for their souls, directing them to God, providing for their needs where we are able, and speaking the consolations of God into their life.¹⁰³ Barth concurs, "If another can comfort and encourage me by telling me that he stands with me under the same command—and there is no greater comfort or stronger encouragement on earth than awareness of this common bond—nevertheless no other can be responsible for my proper hearing of what is commanded of me."¹⁰⁴

Thomas à Kempis wrote, "All human comfort is vain and short."¹⁰⁵ Not so with the consolation of God; its forms are many and can always match the suffering. God can deliver us "*out of* affliction" or encourage us "*in* affliction" so that it can be endured. Luther would be quick to add that the consolations of God soften, rather than remove affliction.¹⁰⁶ The moral economy of Christian responsibility today, just as in Luther's day, takes up this ministry of care to temper sorrow, rather than striving to make it disappear, and what is to be expected from its influence is calmness in catastrophe, strength in tribulation, and peace in adversity rather than the sudden and definitive extinction of all suffering. It is a positive ethics of accompaniment, as opposed to living and dying in desolation.

At this point permit me to beg to differ with Pascalian heartfelt intuition and the diminution of consolation, that «Peu de chose nous console, parce que peu de chose nous afflige.»¹⁰⁷ Life—whether during the late Middle Ages, or the Reformation, or today—involves a monumental amount of conflict management, the greatest of which is death. A prevalent Christian theme asserted by the reformer was that in order to achieve consolation in this life,

one must first be responsible to confront and successfully manage the anxieties of the age and the fear of death by responding and responsibly relying on the God who alone redeems from sin, justifies, and gives peace of conscience, comfort, and security. Thus, consolation is not a remedy, it is a result of the remedy; it is found in *ars vivendi* not *ars moriendi*.

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Endnotes

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (trans. J. Sibree; New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), 417

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1993), 254. Asendorf argued that the theology of Luther was foundational for Hegel's philosophy. See Ulrich Asendorf, *Luther und Hegel* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

³ *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* (vol. 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957-65), 79.

⁴ Paul Althus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schutz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 3; trans. of *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965).

⁵ To take several, typical examples: Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and late medieval nominalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), and "The Shape of Late Medieval Thought: The Birthpangs of the Modern Era," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 64/1 (1973), 12-33, and *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

⁶ See the collection of translated articles in Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm* (ed. Robert J. Bast; vol. CX of *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 177. Hamm refers to the symposium "'Die Frühe Reformation als Umbruch' (Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1996) and the question that is constantly discussed as to whether the Reformation should be understood as a radical break from the world of the late Middle Ages or as a process of continuation—that the Reformation is both. It is a radical change, in that it rapidly broke from and re-evaluated tradition; it is a continuation in that it took up and developed crucial themes from within that tradition."

⁷ Ute Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989), 15-16, "Das Trostbedürfnis der Menschen dieser Zeit ist schier grenzenlos; es entsteht aus der Situation des existentiell von Krankheit und Tod bedrohten, wirtschaftlich und sozial häufig ungesicherten und mancher obrigkeitlichen Willkür ausgesetzten, aber auch religiös in der Ungewißheit über

seinen Gnadenstand und sein jenseitiges Geschick gehaltenen Menschen, der sein irdisches Leben als Leiden, als Umgebensein von Übeln und ihn bedrohenden Mächten erfährt und der sich möglicherweise auf dem Weg zur ewigen Fortsetzung seiner Pein befindet. Die spätmittelalterlich Leidens-, Anfechtungs- und Trostliteratur trägt dem vielfältig Rechnung. Wenn auch Luther sich dieser Themen annimmt, ja das Trösten zur wichtigsten Aufgabe der Theologie überhaupt erklärt, dann ist darin ein Element der »Kontinuität« im »Umbruch« zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation zu sehen. Die Trostbriefe des Reformators können dann zu Kronzeugen werden, wenn es darum geht, dieses genauer zu beschreiben.⁸ Consolation (Trost in German, consolatio in Latin) involved giving encouragement to someone who was sick, sad, or hopeless and to take heart again. To be consoled was considered a gift from God.

⁹ Luther's writings are quoted according to the American Edition of Luther's Works (hereafter LW) produced jointly by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1958-1986, and the standard critical edition of his work in German and Latin: D. Martin Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1993, otherwise referred to as the Weimarer Ausgabe (Weimar Edition, hereafter WA).

¹⁰ See, for example, LW 3:6 (Commentary on Genesis), "At the beginning of the Reformation (initium Evangelii) . . . He (God) kept me occupied to such an extent with responsibilities, worries, perils, and hardships that all ambition was shut out of my mind."

¹¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (trans. George Eliot; New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 45.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), 47, 49-50, 66. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. Graham Parkes; Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 251-52, "It may have been good for that preacher of the little people that he suffered and bore man's sin. But I take delight in great sin as my great consolation."

¹³ See his *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (trans. Patricia M. Ranum; The Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), and his *The Hour of Our Death* (trans. Helen Weaver; New York: Knopf, 1981). Other important works on the subgenre include Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), particularly chapter 3; Fredrick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951); and, especially, the splendid medieval art contained in Joachim M. Plotzek et al., eds. *Ars Vivendi: Ars Moriendi* (Munich: Hirmer, 2002).

¹⁴ The need to educate the laity in Christian fundamentals was mandated by the Council of Nantes and the Decretum of Burchard of Worms (d. 1125). Jean Gerson (1363-1429) initiated the literary form in his immensely popular *Opus tripartitum* that originated out of similar concerns and was the source of much of the *ars moriendi*. See Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres Complètes* (with introduction, text, and notes by Mgr. Glorieux; vol. 2; Paris, Desclée, 1960-1973), 316-343.

¹⁵ The intense medieval fear of sudden death is investigated in Edelgard E. DuBruck and Barbara I. Gusick, eds., *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages* (vol. 45; *Studies in the Humanities: Literature—Politics—Society*; New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹⁶ Attributed originally to Anselm (1033-1109) and commonly titled “Admonition of St. Anselm to Someone Dying and Fearing Excessively for his Sins” can be found in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, ed., *Analecta Anselmiana: Untersuchung über Person und Werk Anselmus von Canterbury* (vol. 4.1; Frankfurt am Main: Minerva-Verlag, 1969-1975), 169-171, and J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Series Latina, vol. CLVIII; Paris, 1844ff.), cols. 685ff. The phraseology intended to affirm the morally and doctrinally correct response: Do you believe in the elements of the Christian faith as they have been defined by the Church? Do you rejoice that you die in the Christian faith? Do you recognize that you have seriously offended God? Are you sorry you have offended your Creator? Do you intend to avoid offending God if He should prolong your life? Do you hope and do you believe that you will come to eternal salvation not by your merits but by the merits of Jesus Christ? Then the dying person or condemned person was urged to place all his faith in the death of Christ. The only specifically ecclesiastical part of the occasion was the final prayer of absolution by the priest.

¹⁷ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 27; Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 138.

¹⁸ Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), and “Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization,” *Church History* 69/3 (September 2000), 558-577.

¹⁹ Jared Wicks, “Applied Theology at the Deathbed: Luther and the Late-Medieval Tradition of the *Ars moriendi*,” *Gregorianum* 79/2 (1998): 365-67, where the *Ars moriendi* contributions of Jean Gerson, Thomas Peuntner, Johann Geiler, and Johannes von Paltz are diligently contrasted with the German text of Luther’s “Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben.”

²⁰ Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The *ars moriendi* in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History; Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

²² The historical term for pastoral work has the primary sense of *cura* or “*þcareyþ*” with a strong sense of “*þþcureyþ*” behind it. The historical centerpiece of this ministerial function was “admonition” (ἑπίτιμος, Acts 20:31) or “correction” (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 2 Th. 3:15) or “instruction through the pastors” (1 Th. 5:12, 14). As well, it is used as the last effort before rejecting a heretic (Tit. 3:10). Its usage was familiar to the apostolic fathers (1 Clem. 7.1; Ignatius Ephesians 3.1; Hermas Visions 2.4.3), and the reference may be applicable to admonitory sermons (2 Clem. 17.3; Justin Apology 67.4).

²³ Cf. Per Anderson, “Reading Luther on Plague in a Technological Age,” *Word & World* 13/3 (1993): 277-283, who investigates Luther’s essay on “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague” and argues that Luther’s ethic of plague presupposes a life and thought world transformed in a way that seems irreversible.

²⁴ Oswald Bayer, "Luther's Ethics as Pastoral Care," *Lutheran Quarterly* IV (1990):126.

²⁵ Parenthetically, Tentler's reading of the late Middle Ages instructional manuals used to guide the confessional practice of priests led him to argue that "consolation and the cure of anxiety remained as prominent to the penitent as discipline and the creation of guilt" in the sacrament of penance. Yet, one can hardly imagine what consolatory effect was realized during intense penitent interrogation and the glaring lights of priestly scrutiny. On this Ozment states, "Priests and laity were often completely frustrated when they attempted to determine degrees of consent to sin and culpability." See Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 103, 131, 148, 349, cited in Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 218-19.

²⁶ LW 36:91. Recall the Medieval Latin descriptor *sinecure* ("without cure" [of souls]), typically applied to the sacerdotal types who shirk this responsibility; those who hold an ecclesiastical office that requires little or no work, but nonetheless provides an income to the holder.

²⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (trans. John W. Harvey; London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 111.

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* (trans. with introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957). *Geistliche Anfechtung* can be heard in the agony of Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24, ESV), the distress of Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Lk. 5:8, ESV), and the sentiments expressed in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 40:1-11, esp. v. 2 "troubled thoughts and fears are theirs, and anxious expectation of the day of their death" (NEB).

²⁹ For a helpful overview of the nature of *Anfechtung*, see C. Warren Hovland, "Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis," in Franklin H. Littell, ed., *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), 46-60.

³⁰ LW 26:77 (Lectures on Galatians) "For once the pure and certain Word is taken away, there remains no consolation, no salvation, no life."

³¹ A monastic method of bible study—*Oratio*, meditatio, tentatio (prayer, meditation, *Anfechtung*)—was encouraged (over his own writings!) where praying and meditating on the scriptural text with conscientious diligence was practiced, especially in times of God's tempting and testing in spiritual matters, e.g., with doubt and despair. See LW 34:283-88.

³² James M. Kittelson, "Luther and Modern Church History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 261. The cure of souls as an hermeneutical lens on Luther to fathom his life and work and their applicability church life today is ably drawn out in Kittelson's chapter.

³³ LW 26:10. "Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves by study, by reading, by meditation, and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others,

console them, and take them from the Law to grace, from active righteousness to passive righteousness, in short, from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the Law and to set against us the consciousness *ȳp* of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that thus he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ."

³⁴ LW 51:129 (Sermon on St. Matthias' Day, Matt. 11:25-30, 1525).

³⁵ Examples include Plutarch's letter to his wife, *Consolatio ad uxorem*, occasioned by the death of their infant daughter Timoxena, and Cicero's *Consolatio*, which he wrote to himself after the death of his beloved daughter Tullia to help him overcome his grief.

³⁶ C. G. Montefiore, *Ancient Jewish and Greek Encouragement and Consolation* (Bridgeport, Connecticut: Hartmore House, 1971).

³⁷ Friedrich Gogarten, *Christ the Crisis* (trans. R. A. Wilson; London: SCM Press, 1970), 284, citing WA 40 II, 254, held that for Luther, "the full content of the Christian faith as he understands it. 'Christ attributes all he does and says to the Father, and this makes God's name no longer terrible to us, but comforting'"

³⁸ LW 43:121, n. 4 (Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague, 1527).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁰ Theo A. Boer, "Is Luther's Ethics Christian Ethics?" *Lutheran Quarterly* XXI (2007): 415.

⁴¹ Cornelia Niekus Moore, "The Magdeburg Cathedral Pastor Siegfried Saccus and Development of the Lutheran Funeral Biography," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35/1 (2004): 89, who also carefully investigates the foci of the exegesis of a Biblical passage, its relevance to Christian living, and the biographical exemplification of the dutiful life of the departed to comfort and instruct the funeral spectators. A synopsis of the modifications that come about as a consequence of the Reformation can be found in Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany 1450-1700* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

⁴² WA 2: (680) 685-697, LW 42:99-115.

⁴³ Wittenberg suffered under the plague to the degree that the University was temporarily relocated to Jena in 1527, yet Luther stayed "because of the terrible fear among the common people," some dying in his arms. Note Luther's letter to George Spalatin, August 19, 1527, WA, Br, IV, 232-233. During the pestilences of 1535 and 1539, even while he was at some of his most trying times as a reformer, he continued to go into the homes of the sick and dying.

⁴⁴ LW 42:104.

⁴⁵ WA 10, III, 2-3, LW 51:70.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Sauter, "How Do I Encounter My Own Death?" *Theology Today* 60 (2004): 501-02.

⁴⁷ LW 51:240 (Sermon at the Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony, I Thess. 4:13-14, August 18, 1532). But, beyond the practical, this also brings to mind Moltmann's (re)orientation of theology, his proleptic point of view, and the eschatological ethics of the resurrection, or, what the redeemed world of life is lived like; "'The future has already begun.' Jesus' resurrection already makes possible

the impossible, namely reconciliation in the midst of strife, the law of grace in the midst of judgment, and creative love in the midst of legalism" and, I would add, true consolation in the midst of desolation. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 171.

⁴⁸ LW 51:204 (Sermon at Coberg on Cross and Suffering, 1530).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁰ LW 25:179 (Lectures on Romans, expositing Rom. 15:33)

⁵¹ LW 52:278 (The Gospel for the Festival of the Epiphany, Mt. 2:1-12, 1535).

⁵² LW 23:273 (Sermon on the Gospel of John [7:39], 1530-32)

⁵³ Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 9, citing Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe*, 9.

⁵⁴ Numerous such occurrences and correspondences to Luther are included, along with a collection of his letters of spiritual counsel, in August Nebe, *Luther as Spiritual Advisor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1894). The most recent is the collection contained in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert; vol. XVII; The Library of Christian Classics; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; repr., Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

⁵⁵ To Michael Dressel, September 25, 1516, WA, Br, I, 57-59.

⁵⁶ Spoken to Benedict Pauli, June 1533, WA, TR, I, No. 949. Strohl asserts that, "Behind the devil's machinations Luther glimpses God allowing evil so that God might bring good from it, a good that will often escape the sufferer's notice until the light of glory replaces the light of grace. The devil is God's devil. The petitions in the Lord's Prayer to 'save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil' are, after all, directed at staying the very hand of God." Jane E. Strohl, "Luther's Eschatology: The Last Times and the Last Things" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1989), 110. The late Richard Marius of Harvard contended that Luther had no "rational or systematic answer" for the problem of evil and that "Satan was finally God's Satan, doing in a perverse way God's will." See Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 76-79.

⁵⁷ To Justus Jonas, December 26, 1542, WA, Br, X, 226-228. This reminds us of Schleiermacher's very personal statements in his graveside sermon for his nine-year-old son, Nathanael, translated in Albert L. Blackwell, "Schleiermacher's Sermon at Nathanael's Grave," *Pastoral Psychology* 26/1 (1977): 23-36; and Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermachers sämtliche Werke* (vol. II/6; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1834-64), 71-72; also found in *The Christian Household: a sermonic treatise* (trans. Dietrich Seidel and Terence N. Tice; vol. 3; Schleiermacher Studies and Translations; Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ To Andrew Osiander, June 3, 1545, WA, Br, XI, 113, 114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ To Valentine Hausmann, February 19, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 267

⁶¹ To Valentine Hausmann, June 24, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 322-23.

⁶² To Matthias Weller, October 7, 1534, WA, Br, VII, 104-06.

⁶³ To Jerome Weller, July 1530, WA, Br, V, 518-20.

⁶⁴ To Jonas Von Stockhausen, November 27, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 386-88. Note also the letter to Mrs. Jonas Von Stockhausen on the same day (pp. 388-89) wherein Luther mentions that God sends suffering in order that we might conform to him. Note also the encouragement that she not leave her husband alone and that she hide the cutlery, other sharp instruments, and any toxins: "leave nothing about with which he might harm himself. Solitude is poison to him."

⁶⁵ A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle Upon the Death of their Pastor, George Winkler, September or November 1527, WA, Br, II, 402-03, LW 43:145-66.

⁶⁶ WA, VI, (99) 104-34, LW 42:121-166. See also, Jane E. Strohl, "Luther's 'Fourteen Consolations,'" *Lutheran Quarterly* 3/2 (1989): 169-82.

⁶⁷ To George Spalatin, November 11, 1521, LW 48:325-28.

⁶⁸ Marius, Luther, 333.

⁶⁹ Strohl, "Luther's Eschatology," 160.

⁷⁰ LW 13:340 (expositing Psalm 110:6).

⁷¹ See *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (ed. Jonathan Barnes; vol. II.1; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b.

⁷² LW 25:151 (*Lectures on Romans*).

⁷³ LW 31:297 (expositing Phil. 2:5-6). This anthropological and soteriological perspective, that the Christian is and lives in another extrinsically, extra se, by an alien righteousness, not from and in herself, is essential for understanding Luther. See Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9-55.

⁷⁴ The doctrine of justification, considered by Luther and his followers to be the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, is enshrined in the Augsburg Confession (1530), a brief statement in Article 4; the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article 1 (1537); Belgic Confession (1561), Articles 22-23; Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Question 60; and Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Chap. II. For a superb examination of the historical development of the doctrine, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, (3rd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ LW 31:299 (*Two Kinds of Righteousness*).

⁷⁶ LW 31:361 (*The Freedom of a Christian*).

⁷⁷ Perhaps his most earnest declaration of this belief is in his Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1546), LW 35:370-71.

⁷⁸ LW 26:133 (expositing Gal. 2:17)

⁷⁹ LW 26:27 (*Lectures on Galatians*).

⁸⁰ LW 26:39 (expositing Gal. 1:5).

⁸¹ See *Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, and the references to training by accustoming or habituation at 1098b4, 1099b9, 1103a20, b16; 1119a27, 1121a23, 1151a19, 1152a29; 1180a3, 15 until one acquires the right habits (©2'H) referenced at 1095a4, 1103a17, 1148b17, 34; 1154a33, 1179b21, 1180b5, 1181b22.

⁸² WA 56:355, LW 25:345.

⁸³ LW 25:261 (*Lectures on Romans*).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁸⁵ LW 31:12 (Disputation Against the Scholastics).

⁸⁶ While I Cor. 11:1, I Pet. 2:21, and the writings of Tauler and à Kempis press believers into the medieval rhetorical sense of *imitatio*, a careful observance of how one responds to the givens in one time and place and going and doing likewise in another time and place, mimicry is not the aim but is often the unmindful result. What is intended is closer to Paul's depiction of the identifying essence of his life in Phil. 1:21 ("For to me, to live is Christ"). This speaks to a far more meaningful connection than a conformand's simple impersonation of Jesus, the core sense being nearer to the Johannine *μὲνεν*, a participatory religio-moral-action-guide found in the real living experience of rootedness in Christ and the concrete ethic of his example; one of concrete relations—a responsibility before God.

⁸⁷ Cf. LW 44:200-1 and his cover letter to John Lang, February 8, 1517 (WA, Br. 1:88-89, LW 48:36-38), and most notably his theses of September 1517 against the infiltration of Aristotelian philosophy into Scholastic theology (WA 1:224ff.; LW 31:9ff). On the idea that Aristotelian ethics drove Luther to take up the reformer's mantle, note the exchange between Ronald N. Frost ("Aristotle's Ethics: The Real Reason for Luther's Reformation?" *Trinity Journal* 18/2 [1997]: 223-241) and Richard A. Muller ("Scholasticism, Reformation, Orthodoxy, and the Persistence of Christian Aristotelianism," *Trinity Journal* 19/1 [1998]: 81-96), and the rejoinder by Frost ("Scholasticism, Reformation, Orthodoxy, and the Persistence of Christian Aristotelianism: A Brief Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 19/1 [1998]: 97-101).

⁸⁸ Dietmar Lage, *Martin Luther on the Imitatio Christi and Conformitas Christi and Their Relationship to Good Works* (vol. 45; *Texts and Studies in Religion*; Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990): *passim*.

⁸⁹ LW 27:238, "the suffering of Christ is both a sacrament and an example—a sacrament because it signifies the death of sin in us and grants it to those who believe, an example because it also behooves us to imitate Him in bodily suffering and dying. The sacrament is what is stated in Rom. 4:25: 'Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.' The example is what is stated in I Peter 2:21: 'Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.'"

⁹⁰ LW 31:333-377

⁹¹ From Paul's dictum, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all" (I Cor. 9:19, ESV).

⁹² Richard Niebuhr "solves" this problem in Luther by utilizing Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols.; trans. Ralph Manheim, pref. and intro. Charles W. Hendl; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1996). He relegates the law emphasis to the image of "man the citizen" *homo politicus* (the obeyer and enactor of laws), which—incidentally—Niebuhr rejects, and incorporates the love emphasis into the image of "man the answerer" *homo dialogicus* (the fitting responder), the symbol of the responsible person. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Gustafson "solves" it by considering Luther's ethic a *Gesinnungsethik*, an ethic of disposition; as it is not a new external law it avoids legalism. The Christian is inwardly disposed to do what the law requires her to do in a different spirit from what was once the case and she acts out her faith toward her neighbor in a spirit and manner that exceeds legal requirements.

See James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). The notion of exceeding legal requirements is reminiscent of two other possible “solutions.” Pascal’s epigram indicated his contention that true morality is found beyond the law, *«la vraie morale se moque de la morale»* (“true morality laughs at morality”), see Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Texte Établi et Annoté par Jacques Chevalier; vol. 34 Bibliothèque de la Pléiade; Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 1094, §24. As well, Halakhic Judaism’s concept of *לפנים משורת הדין* (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*), usually rendered “beyond the line of the law” or “beyond the measure of the law,” understands morality to begin only after the fulfillment of the law. As a supererogatory act, it promotes an end (teleologically) which is morally binding to follow (deontologically), yet in such a manner that it is not deontologically obligatory because it requires so much of the actor. The requirement is to do the right and the good in the eyes of Yahweh (Deut. 6:18) as evolving from the context of one’s acts, and may vary with circumstances and individuals; different from the imposition of a fixed objective legal standard (*דין*, *din*). Along this line, George Lindbeck (“Martin Luther und der rabbinische Geist,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 40/1 [1998]: 40-65) finds formal similarities, despite material differences, in his comparison of Luther’s point of view as a pastor and catechist to Max Kadushin’s probing of the Rabbinic mindset in the latter’s *The Rabbinic Mind* (Classics in Judaic Studies; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952; repr., Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Academic Publishing, 2001).

⁹³ LW 21:103, Luther says, “Here you have a word and a command of God hovering over you, commanding you to love your neighbor, to rebuke the disorderly, and to comfort the sorrowful. Because it is a matter of command, it cannot be wrong” (expositing Mt. 5:33).

⁹⁴ LW 36:124 (The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520).

⁹⁵ I am drawing on Niebuhr’s *The Responsible Self*, 126, and his theological conception of responsibility: “Responsibility affirms: ‘God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.’”

⁹⁶ A trenchant interpretation of neighbor love as shaped by justification/union with Christ which serves as a model to understand and integrate faith and ethics—following the Finnish school of Luther interpretation—is provided by Michigan State University College of Law Professor, Mark Totten, who also holds a Ph.D. in ethics from the Yale University Department of Religious Studies. See his “Luther on Unio cum Christo,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31/3 (Winter 2003): 443-462.

⁹⁷ LW 43:200, “I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!” (A Simple Way to Pray, 1535).

⁹⁸ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989). Luther cites this passage in WA 15, (54) 69-78, LW 43:96-102 (A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg Instructing Them on the Basis of Psalm 120: How to Avenge Themselves on Their Enemies, 1524).

⁹⁹ LW 31:367 (The Freedom of a Christian, 1520).

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (trans. David Wills; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111 culls this reading from Charles Baudelaire, "The Pagan School," in Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr., eds and trans., *Baudelaire as Literary Critic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 74-77. Derrida argues that the act of doing good is a gift to someone that usually comes at a great cost to us, the greatest of which would be to die for others. Derrida's clever yet slight reference to the Christian teaching of God suffering a death to save humanity (p. 40-50) is eclipsed by his discussion of Jan Patočka's distillation of religion as responsibility and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* as "the long history of the origin of responsibility (*Verantwortlichkeit*)" (p. 112). While religion needs to sustain its conversation with its secular critics, and vice versa, identifying the essence of religion to be responsibility results from drawing a sizeable portion of religious dross from their theological predecessors.

¹⁰¹ Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indocctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 307, in Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard*, 149. This sentiment, particularly indicative of the reductionistic element in Strauss' work, also reflects a morally solipsistic thought on Christianity in general. It calls to mind Nietzsche's madman who announces the death of God in *The Gay Science*, no. 125 (1882) and his haunting queries, "'Whither is God?' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. . . . How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?'" Nietzsche devoted the lingering years of his rational life to the answer that humanity must take the matters of forgiveness and atonement into its own hands. So too with our consolation, at the end of the day it can be found by our own hand, "The thought of suicide is a strong means of comfort: it helps us get through many an evil night." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann; trans. Judith Norman; Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 70, §157.

¹⁰² LW 24:42 (comments on John 14:7).

¹⁰³ Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe*, 274, emphasizes this aspect of Luther's consolatory style, "Vielmehr betont er immer wieder seinen Willen, sich um den Consolandus zu bemühen, sein Bestes zu geben und alle seine Künste sprachlichen Überredens und Überzeugens, des Aufmunterns und Erheiterns, kurz, seine rhetorica consolatrix einzusetzen" ("Rather he stresses repeatedly that it is his will to exert himself for the one being consoled, to give his best and to use all his speaking skills in persuading and consoling, in encouraging and cheering up, in short, his rhetoric of consolation").

¹⁰⁴ Karl Barth, *Ethics* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 84.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ: A New Reading of the 1441 Latin Autograph Manuscript* by William C. Creasy (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1989), 73.

¹⁰⁶ LW 33:137 (explicating Ezek. 18:23, 32 in *The Bondage of the Will*, 1525).

¹⁰⁷ Pascal, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1132, §175, "little things console us, because little things afflict us."