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Table of Contents

Melvin Zilz (1932-2005).....	98
Tracking the Trinity in Contemporary Theology	
John T. Pless.....	99
<i>Potestas In Ecclesia, Potestas Episcoporum: Confessio Augustana XXVIII and the Life of the Church</i>	
Anssi Simojoki.....	119
Natural Knowledge of God and the Trinity	
Roland Ziegler.....	133
Man is a Microcosmos: Adam and Eve in Luther's <i>Lectures on Genesis</i> (1535-1545)	
Theo M. M. A. C. Bell.....	159

Man is a Microcosmos: Adam and Eve in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545)

Theo M.M.A.C. Bell

"Until now there has not been anyone in the church who has explained everything in the chapter with adequate skill," so Martin Luther (1483–1546) boldly states in the beginning of the first chapter of his explanation of Genesis.¹ The commentators from the past with their countless questions had confused everything in this chapter: that God has reserved his exalted wisdom and the correct understanding of this chapter for himself alone. He has left us these two things to know: "this general knowledge that the world had a beginning and that it was created by God out of nothing." For Luther, it is clear that the perfect knowledge, which Adam and Eve once possessed in Paradise, has been gone for good. This will make his undertaking not an easy one. Trying to read Scripture in its literal meaning, Luther embarks on this journey on his own and without a guide. "We shall, therefore, leave others to their opinion and explain what seems right to us."²

More than the pursuit of knowledge, Luther is concerned with God's wisdom, which can be found in Scripture. He has some meaningful things to say about it in his Introduction to Genesis. According to Gregory, Scripture is a river, in which a lamb wades and an elephant floats. It is God's wisdom, which makes the wise men of this world fools; and it is the prince of this world who makes children eloquent and eloquent people like children. Not he is the best, who understands everything or even who has no shortcomings, but he who loves the most, like Psalm 1:2 says: "Happy is the man, who loves and meditates on the Law of the Lord." It would be more than sufficient, if this wisdom would please us, if this meditated wisdom would be loved and held day and night.³ These thoughts about love for wisdom, which can only be gained from meditating Scripture day and night, make us think of Luther's story of his so-called tower

¹ WA 42:3,22–23; from Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993).

² WA 42:6,10.

³ WA 42:2,5–13.

Theo M.M.A.C. Bell is a professor of theology at Catholic Theological University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

experience,⁴ but even more it discloses his monastic theological background—exposition of the Scriptures and meditation are intertwined for him.⁵

Luther dedicated an extensive series of lectures to what he called “my beloved Genesis.” Apart from the Psalms, there is no other book in the Old Testament that is treated by him in such a profound and extensive way.⁶ Leaving aside some series of sermons (*Declamationes*) from his younger days, we also have these academic lectures which remained unfinished in spite of a period covering ten years. His Lectures on Genesis (*Enarrationes in Genesin*)⁷ comprise no fewer than three strong volumes of the Weimar edition of Luther’s works and count some 2200 pages.⁸ However, Luther research has not paid the necessary attention that this commentary deserves. While it is true that we must be very cautious in making use of these lectures on Genesis—primarily due to the fact that they are considered a reworking by editors who were influenced by Melancthon⁹—we join Martin Brecht’s opinion: “Nevertheless, the bulk of this commentary, with its amazing richness of features and allusions, undoubtedly does come from Luther, and his spirit is evident in it. Despite

⁴ WA 54:185,12–186,20.

⁵ Martin Nicol, *Meditation bei Luther*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 171. Meditation should not be considered as a private activity but rather as a practice in the Word aiming at teaching and preaching the doctrine therein.

⁶ Oskar Ziegner, *Luther und die Erzväter: Auszüge aus Luthers Auslegungen zum ersten Buch Moses mit einer theologischen Einleitung* (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1936), 9.

⁷ “The Weimar Edition speaks of ‘Commentary’. Actually this is not the right word, but *enarratio*, which means: ‘to speak, tell, or set forth in detail.’ A public context is connoted. Therefore, it means to speak in public in detail.” See Kenneth Hagen, *Luther’s Approach to Scripture as seen in his ‘Commentaries’ on Galatians 1519–1538* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 49–66, quote p. 50.

⁸ WA 42–44. Only the first volume of the Commentary on Genesis is published during Luther’s life in 1544 and has a foreword by him. Further, several editors have worked on the edition. It is not possible to deal here with the complicated *Redaktionsgeschichte*. For this, see E. Seeberg, *Studien zu Luthers Genesisvorlesung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem alten Luther*, Beiträge zur Förderung christliche Theologie (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932) and especially Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1936). See also footnote 10.

⁹ These editors may be responsible for the repetitions that the lectures contain—a result of their using different students’ notes. They likely also added some things. Above all, their own theology crept into the work so that one cannot always be sure of reading the genuine Luther.

the subsequent alterations, this monumental work may still be regarded as primarily his work and thus as a useful source."¹⁰

Why do we choose these lectures? If we are looking for a most ample and detailed description of Adam and Eve by Luther, we can find it here. Furthermore, in the years around 1535 theological-anthropological issues clearly are at the center of his thought.¹¹ Moreover, the Lectures on Genesis are dated from the last stage of his life, when Luther lived the life of a married man himself, and where his own experiences seemed to have enhanced his own appreciation of marriage and family life.¹² Did his marriage influence his exposition of the creation account somehow?

Premodern exegetes used to read Scripture in a different way than many modern exegetes do. To them Scripture was one holy book that fascinated as a whole as well as in its numerous details. It was written by God to put mankind on the way back to Him. That is the reason why reading Scripture is not reading literature in the first place, but reading about the history of salvation and doom, in which one finds oneself: "Like [it happened] to Adam, so to all men. Like [it happened] to Eve, so to all women."¹³ This marks very clearly the central position of the first human beings, and at the same time, it expresses the self-identification of the exegetes with both ancestors; what is said of them, can be applied to all humans. So the story of the first human beings interprets the present interpreter as well.

For Luther the story of the creation and fall still remained a historical reality. In this way, though it had happened some six thousand years ago, one must take the text literally.¹⁴ This was an important argument against philosophers like Aristotle who tended to teach the eternity of the world. But it is also an argument against church fathers like Augustine and Hilary who did not want to read Scripture literally and held that the world was created instantaneously and not successively in the course of six days. The

¹⁰ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Volume 3 – The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 136.

¹¹ Bengt Hägglund, "Luthers Anthropologie," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546: Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 68. In this connection reference is made to Luther's *Disputatio de homine* (1536).

¹² Marc Lienhard, "Luthers Menschen- und Weltbild im Genesiskommentar (1535–1545)," in *Luther-Bulletin* 3 (January 1994): 35.

¹³ WA 24:91,1.

¹⁴ WA 42:3,20.

Bible was for Luther the book of the world and the history of humanity from its very beginning. His exegetical method was aimed at finding the proper historical sense of the text. With this he distinguished himself from many of his predecessors who tended toward an allegorical interpretation.¹⁵

The story of the creation of man gave the exegete an opportunity to describe the relations between both sexes more precisely. It is clear that Luther as an exegete of the Bible was influenced by the thinking of his time concerning the relationship between man and woman. Therefore, his views may appear sometimes dated to us. However, it is essential for us not to seclude ourselves from this strange Luther but to hear him out first.

Like Augustine and many others, Luther could perceive a human ideal of living together in an harmonious way in the original community of Adam and Eve in paradise. First we will deal with man created after the image of God. After that we will look at the relationship of Adam and Eve and their position before and after the fall. A few particular verses from the first chapters of Genesis will have our special attention: Genesis 1:26-27 on the creation of man in the image of God, Genesis 2:16-23, in which the woman is created, and Genesis 3:15, the so-called proto-gospel, in which for Luther the history of creation and fall seems to culminate.

I. Adam and Eve as the Image of God

Man created according to the image of God is a topic that draws the most attention within the first chapter, and no theologian in the present or in the past can avoid determining the nature of this image. It is characteristic of Luther that he never deals with man on his own. He is not interested in a philosophical anthropology, which first treats man as man and after that covers the theological meaning. "What advantage is there in knowing how beautiful a creature man is if you are unaware of his purpose, namely, that he was created to worship God and to live with Him eternally?"¹⁶ The human being can only be defined through his relationship to God and the destination which is intended by him. The most important goal, which Scripture reveals, is to live with God in eternity and to preach God here on earth, to thank him and patiently obey

¹⁵ WA 42:176,21: ". . . quod relictis Allegoriis historiam et propriam sententiam secuti sumus." Sticking to the literal sense (*historia*) is also the reason why Luther estimated the exegete Nicolas of Lyra so highly: "Ego Lyram ideo amo et inter optimos pono, quod ubique diligenter retinet et persequitur historiam . . ." (WA 42:71,17-18).

¹⁶ WA 42:98,11-13.

his word. Philosophers know nothing about this and the world with its highest wisdom is most ignorant when it does not take advantage of Holy Scripture or of theology.

Among all others man is a very special creature. He is created according to the image of God (*ad imaginem Dei*). This has to be mentioned first as this makes him a unique work of God.¹⁷ For Luther this image-character is not identical with certain natural qualities, which are owned by all human beings. The theology of that time, following Augustine, defined the image in terms of the rational powers of the soul and perceived in them the fundamental difference between man and animal. According to the Vulgate translation, image (*imago*) and similitude (*similitudo*) were distinguished. The image of God would consist in memory, the intellect, and will.¹⁸ These three comprise the image of God, which is in all of us. Moreover, the theologians stated that the similitude lies in the gifts of grace. Just as a similitude is a certain perfection of an image, so our nature is perfected through grace. Thus, the similitude of God consists in this: that the memory is provided with hope, the intellect with faith, and the will with love. Sometimes other divisions are made; namely, that the memory is the power of God, the mind of his wisdom, and the will of his justice. In this manner Augustine and others after him have exerted themselves to think out various trinities in man. Luther calls this "not unattractive speculations," which point conclusively to keen and leisurely minds, but they contribute very little toward the correct explanation of the image of God.

Luther rejected these kinds of interpretations.¹⁹ Naturally, man did possess these three powers of the soul (memory, will, and mind) in a most perfect way, and they have been the foundation for a perfect knowledge of God and for a perfect love of God and fellow creatures.²⁰ Yet the image of God is not an active human power in the first place but rather the right relationship of a person to God.²¹ Thus, if the *imago Dei* exists in this

¹⁷ WA 42:46,11: "*opus Dei singulare.*" *Singulare* also points to being distinguished from the other creatures.

¹⁸ WA 42:45,3-7: "*Doctores autem reliqui fere Augustinum sequuntur, qui Aristotelis divisionem retinet, quod imago Dei sint potentiae animae, memoria, mens vel intellectus, et voluntas; in his tribus dicunt consistere imaginem Dei, quae in omnibus hominibus est.*" Augustine, *De Trinitate*, chapt. IX-XI.

¹⁹ WA 42:45,11-17; 247,39-248,8.

²⁰ WA 42:47,23-35.

²¹ WA 42:86,3-16. See also Leinhard, "Luthers Menschen- und Weltbild im Genesiskommentar (1535-1545)," 24-25, and Hägglund, "Luthers Anthropologie," 24.

relationship, then it means that “Adam in his being not only knew God and believed in His kindness, but also lived in a life that was wholly godly, that is: he was without the fear of death or of any other danger and he was content with God’s favor.”²² According to Luther, God meant to say with this: “This is my image, by which you are living, just as God lives. But if you sin, you will lose this image and you will die.” Being created in the image of God means to live this fundamental vital relationship with the creator. In the fall, man does not lose only the similitude but the image too because this relationship with God is annihilated.

According to Luther’s view, the similitude with God is not to be understood as an additional gift of grace but belongs to the natural being of Adam and Eve in their original condition. Their perfection consisted in being equipped with qualities in the spiritual as well as the physical realm. In this way, human beings possessed original righteousness by virtue of their being created.²³ At the same time, however, one should not lose sight of the physical dimension for the personal partnership with God and the certainty of God, which found expression in the physical condition of the first human beings. They possessed a perfect knowledge of the nature of animals, plants, fruits and other creatures. Their interior as well as their exterior senses were perfectly pure.²⁴

Luther’s view that man as the image of God concerns the whole person and is not restricted to the spirit only would definitively break through in modern Bible studies. Moreover, what draws significant attention is that Luther attributes the image of God equally to man and woman. This is an obvious correction of the tradition which saw the image of God only in the male and considered the woman only as an image because of Adam.²⁵ Finally, another remarkable point is this: Luther no longer explained the

²² WA 42:47,9–11.

²³ David Löfgren seems to put the original righteousness of man on the same level with justification by faith. *Die Theologie der Schöpfung bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 62. However there is a remarkable difference that does not seem to be noted by him sufficiently; the original justification in Paradise is not attributed to man but is created inside within his human being and is therefore his possession. See e.g., WA 42:47,8: “*Quod Adam eam in sua substantia habuerit . . .*”

²⁴ WA 42:46,23–26; 47,35–38.

²⁵ See e.g., William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea* (Paris 1500), Fol. 58v: “. . . *quia vir immediate factus est ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei, mulier vero mediante vir,*” quoted by Elisabeth Gössmann, “Glanz und Last der Tradition. Ein theologiegeschichtlicher Durchblick,” in *Mann und Frau – Grundproblem theologischer Anthropologie*, ed. Theodor Schneider (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1989), 37.

image of God in a directly christological sense as he did in his earlier sermons.²⁶ The original purity of human nature is stressed much clearer now.

When Luther talks of the image of God, he emphasizes again and again the difference between the original state in paradise and the one after the fall. When we talk about it now, we deal with something that has become completely unknown to us. "Not only because we don't have any experience of it anymore, but also because we constantly experience the contrary and hear nothing except bare words."²⁷ After the fall, we are not able to imagine what a life in God's image is all about. Death creeps into all our perceptive powers like leprosy so that we cannot even understand that image with our intellect. We are not sure of God any longer but are teased by fear and dismay.²⁸ However, not everything is lost. Where the gospel is at work, a beginning of the restoration of the *imago Dei* is made. Man is born by faith to eternal life, or rather, to the hope of eternal life and is called to his eternal destination. This new life will realize itself here only fragmentarily. Here on earth man lives between expectation and fulfillment.

Is "image of God" the term with which man as a creature in relation to God is defined? In the next paragraph we will view what being created as a man or as a woman actually means. For that meaning, a distinction has to be made between the situation before and after the fall.

II. Adam and Eve in Paradise

The exegesis of the creation story provided Luther with the opportunity to describe the relationship of the sexes more precisely. In his sermons on Genesis in the years 1523–1524, Luther's understanding of Adam and Eve is still strongly determined by theological tradition; whereas in his lectures, his view gained distinct features. This can be explained from the question: Was the woman already in paradise subordinated to the man, or was her subordination only a consequence of the fall? Still completely in line with his predecessors, the young Luther in his sermons on Genesis thought that the woman in paradise was already subordinated to man.²⁹

²⁶ See e.g., WA 42:66,20–28. The reference to Christ as the image of God is called here an allegory or anagogy by Moses.

²⁷ WA 42:47,31–33.

²⁸ WA 42:46,28–29.

²⁹ WA 24:639,6. "*Ibi ante lapsum iniunctum est Adamo et Evae, ut operarentur, ut Adam praecesset, regeret excoleretque paradisum.*"

But how did he think about it in his Lectures on Genesis? Eve appears for the first time in Genesis 1:26. After Luther has stated the remarkable difference between humanity and all other creatures by referring to the words *imago* and *similitudo*, he discussed God's mandate to both Adam and Eve to rule "the earth, the sea and the air."³⁰ He stresses that both have heard this mandate with their very own ears. It was not given as advice but as a command: *Dominamini* ("You shall rule")—given in the plural. If ruling over other creatures is at stake, Eve is completely equal to her husband and a "partner in ruling."³¹ This ruling over everything is, according to Luther, "part, as it were, of the divine nature," it happens without force or effort and is coupled with a perfect knowledge of all things and an immediate intellectual comprehension of the good.³² "If, then, we are looking for an outstanding philosopher, let us not overlook our first parents while they were still free from sin."³³

The verse "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27) offers the Reformer the first opportunity to draw attention to the woman as a creature.³⁴ Not wanting to exclude her from the future life, Moses, who was generally considered as the author of Genesis, has mentioned both sexes explicitly. Luther defines the woman as a physical being that is somewhat different (*quoddam diversum*) from man. The word *animal* here clearly points to the physical aspect. This means that although Eve was a very excellent creature, equal to Adam concerning her being an image of God, she still was physically different. Luther tried to explain this with a comparison of two celestial bodies, the sun and the moon. The sun is more excellent than the moon, though the moon as a celestial body is very excellent.³⁵ The same applies to the woman. Though she is an excellent work of God, she is not equal to the male's glory and dignity. In the first instance, this looks like inequality, but things are not so simple. In the perspective of creation, Luther can put both on the same level. As Moses, the author of Genesis, explicitly states, God created man and woman. She participates in the divine image and similitude. In this way, the woman still remains a partner of the future life and an heiress of the same grace (1

³⁰ WA 42:49,30: "*rectores terrae, maris et aëris*".

³¹ WA 42:151,35: "*socia gubernationis*".

³² WA 42:47,42: ". . . sicut Adam et Heva Deum agnoverunt Dominum, ita postea ipsi reliquis creaturis in aëre, aqua, terra dominati sunt." Luther seems to connect the knowledge of God here with the knowledge of nature and the ruling over the creation.

³³ WA 42:49,39f.

³⁴ WA 42:51,35ff.

³⁵ WA 42:51,39f. The same image is used again in WA 42:52,18.

Pet 3:7). According to Luther, all this is written with the intention to exclude no sex from the full honor of human nature, even if the female sex would be lower than the male. In spite of that, Luther rejects Aristotle's view, which was commonly supported by scholastic theologians, that a woman was a "maimed" man (*vir occasionatus*) or even a monster. He lashes out fiercely against these theologians whom he calls monsters themselves by mocking a creature of God that is created by a special decree of God.³⁶ Again he calls the creation of woman a very excellent work of God. With that he radically rejects the medieval opinion that a woman is an imperfect being by nature.

In the explanation of Genesis 2:18 ("It is not good that man is alone"), one would expect Luther to start with the creation of woman, but surprisingly he starts by mentioning the three estates: church, household (in a wider sense including government), and the institution of the household (in the narrow sense, *oeconomia*).³⁷ This may look somewhat remarkable, but discussing this estate first is important to Luther in order to understand the position of the concrete human being in the world. These are the life connections in which humans are placed in this world. Though the *ecclesia* is the most important estate, after that comes the household, which is set up as a regulation of family life. After exploring this estate Luther turns to the creation of woman. One could also state that with the creation of the woman the household or human community was founded. Like Adam, so also Eve was created according to a well-considered decree. After man was formed from the earth, woman was made from the side of man. God did not do this like a surgeon with a knife but through his word.³⁸ Whereas, in all of nature, offspring are created by males and females and born of the female, in the case of her creation, it is

³⁶ WA 42:53,22f. See e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, art. 99,2 ad 1 and 2; Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* I, chapt. 20. About the woman as a "maimed man" according to Thomas, see e.g., Otto Hermann Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin: Grenze und Grösse mittelalterlicher Theologie: Eine Einführung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1988), 208-227. Isnard W. Frank, 'Femina est mas occasionatus: Deutung und Folgerungen bei Thomas von Aquin', in *Der Hexenhammer. Entstehung und Umfeld des Malleus maleficarum von 1487*, ed. Peter Segl (Köln: Böhlau, 1988), 71-102. Regarding the much more negative approach to the female by Aquinas due to the influence of Aristotle's biology as compared to Augustine's, see Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1981).

³⁷ WA 42:87,10-90,9.

³⁸ WA 42:97,7-12.

the other way around: woman is formed from man, which is a miraculous work, just like Adam's creation from clay. Both are miraculous works, which a philosopher like Aristotle understood nothing. If it were not written in Scripture, it would be difficult for us to comprehend. Like Adam, so is Eve called to life by a unique decree (*singulari consilio*) of God. This means that this creature too is the companion (*socia*) of eternal life, which is superior to the life of other animals. The destination of the human kind is different from the beginning. Man is a unique creature and is suited to be a partner of the divinity and in immortality. At the same time, Adam and Eve become "*pater et mater generationis*" for the increase and preservation of the human race.³⁹

With the creation of man before woman, however, a certain order is set. This becomes clearer when Luther deals with the idea that the woman is a helper "fit to him" (Gen 2:18).⁴⁰ In Hebrew it is stated: "Because she should be in the presence of him" (כַּנְּוִדָּו; *Quod coram eo sit*). With this the woman is distinguished from other female beings (i.e., female animals) that do not always remain in the presence of their male companion. However, the woman is created in such a way that she should always and everywhere be around her husband. Luther does not state the same for the male. This is noteworthy and said of the situation in paradise when both were supposed to be equal.

He continues with a remarkable sentence: "If the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects."⁴¹ And he adds: "Eve was not like the woman of today." Her state was much better and more excellent and in no respect subordinated to Adam, whether you count the qualities of the body or those of the mind. This concrete statement has tempted some authors to suppose that Luther changed his view on Eve in paradise. This would distinguish Luther not only from the exegetes before him but also from his own previous position in his sermons on Genesis. John Thompson talks here about a "created equality" of Adam and Eve.⁴² Mickey Mattox, too, seems to join this view, though he adds some marginal notes. He is of

³⁹ WA 42:89,16: "*Adae itaque adiutorium fuit mulier, solus enim non potuit generare, sicut nec mulier sola generare potest.*"

⁴⁰ WA 42:88,23-40.

⁴¹ WA 42:87,23-25.

⁴² John Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Rules in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and his Contemporaries* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1992), 136-144.

the opinion that the elder Luther leaves no room for domination in paradise.⁴³ However, we would like to qualify this interpretation. Compared to the situation after the fall, the woman has an equal position; but that does not mean equality in every respect. Mattox is aware that Luther's view on the woman's position is somewhat ambivalent. Equality always means equality only to a certain extent. Besides that, there is also some talk of inequality, even in paradise, which we have to investigate now.

First, equality exists above all in being created in the image of God. Both sexes are called to communicate with God and to live with him in eternity. Therefore, both are equipped to know God in an equal way. The woman possessed these mental powers in the same degree as the man. Her nature was pure and full of the knowledge of God so that she could understand and perceive the word of God on her own.⁴⁴ Can there be any inequality or difference in position? We think there is some and in order to see it, Adam and Eve have to be considered in the two different estates. In the *oeconomia*, that is, the domestic regiment and the ruling over creation, full equality can be assessed. Eve in paradise was the most free partner in ruling, which now is totally of the male's concern.⁴⁵ There was a spontaneous harmony of will between them, which was not affected by sin and egoism. Government (*politia*) for the purpose of protecting the community from evil and, if necessary, the use of force did not exist yet because nature was still "pure and without sin."⁴⁶ Once in a while, Luther mentions *politia*

⁴³ Mickey Mattox, *Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs: Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesim 1535-1545* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 101. Mattox writes: "For the young Luther, as for the Christian exegetical tradition generally, there is an order and rule of the male over the female within the unfallen human family. For the elder Luther, this is not so. . . . The spontaneous mutuality of their relationship meant that neither had dominion over the other within the sphere of the home."

⁴⁴ WA 42:50,10-11.

⁴⁵ WA 42:151,23: "*Viri subiecta est, quae antea liberrima et nulla in parte Viro inferior erat, socia omnium donorum Dei.*"

⁴⁶ Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 344. Luther views the existence of the state and the government as a consequence of the fall and he underlines their provisional character by calling them *regnum peccati*; they will be there as long as there is sin.

along with *oeconomia* in paradise, but then he points to the original human ruling over creatures and not to the ruling of humans over each other.⁴⁷

Concerning the situation in the *ecclesia*, things are somewhat different. For Luther it is clear that preaching is the highest task followed by producing offspring.⁴⁸ Concerning preaching, Adam in paradise is given priority from the beginning. As the first human being, he is privileged to hear the word of God and with it comes the mandate to preach. This mandate is given to Adam personally on the sixth day. For Luther, this implies that Eve, who did not exist yet, did not hear the words directly from God, but had to hear them from her husband who informed her later.⁴⁹ The *mandatum Dei* concentrates on public worship (*cultus externus*). Adam was required to worship on every Sabbath and to preach the divine word, which God had spoken to him.

Why was the Sabbath made? First of all, Luther says, God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it for himself. This has the special purpose of making us understand that the seventh day in particular should be devoted to divine worship. Holy is that which has been set apart for God and has been removed from all secular use. God gave his word and command to Adam who is to occupy himself with this word for the sanctification of the Sabbath and for the worship of God. To man all this clearly proves that there remains a life after this life, and that man was created not for this physical life only, like the other animals, but for eternal life.⁵⁰

The church is set up as the first estate by God's short sermon: "Eat from every tree in paradise, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat" (Gen 2:16-17). This little sermon contained all wisdom. "This sermon would have been like a Bible for him and for all of us."⁵¹ The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam's temple, church, altar, and

⁴⁷ WA 42:72,13-15. For *politia* as a postlapsarian institution in behalf of *remedium peccati*, see WA 42:79,7-9; 72,13-15.

⁴⁸ WA 42:89,6-7: "*Revera enim nullum opus fuit praestantius et admirabilius in tota natura quam generatio.*"

⁴⁹ WA 42:80, 11: "*Hanc concionem si, ut textus ostendit, Adam solus audivit, sexta die habita est, ac Adam eam postea cum Heva communicavit.*" Compare to WA 42:50,10-11. There is a certain tension between Luther's view that the word of God had to be preached to Eve by Adam, and Eve's faculty to perceive the word on her own.

⁵⁰ For the Sabbath, see Luther's explanation of Gen 2:3, especially WA 42:60,1-61,32.

⁵¹ WA 42:80,3f.

pulpit.⁵² It was established first (before the household), because God wants to make clear by this sign that man was created for another purpose, different than the rest of the living beings. Since the church was established by the word of God, it is certain that man was created for immortal and spiritual life. And this church without walls or without any pomp would have stayed the same, if man had remained innocent. That means the church was completely different in paradise. Adam and his descendants would have gathered there on the Sabbath day. After refreshing themselves from the tree of life he would have praised God together with all creatures on earth. He would have extolled the greatest gift, namely, that he, together with his descendants, were created in the image of God. He would also have admonished them to live a holy life and to work faithfully in the garden. Was there a law? Not in the sense we know it now. Adam was righteous; law was not envisaged as a postlapsarian device to him. In paradise, it only was some sort of exhortation; ultimately the meaning of the law for Luther is worship in its fullest sense.⁵³ If law is understood that way, we can say that Luther understands the original purpose of the law was to provide Adam with a means of giving concrete form to his love through his responsive obedience to God's explicit command.⁵⁴

God had given the word to Adam alone on the sixth day before Eve was created. He informed her later, and she had to subject herself to the word of God (not to Adam!), which was received by him and preached with authority. For Luther it was still not an issue that a woman should also preach, even though, with the thought of the common priesthood of all believers, he had expressed the task of all Christians to preach.⁵⁵

⁵² WA 42:72,20.

⁵³ WA 42:80,9-14.

⁵⁴ Bernd Wannewetsch, "Luther's moral theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. D. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-135. "Surprisingly, the law is not envisaged as a postlapsarian device, a makeshift repair provoked by the fall, but rather as belonging to Adam's original righteousness, and as such, it could not be opposed to his spontaneous love of God" (Wannewetsch, "Luthers moral theology," 125).

⁵⁵ "Therefore order, discipline, and respect demand that women keep silent when men speak; but if no man were to preach, then it would be necessary for the women to preach." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36: *Word and Sacrament II*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 152; WA 8:498,12-14. Elsewhere (Sermon on 1 Pet 2:5; 1523) Luther asserts that the common priesthood does not mean that women should preach (WA 12:308,29-309,10), referring to the submission of the woman to the man. But as Luther states, there

Nevertheless, Eve took part of the priestly task of Adam by teaching the gospel to her children at home.⁵⁶ Both parents fulfill their priestly task by teaching their children, as Luther had already argued in *Vom ehelichen Leben* (1522). So Eve at home shares the task of preaching with her husband.⁵⁷

Luther goes further into the creation of the woman in connection with Genesis 2:23 ("This at last is bone from my bones").⁵⁸ Eve is led to the man by God and is introduced to him. He accepts her "with the greatest pleasure and reverence." In fact, this is for Luther the divine institution of marriage.⁵⁹ Adam immediately perceives that the woman is a building that is made from him. That is why he calls her "bone from my bones," which, according to Luther, are the words of a person who is righteous, wise, and full of the Holy Spirit. God is the *causa efficiens* of the woman and the marriage with the intention of (*causa finalis*) making the woman a "mundane dwelling" (*politicum habitaculum*) or "household building" (*oeconomicum aedificium*) for the man.⁶⁰ These metaphors need some explanation. Luther adapts the last figure of speech from Genesis 2:22 in the Vulgate text: "*Et aedificavit Dominus Deus costam . . . in mulierem.*" Here a rib of Adam is made into a woman.⁶¹ According to Luther, many interpreters were anxious to know why Moses talks here about building instead of modeling or creating, and they all tried to explain this allegorically in many ways. Thus Eve's body as a "building" would have referred to the church, which is a body with limbs too. Though Luther thinks this traditional allegory is beautiful, he prefers the historical and proper sense of the text. In Holy Scripture, a married woman is called a building (*aedificium*) because she generates and raises offspring (Gen 30:3;

may be situations, in which the woman has to preach, even though she is physically less capable.

⁵⁶ Ulrich Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia, Luthers Genesisvorlesung (1535–1545)*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 323. WA 10,II:301,23–25: "Denn gewißlich ist vater und mutter der kinder Apostel, Bisschoff, pfarrer, ynn dem sie das Euangelion yhn kundt machen."

⁵⁷ Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia*, 323. WA 10,II:301,23–25: "Denn gewißlich ist vater und mutter der kinder Apostel, Bisschoff, pfarrer, ynn dem sie das Euangelion yhn kundt machen."

⁵⁸ WA 42:101,34ff.

⁵⁹ WA 42:100,22–26: "*Quod addit Moses: 'Et [Deus] adduxit eam ad Adam, est descriptio quaedam sponsalium imprimis digna observatione . . . Est enim legitima coniunctio masculi et foeminae ordinatio et institutio divina.'*"

⁶⁰ *Politicum habitaculum* (this is the only place in Luther's works, where it can be found): WA 42:102,22; *oeconomicum aedificium*: WA 42:99,13.

⁶¹ For this subject, see WA 42:98,30–99,36.

Exod 1:21; 2 Sam 7:11). She serves as a permanent shelter, which means that the man finds a dwelling in her for generating and raising his progeny. Luther likes to compare this with a bird's nest. The word *oeconomicum* specifies the figure of the building; as a household building it offers structure and order to living together as a family and society. Also the cultivation of the field, the care for home, cattle, and domestic animals belong to it. To put it in another way: with the creation of the woman, the human species settles as a social and economical being in this world.

Luther relates the notion *politicum habitaculum* to cohabitation, which literally means that a married couple live together, keep house together, and raise a family. So the meaning is very much related to the woman as a building. *Habitaculum* has the sense more of a dwelling place than a mansion. So Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of "the little dwelling place of our body," which is more like the tent of a soldier or the resting place of a pilgrim than a mansion of a citizen.⁶² The word *politicum* includes a broader meaning as in the original state a more comprising dominion might ring through. In this way the woman as the center of life not only offers a housing to her man and family, but in the original condition she also offers order and structure in ruling everything. For Luther the woman as a building and a housing is implied in Genesis 2:22; however, which form this habitation in paradise exactly had, we cannot imagine anymore; it was lost by sin.⁶³

No word in Scripture has been written without reason. That Luther places value on every single word becomes clear when he pays attention to the Hebrew word *happa'am* (חַפְצָאָם), which means now, at last, or this time. "This little word indicates an overwhelmingly passionate love."⁶⁴ It expresses most beautifully the affection of a husband for his wife, who feels his need for her company and for living together in both love and holiness. Though this purity and innocence have disappeared today, the joy of the groom and the affection for his bride still remain.

Eve is called wo-man (*vira*) because she is taken from man (*vir*).⁶⁵ *Vir-vira* is a Latin play on the Hebrew words יָשׁ (אִשָּׁה) and יִשְׁשָׁא (אִשָּׁה). Eve is she-man indeed, denoted in the Vulgate as a *virago*, a heroic woman

⁶² Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermones in Cantica 26,1", in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 1 (Rome: 1957), 170, 9-14.

⁶³ WA 42:99,13-14.

⁶⁴ WA 42:102,25-37. Quote 102,31f.

⁶⁵ WA 42:103,12.

(*mulier heroica*) who performs manly matters. With these manly matters, Luther points to a complete equality in the ruling of domestic and public affairs.⁶⁶ They share children, food, bed, and house; and they are of one will.⁶⁷ Even after the fall, when the woman is subjected to man, there still are remains of this shared ruling. The woman can still be called a *virago* because she lives in joint property with her man.

We already noted some difference in assignment of duties between the sexes, but what about the matter with regard to sexual determination? “. . . the husband differs from the wife in no other respect than in sex; otherwise the woman is altogether a man.”⁶⁸ According to Luther, sex is the only real difference between the sexes. What does this mean? In another context, he states that Eve as a creature differs somewhat from man insofar as far as she has different members and that she has a much weaker nature (*ingenium*).⁶⁹ The first word clearly refers to the sexual characteristics; the last word can be understood in two ways. It can be applied to her natural condition, or to her rational gifts; but possibly it refers to both. In short: though Eve was a most excellent creature, nevertheless she was a woman. So, was there a real difference? Mickey Mattox tried to solve this problem by distinguishing between “qualitative equality” and “quantitative inequality.”⁷⁰ With this, he wants to designate equality in a qualitative sense if Eve’s physical, mental, and spiritual gifts are at stake; and a quantitative inequality, if a comparison of power and size with the man is at stake. But this difference does not really hold; for the physical aspect cannot be equal and unequal simultaneously. In my opinion it is Luther himself, whose speaking of the relationship between man and woman in paradise is not always consistent, who causes the problem. Sometimes he

⁶⁶ WA 42:103,36: “*gubernatio aequalis*”.

⁶⁷ WA 42:103,16: “*Quicquid enim maritus habet, hoc totum habet et possidet coniunx. Sunt communes non solum opes, sed liberi, cibus, lectus, domicilium; voluntates pares sunt.*”

⁶⁸ WA 42:103,18: “*Ita ut maritus ab uxore secundum nullam aliam rem differat, quam secundum sexum, alias mulier plane est vir.*”

⁶⁹ WA 42:51,35: “. . . videtur enim mulier quoddam diversum esse animal a viro, quod et membra habet dissimilia et ingenium longe infirmius.” The translation of *ingenium* as nature is too narrow.

⁷⁰ Mattox, *Defender*, 82. Clearly the author is still saddled with an unsolved problem. “Perhaps he means that Eve was equal in dignity (i.e., worth before God) and in her possession of the virtues with which God had adorned humankind, but not in her social position or status. If that is the case, then Luther is frustratingly obscure about it, for he seems already to have denied even the possibility of differences of social status in an unfallen world” (81).

underlines their equality; other times their inequality. There are passages which refer to a complete equality. Referring to Genesis 2:18 ("I will make him a helper fit for him"), Luther writes that God makes out of Adam, being alone, a husband by adding the woman to him, who was needed for increasing the human race. Originally she was not like the woman today, but her condition was far much better and more excellent, "because she was in no respect (*in nulla re*) inferior to Adam, whether you count the qualities of the body or those of the mind."⁷¹ But in other places Luther states that "though she was a most beautiful work of God, she nevertheless was not the equal of the male in glory and prestige."⁷²

Referring to Genesis 3:14, where Luther explicitly rejects the allegorical explication of Augustine and Gregory, he puts a similar opinion forward. According to these church fathers a difference should be made between a higher and a lower part of the human reason, in which Adam stood for the higher part, which is engaged in the contemplation of God, and Eve for the lower part, which is engaged in ruling over the house and state. This division between higher and lower is rejected by Luther because Eve was in no part (*in nulla parte*), neither in the body nor in the soul, inferior to Adam. Here the full equality of man and woman is used as an argument against a traditional anthropological division between a higher and lower part in humanity. Luther thinks these absurd allegories have caused much mischief and have misled theology into philosophic and scholastic twaddles. Therefore he wants to stick to the simply historical and literal meaning (*simpliciter historicam et literalem sententiam*) of the text itself.⁷³ According to this meaning, the serpent remains a serpent, the woman a woman, and the man a man. For, so he states not without any irony, not the lower but the higher reason have generated Cain and Abel, but Adam and Eve.

Another question is this: How does Luther deal with the two creation stories? It is clear that he wants to read them as a whole. Contrary to his sermons on Genesis, here he wants to stick to a literal reading of the text: a creation in six days.⁷⁴ In fact, in Genesis 2, Moses returns to God's work on

⁷¹ WA 42:87,27-29.

⁷² WA 42:52,10f.

⁷³ WA 42:138,40-139,5.

⁷⁴ WA 42:91,22: "*Pertinet autem hoc eo, ut firmiter teneamus hanc sententiam, vere sex dies fuisse, quibus Dominus creavit omnia, contra Augustini et Hilarii sententiam, qui uno momento putant omnia esse condita.*" Cf., WA 24:62,1 (*Sermons on Genesis 1523-1524*), where Luther still held to Augustine's view.

the sixth day with the intention of describing more closely the creation of mankind.⁷⁵ For Luther it is clear that the man was created first. Eve was created next, towards the end of the sixth day, while Adam slept. On the seventh day God spoke to Adam, mandated and instituted public worship, and forbade him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.⁷⁶ It is rather peculiar that God speaks here to Adam exclusively. Where was Eve? Elsewhere Luther speaks, albeit inconsistently, about the fact that Adam had received the law on the sixth day, before Eve was created.⁷⁷ Apparently it is important for Luther here in Genesis 2:3 (the blessing and hallowing of the seventh day) to underline the preaching and hearing of God's Word as a characteristic task for the seventh day, whereas at the creation of the church as the first estate (Gen 2:16), it is the sixth day, which comes to the fore. However, this inconsistency does not seem to have bothered Luther at all.

III. Adam and Eve after the Fall

Though Scripture does not offer any proof, Luther still thought it most likely that the seventh day was also the day of the fall. This means that Adam and Eve had hardly spent one full day in the Garden of Eden before their temptation and fall.⁷⁸ Satan attacks the humans in the weakest area, namely in the person of the woman.⁷⁹ For although both of them were created equally righteous, still the man surpasses the woman, just like in the whole of nature, the male power surpasses the female. In this way, the male surpasses the female even in the original condition, as Luther asserts here. Satan had understood this very well; and whereas he noticed that the man was more excellent, he did not dare to beset him. Luther is even of the opinion that if Satan had tried to tempt the man, Adam would have been the victor for sure. That is the reason why Satan put Eve's valor to the test, for he saw that she depended so much on her husband that she thought she could not sin.⁸⁰ The mistake that Eve made was that she was not

⁷⁵ WA 42:63,15: "*Hic redit Moses ad opus sexti diei, et ostendit, unde cultor terrae venerit.*"

⁷⁶ WA 42:61,36-39.

⁷⁷ WA 42:77,18-19: "*antequam Heva esset condita, Adae data lex sit.*" Note: here Luther calls it a law, elsewhere he calls it an exhortation (WA 42,80,9-14).

⁷⁸ WA 42:61,33-36.

⁷⁹ WA 42:114,1-11.

⁸⁰ WA 42:114,10-11: "[Satan] *videt enim eam sic confidere viro, ut non putet se posse peccare.*" In the American edition of Luther's Works, this passage is translated too suggestively: "[Satan] puts her valor to the test, for he sees that she is so dependent on her husband that she thinks she cannot sin." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 1:*

satisfied with the wisdom she possessed. She was not satisfied with the word of God and wanted to climb higher and to know God in another way than he had shown himself in his word. "So this is the Fall, that Eve after giving up the true wisdom, threw herself into the deepest blindness."⁸¹

However, this does not clear the man from blame. Both of them were equally righteous before the fall; both of them are equally guilty now. Luther does not agree with almost everybody who asserts that Adam would not have been seduced but had only sinned knowingly (*sciens*).⁸² He would not have wanted to disappoint his beloved and had put the love for his wife above the one for God. Luther is not willing to accept this whitewashing. Adam is seduced as well as not seduced. It is true that this happened not by the serpent, but by his wife and himself, since he had convinced himself that no punishment would follow; this was announced by God (i.e., that they would die). Both human beings fall from faith into unbelief; their sin was that they did not believe in the word of God. Here we notice a remarkable difference with the theological tradition that was shaped by Augustine. To Luther the first humans did not sin out of lust but out of disbelief, which is the refusal to listen to God and his mandate. Luther treats lust more as a consequence than as a cause of the fall.

With the fall, being an image of God and the promise of immortality was lost, just like the immediate knowledge which Adam and Eve had of God.⁸³ The original purity and immediacy stand in sharp contrast to the situation of fallen humanity. According to Luther both sexes are dependent upon each other for procreation, but since the fall the mutual relations are totally changed. Now there is inequality between the sexes and the man is now the head of the woman. The woman is submitted to the man and is no longer able to carry the burden of the ruling, though she

Lectures on Genesis, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 151.

⁸¹ WA 42:121,17-18.

⁸² WA 42:136,3-5. This view was based on 1 Tim 2:13-14, which Luther reads somewhat differently than nearly all who assume that Adam was not seduced but would have sinned willingly and knowingly. Concerning *sciens*, see further Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum Liber II*, dist. 41 (PL 192,751) with a reference to Augustine, *Retractiones*, lib. 1, c. 15.

⁸³ That does not mean that the knowledge of God, which Adam and Eve originally possessed, was completely immediate. In that situation too, there is some talk of the word of God as a medium of communication, which had to be preached by the man.

is grumbling about her unequal situation.⁸⁴ Still she has an important task; she does not serve only as a partner in the procreation and preservation of the human race, but she is also needed for the community of life and the protection of it. An additional element after the fall is the defence of life in threatening situations. So the *oeconomia* needs the *ministerium* of women.⁸⁵

Also the place of sexuality and marriage is different from now on. In paradise Adam met Eve still without any passion of lust or sense of shame. If Eve had not sinned, she would not only have given birth without pains, but also her union with her husband would have been just as honorable (*honestata*).⁸⁶ Adam would have known her with full confidence and an obedient will to God without any evil thought. Nowadays the woman is needed as medicine against sin referring to 1 Corinthians 7:2. Luther also refers to a statement of Peter Lombard, that marriage in paradise was established as a duty (*officium*), but now, above all things, it serves as an antidote (*remedium*).⁸⁷ Therefore men are compelled to make use of intercourse with their wives in order to avoid sin. According to Luther there are very few who marry solely as a matter of duty. For most people marriage is of all things a remedy to restrain lust. The role of sexuality has been changed drastically. After the fall, lust rages in man, who is infected by the poison of the devil. Death has crept into all our perceptive powers like leprosy, and nobody knows yet how much passion rules in the flesh.⁸⁸

In paradise the order of the society was not deduced from the ruling of one person over another. By excluding the civil government from the prelapsarian institution of the estates, Luther rejects the notion that the original human society would have known a social order that was based on a difference in dignity. *Politia* as the exercise of power of men over men belongs to the situation after the fall. However, the state as an institution can be deduced from the will of God, who wants to preserve his world,

⁸⁴ WA 42:151,37. The submission after the fall does not seem to come very easily to all women. There is a reference here to her murmuring (*murmur*) and impatience (*impatientia*).

⁸⁵ WA 42:88, 4-6.

⁸⁶ WA 42:151,12.

⁸⁷ WA 42:88,10-14; 89,34-37. Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum Liber IV*, dist. 2 (PL 192,842): "*Fuit autem Conjugium ante peccatum institutum; non utique propter remedium, sed ad sacramentum et ad officium; post peccatum vero fuit ad remedium contra carnalis concupiscentiae corruptelam . . .*". In other contexts different from sin and fall, Luther can underline marriage and sexuality as good gifts of creation. See e.g., *Von ehelichem Leben* (1522).

⁸⁸ WA 42:46,28-47,2.

which is threatened by selfish desires of human beings. Herewith belongs the law with coercive power, which is needed to protect life from destructive powers. The ruling of all three estates is entirely the concern of males after the fall.⁸⁹ Women cannot perform the functions of men any longer like teaching and ruling. Their functions become fully situated now in the domestic domain (*oeconomia*). In procreation, feeding, and nurturing their offspring, they are the masters.

Because the woman sinned first, she also is the first one to hear her penalty. Therefore, she also received the heavier penalty. Nevertheless Luther ventures to call this penalty "gladsome and merry" (*laeta et hilaris*),⁹⁰ for she receives as the first to sin the promise of hope; she is promised personally that her offspring will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The punishment of childbearing in pain will remain as a heavy burden on her body, but in spite of the penalty she gets the honor of motherhood, keeps her sex, and remains a woman.⁹¹ She notices that she is not separated from her husband so that she does not have to live in isolation. With this Luther wants to express the creaturliness and dignity of Eve as a woman.

The penalty of the man consists in the increase of lust in his body and the aggravation of his tasks, such as supporting his family, ruling, and teaching. Henceforth, all this will involve the highest efforts. The field, once fertile, can now be plowed in sweat and tears only. Also, the man can maintain only with pains the obedience imposed to the woman. This applies even more strongly to the ruling over humans, for was it not Xenophon who had said that it was easier to rule wild animals than human beings?⁹² Also man's relationship to wild animals has been changed radically; he has been alienated from those that do not want to be subjected to him any longer. Only the care for domestic animals remains to him.

Thus the ruling over creation is badly disturbed. With the penalty of sin, also the creation itself is coming into an ambivalent position. It is true that the earth is innocent and that it has not sinned. However, it is forced to endure the curse. On the one side, nature remains the reality created by

⁸⁹ WA 42:151,25: "*Regnum itaque manet penes maritum, cui uxor mandato Dei parere cogitur.*"

⁹⁰ WA 42:148,4 and 23.

⁹¹ WA 42:148,27: "*Videt se retinere sexum suum et esse mulierem.*"

⁹² Xenophon, *Cyropaed.* 1,1,3. Quoted in Greek in WA 42:152,18.

God; on the other side, it becomes a hostile reality and a tool of God's anger in regard of human sin. After the fall, man is called to acknowledge how wonderful the world, nature, and life are. The earth remains a kind, gentle, and forbearing mother; likewise, she is the perpetual servant of the need of mortals,⁹³ but at the same time, the earth feels the curse about which St. Paul had written in Romans 8:21. In the first place, it does not bring forth the good things it would have produced if man had not fallen. In the second place, it produces many harmful plants now. With the increase of sins, not only weeds, nettles, thorns, and thistles will multiply, but also nature will turn against man by cold, lightning, poisonous plants, floods, and earthquakes. According to Luther, the number of contagious and fatal diseases increases visibly too.⁹⁴ Though all this is not described in the Bible, Luther explains this as a consequence of the increase of sin in the world and with that the increase of its penalties.⁹⁵

IV. The Promise that Remains

In spite of the extensive elaborations on penalties, the center of Genesis 3 for Luther is the proto-gospel (3:15). In this Luther finds the promise of a savior and of eternal life. This message seems to pervade the whole history of the first people. God is no tyrant, but a merciful God, who, in spite of the penalties, shows man the way to eternal salvation and worldly prosperity and happiness "because He has given a wife, home and children and preserves and increases this all by blessing it."⁹⁶

However important the arrangement of this worldly life as a defense from chaos and protection against evil may be, the most important is nevertheless the beginning of the history of eternal salvation. It is true that people now are still subject to death as a penalty for sin, but one day they will be resurrected to immortality. This promise is seen by Luther as a reality yet. God transfers the death, which humans deserved, to another and insignificant part of them, namely the flesh, whereas the spirit lives in righteousness because of faith. According to the flesh they deserve death, but according to the hope, they are already liberated from death now. They are already justified by that faith in this world, and the expectation of

⁹³ WA 42:152,29. This is a quotation from Plinius the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, 1,63.

⁹⁴ WA 42:154,35-155,10. Luther mentions here the rise of the "French disease" or syphilis, which in his youth still was unknown, and the "English sweat disease," which spread in Germany (1529) and notably in Wittenberg too.

⁹⁵ WA 42:153,37-154,7.

⁹⁶ WA 42:149,12-17.

eternal life tempers the weight of the inflicted penalties. In this way, faith is put in a central position in Luther's Commentary on Genesis. Adam and Eve trusted God's promise. By doing so, they became the archetypes of justification by virtue of the promise, which effects what it announces. "It is the Word," according to Luther, "which has made Adam and Eve alive and has awakened them from death to life."⁹⁷ As life in paradise was, life now stays surrounded by God's mercy and kindness. The last day will be no return to a paradise lost, but a much more exalted state will be given to human kind. This promise is actually fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He removed sin, swallowed up death, and restored obedience to God. That is the reason he remains a pledge for us. "These treasures we possess in Christ, but in hope. In this way like Adam, like Eve, all who believe until the Last Day live and conquer by that hope."⁹⁸

V. Conclusion

In his Lectures on Genesis, Luther deals extensively with the story of creation and fall and the special position of the first human beings in it. It is possible to consider in other creatures, as it were, God's footprints, but it is in the human being with his and her original wisdom, righteousness, and knowledge of all things that God may truly be recognized, and for that reason, original man is described by Luther as a "microcosmos."⁹⁹ This image had its philosophical background in antiquity and was developed and incorporated in medieval Christianity (e.g., Isidore of Sevilla and Hildegard of Bingen). There is an analogy between the cosmos and man, and the arrangement of the macrocosmos can be traced back within man. This world *en miniature*, the summit of God's creation, contains an understanding of heaven, earth, and the entire creation. Originally, in human beings the knowledge of God, man, and creation were present in full harmony. According to Luther, through the fall this perfect knowledge of all things was lost for good, which means that man as a microcosmos is disturbed. Man's view of himself and the world is troubled like in a broken mirror. In this view, Luther distinguished himself from Renaissance thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci, who considered "man as the measure of

⁹⁷ WA 42:146,18–20. Here a line can be discerned with Luther's commentary on the Letter to the Romans (1515–1516), in which he deals with man as "*peccator re vera, sed iustus ex reputatione et promissione Dei certa.*" (WA 56:272,3–19).

⁹⁸ WA 42:147,5–7. The identification with Adam and Eve here is one with their hope instead of their sin, cf., footnote 9.

⁹⁹ WA 42:51,22–26. It is remarkable that Luther applies this image on Adam especially (*praesertim*)!

all things.”¹⁰⁰ The divine-human shape represents the lasting harmony between the macro- and the microcosmos.

In his Lectures on Genesis, Luther stresses that man and woman are permanently dependent upon each other, and that, in this, the foundation of marriage is found. Human beings contribute, according to God’s mandate, to the planning of life in view of the preservation of humanity and creation. Definitely, the elder Luther had an eye for the original equality of man and woman in paradise, but this does not necessarily imply another view of the situation after the fall. Certainly there is some talk of created equality (in the image of God), but this equality does not extend itself to the concrete life in the three estates in the present time. On the one side, in his description of the relations between man and woman, he still was a tributary in many ways to the views of his time; on the other side, he emphasizes their partnership and common responsibility for the preservation of creation. Undeniably, Luther has provided marriage with a higher social respect by appreciating it as a created institution and, thus, as the highest human estate of life.¹⁰¹ This is an explicit correction of an overemphasis of celibacy by the Church of Rome. According to Luther’s opinion, the papacy had tarnished marriage and had exalted celibacy to the highest estate.¹⁰² Contrary to this self-chosen status of life, which does not comply with the original mandate to preserve the human race, the Reformer emphasizes marriage as a divine institution.¹⁰³ At the same time, the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century has profiled marriage more strongly as a mutual contract based on freedom and mutual respect. For the legal status of women, it certainly meant some progress; forced marriages were disproved as well as forced entries into cloisters.¹⁰⁴ Nuns

¹⁰⁰ Actually a classic idea, developed by Protagoras of Abdera (c. 480–410 BC).

¹⁰¹ See e.g., L. Roper, “Gender and the Reformation,” in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 92 (2001): 290–302; Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁰² WA 42:100,36–101,34. Here Luther mentions his own negative memories from his youth concerning marriage as a sinful state of life by definition (101,13–15). See Gerta Scharffenorth, “Im Geist Freunde werden. Die Beziehung von Mann und Frau bei Luther im Rahmen seines Kirchenverständnisses,” in *Den Glauben ins Leben ziehen . . . Studien zu Luthers Theologie* (München, 1982), 128–131.

¹⁰³ See e.g., WA 42:101,3–33; 101,27–28: “. . . praeterquam quod coelibatus sine verbo Dei institutus est, Imo, sicut praesens historia testatur, contra verbum Dei.”

¹⁰⁴ See further Steven E. Ozment, “Luther on Family Life,” in *Protestants, The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), chapt. 7, 151–168. “Among the leaders of the Reformation, it was widely believed that in most cases women had been placed in cloisters against their will and without full understanding of the consequences” (154).

were even encouraged to leave them behind. From a sixteenth-century point of view, cloisters could only be seen as women-unfriendly because women were kept away from their real tasks and responsibilities in society.

In spite of the fact that the Reformation movement acquired a stronger appreciation for marriage as an earthly institution of God, it did not immediately mean an improvement of the concrete position of women. Now, that an independent development within the cloister was denied, there remained for them only the traditional tasks within marriage and family life. It is obvious that Luther was no proto-feminist. We would do well to bear in mind that proposals for the praxis of marriage and family do not come from general, doctrinal statements, but that they are dependent in a much higher degree from social structures, models of acting, and the horizon of thinking in a certain time.¹⁰⁵ Definitely, the elder Luther caught more sight of the original equality of man and woman in paradise, but it did not necessarily mean another view on the situation after the fall. On the one side, describing the relations between man and woman, he was still supportive of the views of his time, on the other hand he underlined their partnership and common responsibility.

How had the situation in paradise been? Even when some authors underline created equality in Luther's Lectures on Genesis, it does not mean equality in every respect. There remains a certain ambiguity in Luther's statements. Sometimes he stresses equality, especially when there is talk of man and woman created in the image of God. Other times, however, he can also stress a certain inequality from the beginning of creation. The inequality deals then with a difference of sex and a different position in the church. Man and woman are equal before God as creatures, but at the same time they are different from the very beginning and not only after the fall. However, emphasizing the equality of the woman as a full-fledged creature of God already means a remarkable departure from the medieval scholastic theology, in which the woman by nature was considered an imperfect being. Luther was able to bring back the discussion from a philosophy of nature, which was strongly determined by Aristotle, to proper theology; from scriptural insights, he reinterpreted the creation of man and woman theologically. The creation of both sexes are equally miraculous, and therefore, both are destined to eternal life with God. Besides that, man and woman in their being ordered to each other

¹⁰⁵ Scharffenorth, "Im Geist Freunde werden," 142.

have their own functions and responsibilities for the preservation of creation and for the protection against chaos. Although subject to change through time, these are fundamental insights upon which every theology of creation should always be prepared to reflect for its own time, again and again.