

The Relation of Man and Woman in Luther's Genesis Commentary

Seminar Leader: Jane Strohl

Reporter: Jane Strohl

The Seminar organized its work as follows: »In the beginning«: Creation accounts (Knut Alfsvag, Kristen Kvam), Temptation and fall (Kristen Kvam, Kirsi Stjerna); »Marriage and childbearing«: Abraham, Sarah and Hagar (Mickey Mattox), Isaac and Rebekah (Jane Strohl), Jacob and his wives (Risto Saarinen); »Relationships of transgression«: Lot and his daughters (Knut Alfsvag), Dinah (Pernilla Parenmalm), Tamar (Kirsi Stjerna), Potiphar's wife (Mickey Mattox).

With regard to the relation of man and woman, we noted their fundamental equality in their created state. Before the fall Eve too possessed understanding of the Word of God, in part because Adam taught her, but also by her own nature. It was noted that there is at most a vague indication of the priority of the man in Luther's account of the created state (according to Luther the government of the home is assigned to Adam). Luther grounds the subordination of woman to man in the consequences of the fall into sin and not in the differing manner of their creation, whereby woman is made from the rib of man. The addition of Eve to a creation already pronounced good, according to Luther, is for the purpose of procreation. The creation of man and woman is simultaneously the founding of the estate of marriage, which, Luther remarks, was for Adam and Eve a great joy. Thus, in their created state man and woman were entrusted with a twofold vocation: proclamation of God's name and propagation of the species. As a consequence, Luther denounces the church's practice of enforced celibacy at great length in the »Lectures on Genesis«.

Luther expresses mixed opinions regarding the creation of woman in the image of God. Though he does echo traditional subordinationist think-

ing (e. g., »For as the sun is more excellent than the moon ... so the woman, although she was a most beautiful work of God, nevertheless was not the equal of the male in glory and prestige«; WA 42, 51, 36 f), there are also significant passages in the »Lectures on Genesis« portraying Eve as created fully in the image of God *and* equally in this image with Adam, in both her being and doing. It was also noted that the sun / moon analogy appears in Luther's discussion of Gn 1, 27, his point being that although the woman was both different and weaker than the man, she was made by God to be a partaker of the divine image and »likewise of the rule over everything« (WA 42, 52, 13 f). Luther goes on to make clear what opinions he thinks the Genesis text is opposing. In particular he condemns Aristotle's designation of woman as a »maimed man«. Whatever Luther meant by such expressions as »a much weaker nature« and »inferior to the male«, he did not see woman as a defective form of creation.

With regard to the fall narrative, Luther identifies the fundamental temptation besetting Eve as that of unbelief, the loss of trust in God and God's Word, rather than pride or unbridled sensuality. He makes it clear that the nature of Eve's temptation is not peculiar to women but rather characterizes the nature of every temptation. In the »Lectures on Genesis« Luther portrays the pattern of the fall repeating itself throughout church history. Satan attacks and corrupts the Word, precipitating doubt in the children of Adam and Eve and then disobedience. When drawing these parallels, Luther identifies the heretics with the role of Satan, not Eve, whereas her part corresponds to that of the beleagured, faltering Christian.

The consequences of the fall, on the other hand, are gender specific. The woman is barred from public life and confined to the vocation of motherhood, with the suffering and danger inseparable from child-bearing, and subjection to her husband. The man is burdened with the care of ruling and providing for his household. Eve's punishment, however, simultaneously proves to be her great hope and consolation. She receives, along with Adam, the promise of the seed that shall crush the temptor. Moreover, as the forgiven child-bearer, she is destined to play a more significant role in bringing that promise to fulfillment. Luther portrays Eve as exemplary: one who hears the Word of promise, receives it in faith, and proclaims it as comfort to others, in this case her husband, who in this regard is not her superior. »After the fall, sad and with a heart full of hope, Eve comforted Adam: ›I have sinned. But see what a merciful God we have. How many privileges, both temporal and spiritual, He is leaving for us sinners! Therefore we women should bear the hardship and wretchedness of conceiving and giving birth, and of obeying you husbands.« (WA 42, 148, 37-40).

Examination of the histories of Sarah and Rebekah showed a twofold perspective to Luther's interpretation. On one hand, these women exemplify Luther's Reformation doctrine of vocation. They honor God through the pursuit of their ordinary callings as wives and mothers. On the other hand, they simultaneously reveal themselves to be heroines of the faith. They belong among the »Wundermänner« und »Wunderfrauen« in Luther's theology, individuals summoned and empowered by God to defy the normal limits of their station and calling to act boldly for the sake of God's promise. Thus Sarah is the archetype of the virtues proper to the woman as such. Her quiet domesticity reproaches both the immodest »Hausfrau« who indulges in idleness and gossip, as well as women religious who seek to justify themselves before God by eschewing the domestic sphere in favor of a life of manufactured piety. Yet the modest Sarah also rises to

the demands of a special role in salvation history; she is a woman midway between Eve and Mary. Luther holds her up as a model to all Christians because in a situation of barren hopelessness she hears and believes God's promise. Indeed, because she proves to be a more careful student of this promise than was her husband Abraham, she compels him to expel Hagar and her son. Hagar and Ishmael, in turn, also become models of Christian discipleship, this time of those whose claims to superiority are laid low by the law. From despair they pass to contrition, faith in the promise, reconciliation with God, and proclamation of the power of God's grace. Doing typical women's work, i. e., mothering a son, the slave woman too becomes a mother of the church.

Rebekah and Rachel provide similar embodiments of cherished Lutheran theological understandings: the theology of the cross, the dialectic of law and gospel, the »simul iustus et peccator«. They are subject to the authority of fathers and husbands. Maternity is the focal point of their lives and simultaneously becomes critical to the outworking of God's promised salvation. Both transgress the boundaries of obedience – Rebekah in deceiving Isaac into thinking Jacob was Esau, Rachel in stealing her father's household gods – but these actions, though truly sins, are in some sense exonerated by their service to the cause of God's saving work.

Luther presents these Old Testament men and women as moral examples. The women are paragons of modesty, hospitality and obedience (or if not, as in the case of the allegedly gadabout Dinah, their fate reinforces Luther's lessons in domestic discipline). The patriarchs have much to teach the Christian about bearing the burdens of rule over others. They are also exemplars of evangelical faith and thus role models for those who seek God's promised salvation. But they are simultaneously exceptional cases, women and men faced with unique, often dire circumstances that justify extraordinary actions on behalf of God's Word. This is particularly striking in the cases catego-

rized as »Relationships of Transgression«. Such actions are clearly not normative for the life of discipleship. They do witness to God's power to bring forth saints from the common clay of family life and household management (or mismanagement, as the case may be). Luther's »Lectures on Genesis« does not challenge traditional gender

roles and relationships in the civil realm. In the right-hand realm of God's reign, however, when it comes to hearing the promise and proclaiming it, or being blessed with the insight and daring to act outside of the gender box, should God's Word demand it, women are fully the equal of their brothers in the faith.

Luthers christologische Disputationen (1539/40)

Seminarleiter: Prof. Dr. Oswald Bayer
Berichterstatter: Benjamin Gleede

Auftakt war die Analyse von Luthers Lied »Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein«, die *Yoshikazu Tokuzen* vortrug und damit in die zu verhandelnde Sache führte. Zur Einführung gab *Oswald Bayer* einen kurzen Überblick über die Entwicklung des Interesses an und der Einstufung von Luthers Christologie im allgemeinen und den Disputationen im besonderen. Hatte es im 19. Jahrhundert vor allem der Neukantianismus der Ritschlschule – der sich das Melancthonwort von den *beneficia Christi* aufs Papier geschrieben hatte – verhindert, Luthers Neuaufnahme der altkirchlichen Zweinaturenlehre im Horizont seiner Rechtfertigungslehre adäquat zu würdigen, wurde diese im 20. Jahrhundert vor allem durch die von der dialektischen Theologie inaugurierte Paradoxchristologie überdeckt. Erst die neuere finnische Lutherforschung und die Beiträge Jörg Baur – vor allem »Luther und seine klassischen Erben« (TÜ 1993) – zur Aufnahme der genuin Lutherischen Christologie in der württembergischen Orthodoxie haben erneut auf die fundamentale Bedeutung dieser Neuaufnahme für das Ganze der Theologie Luthers aufmerksam gemacht. Daneben mangelt es aber auch in der neueren Forschung nicht an kritischen Stimmen,

wie z. B. Marc Lienhards Monographie »Martin Luthers christologisches Zeugnis« (B 1980), die Luther gerade vor dem Hintergrund des altkirchlichen Dogmas eine problematische Tendenz zum Monophysitismus vorwerfen.

Benjamin Gleedes Vortrag versuchte, den Schritt von den bereits im Neuen Testament vorfindlichen paradoxalen Aussagen über die Person Christi, das heißt Hoheitsaussagen vom Menschen und Niedrigkeitsaussagen vom Gott Christus, zur methodologischen Überlegung über eine grundsätzliche Regulierung der Möglichkeit und Geltung solcher Aussagen überhaupt nachzuzeichnen. Als erster Theologe, in dessen christologischem Konzept der Begriff *ἀντίδοσις τῶν ἰδιωμάτων* eine zentrale Rolle spielt, wurde dabei Leontios von Byzanz († nach 543) aufgegriffen, der durch diesen Begriff die Mittelstellung der chaledonischen Orthodoxie gegen Nestorianer einerseits und Monophysiten andererseits kennzeichnen will. Besagte Aussagen als *ἀντίδοσις* – das heißt als wechselseitige Anteilgabe zweier – zu erklären, kommt in einer solchen Frontstellung deshalb so gelegen, weil der Begriff gerade die Zweiheit in der Einheit festhält, bei aller Betonung der Zusammengehörigkeit beider Naturen