

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**“Martin Luther, Marriage, and Women: An Analysis of Luther’s Religious
Legitimation of Marriage and the Celibate Life for Women in his Sermons and Treatise”**

by

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ABSTRACT

It is the goal herein to demonstrate that although the theology found within the sermons and treatise of Martin Luther appeared/appears liberating to women, it was, in fact, a vehicle for further oppression. The formation of his theology was driven by concerns other than the religious status of and function of women. His concern with the freedom and direct responsibility of individuals before God could have led to a greater autonomy for women; one form that such autonomy could have taken is illustrated by Teresa of Avila.

I will argue that any apparent liberation for women the Reformers seemed to espouse, or any further oppression against women they implemented, were driven by quite extraneous motives. I would contend that the issues taken up by the Reformers were not addressed with women directly in mind at all, for their primary concern lay elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

At first glance the Protestant Reformation, and the theology behind it, appears a grand vehicle by which the roles of marriage and motherhood might have been religiously legitimated for the women of the 16th century. The evils supposed to surround sexual intercourse were less emphasized and the act itself even became strongly encouraged within the confines of marriage. Convents were no longer a mandatory destination for a number of young girls, nor were the rigorous and often masochistic vows forced upon them. Being a wife and a mother, the two occupations the majority of continental women found themselves in anyway, took on a whole new religious meaning. In fact, motherhood and marriage appeared to become the two most highly esteemed and religiously legitimated roles in which women could involve themselves.

However, upon closer examination one is able to recognize that the theology of the Reformers was not necessarily intended to provide this liberation for women, nor did it in actuality. With the denouncing of monastic life, religious expression for women was reduced to one avenue: marriage. The replacement of the images of the virgin Mary and the contemplative Mary Magdalene with that of Martha and her domestic servitude, resulted in a lack of meaningful symbolism for women. Life in the convent was replaced with life in the kitchen and delivery room, while religious vows to God were replaced with marriage vows to the husband. While domestic duties may not as such be oppressive of women, it will be shown that what the Reformers were actually encouraging or legitimating was absolute obedience to the husband.

Having said this, however, I should add that I do not believe that the Reformers were any more or any less prejudiced against women than their Catholic counterparts. Therefore, I would argue that any apparent liberation for women the Reformers seemed to espouse, or any further oppression against women they implemented were driven by quite extraneous motives. At this point it must be made clear that when the terms “liberation” and “oppression” are used here, they are not intended to reflect 20th century connotations. I would contend that the issues taken up by the Reformers were not addressed with women directly in mind at all, for their primary concern lay elsewhere. Such effects as their reforms had on the lives of women, for better or worse, were largely incidental.

In an attempt to simplify my task, I will direct my attention specifically towards the sermons and treatise of Martin Luther. I will first proceed to consider those aspects of his thought which appear at first glance to be potential tools of liberation for women. I will then go on to show why they were really not liberating at all by considering the theology behind their development. Having done this I will address the motives underlying the development of this theology, and attempt to prove that they had nothing to do with women’s issues at all. I next will compare the thinking of Teresa of Avila on the role of women with that of Luther, as her work provides instructive parallels and contrasts to his. Finally, I analyze Luther’s comments regarding the figure of the Virgin Mary and show they illustrate Luther’s struggle with the issues of sexual intercourse, marriage, and the celibate life.

It is my goal to demonstrate that although the theology found within the sermons and treatise of Martin Luther appeared/appears liberating to women, it was, in fact, a vehicle

for further oppression. Also, I hope to prove that the formation of his theology was driven by concerns other than the religious status and function of women. Finally, I intend to show that Luther's concern with the freedom and direct responsibility of individuals before God could have led to a greater autonomy for women; one form that such autonomy could have taken is illustrated by Teresa of Avila.

CHAPTER ONE

The medieval woman of continental Europe found herself presented with one of two career paths; monasticism or motherhood. The former of these two vocations inevitably led to the convent and a life marked by vows of perpetual virginity, while the latter directed its followers into the domestic home and the institution of marriage. These two vocations were entitled to claim for themselves both social and religious legitimation, for indeed this is what made such careers permissible in the first place. Because of such legitimation both vocations could be said to have brought a certain sense of meaning into the lives of women, and to have played a prominent role in defining who these women really were in the society within which they lived.

It should be immediately noted, however, that most women were involved in other occupations besides those of homemaker and nun. We are familiar with the medieval woman dedicating herself to the tasks of mining, farming, marketing, social work, and brewing, to name but a few of her numerous endeavors.¹ Yet despite their skill and labour women were rarely, if ever, defined by such employment.² Their identity lay not in these functions but rather in the duties of motherhood or monasticism. Unlike men, the employment of women in fields outside the home or the convent were ever changing, depending on their marital status. While a man might be a farmer from boyhood until death, a woman's occupation, apart from her assumed role as either virgin or wife, could change several times in a lifetime.³

Thus, in spite of the fact that women were involved in far more spheres than the home or the convent, this involvement was not intended to define them, for none of these

alternate duties were ever really religiously sanctioned. Given the importance of religious legitimation, women were not likely to view themselves as something other than a mother or a virgin who was merely involving herself in other work. This point is well portrayed in a Psalter painted for Geoffry Luttrell (1341) where one is able to see a woman slouched beneath a sack of flour she has picked up at the mill, while her husband rides a horse which is carrying the corn.⁴ In a Franco Flemish-Book of Hours of the early 14th century, September is graced by a scene of a woman leading a horse pulling a harrow, while her husband sows.⁵ Each picture shows a woman devoting herself to an occupation other than motherhood or monasticism, while at the same time defining the woman by her relationship to the man in the portrait, her husband. We have no reason to believe that either woman depicted would be performing the task portrayed if she had not married that particular man in the painting; however, we have every reason to believe that the men would remain in the picture regardless of the presence of the women.

Peter Berger has stated that “religion has been the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation”.⁶ If this is true, and given the fact that the medieval woman was defined more by motherhood and monasticism than by any other occupation which she may have performed, we are forced to assume that both the roles of motherhood and monasticism were religiously legitimated to at least a certain degree. In the case of the women of medieval Europe, to further borrow from Berger, both motherhood and a life of perpetual virginity could be religiously “justified” as vocations.⁷ As a result, these two occupations tended to define the women of the continent, in spite of the fact that they may also have been farmers, nurses, or miners.

MARRIAGE:

The institution of marriage was undeniably blessed by the Church in medieval Europe. This brief excerpt from an 11th century English wedding liturgy (in use up until the 16th century) makes the point nicely:

Look down, O Lord, from heaven, and bless this compact; and as thou sentest thy holy angel Raphael to Tobias and to Sarah, the daughter of Raquel; so vouchafe, O Lord, to send thy blessing upon these young persons.”⁸

There are even earlier documents which contain such blessings and prayers for the newly united couple. Two such documents are from the Pontifical of Egbert (732-766) and the Red Boke of Darbye (c. 1050); the former of these contains the following prayer which was to be said at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony:

“May the Lord bless you and Christ guard you, and may the Lord show his face to you and give you peace, and may Christ fill you with every spiritual blessing for the remission of sins and for eternal life forever and ever.”⁹

The important point to be taken from these texts is that there was no legal significance to them, and thus they were a purely religiously legitimating act.¹⁰ The Church did not claim control over the institution of marriage until after the Council of Trent. Thus, it becomes evident that the Church’s blessing upon marriage was both sought after and given, but certainly not required at this point in history. Therefore, women entered marriage with the perception that they indeed were following a vocation blessed by God.

Even Augustine, in spite of his general suspicion of sexuality, was willing to admit that marriage was a religiously acceptable vocation for women to enter into. He states; "This is what we now say, that according to the present condition of birth and death, which we know and in which we were created, the marriage of male and female is something good."¹¹ A further step was taken by Gratian and Peter Lombard in the 12th century. The goal of these two theologians was to emphasise the goodness of matrimony from the religious point of view. This was done, according to Joel F. Harrington, by pointing out the spiritual and moral usefulness of marriage in "cultivating, through parenthood and affinity, the sentiments of charity and love, as well as the reconciliation of enemies, beauty, and riches."¹² Gabriel Biel of the 15th century was even willing to give marriage a special status amongst the sacraments through his declaration of it to be "the most excellent and first of all (the sacraments) by the moment and place of its institution and by the signification and efficacy of its end."¹³ Finally, Albrecht von Eyb, a firm 15th century advocate of matrimony, stated in his "Marriage Booklet":

"In short marriage is thus an honorable...useful and beneficial thing; through it, land, field and house are built, multiplied and sustained; many disputes, severe wars and enmities stilled and laid aside; good friends and relatives made among strangers, and the entire human race perpetuated."¹⁴

It must be assumed, therefore, that when one was legitimating marriage as a permissible role for a woman, one was also legitimating the act of sexual intercourse and the role of parenthood. Indeed, it should be noted that the essence of marriage was two-fold for the medieval woman, and given the legitimation of the institution of marriage itself, it should follow that each of these two aspects were also religiously justified.

There are innumerable documents which indicate that a woman's first function within a marriage was to serve the needs of her husband. In a text entitled "Le Menagier de Paris" (1393), the woman is instructed to "cherish your husband's person and make sure you keep him in clean linen, this being your office"¹⁵ Clearly the implication was that for the woman there was a necessary link between "cherishing" the husband and serving his physical or material needs. There is also advice for the husband on these matters in order that he may insure that his wife is adequately provided the opportunity of fulfilling her marital duty. For example, the husband was warned to "keep females in the house...make sure they always have work to do in the house and never allow them to be idle."¹⁶ The husband is further warned that if he has a daughter, it is essential that she be taught "everything about the house, to make bread, clean capons, sift, cook, launder, make beds, cut wool, etc..." all for the purpose of not appearing "a fool" upon her own marriage.¹⁷

The second duty of a woman in marriage, not entirely independent of the first, was pregnancy and the bearing of children. This role of the woman was perhaps more religiously legitimated than any other. Even Augustine, not one to spout off praise for sexual intercourse, was forced to admit that it was not sinful for "married persons to have intercourse only for the wish to beget children."¹⁸ Yet it is possible to find even more obvious praise for the vocation of motherhood in the liturgy which surrounded pregnancy, labor, and childbirth:

"Hearken, O most merciful Father to the entreaty of thy servant on behalf of thy handmaidens who are now, or who shall be hereafter, in labour; most humbly entreating thy majesty, that as by thy providence thou hast ordered that they do conceive, so by thy blessing thou wouldst go before them..."¹⁹

“O God, who hast delivered this woman thy servant from the peril of childbirth, and hast made her be devoted to thy service; grant that when the course of this life hath been faithfully finished she may obtain eternal life and rest under thy wing of mercy.”²⁰

It is of importance to note in these two instances that not only have pregnancy and childbirth been blessed, but they have even been associated with the following of God’s will and spoken of in the same breath as salvation. The religious legitimization of motherhood could not be more powerful than this.

Having therefore demonstrated the religious justification of the institution of marriage for women, and the consequent roles of servitude to the husband and motherhood, we may now turn our attention towards an alternative vocation for women: monasticism. If marriage was characterized by faithfulness to one’s husband and family, then monasticism was characterized by faithfulness to God and virginity. As with marriage, monasticism for a woman appeared to be religiously legitimated and therefore seemed to present women with an option; the convent or the home. While a life of monasticism was multidimensional, it is clear that for both men and women, one of its most defining features was a life of perpetual celibacy. Indeed much of the effort that was put forth to legitimate the monastic life concentrated upon the justification of this state of virginity.

Perhaps the earliest indication of the Church’s attempt to systematically legitimate celibacy, with the exception of the apostle Paul, was in 305 A.D. It was at this point that the Spanish Council of Elvira declared that all who were involved in the ministry should “maintain entire abstinence from their wives.”²¹ Indeed, this was nothing more than a recommendation, for at this point in church history sacerdotal marriages were a common

occurrence.²² However, while this may have been only a suggestion, it remains an early assertion that there exists a link between the ministry of the church and celibacy. The assumption that holy work requires a holy lifestyle, and that a holy lifestyle requires celibacy, was evidently being developed as early as 305, and probably earlier. The basis for the religious legitimization of a woman's entrance into the convent, and her ensuing vocation as a nun, clearly exists here.

The documents of the ancient church contain endless examples of attempts to religiously legitimate a life of virginity. Ambrose compares the life of a virgin with that of an angel when he states, "In holy virgins we see on earth the life of the angels we lost in paradise."²³ Basil continues this angelic allegory by remarking, "He who has chosen the angelic life (celibacy) has raised himself to an incorporeal manner of living, since he has surpassed the ordinary possibilities of human nature."²⁴ Both of these heavenly associations present virginity as a lofty, pure, beautiful, glorified manner of existence. The picture is indeed quite aesthetically pleasing.

The writings of St. Cyprian and the poet Fortunatus are, if it is possible, even more euphoric on the subject. Cyprian proclaims, "Now we are speaking to virgins: in them is the flower of the church, the honour and masterpiece of spiritual grace, a happy blossoming of nature...the most brilliant portion of Christ's flock."²⁵ Fortunatus is still more explicit: "Happy virginity was found worthy of giving birth to a God, and of creating its creator. The chaste limbs of virgins are his temples...These limbs, he feels, are His own: unsoiled and unshared by any man. Tenderly and with affection He kisses the breast..."²⁶ The close associations of the virgin with God, Christ, and the Church are

clear, and serve to present this virgin as a thing of purity and beauty; “The Flower of the Church”.

Despite the fact that Augustine proclaimed marriages to be “good”, he has historically been considered one of the most fervent supporters of the celibate life. It would seem that Augustine’s central arguments for the religious legitimization of the virgin lifestyle focuses around the figure of Mary, but we should not consider him unique in this respect.

Augustine states: “Indeed her (Mary’s) virginity was itself more beautiful and more pleasing, because Christ in conception did not Himself take away that which He was preserving from violation by man; but, before He was conceived He chose one already consecrated to God of whom He would be born.”²⁷ Thus according to Augustine, the virgin birth of Jesus signifies that God “himself” has blessed the state of virginity by choosing to incarnate himself through a virgin. For Augustine and others, one need not go further than this ultimate justification of celibacy. Indeed, the figure of Mary, as presented by Augustine and other, has probably served to legitimate the monastic vocation for women more than any other theological argument in favour of the celibate lifestyle.

Finally, it should be noted that, as the work of Jane Tibbets Schulenburg puts it, “an exaggerated emphasis was placed on chastity for women; that is there was a heavily disproportionate admiration for female virginity” in medieval times.²⁸ Therefore not only was the monastic life religiously justified for female participation, but, according to Schulenburg, it was almost to the point where it may have been considered a vocation unique to women. Although this may be a slight exaggeration, monasticism, like marriage and motherhood, certainly appeared to give a certain meaning to a woman’s life, for the

religious legitimation of such roles undoubtedly served to define women in a manner which we in the modern age may not fully comprehend.

* * * * *

We have presented evidence which demonstrates the fact that both the vocations of monasticism and motherhood were religiously legitimated for women in pre-reformation Europe. And yet there would seem to exist evidence which could serve to easily refute such an argument. Hence it may well be asserted that in spite of the appearance of religious legitimation, on a deeper level, neither vocation was really justified at all.

Although Augustine was willing to declare the institution of marriage “good”, he clearly believed that a life of perpetual virginity was very much better. While he was in the habit of praising the beauty and usefulness of the state of marriage, he firmly insisted on its inferiority to a state of perpetual continence.²⁹ In fact, Augustine set the standard for years to come by developing a system of gradations of goodness concerning one’s sexual life, and thus, in a sense, claimed that “if you think *that* is good, it is really nothing compared to *this!*”

Consider the following statements of Augustine:

“No fecundity of the flesh, therefore, can be compared with holy virginity.”³⁰

“So, the physical fecundity, even of those who at the present time desire nothing in marriage except children whom they may hand over to Christ, must not be thought capable of making up for the loss of virginity.”³¹

“Let her accept it who can accept holy virginity, and let only her who does not have self control marry.”³²

“Let spouses have their blessing, not because they beget children, but because they beget them honorably, and lawfully, and chastely.”³³

“...holy chastity is an angelic lot and a foretaste in corruptible flesh of perpetual incorruption. Let all carnal fecundity and conjugal chastity bow to this.”³⁴

“We claim likewise that at the present time marriage is not expedient except for those who do not have self control.”³⁵

From these few remarks of Augustine, it becomes readily apparent that virginity to him was religiously justified to a greater extent than marriage or motherhood. Virginity was both permissible and blessed while marriage and motherhood was permissible but not blessed quite as much. According to Augustine therefore, the purest marriage would never be capable of attaining the degree of goodness which virginity could quite easily grasp.

Virginity, according to Augustine, is to be likened to the state of the angelic beings of the heavens, while marriage comes nowhere near being thus comparable. Hence, one begins to sense that while Augustine asserts that marriage and virginity differ only by degree of goodness, he really means that they are indeed in different realms of goodness altogether. Marriage is not merely not quite as good as a state of perpetual virginity, but it is downright inferior to it.

“He who has chosen the angelic life has raised himself to an incorporeal manner of living, since he has surpassed the ordinary possibilities of human nature. For it belongs properly to the nature of the angels to be freed from the society of marriage and not to let themselves be turned aside to the contemplation of any other beauty than that of the divine face.”³⁶

If this were not enough, Augustine clearly states that marriage is, and should be, aspired to by individuals, especially women, with flawed personalities; namely those lacking self control. It is a consolation prize for the distant loser of a two person race.

This reasoning obviously implies that submission to the sexual drive and sexual intercourse are a result of a lack of self control, and that they exist only as a result of a failure in self-management. Marriage, therefore, becomes a state designed for non-angelic beings who lack the self control to abstain from an act which appears to be held in fairly low esteem. Such reasoning may hardly be considered an attempt to religiously legitimate either marriage or motherhood for women.

Therefore, given the influence which Augustine had upon subsequent generations of Christians, it would seem inappropriate to conclude that the institution of marriage and the role of motherhood was really religiously legitimated for women. From one point of view it was a vocation which was both permissible and blessed, but from another it would seem that it was blessed only in the sense that it was not absolutely condemned. Involving yourself in marriage was in effect an admission that you were committing yourself to an act which was attributable to failure, as the result of which you were doomed to live a life inferior to that which you might have led, if only you had some sort of self control! How far marriage and motherhood were really religiously legitimated in these circumstances is very problematic.

In spite of the seemingly endless praise of a life of virginity, the religious legitimation of this vocation may also well be questioned. Tertullian provides a good place to start:

“And so a veil must be drawn over a beauty so dangerous as to have brought scandal into heaven itself... Rather would she wear rags and mourning, weep and show an Eve plunged in penance, trying to expiate by her contrite appearance, the disgrace of that first crime and the shame of having brought ruin to humanity... You are the devil’s gateway... And yet you think nothing of covering your tunics with ornaments?”³⁷

It should be immediately recognized that much of the thinking behind the advocacy of a life of celibacy was intended to protect men against the physical attraction of a woman's body. Her physical body was dangerous and was thus to be hidden beneath a shroud of hideousness. Being classified as the "Devil's Gateway" can certainly not be considered a religiously legitimating title. In this sense, a life of perpetual virginity may be seen more as an attempt to hide a woman's inherited evil than an effort to open up a religious avenue for women.

In his commentary on the book of Jonah, Jerome makes the statement:

"It is not man's prerogative to lay violent hands upon himself, but rather to freely receive death from others. In persecutions it is not lawful to commit suicide except when one's chastity is jeopardized."³⁸

He further goes on to tell of the heroic actions of Greek and Roman virgins in ages past who had killed themselves for the sake of their chastity.³⁹ This undoubtedly demonstrates more than mere religious legitimation of a vocation. It would seem that when a virgin's sexuality has been affirmed in any manner, their very essence as a human being has been taken away from them. Thus, in a sense, a virgin is blessed as long as she remains sexless. Therefore, virginity may be said to be a religiously legitimated vocation for sexless creatures, but not for women. Schulenburg puts it nicely when she states:

"In the view of churchmen, there was only one way in which women could transcend their unfortunate sexuality and free themselves from their corporeal shackles, and this was through a life of sexless perfection."⁴⁰

There exists a genre of historical accounts which relate numerous instances where women would resort to physical disfigurement in hopes of maintaining their virginity. Although the historical accuracy of these accounts has been questioned and their status declared legendary, they may certainly be regarded as indicative of a certain social mindset that seems excessively to have exalted the ideal of virginity for women.⁴¹ An example of this desire for bodily harm may be found in the figure of Gisla/St. Idaberg who, according to Schulenburg, “prayed for some disfigurement to make her ineligible for this earthly union, and consequently she acquired a fever and strumas (scrofulous tumors).”⁴²

Finally, there is the medieval ideal of the “virago” who, according to Mclaughlin, “is the female military hero who achieves equivalence, or indeed eminence, in the world by becoming not a great woman but, as it were, a man.”⁴³ The essence of this ideal would indeed seem to be expressed by Jerome who stated: “from a spouse she has become your sister, from a woman, a man, from a subject, an equal...under the same yoke she hastens with you towards the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁴ Once again we plainly see that part of being a virgin meant denying one’s physical womanhood. It would therefore be difficult to claim monasticism as being a religiously legitimating vocation for women, given that much of the theoretical basis behind virginity involved denial of at least part of what it meant to be a woman.

There is evidence which would indicate that some women were confined to a life of monasticism within a convent’s walls against their will. This is made apparent in Merry Wiesner’s article “Nuns, Wives, and Mothers: Women and the Refomation in Germany.” In it one reads of remarkable willingness of some nuns to renounce their vows and enter

into marriage once they had been informed of the Protestant movement.⁴⁵ Martin Luther's own wife, Katherine von Bora, was herself smuggled out of her convent with several other sisters on a wagon, hidden inside some empty herring barrels, and brought to Wittenberg. At this point a friend of Luther wrote to him declaring: "A wagon load of vestal virgins has just come to town all the more eager for marriage than for life. May God give them husbands lest worse befall."⁴⁶ Ursula of Munsterburg was herself responsible for smuggling into her own convent "subversive" Lutheran pamphlets which she would distribute amongst her sisters and which seemed to have a considerable effect upon their readership.⁴⁷

Indeed the evidence does not indicate that all nuns were held against their will to a life of perpetual virginity, nor does it indicate that all nuns never found in monasticism a religiously legitimated vocation. But it does seem to warrant the judgement that at least some nuns were willing to question the meaningfulness of their profession. The sheer fact that at least some nuns sought escape from their monastic life seems clearly indicative of this.

¹ Wiesner, Merry. Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. p. 82-96.

² Ibid., p. 83.

³ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴ Verdier, Phillippe. "Women in the Marginalia of Gothic Manuscripts." The Role of Women in the Middle Ages. ed. Rosemarie Morewedge. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975. p. 134.

⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

⁶ Berger, Peter. The Sacred Canopy. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969. p. 32.

⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

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- ⁸ 11th - 16th "Liturgy for the Marriage Service. Women's Lives in Medieval Europe. ed. Emilie Amt. New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc., 1993. p. 86.
- ⁹ Lucas, Angela. Women in the Middle Ages. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1983. p. 71-72.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹¹ Augustine. "The Good of Marriage." The Fathers of the Church. vol. 27 ed. Roy J. Deferrari. New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1955. p. 12.
- ¹² Harrington, Joel F. Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 54.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ¹⁵ "Le Menagier de Paris" (1393). Not in God's Image. ed. Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines. London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973. p. 168.
- ¹⁶ Paolo de Certaldo. "Handbook of Good Customs". Not in God's Image, 1973. p. 169.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- ¹⁸ Augustine. "On Marriage and Concupiscence". ed. Emilie Amt. Women's Lives in Medieval Europe. 1993. p. 26,27.
- ¹⁹ 11th-16th century. "Liturgy for Mothers" Women's Lives in Medieval Europe. ed. Emilie Amt. 1993. p. 97.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97,98.
- ²¹ Lea, Henry. Sacerdotal Marriage in the Christian Church. U.S.A.: University Books, Inc., 1966. p. 30.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ²³ Bugge, John. Virginitas. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975. p. 31.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ²⁵ St. Cyprian. "De Habitu Virginitatis" Not in God's Image. p. 137.
- ²⁶ Fortunatus. "Opera Poetica" Not in God's Image. p. 138.
- ²⁷ Augustine. "Holy Virginitas" The Fathers of the Church. 1955. p. 146.

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- ²⁸ Schulenberg, Jane Tibbets. "The Heroics of Virginity" Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. ed. Mary Beth Rose. Syracuse University Press, 1986. p. 31.
- ²⁹ Augustine. "Holy Virginity" p. 137.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 151.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 152.
- ³² Ibid., p. 152.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 154.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 155.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 166.
- ³⁶ Bugge, John. Virginitas. p. 32.
- ³⁷ Tertullian. "De Virginibus Velandis" Not in God's Image. p. 132.
- ³⁸ Schulenburg, Jane Tibbets. "The Heroics of Virginity..." p. 34.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 31.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 55-59.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 52.
- ⁴³ McLaughlin, Eleanor Commo. "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology." Religion and Sexism. ed. Rosemary Ruether. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. p. 234.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 263.
- ⁴⁵ Wiesner, Merry. "Nuns, Wives, and Mothers: Women and the Reformation in Germany." Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe. ed. Sherrin Marshall. Indiana University Press, 1989. p. 10.
- ⁴⁶ Bainton, Roland. Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971. p. 24.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

CHAPTER TWO:

Having thus considered the religious legitimation of the vocations available for women in pre-Reformation Europe, we will now turn our attention to the thought of Martin Luther, the so called “father of the Reformation”, on this subject. Indeed, the issues relating to both marriage and celibacy were dealt with by Luther on numerous occasions, in fact too numerous to be dealt with exhaustively in this work. Therefore, I will limit my discussion to Luther’s Biblical commentaries which pertain to the matter at hand. This should suffice to present his position on the religious legitimation of marriage and the celibate life, and clearly establish his opposition to the pre-Reformation stance.

It seems that the foundation for Luther’s religious legitimation of marriage is found in the text of Genesis 2:18, “The Lord God also said: It is not good that man is alone; I shall make him a help which should be before him” Luther proceeds first to point out that Adam and Eve were brought together, designed and created by a “well considered counsel”.¹ In saying this Luther implies that “the first marriage” was not brought about due to flaw or sin, but by divine intention. The fact that Adam’s situation prior to the creation of Eve was not considered “good” indicated to Luther that what was missing was the ability of Adam to procreate, and that such an ability only arose with the coming of Eve. Luther states: “For so far Adam was alone; he still had no partner for that magnificent work of begetting and preserving his kind. Therefore ‘good’ in this passage denotes the increase of the human race.”² Thus, according to Luther, from the very beginning procreation was intended and designed by God, and situations where such procreation was not possible were not declared to be ‘good’. Luther goes on to state the

act of procreation to be “the greatest work of God”, a fact that has gone unrecognized only as a result of original sin.³

In Genesis 2:22 Luther marvels at the fact that it is said that “God *built* the rib which he had taken from Adam”. Why would the verb ‘build’ be used to describe the creation of Eve instead of ‘form’ or ‘create’? Luther develops a rather creative explanation which he believes serves to support the institution of marriage and the act of procreation. By referring to Gen 30:3, 16:2, Exodus 1:21, and II Samuel 7:11, Luther is able to conclude that the verb ‘to build’ was used to describe the creation of Eve because the woman who is both wife and mother is often likened to a ‘building’ in the scriptures. According to Luther, “the wife is called a household building because she bears and brings up offspring.”⁴ Therefore, it is significant that the verb ‘build’ is utilized to describe Eve’s creation, for this would indicate that woman’s original purpose was to marry, procreate, raise children, and develop the ‘household building’. And Luther does not mind pointing out that “those who, like impure papists, live as celibates do not have such a home.”⁵

The second half of Genesis 2:22 also attracts the attention of Luther and brings his wrath, once again, down upon the papists. He notes that at the completion of the creation of Eve, she was “brought” to Adam by God. Adam did not himself of his own accord go out and find himself a wife, rather she was given to him as a sort of divine gift; thus marriage becomes “the lawful joining of a man and a woman and a divine ordinance and institution.”⁶ In his essay entitled “The Estate of Marriage”, Luther reverts back to Genesis 1:28 and the command given by God to “be fruitful and multiply”. He describes this as not merely a command but an ordinance, a necessary action to be taken by human

beings for the simple reason that they are human.⁷ How then could the holiness of marriage be questioned? How could the institution of marriage be considered inferior to anything? Luther declares:

“Therefore it should be particularly noted that this passage is not only directed against all the awful abuses of lust but that it also gives support for marriage in opposition to the wicked invectives with which the papacy has brought shame on marriage...Are spouses impure? Is God the author and establisher of impurity when He himself brings Eve to Adam? The papacy has truly paid the deserved penalties for such blasphemies.”⁸

Luther seems aware that he remained open to a certain challenge from those who claimed that perpetual virginity remained the superior way of life. Thus far Luther has dealt with the state of affairs prior to “The Fall”. So the objection might be raised that what Luther had said about the married life thus far could not be maintained subsequent to the arrival of sin onto the world stage. But Luther believed that the religious legitimization of marriage held true. Indeed, while admittedly sin brought suffering into marriage and procreation by way of bodily pain, he insisted that marriage and procreation became even greater states of blessedness.

To prove his point Luther focuses much of his attention on Genesis 3:16, “But to the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your sorrow when you are pregnant. In pain you will bear children, and you will be under your husband’s power, and he will rule over you.” Luther declares the importance of noting that Eve is not separated from Adam, her “womanhood” is not taken from her, and her ability to procreate remains intact.⁹ Hence, there would seem immediate proof that marriage and procreation remain divinely blessed. Furthermore, while it is true that it becomes the woman’s plight and punishment to endure

pain and suffering during pregnancy and childbirth, such should not be seen to overshadow the blessings which she retains. As Luther states: "Those very misfortunes are not without fruit. They tend to humble and hold down our nature, which could not be held in check without a cross."¹⁰ Perhaps the greatest proof, in the eyes of Luther, that the institution of marriage remains in high esteem in the mind of God, is that the woman has been promised that "from her will come the seed which will crush the head of Satan."¹¹ The very salvation of the woman, and even the world, will come about through the woman's "seed", or through the marital act of procreation. How could the institution of marriage be classified as inferior to anything, Luther asks, if it holds the key to salvation?

Luther believed that the text of Genesis 4:1 was greatly offensive to the "papists", for it was perceived by them to be an act of sinful lust, given the fact that it was one of the first recorded actions taken by Adam and Eve subsequent to the Fall.¹² But in Luther's thinking this act was without disgrace. To demonstrate this he fell back upon his previous arguments while adding one further penny to his bank. Luther believed that it was useful at this point to skip ahead to the book of Exodus and the giving of the "Ten Commandments", specifically the command to "Honor your father and mother".¹³ The fact that one of the commandments dealt with the institute of parenthood was proof enough for Luther that marriage and procreation were ordained by God. Why would God include this command in the holiest of holy laws if it were dealing with an institution which was inferior from its outset? Everything seemed to indicate to Luther that the first

account of sexual intercourse and the ensuing procreation of Cain and Abel was anything but disgraceful.

Luther goes on to maintain that sexual intercourse within marriage is not only not disgraceful, but actually healthy; both physically and spiritually. Luther believed that the physicians of his day were capable of demonstrating that if the command of Genesis 1:28 were “forcibly restrained” in a person, their blood would become poisoned resulting in their body becoming “unhealthy, enervated, sweaty, and foul-smelling.”¹⁴ Thus for the physical health of married persons to be maintained, they would have to engage in sexual intercourse. Likewise, a certain spiritual health was also gained within matrimony, for according to Luther, marriage provided a certain insurance against committing fornication and receiving the subsequent punishment for it which was dealt to Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁵ “We know only too well that the most terrible plagues have befallen lands and people because of fornication.”¹⁶

From here Luther primarily bases his arguments upon the epistles of the New Testament. In Galatians 3:3 it states: “Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now being ended with the flesh?” Luther deems this verse a weapon of choice of his “papist” adversaries, for he remarks: “This passage must be considered because of our slanderers, the papists, who twist it against us and say that under the papacy we began with the Spirit, but now we have taken wives and are being ended with the flesh.”¹⁷ The flesh in this text does not, according to Luther, refer to sexual intercourse within marriage. The “Spirit” in this sense refers to that which is “done in accordance with the Spirit”, while the “flesh” is that which is done apart from the spirit.¹⁸ Given the fact that marriage

and the act of procreation were established by God, both before and after the fall of humanity, the act of sexual intercourse cannot be said to be of the “flesh”. Luther declares: “Therefore all the duties of Christians - such as loving one’s wife, rearing one’s children, governing one’s family, honoring one’s parents, obeying the magistrate, etc., which they regard as secular and fleshly - are fruits of the Spirit.”¹⁹

In his commentary on Galatians 4:30 Luther lashes out against the notion that the celibate life is to be likened to the life of an angel. He claims this life of celibacy and perpetual contemplation to be nothing more than an “impressive front of sanctity”.²⁰ Anyone who thinks this vocation will ultimately lead to a recognition by the divine of supreme piety, is being fooled. According to Luther, Paul himself would warn them to this effect:

“Regardless of how celibate a life you lead or how you conduct yourselves in humility and the religion of angels or how you wear out your bodies with frequent discipline, you are slaves of the Law, of sin, and of the devil; and you will be cast out of the house, because you seek righteousness and salvation through your own works, not through Christ.”²¹

A difficult problem seems to present itself to Luther in the text of I Corinthians 7:1,2, where it states: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.” It would seem here that Paul is in agreement with Luther’s adversaries by advising that one should not “touch” a woman, and that marriage is for those without self-control. Luther begins his commentary on this verse by asserting that Paul is not ‘advising’ celibacy, but condoning it. Yet he insists that Paul is only condoning it for

those very few people to whom God has given the gift of celibacy. It should be noted that this gift does not manifest itself merely because one has taken vows of chastity and abides in a monastery; for according to Luther such people are not likely to possess this gift as it is not even found in even “one in a thousand”, and thus they are probably burning with passion.²² And even when the gift of celibacy has been given, it should not be viewed as superior to marriage. Marriage remains a divinely instituted vocation, blessed by God. It is the natural path for a human to take, for it would seem that when a human chooses celibacy over marriage, they will be plagued by constant “temptation to immorality”. For those who have not been granted the gift of celibacy, a life of perpetual virginity is indeed inferior to marriage. Paul in this text is merely asserting that the gift of celibacy exists, and that where it is given it should be declared as “well”, but not better than marriage.

Luther summarizes the meaning of the text as follows:

“...that whoever does not feel that he has that precious quality but rather is inclined to fornication, he is commanded to marry. And this commandment is to be received as coming not from a human being but from God. From this it follows that nobody can vow to be chaste, nor should he keep such a vow but rather break it if he finds or feels that he does not have that precious quality but is inclined to fornication; for such a vow is really made contrary to God’s command...it is not a sin for a man to be without wife and child. In other words, whoever has the grace by choice and desire to live the life of a celibate can look forward to happy days...”²³

In Luther’s day there was a ‘papist’ saying which claimed, “He who is too violent in love commits adultery with his own wife.”²⁴ Luther believed that the text of I Corinthians 7:3,4 served to refute such a confining belief, for implicit in this passage is a rather remarkable degree of sexual freedom within matrimony. Luther states: “Certainly

no one can commit adultery with his own wife unless he did not think of her as his wife or did not touch her as his wife.”²⁵ He infers this given the fact that we have been commanded to voluntarily give up ownership of our bodies within the life of matrimony. “Oh how many laws this little saying of St. Paul repeals: ‘No one rules over his own body!’ It can brook no laws. How can someone forbid me the body given to me by God’s law and power?”²⁶ Thus, not only does Luther insist on a whole-hearted religious legitimization of marriage and sexual union within marriage, but he also would go so far as to establish a striking degree of sexual freedom within that relationship. Instead of supporting certain restraints of sexual union within marriage, Luther believes this text to confirm his own view that sex within marriage should be regulated only by “how one sees fit”!²⁷ This same freedom is evident throughout his essay, “The Estate of Marriage”. In it he condemns several “human impediments” to marriage as being “worthless” rules of conduct, such as that which prohibits one from marrying “a Turk, a Jew, or a Heretic”.²⁸ Once again, Luther grants the Christian a remarkable degree of freedom within the institution of marriage.

I Corinthians 7:7 reads: “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” Luther himself is forced to agree with Paul on this matter, for life surely would be much simpler if all were not bound to marriage and the labour and hardships which inevitably surround it. While admitting this, Luther does not infer that these difficulties are to be avoided, even though from a human perspective one should really like to avoid them. He maintains that both celibacy and marriage are “gifts” from God, but also that both are “equal before him”.²⁹ The

labours required of marriage instill in its participants a necessary faith in God, while the life of celibacy, being relatively free of hardships, does not make this requirement. Thus the mother labouring to bathe her child and the father being ridiculed for changing the diaper of his baby (behold Luther, the liberated man!) are performing noble works, for they toil in “Christian Faith”.³⁰ Luther proclaims “matrimony as the most religious state of all”, for “ marriage is by nature of a kind to teach and compel us to trust in God’s hand and grace, and in the same way forces us to believe.”³¹ A life of celibacy does not necessitate such faith, in spite of its superficial appeal to humanity, and therefore one should think matrimony a far nobler profession.

Luther also used the text of I Corinthians 7 to deal with another problem with which he was faced. Assuming there were those within the monastic life who came to agree with Luther, how could they knowingly act against a vow they had made directly to God? Could a vow to God be broken? This problem, according to Luther, is really not much of a problem at all, for nowhere within the scriptures may it be proven that “chastity is classified as a vow”.³² Furthermore, Luther believes that one’s freedom within Christ may enable one to break free from a vow which is either “unbearable or involuntary”.³³ And if this were not enough, Luther believed those vows which were made by a person under the age of twenty could be annulled without further ado; though some of his supporters disagreed with him on this point.³⁴

In his commentary on I Corinthians 7:8 Luther argues that it was likely that St. Paul, at least at one point while he was considered an apostle, had a wife. He believes that much of the evidence for this lies within the text of Phil. 4:3 which states: “And I ask you also,

true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel.” The fact that Paul never elsewhere uses the term “yokefellow” to refer to anyone else, along with the common association of “pulling of the yoke” with matrimony, allows Luther to make such claims about Paul’s marital status.³⁵ Additionally Luther asserts that the request which St. Paul is making would be most suitably directed towards a woman, for it would make sense for a “woman to be commended to a woman.”³⁶ Luther also believes that St. Paul was claiming for himself the “right” to take for himself a wife in the text of I Corinthians 9:5,6, when Paul remarks: “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a sister as a wife, as the other apostles and brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” Not only does this text assert a belief in the right of matrimony, but when it is taken in conjunction with Phil. 4:3, one is able to deduce that Paul had either become a widower, or had chosen not to have his wife accompany him.³⁷

From this example of Paul, Luther deems himself justified in attacking specific doctrines of the “papists”. The fact that Paul and other apostles were married prior to and during their apostleship prompts Luther to question how the “papists” are permitted to forbid a married man to become a priest.³⁸ Additionally, regardless of Paul’s marital status, he nonetheless claims for himself the “right to be accompanied by a wife”; furthermore, he makes this very claim while he is an apostle. Luther rather sarcastically asks the question:

“Please explain to me how such a vicious sacrilege can be harmonized with the teaching of St. Paul, who was a widower and assumed the right to marry, giving all widowers and widows the right to marry, excluding no one neither priest nor layman.”³⁹

If then it is admitted, as it certainly should be according to Luther, that it is permissible for one who is already married to enter into the priesthood, why should it not also be permissible for one to marry subsequent to their taking the priestly office? “Is the poor little state of marriage such a devilish thing when it is entered into after the priesthood? Or is it so eminently divine when it precedes it?”⁴⁰ Clearly Luther realized that if marriage was asserted to be blessed by God but was forbidden to be participated in by those deemed most holy, then matrimony took on all the appearances of an inferior blessedness; religiously legitimated in word but not in deed. If marriage were to retain the righteousness which Luther believed was given to it by God in Genesis, then to forbid it to those involved in a holy vocation was a contradiction, forcing one to ask the question: “How does it come about that here God must oppose himself...?”⁴¹ If this were not enough, Luther directs his readers to the text of Titus 1:6 which explicitly states that a bishop is “the husband of one wife”. Regardless of whether or not this is commanding a bishop to marry or commanding him to refrain from polygamy, the fact remains that the right of a bishop to marry remains intact. Such a text prompted Luther to simply conclude that “an apostolic bishop elected by God can have a wife.”⁴²

* * *

Clearly the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century brought about a wind of change to the continent of Europe. A new system of Christian religious thinking took over in many countries and with it came an alternative approach to the way in which the vocations of women were religiously legitimated. This is explained clearly by Ruether:

“The Reformation rejected virginity as the highest expression of Christian devotion. It also rejected institutionalized celibacy of any kind. The antisexual

spirituality that supported celibacy thus began to disappear...Marriage was no longer seen as inferior to virginity in the Christian life. Sex was no longer viewed as a venial sin even within marriage...The Christian was no longer seen as someone trying to live “angelically” as in the heavenly age to come where there is no more marrying.”⁴³

In Chapter One it was argued that in pre-Reformation Europe there seemed to exist two vocations which were religiously legitimated, but that in fact both could be said to be religiously legitimated only in appearance. Ruether’s statement reflects the common view that the Protestant Reformation had the effect of largely correcting the problem. While the vocation of perpetual virginity in pre-Reformation Europe appeared to provide a religiously justified life which was available for women, in fact one might almost say that it was a vocation for sexless creatures and not women at all. While the vocation of marriage and motherhood in pre-Reformation Europe also appeared to be religiously justified for women, in effect it was considered an inferior lifestyle for those women without the possession of self control. The Reformation, by rejecting celibacy as an institutionalized vocation and by elevating the status of marriage and dissociating it from an act of “venial sin”, apparently corrected the problem.

Indeed, it would seem that the Reformers altered the existing system of religious legitimation by declaring the celibate ideal as “unnatural”.⁴⁴ They proclaimed the human sex drive as a natural human characteristic, and asserted that to consider it otherwise made the clerical lifestyle torturous, and the institution of marriage “unspiritual.”⁴⁵ According to Dowell and Hurcombe, “one of the most vaunted enlightenments of the Reformation is that it restored marriage to a long-lost degree of spiritual dignity”.⁴⁶ This spiritual

“dignity” or religious legitimation of marriage was a result of the Reformers’ attempt to lower the esteem given to the celibate life while re-establishing the divine blessing which they believed was originally given to the act of procreation within marriage.

¹ Luther, Martin. “Genesis 1-5.” Luther’s Works. vol. 1. ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958. p. 115.

² Ibid., p. 116.

³ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

⁷ Luther, Martin. “The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage” Luther’s Works. vol. 45. p. 18.

⁸ Luther, Martin. “Genesis 1-5” Luther’s Works. vol. 1. p. 134.

⁹ Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 199.

¹² Ibid., p. 237, 238.

¹³ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁴ Luther, Martin. “The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage” Luther’s Works. vol. 45. p. 45.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁷ Luther, Martin. “Lectures on Galatians” Luther’s Works. vol. 26. p. 216.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

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- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 459.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 459.
- ²² Luther, Martin. "The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage" Luther's Works. vol. 45. p. 18,21.
- ²³ Luther, Martin. "I Corinthians 7, I Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy" Luther's Works. vol 28. p. 9,10.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 13.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 13.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 14.
- ²⁸ Luther, Martin. "The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage" Luther's Works. vol. 45. p. 25.
- ²⁹ Luther, Martin. "I Corinthians 7, I Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy" Luther's Works. p. 16.
- ³⁰ Luther, Martin "The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage" Luther's Works. vol. 45. p. 40.
- ³¹ Luther, Martin. "I Corinthians 7, I Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy" Luther's Works. p. 18.
- ³² Luther, Martin "The Christian in Society: The Estate of Marriage" Luther's Works. vol. 45. p. 285.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 286.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 287.
- ³⁵ Luther, Martin. "I Corinthians 7, I Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy" Luther's Works. p. 22.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 22.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 23.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴² Luther, Martin. "Lectures on Titus, Philemon and Hebrews" Luther's Works. vol. 29. p. 18.

⁴³ Ruether, Rosemary. Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977. p. 71.

⁴⁴ Harrington, Joel F. Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 61.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁶ Dowell, Susan and Linda Hurcombe. Dispossessed Daughters of Eve. London: SCM Press, 1981. p. 93.

CHAPTER THREE

Before one begins to analyze in depth Martin Luther's apparent religious legitimation of the vocation of marriage and motherhood for women, it is essential to first understand the basis upon which this appearance lies. One must try to see how the peripheral ideas of Luther flow out from his central tenets. To determine the core of Luther's thinking is not a difficult task, for perhaps more than any other thinker Luther had a specific and concrete cause which may easily be described. It is from this basis that the remainder of Luther's thinking must be considered.

Given that Luther has been described as the 'father of the Reformation' perhaps the best approach one could employ to determine the heart of his thought would be to consider just what it was that he sought to reform. What was it specifically about the Roman Church which prompted Luther's assault? In the end Luther sought reform in nearly every direction imaginable, yet each of his aims derived from a common source, and it is at this source where one can easily discern the basis of his thought. Luther himself provides insight into the basic issue when he relates to his readers the state of his conscience prior to his 'conversion' experience:

"I tried as hard as I could to keep the Rule. I used to be contrite, and make a list of my sins. I confessed them again and again. I scrupulously carried out the penances which were allotted to me. And yet my conscience kept nagging. It kept telling me: 'You fell short there. You were not sorry enough. You left that sin off your list.' I was trying to cure the doubts and scruples of the conscience with human remedies, the traditions of men. The more I tried these remedies the more troubled and uneasy my conscience grew...The just shall live by faith"¹

Clearly Luther was troubled by the fact that within the 'system' which Rome set out for its followers, human beings would never be capable of coming to the point where they might be convinced that they had 'done' enough to free themselves from a sense of guilt. The more desperately they tried to behave righteously, the more aware they became of their shortcomings. Luther's great discovery was that such a system was not required by Scripture, which demanded just the opposite. "The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever but only faith", so that one "is justified by faith alone and not any works."² Indeed, many of Luther's Biblical commentaries reiterate this very thought time and time again.

Two examples should suffice to demonstrate Luther's obsession with the notion of justification by faith alone. First, in spite of the fact that the word 'alone' did not appear in the Greek text of Romans 3:28 ("the righteous shall live by faith"), Luther deemed it necessary to include it nonetheless.³ He believed that the omitting of 'alone' from this text left open the possibility that something other than faith might be acceptable for the attainment of righteousness; this was not acceptable and therefore he was entitled to make the text "clearer and more vigorous".⁴ The second example is Luther's treatment of the Epistle of James. Although Luther was willing to admit that this epistle was "valuable", he denied that it held any "apostolic authorship" whatsoever.⁵ It was proposterous that any epistle which was from the pen of an apostle would lay claim to any idea which served to contradict Paul. Indeed, Luther believed the epistle to "ascribe justification to works" and not to faith, and therefore it was certainly not to be regarded as highly as other New Testament texts.⁶ Thus the central principle of Luther's thought is clear.

Therefore, given that no person may be justified by works, it stands to reason that no person may be considered more righteous than another based upon their actions. This implied that both priest and layman were equal in the eyes of God, neither having a more holy lifestyle than the other. “What then are priests and bishops? I answer, Their government is not one of authority or power, but a service and an office; for they are neither higher nor better than other Christians.”⁷ It was thus of necessity that the vocation to the ministry be cleared of most of its traditional prerequisites; these were nothing more than superficial ‘works’ of holiness, like the vow of celibacy.

Luther realized that such a notion implied a certain equality of vocation, in fact demanded it. He was forced to conclude that no vocation exceeded another in its religious value; they were merely different but equal under the eyes of God. “For all Christians whatsoever really and truly belong to the religious class, and there is no difference among them except in so far as they do different work.”⁸ Appealing to the text of I Corinthians 12:12, Luther likened the Christian population to a single body and asserted that the “princes, lords, artisans and farm-workers” were all equally a part of the “religious class”, while the “secular class” within this Christian body ceased to exist. Therefore the way was made open for any man to become a priest while not being required to act more righteously than another, for their baptism in Christ made them equal. In fact, basing his reasoning on the text of I Peter 2:9, Luther claimed that all Christians were priests to begin with, and therefore “when a bishop consecrates, he simply acts on behalf of the entire congregation, all of whom have the same authority.”⁹ To make his point, Luther used the following example:

“Suppose a small group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and settled in the middle of a desert without any episcopally ordained priest among them; and they then agreed to choose one of themselves, whether married or not, and endow him with the office of baptizing, administering the sacrament, pronouncing absolution, and preaching; that man would be as truly a priest as if he had been ordained by all the bishops and the popes.”¹⁰

Thus we are left to assume that all are equal before Christ; and given that all Christian men, whether they be peasant or prince, might qualify for the priesthood, without being required to take any special vows of holiness, we are left to conclude that all vocations are equally religiously legitimated; except, of course, the vocations of women.

In order to fully understand Luther on this point it is useful to consider his commentary on the second chapter of I Timothy. Luther begins his discussion on this topic with in I Timothy 2:8 where Paul writes, “I desire then that...the men should pray.” He commences his analysis of this verse by making it clear that the prayer that is desired in this text is public prayer, not private.¹¹ This is deduced from the fact that this prayer is preceded by the preaching of the word, the lifting up of hands, and singing; all indicative of public worship. According to Luther, it is the men who have been singled out to pray in such a situation, for the use of the word “men” in this sense should not be considered a synonym for “human beings”. Luther is willing to grant women the right to pray in private, but although he was also willing to allow them to read and sing in public, he did not allow public prayer by a woman.¹² Therefore, a woman could not possibly be considered for the role of priest, and thus it would seem that her equality with men under God is questionable.

In the text of I Timothy 2:11 Paul recommends, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness." Once again Luther believes this text to refer to public worship. "There a woman must be completely quiet, because she should remain a hearer and not become a teacher. She is not to be the spokesman among the people."¹³ Setting the latter half of this statement against Luther's tale of the "earnest laymen out in the desert", serves to produce a rather telling conclusion. Since women are not permitted to be the "spokesmen" among the people, they are in some sense not entitled to the same claim of "priesthood" in Christ, through baptism, as men are, and therefore their role in the "body" must either be considered inferior, or absent all together. Luther asserts quite confidently that this text "takes from her (women) all public office and authority."¹⁴

"THE DEATH OF TWO MARYS":

According to Merry Weisner, Luther's portrayal of women was ambiguous at best.¹⁵ Luther emphasized woman's creation by God and her salvation by Christ through grace and faith. Marriage was indeed a vocation in which a good Christian woman could and should involve herself, and by so doing, she followed the will of God. But it remains the case that the language used by Luther to describe these women was hardly complimentary - "a weak vessel, a nail, a tortoise".¹⁶ Among Luther's statements about women are the following:

"God has created men with broad chests and shoulders, not broad hips, so that men can understand wisdom. But the place where the filth flows out is small. With women it's the other way around. That's why they have lots of filth and little wisdom."¹⁷

"Women are created for no other purpose than to serve men and be their helpers. If women grow weary or even die while bearing children, that doesn't harm anything. Let them bear children to death; they are created for that."¹⁸

While indeed women could best serve God through motherhood, marriage meant a life of unwavering servitude to the husband:

“If a woman forsakes her office and assumes authority over her husband, she is no longer doing her own work, for which she was created, but a work that comes from her own fault and from evil. For God did not create this sex for ruling, and therefore they never rule successfully.”¹⁹

Luther’s account of marriage was developed in such a way as to make perpetual virginity appear an inferior lifestyle, and to divinely legitimate male dominance over women, and female subservience to men.

According to Weisner, the results of such action were twofold. Weisner, like many others, asserts that prior to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, women were offered the lives of two biblical women from whom they might discover the answers to the basic questions of their own existence. From the figure of Eve women were taught why they were inferior to men. They were responsible for the sin of the world, and their lives daily reflected the punishment which God saw fit to lay upon them.²⁰ From the virgin Mary women saw the image of a perfected woman, a figure whom they could seek to emulate, while realizing full well that hers was an unattainable condition - that of a virgin mother.²¹

According Weisner, Luther managed to kill both the virgin Mary, and a second Mary, Martha’s sister. With his de-emphasis of the figure of the mother of Christ there came a subsequent re-emphasis upon the figure of Eve. While Weisner admits that the figure of the virgin Mary may have been detrimental in that it portrayed an unattainable ideal, this

image nonetheless showed women in a positive light, while also serving to present Christ in feminine imagery.²² Removing this image from the focal point meant that women were left with the figure of Eve, an image which throughout the ages has symbolized woman as an evil, seductive, and doomed being; and Christ who was understood by way of masculine imagery.

Weisner asserts that for Luther, “the ideal woman in the home is Martha, seeing to the preparation of food and overseeing the servants.”²³ This then results in the death of the second Mary, Martha’s sister, who instead of involving herself in the domestic realm, spent her time in devotion to Christ. Mysteriously Luther omits any discussion of this story from his commentary on the Gospel of John, for indeed the text would seem to indicate that Jesus praises the action of Mary and not Martha. So far as Luther is concerned, a woman’s place is not to be found in directly religious or church work. The convent is replaced by the kitchen, and servitude to Christ by servitude to the husband. Indeed the domestic sphere is seen as a place not so much for the vocation of motherhood and the performance of household duties, but rather of absolute obedience to the husband. The woman comes to worship God not directly, but through her husband.

Luther, however, was intelligent enough to realize that he was faced with some inconsistencies here. If indeed sexual intercourse within marriage was blessed by God, and man was established as stronger than the weaker vessel of woman, why would God have it that his son Jesus would be born of a virgin woman? Luther’s response to this question is very telling:

“Yet how great would the pride of the men have been if God had willed that Christ should be brought forth by a man. But this glory has been completely taken

from the men and assigned to the women (who are nevertheless subject to the rule of men) so that the men should not become vainglorious but be humble.”²⁴

As Weisner so aptly concludes, “even the best of woman was simply God’s tool to teach men a lesson.”²⁵

According to Rosemary Ruether there exists within the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions “a concept of the goodness of the created being that likens it with the holy being of God.”²⁶ This holy created being has had a tendency to be portrayed in feminine terms, specifically through the person of the virgin Mary. The Immaculate Conception served to link the created being of Mary with the divine being of the trinity, and therefore humanity came to participate, to a certain degree, in their own salvation. This notion of humanity working for their own salvation was vehemently rejected by Luther and the Reformers. The created being was in no manner capable of participating in this process of salvation, for the “fall” made this utterly impossible. Therefore, given what the figure of Mary served to represent, her image, and the symbolism which surrounded her, was rejected by Luther. Thus Christ came to be defined by masculine imagery alone, serving to further remove religious legitimation from not only the vocations of women, but women themselves.²⁷ This lack of feminine imagery within Protestantism produced no incentive for any real involvement of women within the actual church or religious life of Protestantism. If the feminine wasn’t evident in the figure of Christ, why should it be evident in the church?

As Jane Dempsey Douglas says:

“With the disappearance of the nuns in protestantism, women lost one visible, official role in the Church that was not immediately replaced, even by the revival

of the deaconesses later in the century. Women were not ordained to the ministry in mainstream Continental protestantism for centuries, nor were they permitted to be elected as laymen to the official boards that governed the churches.”²⁸

A religiously legitimated role was thus eliminated by the Protestant movement, and more importantly, it was not replaced. The role of “pastor’s wife” replaced the vocation of the nun. But while this monastic life had given women the opportunity to directly serve God, the role of marriage, now more than ever, permitted this service to God only through the husband. Religious legitimation was replaced with a sort of domestic legitimation. Ironically, it would appear that what Luther was above all seeking to avoid was the very thing he was telling women that they must do - save themselves by good works.

SARAH:

Luther’s discussion of Sarah, in his commentary on Genesis, throws a great deal of light on his view of the role of women in society. The first mention of Sarah is found at the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis. Sarah is introduced to readers of the text as “the wife of Abraham”, and immediately we are told that she is a “barren” women. Curiously enough this barrenness of Sarah is what is described by Luther as the “hell” with which God chooses to test this holy man Abraham.²⁹ We are thus immediately faced with a question: If it is a woman’s divinely given duty to bring forth children, why does Luther describe barrenness as the man’s hell and not the woman’s? Is it not the woman who is failing to fulfill her duty? By asserting that this hell belongs to Abraham, Luther is implying that a woman’s duty to produce offspring is not so much a duty to God as it is a duty to her husband, and that when this duty is not performed it affects the husband more

than it does the wife. Motherhood becomes less a means for religious legitimation of a woman, than of her husband. The woman in this sense becomes no more than a tool for the betterment of the man.

The text itself would seem to contradict this way of thinking. If the sole purpose of Sarah was to bear children for Abraham, of what use was she to Abraham if she was barren? The text appears to indicate that Abraham and Sarah had been together for a number of years prior to this discussion about infertility. Why would Abraham put up with Sarah if she was unable to perform her one duty in life? Savina J. Teubal states: “What seems difficult to accept is that patriarchal men, whose aspirations are generally to have successors and heirs would have stood by their barren wives.”³⁰ Perhaps this text suggests the possibility that the sole role of women is not to provide children for their husbands, for Abraham himself seemed to accept this sentiment. Luther clearly empathizes with Abraham’s situation; yet there is no indication within the text itself that Abraham is to be pitied. The text seems merely to point out that Abraham and Sarah are married and that Sarah is barren. There is no discussion of anyone’s failure to perform their duty, yet this is exactly what Luther asserts that it is doing.

Throughout Luther’s commentary he appears to making a fundamental assumption that Abraham is the perfect model of faith, and therefore nothing may be interpreted in such a manner as would serve to contradict this notion. The journey of Abraham and Sarah into Egypt and Abraham’s subsequent willingness to hand Sarah over to Pharaoh seems to present Luther with a problem. Luther maintains that Abraham suffered great pain when

Sarah was taken away from him, in spite of the fact that the text makes no mention of any such suffering, indeed concern for his wife is not even alluded to.³¹

Luther is also faced with the problem of keeping Sarah out of Pharaoh's bed, and thus he goes on to praise the moral qualities of Pharaoh in order that he might justifiably conclude that Sarah was freed "even before he attempted anything with her".³² The text, however, makes no mention whatsoever of this issue. Why, then would this be of such concern to Luther? One finds the answer to this question when Luther ascribes to Abraham a sermon which is, once again, nowhere to be found in the text itself. In this sermon Abraham addresses Pharaoh himself and reminds him of his folly in taking his wife and thus daring to challenge a righteous man of God.³³ According to Luther, therefore, the wrong was done to Abraham, not to Sarah. Sarah's chastity was maintained not for her own sake, but for the sake of her righteous husband. The woman takes on all the qualities of a possession, not of God but of man. Curiously enough the text contains no sermon; in fact, it is the pagan Pharaoh who has the last word while the righteous Abraham is silent, indicating that indeed Abraham was wrong in his treatment of Sarah. Luther seems to be willing to praise the moral qualities of Pharaoh when it is necessary and then to reverse his position when the situation requires it. His manipulation of this text has all the indications of a man seeking to religiously legitimate male ownership of women and authority over them, not to provide any such justification for the female vocations of marriage and motherhood.

In Luther's commentary on Genesis 12:1-6 he alludes to the fact that travel in that day and age was no easy task.³⁴ It was considered a great struggle to pack up one's entire

possessions and family and journey months on end to a foreign land. Luther believes this endurance to be a further example of Abraham's great faith, for Abraham had already been forced to pack up camp twice, first on his departure from Haran, and then upon his escape into Egypt away from the great famine which was plaguing the land. This was no enviable task. However, when Abraham is forced to leave Egypt at the end of the twelfth chapter of Genesis, Luther chooses to see this as a type of victory procession for Abraham.³⁵ Why this about-face? If Luther were consistent in his thinking he would have seen that this exile from Egypt was another struggle, doomed to be full of suffering, only this time brought about by Abraham's own foolishness. A punishment perhaps? This time, however, Abraham has even more material possessions than ever before, and thus the struggle has become even greater (although one could argue that the struggle was well worth it, given the obvious material surplus.) There is no indication that exile out of Egypt was anything which Abraham himself would have wished for. Thus, by Luther's own standards, both Pharaoh and Abraham endure punishments; Pharaoh suffers the effects of a plague, while Abraham struggles through another exile. All this punishment on the account of Sarah is certainly impressive, yet Luther seemingly chooses not to recognize it. It would seem to indicate, therefore, that Luther would rather avoid any interpretation of this text which would tend to assert God's protection and concern for the life of a woman, while undermining the action of a man.

Luther's commentary then proceeds to address the texts which concern the figure of Hagar. When Hagar becomes pregnant a domestic dispute breaks out, as we are told in Genesis 16:5. Sarah says to Abraham, "The wrong done to me is your fault! I myself put

my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The Lord decide between you and me!” Luther’s effort to explain this passage appears rather comical. He sees it as the narrator’s account of further domestic disturbances between the complaining wife and the bickering servant which Abraham was forced to endure; “such is life”, says Luther.³⁶ Sarah’s speech is seen by Luther as mere complaining, and should be viewed as further evidence of what Abraham had to put up with. It is proof to Luther of the plight of the husband; thus he warns: “If you are a husband it is impossible for you not to have either a Hagar or a troublesome servant in your home.”³⁷ Further, he sees the feuding between Sarah and Hagar as an example of “the boundless weakness of women.”³⁸

Whatever Luther may say about this text, it is certainly not a proof that a woman should be obedient to her husband. In fact it is Abraham who God commands to be obedient to Sarah’s insistence that Hagar be sent away. An extremely telling passage, which once again Luther passes over in silence, is found in Genesis 21:12, which states: “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; *whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says*, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued.” Nunnally-Cox very correctly points out that Abraham has been ordered by God to comply with the wishes of Sarah, even though it appears to Abraham that the long awaited son and heir is Ishmael.³⁹ It is Sarah who is most discerning of the plan of God, not Abraham, for her counsel to Abraham is agreed with by God. As Sharon Jeansonne remarks, when Sarah accuses Abraham of wrongdoing, the narrator of the text makes absolutely no attempt to correct or condemn her accusation.⁴⁰ We therefore have no reason to believe, according to the

text itself, that Sarah's accusation was either unwarranted or unjust. It becomes clear that Sarah's role in the covenant is as vital and important as Abraham's. The woman is not merely an interchangeable piece in the puzzle, nor a tool to be used by her husband; rather she is an active and integral part of the plan of God.

Luther's discussion of Genesis 23, which tells of the death of Sarah, the matriarch, also provides a certain amount of insight into his thought. In this instance he is forced to find a reason for an entire chapter being dedicated to the death of Sarah, without placing her on too high a pedestal. He accomplishes this task by directing his attention away from Sarah and emphasizing the importance of Abraham. Luther suggests that although on the surface this chapter appears to greatly honour the matriarch, this is not the real meaning of this text. He claims that Abraham's concern here is not with finding Sarah's place of burial, but with establishing his own final place of rest. The time has come, according to Luther, for Abraham to settle down, and the death of Sarah provides him with this opportunity. As Luther says: "Here he (Abraham) is seeking an undisputed place for her burial - a place that belongs to him."⁴¹ The emphasis is therefore placed not on the mourning of Sarah's passing, but on the ownership of land by Abraham made possible by the death of his wife. Again it is suggested that the woman is to be used as the tool of the man. She is a possession, not to be glorified for her own righteousness before God, but for her usefulness to a man.

LEGITIMATION:

Can it too be said that Luther advocated the religious legitimization of the vocations of marriage and motherhood for women? If so, it would seem to follow that sexual

intercourse, domestic service, and pregnancy and labour were all acts which, in their own right, were considered by him to be blessed by God. The case may be made, however, that Luther denied the blessedness of each of these acts; and thus it may well be questioned whether he provides a religious justification for marriage and motherhood.

While Luther evidently wishes to affirm the goodness of procreation throughout his commentaries on the first few chapters of Genesis, he nevertheless presents his readers with a rather ambiguous position. He writes: "Intercourse is never without sin; but God excuses it by his grace because the estate of marriage is his work, and he preserves in and through the sin all that good which he has implanted and blessed in marriage."⁴² On other occasions Luther refers to the act of sexual intercourse as a thing of "shame" and "disgust".⁴³ Such remarks give rise to a number of obvious questions, as Cahill points out:

"Why is the sexual act always sinful, if it is part of God's ordinance and command? Is God a cosmic utilitarian who commands sin that good may result? How can God command a sinful act, then 'excuse' it? Indeed, why is it in need of excuse if it is commanded as the avenue through which the promise of creation is fulfilled? Is Luther by means of this paradox articulating a theologically coherent position?"⁴⁴

Luther's comments on the story of Onan, in Genesis 38:8-10, are symptomatic of his position. It was Onan who was struck dead by God after he had taken it upon himself to practice coitus interruptus. Although this passage is open to numerous interpretations, Luther preferred to view the punishment of Onan as proof that the act of coitus interruptus was "a most disgraceful sin...far more atrocious than incest or adultery."⁴⁵ If Luther is willing to hail procreation as good, then we should be fairly confident in assuming that for him Onan's sin was in making improper use of his semen. It appears to

follow that sexual intercourse, even within marriage, may be a more atrocious act than incest if it is done for purposes other than procreation. Therefore, while Luther may appear to be an advocate of a Christian's sexual freedom within marriage, he still maintains the belief that sexual intercourse, in its own right, is a rather ugly business. While this position is not unique to Luther, it is still of importance to note that he does not religiously legitimate sexual intercourse.

It would seem that Luther could not decide on the moral status of sexual intercourse within marriage. Theory and environment taught him to hold it as a shameful and disgusting act, and unavoidably sinful. Yet certain biblical texts combined with his own experience prompted him to speak otherwise:

“When one looks back upon it, marriage isn't so bad as when one looks forward to it...When I look beside myself, I see my brothers and sisters and friends, and I find that there's nothing but godliness in marriage. To be sure, when I consider marriage, only the flesh seems to be there. Yet my father must have slept with my mother and made love to her, and they were nevertheless godly people. All the patriarchs and prophets did likewise. The longing of a man for a woman is God's creation...”⁴⁶

Luther's self-contradictions on this matter portray a man who was struggling with this issue himself. His statements, when taken together, present a rather ambiguous position. Perhaps one should be willing to give Luther credit where credit is due, for this indeed appears to be a man willing to challenge certain moral positions in a day and age where such challenges were not favorably looked upon. While he may seem on occasion sexually conservative, at times he appears quite revolutionary.

Luther is equally unsuccessful in religiously legitimating domestic service and motherhood as viable vocations for women. It would seem that Luther prefers to describe the woman's role of subordinate homemaker as a punishment rather than a divinely blessed vocation. In his commentary on Genesis 3:16 Luther explains that Eve's punishment is the perpetual subordination of woman to man. "Eve has been placed under the power of her husband, she who previously was very free and, as the sharer of all the gifts of God, was in respect no inferior to her husband."⁴⁷ If Eve had not sinned the situation most certainly would be different: "If Eve had persisted in truth, she would not only not have been subjected to the rule of her husband, but she herself would also have been a partner in the rule which is now entirely the concern of males."⁴⁸ Thus we are left with the impression that a woman's vocation as a subordinate homemaker is not really a blessing but a curse. It is not a religiously legitimated vocation; rather it is a perpetual reminder of woman's sinful nature. Luther implies this by noting how women today take the name of their husband, just as Adam himself named Eve, and remarking that such are "traces" of the "sin" and "misfortune" of the woman.⁴⁹

Many of Luther's comments would suggest that the woman's subordination and service to man is due to her mental and spiritual inferiority. Consider the following statements:

"Adam is approved as superior to Eve, because he had the right of primogeniture."⁵⁰

"Not only has God's wisdom ordained this, but there was more wisdom and courage in Adam. And by this one sees who is wiser and rightly preferred. But Adam was wiser than Eve."⁵¹

“We see the boundless weakness of women. They indulge their moods and are controlled by them.”⁵²

The woman is presented in such a manner as to demonstrate that she needs all the leadership and guidance she can get. Clearly, according to Luther, the man is there to provide this direction. Thus the subordination and service of the woman in the domestic realm is more a matter of what is necessary due to her nature than it is a religious legitimation of a vocation. Her position is a result of her inferiority not of her blessedness.

THE ‘WORKS’ OF MOTHERHOOD:

In his preface to the Epistle of James, Luther seeks to demonstrate that this letter should be considered to be of lesser importance than the writings of Paul. He bases his arguments on the fact that this epistle advocates the doctrine of justification by works and not by faith alone.⁵³ Luther states: “In direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible, it ascribes justification to works, and declares that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered up his son.”⁵⁴ The accomplishment of works cannot attain human salvation, for “only faith alone may justify”.⁵⁵ Luther desired to prove that one was neither justified by good deeds, nor damned by wickedness, for salvation dependent on faith alone.⁵⁶ To believe otherwise would be to question one’s need for dependence upon God, as Luther states in his commentary on Galatians 5:4, “...but if I think that he demands the Law and works of me as a condition for righteousness, then He has become of no advantage to me and I am severed from him”.⁵⁷ Hence our actions, however good or bad they are, are inconsequential to our salvation.

Luther, however, realized that his position might be misunderstood, and that it could be easily inferred from such statements that a Christian need pay no heed to their actions since they are irrelevant to the attainment of salvation. But this is not what Luther intended, for he goes on to assert: “The spirit in turn, gives us the happiness and freedom at which the law aims; and this shows that good works really proceed from faith.”⁵⁸ What is important to Luther is which comes first. If one asserts that works produce faith, then one is implying that humans have the capability of attaining their own salvation, and for Luther this is not acceptable. But if one asserts that faith produces good works then one not only retains the sovereignty of God, but also implies that a true Christian will inevitably *do* good.

Perhaps nowhere does Luther explain himself more clearly on this subject than in, “The Judgement of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows”, where he states:

“It will be strongly objected that the works of the divine law commanded in the decalogue, such as chastity, gentleness, generosity, and obedience to parents, do not justify, nor are they necessary for righteousness and salvation, since Paul says, ‘No flesh is justified by the works of the law’ (Romans 3:20). Yet they are necessary, as Christ says in Matthew 16, ‘If you wish to enter life, keep the commandments.’ Nor can these works be set aside even where faith, which alone justifies, is present, since they are the fruits of a justifying faith. For faith without works is dead and worth nothing... Thus it can be said in the matter of a vow and its works that the works are still necessary...”⁵⁹

Works, therefore, are to be seen as a product of faith; a proof of salvation, so to speak. Good actions are a by-product of faith, for they are a fruit of the tree of faith. Where faith is present so must be its fruit. Good actions indeed cannot be absent from the Christian

faith, for if they are, so too must be the faith. The tree of faith produces the fruit of good action, but the fruit of good action does not produce the tree of faith.

Luther's commentary on the text of I Timothy 2:15 reads as follows:

“You will be saved if you have also subjected yourselves and bear your children with pain. It is a very great comfort that a woman can be saved by bearing children. That is, she has an honourable and salutary status in life if she keeps busy having children...She is described as ‘saved’ not for freedom, for license, but for bearing and rearing children. Is she not saved by faith?...Simple childbearing does nothing, since the heathen also do this...I add this, therefore that they may not feel secure when they have no faith.”⁶⁰

Luther obviously recognized the possibility that one might hold this passage to mean that women are in fact saved through works; the work of bearing children. But according to Luther this verse must be considered in light of what he asserted in his essay “The Judgement of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows”, and of what he states in the latter portion of his commentary on this verse itself. According to him, the bearing of children does not produce faith in women, but faithful women will necessarily involve themselves in the bearing of children. Childbearing is the mark of a faithful woman. A woman may bear children without being declared a Christian, but it would seem that a woman who is capable of doing so may not be declared a Christian unless she bears children.

Luther is not guilty of inconsistency, for he does not declare that women are saved through works of motherhood as such. However he does create a necessary link between motherhood and the faithful woman. The role of motherhood becomes not so much a vocation as a duty or requirement for the woman who seeks to prove her faith. Luther does not so much seek to religiously legitimate motherhood, as to religiously require

motherhood. The place of the childless woman in Luther's Christianity seems uncertain, since woman's salvation seems necessarily linked to the act of childbearing. Less than one in a thousand faithful women are granted the gift of celibacy; the rest, apparently, must marry and have children.

* * *

Although many perceive Luther to be responsible for providing women with a certain degree of liberation from their pre-Reformation existence, in fact the opposite may be the case. As has been shown above, Luther does not offer women the religious legitimation which at first glance he may appear to do. He rejects the vocation of monasticism as a viable career path and he attributes to marriage and motherhood something other than religious legitimation. The two Marys are replaced with the domestic Martha, while marriage and motherhood, rather than being legitimated, become required as a matter of duty, as a sign of inferiority, as punishment, and as proof of faithfulness. Indeed the functions of women in the Reformation society carry with them no more a sense of religious legitimation than they did prior to 1517. The religious justification of the vocations of women appear at a superficial level both before and after Luther, but may easily be put into question upon deeper analysis.

¹ Chadwick, Owen. The Reformation. Markham Ontario: Penguin Books Canada, 1990. p. 45.

² Luther, Martin. "Freedom of a Christian" Martin Luther. ed. John Dillenberger. Toronto: Anchor Press, 1961. p. 55.

³ Brecht, Martin. Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. vol. 3. p. 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

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- ⁵ Luther, Martin. "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude" Martin Luther. 1961. p. 35.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ⁷ Luther, Martin. "Secular Authority" Martin Luther. 1961. p. 392.
- ⁸ Luther, Martin. "Appeal to the Ruling Class" Martin Luther. 1961. p. 407.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 408.
- ¹¹ Luther, Martin. "Lectures on Timothy" Luther's Works. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973. vol. 28. p. 271.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- ¹⁵ Weisner, Merry. "The Death of Two Marys" Disciplines of Faith. eds. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987. p. 302.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ²⁶ Ruether, Rosemary. Mary - The Feminine Face of God. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977. p. 72.

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- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 72,73.
- ²⁸ Douglass, Jane Dempsey. "Women and the Continental Reformation" Religion and Sexism. ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1974. p. 306.
- ²⁹ Luther, Martin. "Genesis 6-25" Luther's Works. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960. p. 240.
- ³⁰ Teubal, Savina J. Sarah the Priestess. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1984. p. 32.
- ³¹ Luther, Martin. "Genesis 6-25" Luther's Works. p. 304.
- ³² Ibid., p. 310.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 316.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 245-284.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 322.
- ³⁶ Luther, Martin. Luther's Works. vol. 3. p. 54.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 54.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 47.
- ³⁹ Nunnally-Cox, Janice. Fore-Mothers. New York: The Seabury Press, 1981. p. 8.
- ⁴⁰ Jeansonne, Sharon Pace. The Women of Genesis. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990. p. 16.
- ⁴¹ Luther, Martin. "Genesis 6-25" Luther's Works. vol. 3 p. ???
- ⁴² Cahill, Lisa Sowle. Between the Sexes. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. p. 124.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 124.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 124.
- ⁴⁵ Schmidt, Alvin John. Veiled and Silenced. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1989. p. 34.
- ⁴⁶ Cahill, Lisa Sowle. Between the Sexes. p. 134.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 127.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁰ Luther, Martin. "Lectures on I Timothy" Luther's Works. vol. 28. p. 278.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 278

⁵² Luther, Martin. "Genesis 15-20" Luther's Works. vol. 3. p. 47.

⁵³ Luther, Martin. "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude" Martin Luther. p. 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁵ Luther, Martin. "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" Martin Luther. p. 22.

⁵⁶ Luther Martin. "Lectures on Galatians 5-6" Luther's Works. vol. 27. p. 17.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁸ Luther, Martin. "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" p. 22.

⁵⁹ Luther, Martin. "The Judgement of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows" Luther's Works. vol. 44. p. 298.

⁶⁰ Luther, Martin. "Lectures on I Timothy" Luther's Works. vol. 28. p. 279.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ironically, we are left with a Luther whose basic principles seem to religiously legitimate a life of marriage and motherhood for women scarcely more than a life of monasticism. It should be evident that the role of women within marriage did not drastically alter with the emergence of Luther, for he did not stray far from the thoughts of his pre-Reformation adversaries on this issue. Hopefully it has been adequately demonstrated that neither Luther nor the “papists” went so far as to religiously legitimate marriage for women. Although Luther did promote the cause of an increase of sexual freedom within a Christian marriage, he did not intend this to necessarily effect the lives of women, for his motivation on this issue had to do with the freedom of the male clergy.

In spite of the fact that Luther did not promote a life of celibacy for women, he certainly did not condemn it. His oft repeated statement that the gift of celibacy is granted to less than one in a thousand woman, is by no means religiously legitimating; but neither is it a statement of complete rejection. Given Luther’s dislike for the celibate lifestyle, why did he not condemn it outright? Clearly Luther could not find biblical grounds for doing so, for indeed Mary herself was a virgin, to say nothing of her son. Yet this lack of biblical support did not prevent him from doing the best he could to discourage it. Despite the fact that he allows for certain women to be permitted to live the monastic life, rare though they may be, he remains silent on how they ought to live, for he would seemingly prefer not to advocate this lifestyle any more than he must.

In saying that less than one in a thousand women had the gift of celibacy, Luther’s intention was to indicate that such a lifestyle should neither be encouraged nor sought

after in the manner that it had been, previous to 1517. For Luther it was a dangerous path to follow as it could not but imply a belief in justification by works. In the eyes of Luther the life of a monastic was nothing more than a vain attempt to “work” towards the attainment of righteousness and salvation. Monasticism served to contradict his belief in the priesthood of all believers, for it created a system which functioned on the principle that there existed degrees of righteousness amongst believers based upon their actions. Such a system inevitably led to the prohibition of clerical marriages, which, according to Luther, was a ridiculous standard to uphold, since it was contradicted by the Bible itself.

While it would be difficult to prove that Luther’s theology served to absolutely legitimate the role of motherhood and marriage for women any more than the theology of the “papists”, it may prove an easier task to demonstrate that Luther’s fundamental principles do not necessitate the condemnation, or even the discouragement, of the monastic lifestyle. In order to accomplish this task I will turn my attention towards St. Teresa of Avila and argue that her advocacy of the monastic lifestyle for women need not be considered a challenge to Luther’s fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone.

* * *

“Even though the soul knows its own wretchedness and grieves to see what we are,...true humility doesn’t come to the soul with agitation or disturbances, nor does it darken it or bring it dryness. Rather, true humility consoles and acts in a completely opposite way: quietly, gently and with light...It grieves for offenses against God; yet, on the other hand, His mercy lifts its spirit.”¹

-St. Teresa of Avila.

Prominent in the writings of St. Teresa is the topic of humility. In the first lines of the prologue to The Book of Her Life she writes, “Since my confessors commanded me and gave me plenty of leeway to write about the favors and the kind of prayer the Lord has granted me, I wish they would also have allowed me to tell very clearly and minutely about my great sins and wretched life.”² This Augustine-like statement is clearly telling, for it seeks to link the receiving of favors from God with humility. Teresa presents herself as a sinner who nevertheless found favor with God. Her humility bases itself upon the conviction that she has received the grace of God in spite of herself, not due to her acts of merit. This thought could hardly be more Lutheran; Luther himself stated, “I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him...Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith.”³

According to Alison Weber much of Teresa’s works seeks to highlight her own ineptitude by way of reference to such things as her “bad memory, ignorance, stupidity, foolishness, weakness, wickedness, grave faults and sins”.⁴ At one point Teresa declares her own unfortunate state due to her having been blessed with a certain physical attractiveness which caused her as a teenager to behave in a flirtatious manner towards two of her male relatives.⁵ She dwells upon her own seemingly trivial faults and failures much like Augustine did before her. Her purpose in such a tendency to over-confess, however, is clear. Teresa is willing to admit that God has granted her certain favors throughout her spiritual quest, but she feels it important not to associate such favors with her own goodness, and thus she questions such goodness at every opportunity. Prominent

among these favors were her mystical experiences, which she was determined not to attribute to any meritorious acts of hers. Teresa, much like Luther, maintains that there is a necessary association between humility and grace; both would say that to accept the grace of God is necessarily to recognize one's own humble existence and the fruitlessness of one's attempts to behave righteously.

Luther's insistence on the humility of the true believer is evident in his commentary on the text of I Peter 2:20. There he asserts that the anointed ones, or authentic Christians, are only those who have humbled themselves and not attempted to work for their righteousness.⁶ Piety becomes associated with humility. "If you had a contrite and humble heart, He would come, just as He came when Peter was preaching in Acts 10:44"⁷ Thus, the spirit comes upon those who have been willing to humble themselves by putting away their meritorious acts. Humility is the sign of true faith, for only through humility is one able to comprehend the grace of God. On this point it would seem that Luther and Teresa agree.

When Teresa decided to devote her herself to the convent and the life of a monastic, one senses that her motive for doing so was not a desire to behave more righteously, but rather a desire to commit herself more fully to God. Seemingly it was the love of an earthly father which presented Teresa with the greatest obstacle:

"So great was his love for me that in no way was I able to obtain his permission or achieve anything through persons I asked to intercede for me. The most we could get from him was that after his death I could do whatever I wanted."⁸

"When I left my father's house I felt the separation so keenly that the feeling will not be greater, I think, when I die. For it seemed that every bone in my body was being torn assunder."⁹

“Only God’s help gave courage against the self and detachment for God alone.”¹⁰

Teresa clearly believed that it was the love of her father which prevented her from devoting herself to God. Obviously she held the belief that if one’s devotion to God is distracted in any manner, then that which is causing the distraction ought to be removed, for spiritual devotion was of singular importance. One should note, from the second of these three passages, that her earthly father was someone with whom she was close; she was not opposing the will of a father whom in any case she held in contempt. Teresa was willing to separate herself from those with whom she was intimate, in order that she might obtain what she believed was the necessary detachment to dedicate herself to God. Her entrance into the monastic life, however, was not perceived by Teresa to be a meritorious act, but rather a necessary step in establishing her devotion and humility towards God; a step to which she was driven by her acceptance of the grace of God.

In order to find a parallel to this thought in the works of Luther, we must turn to his commentary on the text of Genesis 22:3, the account of Abraham’s obedience to God’s command that he take his son Isaac and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Luther perceived this story to be an account of a human being forced to choose between his relationship with his son or his relationship with God. Abraham’s action prompts the following response from Luther:

“This is an extraordinary example and a description of perfect obedience, when so suddenly and at one and the same time Abraham thrusts out of sight and does away with everything he used to hold dearest in his life: his home, his wife, and his son who had been so long expected and upon whom such grand promises had been heaped.”¹¹

While Luther would be the first to maintain that Abraham's roles as father and husband were both ordained by God, he nevertheless was willing to assert that Abraham had acted righteously in choosing to sacrifice his familial duties in obedience to God. In the words of Luther himself, "This is truly denying oneself and forsaking everything".¹²

One cannot help but notice the similarities between Teresa's comments about her decision to enter into the monastic life and Luther's remarks about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son. Both are willing to accept the fact that earthly relationships are inferior to one's relationship with God and may even need to be sacrificed in order that this relationship is not compromised. It is interesting that Luther mentions the fact that Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac not only endangered his relationship with his son, but with his wife as well. As much as Luther has praised the institution of marriage, he nevertheless speaks favorably of an instance where this great estate is sacrificed in obedience to God. In so doing Luther makes himself vulnerable to arguments in favour of the monastic life.

Luther perhaps had left himself open to several attacks from the "papists", for indeed one could easily accuse him of either justifying Abraham by his works, or of questioning the supremacy of the institution of marriage. Apparently he recognized this danger, for he was quick to add a note of qualification to his commentary on this text:

"Let us remember, however, that in this entire account one should pay special attention to the Word and command of God, which glorifies all the works of believers and makes them grand, no matter how small they are. Similarly, the works done without a command, even though they are most saintly in outward appearance, are nothing but filth, like those of the pope or other fanatics."¹³

While this comment does serve to address those who may think that Luther is attributing “works” to Abraham, it does not necessarily serve to re-establish the supremacy of marriage. Luther’s emphasis upon the true believer’s obedience to God seems to leave open the possibility that one may live the monastic life.

Indeed, obedience is the golden thread which runs through much of Teresa’s writings. “If we walk with pure conscience and in obedience, the Lord will never allow the devil to have such power over us as to deceive us in a way that can harm our souls.”¹⁴ Obedience was one of the fundamental lessons taught in the convent which Teresa founded herself. An example of this obedience is well portrayed in the following story that she tells:

“One day, in the refectory, they gave us portions of cucumber, and mine was a very small one and rotten inside. I called a sister quietly - one of the most intelligent and gifted we had - and, in order to test her obedience, told her to go to her little garden - we each had a garden - and plant the cucumber there. She asked me if she was to plant it upright or sideways. I told her sideways. So she went and planted it, without its ever occurring to her that it could not possibly do anything but shrivel up. The fact that she was acting under obedience blinded her natural reason and made her believe that she was doing quite a normal thing.”¹⁵

The monastic life experienced by Teresa was one that instilled in the nuns absolute obedience to God by teaching them to be absolutely obedient to one another. “Blinding their natural reason” left practitioners in a state which permitted them to be as obedient as they could to God. According to Teresa, “The more we dig in the mine of obedience, the more we will discover;...the more we will be masters of our will in order to bring it into conformity with God’s”¹⁶ In other words, the monastic life led by Teresa intended its practitioners, in the words of Luther, to “deny themselves and forsake everything” in obedience to the will of God. Obedience was the tool by which one was enabled to

overcome self love, and self love was that which stood between humanity and God.

Obedience “brings the soul humility and tranquility; it serves as a shield from the devil”.¹⁷

As Christine Allen expresses her view on the matter, “obedience leads to an overcoming of self-love, egotism, and pride”.¹⁸ Only if one is obedient may they hope to attain spiritual union with God.

Given this emphasis upon obedience in the convent, and in the lives of women in general, Teresa made use of the slight spiritual advantage she saw there was in being a woman. If obedience leads to humility and humility leads to the one’s recognition of God’s grace and this grace is a sign of true faithfulness, then those able to demonstrate obedience best should be considered to be the true believers. The work of Teresa seems intent upon proving that it is women who are most capable of displaying such supreme obedience.

“In the case of a poor little woman like myself, weak and with hardly any fortitude, it seems to me fitting that God lead me with gifts, as He now does, so that I might be able to suffer some trials He has desired me to bear. But servants of God, men of prominence, learning, and high intelligence...when they don’t have devotion, they shouldn’t weary themselves.”¹⁹

In this statement Teresa is implying that spiritual gifts are granted to those who are most weak and humble, while those who are most intelligent and prominent are at a disadvantage for receiving such gifts. If this is true, according to Teresa, women are at a distinct advantage. “Women need no more than what their intelligence is capable of. If they have that, God will grant them His grace; and, when His Majesty is pleased to teach us anything, we shall find that we have learned it without any trouble or labour of our

own.”²⁰ While this may appear as though Teresa is abasing herself, it may very well be her way of promoting the spiritual potential of women beyond what her male contemporaries would deem appropriate, but in a manner which they could hardly question. According to Alison Weber:

“Teresa concedes women’s weakness, timidity, powerlessness, and intellectual inferiority but uses the concessions ironically to defend, respectively, the legitimacy of her own spiritual favors, her disobedience of the educated clergy, her administrative initiative, her right to ‘teach’ in the Pauline sense, and her unmediated access to the Scriptures.”²¹

Teresa found women to be in a position, because of where men had put them, where they could find more favour with God than men ever could. She seems to express this great irony throughout her work with tremendous effect and with startling power. “Lord of my soul, you did not hate women when you walked in the world; rather you favored them always with much pity and found in them as much love and more faith than in men.”²²

While Luther may not have agreed with Teresa’s conclusions it should be clear that he was supportive of the basis upon which she grounded them.

Teresa often used the analogy of marriage when referring to the relationship a woman could have with God through his Son and Spirit. “You have already often heard that God espouses souls spiritually...And even though the comparison may be a coarse one I cannot find another that would better explain what I mean than the sacrament of marriage.”²³

Teresa believed that Christ himself appeared before her in a vision and declared, “Behold this nail, which is a sign that from this day you will be my spouse.”²⁴ Speaking even more intimately about her relationship with Christ she goes on to state:

“But when this most wealthy Spouse desires to enrich and comfort the Bride still more, He draws her so closely to him that she is like one who swoons from excess of pleasure and joy and seems to be suspended in those Divine arms and drawn near to that sacred side and to those Divine breasts.”²⁵

Teresa has replaced human marriage with a marriage to the divine, in a sense legitimating the existence of a woman who is not married to a man. In fact, Teresa went so far as to congratulate herself and her sisters for having managed to escape the “subjection” of marriage which would surely have served to hinder them from devoting themselves completely to Christ.²⁶ According to Allen, “spiritual betrothal has given way to spiritual marriage; the soul which emptied itself ‘for the love of God’ was filled by that same Lord.”²⁷ This rejection of marriage should be seen in light of the obedience which Teresa has thus far advocated. In the eyes of Teresa, marriage possesses the potential of acting as an obstacle to giving one’s absolute obedience to Christ. According to Mary Luti, Teresa believed that one’s quest for the holy, while it does necessitate an association with like-minded loved ones, remains “characterized fundamentally by a final aloneness”, a sort of monogamous relationship with Christ.²⁸ That which may distract one’s attention from the divine must therefore be “denied”. She has legitimated monasticism without necessarily contradicting Luther’s fundamental intention. In fact, in a tract prefaced by Luther himself and written by the protestant woman Ursula of Munsterberg, who had decided to remain in her convent despite her ‘conversion’, we read the following: “We are married to Christ and to seek to be saved through another is adultery.”²⁹ Teresa would have thoroughly agreed with this sentiment.

In an article entitled “What has Wittenberg to do with Avila?”, Donald Nugent argues that Luther and Teresa need not be seen as holding completely contradictory views. To begin with they both emphasized the grace and mercy of God. Luther’s theology was based upon a “passive righteousness” which implied that there was nothing that we as humans could do to attain our own salvation, a thought which he presents clearly in his preface to his commentary on the Epistle of James. Teresa too believed herself dependent upon God’s grace and mercy to save her, and indeed many of her writings seek to demonstrate her own ineptitude at accomplishing anything. She is dependent solely upon the favours which God through Christ has granted her. In fact the original title of her biographical work, “The Life of Teresa”, was, “A Book of the Mercies of God”.³⁰

Nugent goes on to claim that Luther and Teresa were both Christ-centred theologians.³¹ Such a claim is easily supported in the work of Luther, who at one point reproaches those who would attain salvation “apart from Christ, as though it were sufficient for them to have believed and thus ‘sola fide’ not through Christ (per Christum) but alongside Christ (juxta Christum) or beyond Christ...[B]ut it is necessary to have Christ always, hitherto and to eternity as mediator of such faith.”³² Nugent maintains that the same applies, if less obviously, to Teresa; as is shown by the following passage in her “Life”: “One year, on Saint Paul’s Day, when I was at Mass, I saw a complete representation of this most sacred Humanity, just as in a picture of His resurrection body, in very great beauty and majesty.”³³ Teresa claimed that “almost invariably” her visions were of the Risen Lord, and this according to Nugent is demonstrative of the fact that she held the humanity of Jesus as central to her thinking, not wishing to replace him with the

“cosmic Christ”.³⁴ According to Nugent, this tendency in Teresa seems to “correspond with Luther’s distinction between Christ as exemplum and Christ as sacramentum, the historical Jesus and the mystical Christ”.³⁵

Similarities may also be seen in their attitudes to the place and function of scripture in the Christian life. Luther’s famous motto of ‘Sola Scriptura’ is well evidenced in the following passage:

“But lest we fight them with mere words, let us adduce Scripture. St. Paul says that if something superior be revealed to any one sitting there and listening to another speaking God’s word, the first speaker must be silent and give place....Who could enlighten Christian people if the pope erred, unless someone else, who had the support of Scripture, were more to be believed than he? We ought to apply that understanding of the Scriptures which we possess as believers, and constrain the Romanists to follow...”³⁶

For Luther, scripture is the standard against which all else is measured and verified. Only scripture possesses the power to authenticate any given doctrine. In rather similar fashion, Teresa claimed that a spiritual favour may be said to be of God “only if it is in conformity with Holy Scripture; if it were to diverge from that in the very least, I think I should be incomparably more firmly convinced that it came from the devil.”³⁷ Apparently for Teresa, as for Luther, scripture was the norm against which all else was measured. Scripture served as an unfailing source which both Luther and Teresa utilized in the verification of their doctrine.

But perhaps most importantly, as Nugent points out, both Luther and Teresa present theologies of the cross.³⁸ When the cross is central to a Christian system of theology there is inevitably the intention of demonstrating a human’s desperate need for salvation. A

theology of the cross tends to emphasize the sinful nature of humanity, and their need for redemption through the shedding of Christ's blood. Such a theology concentrates upon the sinfulness and weakness of humanity and its absolute inability to save itself. A theology of the cross, therefore, points directly at the grace of God and not the meritorious works of humanity. When it is said that a kind of Christian theology is not one of the cross, this does not mean that it denies the importance of crucifixion of Christ. Rather, such a theology seeks to emphasize the goodness of humanity, both in nature and in deed. Instead of proclaiming humanity's need for the grace of God, it seeks to encourage humanity's ability to participate in the salvific process. The cross is not central to such a theology, while the inherent goodness of the nature of humanity is.

It should be clear that both Luther and Teresa were indeed advocates of a theology of the cross. Luther, at his conversion, dwelt upon the idea that he was in no way able to free himself from a sense of guilt. His own efforts were inadequate to ease his conscience. He was forced to conclude that only the grace of God could free him from this sense of guilt, and that this grace was made possible through the death of Christ. Meritorious works could not achieve salvation; for his own efforts were not enough, for they stemmed from a sinful human nature. Teresa has a similar way of thinking. She is continually emphasizing her own ineptitude, weakness, and ignorance. In spite of these shortcomings she nevertheless receives favours from God, and thus she attempts to demonstrate to her readers that such spiritual favours do not stem from her own abilities. She is totally and completely reliant on the grace of God. Her emphasis upon the need for humility and obedience further point to a belief in the sinful or faulty nature of humanity. Luther's

description of himself at conversion and Teresa's continual description of her own weaknesses contain remarkable similarities. Both conclude that human efforts are inadequate and will inevitably fail, for the only thing that will truly save and empower humanity is the grace of God manifested through the death of his Son on the cross. The only good that humanity is capable of flows out from a faith in God. Luther states:

“Therefore it is impossible for faith in Him to be idle; for it is alive, and it itself works and triumphs, and in this way works flow forth spontaneously from faith. For in this way our patience flows from the patience of Christ, and our humility from His, and the other good works in like manner, provided that we believe firmly that He has done all these things for us, and not only for us but before our eyes.”³⁹

Teresa remarks in similar fashion, concerning one of her sisters:

“...for it had made her realize that any good thing we do has its source, not in ourselves but rather in that spring where this tree, which is the soul, is planted, and in that sun which sheds its radiance on our works...realizing that without His help we are powerless. She then went on at once to praise God; and, as a rule, when she did any good action, she never gave a thought to herself at all.”⁴⁰

I do not intend to claim that the beliefs of Luther and Teresa were entirely compatible. But I would maintain that Luther's basic theological claims did not necessitate that he abolish the option for a woman to lead the monastic life. Teresa's thinking, I believe, is proof of this. The arguments she uses to justify monasticism do not seem contrary to what Luther himself would have held to be true. It could be argued, therefore, that the “death of the two Mary's” was not necessarily attributable to sound theological reasoning on the part of Luther, but instead to his own tendency to overreact to that which superficially appeared to stand against him.

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- ¹ Weber, Alison. Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. p. 75.
- ² Ibid., p. 42.
- ³ Dillenberger, John and Claude Welch. Protestant Christianity. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954. p. 19.
- ⁴ Weber, Alison. p. 50.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 52.
- ⁶ Luther, Martin. "The Catholic Epistles" Luther's Works. vol. 30. p. 256.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 256.
- ⁸ Weber, Alison. p. 57
- ⁹ Ibid. p. 57.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 57.
- ¹¹ Luther, Martin. "Genesis" Luther's Works. vol. 4. p. 103.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 103.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 103.
- ¹⁴ Weber, Alison. p. 143,144.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 138.
- ¹⁷ Allen, Christine Garside. "Self-Creation and Loss of Self: Mary Daly and St. Teresa" Studies in Religion. vol. 6, summer, 1976-77. p. 70.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 70.
- ¹⁹ Weber, Alison. p. 37.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 39.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 39,40.
- ²² Ibid., p. 41.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 112.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁶ Luti, Mary. "A Marriage Well Arranged: Teresa of Avila and Fray Jeronimo Gracian de la Madre de Dios" Studia Mystica. vol. 12. no. 1. spring, 1989. p. 36.

²⁷ Allen, Christine Garside. p. 68.

²⁸ Luti, Mary. p. 41.

²⁹ Bainton, Roland. Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971. p. 52.

³⁰ Nugent, Donald Christopher. "What has Wittenberg to do with Avila?" Journal of Ecumenical Studies. vol. 23. no. 4. Fall 1986. p. 652.

³¹ Ibid., p. 652.

³² Ibid., p. 652.

³³ St. Teresa of Avila. "The Life of the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus" Complete Works of St. Teresa. ed. Allison Peers. London: Sheed & Ward, 1946. p. 179.

³⁴ Nugent, Donald Christopher. p. 653.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 653.

³⁶ Luther, Martin. "An Appeal to the Ruling Class" Martin Luther. ed. John Dillenberger. New York: Anchor Press, 1961. p. 414.

³⁷ Nugent, Donald Christopher. p. 653.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 653.

³⁹ Luther, Martin. "Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews" Luther's Works. vol. 29. p. 123.

⁴⁰ St. Teresa of Avila. vol. 2. p. 207.

CHAPTER FIVE

The figure of the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, played a large role in establishing the monastic life as one that was divinely blessed. As was mentioned earlier, Augustine himself believed that the virginity of Mary was proof enough that a life of perpetual virginity was religiously justified. Indeed, the argument appears rather sound. The very fact that the son of God was born of a virgin seems to be indicative of the fact that virginity is a divinely blessed way of life. Why otherwise would God have chosen to have Christ born of a virgin instead of a woman who had experienced sexual relationships within a marriage? If marriage indeed was as divinely blessed as virginity, why did God choose to avoid it as the means by which the incarnation would take place? These questions appear to be directed squarely at Luther, for how could he hold the institution of marriage superior to the life of the monastic, given the example of Mary? This question demands that we consider Luther's attitude towards the virgin Mary herself.

Luther's opinion about the role of Mary as mediator is abundantly clear:

"He has given for me not St. Francis or any other monk or the mother of Christ or St. Peter or an angel or cowls and tonsures, but a far more precious treasure. Salvation and deliverance from death demand a greater service than any man or angel could perform - only God's only-begotten Son can do it."¹

"[I]t (human reason) runs to the saints and invokes the aid of the Virgin, saying "Intercede for me before your Son, show Him your breasts"; it calls on (the nonexistent) St. Christopher or St. Barbara for their intercession and even tries through monkery to be its own savior. But all of these are disqualified from being our sin-bearers, for if sin rested on me and all the world, we should be lost: the burden is too great. That is to say there is no one but Christ who is able to make satisfaction for the sins of the world."²

This is further evidence of Luther's strict theology of the cross. Clearly the purpose behind the above statements is to make Christ the central and only figure in the Christian salvation process. It is a reaction against the veneration of Mary and the belief that she was capable of acting as a mediator between humans and God. Not only did he reject the belief that Mary was a mediator but he also condemned the very act of venerating her. Luther once claimed that books such as the Marialia, Stellaria, Rosaria, and Coronaria, which were filled with praise for the virgin mother, might as well have been titled Diabolaria and Satanaria.³

Luther's intention was not to hold the virgin Mary in low esteem but rather to prevent her from being worshipped as an idol. Anything which challenged the idea of *solus Christus* was to be rejected. He believed that the form which the veneration of Mary took in his culture was vulnerable to this charge of idolatry, for he stated:

“They put that noble child, the mother Mary, right into the place of Christ. They fashioned Christ into a judge and thus devised a tyrant for anguished consciences, so that all comfort and confidence was transferred from Christ to Mary, and then everyone turned from Christ to his particular saint. Can anyone deny this?”⁴

In this manner, Luther claimed, the grace of God was questioned and the salvation process was placed in the hands of mere mortals. Faith in God was replaced with a devotion to a human woman. Because of this, Luther believed, the saving power of Christ was assumed to be inadequate, and the grace of God was qualified by the mediation of Mary.

For these reasons Luther sought to discourage, if not forbid, the practice of worshipping the virgin Mary. But this does not mean that Mary was to be held in low esteem, nor does it address the question as to why the son of God was born of a virgin and

not a married woman. While Luther did not worship Mary, he certainly was quick to praise her many virtues. At one point he admonishes those, specifically the Jews, who dared to insult the virgin. He writes: "For how could they be so bold as to call Mary a whore, with whom they could find no fault, if they were not vested with the power to trample God and his commandment under foot?"⁵ He goes on, as though speaking from a Jewish perspective, to describe Mary as a woman "of whom I knew no evil, and in whom I had never detected any evil; and other people, against whom I bore a grudge, praised and extolled her, regarded her as an excellent, pious, virtuous, laudable woman..."⁶ Obviously, Luther's intent in lashing out against the veneration of Mary was not to question her virtue, but rather to oppose those who sought to put her in the place of Christ.

While this may be so, Luther nevertheless wanted to continue to emphasize to his readers the relationship between Christ and the virgin Mary, as is shown by the following:

"For the Jews have cursed and harmed themselves more than enough by cursing the Man Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son, which they unfortunately have been doing for over fourteen hundred years."⁷

"Whoever denies, defames, and curses Jesus of Nazareth, the virgin Mary's son, also denies defames, and curses God the Father himself who created heaven and earth."⁸

"The Jews ever blaspheme and curse God the father, the Creator of us all, just by blaspheming and cursing his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's Son, who God has proclaimed as his son..."⁹

Besides Luther's attitudes towards Jewish people, it is interesting to note his inclusion of several references to Mary when he is speaking of Jesus. Clearly he did not need to add these descriptions of Jesus as the son of Mary out of necessity, for surely his readers knew

to which Jesus he was referring. Probably part of his intention of including such descriptions was to highlight both the humanity and the Jewishness of Christ. But regardless, it is clear that Luther was not ashamed to associate Jesus with Mary, and to underscore this association. The texts quoted seem to indicate clearly his high regard for the virgin Mary, in spite of his desire to discourage people from worshipping her.

But how does Luther go about explaining why God chose a virgin over a married woman to give birth to his Son, especially given his insistence on praising the institution of marriage at the expense of the life of the monastic? Luther begins his explanation by alluding to the text of Genesis 3:15 which asserts that salvation shall come forth from the “seed of a woman”. This text suggests that Jesus was to be the seed of Mary, but not of Joseph, for if the prophecy had intended that Jesus have a human father then it most assuredly would have described this savior as the “seed of man” and not the “seed of woman”. Therefore in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, according to Luther, Jesus must have had a human mother but not a human father,

“Therefore, the solution must ultimately be that this seed is a true natural son of the woman; derived from the woman, however, not in the normal way but through a special act of God, in order that the Scripture might stand, that he is the seed only of a woman and not of a man.”¹⁰

The virgin birth, therefore, serves to fulfill this prophecy, for the child of Mary was not the seed of a human male, yet he remained a child of flesh and blood and thus able to still be considered the seed of Abraham.¹¹

However, Luther realized that the mere fact that this savior was prophesied to be the “seed of a woman” did not in itself necessitate that it was not also the seed of a human

male; however unlikely this may have been. But there was clearly a far more powerful argument which Luther could utilize. "Because he was to be the blessed seed which would bless all others, he could not be begotten by man, since such children, as has been said, cannot be conceived without sin because of the corrupt and tainted flesh, which cannot perform its function without taint and sin."¹² In the mind of Luther, Christ, as the savior of the world, could not possibly have been conceived by Mary by way of natural human sexual intercourse. One as blessed as Christ could not be the product of so "accursed an act".¹³ Sexual intercourse, being the work of the flesh, "is consumed and corrupted by evil lust, so that its natural act of procreation cannot occur without sin...an act of the flesh produces also a carnal and sinful fruit."¹⁴ That which is cursed cannot possibly bless, and therefore if Christ's role was to bless, then he could not possibly have been the product of an act which was cursed.

We are once again faced with the problem of why Luther believed that the institution of marriage was so greatly blessed by God if the very act which was closely associated with it was so greatly cursed. It would almost seem from this passage that Luther advocates a life of perpetual virginity that is able to escape this horrid act of procreation. Yet, in the paragraph which follows his assertion that "the work of the flesh is cursed", he claims, "These stupid idolators do nothing more than to glorify only the mother of God; they extol her for her virginity and practically make a false deity of her".¹⁵ We are seemingly left with a dilemma, for sexual intercourse is cursed but virginity is not to be praised. However, Luther is guilty of making a great assumption; that all those who practiced virginity did so in order to gain merit towards their own salvation. He assumes

that the doctrine of the grace of God is incompatible with a life of monasticism. In his own experience as a monastic this may indeed have been the case, but the writings of Teresa should demonstrate that it was not necessarily appropriate to generalize from this.

According to Luther, the only reason that virginity was praised in the instance of the conception of Jesus was because “the flesh is tainted and its built-in physical nature cannot bestow her fruit except by means of an accursed act”.¹⁶ Otherwise it should not receive such glory. Yet even Luther was willing to offer the following promising qualification: “Indeed, cursed be this and every other virginity *if* it exists for its own sake, and accomplishes nothing better than its own profit and praise”(emphasis mine). There seems a slight willingness - ever so slight - on the part of Luther to accept the possibility that not all of those who practice the celibate life do so in order to attain salvific merit.

To call the act of sexual intercourse “accursed” cannot be considered an attempt at religious legitimation. And thus we are forced to ask why Luther would advocate a life characterized by this sinful act over a life that abstained from indulgence in these lusts of the flesh. Although he would most certainly have denied it, Luther’s attitude towards sexual intercourse appears to provide substantial grounds for religious legitimation of the celibate life.

It is interesting to note that Luther denies the doctrine of the immaculate conception. While this serves to keep Mary among the redeemed, it nevertheless poses certain problems with Luther’s thinking. According to Luther, Mary was not without original sin, but Jesus was. Luther states:

“Mary was born of parents in sin just like other human beings. Christ’s conception was sinless because the Holy Spirit took Mary’s flesh and blood and

by His power and grace purified them, and because as a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit this conception escaped the lust and sin of ordinary human begetting.”¹⁷

We are left to conclude therefore that the only way in which original sin is able to enter into the life of a human is by that human having been conceived by the act of sexual intercourse. Christ’s birth was able to bypass this accursed act, and therefore he was not born with original sin. However, Luther had stated on many occasions that the work of the flesh is cursed and cannot bear good fruit. If Mary was conceived by way of natural, sinful, sexual intercourse, how could Christ be considered to be the “seed of a woman” and not be considered a “cursed fruit”? Luther would probably have answered this question by claiming that Mary had been purified by the grace of God. If this is the case then why did the birth of Jesus necessitate a virgin birth? For according to Luther, the very reason God chose that his son be born of a virgin was so that he might avoid the accursed act of sexual intercourse which was incapable of producing a blessed fruit. Luther’s claim that original sin is passed on solely by sexual intercourse certainly does nothing to religiously justify the institution of marriage, while the same cannot be said of what it does for celibacy. His arguments hardly seem compatible with his insistence that the institution of marriage is ordained by God.

Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of Luther’s thought concerning the virgin Mary is the fact that he believed her to have remained a virgin even after the birth of Christ and for the remainder of her married life with Joseph.

“Therefore, one cannot from these words (Matt 1:18,25) conclude that Mary, after the birth of Christ, became a wife in the usual sense; it is therefore neither to be asserted nor believed...when Matthew (1:25) says that Joseph did not know Mary

carnally until she had brought forth her son, it does not follow that he knew her subsequently; on the contrary, it means that he never did know her.”¹⁸

One cannot help but wonder why Luther would choose to believe this. According to him, Mary’s virginity was required prior to the birth of Jesus in order that this “blessed” Christ might not be born by means of an “accursed” act. He states: “The spirit extols this virginity, however, because it was needful for the conceiving and bearing of this blessed fruit. Because of the corruption of our flesh, such blessed fruit could not come, except through a virgin.”¹⁹ Mary’s virginity was a tool used by God. Once the purpose for which God required Mary’s virginity was fulfilled we should expect, if Luther is correct, that the celibate life would no longer be necessary. Yet Luther maintains just the opposite. Should we not expect Mary to live out a natural, divinely ordained marriage? Luther says no. Why? Luther again seems to be legitimating the celibate lifestyle over the institution of marriage, for in the case of Mary the celibate life seems not merely blessed in itself, but an essential aspect of the divine economy of redemption.

¹ Siggins, Jan D. Kingston. Martin Luther’s Doctrine of Christ. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970. p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³ Luther, Martin. “Luther’s Warning to his Dear German People” Luther’s Works. vol. 47. p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵ Luther, Martin. “On the Jews and their Lies” Luther’s Works. vol. 47. p. 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁹ Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁰ Luther, Martin. "Christ was Born a Jew" Luther's Works. vol. 45. p. 202.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 203.

¹² Ibid., p. 204.

¹³ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁷ Siggins, Jan D. Kingston. p. 34.

¹⁸ Luther, Martin. "Christ was Born a Jew" p. 212.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 205.

CONCLUSION

Luther appears to be a man who sincerely struggled with the place of marital sexual intercourse within the Christian life. Yet while this struggle may well have existed, we must be careful not to believe that this was the fundamental problem with which Luther's writings attempted to address. His concern was not primarily with the place of women in Christian society, but rather with the place of faith and works in Christian theology. Indeed his doctrines concerning faith and the grace of God must be seen to define all else which his pen put forth; including his comments upon women and sexuality. His inconsistencies, as have been put forth, on these two subjects should help demonstrate that Luther's opinions regarding women and sexuality were not independently defined, but rather molded into an already existing theological system which he had devised. While this system stood as the basis for the Reformation, his views on women, marriage, and the celibate life, did not serve to reform the religious legitimization of the roles of women.

I have often been asked during the process of writing this thesis: why, if Luther indeed was no more legitimating of women's religious roles than his predecessors, the present day 'Protestant' church appears to provide women with a greater opportunity in directly religious roles, i.e. ministers, than the Catholic Church? I think it a mistake to attribute this legitimization by certain 'Protestants' of women in ministry, if indeed it does exist, to Luther's attitudes towards women. Indeed, one should not have guessed, given Luther's comments, that women would have ever found themselves in the positions they now may hold in many 'Protestant' churches. Instead, perhaps, one should look at the notion put forward by Luther and other Reformers of the freedom of Christians to read and interpret

the Bible for themselves as an explanation for this phenomenon to exist in the Protestant Church. Although this is an entirely different subject matter it does appear to be rather ironic, for while in one sense Luther's theology appears not to religiously legitimate the roles of women at all, in another sense it has provided the groundwork for them to legitimate their entrance into the seminary!

Indeed, there appears to exist in this a very valuable lesson for thinkers of any era. Although a certain system of thought is meant to address a very specific subject matter, the development of this system may result in it achieving for itself a very general sphere of influence. While this thought system may appear to be superficially sound, when it is applied in a more general sense, its inconsistencies may very well present themselves. While Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone appeared consistent with Biblical texts, when it is applied to issues involving women, marriage, and the celibate life, in the manner that it is, its inconsistencies are indeed rather glaring as it fails to religiously legitimate the roles of women. Theologians have a certain responsibility to recognize the effects that their theological systems can and will have upon society. Luther is no exception to this rule.

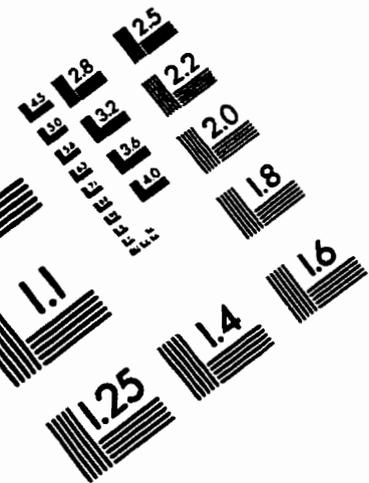
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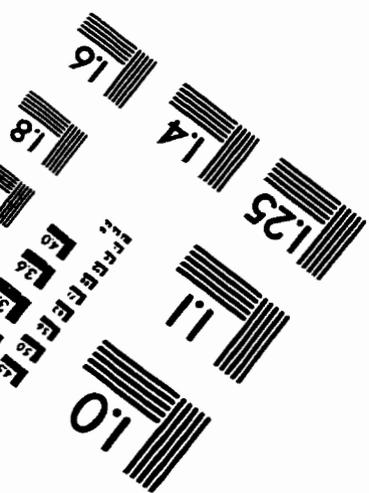
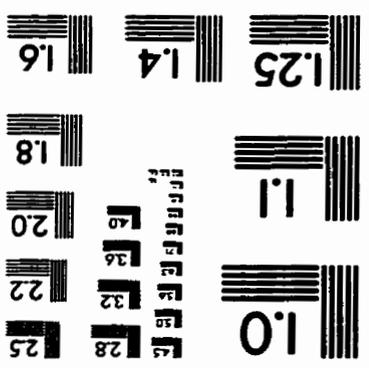
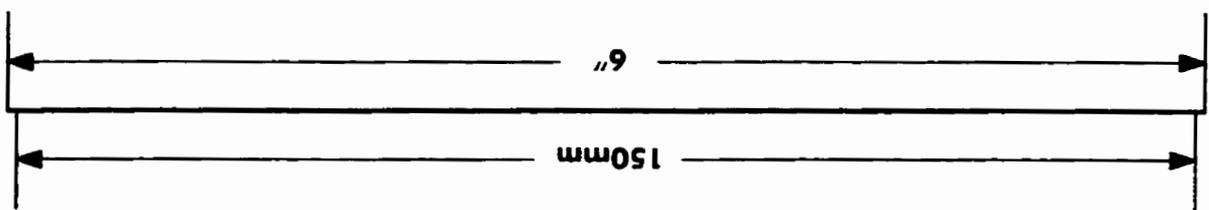
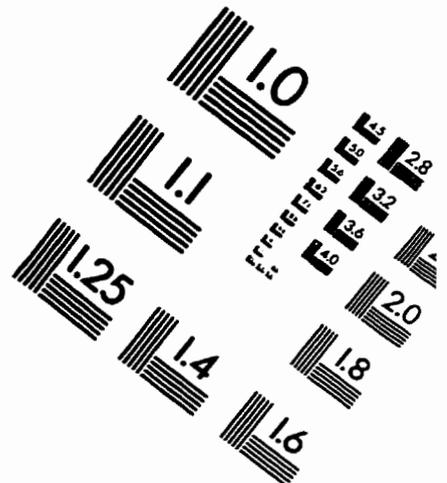


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