

THE LAW
IN THE THEOLOGIES OF WINGREN AND RUETHER:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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NANCY ANNE OLSON HESS

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Summary:

This thesis is a comparative study of the concept and role of the law in the theologies of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Gustaf Wingren. The analysis of their theologies shows that Wingren uses the law as a formal theological category and Ruether does not. The absence of the law in Ruether's theology has implication for theological ethics.

For Wingren the law has two uses. The first use, the so called political use, is that which compels and coerces ethical behavior in the human. The first use of the law is used to insure that all humans receive the fullness of life that God intends for all of creation. The second use of the law, the so called spiritual use, accuses the human when he/she does not meet the demands of the law. When the conscience is accused the human is prepared to hear the gospel. For Wingren, the gospel is what gives the human a new will to live by freeing the human from the burden and condemnation of the law. The law and the gospel serve each other but have distinct functions. The law demands ethical behavior and the gospel gives salvation. According to Wingren, the source of ethical behavior is located in the doctrine of creation not in the doctrine of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ; thus preserving the notion that the gift of grace is not earned by good works but is given freely.

For Ruether, appropriate ethical behavior is revealed to humans through paradigmatic individuals who denounce systems of oppression and announce God's intent for creation, namely, liberation. Jesus is one such paradigmatic individual who both denounces oppression and announces the kingdom of God. Jesus both demands justice in relationships and offers liberation. The gospel message of Jesus, in effect, collapses the law and the gospel into one entity. The follower of Jesus hears that salvation is dependent upon appropriate ethical behavior thereby nullifying the notion that grace is an unearned gift.

The thesis concludes with a constructive statement which develops a feminist theology based on Wingren's concept of the law.

Key terms:

Theological ethics; Creation theology; Theological anthropology; Law as a formal theological category; Just relationality; Feminist theology; Hierarchy; Dualism; Gospel; Christology

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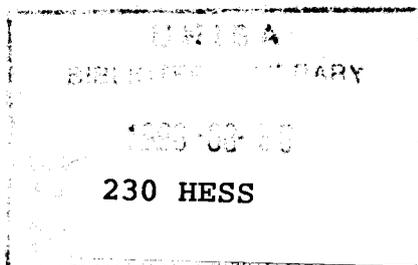
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INTRODUCTION

It is the hypothesis of this project that Ruether does not use the concept of the law as a formal theological category. Because the law is absent, she locates ethical behavior in the concept of revelation. In so doing, the gospel message contains both promise and command thereby, in effect, nullifying the freeing effects of the gospel.

In contrast to Ruether, Wingren begins his theology from the perspective of creation rather than revelation or redemption. He locates the source of ethical behavior in the law, which is creation's work to sustain and promote life. The gospel is a distinct word that restores life and proclaims the forgiveness of sins. The exhortations to ethical behavior pronounced by Jesus are the continuance of creation's work pointing us to our neighbor but they do not speak to us of our worth or righteousness before God.

The following analysis of the concept and role of the law in Ruether's and Wingren's theologies will demonstrate the implications for theological ethics when the law is absent or misconstrued. To show this it is necessary to give an overview of their respective theologies. In Ruether's case, since the law as a formal theological category is absent, one must present her theology in detail to demonstrate its absence. In the case of Wingren, who organizes his theology around the law/gospel dialectic, it is easier to examine his use of the law without an in depth analysis of his entire theology.

Because Ruether's theology is as much an analysis of patriarchal theology as it is constructive feminist theology it is necessary to include her critique and analysis of the theology she wishes to correct in light of women's experience. Ruether is a historian as well as a theologian and her theological work is based upon the re-interpretation of doctrine using other historical sources.

Part one, Wingren's theology, is organized around the loci of creation, anthropology and christology. The presentation of Wingren's material differs somewhat from Ruether's. The thread that runs through all of Wingren's theology is the law/gospel dialectic. Therefore presenting Wingren's theology is less cumbersome and appears more succinct than Ruether's.

Part two, Ruether's theology, is a construction of Ruether's theology by this author. Delineating her theological concepts into a systematic whole has been a process of assembling and organizing her voluminous writings around the loci of creation, anthropology and christology. These loci were selected as key areas in which the law/gospel dialectic operate.

Part three is a critique and analysis of Ruether's and Wingren's theologies. It examines the areas in which there is agreement between them and it highlights their divergent views. This section also reviews the implications for theological ethics when the law is absent or misconstrued.

Part four sets forth a prospective theology that utilizes Wingren's concept of the law as the source of theological ethics while addressing key issues of feminist theology. It is an attempt to resolve the problem of theological ethics when the law is absent or misconstrued while not neglecting Ruether's concerns, namely, the inclusion of women in the theological endeavor, liberation for all, overcoming dualism, and preserving the dynamic unity of creation and redemption. It is an attempt to construct a "theology of works" that preserves the integrity of both the law and gospel while continuing to work for transformative praxis.

The analysis of Ruether's theology will show Ruether's starting point, even in the doctrine of creation, is salvation/liberation. The creating and sustaining of life itself is subordinated to the redeeming of it. An analysis of Ruether's understanding of creation will show that God's being and hence God's intent for creation, in other words God's ontological project, is that of salvation/liberation. Because salvation/liberation is God's intent for creation according to Ruether,¹ God exercises a preferential option for those in need of liberation, namely the poor/oppressed.² For humans to be on the side of God, then, they must participate in God's intent for creation, salvation/liberation.

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 20.

In the discussion of Ruether's doctrine of creation her concerns for the dismantling of dualism and for inclusivity and mutuality will be revealed, for these two issues have ethical implications for her.

Ruether is concerned with the split between the material and the spiritual world and the subsequent alienation of the two by the hierarchicalizing of the spiritual world over the material (dualism). This dualism is at the root of sexism.³ If the material world is devalued in traditional Christian theology and salvation/liberation has been perceived as "a flight from the earth to a changeless infinite world beyond . . . the liberated consciousness . . . that alienates it from nature in a body-fleeing, world-negating spirituality"⁴ then it seems that understanding God's intent for creation as salvation/liberation only perpetuates the dualism. If the task of feminist theology is to correct an androcentric bias, in this case the dualism between creation (the material world) and salvation/liberation (the spiritual world) then it must pay attention to a doctrine of creation. In other words beginning with the notion of salvation/liberation as the primary principle of the doctrine of creation, bypasses a fundamental understanding of God as the source of life who alone creates and thereby values the material world. Rather it moves directly into God's redemption of the world and our participation in that process. What is not clear in Ruether's thought is a role differentiation between the Creator and the created. Because of this human ethical behavior can either take on a god-like arrogance or general lethargy due to the magnitude of ethical decisions required of us which we are unable to carry out.

³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine," in Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 44. See also, Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 3-4.

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine," p. 48.

Ruether also rejects the concept of law and gospel, old and new Adam, as being further dualisms.⁵ A discussion regarding the place of conscience, or the seat of ethical behavior as a reality (living under God's laws of creation) is absent in Ruether's thought. And she categorically rejects the use of natural law because it only sacralizes the hierarchy and promotes dualism.⁶ Because of this she has no other option than to locate ethical behavior in the gospel.

Another concern for Ruether is exclusivity. While the understanding of God as exercising a preferential option for the poor/oppressed is not a problematic theme in light of the biblical material, most notably the Exodus tradition, understanding a doctrine of creation exclusively through this tradition may imply that only the oppressed are the subjects of God's attention and creative activity. If this is the case, then what is God's relationship to the rest of creation, particularly those who are oppressors? Does the knowledge of being less preferred force the oppressor to good works in order to acquire favor?

These questions lead us to consider Ruether's anthropological claims. Her anthropology includes the notion of human's original potential for relatedness and connectedness with God and creation (*imago dei*) which is thwarted and turned into systems of alienation and oppression.⁷ While this appears as a statement regarding the universal condition of humanity, further analysis will show that her primary concern is not to work with a universal theological anthropology but rather within the particular sociological categories of oppressed and oppressors. This is seen primarily in the emphasis she places on reconfiguring the theological understanding of *imago dei* to intentionally include the valuing of women. For Ruether, an inclusive or universal

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 39-42.

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 94-99.

⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," in Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith Weidman (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 9.

anthropology is one which revises "the symbology of male and female and their relationship to each other."⁸

What is absent in Ruether's anthropology is a theological statement regarding the universal human condition and where we equally stand before God, *coram deo*. While she does state that humans are grounded in God and created with potential (*imago dei*) she primarily describes humanity according to gender, race and class, in other words, sociologically and politically, *coram hominibus*. This has implications for understanding sin and redemption and subsequently theological ethics.

Sin, for Ruether, is alienation and oppression and is both personal and social. Redemption is relatedness and mutuality and includes both the personal and social. However, for Ruether the personal level is described psychologically as though the human can be transformed by new attitudes.⁹ The social nature of sin is described politically and is something that can be dismantled when the liberated self works at transforming structures of evil.¹⁰ Ethical behavior then arises out of the dynamic relationship between the converted personal self and its desire to transform those political structures which are evil. The basis for this ethical behavior is conversion.¹¹

Theological ethics based upon this understanding primarily concerns itself with how persons stand *coram hominibus*. It neglects to point out the relationship between our ethical activities and God's creative work other than to say that in dismantling oppression we are participating in God's ontological project. The question to ask, is what the relationship is between our ethical behavior and our salvation. Is it possible to eradicate sin by corporate conversion and the dismantling of systems of domination?

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹Ibid., p. 25 and p. 67.

To examine the relationship between good works and salvation it is necessary to study Ruether's christology. An analysis of Ruether's work reveals that Jesus, the prophet-messiah, is the one who "discloses the transformatory and liberating patterns of relation to each other and, through them, to God, not only for his situation, but also in ways that continue to speak to our situation."¹² In other words, the gospel Jesus proclaims has a pedagogical function, teaching and showing humans better patterns of relationality which in turn liberates or saves humans.¹³ In the prophetic tradition, Jesus is the revealer of God's intent for salvation/liberation and announces the kingdom of God thereby bringing this image of reality to the center of our consciousness.¹⁴ As far as forgiveness of sins is concerned, Ruether writes:

We cannot speak of Jesus as having overcome all evil or delivered us from all sin, as though that were a final and definitive possession that has only to be appropriated in faith and applied to some inward and invisible reconciliation with God. All this type of language mystifies history and betrays Jesus again to the extent that it turns us away from the concrete realities of good and evil in human life and teaches us that we can be saved apart from these realities.¹⁵

In other words, as a corrective to understanding salvation as primarily personal, privatized, and spiritual, she wants to affirm the connection between the personal and social-political arenas in the understanding of salvation. The avenue for experiencing and receiving salvation is the liberation that occurs in dismantling systems of dominance. It would seem, then, that until liberation is accomplished by collective appropriate ethical behavior, salvation is only glimpsed in moments of liberation.

¹²Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 5.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 23.

Salvation as assurance of the ultimate forgiveness of sins in spite of our systems of domination is an inappropriate concept for Ruether. Grace, or the gospel message, is found in repentance and in solidarity with the poor. Which means, then, the receiving of grace depends upon one's actions and one's working toward a just society. This is conditional grace. From this author's perspective, prefacing the word "grace" with the word "conditional," nullifies the meaning of grace.

It is the opinion of this author that Wingren's theology offers correctives to Ruether's theology in the area of theological ethics. The following analysis will attempt to prove the hypothesis that theological ethics is more appropriately located in the doctrine of creation, specifically in the concept of law.

PART ONE: GUSTAF WINGREN'S CREATION THEOLOGY

Chapter One THE CONTEXT OF WINGREN'S THEOLOGY

Gustaf Wingren was born in Sweden in a small manufacturing town in 1910. His early experiences of the lack of integration between the daily, ordinary life and the life of the church filled him with discord. He writes:

There was nothing to link together the facts of eating, singing hymns, playing football and going to the cinema. Sexuality and the sordid fact of women giving birth to children were forgotten pieces of reality when one played the violin or sang in the choir, I thought. And in the cheerful enthusiasm of the popular movements, death was completely ignored. All the culture and civilization I came across in my surroundings seemed to me to be a flight from reality, escapism. Religiousness was included there, too. One was converted and shook off certain habits. But life was not integrated by piety. On the contrary, religiousness was still only a specialty, one among all the others. In this situation I suddenly discovered that the actual church building was the only integrating factor.¹

The integrating factor for Wingren was that some actions were related to that church building. It encompassed daily living from birth to death; the taken for granted "ringing in of the Sabbath on Saturday", the extension of charity and the non-religious presence of daily work and routine.² From that discovery to the present Wingren has, "always sought to choose topics that throw light on the integrating function of the Christian faith in human life as a whole."³

Wingren began his theological studies in 1929 and by 1939 he became a licentiate and then a pastor. His licentiate thesis was based on Irenaeus and

¹Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), p. 14.

²Ibid., pp. 14-15.

³Ibid., p. 15.

Marcion but by the early 1940's he moved into the study of Luther. Wingren knew that he wanted to study the topic of creation and daily life and Luther's doctrine of vocation seemed to have all the connecting points he needed. His doctoral dissertation became the book, Luther on Vocation.

He studied and taught in Lund, Sweden with Nygren and Aulén who (as proponents of the "Lundensian school") were historical theologians. Their emphasis was on the doctrine of the atonement and both found Luther and Irenaeus to be the most brilliant interpreters of that doctrine. Wingren was influenced greatly by these teachers and while they concentrated on christology, the second article of the trinitarian creed, Wingren found both Irenaeus and Luther to contain rich materials regarding the doctrine of creation.⁴

A turning point came for Wingren when he was invited to fill Karl Barth's chair in Basel from April to July 1947. He writes on several occasions that this experience had a major impact on him. The challenge of dealing with Barth's cosmopolitan audience of students who were interested in what theology, particularly biblical theology, had to say about the contemporary world, left Wingren feeling inadequate. He states:

It was not the students' attitude toward the question that was at fault but my theological education. I had to admit this to myself when time and again I left my seminars on Wednesday evenings feeling spiritually shaken.⁵

Wingren's awareness of his emphasis on historical theology to the detriment of his understanding of biblical theology, urged him to explore biblical theology. In this one might say Karl Barth had a positive influence on Wingren. However, Wingren still could see the lacuna in Barth's theology and from that time on spent much time polemicizing Barth's theological thought. Upon returning to Lund, Wingren challenged his own teachers and colleagues. He openly shifted his

⁴Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1979), pp. 4-6.

⁵Gustaf Wingren, Flight from Creation, p. 20.

theological position by becoming a biblical and historical theologian and in so doing refuted the "motif" method of Nygren and focused on developing his own creation theology.⁶

Wingren refers to the doctrine of creation in Christianity as creation faith. He describes it thus:

it is a faith that includes everyone and is applied to everyone, even atheists and followers of other religions. God is at work in every childbirth and it is this same God who speaks through Jesus. God is at work in every community-creating activity that serves the well-being of people, regardless of who carries out the activity, and it is the same God whom we praise in the Lord's Supper. When the statements in the Creed are seen as *Christian* statements about the *Christian's* God, this aspect of the Creed is easily obscured.⁷

The primary emphasis in Wingren's theology is the re-introduction of the doctrine of creation into Christian theology. His concern is that with post-enlightenment philosophy and theology, the recognition of the universal, creative activity of God has been treated as *adiaphora*.⁸ In his opinion, the emphasis on revelation as the only way of obtaining knowledge of God (as exemplified by Barth) has encouraged the church to make the unwarranted claim that it has the correct word for the world. This has set the course for nihilism. Creation theology is a corrective for this. Wingren writes:

When the church was withdrawn from itself, on its "flight from creation," it was fairly natural to neglect the first article of faith (this article was directly misused by the racist ideologies of the Third Reich). But today, fear of the first article is an anachronism. "The flight" now places theological reasoning in obvious theoretical difficulties. For the social and political program to which churches

⁶Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 8-13.

⁷Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, trans. Edgar M. Carlson (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p. 12.

⁸Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, see chapter 2, "Creation and Ethics," pp. 33-53.

all over the world now give their support are often thought out and presented by persons who are not of the Christian faith. The church allies itself only secondarily to worldly manifestos. How then can a program or manifesto be justified theologically by the gospel, by the specific words about Christ which the church alone--not the world---acknowledges?

. . . We must make the effort to understand theoretically how a person *without* "the right faith" can accomplish things which benefit his fellow men and which, with respect to the world, are useful.⁹

According to Wingren, theology has more and more responsibility to nature which is yet another reason for contemporary theology to be concerned about a theology of creation. He writes:

In order to protect man, in particular the weak and the stressed, during the coming years we must begin the great battle against environmental pollution all over the world: the fight against industrial poisoning of water, air and earth; the fight against meaningless rise in production which sacrifices the health of the individual for fairly pointless material gains; the fight against a population explosion which can only be halted by a new, conscious respect for the female body; above all the fight against mass hunger. Not one of these new fields can be mastered unless Christians and non-Christians co-operate by using common-sense arguments; not one of them can be touched unless we direct our attention positively to the natural phenomena around us.

Taking on this job while there is a "flight from creation" is inconceivable. In its biblical texts and its long history, the church has a wealth of thought about God as the Creator. Tragically, these beliefs are neglected, even though the churches' creed, repeated every Sunday, begins:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth."¹⁰

While creation has been discussed in contemporary theology, Wingren believes that it has been subordinated to the second article of the creed, christology. "Thus," states Wingren, "the world is interpreted in terms of the incarnation. The first article of faith is omitted and we start at the second---precisely as

⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 82-83.

Barth did."¹¹ This "flight from creation" as he describes it, is problematic for Wingren particularly in discussing ethical behavior.

One problem with beginning theology from a second article stance is: How can it be that non-Christians are ethical without having heard the word of the gospel? Furthermore, if knowledge of God is only through Jesus Christ, then how do we connect that knowledge with the daily living and breathing and working and all the other ordinary things that all people do?

Another problem with beginning theology from a second article stance is that "knowledge" of God becomes salvation. The gospel then both informs us of God and tells us how to behave. By using the gospel in this fashion, the gospel becomes indistinguishable from command and it eventually loses its liberating and life-giving power. Knowledge of God through Jesus Christ does not liberate the human to clear and decisive loving ethical behavior. Life still remains ambiguous. Good as well as poor ethical decisions are still being made in spite of what we know through the teachings of Jesus. To preserve the integrity of and the nature of the gospel, it is imperative to rediscover the doctrine of creation because this is the realm where ethical behavior occurs, not in christology.

To re-introduce the doctrine of creation to the contemporary theological context Wingren believes that theologians must return to those writers who lived before the age of reason, before the world became *nur welt*, to recover a God-filled understanding of creation. It is his opinion that the two theologians most successful in integrating the relationship between the meaning of creation and the message of salvation are Irenaeus and Luther.¹²

These two theologians have contributed significantly to Wingren's creation theology. For a richer understanding of Wingren's work it is helpful to

¹¹Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹²Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 6.

extrapolate the salient concepts of Irenaeus and Luther which, for him, become foundational to his theological content and method.

In Irenaeus, Wingren finds the concept of *recapitulatio* to be a useful link between creation and gospel. Recapitulation is redemption. It is the restoration of the creation and health and wholeness for the human. It is the liberation from those forces which inhibit us from becoming truly human as God created and intended us to be and gives us freedom to be natural. Redemption, for Irenaeus, is not new creation but rather, it is restoration to the wholeness of the original creation. What the human wants from God, namely health and wholeness, is in harmony with what God wills for creation. This also implies a movement in creation. Creation is a dynamic process not a static event. God is always creating us to be fully human. Jesus Christ is the one person who has shown us what being fully human is. With his death and resurrection we are assured that the wounds and injuries we now endure will be healed and that we will become what God intends us to be. So the link between creation and redemption for Irenaeus is that creation is the whole gift given, disease threatens and injures it and redemption is the healing of it.¹³

Wingren has used the law/gospel dialectic and the concept of *vocation* from Luther as essential components of his creation theology. Luther understands the law as having two uses; to coerce and to accuse. The first use of the law is commonly called the civil or political use of the law. This is critical to creation theology because it proposes that God's law is a given, prior to Revelation, and is used to force us into serving our neighbor so that God can continue to create life whether we choose to serve or not. This law is universal and applies to all of creation. The second use of the law, the spiritual use, strikes our heart when we realize that we cannot completely and consistently live up to the expectations of the law by our own power or merit. It is this use of the law that connects creation with the gospel because it drives us to the words, "forgiveness of sins." Jesus Christ is the one who liberates us from the

¹³For an in depth analysis of his interpretation of Irenaeus see: Gustaf Wingren, Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

condemnation of the law. Salvation, for Luther, is freedom. It is freedom from guilt, from self-condemnation, from the consequences of breaking the law.

It is through our work that the first use of the law is put into effect. Through our labors God serves the neighbor. These labors are the everyday things of life from changing diapers to preaching sermons. With our hands and bodies, God continues to give life. Luther's understanding of vocation is significant for Wingren's creation theology because it makes the connection between our everyday lives and the creative activity of God.¹⁴

Along with Irenaeus and Luther, the philosophy of K. E. Løgstrup has a key place in Wingren's creation theology. Løgstrup is a contemporary Danish theologian/ethicist/philosopher who claims that loving the neighbor is part of life itself and not a dictum unique to religion. He uses the concept of "sovereign life expressions" to describe the actions of the Creator. According to Løgstrup, "creation is the universal experience of divine presence as the inescapable experience of the goodness and order of life."¹⁵ These sovereign or spontaneous life expressions explain the continuation of life in the face of destruction. The forces of destruction are secondary; the enemy cannot exist before the Creator. The sovereign life expressions are unconquerable and the observation of this elicits faith in God.

There are open and closed manifestations of life. The open manifestations are love, mercy, trust and those responses that bring forth life. The closed manifestations are hate, envy and so forth and they work against life. The ethical demand to love one's neighbor is a silent demand and is pervasive. It seems like an impossible demand. The proclamation of Jesus "consisted not only in his giving expression to the demand of God and of human existence. He also announced that the love upon which our life depends but which our own

¹⁴For further analysis of Wingren's appreciation for Luther see: Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

¹⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. xlii.

self rejects is a divine reality in spite of our rejection of it."¹⁶ This divine reality is available to humans through forgiveness. Løgstrup's understanding of forgiveness is two-fold. It is the restoration of broken relationships between humans and the unexpected restored relationship with God.

The link between creation and salvation, for Løgstrup, is found in the relationship between the ethical demand and the resurrection. The ethical demand is creation's gift (sovereign manifestations), which is always threatened by destruction (closed manifestations) and yet is still in force and will not falter in the face of destruction, attested to by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Along with Irenaeus, Luther and Løgstrup, Wingren has been influenced by other theologians and experiences. He writes:

At the university, when one writes about something, one is closely questioned about the evidence for the statements made about the subject. The reason for choosing to write about that particular topic is seldom submitted to such close questioning. It is usually sufficient to say that the topic has not yet been dealt with. But I wonder whether the choice of topics, often and in many disciplines, is not the most interesting question at the university level. One's whole personality, childhood, youth, and environment have a part in that choice.¹⁷

His choice of topics grew out of his childhood experience and were shaped by his education and the socio-political situation in which he lived. Throughout his studying and teaching he has remained concerned with making the connections

¹⁶Knud E. Løgstrup, The Ethical Demand, trans. Theodore I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 221.

¹⁷Gustaf Wingren, Flight From Creation, p. 13.

between the church and everyday life. In his words:

in every situation which forced me to choose between academic honor and a vigorously functioning church, a church close to the problems of ordinary people, I decided for the church.¹⁸

To make the connections between the church and everyday life Wingren uses a theological approach which he refers to as a "two-fold phenomenological approach." The two phenomena Wingren refers to are anthropology and hermeneutics. He explains it thus:

Our starting point is the observation of two functions: the actual demands (including points of view, theories, etc.), and the actual proclamation (which claims that the original word of scripture is now being spoken in this given situation with its points of view, theories, community structure, etc.). This provides a twofold, purely phenomenological approach.¹⁹

According to Wingren every theology presupposes a certain anthropology and a certain understanding of how the scriptures should be read. Wingren states:

Every theology presupposes something about how the New Testament should be read and what it is. . . .Something is presupposed in regard to primitive Christianity, Jesus, and the biblical writings. This we call here "hermeneutical presuppositions." Every theology also presupposes a conception about man and his situation as this Word which we try to interpret confronts him. . . . But every theology presupposes something about man in general, about contemporary man. This is not obvious and sometimes not even admitted. On the contrary we would rather hide this from ourselves as theologians and from those who read our theological production.

. . . . The hermeneutical presuppositions with which we approach our task of interpreting "Christianity," "the Word," or

¹⁸Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 10.

¹⁹Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 161.

"the kerygma," correspond to other presuppositions concerning man, the cultural life, and humanity.²⁰

For a theological system to be internally sound, both the anthropological and hermeneutical presuppositions must be explored and then tested to see if they are valid on the basis of scripture.²¹ This is critical for Wingren since he believes that theology's aim is to interpret "Christianity," "the Word" and "revelation," (using these words in their broadest sense). A theology which does not do this is "no longer theology."²² It is his belief that:

The Word exists to be made known; only when it is preached is its objective content fully disclosed. Man was created in the beginning by the creative Word, and destined to live by that which comes from the mouth of God. Men understand themselves aright and receive true human life in the hearing of God's Word. The Word reaches the objective for which it was sent out only when it effects an entrance into men. Man reaches the spring out of which he can draw human life only when the Word of the Creator comes to him.²³

Wingren organizes his anthropological assertions around the themes of creation and law. His hermeneutical claims are described using the themes gospel and church. The following analysis around the loci of creation, anthropology and christology, will show that Wingren understands the law as creation's word and the gospel as being the church's word. These two words, law and gospel, differ in function and content but are held together in a dialectical fashion. The following analysis will also show that Wingren locates human ethical behavior in the doctrine of creation (the law) thereby insisting that gospel provides only promise and not command.

²⁰Ibid., pp. ix-x.

²¹Ibid., p. xi.

²²Ibid., p. xi.

²³Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, trans. Victor C. Pogue (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 13.

Chapter Two

WINGREN'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Wingren's aim is to create a theology that strikes a balance between dogmatics and analysis.¹ Theology, as he defines it, is "the scholarly work which, on the basis of historical sources, aims to state what is characteristic of the Christian faith and the Christian ethos as compared to other kinds of religion and philosophy in our times; to state what is 'Christian' in a descriptive way using scientific reasoning, i.e. using arguments which can be tested by everyone."² He defines dogmatics as, "the normative process by which the truth of the Christian confession of faith is upheld while that faith is described scientifically."³ According to Wingren, due to the present day scientific and analytical approach to religion, "the description of Christianity as a totality is threatening to disappear entirely as goal for analysis."⁴ Furthermore, he writes:

The scholarly prohibition against comprehensive descriptions laid down by rigid "analysis" applies, it seems, only to Christianity. Precisely here, comprehensive descriptions are the same as "persuasive definitions." If one talks about "the Christian faith" in general, then one is found guilty of spreading the same kind of propaganda as the politician when he talks about "true democracy," "genuine freedom," "healthy nationalism."

. . . "Dogmatics" is deliberately and openly normative. "Analysis" not only rejects this deliberate normativeness but also rejects the unconscious or veiled normativeness that it sees concealed in the guise of comprehensive description. Since we have already defined "theology" as the scholarly work which tries to state what is characteristic of the Christian faith and ethos, it is quite obvious how we look upon the topic given: "Theology *between* dogmatics and analysis." It is a matter of achieving

¹Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, p. 57.

²Ibid., pp. 57-58.

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴Ibid., p. 58.

comprehensive descriptions of the Christian faith and ethos without falling into the normative patterns of dogmatics.⁵

Wingren's theology is an attempt to provide a comprehensive description of the Christian faith and life in a way that is intelligible for Christians and non-Christians alike. The most effective way to provide a description of the whole Christian faith, according to Wingren, is to use the first article of the creed as the starting point for theology. Although he begins with the first article, he clearly affirms the unity of the creed and states that the three articles do not deal with three separate subjects but rather describe the same reality. He writes:

one cannot separate the content of the three articles of faith from one another. The whole Christian faith is creation faith, for the Creator acts in everything, from the beginning to the resurrection of the dead. In the same way, faith is altogether faith in the Son. What is human in a person and what constitutes the destruction of one's humanity can be identified only with the help of "God's image," the true man, who is Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, it can truly be said that all Christian faith is faith in the Spirit. We do not see God face to face and Jesus does not live as a historical person today. If we believe, it is because of the Spirit's invisible work in our heart.⁶

The order in which one organizes the articles of the creed is important. Wingren chooses to begin his theology with the first article of the creed, namely, God as Creator and then move to the second and third articles. He writes, "the order in which the two are given does not represent the sequence in our acquisition of knowledge concerning God, but the sequence in God's dealings with us."⁷ Wingren begins his creation theology by emphasizing that God is the giver of all life.

⁵Ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁶Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 192.

⁷Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 41.

2.1 GOD AS THE SOURCE AND GIVER OF ALL LIFE

When the first article calls God the "maker of heaven and earth," it is speaking of God as being active in all that is recounted in the entire confession---including the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. Moreover, he is active precisely in his role as Creator. There is a great problem implicit in the fact that the life which is created by God is given without the recipient knowing who the giver of it is. God's creative action is received by us in the same way that a newborn child receives oxygen through breathing. One lives in a relationship to God without using his name and without using any religious labels.⁸

Foundational to Wingren's theology is the understanding that all life as we know it is created and given by God whether or not humans label it as such. In understanding God as Creator, Christians make a universal claim, namely, God works through all of creation.⁹ According to Wingren, the gospel:

cannot today build life against destruction if what we call "the universal" (faith in life as a gift) is judged to be something quite impossible, that is, lacking any foundation in *general* human experience. This thesis that faith in the Creator lacks "natural" support within our lives and can only be found in the revelation of the Bible is nihilistic---it destroys faith. . . .

In order that the Gospel might have meaning for the human who hears its "specific" word, man's universal interpretation of life, based on experience common to all, must contain faith . . . In our post-Enlightenment era, anchoring Christian faith in the generally human is, according to Løgstrup, more necessary than it ever has been before.

. . . Therefore it is important in the present time to analyze human life in such a way that every human being, including the atheist, discovers "the universal" according to Christian faith in his everyday experience. If what is in accord with Christian faith is really universal, then it is to be found in the experience of every human being.¹⁰

⁸ Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 132-133.

Every human being experiences life as something given from outside of him or herself. If indeed the Christian claim is that God is the source and giver of all life, which is what the first article of the creed declares, then according to Wingren, "every human being, in looking about, must be able to discover *gifts* in his life; that is, things which he cannot create himself but must be *given* to him."¹¹ It is God's project and intent for creation to give, sustain and protect the gift of life. Wingren states:

To believe in the Creator is to believe in a God who cannot do other than constantly make new. Just as God, according to the Christian faith, cannot do other than love, so he cannot do other than create, which means to *make new*, against all that corrupts, against all death.¹²

2.2 LIFE IS ALWAYS GIVEN AND THREATENED

It is also a universal experience that life is threatened. Wingren writes:

life for the human is something always given and always threatened. Translated into biblical language this implies that the Creator gives, generates, awakens to life; and that he does this in opposition to that which damages, destroys and distorts life.¹³

The recognition of the threat to life is found when humans find themselves in situations that remind them "they are not lords over what happens. Nor can people avoid the elemental attitudes of hope and fear."¹⁴

Wingren refers to those things that threaten life as forces of destruction. He understands these forces of destruction to be all pervasive in human life and they are God's enemy, the opposition that God encounters as God creates

¹¹Ibid., p. 134.

¹²Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 193.

¹³Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

life.¹⁵ In using the phrase "forces of destruction," Wingren does not only refer to acts that destroy life but also understands them as permanent life-destroying forces.¹⁶ According to Wingren, "the destroying force rules from the very beginning of our lives" and "it cannot be rooted out through any effort or decision of our own."¹⁷ This is expressed in the biblical story of creation and in the interpretation of original sin as understood by the ancient church fathers. Wingren writes:

Original sin, for them [the ancient church fathers], meant envy. They could imagine nothing less creative or more contrary to giving than envy . . . to be envious, to see something good happen to another and to react negatively only because it did not happen to me---this is sheer destructiveness. It is displeasure in the presence of the one who gives, and therefore it is enmity against the Creator.

Envy is universally human; it is found in the hearts of all of us Envy is simply there. That is a naked fact---like saying that life is there. But these two naked "givens," although they are alike in being original phenomena, are totally unlike in their structure. Envy corrodes and eats away at life. Envy cannot exist unless the good is already present.

. . . The one who is driven by envy is subordinated by the very nature of that envy. Such a person must wait for the good and then react negatively to it. One who is envious cannot independently create anything.¹⁸

Life is always threatened. But this threat is secondary to the work of the Creator. Wingren states, "'the opposition' corrodes, eats away, and destroys, and thus in a sense 'lives off' the created. Therefore the work of the Creator is

¹⁵Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 26. Edgar Carlson, the translator of *Credo* explains this more fully in endnote 2, p. 195. He writes, "Wingren uses the noun with a definite article 'the destruction' to describe not only a condition but that which causes the condition. It implies a dynamic evil and an active presence of decay and deterioration which 'the destruction' does not necessarily convey in English. We have sometimes used 'forces of destruction' or 'destroying powers' to translate what is quite uniformly conveyed in the original by 'destructionen.'"

¹⁷Ibid., p. 26

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 26-27.

always primary and the opposition is always secondary."¹⁹ Using Løgstrup's terminology, Wingren describes the actions of the Creator as "spontaneous manifestations of life." And those actions that destroy the actions of the Creator, traditionally referred to as actions of the devil, he labels "closed manifestations of life."²⁰ Wingren explains it thus:

Trust, love, and sincerity are sovereign; that is, they are not reactions to what others have done to us but are free and total. Therefore they open up new possibilities of life around us. And, according to Løgstrup, they are always *given*. If our will to live is broken, we cannot, through a moral decision, create trust, love and sincerity toward those around us. Moreover if these positive manifestations of life return, they return because they are again *given* to us in the same way as life itself is given.

Hatred, mistrust, and insincerity are, in contrast, reactions; that is, they are by nature secondary and derived. They do not open up but rather close down the possibilities of life for people around us. And they are---purely linguistically---impossible to describe in positive terms: it is necessary to use negative formulations in order to describe them at all.²¹

The open manifestations of life are sovereign since they are given as gift. The closed manifestations of life are secondary and threaten the gift of life. According to Wingren, "it is typical of both the sovereign and the closed manifestations of life that they seize man; Luther would have said man is 'ridden' by them."²² Reflecting upon the seed of destruction which is in

¹⁹Ibid., p. 27.

²⁰Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 134.

²¹Ibid., pp. 134-135.

²²Ibid., p. 136.

every human, Wingren states:

it is a real mystery that life continues. One would expect life to simply die out. There is no other explanation for the continuation of life than those spontaneous expressions of life---love, giving, the willingness to die for the young to whom we give birth. . . . They are threatened by destruction but they are not conquered. After each onset of hatred, lovers smile at one another, children play, lives are built up---they are sovereign.²³

Because life is always threatened, God must always create life anew.

2.3 CREATION IS ON-GOING

If the Christian claim is that all life is created and given by God, then creation can not be a once and for all act but must be an on-going activity. Wingren opposes the idea of looking at creation as only "result." He writes:

When the word "Creation" is used, one is inclined to think of a *result* of the act of Creation, something which comes into being as a result of the creative act, and which now exists by itself. We find this way of thinking in an institutional form in the theology of order, which thinks in terms of result. We find it again in institutional form in the attempt to think of the Church as a reality involved in the world which is unrelated to God's activity, and in the strenuous avoidance of any idea of the Word as creative of the Church. . . .

If we are determined to look for results in this way, we shall cut the nerve of the belief in Creation, viz. the assurance that God is actively creating *now*, and that life itself is the other side of God's continuing creative activity.²⁴

The very acts of breathing, eating, drinking and so forth are all indicators that God is at work creating.²⁵ Furthermore all sovereign manifestations of life such as love, mercy and trust are gifts given by God to create and sustain life. They

²³Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 28.

²⁴Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 46.

²⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 52.

are given, as Wingren states, to "create something new and give the environment a new start and new possibilities for life."²⁶ God's goal is to eliminate the opposition, the forces of destruction, so that life can be lived freely. The implication of this, according to Wingren is:

not the construction of a new order, or an eternal system of rules which is the goal, but rather the opposite and typically biblical goal of *freedom*. The goal is the creature's freedom to be one's self, to be a created being who thanks and praises God, whose life is a song of praise.²⁷

Because all life is a gift from God there is an interdependence between creation and God. In this Wingren states, "to live is to be in relationship with God."²⁸

2.4 TO LIVE IS TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The emphasis in Wingren's doctrine of creation is on God's work, not on any special characteristics the human is endowed with. Because the gift of life comes to the human and is not something that humans can manufacture or create by their own power, there is a dependent relationship between the Creator and what is created. Wingren writes:

It is quite clear that the Biblical texts which deal with Creation do not deal primarily with man's endowments but with God's power and goodness . . . God was not active only when the world of men came into being, so that what we have now to deal with are the end-products of His original Creation. But when we move and breathe we are in a living relationship to the Creator whose work is still continuing.²⁹

²⁶Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 28.

²⁷Ibid., p. 24.

²⁸Ibid., p. 38.

²⁹Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 47.

Wingren maintains that life as gift is a universal experience regardless of whether or not the receiver acknowledges God as the giver. According to Wingren:

The relationship to God which is given in existence does not mean salvation, because the individual is at the same time a prisoner of the forces of destruction. But the human activities which mark one's day-to-day existence are at the same time vehicles for God's creative activity, even though they are human and therefore imply human effort. When we humans survey our whole situation, including that which we have not gained through our own efforts but have *received* at birth, and every day, then we stand at the very boundary of our existence, and therefore we also stand in the presence of God. What is added when one describes all of this in religious language is the word "God." But even without that word, we were already standing in the presence of God, without using God's name.³⁰

Creation is the arena wherein the gift of life is given and operates. It is in the created world where God and the human are connected. We cannot live in relationship to God without living in the world. Furthermore, God uses humans in the world as vehicles for bestowing life on others. Even if the human does not have knowledge of God, or if the human corrupts God's work, God still uses humans to assist in creating life. According to Wingren:

One of the aspects of God's continuing work is the dealings which other people have with us, or the effects they have upon us. There is the obvious instance of our own birth, and the protection and help which we later receive from parents---their supplying of the basic necessities of life through the work of others, the neglect by others of their own pleasures on our behalf, and the assistance and readiness of doctors and nurses to give their time when life is in danger, etc. There is nothing lacking in this goodness which flows through human life, but throughout it is the Creator's own goodness flowing out into the continuing life which God has created, preserving it from harm. We cannot isolate this goodness and change it into a quality possessed by an individual before God. When God's gifts and goodness come down upon man, the individual . . . may well have complaints to make about the necessity of having to give. These necessities of life are not

³⁰Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 38.

given to us only when the goodness of an individual emerges, and do not cease when the evil will of the individual rebels against the Creator. Everything in man is evil, since evil consists in man's usurpation of this position and his selfish keeping of it for himself. But no such evil in the individual is able to disrupt the flow through human life of the actions and dealings of God, which serve to sustain and preserve life. These actions are God's. Man is not the complete result of God's perfected work of Creation, partly good and partly evil. Rather, man is used by the Creator as the object of His continuing work of Creation. God's works are good, even if man corrupts and distorts them.³¹

To live is to be in relationship with God as well as being in relationship with God's creation. Wingren uses Luther's concept of vocation to describe the relationship of service that God employs to sustain and preserve life.

2.5 GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY IN COMMUNITY

Luther describes vocation as serving others in all of the stations of life. Wingren, commenting on Luther's theology, says "it is the 'station' itself which is the ethical agent, for it is God who is active through the law on earth."³² The station's main point is to sustain creation. Works (vocation) belong to this world to serve the neighbor; works are not directed toward God. Wingren writes, "in his vocation one is not reaching up to God, but rather bends oneself down toward the world. When one does that, God's creative work is carried on."³³ The goodness of the Creator is shown through the goodness that flows from humans to humans, who should look for opportunities to responsibly use what God has created. Through service to the neighbor, God gives and sustains life.

There are two necessary components to Wingren's understanding of service to the neighbor. One is that regardless of the motives behind human works, service to the neighbor is always God's work through human vehicles. By

³¹Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 47.

³²Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, p. 6.

³³Ibid., p. 10.

saying that, Wingren wants to indicate that good works are not something that humans create themselves. This is important for Wingren because he does not want to associate good works with the earning of salvation. Good works establish righteousness *corum hominibus* but not *corum deo*.³⁴ Second, Wingren locates service to the neighbor in the first article of the creed to emphasize that it isn't knowledge of God through the revelation of Jesus Christ that inspires ethical behavior but rather it is God's creative work that promotes service to the neighbor. Wingren writes:

God is at work when man himself breathes, eats, drinks, and so on. These elementary acts of life take place among all people irrespective of whether they have heard the Gospel preached or not. Moreover, nearly everyone in some way, in his or her own surroundings, helps such acts of life to be performed; this help constitutes a "morality" that is prior to any moral decision. Commonly, however, theologians who wish to make the Gospel of Christ the only source of ethical knowledge leave this out of consideration and concentrate all their attention instead on problematic points of human behavior. Hence, for them, God cannot be thought of as acting and present unless his presence means the communication of knowledge, or "revelation."³⁵

There is nothing that will prevent God from giving the good gifts of life in creation. However, God's giving is met with hostility. Humans are tempted to independence from God. Our temptation is to regard life and creation as our own to do what we please with it. In so doing we deny the work of creation and neglect the needs of our neighbor. This breach of trust between the creature and the Creator is destructive for the human. For God to continue to give life in the face of hostility, God must constrain human selfishness.

³⁴Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, pp. 153-154.

³⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 52.

2.6 THE UNRECOGNIZED DEMAND

According to Wingren:

When man disbelieves in God, disregards his neighbour, and makes an idol out of Creation "without excuse," this means that he has definitely rejected demands which, however indistinctly he may have been aware of them, should have been sufficiently powerful to lead him to act differently.³⁶

God's unrecognized demand is a universal demand for faith and love.³⁷

Wingren defines "faith" as "recovery of man's original and natural position, for which both he and Creation alike were destined and equipped."³⁸ He writes:

In trusting God, man escapes from his fear of losing life and can in consequence adopt an attitude of benevolence toward his neighbour. When man in faith thus dares to take the position of servant, he is "the most free lord of all Creation and no servant [Wingren quoting from Luther's *De libertate christiana*]."³⁹

Wingren more clearly describes the unrecognized demand as follows:

In Rom. 1 Paul shows that God's revelation in Creation is the primary basis for His demand for *faith* and not simply for refraining from heinous offenses, or for adopting an attitude of regard for one's neighbour. The unrecognized demand, which is addressed to men by the very fact of their living in the world, is a demand for faith and trust in God, and also a demand to put away "idols" (i.e. the worship of the creature rather than the Creator, Rom. 1. 19ff., 23, 25) and to love their fellow men (Rom. 1.30ff.).⁴⁰

³⁶Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 57.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 60.

Where the sovereign life manifestations are repressed or denied, "the Creator must bring about consideration for others by coercion. This is the function of the law---to compel people to do the good which they do not voluntarily want to do."⁴¹ Because all humans live in relationship to God, depending upon God for the gifts of life, all humans live under the compulsion of the law which serves to promote life. This is the starting point for Wingren's anthropology.

⁴¹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 57.

Chapter Three

WINGREN'S ANTHROPOLOGY

According to Wingren, "when God wanted to create beings who were like him, he created humans."¹ This is what it means when Wingren states that humans are created in the image of God. Humanness is not foreign to God, states Wingren, "in fact, God's humanity is present in everything that is said about God in the Bible . . . the texts speak about God in an anthropomorphic way: This is the way he is."² Therefore when God becomes human in Jesus Christ, God has not become something foreign to God's self.

Wingren maintains that humans and all that is created is created by God. All of the other created things are given to humans to serve them and maintain life. In this sense, humans have been given dominion over creation. Wingren writes:

It is a distinctive feature of the Biblical account of Creation that it places man and the world together The whole of the "goodness" of Creation flows to man and waits to be used by him. God's goodness is expressed in the good things of Creation, and His giving of life in the sun, the rain (Mt. v.45), plants and animals. This is only one aspect of God's work of Creation. As soon as man had been formed by the Creator, he was put in Creation to make use of the earth (Gen. II. 5 ff.). Man, that is, cannot live in obedience to God without living in the concrete relations to the world which God appointed him. Man's goodness flows out to the world, and waits the opportunity of dealing with what God has created. In this way, viz. by man's use and dominion, the goodness of the Creator is manifested to other creatures.³

Wingren understands that "the world is something good; it belongs to God and is something in which the human can move about freely and without fear" which

¹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, pp. 88-89.

is what he means by the human having dominion over creation.⁴ With this gift of dominion it is inappropriate for humans to look down upon creation as something "lower" or to have religious awe for nature. Nor are humans to live with ideologies regarding nature that are crippling and do not produce service to the neighbor. Dominion is freedom. It is the ability to live freely in God's creation without fear and in service to the neighbor. To live freely means that the human believes that all that is created comes from outside the human. And this freedom requires faith and praise in the Creator as well as service to the neighbor. Wingren states that this is the purpose of creation. He writes:

This trust which man has in God, and his consequent willingness to be at God's disposal for service to his neighbour, is the purpose of Creation, and therefore the purpose in every birth. When men neither trust in God nor display any willingness to serve their neighbour, they are under judgment.⁵

Wingren understands that the opposition to God, as manifested as envy and idolatry in the human, is a destructive force within the human heart. This, in conjunction with the forces of destruction present in the world, give the human a double aspect to his/her status in Creation. Wingren writes:

God's creation continues, in spite of men's opposition to God, and in His continuing Creation God uses men, and their opposition and unwillingness do not prevent Him from using them In part man retains a certain power over Creation, so that he is able to have a certain control over it in freedom. In part, however, he is disobedient to God's will for him in relation to his fellow men and the good which God has created. Therefore when God forces him to do His will he is brought into a relationship of compulsion and bondage to his neighbour and to the work which he is given to do on earth.⁶

⁴Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 53.

⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 94.

⁶Ibid., pp. 94-95.

3.1 THE NOMOLOGICAL EXISTENCE OF THE HUMAN

Wingren makes the claim that all life is created by God, and all life is threatened by forces of destruction in opposition to God. Therefore God must use God's law to compel and constrain in order for life to be sustained and protected. Because God is the creator of all, all of creation stands in bondage to the law. This is a universal anthropological claim describing all humans, Christian and non-Christian alike. This law directs us to service of the neighbor. Wingren explains it thus:

The world was not created once and for all, but it is being created by the God who lives today. 'To create is continually to make new' says Luther; and in another place he says, 'To create is to order'. God creates now by giving his orders through his law and demanding that duties be performed. Men stand under the law and are driven from morning to night by the law, from which all the work of this world originates, for the law points to one's neighbour, relates all my actions to my neighbour and forces me to order my life as a servant of others Luther [allies] the law with the earth and one's neighbour, and the Gospel, on the other hand, with heaven and God. The work of creation and law, are in this way, brought very close to each other. By making use of the command of the law God turns man towards his neighbour and directs what he does toward an object lying outside himself, his neighbour's welfare. All that comes into existence on earth by human labour, and upholds our life, comes from God the Creator, the Lord and Ruler in all occupations and classes of society.⁷

In this way, Wingren assigns ethical behavior to the first article of the creed and understands all good works toward the neighbor as originating from God through the law. The law is God's creative activity and is operative in all humans to promote and sustain life for all creation. In this sense Wingren can say that all humans are in bondage to the law in so far as the law compels humans to do what is necessary in order for evil to be opposed and good to be

⁷Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, pp. 141-142.

promoted. Wingren states:

What is characteristic for the work of the law is that through it evil is opposed and the good is promoted even if the individual does not freely will the good. The individual remains God's creation nonetheless. This becomes clear when we realize that, in spite of resistance, a person cannot refrain from spontaneously, and unwillingly, being drawn toward others in love and trust. The compulsion of the law therefore never implies total coercion. There remains in us enough insight into what a free person should be that we both acknowledge that our lack of freedom involves guilt, and that our true freedom lies in the gospel's picture of Jesus.⁸

In accordance with Luther's view of the law, Wingren understands that God works to create through the law in two different ways. God both compels service to the neighbor and accuses the human of his/her sinfulness.

3.1.1 The first use of the law

The first use of the law is also referred to as "the civil or political use of the law" (*usus civilis* or *usus politicus legis*).⁹ The function of the first use of the law, according to Wingren is as follows:

As soon as we begin to ask ourselves, "What does the Law do in the *world?*", we at once find that we are dealing with the first use of the Law. The Law is operative in the external world. It produces works which would not have been produced had it not demanded their performance.¹⁰

"Whenever the Law demands the performance of good works," states Wingren, "we are dealing with the first use of the Law, and of 'earthly righteousness,' to

⁸Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 58.

⁹Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 115.

¹⁰Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 149.

use Luther's phrase."¹¹ The first use of the law concerns righteousness toward our neighbor and, according to Wingren, "God's compelling law must exist if our neighbors are to get what belongs to them."¹² The civil use of the law, Wingren writes, "proceeds directly from the fact that God is *Creator*."¹³ The work of the law is operative in social institutions as well as in the hearts of humans. Wingren states:

He [God] has created the whole world, and cannot remain a passive onlooker while evil and death become firmly entrenched in the world. He sets up a barrier against the onward course of evil, and restricts its effects. Various social institutions such as the police force, the judicature, and so on, have each been given their allotted task from God. To understand the connexion between these earthly ordinances and God's continuing Creation we must try to see two things: first, it is men's evil deeds which are punished and prevented by these earthly ordinances; but second, in their actual prevention, the whole life of society is preserved. Life, which comes into being as a direct act of God, cannot continue unless God continues to create it anew each day. The defensive and protective activity of earthly government against anything which injures life, such as murder, theft, and so on, is also a life-giving and life-preserving activity. Even when it is necessary to use force to prevent injury to life, it is the Creator's force which is operative and the good of the neighbour which is being safeguarded.¹⁴

Because the needs of the neighbor change, and the forces of destruction take on new forms, the law must be mutable.¹⁵ Wingren agrees with Luther that the law must "accommodate itself to the situation."¹⁶ And furthermore, Wingren states, "if one were to use language as Luther did, one would not

¹¹Ibid., p. 153.

¹²Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 61.

¹³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 152.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁵Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 63.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 63.

identify law with the status quo, but rather set the status quo and the law against another."¹⁷ The reason for this is that sacralizing existing social orders and regarding them as fixed ordinances implies that God created once and for all and is not creating now.¹⁸ Wingren explains it thus:

God's law is God's precisely because it is changeable. If it were unchangeable it could not be God's law because it would then put an end to the proposition that God is the Creator *now*. God undertakes constantly new actions, and destruction appears in constantly new forms. The old law, the law that is in force, is a marvelous instrument for the egotist to use in accomplishing his ends. If people are clever enough and hunt long enough, they will be able to take advantage of the law for themselves (i.e. deprive others of their rights). When the God of the Decalogue creates, he exposes the hidden, "tidy" thefts and murders; he sets up new barriers against cunning and, with the help of law, gives freedom to the oppressed. But that law of God which is then positively established for the benefit of the needy also comes to be used by the forces of destruction; it, too, must be reconsidered and tested on the basis of neighborly love.¹⁹

Along with mutability, the law has another characteristic. The law is finite. In other words, "the law is *not* the instrument God uses to offer eternal life," states Wingren.²⁰ He writes:

the Law is an instrument of God only in *this* life, only here and now For since the Law is a divine work with human beings who do not freely and spontaneously will what God wills, a set of terms other than those associated with the Law is used in the Bible to describe eternal life; namely "freedom," "salvation," and "song of praise." The thought that eternal life involves man's adaption to an eternal law is one alien to scripture.

Now, this does not mean that what the Law demands should be absent from the realm of freedom and praise. On the contrary, the Law itself demands something, which, were it

¹⁷ibid., p. 63.

¹⁸ibid., pp. 63-64.

¹⁹ibid., pp. 64-65.

²⁰ibid., p. 65.

realized, would abrogate the Law as Law. That is, it demands that life be allowed to manifest itself freely, and therefore requires, paradoxically, its own disappearance.²¹

It is critical for Wingren that the first use of the law be understood as pertaining to good works, not "that those who do them shall become better."²² The human is compelled by the law to serve the neighbor in order that life may be protected and sustained and so that the goodness of creation may flow freely to all humans. But this work does not make humans righteous before God.²³ Rather all good works, regardless of who does them, benefit the earthly realm and establish human righteousness before other humans. Humans, however, do not always do willingly what the law commands. Therefore, humans stand in judgment before God. According to Wingren:

In an introductory manner, we have already talked about *humanity* as a permanent side of God's nature, according to the Creed. In the parable of the final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), the point is that whatever people may have done or left undone, they have met God in their contacts with other people. It may be that one who claims to be an atheist but considers the encounters with other people to be decisive for one's existence, stands closer to biblical faith in God than one who lightly and freely affirms the dogmas, but claims that God is entirely "transcendent." Before a purely transcendent God it would not be possible to feel the guilt about which the New Testament speaks.

Human existence has a boundary---it ceases to be at a certain point. If I stand at this boundary, without the possibility of making amends for a fault I have committed, and if I assume the guilt for this fault, then I really stand in the presence of God. And I stand there silently, without sanctimoniousness, that is, with mouth stopped (Rom. 3:19). This boundary for my life forms a part of a universal boundary for human life. . . .

²¹Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 124-125.

²²Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 164.

²³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 127.

Therefore the memories of our encounters with people, especially as we get older, are confrontations with the boundary.²⁴

The law then not only compels the human to serve the neighbor but also accuses the human heart.

3.1.2 The second use of the law

Sinfulness, or the opposition to God, has several characteristics according to Wingren. He writes, "the main aspect of sin is, of course, disobedience, which is also unbelief and lack of trust in the God who creates and commands."²⁵ Sin also manifests itself when human relationships are corrupted.²⁶ And finally sin is expressed in "clinging to the things of Creation without being capable of abandoning them for fear of losing them," in other words, idolatry.²⁷ With sin comes judgment. The compelling function of the law, besides providing service to the neighbor, also has a "hidden effect" on the human. It burdens the conscience with guilt and also addresses the human condition. In other words, "the Law" writes Wingren, "sets man before God, and puts him there as a captive and a sinner, 'without excuse.'"²⁸ The second use of the law exposes the opposition in the human heart. According to Wingren:

In general, God's continued activity means that He reveals new aspects of His existence; and this general proposition . . . is applicable also to judgment and wrath, and therefore to man's insight into his own perversity Because sin is in fact an intrusion in the life which is given in Creation; because man to a greater degree than Creation itself has fallen from his true nature; and because the work of Creation is not ended but continuous, and man is thus ordained and compelled to serve his neighbor

²⁴Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, pp. 66-67.

²⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 49.

²⁶*ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁷*ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁸*ibid.*, p. 174.

even in the midst of his rebellion, he constantly comes up against the works of God and the need of his neighbour. In this he is reminded that there is something wrong with him. If this were not the case, it would be man and not God who is the lord of Creation.²⁹

The *opus proprium* of God, the proper works of God, are creation and giving but God also chastises with God's wrath, God's *opus alienum*.³⁰ This wrath of God establishes guilt in the human *corum deo*, before God. And, "its concern," states Wingren, "is as far as possible to get rid of certain behaviour by punishing it."³¹ He writes:

The Law is not addressed only to the conscience in order to judge it *corum deo*, "inwardly." But when we say that this purely earthly punishment executes the "wrath" of God and communicates His Judgment, we are not isolating the demand for outward civil righteousness from man's self-criticism *corum deo*. The wrath which is manifested in human society may at any time compel man to call into question the whole of his existence and arouse him to hear the inward voice which shows that his whole life is lost and wasted. The Law is at work in its "spiritual use" when men acquire this conviction of the waste which they have made of their lives, even though in expressing their need men may not use the term "God" or "condemnation." For man has only one life, and his conviction that the life which he has wasted brings him back to the source of his life, to the Creator, even though he does not know His name. He is brought back only to find that the source of life is blocked. In a situation such as this in which he is forced to make idols of the things of Creation, thereby losing more and more of his freedom, man experiences the wrath of God as an objective reality. In so doing he has a foretaste of the wrath of the Last Judgment, even though he still may escape it.

. . . In the Last Judgment every man will be held accountable for the insight which God has given him into the demand which is laid upon him, and he will be judged by whether

²⁹ibid., pp. 52-53.

³⁰ibid., p., 55.

³¹ibid., p. 56.

this insight, be it great or small, has forced him to the "improvement which God has intended for him."³²

This is the meaning of the second use of the law. Wingren writes:

[it] is the use of the Law which accuses the conscience and condemns man before God. The Law *kills* and *crucifies* when it fulfills this purpose; that is to say, the Law itself 'empties' man of divine life and makes him a 'sinner.'³³

The second use of the law is referred to as the "spiritual use of the Law", *usus spiritualis legis*.³⁴ The second use of the law is connected with the proclamation of the gospel in that when the gospel is preached, the human becomes aware of his/her guilt.³⁵ According to Wingren, "the accusation is this: You should be willing, but you are unwilling."³⁶ He states:

When the Law presses upon man and compels him to do certain things, it exposes the opposition which lies in his heart. This opposition is expressed in the word of denial addressed to his neighbour by which man reveals his egocentricity, in his word of assent to his idols, and in the pain which he suffers when he is deprived of money, honour, or pleasure. By this he reveals that his heart is godless. We might say that man's conscience has a continual foretaste of the Last Judgment. The Last Judgment accuses man before God and Christ, but it does so by pointing to simple everyday occurrences in the world in which "the least of these my brethren" have been given or have not been given bread, water, and clothing (Mt xxv.31:46) Man's insight into the nature of God and His will increase, since God continues to have dealings with him. Consequently the proclamation of the Gospel or the preaching of Christ means that the man who hears the word of the Gospel becomes aware of his guilt and recognises in

³²Ibid., pp. 56-57.

³³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 128.

³⁴Ibid., p. 128.

³⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 175.

³⁶Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 72.

retrospect his terrible impurity in a way which, in comparison with any insight into guilt and Law previously held, is something quite new.³⁷

Because the primary function of the second use of the law is to accuse, Wingren devotes attention to the notion of guilt and conscience and the parts they play in the process of God's judgment. He understands the root cause of guilt as the disruption of fellowship between humans and God. The disruption of the fellowship with God is experienced in the disruption between human relationships and in the attitude humans have toward the rest of creation. All of these relationships are "perverted" when the relationship with God is destroyed.³⁸ He writes:

Guilt results when we see how something ought to be but is not. We cannot feel guilt without having an idea of how we ourselves ought to be; it is only against that background that we can see our own deviation as something evil.

. . . A person who is without consciousness of guilt, a person who never feels that correction and regret have any place in human life, that person lacks an identity In the denial of guilt we overlook the fact that we do really live at the expense of other people in our very will to live and in our efforts to expand our existence. To live at all is to live in debt to others. If we deny this fact we could destroy ourselves, for we need others just as they need us.³⁹

Wingren understands guilt and the recognition of it as a normal human phenomenon and because of this he believes that guilt is an indication of health. He states it thus:

Genuine guilt, which is anchored in our very existence, arises from the fact that none of us lives without having received and benefited from the self-denial of others. We cannot look into our own life without realizing that each of us is called to be a person from whom someone else draws the courage to live.

³⁷Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 175.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 73.

Meaninglessness results when we fail to answer this call and instead burden and spoil other lives. This sense of meaninglessness is the experience of guilt in an unarticulated form. It is the claim made by those natural expressions of life which belong to one's health but have been lost. Guilt is, therefore, health in a negative form. Formulated biblically, God's image is seeking to come to expression but is encountering opposition.⁴⁰

The conscience functions in conjunction with God's judgment. The conscience judges us *post facto*, "it cannot be expected to give us guidance in advance."⁴¹ In Wingren's words:

[the] conscience speaks about deeds already done, and it constitutes a foretaste of the rehearsal of the final judgment. If a person listens to the voice of conscience and comes under its judgment, God's final judgment already *happens*. If the person does not listen---that is if the judgment is not allowed to engulf the person---the judgment remains, and waits. When conscience is allowed to judge, it exercises a sanitizing function; therefore guilt belongs to health.⁴²

The conscience is a universal principle. It judges when the human has not benefited others.⁴³ What is distinctive about the Christian understanding of conscience is Christians believe that judgment applies to the whole person as differentiated from those notions that some qualities in the human are potentially good. The Christian claim, according to Wingren's description is that "the judgment of the total person is. . . the negative side of the Christian faith's conviction about God's gracious intervention. Where judgment rules, forgiveness rules also."⁴⁴ Another distinctively Christian interpretation of conscience is "that the meaning of all human life has already been realized."⁴⁵

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 74.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 69.

⁴²Ibid., p. 70.

⁴³Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 71.

Wingren continues:

Everywhere else people are striving for a goal not yet attained--- the messianic kingdom on earth, the classless society, nirvana, genuine existence, etc. Christian faith is offensive because it asserts that no idealized picture of human nature, no showing of will, no asceticism or decision, can bring about a result which improves upon what has already been attained, and---mark this well---attained in one who was executed and beaten, one who was thirsty, one who, to the very last drop of blood, was "given for many"---and who *thereby* was made perfect. Before this one alone the law is dumb, every accusation is silenced. It is this one who will judge all others. Every person now living must yield in his presence.⁴⁶

3.1.3 The relationship between the first and second use of the law

As the first use of the law continues to compel service to the neighbor, the second use of the law accuses the unwilling heart. In this way the two uses of the law are intertwined. To summarize the relationship between the two Wingren writes:

God requires that certain external acts be done. The point in the "first use of the law" is this: if we do not love our neighbor, we must be coerced to act outwardly as though we do. A piece of bread is just as nourishing for the hungry when it is given unwillingly as when it is given in love. . . .

When the law constrains or compels us to some action, it is not seeking to make us good. The law is a part of God's *creative* work. It aims, quite simply, at producing good exterior products, just as God does when he creates clothes, food, house and home. Nowhere in the world are workers jubilantly happy all the time. God prefers willing co-workers, but when he does not find any he takes unwilling ones. . . .

The goodness in a deed is its usefulness to others. From the point of view of the deed itself it is a matter of indifference whether it is performed by the church or by a non-Christian group. There is no good to be found on earth, regardless of who carries it out, which is not worked by the Creator.

. . . They [good works] are rather signs of the goodness of the Creator, goodness under compulsion; they are not signs of the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 71.

person's inner goodness. They are *imitations* of the spontaneous manifestations of life---mercy, love and trust which empower us even without our decision. . . .

Finally, inasmuch as they are imitations, they accuse the doer inwardly, toward the "heart." When God constrains, the accusation always lies hidden in the constraint. When the law provokes to deed, its "first use," there is enclosed within it the law's "second use," its pointing out of the absence of spontaneity.⁴⁷

In another context he writes:

At one time I am forced to look outwards to the world which is purer than I am, and which has a right to my services. At another time I am forced to look inwards to myself, but I am less pure than the world, and remain so whatever I may do. The first and second uses of the Law coincide.⁴⁸

The two uses of the law then work together to pass judgment on the human. Through the second use, the human sees the image it was created to be and yet has been corrupted. In this way the law points us to the image of Christ. For Christ is, according to Wingren, "the image of God and who can therefore make me human again (Col. 1.15; Gen. 1.26)." In this way the law and the preaching of the gospel illuminate one another. Wingren explains it thus:

The guilt which is revealed when a man hears Christ preached to him is the same as he has encountered previously in his conscience, except that it is extended and widened to include the whole of his existence. . . the second use of the law can only be fulfilled when the Gospel is preached. The realisation of his total guilt comes only when a man has glimpsed his total forgiveness. The vast extent of his old corrupted nature can be comprehended only when his new nature comes into being.⁴⁹

The actual demands of the law become revealed to humans by the preaching of

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁸Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 181.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 182-183.

the gospel. God's unrecognized demand for faith and love becomes recognizable. He writes:

these actual demands which are revealed to us by the word of the Gospel embody the rule of the Law, sin, and Creation, i.e. human birth. Anthropology cannot be dealt with independently of the Gospel, but rather man's actual situation is revealed when the Gospel is preached to him. It is then that the demands which are made upon men cease to be unrecognised, that guilt is revealed, and men reinterpret the demands made upon them and come to know that they themselves have been created by the God of whom the Gospel now speaks.⁵⁰

The preaching of the gospel points the human beyond the law and in it we see that the law is merely a means to an end.⁵¹ The content of the gospel is found in Jesus Christ, the true image of God who experienced the same human life process as we do. This is foundational to Wingren's christology.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 189.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 195.

Chapter Four

WINGREN'S CHRISTOLOGY

The biblical picture of humanity professes that humans are created in the image of God. Wingren maintains that everything that is said about the biblical picture of Adam describes our present human life. This includes the story of Adam, i.e. our disobedience and the ensuing consequences of disobedience which run contrary to God's intent for creation.¹ Wingren states it thus:

The human is the image of God; this was the intention of creation. The destruction that takes place in the human heart spoils the person and, at the same time, frustrates God's own plan.²

Jesus, who is also created in the image of God, like all humans "had to pass through all the situations of human life," including temptation, "in order to be completely human."³ What differentiates Jesus from the rest of humanity is that Jesus exhibited spontaneous life-manifestations freely, without coercion. Jesus did not frustrate God's intent for creation. Wingren writes:

When we talk about a spontaneity that empowers a person, we are talking about creation rather than law. This is a creation that gradually unfolds as spontaneous life-expressions occur. Yet it is pure creation; the constraint is lacking. The person is wholeheartedly involved in the action; indeed, it is only after one has acted that one becomes aware of what it was that moved one to action.

If this is the original, uncoerced spontaneity of creation, then Christ is the definitive reappearance of that freedom. Jesus' life is a single, complete "spontaneous life-manifestation" without anything subtracted from it, or to use the language of Hebrews, "tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:15). Before there was law there was pure creation; after the law there was

¹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 84.

once again pure creation. The law has intervened (cf. Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19).⁴

Because Jesus faced temptation and did not succumb to it, Jesus can be said to represent true humanity. According to Wingren:

When one who is tempted remains pure, then God's innermost will is revealed. Then, for the first time, true and untarnished humanity is revealed as well.⁵

To understand the true humanity of Jesus, it is critical for Wingren that Jesus' temptations be taken as real temptations, not just as the appearance of temptation. In other words when Jesus was faced with temptation, there was the real possibility of him yielding to it.⁶ In order for Jesus to save humanity, it is necessary for Jesus to actually experience what all humans experience, temptation and death.⁷ In this, Wingren claims that Christ is under the law. He writes:

As long as Christ was being tempted, He was being humiliated, and His temptations were greatest in Gethsemane and on the cross. Having come triumphantly through every temptation, He was then raised up, for then He had passed the test which Adam failed, i.e. which we fail. His exaltation means freedom from temptation and power to "help those who are tempted" (Heb. ii. 18, cf. iv. 14 ff., v.7 ff.). When the humiliation becomes transformed into exaltation, the help which He renders to the tempted then comes into all the world and the Gospel is heard in the world of the law. This gives us the opportunity to define what we mean by the title of the present chapter, "Christ under the Law." *Christ is under the law as long as he is tempted.* It is clear from what we have said above that Christ had to be tempted in order to be able to save. Otherwise he could have never reversed what happened to Adam. *This means that the humanity of Jesus is to be regarded as of enormous consequence.* But the victory

⁴Ibid., p. 77.

⁵Ibid., p. 23.

⁶Ibid., p. 84.

⁷Ibid., p. 84.

which He won in His temptations at exactly the point where Adam fell, i.e. where we ourselves fall, was attributable to the fact that in the heart of these temptations nothing less than the divine nature itself was at work. This is revealed most clearly in the crucifixion. But it is also to be seen in all the other temptations of Christ from the beginning of His ministry and the baptism in the Jordan.⁸

To be tempted, according to Wingren, "is to be under the law, to have our will in conflict with God's."⁹ Jesus was under the law but did not need the law, as does the rest of humanity, to compel obedience. Wingren explains:

in His humiliation and obedience Christ stands *under the law*. His whole life as a man was lived under the law. At every point in life we are brought up sharply against the law, and none is free from it. Man has set himself defiantly against his Creator, against the very source of his life. Creature that he is, he is compelled to depend on something beyond himself for life, and since God remains Creator in all the world, wherever he turns for protection he is directly confronted by his Creator, even though he fails to live in conformity with the will of God, i.e. to realise the image of God in himself. He clutches greedily at the gifts of God in creation, and cannot share them with his fellows. And it is down into this corrupt humanity that Christ has come. He cannot redeem man or turn him back from his erring course without being involved Himself in the same perversity, but resists it, halts it, and alters its direction To be tempted as Jesus was is to be under the law, to have our will in conflict with God's. But to be obedient in temptation does not simply mean to fulfill the law but to put to an end once and for all every situation in which the will of God opposes man. Obedience means a return to the pure and undestroyed creation. The power of the law is not the normal condition which can continue because of Christ's obedience, but the abnormal situation which is removed as a result of His obedience. It is good only for dealing with disobedience. Where obedience supervenes, the law, wrath, and judgment give way and the law is fulfilled and put to silence.¹⁰

⁸Gustaf Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 46.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

In this, Wingren can say, "Jesus' life can be said to constitute the reconquest of the created order, the halting of destruction. This is true of both his birth and his public ministry."¹¹ It is this reconquest of the created order and the halting of destruction that constitutes the gospel.

4.1 THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

According to Wingren:

The word "gospel" (*evangelion* in Greek) means "good news." The prefix *ev* (which means "good," "joyful," "beautiful") cannot be attached to any message whatever. Those toward whom the message is directed, must be relieved of something they have feared or gain something for which they have hoped as a result of the message. When that happens, the listeners have heard an evangel. The information that God is Lord of all humanity is "good news" because it means God's victory over the enemy of all humanity.¹²

The good news of God's victory over the enemy of all humanity is good news precisely because it is a specific word of hope addressed to humanity who live with ambiguity. Wingren, like Løgstrup, understands that life is ambiguous. The ambiguity of life is defined by Wingren in the following manner:

though life contains the gift of processes and manifestations which support and sustain human existence, it also contains events and manifestations which are a threat to all human life and whose whole direction is destruction. Each kind of manifestation is, however, equally real. Moreover, the two are not similar in any sense at all. It is then, according to Løgstrup, not possible for us to give a univocal interpretation of life. Against any talk of the power for good, many examples of actual cruelty can always be given---even cruelty that is adopted, successful, and never questioned.

Given what we know of life's ambiguity, it would not then appear improbable that perfect goodness without destruction or

¹¹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 81.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

the desire to hurt once existed in human form on earth, and that this very human was executed in the most cruel way. But the story of Jesus' life and death culminates in *Easter*---the story of his resurrection, the event which is the core of the Gospel. And this human being, the one who gives only life and not destruction, *lives at this very moment*, and is close to those who in faith reach out toward him. This specific word, that is, the Gospel, cannot be made probable or plausible on the basis of general human experience. It remains a word at the edge of our human existence, pointing beyond, to "another kingdom." But the Gospel does have a life-building function which it can fulfill here and now: it can support the will to live in a person who, assailed on all sides by destruction, yet deep in his soul ardently longs for life, love and hope.¹³

It is significant to note that in keeping with his understanding of creation, Wingren understands life's ambiguity as a universal human experience. Both the forces of destruction and the Creator's creating of newness and life are experienced by all people prior to the hearing of the gospel.¹⁴ Jesus entered into this world characterized by ambiguity and, according to Wingren:

He is, according to the Gospel, our "savior," because he placed himself on the side of life over against death: he healed the sick, he restored sinners, and he was resurrected on the third day. The character of salvation becomes incomprehensible if this "doubleness" of life is not a given *prior* to the Gospel.¹⁵

Faith in the goodness of life over against the forces of destruction, can be generated on the basis of general human experience. However, Wingren states, "it will always be a faith that is threatened and so cannot survive without being given support."¹⁶ It is the gospel that gives this life-support.¹⁷ In other words

¹³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 131-132.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 133-134.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 132.

the gospel gives a "specific" word, a word of life over the forces of destruction which in turn supports the will to live which is always threatened in an ambiguous world.¹⁸

Wingren understands the "will to live" as something which is "variable and shifts from time to time during a person's lifetime . . . these changing forms of the will to live . . . make it possible for the individual to go unfrightened into the new day which lies ahead."¹⁹ Jesus' activities strengthen people's will to live.²⁰ Wingren writes, "after an encounter with him [Jesus], people clearly have a new will to live, a new courage for life. This new courage for life also includes the courage to die."²¹

The gospel differs significantly from the law. The law commands and accuses. There is no freedom in the law. The gospel, however, frees and gives support to the will to live. Wingren writes, "the Gospel is Gospel by virtue of the fact that it sets itself against the law."²² The gospel sets itself against the law by annulling the judgment that the law passes on humans through Jesus' offer to forgive sins.²³ It is here where the divine nature of Christ is revealed. Wingren explains it thus:

As man Christ stands under the law. Under the law and under wrath Christ lives the life of Adam, i.e. our own human life, which means that he is tempted In his temptation He is divested of His divinity in such a way that to the end it is His dread in the presence of God which binds Him to God. But the humiliation is really a victory, for it represents the opposite of Adam's attitude. When Christ refrains from seeking to be like God, and rather

¹⁸Ibid., p. 133. See also Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, pp. 138-140.

¹⁹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 138.

²⁰Ibid., p. 138.

²¹Ibid., p. 138.

²²Gustaf Wingren, Gospel and Church, p. 98.

²³Ibid., p. 96.

empties Himself, taking the form of a servant, He in fact achieves the image of God, i.e. true humanity. When Adam---man---destroyed human life, what happened was that he wanted to become "like God" and avoid the form of a servant. In the life which He lived as a man Christ succeeded in rendering obedience, even though He had "emptied Himself." And this obedience broke the power of the law and did away with wrath. The uncorrupted life is free from the law and therefore death. But this life has been realized only in the resurrection of Christ. Humanity is to be found only in the one who rose on the third day, and if we would attain humanity we must seek it from Him.

As *God* Christ is at work in begetting and creating in others the life which they themselves do not possess. Adam did not have the power to create even in his God-appointed state of purity. Since the dominion of death and the destruction of human life arose in man's disobedience and yielding to temptation, Christ brings His creative power to bear at the critical point when He forgives sins. His divinity was to be seen in His earthly life in His forgiving men their sins. This completes the circle, for we have just defined His humanity as His submission to the law. And it is manifest that His offer to forgive sins annuls the judgment which the law passes against man. *But He began to break the power of the law even before His death, and in this we see His divine nature revealed.* Now that He is risen He continues this same divine activity among all men through the Gospel which comes from the empty grave into all the world.²⁴

The gospel, according to Wingren, is "the message of Christ's death and resurrection and the promise of the future which we ourselves approach by our death and resurrection."²⁵ Christ's future is our future: "what happened to Jesus in the resurrection on the third day is linked to what will happen to us; we will receive life through death."²⁶ Wingren also writes, "the empty tomb

²⁴Ibid., pp. 95-96.

²⁵Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, p. 137.

²⁶Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 142.

represents the struggle of faith for *total freedom* and sovereignty here on earth."²⁷ Wingren explains it thus:

This Christian freedom and sovereignty rests on the certainty that Christ is arisen and that nothing that happens can wrest from him his power over the future. In that unfolding complex of events, around which the Second Article of the Creed gathers everything, lies a key that can open up and resolve the complexities of earthly events in the present. Opposition and defeat can be interpreted through Jesus' death and resurrection as well as victories and newly won external freedoms. Faith meets nothing that is ultimately disheartening. Everything, dark experiences as well as light ones, rolls toward a future of resurrection of life.

. . . It is in *the future* that Christ now lives; it is from the future that he now speaks

Christ's arrival in the Last Judgment means that the world of work and compulsion will then at last be translated into total and unlimited freedom. And this translation and realization will take place through a Man who is coming, that is, the only Man who has hitherto won total freedom---freedom from death.²⁸

4.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL

The law works with the gospel message to carry out the work of death and resurrection. In other words, while the law and the gospel have different contents and functions, the law serves the gospel.²⁹ Wingren states, "when the law is at work that which the Gospel promises can fully be accomplished; man can die and rise again, thanks to the double action on which the law and the Gospel co-operate."³⁰

Because the world is threatened by the forces of destruction, God must use the law to continue to create. In this it can be stated that the law is opposed to

²⁷Ibid., p. 143.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 144-145.

²⁹Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, pp. 138-139.

³⁰Ibid., p. 139.

sin, the forces that destroy God's creation. As the law compels it also accuses the conscience and kills the old Adam thereby making way for the new person to rise. In Wingren's words:

Because Satan possessed the power Christ had to be put on the cross and---on the other hand---because Christ conquered and rose again there is redemption for mankind. When Christ with his death and resurrection takes the field of humanity the man of sin is choked and crucified and the new man arises and is sustained, man freed from the enemy. The Gospels describe the events of the death and the resurrection as past, offer man today the life that has in that way been won for him, and promise for the future the total downfall of Satan and the resurrection of the dead. The Gospel and faith look forward towards that which no eye hath seen.

Till the world is born anew, till then the conflict rages. So long is faith without sight. So long sin remains a power that the law must condemn and fight. A sentence that is continually cropping up in Luther's writings says that the law must be imposed upon the old Adam and discipline him, crucify him. It is important to observe at what point the law comes in alongside the Gospel. Already the Gospel has brought to us Christ's cross and resurrection and has brought us under Christ's authority. His death and resurrection are to become our death and resurrection. The law does not split up the message of the Gospel in such a way that when the law begins to speak we have two messages; rather, the law combines with it and carries out something of the work of death and resurrection, that is, it kills.³¹

According to Wingren, "the second use of the Law is therefore fulfilled when the image of Christ is proclaimed in the Gospel."³² The first use of the law forces the human to look outside of him/herself toward the world which requires his/her service. The second use of the law forces the human to look inside of him/herself and see one's failings. In this the first and second use of the law "coincide."³³ The second use of the law reveals to the human what the human is intended to be, the image in which the human is created. Wingren states,

³¹Ibid., p. 138.

³²Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 182.

³³Ibid., p. 181.

"the image of the Law points forward to Christ, who is the image of God, and who therefore can make me human again (Col. 1.15; Gen. 1.26)."³⁴ When the gospel is preached, the human realizes his/her total forgiveness and thus also recognizes his/her total guilt. Wingren writes, "the vast extent of his old corrupted nature can be comprehended only when his new nature comes into being."³⁵ In this way the law and the gospel work together even though they have two different functions. Wingren states it thus:

The very fact of Creation and the Fall has brought the work of the Law into being, but the Gospel is a new beginning which will finally destroy the reign of the Law. However it may come to men, the Law is always basically a summons to works However the Law is sharpened, it cannot as Law give new Creation or resurrection from the dead. As Law it continues to play its part in warding off sin. From the point of view of the Law, however, the preaching of the Gospel does not end at a particular point, but points beyond all that we call "Law" to the "kingdom that is not of this world."

Nevertheless, the Gospel of Christ must be preached in order that the function of the Law *coram Deo* in human society may be depicted. The Law as Law is essentially incomplete as long as the preaching of the image of Christ has failed to come to men. However precise a form a commandment may take, it can never make its accusation as particular as this human life can. It is a part of the Incarnation that in His humanity Christ can be all things to all men. All men can see their own humanity realised in Him, but also see the gulf between this true "image of God" and the image which they themselves have created in rebellion against the decree of the Creator. This is one of the reasons why the task of preaching can never be finished The Gospel proclamation of Christ is always new, for it exercises a different function in man. It reveals to each man something that is unique, and builds him up in a way that is also unique. The accusation against man consists in the fact that there is no accusation in the Gospel which is preached to him, but only a description of something that has taken place. The man who hears the Gospel is not allowed to find refuge in works, for there is no longer any need of works; but in hearing the Gospel he is brought into

³⁴Ibid., pp. 181-182.

³⁵Ibid., p. 183.

contact with a life which ends only in the kingdom that is not in this world.³⁶

The law then works with the gospel in killing the old Adam to prepare humans to hear the preaching of the good news of the gospel. In other words, the law condemns and the gospel saves. Salvation, for Wingren, means to become fully human, to become what God intends us to be. Because humans live and give in to the forces of destruction both outside and inside of themselves, they do not experience their true humanity. The law serves to produce open life manifestations that the human does not willingly do. The movement of the gospel conquers inhumanity and liberates the human from the compulsion and accusation of the law.³⁷ "To be saved is to become human; it is to be what one was created to be, to be made free," states Wingren.³⁸

4.3 JESUS' MINISTRY AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

"The whole of Jesus ministry," writes Wingren, "can be subsumed under the word *servant*---the healing of the sick, the proclamation about the coming kingdom of heaven for the poor and the hungry, the granting of forgiveness."³⁹ All of these things comprise one undivided deed: the restoration of the created order, the meeting of immediate needs provided to individuals and the pointing forward to a coming future.⁴⁰ Wingren illustrates this in the following manner:

When a man who has lost the capacity to move takes up his bed and walks, he wins back a lost capacity for movement, and then the present is filled with unexpected joy. Then, too, the man has been given a future toward which he may move---a future of

³⁶Ibid., pp. 193-194.

³⁷Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 178.

³⁸Ibid., p. 191.

³⁹Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 85.

recovered health. A rich present, an open future---all these are held together at once.⁴¹

The deeds of Jesus are signs pointing to the future. They give something now and at the same time contain promises for the future. Wingren explains it thus:

The proclamation of the gospel is directly described as a communication concerning the coming of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). This message is combined with a call to repentance. Consequently, in the proclamation of the gospel something is coming to us from without, something which we could not ourselves bring forth if it were not given. On the other hand, something is happening within us: we believe, we turn around (for repentance means a reversal of the direction in which we are moving). In precisely the same way, healing implies that something comes to us from outside, at the same time that a change is taking place in our personal well being. "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). As individuals we become healthy, and at the same time the environment in which we exist is changed through the coming of a new "kingdom."

"Kingdom" means having dominion over something. To rule is to act against an enemy (see 1 Cor. 15:24-26). Therefore the coming of a kingdom points forward toward the future, precisely as does the preaching of the gospel. Healing and proclaiming have, therefore, the same character: both give something now, and as a result of what they give now, both contain promises for the future.⁴²

Jesus' deeds have the character of being both something for the present and for the future. Furthermore, Jesus' deeds point humanity to something new. His deeds, states Wingren:

enter wholly into the present moment to heal an individual's present and specific need. Messianic acts so intentionally insignificant as those Jesus performed, do not fit what Judaism expected of a genuine Messiah. To devote hours to a single individual, to stop before a single sick person, is scandalous behavior on the part of one who presumes to bring about a new

⁴¹Ibid., p. 86.

⁴²Ibid., p. 86.

world order. But that is the way this Messiah acts---and precisely on that account he points forward to something which is entirely new.⁴³

What is new is the notion of servanthood. According to Wingren, if Jesus had "undertaken to purge society through some grandiose action, he would have been following the usual pattern of society."⁴⁴ Instead he reached into the places where people are threatened. This, according to Wingren has implications for the concept of the church. "The church's influence is most pure and genuine," he writes, "when it moves in where individuals are threatened, and where they do not get support from anyone else."⁴⁵ Wingren states:

The true fruit of the earthly deeds of Jesus are people who live as grains of wheat, and who consequently care for and support life by offering up their own. They do not give rise to great cultural products, but there will be a harvest---new grains of wheat, people willing to devote their lives to the care and support of those in need

Those who pattern their own actions after the deeds of Jesus will be identified with more than his deeds. In the pattern of action that follows Jesus' deeds there is always the example of the grain of wheat in which the doubt about the meaning of existence gradually gives way to the faith that spends itself in service to others.⁴⁶

Wingren, in following Luther's notion of vocation, understands that the work that humans do are not salvific. Our work, writes Wingren, "does *not* make man righteous before God."⁴⁷ Rather they sustain God's created world and give well-being to the neighbor. "Moreover," he states, "*all* lives lived under the Law, whether those of Christians or non-Christians, have this sustaining

⁴³Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 127-128.

effect For good deeds done in the earthly realm benefit their recipient regardless of who does them."⁴⁸ However, for those who have heard the good news of the gospel, the gospel has a "sifting effect" upon their ethical behavior. Wingren explains it thus:

The demands made upon us which we find irksome do not mean that our fellow men are good, yet God still comes to us through these demands. When, therefore, the Gospel is preached and faith comes to birth, this means that we now have a new opportunity of critically examining these demands which are made upon us, and the duty of sifting among them to determine which to accept. The freedom of the Christian from the law implies also freedom to choose between the multifarious demands made by those among whom we live.⁴⁹

Our works, our vocations, do not make humans righteous *corum deo*, they are works that make us righteous before our neighbor. All humans, states Wingren, "are involved in matters that build up the lives of others" and "we are involved in matters that destroy other people's lives."⁵⁰ When we choose to build up the lives of others, we are righteous before our neighbor and God's work of creation continues in us. There is, however, a relationship between works and faith which stems from the relationship between law and gospel. Works are done in the world of the law to sustain creation, and faith is the work of the gospel which brings salvation. According to Wingren:

When God, through the orders he has established, deals with man, he aims to save man in heaven, and he wants man to serve his neighbor. In the law which speaks in the vocations of men God compels man without the assent of his heart to serve others. Thereby the old man is crucified, the neighbor is helped, and through his cross, man himself is advanced on the way toward heaven and salvation, all by one concrete action of God. In the gospel the gate of heaven is opened, and a miracle takes place. He who enters heaven immediately descends in love, in "free

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁹Gustaf Wingren, Gospel and Church, p. 117.

⁵⁰Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 134.

bondage." He gives himself to the care of his neighbor, concerned about his well-being. Thus God carries forward his double work in a new concrete action, not now without the assent of man's heart, but with the heart through the Word and the Spirit. The freedom of faith does not dissolve vocation. On the contrary, it sustains it and gives it new life.⁵¹

What is distinctive about Wingren's understanding of the relationship between works and faith, law and gospel, is that he clearly wishes to state that all good works humans do, are in effect God's creative activity in us through the work of the law. Faith is what is received through the gospel which frees the human from the preoccupation of one's salvation to serve the neighbor. Faith, works, law and gospel are held in a dialectical tension; but if one had to apply linear logic regarding the order in which the two are given, Wingren makes the claim that law precedes the gospel just as works precede faith. The works of Jesus were those of a person who lives under the law. His works pointed us toward what it means to be fully human. When he offered the words of forgiveness of sins, he proclaimed the gospel, which is life---natural, human life.⁵² According to Wingren:

The gospel differs from the law in that it speaks primarily to the individual. It doesn't deal with our own practical contributions to the state of the world. It has something to say to me, an individual, even when I am about to die and cannot reasonably be expected to do anything at all which may be of benefit to others. A church cannot solely resolve itself into "social action" without failing the lonely, the unwanted and the dying---those who don't even have the strength left to pray or move their lips any longer. Jesus Christ, at any rate did not fail them

This is not to say that the gospel only talks about "heaven" or "paradise" and keeps quiet about life on earth. The gospel, after all, paints a picture of a person, Jesus Christ. We cannot see this picture without seeing community and fellowship. For that person never did anything solely for his own good---others were always included in his actions. He who today, through hearing and accepting the gospel, receives Christ as gift, also receives life as a gift. The gospel gives life, natural, human life.

⁵¹Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, p. 66.

⁵²Gustaf Wingren, The Flight from Creation, p. 82.

But we had this life previously too, before and irrespective of the gospel, even if it was in a perverted and damaged condition. Ethically, the gospel doesn't add anything "supernatural" to our ordinary nature. The gospel cleans up; it clarifies and gives a form---but it gives a form to something which we have already lived in, as people. This simple situation is borne out by an experience which each of us can have whether or not we are Christian. When we neglect to do something good our negligence is almost never the result of ignorance of the good. We knew but we didn't do the good. The gospel doesn't need to give any new ethical "knowledge." It is much more important that it gives us the Lord, who sacrificed his own life to offer everyone who believes the gift of daily fellowship with him.⁵³

The truly human life that is given through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, concerns itself with freedom, not with obedience to an external law.⁵⁴ Ethical behavior then, is the continuance of creation's work for service to the neighbor done in bondage to the law. The words, "forgiveness of sins," restores health and gives freedom to the believer. Wingren writes:

The gospel speaks directly to our human situation. This is the decisive point. Our betrayal of the expectations of others (that is ethical negation) destroys spontaneity, both on our part and on the part of our neighbor, and it implies ultimately the destruction of life (that is, physical negation). The ethical and the physical are not two widely separated entities. On the contrary, they are intimately connected. This is the case in each individual's self-appraisal regardless of whether or not one has religious faith. The gospel paints a picture in our day of a person who in the crucifixion stood the test; he did not withhold but gave forth, and this says to the listener also today that the crucified one lives. In his resurrection lies forgiveness; to say that he is raised is identical with saying that he restores those whom he meets in the kerygma. The ethical and the physical thus come together in the offer which the gospel makes. *The resurrection and the justification of the hearer are one.*

The one who accepts the restoration of his own life is drawn into that journey toward the future which is the heart of

⁵³Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁵⁴Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 126-127.

the new life that the gospel offers. The resurrection life, even though it is lived under the conditions of destruction here on earth and under the reign of law, means fellowship with Christ in his suffering, that is eventual death for the old world. And it means, above all, that we willingly and gladly live so that we interpret the difficulties we meet not as loss, but as signs of life and of approaching morning.⁵⁵

In conclusion, Wingren understands that the gospel does not add anything to the human which would make him or her more ethical than non-believers. Jesus' commands to love and serve the neighbor are the continuance of creation's work through the law. The gospel of Christ, however, does have political consequences. Wingren writes:

What has been said here does not mean that the gospel of Christ has no political consequences. Christ is a person and he helps people to be natural and to see what common sense requires of them. This is no new knowledge of a supernatural kind. The same clear-sightedness can come to one in a situation that is filled with hate and quarrel if, for example, a little child suddenly appears who is not full of hate and who is raised above that which the adults are fighting about. To see what is natural is difficult---one needs a helping hand, a "catalyst," to see it. But it is the natural things that one sees, that one has always known deep down. In the way the gospel picture of Christ gives us a push in the same direction as "nature," the creation. His picture compels us to *change* the conditions of our fellow men as best we can.⁵⁶

For those who have heard the gospel, there is a different "feeling about life which is created by the resurrection," writes Wingren.⁵⁷ This feeling is "characterized by the realization that the difficulties and the resistance *taste* differently than before; they taste of life, victory, gain, in spite of the fact that nothing one can point to is victory or gain."⁵⁸ This new "taste" is the taste of

⁵⁵Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, pp. 124-125.

⁵⁶Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁷Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 116.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 116.

victory over death and the powers of destruction which is the clear and specific word of the gospel. In this the gospel gives only promise and not command.

PART TWO: ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER'S FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Chapter Five

THE CONTEXT OF RUETHER'S FEMINIST THEOLOGY

As women come into conscious awareness of their social, political and economic oppression they cannot help but also look at the doctrines and practice of their religious traditions. It has been shockingly stated that the feminist movement is the "death-knell" for Christianity.¹ Behind a statement such as this, one can hear the struggling of women to reconcile their outrage from being excluded and oppressed by the Christian tradition with their earnest desire to make theological sense of their world.

As women examine the historical development of the Christian tradition they discover that for the most part it is "*history*" not "*her story*."² This tradition has been primarily shaped by a male perspective and has excluded women's experience of God and the world. Feminist theologians see the theological, historical and ecclesiastical traditions as patriarchal and hierarchical which had and continues to have negative consequences for the daily lives of women.

Patriarchy is defined as that social structure which places the male (the patriarch) as the rightful head of the household. As ruler, provider and decision-maker all those who are in his domain become his property and his responsibility. In this structure women, children and servants are seen as minors who need to be protected and preserved. As property they are considered as economic benefit for the male in charge.³ To speak of the church as being patriarchal means that the early church fashioned itself after

¹Daphne Hampson, Theology and Feminism, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 1.

²Barbara J. MacHaffie, Her Story: Women In Christian Tradition, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 1.

³Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, From Machismo to Mutuality: Woman-Man Liberation, (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 8-9.

this secular societal structure. And, as feminist theologians claim, this patriarchal structure and attitude still exists in the church today.⁴

Hierarchy pertains to the arrangement of persons or other entities in sequential fashion. When it is used in the context of feminist theology it refers both to the ecclesiastical organization of the church as well as to the value assigned to each person or entity according to where they are positioned in the sequence. The claim is that those who are first in the sequence have more value and influence than those who are located lower down in the sequence.

In her book, Women-Church,⁵ Ruether traces the development of the Christian church under the influence of a hierarchical world view. She concludes that as the Christian church developed in patriarchal and hierarchical fashion, the authority to define true doctrine resided with those at the top of the hierarchy and from there trickled down to the common Christian. Feminist theologians, such as Ruether, believe that this trickle down effect has remained intact to this day.⁶

If the very structure of the Christian tradition is based on a patriarchal hierarchy, then the assumption which follows is that those with the political power (historically men) have the "right" to control and define what is normative for the faith experience. As a consequence of this, women who are not regarded as equals in a patriarchal structure have been denied access to positions of influence in the hierarchy of the church. Women have been denied the opportunity to participate in the governance, leadership and formal theological debates in the church. Feminist theologians claim that the male prerogative of the patriarchal and hierarchical designs of church structure and

⁴Ibid., pp.10-12.

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church: Theology and Practice, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), see Chapter 8 "Ministry and Community for a People Liberated from Sexism," pp. 193-213.

doctrine have therefore systematically excluded women's experience of God and the world.⁷

With the rise of the women's movement and its accompanying critique of the patriarchal family system, as well as the exclusionary nature of political, economic, social, and ecclesiastical hierarchies, theology too has been placed under a microscope. This examination has left many women skeptical of the Christian tradition, on the one hand, and has challenged many to develop theological systems for and about women as a corrective to the exclusive nature of male-defined normatizing of the Christian tradition, on the other.

The results of this examination of the Christian tradition have been a catalyst for some feminists to declare that Christianity has no possibility of relevance for women. Mary Daly is one feminist who has examined what Christians hold to be authoritative for their faith---scriptures, traditions and dogma---and has determined that nothing is useful because it is systemically male-oriented, exclusive and oppressive for women. She writes:

The majority of those who believe themselves to be sophisticated would probably deny that taking christian myth "seriously" has had any effect on their behavior or beliefs. The fact is that the symbols of christian and prechristian patriarchy permeate Western culture and are actively promoted by Western technocracy. The messages of murderous misogyny are simultaneously superrefined and supercoarsened. Moreover, the christian church prepared the way for postchristian mental/moral dismemberment by morally coercing its members to believe the blatantly bizarre. The penalty for refusing such forced acts of "faith" was eternal damnation and hellfire. The descendants of christians. . . have been trained to believe the unbelievable⁸

⁷Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, From Machismo to Mutuality: Woman-Man Liberation, pp. 10-12.

⁸Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 89.

Daly's solution is to leave the tradition behind. She wrote in 1971, "the women's movement will present a growing threat to patriarchal religion less by attacking it than by simply leaving it behind."⁹

Other women, such as Daphne Hampson, refer to themselves as 'post-Christian'.¹⁰ They recognize that the Christian tradition had value for them in their discovery of God but they need to move beyond this tradition to create a meaningful theological system that takes women's construction of reality seriously.¹¹

There are numerous feminist theologians who struggle to retain the Christian tradition and reconcile it with women's experience. Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Roman Catholic laywoman, is perhaps one of the most prolific writers of the North American feminist theologians.¹²

Ruether did her undergraduate work at Scripps College in Claremont, California beginning in 1954. She claims:

I start my discussion of my journey in faith there because those years of undergraduate education were, for me, years of dramatic intellectual awakening. One might almost speak of them as years of conversion, from being an object to being a subject of education, years of being galvanized into a process of continual, self-motivated search for enlarged understanding, not as a means of "winning" something from others, but as a way of developing and locating myself, my own existence. Those years of education

⁹Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father: Women's Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness," in Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 57.

¹⁰Daphne Hampson and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Is there a place for Feminists in a Christian Church?," New Blackfriars (Oxford, England) 68, no. 801 (January 1987): 8.

¹¹Ibid., p. 8.

¹²William M. Ramsay, Four Modern Prophets: Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gustavo Gutierrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), pp. 73-74.

also laid a solid base of historical consciousness, of awareness of the whole Western historical experience and a methodology for expanding that awareness that continues to undergird the way I ask and answer questions.¹³

Ruether states that her personality and her introduction into Roman Catholicism are direct products of her mother's influence. Her mother and her mother's friends were products of the feminist movement of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries who Ruether claims "were an important reference group for me in my development."¹⁴ She states:

I realize that the reason my own flight into critical freedom and growth always felt so natural, so inevitable, so firmly supported by the Ground of Being that upheld me, was because of the real heritage upon which I drew was not the official patriarchal heritage, but the unofficial matriarchal one. This is the heritage of mothers and daughters who bond together to maintain the survival of the human community while the males are off killing themselves, destroying the world, and stifling the creative spirit with doctrinaire authoritarianism. For me the patriarchal heritage fell away fairly early, revealing itself to be a façade and a delusion. It is the matriarchal heritage of mothers and daughters that underlies my real life. Perhaps this is why I always instinctively think of God, not as the paternal superego but as the empowering matrix.¹⁵

In a biographical sketch of Ruether, William M. Ramsey states that Ruether's concern for justice informed her relationship with the church. He writes:

Repelled by such a lack of concern for justice on the part of the church and attracted by the thought of professors who had rejected Christianity for other meaningful understandings of life, she tended to move away from her Catholic upbringing for a little while. Nevertheless she soon came to realize that for her the

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 17-18.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 23-24. Chapter One of Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, contains an in depth autobiographical account of further influencing factors on Ruether's life.

Christian faith was what offered the best way to express the nature of human existence and our relationship to God. It was an ecumenical Christianity she adopted. She has worshipped in churches of many denominations, spoken at schools of many denominations, and now teaches at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a Methodist institution. Yet she remains a Roman Catholic.¹⁶

Ruether is an exemplary Christian feminist who uses scripture and tradition as normative material for theological claims. However, in addition to these, she uses non-canonical materials, namely, ancient Near Eastern traditional myths, Gnostic writings, sociological anthropology, biology, physics and ecological theory to critique and explain the Christian tradition.¹⁷ Her use of these extra-canonical materials is for the purpose of finding new meaning in the Christian tradition that has been codified by males. She writes:

I believe that a plurality of ecofeminist perspectives must arise from many cultural backgrounds and enter into dialogue with each other. No one person can do it all. My primary task is to speak from that broad configuration of culture that has shaped me and my context. This is a Western Christianity, which looks back to the ancient Near Eastern, Hebrew, and Greek worlds and stands in the post-Christian world of secularity. This is the context for which I feel called to take responsibility, without making any privileged truth or value claims for this culture.

. . . We need to allow "every voice to be lifted," to gather together in mutual interaction and transformation the many cultural heritages of humanity, some that have been unjustly dominant and yet do not lack precious resources, and others that have been deeply silenced and rightly claim space to flower again.¹⁸

The preponderance of Ruether's work is to bring women's voices into the theological arena and to allow women's experience to contribute to the ongoing

¹⁶William M. Ramsay, Four Modern Prophets, p. 73.

¹⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), p. 10-11.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11.

theological interpretation of human experience. She states:

Received symbols, formulas, and laws are either authenticated or not through their ability to illuminate and interpret experience. Systems of authority try to reverse this relation and make received symbols dictate what can be experienced as well as the interpretation of that which is experienced. In reality, the relation is the opposite. If a symbol does not speak authentically to experience, it becomes dead or must be altered to provide a new meaning.

The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of women's experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience. Feminist theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority.¹⁹

Along with the inclusion of women in the theological enterprise, Ruether claims that the goal of feminist theology is liberation from sexism. Ruether writes:

We have said that feminist theology must engage in a systematic reconstruction of all the religious symbols of the human-God relationship to delegitimize sexist bias and to manifest the authentic vision of redemption as a liberation from sexism.²⁰

It is this vision of redemption as liberation from sexism that provides the impetus for Ruether's work. Her writing is aimed at helping people imagine and work toward a new humanity, namely, a world without sexism. Because of this, much of her constructive theology is concerned with theological ethics, in other words, an appropriate morality for human community.

¹⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 12-13.

²⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," in Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 16.

Ruether's theological ethics must be examined against the backdrop of her claim that women's experience has been excluded in the shaping of theological interpretation. This claim shapes her understanding of how the Christian tradition has codified the understanding of God, creation, the human, sin, salvation and christology as well as the other components of Christian dogmatics. Ruether's feminist theology makes "use of the basic paradigm of Christian systematics."²¹ But she also explores the content of this paradigm with the intent to correct it in light of the inclusion of women's experience. Stated in her words, "as feminist theology systematically corrects the androcentrism of each category of Christianity, it is to be hoped that the alternative possibilities of the Christian pattern of theology for a liberation theology for women will come into focus."²² This position is important to note because it defines the area of her concern while doing Christian theology. It is her hermeneutic, the lens through which she views the traditional sources for Christian theology.

This hermeneutic is also applied to her theological ethics. Liberation as redemption from sexism is foundational to her understanding of appropriate ethical behavior. Ruether describes it thus:

The feminist religious perspective that seems, to this author, most helpful is one that draws on a liberation theology perspective. This perspective does not exclude the invoking of religious symbols from outside the biblical tradition, as well as from suppressed traditions that have been condemned as "heretical." But it draws in this larger heritage through the liberation theology perspective, rather than from a perspective that opts for one side (maternal, natural, pagan) against the other (paternal, historical, biblical). It seeks to get to the root alienation behind these dualisms, expressed in exploitative social patterns, to create a new humanity and new social relations beyond these divisions.²³

²¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 38.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 38.

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," pp. 15-16.

The project of liberation and the creation of a new humanity with new social relations is not problematic in and of itself as a legitimate focus for theological ethics. It becomes problematic when the impetus for ethical behavior is located exclusively in the second article of the Christian trinitarian creed, namely, the saving/liberating words and works of Jesus Christ. Using salvation/liberation as a starting point for Christian ethical behavior runs the risk of establishing theological ethics as works righteousness, meaning that the good works, morality, of the human are prerequisites for salvation.

The following analysis of Ruether's theology around the loci of creation, anthropology and christology will show that she does not use the law as a formal theological category. From the following analysis the reader will discover that Ruether begins and builds her theology around the theme of salvation/liberation. This starting point leads her to locate theological ethics in the gospel. Because Ruether does not use the law as a formal theological category she is dependent upon the gospel to provide both command and promise. It is this dual use of the gospel that leads to the problem of theological ethics when the law is absent or misconstrued.

Chapter Six RUETHER'S THEOLOGY OF CREATION

An underlying principle for Ruether, in developing an ecological-feminist theology of nature, is the rethinking of "the whole Western theological tradition of the hierarchical chain of being and chain of command."¹ For Ruether:

This theology must question the hierarchy of human over nonhuman nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value. It must challenge the right of the human to treat the nonhuman as private property and material wealth to be exploited. It must unmask the structures of social domination, male over female, owner over worker that mediate this domination of nonhuman nature. Finally, it must question the model of hierarchy that starts with non-material spirit (God) as the source of the chain of being and continues down to nonspiritual "matter" as the bottom of the chain of being and the most inferior, valueless, and dominated point in the chain of command.²

6.1 NATURE AS HIERARCHY AND THE "TRICKLE DOWN" EFFECT

The "trickle down" effect found in the concept of nature as hierarchy presents at least two problems for feminist theology. One resulting problem of the "trickle down" effect is the establishing of the hierarchy of humans over nature and the ensuing alienation between them. Another problematic outcome of the "trickle down" effect is the resultant devaluing of woman/women.

Ruether, in many of her works, traces with great scholarly detail the development of the Christian doctrine of creation throughout history and skillfully shows how the process of alienation from and devaluing of nature occurred.³ While it is not necessary to reproduce her scholarly work in its

¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexsim and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ Ruether's book Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, is perhaps her most comprehensive feminist exploration of the relationship between Christian doctrinal claims and nature.

entirety, it is necessary to highlight key points of Christian doctrinal development in order to review her critique of the inherent androcentric bias.

Hierarchy, according to Ruether, pertains to sequential ordering and the assigning value or worth based on one's position in the sequence. In other words that which is considered at the top or the apex of the chain has more value than that which is below. The concept "nature as hierarchy" operates under the assumption that God is at the top of the chain of being and is "Pure Spirit."⁴

The cosmology, that is, the understanding of the origins and the structure of the universe, that developed around this concept of God, describes the relationship between God and nature as emanating from God as pure Spirit and "trickling down" to the bottom, "pure matter."⁵ It begins from what is considered superior and moves down to that which is considered inferior. What is key to note in this trickling down effect is that both moral and ontological descriptions accompany the positions in the hierarchy. According to Ruether:

In between are various gradations of matter and spirit: angels, humans, animals, plants, rocks. Each level above is both morally and ontologically superior to that below it and is mandated to rule over it. God rules over the whole, and angels rule the cosmos as delegates of God. Humans, in turn, rule over the natural order.⁶

In this cosmology, "nonhuman nature can be seen as that which is beneath the human, the realm to be controlled, reduced to domination, fought against as font of chaos and regression," writes Ruether.⁷ The understanding of nature as something to be dominated has contributed to the alienation between the human and nature and has been instrumental in the devaluing of the material

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 18.

⁵Ibid., p. 18.

⁶Ibid., p. 18.

⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 75-76.

world and subsequently women. The "trickle down" effect assumes that spirit has more value than matter and that matter is somehow outside of the realm of spirit.

In tracing the origins of this assumption she examines the place of nature in the early Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies. The Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, is a precursor to the Hebrew creation story.⁸ This story emerged from earlier Sumerian world stories and, according to Ruether, all are based on the notion of "a primal Mother who is the origin of both the cosmos and the gods."⁹ This mythology centers around the cycle of death and renewal and was communal, meaning that both nature and society joined in the rituals of observing death and renewal. She writes:

In these early civilizations, this holistic world view was expressed in the public celebration of the new year's festival, wherein the whole society of humanity and nature experienced the annual death of the cosmos and its resurrection from primordial chaos. In this cult, the king, as the personification of the community, played the role of the God who dies and is reborn from the netherworld. His counterpart was a powerful feminine figure who was at once virgin and mother, wife and sister, and who rescued the dying God from the power of the underworld. The king united with her at the end of the drama to create the divine child of the new year's vegetation.¹⁰

Hebrew society and religion were forged in the presence of the neighboring Canaanite culture and assimilated the renewal festival cultic rituals from these neighbors. "But," according to Ruether, "Yahwism repressed the feminine divine

⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: And Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 15.

⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 47. See also: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 76, and Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, pp. 17-18.

role integral to this cult and began to cut loose the festival itself from its natural base in the renewal of the earth."¹¹

This occurred, Ruether notes, primarily because the Hebrews' understanding of the gift of land as their legacy, and their method of acquiring it, led them to reject the tradition of the earth cults. As Ruether claims:

They took over the old earth festivals but reinterpreted them to refer to historical events in the Sinai journey. The messianic hopes of the prophets still looked for a paradisaic renewal of earth and society, but this renewal broke the bonds of natural possibility and was projected into history as a future event.

So the pattern of death and resurrection was cut loose from organic harmonies and became instead an historical pattern of wrath and redemption.¹²

The concept of nature shifted from a womb-like image of birth, and renewal of the earth and of the gods and goddesses, to an image of the divine removed from the natural cycles. The divine is now the one who shapes chaos and orders it into the cosmos, as depicted in Genesis 1, concerning which Ruether writes:

In Hebrew thought God has been elevated above the creation he "makes." The relation of God to creation is that of an artisan shaping an object outside himself. God sends forth his "word," which calls something into being that does not partake of his nature. Nature is no longer a womb within which Gods and humans gestate.¹³

This is a shift from the Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies in which the divine was thought to be within chaos and the cosmos, not transcendent to it.¹⁴ In

¹¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine," in Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 47.

¹²Ibid., p. 48.

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 76-77.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

the Genesis 1 story God's transcendence emerges. God is now co-existent with the primordial chaos and no longer emergent from it. "In later Hebrew thought," she writes, "God is seen as sovereign over both cosmos and chaos."¹⁵ With this understanding of God as transcending both chaos and cosmos, chaos is seen as an expression of divine wrath and punishment for rebellion. She continues, "human sinfulness evokes God's chastising anger, which takes the form of subjecting his people to chaos."¹⁶ Creation is restored when obedience is restored. Ruether describes the resulting view of human's relationship with God and nature: "Creation perfected into harmonious blessedness, encompassing both abundance and just distribution of the goods of creation, is the future hope toward which God points humanity as the reward of submission to him."¹⁷

Nature, in this cosmology, is seen as something beyond human control and becomes the arena in which God acts out God's favor or disfavor upon obedient or disobedient subjects. Still at this point women and men were equal, in so far as their relationship to nature is concerned. Ruether states:

There is not a direct correlation between women and nonhuman nature because nonhuman nature is not seen as a sphere subject directly to human (male) control. Rather it is an encompassing sphere in which God acts out wrath or reward. God's covenantal relation with humanity links the human and natural communities in one creation. Nature suffers along with humanity in the ups and downs of relationship with God.¹⁸

Nature and humanity, including women, suffer together the consequences of human disobedience and likewise share in the rewards of obedience. Nature and the human remain linked to each other in this covenantal Hebraic understanding. This, however, changes radically in Greek thought. Not only does nature become separate from humans, but it becomes inferior, something

¹⁵Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 78.

to be subdued. And human consciousness becomes split and hierarchicalized by gender.¹⁹

In Plato's creation story, Timaeus, Ruether points out distinctive differences from Hebraic cosmology, stating that Plato defined the world in two realms:

the invisible, eternal realm of thought and the visible realm of corporeality. The invisible realm of thought is primal and original. In the beginning there existed alongside it the unshaped matrix of visible being which Plato calls "space" or "the nurse."²⁰

In between these realms the Creator creates by "making" things from "dead stuff" as a "cosmic artisan."²¹ She writes:

This concept of the cosmos as "made" and not "begotten" will appear in Christian theology as the primary means of distinguishing between the generation of the divine in the Trinity, and God's creation of the world. Having been "made" rather than "begotten" (gestation no longer appears, even as an option), demotes the cosmos to the status of a possessed object, and distinguishes it from the self-subsistent life of the divine.²²

This concept of the cosmos as "possessed object" and outside of the divine self effectively disconnects God's spirit from nature. God's relationship to nature is paralleled in human's relationship to nature. In the hierarchical scheme of things, the human is to dominate what is lower, in this case nature. Nature is now an object to possess and control as something alien to the human.

As Ruether continues to trace the early development of the alienation between God, humans, and nature and the subsequent splitting off of spirit from matter, she recognizes that in this alienation from nature are the origins of the devaluing of woman. This occurs in the association of women with matter. It

¹⁹Ibid., p. 78.

²⁰Ibid., p. 22.

²¹Ibid., p. 22.

²²Ibid., p. 23.

begins, according to Ruether, with the elevating of human consciousness to an equal status with God and the association of this transcendent status with the male consciousness only. She writes:

Unlike Hebrew thought, Greek philosophy raises human (male) consciousness to the same transcendent status as God, outside of and above nature. Human (male) consciousness is seen as partaking of this transcendent realm of male spirit, which is the original and eternal realm of being. The visible world and bodily existence thus become objectified as an inferior realm beneath consciousness, to be subjected to its control. Primal matter is seen as recalcitrant "stuff" that resists being shaped into form through the imposition of male ideas. The mind must struggle to subdue and order this lower matter.

Matter is also seen as the source of the moral devolution of mind. Mind entrapped in matter loses its "wings" and becomes subjected to moral chaos, that is, the passions. Thus the struggle to subdue and order matter ends finally not in the triumph of cosmos as final blessedness but in a flight of the mind from nature and body to a spiritual (disembodied) realm. Here it can live a blessed and congenial existence for eternity freed from the struggle against finitude, change, and death.²³

In Greek philosophy, exemplified by Aristotle's Politics and Plato's Timaeus, Ruether finds that matter is symbolically represented by women. In these two illustrations she believes that "the hierarchy of spirit to physical nature as male to female is made explicit."²⁴ The association with Greek males as possessing reason and women as well as lower classes or different cultures representing passions and chaos (matter which needs to be controlled) not only served to describe reality but also became normative for the ordering of society and became inculcated on the spiritual psyche. According to Ruether:

The chain of being, God-spirits-male-female-nonhuman nature-matter, is at the same time the chain of command. The direction of salvation follows the trajectory of alienation of mind from its

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward A Feminist Theology, pp. 78-79.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 79

own physical support system, objectified as "body" and "matter."²⁵

Ruether claims that the male consciousness of late antique Greco-Roman culture turned "to a world-fleeing spirituality as the dominant focus of energy."²⁶ In this a fear of the body, flesh, death and decay developed. And, as she articulates it:

Only by extricating mind from matter . . . can one prepare for the salvific escape out of the realm of corruptibility to eternal spiritual life. All that sustains physical life---sex, eating, reproduction, even sleep---comes to be seen as sustaining the realm of "death," against which a mental realm of consciousness has been abstracted as the realm of "true life." Women, as representatives of sexual reproduction and motherhood, are the bearer of death, from which male spirit must flee to "light and life." . . . Thus Gnosticism, the most extreme expression of cosmological dualism, sees physical nature as coming into existence through a fall. Its very nature is evil and its creators and rulers are demonic spirits. Nature ceases even to be the arena of divine sovereignty and becomes an antidivine sphere, grounded in ignorance and darkness. The true divinities and the world of life constitute a spiritual realm totally transcendent and alien to physical existence. As symbol of the body, sexuality, and maternity, woman represents the evil lower nature.²⁷

Ruether has shown that the splitting of the divine from nature led to the splitting of the spirit from matter and elevating spirit over matter. This, in turn led to the (male) human consciousness being elevated to god-like transcendence. The spiritual world is now that which is in harmony with the divine. The elevation of reason and its association with the spiritual world, contributed to the projection of evil unto the material world.

The material world represents death and decay and has come to be viewed as evil in itself. It represents the bondage of the fall of humanity. In patristic and

²⁵Ibid., p. 79.

²⁶Ibid., p. 79.

²⁷Ibid., p. 80.

medieval cosmology, Ruether writes, "nature . . . lies under a curse."²⁸ Nature (embodied by woman) drags down the spirit into the carnal realm and this leads to eternal damnation.²⁹ To remain in harmony with the divine, the material world must be escaped and/or controlled. All that is associated with the material world tempts the (male) human away from what is spiritual and must be subdued and dominated in the cosmic struggle to escape from evil.

As the concept of divine immanence began to be replaced with notions of divine transcendence, nature became less valued. Furthermore, as male consciousness became more identified with transcendent god-like qualities, women became less valued. Woman's consciousness was seen to be inferior to the male transcendent spirit and representative of nature, the material world, all that is below---passion, sexuality, reproduction---hence women "are bearers of death, from which male spirit must flee to 'light and life.'"³⁰ "Woman," she states, "as the cause of the fall of man and nature in the beginning,"³¹ has, along with nature, become demonized. Ruether writes:

The fall of humanity precipitated the world into bondage. The airy realm between earth and moon is filled with demonic spirits. The devil, the prince of this realm, rules over the non-human and non-Christian world. Only through the Church, mediating grace beyond nature, nature is restored to the sovereignty of God and becomes a vehicle of grace (sacrament). But this grace, controlled by the Church and beyond the present capacities of nature, is surrounded by the demonic Those who seek to probe nature's secrets do so only by making a pact with the devil.³²

The demonization of nature, in effect, justifies the domination of women.

²⁸Ibid., p. 81.

²⁹Ibid., p. 81.

³⁰Ibid., p. 80.

³¹Ibid., p. 82.

³²Ibid., p. 81.

The concept of nature as hierarchy has resulted in the alienation between humans and nature and the devaluation of women. Furthermore, according to Ruether, the concept of nature as hierarchy tends to regard the established hierarchy as fixed orders of creation. The concept of natural law tends to legitimate these fixed orders and, therefore, she opposes the notion of natural law in her understanding of creation.³³

6.2. GOD/ESS AS MATRIX³⁴

Ruether begins her understanding of God in relation to creation by returning to the ancient Near Eastern Goddess tradition. The Goddess image, in her estimation, is a clue to how these early people imaged the "source and powers of life on which they depended."³⁵ The concept of "Primal Matrix," according to Ruether, describes a womb-like image of the divine, "within which all things, Gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings, are generated."³⁶ In this concept, the divine is not transcendent or outside of nature but rather is the source of new life. Ruether describes it thus:

Here the divine is not abstracted into some other world beyond this earth but is the encompassing source of new life that

³³Ibid., p. 97.

³⁴Ruether's rationale for the words she uses for the divine is as follows: "When speaking of the understanding of the divine of the ancient Near East, I speak of Gods and Goddesses, making clear that paired male and female concepts were used. These terms are capitalized, rejecting the traditional Western usage that left them lowercase to signal that these were false deities and not the true (Judeo-Christian) God. When speaking of the divine within the Judeo-Christian tradition, I use the term God. This is understood to be a male generic form and thus inadequate to express the vision of the divine sought in this theology. It does not imply, however, that there are not usable and authentic intimations of divinity found within traditional Jewish and Christian understandings of God. Finally, when discussing fuller divinity to which this theology points, I use the term God/ess, a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one." Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 45-46.

³⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 48.

³⁶Ibid., p. 48.

surrounds the present world and assures its continuance. This is expressed in the ancient myth of the World Egg out of which all things arise.

The ancient apprehension of Goddess as Primal Matrix has never entirely disappeared from the human religious imagination, despite the superimposition of male monotheism. It survives in the metaphor of the divine as Ground of Being. Here the divine is not "up there" as abstracted ego, but beneath and around us as encompassing source of life and renewal of life; spirit and matter are not split hierarchically. That which is most basic, matter (mother, matrix), is also most powerfully imbued with the powers of life and spirit.³⁷

Ruether's understanding of God is based on this model of Primal Matrix. God is not defined in terms of transcendence and immanence, is not defined within the spirit-matter dualism, but, is the ground of being and new being. She writes:

The God/ess who is primal Matrix, the ground of being-new being, is neither stifling immanence nor rootless transcendence. Spirit and matter are not dichotomized but are inside and outside of the same thing. When we proceed to the inward depths of consciousness or probe beneath the surface of visible things to the electromagnetic field that is the ground of atomic and molecular structure, the visible disappears. Matter itself dissolves into energy. Energy, organized in patterns and relationships, is the basis for what we experience as visible things. It becomes impossible anymore to dichotomize material and spiritual energy.³⁸

In another context Ruether describes God as, "the transcendent matrix of Being that underlies and supports both our existence and our continual potential for new being."³⁹ In other words, God is identified with creation and the renewal of it, not as an outside pure spirit, but rather as the energy that is the source and continuity of actual and potential existence. This describes a God who is interrelated with creation, which provides the basis for removing the false dichotomy of spirit and matter.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 48-49.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 85-86.

³⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 9.

6.2.1 Dualism and the understanding of God

Ruether's use of the metaphor "Prime Matrix" to describe God is a corrective for the dualism she sees inherent in an androcentric understanding of God.⁴⁰

She describes dualism thus:

Fundamental to human experience is a basic sense that things are not as they should be. Self-consciousness allows humans to stand out from their environment and imagine better alternatives, in relation to which both the natural world and human society are judged as lacking The categories of good and evil are absolutized extrapolations from these more concrete experiences of negativity and preferred alternatives.

This capacity to imagine better alternatives is essential to the human capacity to invent artifacts and ways of behaving that incrementally improve daily life. But the danger of translating this capacity into absolutes is that we imagine that these absolutes actually exist, that there is an absolute good that can be set against an absolute evil, and that humans can strive to realize one side of this duality by repudiating the other.

This problem is compounded when the evil side of this polarity is identified with other people and things: with other groups of people over against our group, with women over against men, and with our bodies and the physical world over against our minds.⁴¹

These dualities of the divine over against nature, and the spirit over against the body, are based on sexual symbolism. According to Ruether:

All the basic dualities---the alienation of the mind from the body; the alienation of the subjective self from the objective world; the subjective retreat of the individual, alienated from the social community; the domination or rejection of nature by spirit---these all have roots in the apocalyptic-Platonic religious heritage of classical Christianity. But the alienation of the masculine from the

⁴⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 53.

⁴¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, pp. 115-116.

feminine is the primary sexual symbolism that sums up all these alienations. The psychic traits of intellectuality, transcendent spirit, and autonomous will that were identified with the male left the woman with the contrary traits of bodiliness, sensuality, and subjugation. Society, through the centuries, has in every way profoundly conditioned men and women to play out their lives and find their capacities within this basic antithesis.⁴²

Dualism and the domination of that which is below has resulted in an intricate structuring of the orders of creation. In effect, the patriarchal and hierarchical societal structures have been sacralized.⁴³ This, according to Ruether, is particularly seen in the naming of God in terms of male monotheism. She notes that "God is modeled after the patriarchal ruling class and is seen as addressing this class of males directly, adopting them as 'sons.'"⁴⁴ Furthermore, she states, men are God's:

representatives, the responsible partners of the covenant with him. Women as wives now become symbolically repressed as the dependent servant class. Wives, along with children and servants, represent those ruled over and owned by the patriarchal class. They relate to man as he relates to God. A symbolic hierarchy is set up: God-male-female. This hierarchical order is evident in the structure of patriarchal law in the Old Testament In the New Testament this hierarchical "order" appears as a cosmic principle. . . .⁴⁵

Ruether's use of Primal Matrix as a metaphor for God is also a corrective to the dualism of the God-cosmos division she sees in the patriarchal and hierarchical understanding of God.

⁴²Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine," p. 44.

⁴³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 10.

⁴⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 53.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 53.

6.2.2 The God-cosmos division

The God-cosmos division occurred with the uniquely Christian understanding of God creating out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*, coupled with the cosmology of later Hebrew thought of the sovereignty of God who transcends both chaos and cosmos. This synthesis is problematic, as Ruether argues, because:

Neither the Genesis nor the Platonic stories contain this dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*, since both assume some kind of chaotic "stuff" that was "there" in the beginning. In both stories God shaped this chaotic material into the cosmos. But Christian philosophical theology objected to this possibility of the eternal coexistence of "matter," since it suggests a source of being parallel to God. This challenged God's absolute sovereignty.⁴⁶

The solution then was to understand God as the creator of matter itself as well as the shaper of the cosmos. But this solution, according to Ruether, added another problem:

This doctrine leaves Christianity with an unresolved ambiguity about the ontological status of "matter." If it comes from God, then in some sense it is seen as an emanation from divine being, grounded in divine being. Yet its status as "creation" identifies it as a kind of "being" outside of God, non-divine and mortal by nature, having no self-subsistent principle of existence of its own.⁴⁷

To bridge the gap between the creator and creation while preserving the sovereignty of God, a pluralistic understanding of God, namely the Trinity, was developed. This, according to Ruether, was borrowed from the Jewish understanding of a "male monotheistic God" and was designed to:

span the divide between divine transcendence "outside" of creation and immanence or divine presence "in" creation, grounding its existence and being revealed in history, and finally bringing creation itself to transformed communion with God. The

⁴⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, p. 26.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

concepts of divine "Word" and "Spirit" perform these roles of creational, revelational, and perfecting immanence.⁴⁸

Even with this understanding of the immanence of God through the Trinity, there is still ambiguity regarding the split between God and the cosmos. Now the problem is centered around whether or not the other two persons of the Trinity are created. Ruether explains:

This was the view of Arianism. Orthodox Trinitarianism rejected this view for a belief that they are wholly divine, equal to the "Father." It also rejected suggestions of several early Christian groups that saw male and female elements in God as the symbols of divine movement from transcendence to immanence.

Yet if the Word and Spirit of God are equally male and transcendent, alongside the Father, then how are they also "within" creation? Again the Christian view seems to want to span two concepts of the divine-cosmos relation, seeing God as a totally distinct, eternal and self-subsistent Being, over against the non-divine, dependent status of created being; and yet also, in some sense seeing creation as welling up out of and being sustained in existence through the being of God.⁴⁹

In other words, according to Ruether, the Christian tradition remains ambiguous with regard to God's relationship with the cosmos. It wants to say that God is both outside and within creation yet wants to preserve the sovereignty of God which essentially splits God from creation.

The Christian cosmological synthesis of the ancient Near Eastern, Hebraic and Platonic traditions, as Ruether suggests, is fraught with ambiguities. These ambiguities have contributed to the devaluation of nature and, hence, of women. Furthermore, this cosmological synthesis has affected the Christian understanding of God by emphasizing God's transcendence at the expense of God's immanence.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 27.

6.3 THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF ALL THINGS

Returning God to creation obliterates the need to develop complex cosmological hierarchies. If God is seen as the source and continuance of all that is, then nature takes on value and no longer needs to be subordinated and dominated by the realm of embodied spirit. What is key to the valuing of nature, according to Ruether, is the recognition of the interrelatedness of all things. She writes:

Both earth science and astrophysics give us extraordinary and powerfully compelling messages about our kinship, not only with all living things on earth, but even with distant stars and galaxies. A profound spirituality would arise if we would attempt to experience this kinship and make it present in our consciousness.⁵⁰

The earth sciences have shown that our bodies are made up of elements that have circulated billions of times through other living and non-living beings in the evolution of the earth. To regard the human as separate from nature is impossible, according to scientific analysis. Furthermore, to assume an anthropocentric stance toward nature, according to Ruether, does not take into account our place in the evolution of the earth. Ruether reminds us that humans are late comers to the planet:

It took about 3.9 billion years, some eight-ninths of the earth's history, simply to generate photosynthesizing bacteria. The entire evolution of land plants and animals has taken place in the last one-ninth of earth's history. Within that history of land animals, humans occupy a fraction of time, a mere 400,000 years, or less than one-tenth of 1 percent of earth's history. . . . Clearly the anthropocentric claims to have been given "dominion" over the earth, and over all its plants and animals, appears absurd in the light of the 4,599,600,000 years in which earth got along without humans at all!⁵¹

⁵⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: And Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 48.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 45.

"Dominion" as domination, or the superiority of the higher over the lower, is no longer an appropriate way to describe the relationship with nature.

Human consciousness, which traditionally gave the (male) human transcendent spirit superiority insofar as it was likened to God, is reconfigured by Ruether as that which has continuity "with the radial energy of matter throughout the universe." Furthermore, she states:

Our intelligence is a special, intense form of this radial energy, but it is not without continuity with other forms; it is the self-conscious or "thinking dimension" of the radial energy of matter. We must respond to a "thou-ness" in all beings. This is not romanticism or an anthropomorphic animism that sees "dryads in trees," although there is truth in the animist view. The spirit in plants or animals is not anthropomorphic but biomorphic to its own forms of life. We respond not just as "I to it," but as "I to thou," to the spirit, the life energy that lies in every being in its own form of existence.⁵²

Human intelligence puts us into a relationship of responsibility with creation. It does not give us the "right" to dominate and subdue nature. Nature is human's life support system, therefore, the deep kinship between God as ground of being-new being, nature and the human must be recognized. We are radically dependent upon each other and are to be in a relationship of reverence. In order to realize this interdependence, according to Ruether, we must "convert our intelligence into an instrument that can cultivate the harmonies and balances of the ecological community and bring these to a refinement."⁵³

6.3.1 The conversion to the earth

Instead of viewing nature as linear with an ultimate end, Ruether suggests an alternative model which she refers to as conversion. "Conversion," Ruether explains, "means that we rediscover the finitude of the earth as a balance of elements, which together harmonize to support life for all parts of the

⁵²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 87.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 88.

community."⁵⁴ To begin the process of converting our intelligence toward the earth it is necessary to utilize a new form of intelligence. This involves using thought patterns other than the linear pattern. Ruether observes:

The dominant white Western male rationality has been based on linear, dichotomized thought patterns that divide reality into dualisms: one is good and the other bad, one superior, and the other inferior, one should dominate and the other should be eliminated or suppressed. The biological base of these patterns is specialization in left-brain, rational functions in a way that suppresses the right-brain, relational sense. This one-sided brain development seems more dominant in males than in females, possibly because of later verbal development in males.⁵⁵

This linear, dichotomized, left brain-specialization, is not conducive to ecological thinking, conversion to the earth. It operates on a rational system that suppresses the necessary integration of the relational, or right brain. Ruether goes so far as to say that left-brain specialization is ecologically dysfunctional. She writes:

What we must now realize is that the patterns of rationality of left-brain specialization are, in many ways, ecologically dysfunctional. Far from this rationality being the mental counterpart of "natural law," it screens out much of reality as "irrelevant" to science and reduces scientific knowledge to a narrow spectrum fitted to dominance and control. But the systems it sets up are ecologically dysfunctional because they fail to see the larger relational patterns within which particular "facts" stand. This rationality tends toward monolithic systems of use of nature. Linear thinking, for example, directs agriculture, or even decorative planting, toward long rows of the same plant. This magnifies the plants' vulnerability to disease. Humans then compensate with chemical sprays, which in turn send a ripple effect of poisons through the whole ecological system. Nature, by contrast, diffuses and intersperses plants, so that each balances and corrects the vulnerabilities of the other Ecological

⁵⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 67.

⁵⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 89.

thinking demands a different kind of rationality, one that integrates left-brain linear thought and right-brain spatial and relational thought.⁵⁶

This integrative thinking provides an alternative way of looking at the ordering of nature which essentially is more true to the way nature "orders." To convert our minds to the earth, Ruether states, "means understanding the more diffuse and relational logic of natural harmony . . . to fit human ecology into its relation to nonhuman ecology."⁵⁷

Employing new patterns of thinking is only part of the process of converting our minds to the earth. Humans also have to convert their minds to each other in order to realize their kinship with nature. According to Ruether:

Any ecological ethic must always take into account the structures of social domination and exploitation that mediate domination of nature and prevent concern for the welfare of the whole community in favor of the immediate advantage of the dominant class, race, and sex. An ecological ethic must always be an ethic of eco-justice that recognizes the interconnection of social domination and domination of nature.⁵⁸

Understanding the interrelatedness of social domination and the domination of nature is essential because nature is affected by human historical development.

6.4 THE REUNION OF HISTORY WITH NATURE

When early Christianity began to separate redemption from creation, it also separated history from nature. As Ruether points out, this occurred with the apocalyptic-Platonic cosmological synthesis⁵⁹ wherein the soul was thought to be immortal, the earth was just an evil temporary dwelling place and that

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 90.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, p. 190.

escape, or redemption, was world-fleeing and eschatological. Creation became demonized and history became the history of human redemption.⁶⁰ To continue to see history as salvific over and against nature has contradictions. History that is regarded as something moving toward a final end-point of salvation, be it by evolution or revolution, must be questioned. Ruether explains:

This concept of a final salvific end-point of history is intrinsically contrary to created existence and leads to several contradictions. Either this end-point escapes outside history altogether and ceases to provide any hope, reducing all human history to 'one damn thing after another'. Or else it leads to the mythical pursuit of a revolution that can never come. If this final salvation is identified with any particular social revolution, it tends to absolutize this revolution and hence to make it totalitarian.⁶¹

Ruether wishes to reclaim from the Hebraic covenantal tradition the fundamental component of unity between nature and human history. According to Ruether, "the Hebraic understanding of the God of Israel did not set history against nature, but rather experienced God as Lord of heaven and earth, whose power filled all aspects of their lives."⁶² The covenantal understanding is based upon God's bestowing blessings to those who are faithful to God. This faithfulness to God is expressed in obedience to God and just and right relationships with the earth and humanity. The consequence of disobedience and injustice is punishment, which is meted out both in Israel's political life as well as through nature. According to Ruether:

The struggle to restore justice in society and harmony with nature becomes a historical project that defines the fallenness and hope of humanity. For Hebrew thought there is one covenant of creation that includes nature and society. To break the covenant of creation is to create both social injustice and natural

⁶⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine," p. 48.

⁶¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 68.

⁶²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 207.

catastrophe. Whereas the restoration of the covenant of creation unites social harmony and peaceful, prosperous relations with nature. Natural disaster is no longer seen as simply a matter of capricious natural powers. It reflects social injustice. This Hebrew prophetic sense of the interconnection of harmony with nature and social justice is particularly important for the construction of an ethic of eco-justice.⁶³

In this covenantal understanding, a key component was the gift of the land. This gift of the "promised land" was dependent upon Israel's righteousness. Ruether states:

The gift of the land is not a possession that can be held apart from relation to God. If Israel "pollutes" the land with iniquity, "the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you" (Leviticus 18:28).

One of the major fruits of this Hebraic understanding of the covenantal relationship between justice and prosperity in the land is found in the sabbatical legislation.⁶⁴

Ruether understands the Jubilee laws as an important model of eco-justice. In this sabbatical legislation not only was the land consciously renewed, but unjust relationships were rectified. The importance of the Jubilee laws, according to Ruether:

lies in providing a model of redemptive eco-justice. Unlike apocalyptic models of redemption, the Jubilee vision does not promise a "once-for-all" destruction of evil. Humans will drift into unjust relations between each other, they will overwork animals and exploit land. But this drift is not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent "order." Rather, it is to be recognized as a disorder that must be corrected periodically, so that human society regains its right eco-social relationships and starts afresh.⁶⁵

⁶³Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 68.

⁶⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 211.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 213.

This periodic righting of relationships takes place within human history and nature. To speak of a covenantal relationship in our contemporary setting means that humans do not see nature as an object to be possessed but rather as a relationship of caretaking with ultimate accountability to God. Ruether describes the covenantal vision thus:

This covenantal vision recognizes that humans and other life forms are part of one family, sisters and brothers in one community of interdependence. Although we have limited rights of use of other life forms, and also responsibilities of care and protection toward them, there is an ultimate thousness at the heart of every other living being, whether it be a great mountain lion or swaying bacteria, that declares its otherness from us. The covenantal relation between humans and all other life forms, as one family united by one source of life, forbids this otherness from being translated into destructive hostility. . . . Each life form has its own purpose, its own right to exist, its own independent relationship to God and to other beings. Encompassing our relation to nature as usable things there must remain the larger sensibility, rooted in the encounter with nature as "thou," as fellow beings each with its own integrity.⁶⁶

The reunion of nature and history in a covenantal fashion also requires a realistic understanding of human finitude and the limitations of nature. The fear of death and avoidance of it is another way to alienate oneself from nature. "In nature," Ruether states, "death is not an enemy, but a friend of the life process." Furthermore, "the death side of the life cycle is an essential component of that renewal of life by which dead organisms are broken down and become the nutrients of new organic growth."⁶⁷ To be human is to change just as nature changes. She writes:

Both change and death are good. They belong to the natural limits of human life. We must seek the life intended by God for us within these limits. The return to harmony in the covenant of creation is not a matter of cyclical return to the same, for each

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 227-228.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 53.

new achievement of workable balances is different, based on new environments and technologies. It is a historical project that has to be undertaken again and again in changing circumstances. Each great social movement, such as the labor movement, leaves some needed changes undone and generates new contradictions. So it is left for a new generation to undertake again the project of a just and viable life for their times.

This concept of social change as conversion back to the center, rather than to a beginning or end-point in history, seems to me a model of change that is more in keeping with temporal existence, rather than subjecting us to the tyranny of impossible expectations. . . . We need to recover the Hebrew sense of the mortal limits of covenantal existence, rather than the apocalyptic and Greek flight from mutability.⁶⁸

Not only is the human finite, but nature too has limitations. Ruether believes it is necessary for humans in their conversion process to recognize with a covenantal vision the "laws of Gaia, which regulate what kinds of changes in 'nature' are sustainable in the life system of which we are an inextricable part."⁶⁹ Nature is historical just as humans are. It is born, it grows, it changes and dies. But always as it evolves it brings forth new possibilities.⁷⁰

An underlying principle in all of these notions---the covenantal vision, the interrelatedness and interdependence of all beings and the reuniting of nature with history---is a principle of justice, of non-alienated relationality. As Ruether describes it, God's intent for creation is:

the Shalom of God which remains the true connecting point of all our existences, even when we violate and forget it. Redemptive hope is the constant quest for that Shalom of God which holds us all together, as the operative principle of our collective lives.

⁶⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 69.

⁶⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 31. The term "Gaia" is used by Ruether to represent the planet as a "living system, behaving as a unified organism," and is a term used for the Greek Earth Goddess (p.4).

⁷⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 86.

God's Shalom is the nexus of authentic creational life that has to be reincarnated again and again in new ways and new contexts in each new generation.⁷¹

6.5 GOD'S INTENT FOR CREATION IS SHALOM AND JUSTICE

The totality of God's gifts and the fulfillment of them, shalom, is God's intent for creation. This is God's covenantal relationship with creation. But as Ruether has pointed out, these gifts are received when right relationships are established with God, with human community and with nature. Just as redemption and nature cannot be divided in the covenantal relationship, shalom and justice cannot be separated either.

Alienation from the self, from nature, and within human community is a distortion of God's intent for creation. A world of alienation and domination is a false world. To be liberated from this world is not to escape from it and be transported to a paradisaal world beyond nature and history but rather it is to reshape the world into the true world in accord with God's original intent.

Ruether states:

"this world" is *not* God's creation, and so the solution to this dilemma is not a flight from creation to "heaven," but an overthrowing of this false world which has been created out of man's [sic] self-alienation, and a restoration of the world to its proper destiny as "the place where God's will is done on earth, as it is in heaven."⁷²

The work of restoration is a striving for justice by the dismantling of systems of domination. In this sense the process of liberation from the false world of alienation and domination into the true world of God's shalom, is salvation.

⁷¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 69-70.

⁷²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power, (New York: Paulist Press), p. 9.

Ruether believes that:

We must recognize that the movement of revolt against false and oppressive worlds of "Powers and Principalities" is integral to the renewal of the world whereby creation and bodily existence become the vehicle and theophany of God's transcendent appearing; i.e., creation becomes the place for the appearance of God's *Shechinah* God's presence does not appear just in one time and place "once for all," but wherever reconciliation is established and man [sic] glimpses his [sic] unity and the unity of the world with its transcendent foundation and meaning.⁷³

When justice and righteousness are not present, God must opt for the dominated in order to "overthrow unjust relationships."⁷⁴ Ruether also states that God "opts for the poor precisely because the rich have opted against them. This is why the poor are poor."⁷⁵ Because God's Shalom requires right relationship, the liberation of the dominated is liberation for all. It is the restoration of the broken interrelatedness of creation. Ruether states:

God as liberator acts in history to liberate all through opting for the poor and the oppressed in the present system. The poor, the downcast, those who hunger and thirst, have a certain priority in God's work of redemption . . . the aim of this partiality is to create a new whole, to elevate the valleys and make the high places low, so that all may come into a new place of God's reign, when God's will is done on earth.⁷⁶

6.6 A SUMMARY OF RUETHER'S THEOLOGY OF CREATION

The prime component of Ruether's theology of creation is the dismantling of hierarchical claims and dualisms. Her theology of creation addresses the split between God and nature, spirit and matter, and history and nature (also

⁷³Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 157.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 157.

⁷⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 54.

referred to as redemption and creation). All of these dualisms are based on the same principle, namely, the hierarchical model with its moral and ontological value judgments, which results in domination and destruction. A theology of creation, or as Ruether refers to it, "eco-feminist theology" must be founded upon a principle of earth healing. She writes:

The goal of this quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, and between humans and the earth. Such healing is possible only through recognition and transformation of the way in which Western culture, enshrined in part by Christianity, has justified such domination.⁷⁷

To that end she begins by removing the false dichotomy between the transcendence and immanence of God. Instead she envisions God as Primal Matrix, the ground and source of being and new-being. The metaphor she uses to explain this is the scientific concept of energy. Energy in patterns is what we see in visible things. Matter itself dissolves into energy, hence it is impossible to split spirit from matter. God as Primal Matrix is not transcendent spirit but rather in, beneath, and around. Matter is imbued with life and spirit.

Understanding God as in, beneath, and around, gives nature value. When nature is no longer seen as merely an object to possess, but rather imbued with life and spirit, it takes on new meaning. Nature is something to be regarded with reverence. As we convert to the earth we discover the interrelatedness of all things and our kinship with nature as our life support system.

Our kinship with the earth necessitates a kinship with humanity because human society is entwined with nature. The societal systems of human domination and exploitation are interconnected with the domination and exploitation of the earth. Competition for resources for the privileged few, for example, leads to the exploitation of peoples and further exploitation of nature. Therefore to be about earth-healing we must also be about the business of dismantling systems

⁷⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing. pp. 4-5.

of domination and oppression. Ruether understands this in terms of covenantal relationship and utilizes God's covenant with Israel as a model.

To understand the full purpose of Ruether's use of the Hebraic covenant tradition it is important to unmask the split between history and nature, or in other words, the splitting off of redemption from creation. Human salvation history, in the covenantal tradition, was not a separate event from nature. Ruether writes:

This is one lived reality in time and place that is not differentiated into separate spheres of "creation" and "redemption." The God made present in historical acts of deliverance is at the same time the God who "made heaven and earth." Nor is it appropriate to say that the affirmation of redemption from Egypt precedes and is more foundational than the affirmation of God as Creator, or vice versa. Israel experienced both divine judgment and divine blessing in relation to threatening neighbors, and also in relation to storms and droughts. They praised God for deliverance from enemies and for the miracles of fertile fields and starry night skies. In contrast to Greek thought, which saw reality as moving in geometric space, Hebraic thought saw reality as "event."^{7 8}

One of Ruether's objectives in reuniting history with nature, in other words, redemption with creation, is to overcome the notion that salvation is a matter-fleeing, eschatological event. The misperception of redemption as immortality, meaning that a real and paradisaal world exists somewhere else, promotes a disregard for this world.

Another objective for reuniting history with nature, using the Hebraic covenant model, is to understand that shalom and justice go hand in hand. In this understanding God's favor or disfavor is expressed here and now, in history and with nature, and it is dependent upon just relationships within humanity and with nature. In this sense, one might say that the law and gospel, to use traditional theological terms, have been combined. God's demand for justice and right relationality goes hand in hand with the experience of God's blessings.

^{7 8}Ibid., p. 208.

God's intent for creation is the full interrelatedness of the whole. Domination breeds alienation and therefore must be overthrown. To do this God opts for those who are unjustly treated, the poor and oppressed. This preferential option for the poor is for the purpose of liberating all of creation so that right relationality is restored and God's shalom is realized.

Ruether speaks of redemption or liberation as a component of her theology of creation. Liberation and shalom, in other words, redemption, is creation. God's *shechinah* is realized in moments of liberation where just relationality is restored. Ruether does not use the concept of the law, in her doctrine of creation, as a formal theological category or as the vehicle or agent for just and right relationality. She describes God as the energy that is embued in life and claims that human intelligence and conversion to the earth is what promotes ethical behavior. Our kinship with the Divine and with nature is what motivates and assists humans in working toward just relationality. Earth healing is central to her theology of creation and this occurs through human recognition and transformation of systems of dominance.

Ruether's own summary of eco-feminist theology and her vision for the new world in which God's shalom is realized, is eloquently stated:

One might call this even a "new religion," if one understands by this the prophetic vision to shape a new world on earth, and not an alienated spirituality. A society no longer bent on "conquering the earth" might, however, also have more time for cultivation of interiority, for contemplation, for artistic work that celebrated being for its own sake. But such interiority would not be cultivated at the expense of the community, as in monastic escape from "the world." It would be a cultivation of the self that would be at one with an affirmation of others, both our immediate neighbors and all humanity and the earth itself, as that "thou" with whom "I" am in a state of reciprocal interdependence.

Such solidarity is not utopian, but eminently practical, pointing to our actual solidarity with all others and with our mother, the earth, which is the actual ground of our being. Perhaps this also demands a letting-go of that self-infinetizing view of the self that culminates in the wish for personal immortality. One accepts the fact that it is the whole, not the individual, which is that "infinite" out of whose womb we arise at birth and into whose womb we are content to return at death, using the human

capacity for consciousness, not to alienate ourselves from nature, but rather, to nurture, perfect, and renew her natural harmonies, so that the earth might be fair, not only for us and our children, but for all generations of living things yet to come.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, p. 211.

Chapter Seven

RUETHER'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Central to feminism is a re-imaged doctrine of anthropology, or, specifically, the revision of the symbology of male and female and their relation to each other. Humanity has always seen, in the division of humans into gender, male and female, a basic symbolism of the dialectics of human existence. But this symbology of humanity as male and female has primarily been done from a male point of view and has been used to ratify the subordinate or auxiliary status of the female in relation to the male.¹

Ruether's anthropology as well as her theology of creation insists on just relationality in the interrelatedness of all things, grounded in God, as the basic principle. Her concept of sin is based on broken relationality and is both personal and political. Ruether's anthropology also includes a reframing of the evil-good dichotomy as an evil-conversion dialectic. And, she understands the *imago dei* as inclusive of women and all other humans who have been excluded from the ruling-class male-normatizing tradition.

7.1 THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF ALL THINGS, GROUNDED IN GOD

Foundational to Ruether's feminist theology is the concept of the interrelatedness of all things grounded in God with just relationality. Ruether writes:

Feminist theology thus bases itself on just relationality. On this basis it seeks authentic relations between men and women, between some women and other women, between men and women of different classes and races, and between human and nonhumans. It understands God as the creator, sustainer, and renewer of the just relationality that can promote our redemptive fullness of being.

All our images of God are metaphors and projections from our human standpoint of an ultimate ground of being and new being that is beyond such images. The question is not whether there are some images that are not human projections, but

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 22.

rather what human projections promote just and loving relationality, and which projections promote injustice and diminished humanness. Our images of the God-self relation may be more than, but cannot be less than, that which promotes goodness in human relations.²

Ruether understands the human as having greater responsibility than the rest of creation in this relationality because the human has the ability to reflect upon what "is" and has insights into what "ought" to be. Implicit in this is the notion that the human is free to make appropriate ethical choices and that human sin has not obliterated the *imago dei*. According to Ruether:

Humans stand out against their environment and are able to imagine alternatives to what is. They are able to generate, mentally and culturally, ideals and projects of what might be, as something better than what is, and they can use this ideal to judge and change the existing situation. Human beings, then, stand in the existential dialectic between the "is" and the "ought." The two are interdependent.³

For Ruether, it is possible for the human to work toward just relationality. This is an ongoing process, one that is never completed because new historical situations require new work for just relationality. Furthermore, this is a present and forward-looking view. It is not one that attempts at re-creation as though the aim is to return to a paradisaical state nor is it a futuristic post-historical view. Ruether's anthropology assumes that there are elements to a just society, that humans are capable of making a just and livable society and that it is an historical project.⁴ With regard to human ethical behavior in

²Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience: The Case of *Imago Dei* and Gender Equality," in Radical Pluralism and Truth, eds. Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 103.

³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 160.

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 68-69.

creating a just a livable society, Ruether states:

What we have as finite human beings is not certainty but a certain trust in the coherence of ultimate reality and assurance that our experience is capable of being in touch with this ultimate reality. But our formulations must be constantly tested by the ethical results of the appropriated theories for our experience.

This ethical criterion can be formulated in terms of the classical Jewish version of the golden rule: Do not do to others what you do not wish others to do to you. The ethical criterion is understood here in the broadest sense in the way theories manifest themselves in just and loving relations that promote the fullness of human personhood in mutuality. On the basis of this ethical test, we need to make our way experimentally along the path to a fuller and fuller, but never final or perfect, understanding of how we should relate to one another.⁵

God is on the side of fullness of personhood, therefore in just relationality we experience God's intent for us, namely the true redemptive personhood. The human who is able to experience redemptive personhood is also able to discern what is ethically appropriate because the human is capable of conversion.

7.2 THE NATURE OF SIN

Sin and evil in Christian theology has primarily been described in human terms in so far as it is believed that only humans have the capacity to sin. Ruether describes the traditional understanding of evil as "a primordial 'event' whereby the ambiguities of human existence, such as obedience and free will, were turned to the wrong choice."⁶ And, as Ruether states:

Humanity became alienated from its authentic self, unable to rectify itself and in need of a divine redemption that was now beyond its own capacities. Redemption and hence the possibility of conversion are then presumed to have become available to humanity, as Christians, only after the redemptive work of Christ.

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience: The case of the Imago Dei and Gender Equality," p. 103.

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 159.

This construct is a symbolic one, mythologized as separate historical "events."⁷

This concept of sin is based on the assumption that the human has freedom to choose good alternatives and failure to do so constitutes a corruption of the potential self, or sin. Therefore the alternatives which may offer something better than what is already present, have a redemptive quality. A present situation which does not exhibit the potential of the good alternative is understood as "evil."

7.2.1 The good/evil dichotomy

As Ruether has pointed out in her discussion of dualism, the projection of evil on to the "other" has bifurcated the self, and alienated the self from community and nature. The Christian tradition regarding good and evil is a synthesis of the Jewish notion of human free will and Greek metaphysics.⁸ Ruether states:

Evil is located both in the freedom of the human will and its choice of disobedience against God, and in the flawed ontology of mortal being. The fusion of these two views compounded the dilemma of human entrapment in sin and evil in Christian teaching, for which humans are both culpably guilty and yet incapable of escaping through their own "natural" capacities.⁹

The Pauline-Augustinian view depicts a dualism between the spirit and the flesh. The realm of flesh is bondage to sin and death and the realm of the Spirit is available through rebirth in Christ which enables Christians to live a virtuous life and be inheritors of eternal life. It is understood that through Adam, sin has become a state that humans cannot escape. Baptism into Christ frees the human from the powers of this world granting immortality and bestows upon him/her the power to be virtuous.

⁷Ibid., p. 159.

⁸For an in depth historical analysis of the development of the Jewish, Platonic-Gnostic and Pauline-Augustinian views of good and evil see: Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, pp. 116-127.

⁹Ibid., pp. 126-127

According to Ruether, the good/evil dichotomy based on the spirit/body split has generated a confusing anthropology in the Western world. She writes, "this classical Christian understanding of sin as both ethical and metaphysical, as both disobedience and finitude, has imparted a mixed heritage to the Western world."¹⁰

The problems with the good/evil dichotomy, according to Ruether, are as follows. First is the notion that human mortality is a consequence of human sin. Ruether believes that this has "laid upon Christians an untenable burden of guilt."¹¹ Another problem is that of an earth-fleeing ethic derived from the notion that mortal life is evil as she claims:

The separations of the holy from the unholy, the spiritual from the carnal, and immortal from mortal life have also mandated phobic relations to the death side of the life cycle, to decay, dead bodies, and the life fluids of sex and reproduction. These phobic patterns have been used to structure social apartheid along gender and ethnic lines.¹²

Finally, another problem with the good/evil dichotomy is the negation of women.

7.2.2 The association of women with sin

"Some feminists," according to Ruether, "feel that the good-evil dichotomy is not one that feminists should accept."¹³ She explains:

It is the underlying "error" of patriarchal thinking that the dialectics of human existence---male/female, body/consciousness, human/nonhuman nature---are turned into good-evil dualisms. Moreover, these dualisms of the polarities of human existence

¹⁰Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹Ibid., p. 139.

¹²Ibid., p. 140.

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 160.

scapegoat the "evil" side as "female." Sexism is the underlying social foundation of the good-evil dichotomy.¹⁴

The good-evil dichotomy lends itself to an "us against them" mentality, or a subject-object understanding of relationality. Inherent in this is the belief that if the dominant person or group can suppress or even eradicate the "other" then evil will also be eradicated. This distorted view of the self in relation to the other has expressed itself in the dualism of male superiority and female inferiority and the identification of women with evil.

According to Ruether the Greek story of Pandora and the Hebrew myth of Eve are two primary myths in the Western culture which have scapegoated women as the cause of evil.¹⁵ The Hebrew story of Eve, in the early Rabbinical writings, was not interpreted as describing the basis of the origins of evil. Ruether states:

For Judaism, the primary myth of evil lies in the story of God's election of Israel and its subsequent apostasy from God by seeking idols. It is this drama of good and evil, and not the Eve story, that shapes Hebrew thought.¹⁶

It was the Pauline dualism of the Old Adam and the New Adam that utilized the Eve story as the basis of the etiology of evil. Ruether claims in the post-Pauline writings, exemplified by 1 Timothy, "Eve's secondary position in creation and primacy in sin are used to justify the resubjugation of women in the Christian church."¹⁷

As Paul's theology was developed by early Christian theologians the

¹⁴ibid., p. 160.

¹⁵ibid., p. 166.

¹⁶ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷ibid., p. 167.

scapegoating of women for sin became more explicitly stated. Ruether writes:

Pauline theology, as it came to be interpreted by Augustine and his successors, saw the Adamic fall as obliterating human freedom to choose good. Humans become alienated from their own good human potential, which must be given back to them as a gift through the Crucifixion of Christ. Thus, the scapegoating of Eve as the cause of the fall of Adam makes all women, as her daughters, guilty for the radical impotence of "man" in the face of evil, which is paid for only by the death of Christ!¹⁸

In Christian theology, the story of Eve served to justify the inferiority of women based on Eve succumbing first to temptation, thereby indicating woman as being the weaker sex. And the story of Eve has located the cause of evil in woman/women. Ruether writes:

Traditional Christianity adopted this reading of the Fall story, in which Eve was the primary guilty partner in causing historic evil in the world. While Adam went along with her almost as an act of noblesse oblige, he was relatively innocent of any responsibility. Woman's subordinate status, therefore, not only reflects her original inferior nature but also is a just punishment for her guilt in causing evil to come into the world, thereby leading to the death of Christ. Far from saving her, the death of Christ only deepens her guilt, while it absolves the male of his fault and allows him to represent the male savior.¹⁹

This scapegoating of women continued on through the Reformation, manifested itself in the witch-craze and has continued in various forms to the present.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Western Tradition and Violence Against Women," in Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), pp. 32-33.

²⁰ For a more in depth discussion regarding the present forms of the abuse of women see: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 170-178. See also, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Western Tradition and Violence Against Women," in Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique, pp. 31-40. For a more detailed account of the persecution of women as witches see: Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, chapter 4. See also, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Bury the Crucible, Shatter the Self-Inflicted Spell," National Catholic Reporter, (March 17, 1989): 33.

Ruether offers the following explanation for the perpetuation of this scapegoating:

Because women are in fact not inferior, but full human persons of equivalent capacities upon whom all males, as children, were once dependent, the task of suppressing women into dependence on males is a never-ending struggle. It is not a "coup" accomplished once upon a time in some mysterious victory of patriarchy at the dawn of history. It must be reiterated generation after generation, by repeating the myths of woman's original sin to the young, both male and female, and by reinforcing laws and structures that marginalize women from power roles in society. Even then the task is not accomplished. Wives show an alarming lack of submission, and irrepressible tendency to assert shreds of autonomy and resistance. The whole range of coercive techniques, from brute force to contempt and ridicule to artful blandishments, is necessary to keep her in her "place." Religion is relied upon as both the foundation and the daily aid in the project.²¹

Ruether's historical analysis has shown that the hierarchicalizing of spirit over body, symbolized by masculine over feminine, has led to the projection of evil onto the material world, hence woman. This dualistic thinking has also associated finitude, mortality, death with evil and as a consequence of sin. In this scheme salvation is the striving for the eradication of evil in this world and the ultimate victory, life eternal, in the next. This dualistic understanding has led to the alienation of the self from the self, the self from community and the self from the world.

Dualistic thinking has also created contradictions for the human in that evil is regarded both a metaphysical reality as well as an act of willful disobedience by the free human. Therefore, on the one hand humans are not responsible for evil and on the other hand, humans are culpable. Their own mortality is the result of the sin of disobedience. This contradiction has contributed to the scapegoating phenomenon in which the fallen nature of the human is projected onto "the other" and that object is seen to embody evil and must be subdued

²¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 169-170.

and even eliminated. This is exemplified by the use of the story of Eve to justify the inferiority of woman both because of her weakness and susceptibility to temptation, and as punishment for introducing evil into the world.

7.2.3. Ruether's understanding of sin

As a corrective to the dualistic thinking she finds evident in the traditional Christian concept of sin, Ruether presents an alternative view. For Ruether, sin is not just a private spiritualized notion of one's distorted personal relationship with God. Rather it encompasses both the personal as well as the social and political realm. Ruether writes:

It would seem, however, that feminism presumes a radical concept of "sin." It claims that a most basic expression of human community, the I-Thou relation as the relationship of men and women, has been distorted throughout all known history into an oppressive relationship that has victimized one-half of the human race and turned the other half into tyrants. The primary alienation and distortion of human relationality is reflected in all dimensions of alienation: from one's self as body, from the other as different from oneself, from nonhuman nature, and from God/ess. Feminism continues, in a new form, the basic Christian perception that sin, as perversion of good potential into evil, is not simply individual but refers to a fallen state of humanity, historically. Feminism's own claim to stand in judgment on patriarchy as evil means it cannot avoid the question of the capacity of humanity for sin.

The difficulty in analyzing the validity of the concept of good and evil is in the distortion of this dichotomy into a ratification of evil itself. If, as we have said, it is generic to human nature to stand out against its environment and to imagine alternative images of the authentic and good self, then the very concept of evil and good is generated as the extreme polarities of this perception of an inadequate present over better possibilities. Human capacity to imagine and create is rooted in this ability to project alternatives.²²

²²Ibid., p. 161.

As aforementioned, it is in the polarizing of these alternatives and the naming of "the other" as inferior or evil, that is problematic. In this false naming of evil, relationality is distorted. Ruether states:

Feminists, in rejecting this kind of naming of evil, are at the same time suggesting that evil does exist, precisely in this false naming, projection, and exploitation. This very process of false naming and exploitation constitutes the fundamental distortion and corruption of human relationality. Evil comes about precisely by the distortion of the self-other relationship into the good-evil, superior-inferior dualism. The good potential of human nature then is to be sought primarily in conversion to relationality. This means a *metanoia*, or "change of mind," in which the dialectics of human existence are converted from opposites into mutual interdependence.²³

Because sin is the distortion of relationality and sexism is distorted relationality, Ruether and other feminists can say that sexism is sin. This by no means makes the claim that males, as the designers, perpetuators and perpetrators of sexism are solely responsible for sin. Ruether reminds us that "both males and females, as human persons, have the capacity to do evil."²⁴ She does state, however:

historically . . . women, as well as subjugated men, have not had the same *opportunities* to do so. The monopolization of power and privilege by ruling-class males also means a monopolization of the opportunities for evil. This means not only that men have been the primary decision makers of human history but also that the very modes of relationship set up by this monopoly of power and privilege create violent and oppressive ways of pursuing the "good ends" envisioned by this male ruling class.

This does not mean that women and subjugated men are not also capable of evil, but their opportunities to do evil have been generally limited to the subsystem relationships within this overall monopoly of power and privilege by the male ruling class. Women sin by cooperating in their own subjugation, by lateral violence to other women who seek emancipation, and by oppressing groups of people such as children and domestic

²³Ibid., p. 163.

²⁴Ibid., p. 180.

servants under their control. Women can be racist, classist, self-hating, manipulative toward dominant males, dominating toward children. But these forms of female evil cooperate with and help to perpetuate an overall system of distorted humanity in which ruling-class males are the apex. Thus women, or other oppressed groups, are not wrong when they claim that while we are all capable of evil we have not all been, in the same way, equally responsible for it.²⁵

In this way the sin of the individual and social evil are connected. Ruether believes that all evil is relational because all sins, even personal sins, "take place in a systemic, historical, and social context."²⁶ The systemic and historical nature of sin is a mixture of both personal responsibility for establishing the system and the transcendent nature that the system takes on when it becomes larger than individuals. Ruether explains:

The system transcends us as individuals in space and time. It forms an organizational structure of society and social ideology, which is itself the product of many centuries and generations. This system is so much larger than any individual that one could easily imagine oneself totally helpless, the captive of demonic powers beyond one's control. Yet this system is the creation of humans, not of God or fallen angels. We made it. We perpetuate it by our cooperation with it. Without our many-sided cooperation with it, it could not continue to stand. Thus, in spite of the reality of systemic evil which we inherit, which has already biased us before we can choose, we have not lost our capacity to choose good rather than evil, and hence our capacity for responsibility. We can unmask sexism as sin. We can disaffiliate with it. We can begin to shape at least our personal identity and then our more immediate relationships with others in a new way.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., pp. 180-181.

²⁶Ibid., p. 181.

²⁷Ibid., p. 182.

Ruether has claimed that sexism is "the root sin upon which the crimes of history have been constructed."²⁸ She has determined that sexual dualism has been operative in the soul/body split which has resulted in the alienation between the self with the self, with community, and with nature. Besides the domination of the "other" there have been other ramifications of this soul/body split with regard to the understanding of sin that Ruether's feminist understanding wishes to address.

One of these is the association of finitude with evil or sin. Ruether writes:

The reconstruction of the ethical tradition must begin by a clear separation of the questions of finitude from those of sin. Finitude is not our fault, nor is escape from it within our capacities. Mature spirituality frees us from ego-clinging for acceptance of the life processes of which we are inescapably a part. Within the bounds of finitude and mortality, there is certainly much missed plenitude that is outside our control or decision-making; that is tragic, but not "sin."²⁹

She goes on to say that sin belongs to the "sphere of human freedom where we have the possibility of enhancing life or stifling it."³⁰ It is the human misuse of freedom in the domination and exploitation of "the other" that is the real issue of sin.

Ruether's own words best conclude her understanding of sin:

Sin, then, as that sort of evil for which we must hold ourselves accountable, lies in distortion of relationship, the absolutizing of the rights to life and power of one side of a relation against the other parts with which it is, in fact, interdependent. It lies further in the insistent perseverance in the resultant cycle of violence, the refusal to empathize with the victimized underside of such power,

²⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sexism, Religion, and the Social and Spiritual Liberation of Women Today," in Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy, ed. Carol C. Gould (Totowa N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 121.

²⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 141.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 141.

and the erection of systems of control and cultures of deceit to maintain and justify such unjust power.³¹

The discussion of just relationality in the interconnectedness of all things grounded in God portrays Ruether's understanding of the intent for creation and for the human who is interdependent with creation. Her notion of sin is that of alienation and broken relationality based on a system of domination and exploitation. Ruether understands the human as having the capacity to rectify this perpetuation of evil/sin by disaffiliating with the false naming of what is good, those things which in actuality promote the personal and systemic preservation of hierarchical privileges. In other words humans are capable of converting toward just relationality. Conversion is the basis for appropriate ethical behavior.

7.2.4 Evil and conversion

Ruether believes that traditional Christianity has separated evil from conversion as two separate historical events. She finds this separation problematic in that it does not accurately describe human experience. She writes:

Consciousness of evil, in fact, originates in the process of conversion itself. To locate and identify certain realities as "evil" means to already have taken the fundamental existential turn of disaffiliating oneself from them. The way in which one situates the ideal or good potential self over against evil, then, generates a certain description of the etiology of evil. One constructs stories of "how evil began," whether it is Eve's "tempting" of Adam through the serpent or the crushing of matriarchy by patriarchy. This does not mean that evil has no objective historical reality. It simply means that we can't lose sight of the fact that the center of the drama is the human person situating itself in opposition to perceived falsifications of its own being in the name of a transcendent possibility of a good self.³²

³¹Ibid., p. 142.

³²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 159.

In the same vein, Ruether discusses the relationship between liberation, grace and self-judgment. Liberation begins with the transcendent possibility of a good self. Ruether explains:

Liberation begins in grace and moves from this foundation in grace to the possibility of self-judgment and repentance. Liberation is not a fruit or reward of repentance, so much as it is the ground and possibility of repentance. Liberation begins in a gratuitous mystery of freedom that happens within our situation, yet beyond the capacities of the alienated situation itself [sic]. It is experienced as a free gift "from above." It is only in that gratuitous and transcendent mystery of freedom, that dawns upon us without our "deserving" it, and before we have articulated our need for it, that we find ourselves able to enter into this articulation and transformation. Repentance then is simply the power to disaffiliate our identity from the false and oppressive power systems of fallen reality. But the gift of liberation, although alien and transcendent to the situation of sin, is not alien to "our natures," but springs from the same "ground" as man's [sic] original foundation. So it is not properly seen as "supernatural," but as a restoration of man [sic] to his [sic] true self, and a reintegration of creation with its true destiny as "God's Kingdom."³³

In other words, Ruether understands the human as grounded in God the primal matrix. And in this grounding, the human experiences grace (the potential for true self) which leads to the ability to disaffiliate with the fallen systems of false reality (repentance) and in turn is restored to the true self (liberated) and a reintegration of creation (interconnectedness with just relationality) which is all of creation's true destiny.

Evil, then is found in the turning away from the true destiny of creation. Ruether explains it thus:

The explanation of evil is never really comprehensible in terms of the proper foundations of Being, for evil is always the improper, the inauthentic, the spurious. It is founded in the inexplicable and groundless turning of man [sic] from the true foundations of his

³³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power, p. 9.

[sic] nature, and, through man [sic], the fall of all creation. Evil then cannot be said to be natural to man [sic] or nature. Man's [sic] true nature is that nature given him [sic] by God as the proper intention of his [sic] being, and which is always and everywhere "very good." Evil then is essentially a violation of man's [sic] true nature. Thus we can say that evil is rooted in that which does violence, in the deepest and most profound sense, to the proper foundations of man's [sic] being and, through him [sic], all things.³⁴

Here Ruether states that humans' true nature is that given to humans by God and that sin is a violation of that nature. To turn away from sin is to disaffiliate with the fallen systems of reality. The ability to turn away from these fallen systems is given in moments of liberation/grace when one experiences one's true potential. This activity of turning away from sin and turning toward just relationality, conversion, does not take place in the arena of the law but rather in the arena of grace. It is God's gracious acts that stimulate repentance and conversion in the human and hence motivates the human toward appropriate ethical behavior.

7.3 IMAGO DEI AS GENDER INCLUSIVE

Ruether believes that "the key feminist anthropological question is not how gender relates to the image of God, but rather how gender relates to humanness."³⁵

7.3.1 The exclusion of women from *imago dei*

Hierarchicalization and gender differentiation has been associated with the falling away from true, or original humanity. Original humanity as immortal

³⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, " 'Love Your Enemies' as Rebellion: A New New Testament Basis for Nonviolence," Fellowship (July 1970): 8.

³⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience: The Case of Imago Dei and Gender Equality," p. 102.

spirit "falls" into bodiliness.³⁶ Bodiliness is the source of sin and true humanity can only be realized once the spirit, or soul, is set free from the body. Since male consciousness was identified with the spiritual realm, the higher part of the self, and the female was associated with the bodily realm, the lower part of the self, she cannot fully represent the image of God.³⁷ Ruether states:

This ambiguous structure of Christian anthropology expresses what today might be called a 'case of projection.' Males, as the monopolizers of theological self-definition, project onto women their own rejection of their 'lower selves.'³⁸

The ambiguity found in Christian theological anthropology stems from this dualistic understanding of humanity. She writes:

Christian theological anthropology recognizes a dual structure in its understanding of humanity. This dual structure differentiates the essence from the existence of humanity. What humanity is potentially and authentically is not the same as what humanity has been historically. Historically, human nature is fallen, distorted, and sinful. Its original and authentic nature and potential have become obscured. The *imago dei*, or image of God, represents this authentic humanity united with God.

. . . . When we examine the theological tradition we see an ambiguity in the way *imago dei*/sin has been correlated with maleness and femaleness. On the one hand, deeply rooted in Christian thought is an affirmation of the equivalence of maleness and femaleness in the image of God. This has never been denied, but it has tended to become obscured by a second tendency to correlate femaleness with the lower part of human nature in a hierarchical scheme of mind over body, reason over passions. Since this lower part of the self is seen as the source of sin---the falling away of the body from its original unity with the mind and hence into sin and death---femaleness also becomes linked with the sin-prone part of the self.

³⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics," in, Image of God and Gender Models: In Judaeo-Christian Tradition, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), p. 264.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 264.

³⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 94.

. . . Women, although equivalent in the image of God, nevertheless symbolize the lower self, representing this in their physical, sexual nature. This notion that woman in her physical, sexual nature, not only symbolizes but incarnates lower human nature and tendency to sin seldom fails to revert to the theological definition of woman's equivalence in the image of God. Woman in her essential nature is seen as having less of the higher spiritual nature and more of the lower physical nature. She is an "inferior mix" and, as such, is by nature non-normative and under subjugation As an "inferior mix," woman can never as fully represent the image of God as man, who is seen as representing the rational and spiritual part of the self.³⁹

While Christianity has never completely denied the inclusion of women in the *imago dei*, Ruether points out that the hierarchical model has indeed excluded woman in her femininity from participating in the image of God. As women become more male-like, in other words, escape from their bodies, they can participate in the original androgynous humanity.

In summary, Ruether has described the patriarchal notion of the *imago dei* as being the original state of the human before the "fall" into sin. Originally this image was used to describe the human (male) relationship to creation as one who has the right as "lord" over it. In subsequent theological development, the image of God began to be understood as a subject-subject relationship (*analogia relationis*) between God and humans and reflects authentic humanity in communion with God.⁴⁰ While women have not been denied participation in the *imago dei* Ruether has pointed out, however, that as "inferior mix" they cannot as fully as males, represent the image of God and experience the same communion as males.

7.3.2 *Imago dei* as full redeemed personhood

As a corrective to exclusionary models of *imago dei* Ruether believes it is imperative to address the inclusion of women in *imago dei* as foundational to

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

⁴⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics," pp. 271 and 274.

an egalitarian anthropology. Ruether's understanding of *imago dei* is developed out of a creative synthesis between two anthropological claims, namely, the rationalist unitary view and the romantic dualist view.⁴¹ From the rationalist unitary view she wishes to preserve the importance of understanding the equality of men and women in both the public life and in the home. From the romantic dualist view she wishes to preserve the characteristics of altruism and service. Therefore she opts for full psychic integration without labeling human characteristics as "masculine" or "feminine." According to Ruether, "recovering our full psychic potential beyond gender stereotypes thus opens up an ongoing vision of transformed, redeemed, or converted persons and society, no longer alienated from self, from others, from the body, from the cosmos, from the Divine."⁴²

Ultimately, she believes, "we need to affirm . . . that all humans possess a full and equivalent human nature and personhood, *as male and female*."⁴³ The *imago dei* which provides humanity with its authentic ground, is full redeemed personhood.

7.4 A SUMMARY OF RUETHER'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Ruether writes:

A feminist construction of theology starts with the feminist question of a just and truthful anthropology. It asks how can women situate their experience of their full and autonomous personhood in relation to men, society, and God in a way that does justice to this experience.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 276-277.

⁴²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 114.

⁴³Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience: The Case of Imago Dei and Gender Equality," p. 102.

In so doing, women must question the hierarchical tradition based upon spirit/body dualism wherein what is rational is good and what is physical is evil. Included in this false dualism is the notion that human finitude is a result of sin which leads to post-historical redemption and a body-fleeing ethic. And the conflicted message of evil as both a metaphysical reality as well as a result of human disobedience must be re-examined. Women must also question the projection of evil onto bodiliness, or "the other" in the hierarchical model which has scapegoated them for evil and has made them the objects of subjugation and exploitation. Furthermore, women must refuse to accept the myth of Eve as the basis for the etiology of evil.

Likewise, women must be suspicious of the model of complementarity which can either continue to foster the male-female hierarchy or result in a new dualism of female superiority. The complementary model describes the association of religion with femininity. Ruether writes, "since the eighteenth century [the] hierarchical model has gradually been transmuted into a complementary one."⁴⁵ Both religion and femininity are expressions of "nonrational spirituality, emotional nurturance, and an ethical stance of altruism and self-sacrifice."⁴⁶ This is a new dualism which understands the complementary nature of opposites, the masculine and the feminine. The notion of complementarity is useful for the encouragement of altruism and service but must not perpetuate the labeling of traits as "masculine" or "feminine."

Ruether's feminist anthropology also concerns itself with the false dichotomy of evil and good which leads to the conception of sin and redemption as two separate events. Rather, it is more appropriate to understand evil in a dialectical relationship with conversion. Her understanding of the human is that the human is free to convert to just relationality and the interconnectedness of all things, which is God's intent for creation. For Ruether, sin is the brokenness of relationality which leads to alienation. It is both personal in the alienation of the self from the self, but is also systemic in that the alienation from the self leads to alienation from community and from the earth. Systems of

⁴⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 23.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 23.

domination, created and perpetuated by humans, therefore are also sinful and distort full and redeemed personhood.

Grace is the starting point for Ruether's anthropology. It is out of the moments of grace, when we are reminded of our true selves, that the possibility of repentance or conversion occurs. While liberation, or redemption, is not the reward for repentance, it is the ground and possibility of repentance and springs forth from the ground of our being and restores us to our true self. Repentance is found in the disaffiliation with the false and oppressive systems of "fallen" reality. It is "fallen" in that it does not reflect the true intention of God for a redeemed creation. In all of this *imago dei* is not obliterated but rather distorted, and can be glimpsed in history.

The *imago dei*, as the fullness of redeemed humanity, is inclusive of both men and women as fully male and female. In working toward a feminist anthropology Ruether believes that humans should all seek wholesome psychic integration as a more accurate reflection of the image of God. While this is possible in the present, Ruether reminds us:

The fullness of redeemed humanity, as image of God, is something only partially disclosed under the conditions of history. We seek it as a future self and world, still not fully achieved, still not fully revealed. But we also discover it as our true self and world, the foundation and ground of our being. When we experience glimpses of it, we recognize not an alien self but our own authentic self. We experience such glimpses through encounters with other persons whose own authenticity discloses the meaning of such personhood. By holding the memory of such persons in our hearts and minds, we are able to recognize authenticity in ourselves and others.

The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is one such memory, one such paradigm. It is no less paradigmatic when we recognize that it is partial and needs to be joined by other models, other memories, particularly those that disclose the journey to redemptive personhood from women's experience. Thus the question of anthropology leads us, theologically, to the problem of Christology.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 114-115.

It is clear that Ruether does not use the theological terminology of law in her anthropology. Rather she uses the terms 'just relationality' and 'interrelatedness' as God's intent for creation. While she does not want to say the image of God is obliterated by sin, namely, unjust relationality, she does refer to *imago dei* as the fullness of redeemed personhood. This terminology implies a restoration to full personhood which occurs in moments of liberation. Furthermore, conversion and wholesome psychic integration are the avenues by which full, redeemed personhood is glimpsed. The discovery of our full redeemed personhood is revealed to us through paradigmatic humans, those who are authentically human. Thus, for example, the person of Jesus reveals authentic personhood, thereby enabling us to glimpse at our own redemptive personhood. In this way it is the gospel that reveals to us the mandate for ethical behavior, in other words, just relationality with the self and with all creation.

Chapter Eight

RUETHER'S CHRISTOLOGY

Christology is the doctrine that should sum up our hopes for a redeemed humanity. In Christ one should see both a paradigm and an empowerment to create this redeemed humanity. Yet, ironically, Christology has become the doctrine of the Christian tradition most used against women. The maleness of Jesus is used to suggest that men alone can represent Christ in the priesthood. Women are redeemed by but, somehow, cannot image Christ. This translation of Christology into a ratification of male domination comes about through the transposition of the reality of Christ from the future that is in the process of being revealed to a cosmological doctrine of the great chain of being. The Logos or Word of God is seen as the rule of this top-down cosmology. Males, in turn, are seen as expressing, in the human order the domination of spirit over nature, mind over body.¹

Orthodox christology, the doctrine of Christ as established by the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), has its roots in both the messianic tradition and in the wisdom tradition. The synthesis of these traditions, according to Ruether, as well as the repudiation of some of the original elements in both of these traditions have been instrumental in the patriarchalization of christology.²

8.1 THE PATRIARCHALIZATION OF CHRISTOLOGY

Ruether's historical analysis of the complex development of orthodox christology reveals that the Hebraic understanding of both messianic hope and the messianic message of Jesus regarding the kingdom of God have been reinterpreted "in inward and personal ways that [has] little resemblance to what the Jewish tradition meant by the coming of the Messiah."³ It is her understanding that Christian christology has changed the original meaning and framework of Jewish messianic ideas while still claiming "dogmatically the

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," pp. 20-21.

²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 116-117.

³Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World, p. 32.

identity between its formula and the 'true meaning' of the Biblical points of reference."⁴

It is Ruether's contention that in Christian biblical scholarship, the social-political dimension of Jesus' messianic proclamation has been interpreted as spiritual and individualistic which thereby associates his proclamation with the eschatological and personal realms.⁵ In her opinion, the Christian association of Jesus' messianic proclamation with the eschatological and personal realm was a response to the failure of the occurrence of the imminent kingdom of God. According to Ruether, "when this event failed to materialize, Christianity pushed it off into an indefinite future, i.e. the Second Coming, and reinterpreted Jesus' messianic role in inward ways."⁶ These "inward ways" refer to the way the believer can connect him/herself with the transcendent kingdom of God through personal conversion not through social or political change. In effect, this position spiritualizes the kingdom of God thereby disassociating it with social-political action and structural change. Ruether states, "it effectively denies the possibility of any real change within history."⁷ She questions if this association of the kingdom of God with personal conversion and the resulting passive stance toward the social-political *status quo* is even a possible interpretation of the messianic hope of Judaism in Jesus' time, given the historical framework in which the Hebraic messianic hope developed.⁸

In contrast to the biblical scholarship of Brandon, Cullmann and Hengel, Ruether does not want to make a distinction between spiritual and social messianism as she believes this distinction is an inaccurate interpretation of the Judaic

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 116.

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World, pp. 10-11.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11.

messianic understanding. She writes:

Brandon, as well as Cullman and Hengel, seems to me to err by perpetuating the basic Greek dualism between the inward and the outward, the spiritual and the social, time and eternity . . . the dualism itself is inappropriate for understanding the messianic idea, which is *both* religious and political, both transcendent and this-worldly, both inward and outward. The kingdom of God is a holistic vision of this world, the created world as it is supposed to be when, as Jesus said, 'God's will is done on earth.' It means both reconciliation with God, when people obey God from the heart, *and* justice on earth and harmony between humanity and nature. These are not two different things, but, in fact, two sides of the same thing. . . . Reconciliation with God means the revolutionizing of human social, political relations, over-throwing unjust, oppressive relationships. The socio-political dimension is never lost in Hebrew messianism, but always remains the central expression of what it means to obey God.⁹

According to Ruether, in Jewish thought the eschatological age will be ushered in by a direct reign of God and the Messiah is purely a political figure. In this, she states, "the Messiah is *never* associated with the eschatological redemption."¹⁰ Based upon her historical and biblical research Ruether writes, "I suggest that Jesus's vision of the kingdom was essentially this-worldly, social and political, and not eschatological."¹¹

Ruether believes it was essentially the failure of Jesus' messianic mission, his crucifixion, that encouraged the reinterpretation of the messianic tradition. And the disciples' experience of the Resurrection, states Ruether:

enables the disciples to repudiate the possibility that the Crucifixion signaled the failure of Jesus' mission or his rejection by God. Rather, this mission is to be reinterpreted in terms of a redemptive suffering servant who atones for the sin of Israel and who, in turn, is transmuted to the heavens from which he will return as conquering Messiah. Jesus is rescued by God from

⁹Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

death and given ongoing life in the present and the future. In the present he lives on in the prophetic Spirit which the early Christian community experiences as alive in their midst, as a power of both ecstatic utterances and gifts of forgiveness and healing. This prophetic Spirit is understood to be the Risen Lord alive in their midst or, according to the Johannine tradition, a Spirit which Jesus "sent" to replace himself once he himself had gone "to the Father."¹²

The early Christians believed that Jesus' spirit was alive in their midst. It was also an apocalyptic era in which they anticipated the coming kingdom of God in their lifetime. Jesus became identified with the messianic person who would usher in the kingdom of God therefore the early Christians were able to ascribe to him the name, "Messiah."

Orthodox christology developed out of the synthesis of the messianic and apocalyptic traditions. Another tradition, the Wisdom tradition, was also influential in shaping christological doctrine.

Ruether states that the term *logos*, as identified with God incarnate in Jesus Christ, has a long philosophical tradition.¹³ It has its roots in the Goddess tradition in that the image of the Goddess was so great when Hebrew religion, in Hellenistic form, adopted the notion of divine wisdom, "they too depicted it as a female figure who disclosed the wisdom of God and was the divine instrument in creation and revelation."¹⁴ But as Christianity develops, the female figure is displaced and the *logos* becomes defined as the "male offspring and disclosure of a male God."¹⁵ And the idea of *logos* as "divine wisdom which

¹²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 122.

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," in Feminist Theology: A Reader, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1980), p. 138.

¹⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 117.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 117.

grounds and discloses the cosmos and unites the human with the divine", a feminine metaphor, becomes reinterpreted androcentrically.¹⁶ She writes:

In Greek and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy, the divine Logos was the means by which the transcendent God came forth in the beginning to create the world. The Logos was simultaneously the immanence of God and the ground of creation. Through the Logos God created the world, guided it, was revealed to it and reconciled the world to God.

The Logos was particularly related to the rational principle in each human soul. By linking the term Christ, the Messiah, through which God redeemed the world, to the Logos, early Christianity prevented a split between creation and redemption threatened by early Gnosticism. The God revealed in Christ was the same God who created the world in the beginning, the authentic ground of creation manifest in fulfilled form over against the alienation of creation from its true being. The term Logos as the divine identity for Christ should have been a term that pointed all humans to the foundations of their true humanity.

Yet the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish tradition was shaped in a patriarchal culture which gave the terms Logos and Christ an androcentric bias.¹⁷

The fusion of Hebrew messianism and Hellenistic thought regarding the divine *Logos* created, according to Ruether, "the imperial Christ of Nicene theology."¹⁸ This "imperial Christ," as the Messiah, in turning over the existing great imperial enemy nations will usher in a rule that will "itself become the new imperial ruling power."¹⁹ As the Greek concept of *Logos* or *Nous* of God became incorporated into the imperialistic understanding of the Messiah, christology

¹⁶Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," p. 138.

¹⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 48.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 48.

began to be constructed in hierarchical fashion. She observes:

To this dream of the messianic ruler of the new age, Greek philosophy added the concept of the divine Logos or Nous of God which discloses the mind of God and manifest, in noetic form, the plan of nature. This Nous of God is not only *demiourgos*, or agent of God in creation, but also the means through which the universe is governed. This concept is set in the context of a hierarchical 'chain of Being'. Just as the Nous of God governs nature, so the Greeks must govern barbarians, masters govern slaves and men govern women. The free Greek male is seen as the natural aristocrat, representing mind and headship in nature. Women, slaves and barbarians are the 'body people' who must be governed, who are 'servile by nature'. Greek political thought in the Hellenistic period linked this Logos theology with the universal emperor who must act in the body politic as the representative of the Nous of God governing the universe.

In the christology of Eusebius of Caesarea . . . these two heritages of Hebrew messianism and Greek Logos philosophy are brought together. Christ becomes the Pantocrator, the cosmic governor of a new Christianized universal empire. The Christian emperor, with the Christian bishop at his right hand, becomes the new Vicar of Christ on earth, governing the Christian state of the new redeemed order of history. In this vision, patriarchy, hierarchy, slavery, and Graeco-Roman imperialism have all been taken over and baptized by the Christian church.²⁰

Ruether's historical analysis of the origins of christological thought reveal that original components of the messianic/apocalyptic and wisdom traditions were interpreted against the backdrop of a hierarchical and patriarchal world view. The Messiah is expected to be a male and the *Logos*, as the immanence of God and the ground of creation, was interpreted androcentrically. Ruether writes:

Since rationality was presumed by these patriarchal cultures to be normatively male, all the theological reference points for defining Christ were defined androcentrically. Essential humanity, the image of God in humanity and the Logos of God were interrelated in androcentric definitions. These definitions re-enforced the assumption that God was male and that Christ must therefore be male in order to reveal the male God.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Although Christianity has never said that God was literally a male, it has assumed that God represents pre-eminently the qualities of rationality and sovereignty. Since men are presumed to have these qualities and women not to have them, the male metaphor has been seen as appropriate for God, while female metaphors have been regarded as inappropriate. The Logos or Word which reveals the 'Father' therefore has also been presumed to be properly imaged as a male. The title 'Son of God', an inadequate metaphor for divine immanence, imagined as something like a parent begetting an offspring, has also been taken literally and seen as further indication that the Logos is male.²¹

The patriarchal notions of God as possessing the qualities of sovereignty and rationality, of nature as hierarchically arranged, and of an anthropology that claims the superiority of male over female, all come together in the doctrine of Christ. When the Christian Church became the imperial religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the foundation was set for an "imperial Christology" which, according to Ruether, reintegrated messianism:

into a kingship ideology that provides the "sacred canopy" over the existing political and social hierarchy. Likewise the Christological doctrine of Christ as *Logos* or ground of the created world is identified with the foundation of the existing social system. Christ as *Logos* or *Nous* (mind) of God discloses the divine mind and provides the plan and government of the established social cosmos. All is integrated into one vast hierarchy of being. Just as the *Logos* of God governs the cosmos, so the Christian Roman Emperor, together with the Christian Church, governs the political universe; masters govern slaves and men govern women. . . . Christology becomes the apex of a system of control over all those who in one way or another are "other" than this new Christian order.

Women, of course, are still regarded as humble members of the Christian body, but their inability to represent Christ is sealed by the definition of Christ as founder and cosmic governor of the existing social hierarchy and as the male disclosure of a male God whose normative representative can only be male. . . . The male alone is the normative or generic sex of the human species; only the male represents the fullness of human nature, whereas woman

²¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," pp. 138-139.

is defective physically, morally, and mentally. It follows that the incarnation of the *Logos* of God into a male is not a historical accident but an ontological necessity. Just as Christ has to be incarnated in a male, so only can the male represent Christ.²²

Christology which has been shaped out of a patriarchal and hierarchical world view has, according to Ruether, "become the doctrine of the Christian tradition most used against women."²³ It has ratified male domination and justified patriarchal and hierarchical social systems.²⁴ It has been used against women's ordination.²⁵ It has promoted racism and anti-Semitism.²⁶ And the patriarchalizing of christology has distorted the prophetic message Jesus delivered regarding the kingdom of God.²⁷

The question feminists ask, given the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of christology, is "can a male savior save women?"²⁸ Ruether's exploration of the patriarchalization of christology leads her to pose these questions:

Where does this leave the quest for a feminist Christology? Must we not say that the very limitations of Christ as a male person must lead women to the conclusion that he cannot represent redemptive personhood for them? That they must emancipate

²²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 125-126.

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 20.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 126.

²⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, pp. 43-73. See also Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 31-43 and Ruether New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human liberation, pp. 89-114.

²⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 18.

²⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 116.

themselves from Jesus as redeemer and seek a new redemptive disclosure of God and of human possibility in female form?²⁹

8.2 REENCOUNTERING THE JESUS OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Ruether believes the "starting point for this inquiry must be a reencounter with the Jesus of the synoptic gospels, not the accumulated doctrine about him but his message and praxis."³⁰ It is her contention that "once the mythology about Jesus as Messiah, or divine *Logos*, with its traditional masculine imagery, is stripped off, the Jesus of the synoptic gospels can be recognized as a figure remarkably compatible with feminism."³¹

Ruether argues that the deeds of Jesus "reveal the meaning of his person and his message"³² and "fundamental to Jesus' liberating action is his preferential option for the poor."³³ According to Ruether, "fundamentally, Jesus renews the prophetic vision whereby the Word of God does not validate the existing social and religious hierarchy but speaks on behalf of the marginalized and despised groups of society."³⁴ Therefore, Ruether suggests that christologies based on Jesus of the synoptic gospels understand him as a messianic prophet, one who "proclaims his message as an iconoclastic critique of existing élites, particularly

²⁹Ibid., p. 135.

³⁰Ibid., p. 135.

³¹Ibid., p. 135.

³²Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 20.

³³Ibid., p. 20.

³⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 136.

religious élites."³⁵ She writes:

Jesus proclaims an iconoclastic reversal of the system of religious status: The last shall be first and first last. The leaders of the religious establishment are blind guides and hypocrites. The outcasts of society---prostitutes, publicans, Samaritans---are able to hear the message of the prophet. This reversal of social order doesn't just turn hierarchy upside down, it aims at a new reality in which hierarchy and dominance are overcome as principles of social relations.³⁶

Through Jesus' iconoclastic reversal of the existing social hierarchy, God is acting in history to proclaim good news to the poor and the oppressed. It is God who chooses the poor precisely because the rich have chosen against them. In Ruether's words, "since it is the rich who have deprived the poor of all hope, God opts for the poor in order to right the wrongs in history."³⁷ It is the poor and the outcasts who, according to Ruether:

have a priority in the kingdom. Having nothing in this world, they will be particularly receptive to the good news, while the rich man will go sadly away. The pious and the educated will take offense at the messianic prophet, for they have been used to gaining status and power over others through their education and religious observances. . . .

. . . The tax collector, Zacchaeus, who was both despised and an exploiter in the imperial system, responded to Jesus by declaring that he would give half his goods to the poor and restore four-fold to those he had defrauded. It is for this response that Jesus declares that 'salvation has come to this house' and 'he also is a son of Abraham, for the Son of man comes to seek and save those who are lost'. Thus those who are rich, even the exploiters, have hope if they hear the good news as a call to give up their false wealth and join Jesus in solidarity with the poor.

³⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 53.

³⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 136-137.

³⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 20.

But the respectably privileged refuse to hear this message. This is why it is so hard for them to enter the kingdom. The message for them is 'those who would be first must become last and servant of all'.³⁸

Jesus is not announcing a new hierarchy where the poor assume positions of power over their oppressors. Ruether reiterates, "this reversal of order is not simply a turning upside down of the present hierarchy, but aims at a new order where hierarchy itself is overcome as a principle of rule."³⁹ When all systems of domination are eradicated and just relationality becomes the principle by which people live in community then the blessings of God in their totality will be known. This, according to Ruether, is the nature of the Hebraic notion of the kingdom of God.⁴⁰ Prosperity and blessing occur when right relationality with nature, with other humans, with the self and with God occurs. Therefore in announcing the kingdom of God, Jesus as prophet-messiah denounces all systems of domination.

Furthermore, according to Ruether, "Jesus exemplifies in his own life what it means to become a servant of all and to give one's life as ransom for many."⁴¹ Jesus not only uses the servant language to describe appropriate relationality within the human community but also to re-image the relationship between humanity and the divine. Ruether writes:

He speaks of the Messiah as servant rather than king to visualize new relations between the divine and the human. Relation to God no longer becomes a model for dominate-subordinate relations between social groups, leaders, and the led. Rather, relation to God means we are to call no man "Father, Teacher or Master" (Matt. 23:1-12). Relation to God liberates us from hierarchical relations and makes us all brothers-sisters of each other. Those who would be leaders must become servants of all. Women play an important role in this Gospel vision of the vindication of the

³⁸Ibid., pp. 20-21.

³⁹Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 11, 15.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 21.

lowly in God's new order. . . . The role played by women of marginalized groups is an intrinsic part of the iconoclastic, messianic vision.

. . . The protest of the Gospels is directed at the concrete sociological realities in which maleness and femaleness are elements, along with class, ethnicity, religious office, and law, that define the network of social status.⁴²

Jesus not only protested against the hierarchical network of social status but embodied a new humanity of just relationality. It is this understanding of Jesus that is foundational for Ruether's feminist Christology. Because of this understanding of Jesus, Ruether claims that "theologically speaking . . . we might say that the maleness of Jesus has no ultimate significance."⁴³ She continues to say, however, that "it has social symbolic significance in the framework of societies of patriarchal privilege."⁴⁴ The symbolic significance of Jesus' maleness is that he witnesses against the system of patriarchal privilege. He empties himself of the privilege of his gender.

8.2.1 The *kenosis* of patriarchy

Ruether defines the *kenosis* of patriarchy as "the announcement of the new humanity through a lifestyle that discards hierarchical caste privilege and speaks on behalf of the lowly."⁴⁵ She writes:

Jesus as liberator calls for a renunciation, a dissolution, of the web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and deprivation. He protests against the identification of this system with the favor or disfavor of God. His ability to speak as liberator does not reside in his maleness but in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment. He speaks to and is responded to by low-caste women because

⁴²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, pp. 136-137.

⁴³Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 137.

they represent the bottom of this status network and have the least stake in its perpetuation.

. . . In this sense Jesus as the Christ, the representative of liberated humanity and the liberating Word of God, manifests the *kenosis of patriarchy* In a similar way, the femaleness of the social and religiously outcast who respond to him has social symbolic significance as a witness against the same idolatrous system of patriarchal privilege. This system is unmasked and shown to have no connection with favor with God. Jesus, the homeless Jewish prophet, and the marginalized women and men who respond to him represent the overthrow of the present world system and the sign of a dawning new age in which God's will is done on earth.⁴⁶

The *kenosis* of patriarchy denotes a radical change of the existing system of relationality. Ruether believes that Jesus' "ability to be liberator does not reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment."⁴⁷

8.2.2 Liberation and redemption

Jesus, according to Ruether, announced the kingdom of God and denounced systems of domination and oppression. In this annunciation and denunciation, coupled with liberating praxis, redemption is experienced as:

the overcoming of every evil, the wiping away of every tear. One cannot divorce social and physical evils, such as poverty, nakedness, homelessness, lameness, blindness, and diseases, from spiritual evils such as rejection of God, as though the social and material level was inferior and unimportant. Jesus manifests his liberating work in the realm of people's physical afflictions first of all. It is precisely in this physical and social realm that people's spiritual bondage and liberation is being manifested. To see that the world is full of outcast and afflicted people is to see that the world is at present in bondage to the Prince of Darkness. To see these afflictions being overcome is to know that the redeeming

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁴⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 56.

finger of God has come upon us. It is in this sense that the kingdom is already 'in our midst.' It is not 'within us' in the sense of an inward spiritual kingdom as distinct from an outward and social one (Luke 17:21).

For liberation theology the kingdom is neither something that evolves from the present social system, nor is it unrelated to real social changes in history. It comes about through liberation, through the freeing of people from bondage to sin and evil and so is experienced as an inbreaking of grace. It cannot be incarnated completely in any particular social system. It transcends the limits of social systems, even revolutionary ones, and judges their inadequacy, pointing to the further hopes that are still unrealized.⁴⁸

In other words, redemption or grace is recognized in acts of liberation. For Ruether the restoration of just relationality between humans and God, between humans and other humans and between humans and all of creation is both the goal and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Jesus, as one who announced the kingdom of God and denounced systems of domination and oppression, is a liberator and therefore a redeemer. In his message and praxis he becomes a paradigmatic human. Ruether writes:

Jesus must be seen as paradigmatic of the redeemed humanity in his faithfulness to God's will, even to death. He is an exponent of God's Word, in his critique of oppressive structures and in his announcement of the kingdom. But, that which he announces is not himself, but the liberated humanity to come.⁴⁹

In another context she describes it thus:

The redeemer is one who has been redeemed, just as Jesus himself accepted the baptism of John. Those who have been liberated can, in turn, become paradigmatic, liberating persons for others. Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated "once-for-all" in the historical Jesus. The Christian community continues Christ's identity. As vine and branches Christic personhood continues in our sisters and brothers. In the language of early Christian prophetism, we can encounter Christ in

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 22.

the *form of our sister*. Christ, the liberated humanity, is not confined to a static perfection of one person two thousand years ago. Rather, redemptive humanity goes ahead of us, calling us to yet incompleting dimensions of human liberation.⁵⁰

There are two features of Ruether's understanding of Jesus that must be highlighted. One is this understanding of Jesus as paradigmatic. And the second is that Jesus must be understood in proleptic and anticipatory terms rather than in terms of fulfillment and finality. By understanding Jesus as paradigmatic she wants to clearly state that Jesus as Messiah must be understood contextually. She writes:

We must accept its relativity to a particular people . . . The Cross and the Resurrection are contextual to a particular historical community. These are breakthrough experiences that found *our* people, that mediate hope in the midst of adversity *for us*. But this does not mean that these are the only ways that this may happen, or that other people may not continue parallel struggles on different grounds; namely the Jews, for whom the events of Jesus did not become paradigmatic events, and who continue to find themselves on the Exodus and the Torah as the memory and the way.

Some Christians will see such contextualizing of the Christian symbols as totally unacceptable. For them, Jesus as the only name that may be named on earth and in heaven is absolute. I can only say that our two thousand years of human experience do not allow that assertion to be taken literally. He may indeed be the only name *for us*. But other names continued to be named and do not fail to bear fruit. Nor does it seem to me that the power of Jesus' name will become less if we cease to use that name to deny the validity of other people's experience of God through other means. Indeed, only when we cease to use Jesus' name to negate other people's experience of the victory of life over death, can the name of Jesus cease to be a name that creates alienation of Jew from Christian, Christian from non-Christian. Then we can begin to find in our differing ways of

⁵⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 138.

mediating hope in the midst of defeat new possibilities of human solidarity.⁵¹

Ruether also believes that Jesus should be understood in proleptic and anticipatory terms and not in terms of fulfillment and finality. She writes:

Jesus should not be said to fulfill all the Jewish hopes for the coming Messiah, which indeed he did not. Rather, he must be seen as one who announced this messianic hope and who gave signs of its presence, but who also died in that hope, crucified on the cross of unredeemed human history.

In his name we continue to proclaim that hope, and also to begin to experience its presence. But, like Jesus, we also do that under the cross of unresolved human contradictions. The final point of reference for the messianic advent still remains in the future. Its unambiguous arrival still eludes us. Here and now we, as much as the Jews, struggle with unresolved history, holding on to the memory of Jesus' resurrection from the cross as the basis for *our* refusal to take evil as the last word and *our* hope that God will win in the end.

This proleptic understanding of Jesus' messianic identity is familiar to Christian exegetes. It has been particularly renewed in liberation theologies. It is the exegesis that best translates the New Testament experience. Jesus' message is falsified when it is translated into a final fulfillment that is spiritualized and institutionally lodged in the past.⁵²

For Ruether, redemption/liberation is an on going project that will not be completed until just relationality is accomplished. This project is undertaken anew in every culture and in every context where there is unjust relationality, throughout the duration of human history. Redemption then, is not a once and for all event accomplished by Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. It is to be understood proleptically and in concrete realities. According to Ruether:

We cannot speak of Jesus as having 'fulfilled' the hopes of Israel, for these were hopes for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has not been established on earth in any final or unambiguous

⁵¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, pp. 72-73.

⁵²Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 42-43.

form, either in the time of Jesus or through the progress of the Christian churches or nations. We cannot speak of Jesus as having overcome all evil or delivered us from all sin, as though that were a final and definitive possession that has only to be appropriated in faith and applied to some inward and invisible reconciliation with God. All this type of language mystifies history and betrays Jesus again to the extent that it turns us away from the concrete realities of good and evil in human life and teaches us that we can be saved apart from these realities.⁵³

Finally, redemption or liberation, as discussed in Ruether's anthropology, is not something that is spiritual or supernatural or alien to our natures but rather it is a restoration of the human to its "true self, and a reintegration of creation with its true destiny 'God's Kingdom.'"⁵⁴ This restoration of our true self, which is that of being in right relationship with God, with humans and all of creation, is discovered in moments of liberation from oppressive systems of fallen reality. The discovery of freedom gives humans the power to disaffiliate with fallen reality thereby enabling them to become paradigmatic liberating persons for others.

In accord with her understanding of liberation as redemption in both the personal realm as well as in the social-political realm, Ruether understands that liberation is dependent upon both our interior transformation as well as appropriate ethical behavior. She states:

Feminist theology would . . . stress the dynamic interconnection of the personal and the social. We cannot split a spiritual, antisocial redemption from the human being as a social being, embedded in socio-political and ecological systems. But neither can we imagine a reconstructed social order without converted selves. Feminism recognizes sinfulness as an expression of precisely this splitting and deformation of our true relationships with all the networks of being with which we are connected.

The quest for the good self and the quest for the good society exist in unbreakable dialectic. One cannot assume with the

⁵³ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power, p. 9.

social managers, whether liberal or socialist, that reorganized social relations on a structural level will automatically produce the new humanity. But one also cannot suppose that simply building up an aggregate of converted individuals will cause them to act differently, and so society will be redeemed without any attention to the structures of power

Social and historical structures of evil build up a quasi-autonomous life of their own that holds us in bondage as individuals. Yet we are still free. We can begin to act differently and, in so doing, begin to withdraw support from the evil structures. We must begin to model, in our social relationships, the new world that we seek. Thus a feminist liberation spirituality, while seeking a new, non-sexist social order, cannot neglect the cultivation of new interiority. Nor can it suppose simply that new attitudes on the individual level are enough. We must enter into a process in which the liberated self and the transformation of social systems are interconnected.⁵⁵

Hearing the message of Jesus, the good news of the kingdom of God, gives the hearer more than a privatized, interior sense of one's personal liberation. The nature of the message also calls forth appropriate human ethical behavior which works toward the transformation of oppressive social systems and those things which stand in the way of the true coming and realization of the kingdom of God. The gospel, in other words, becomes the source of and the catalyst for ethical behavior in the hearer.

8.3 THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE TO JESUS

To appropriate Jesus' message and to follow him means to become a servant of all, to give one's life as ransom for many, as he himself exemplified. Ruether states, "following Christ basically means to follow this kind of way of life in the concrete contexts of the social conflicts of one's time."⁵⁶ Because Jesus announces the liberated humanity to come, Ruether believes, "it is we, the community of Christ, who must carry on that prophetic denunciation and

⁵⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," pp. 25-26.

⁵⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 21.

annunciation and attempt to continue to model, in our converted humanity, that aspiration."⁵⁷

As aforementioned, Ruether understands that Jesus did not overcome all evil or deliver us from sin but rather professed and lived in the faith that the kingdom of God is at hand. He too faced the powers and principalities that we face. But in the concrete acts of liberation, that Jesus displayed, the kingdom was present. As Ruether writes:

The kingdom was present in Jesus' time, in those concrete signs of liberation, in those acts of healing and love that manifested the breaking of Satan's power over human life. But it was also absent in Jesus' time. The élites refused to hear him. His own disciples misunderstood him and sold him out. The Romans crucified him. The powers and principalities showed in Jesus' death that they were still in power. Christian faith, as resurrection faith, arises through a refusal to take these facts of the victory of evil as the last word. In the face of the assassination of prophets, Christian faith reaffirms that life and liberation are possible and God will win in the end. Jesus, the crucified prophet, thus becomes the name in which we continue to reaffirm this faith, his own faith, that the kingdom is at hand. But we affirm this faith not simply by verbal affirmations, but by following his liberating praxis and putting ourselves, as much as possible, in the place where he put himself, as ones who make themselves last and servant of all.⁵⁸

The life of one who follows Christ is situated in the context of the struggle between the evil present in existing structures of domination and oppression and the inbreaking of redemption found in concrete acts of liberation. The one who follows Jesus struggles against evil. Ruether writes:

As one struggles against evil, one also risks suffering and becomes vulnerable to retaliation and violence by those who are intent on keeping the present system intact But in risking suffering and even death on behalf of a new society, we also

⁵⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," p. 22.

⁵⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, pp. 23-24.

awaken hope. The poor learn not to be afraid of those in power and to begin to take their destiny into their own hands. Even when the prophet is killed, the struggle goes on. Indeed, their very death becomes a rallying point for new energy. In their name people now organize themselves to renew the work of liberation. The memory of their lives becomes stronger than the powers of death and gives people hope that the powers of death can be broken. This is the real meaning of redemptive suffering⁵⁹

The cross reveals the mystery of redemptive suffering. According to Ruether:

The God revealed in Jesus has identified with the victims of history and has abandoned the thrones of the mighty. In Jesus' cross God abandons God's power into the human condition utterly and completely so that we might not abandon each other. God has become a part of the struggle of life against death.⁶⁰

The task of followers of Christ is to be engaged in the struggle between life and death. Ruether uses the imagery of God's Kingdom and Satan's Kingdom to describe this struggle.⁶¹ But she categorically states that both of these kingdoms "are human kingdoms, societies of this world."⁶² And that "the task of the follower of Christ is to move human society a little farther from the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of alienation and oppression, and closer to God's kingdom, a society of peace, justice and mutuality."⁶³

8.4 A SUMMARY OF RUETHER'S CHRISTOLOGY

Orthodox christology as established by the Council of Calcedon is rooted in both the Hebraic messianic and wisdom traditions and is further interpreted through Hellenistic thought. Ruether claims that while the Church theologians believe orthodox christology to be continuous with the messianic and wisdom

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 29.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 23.

⁶²Ibid., p. 23.

⁶³Ibid., p. 23.

traditions, in actuality they have misinterpreted both traditions and in fact have distorted the true understanding of the Messiah as well as Divine Wisdom. This distortion has created a christology where Jesus is used to ratify systems of oppression. And, as Ruether suggests, the doctrine which should summarize and speak for our hopes for redeemed humanity has in actuality been used against women.

In order for feminists and other liberation theologians to find a picture of Jesus that is redemptive, it is necessary to return to the Jesus of the synoptic gospels. This Jesus restores to the center the message of the kingdom of God. In so doing he announces the good news of liberation from oppression as well as denounces the structures which continue to oppress. The announcement of the kingdom of God also means that God has exercised preferential option for the poor and oppressed in the present system. "But," as Ruether states, "the aim of this partiality is to create a new whole, to elevate the valleys and make the high places low, so that all may come into a new place of God's reign, when God's will is done on earth."⁶⁴ The poor and marginal groups have a special affinity for the gospel and therefore especially hear the message. Women, who are included in marginal groups, and oftentimes considered the "oppressed of the oppressed"⁶⁵ find the message of Jesus liberating since they are, in the present scheme of things, the last who will be first in the kingdom of God. Because of this, Ruether believes that the Jesus of the synoptic gospels is compatible with feminism.

For Ruether, Jesus is to be thought of in paradigmatic terms. Every act of liberation accomplished by Jesus is an indication that God's redemptive finger is present. As followers of Jesus become transformed by and act upon the message of the kingdom of God, they too become paradigmatic liberating persons for others. Ruether understands this paradigm to be contextual for a particular historical community. In other words Jesus is paradigmatic for those who have experienced breakthrough experiences that mediate hope in

⁶⁴ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁵ibid., p. 55.

particular social and cultural contexts but he is not the only paradigm for liberation and hope.

Jesus is also to be understood in proleptic and anticipatory terms. Jesus has not fulfilled the Jewish messianic hope and cannot be understood as finally conquering sin and evil. Rather, he was crucified in the same struggle against powers and principalities. But his resurrection points us to the hope that evil will not be the last word and that God will win in the end.

To participate in the life of Jesus means to continue his annunciation of the kingdom of God and to denounce systems of oppression and domination. Through Jesus' words and deeds we understand more fully the nature of the kingdom of God and work to move the world closer to that realization. To follow Jesus is not to just have a private transformed life but to bring about liberation, hence redemption, in concrete historical situations. This means becoming representations of the new kind of humanity exemplified by Jesus. This new kind of humanity is that which empties itself of claims to power and instead works toward the empowerment and liberation of others.⁶⁶

To know Jesus as one who announced the kingdom of God and denounced systems of oppression is to participate in his liberating praxis. In Ruether's words:

I suggest we think of the messianic hope to which Jesus points us, not as the eschatological end-point of history or as transcendence of death, but rather as the Shalom of God which remains the true connecting point of all our existences, even when we violate and forget it. Redemptive hope is the constant quest for that Shalom of God which holds us all together, as the operating principle of our collective lives. God's Shalom is the nexus of authentic creational life that has to be reincarnated again and again in new ways and new contexts in each new generation.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 70.

For Ruether, Jesus reveals the redemptive hope of the Shalom of God. In following the example of Jesus, humans who find meaning in the Christian context exhibit appropriate ethical behavior. In this scheme, it is the gospel message of Jesus that both demands and describes ethical behavior for the human.

PART THREE: CRITIQUE AND APPRAISAL

Chapter Nine

THE COMMON THEMES IN RUETHER'S AND WINGREN'S WORKS

The preceding analysis of Ruether's and Wingren's works around the loci of creation, anthropology and christology, have revealed several areas of compatibility between the two theologians.

Both theologians assert that God is the creator of the world. Ruether prefers to use the term "Primal Matrix" as a metaphor for God to emphasize God as the ground of all being. Both she and Wingren understand the interrelatedness between God and creation. The interrelatedness of God and creation is important for both theologians because neither want to emphasize the transcendence of God at the expense of God's immanence.

For Ruether, this concern is discussed in her repudiation of dualism; the mind/body, spirit/matter split and the ensuing hierarchical cosmology that has developed from this notion. The hierarchicalizing of spirit/mind over body/matter has given rise to an understanding of God that is transcendent and separate from creation, which has had a detrimental effect upon the relationships between humans and God, humans and other humans, humans and the self, and humans and nature. She also indicates that God's will for creation is well-being and liberation, which is God's agenda for this world, not for a transcendent spiritual world beyond history or outside of nature.

For Wingren, this concern is discussed in his proposal that God is the creator of all life and that God's arena of creation is in this world. Furthermore, Wingren discusses the immanence of God in his christology wherein Christ is both truly human in that he is under the law and truly divine in that he annuls the condemnation of the law through the gift of forgiveness of sins as well as in the complete giving of himself. Wingren also stresses the immanence of God in his understanding of theological ethics. The law and gospel work together to both sustain God's creation and create a new person in the believer; in this the physical and ethical are not separate. All works done by the compulsion of the law are God's works, for the continuance of creation and the sustaining of life.

Ruether's theology of creation draws from both the pre Judeo-Christian religious and cultural traditions as well as the biblical tradition. Her theology also incorporates the contemporary scientific world view. Although Wingren chooses to concentrate exclusively on the biblical texts he does consider present ecological concerns in his creation faith.¹ Both theologians emphasize the interrelatedness between God and creation and both understand God's intent for creation as wholeness and well-being for all of creation. Ruether uses such terms as "just relationality" and "liberation" to describe God's intent, while Wingren uses terms such as "life," "health" and "wholeness." Essentially they agree on proper reverence for and use of creation and understand it as gift.

Wingren understands creation as a gift given to humans for the on-going creation and sustenance of life. While he uses the image of dominion and Ruether does not, they both understand creation/nature as gift, not as something to be abused. Wingren understands the abuse of nature as resulting from the lack of understanding of the unity of humans and nature thereby collapsing the notion of dominion and notion of domination into one.² Here Wingren agrees with Ruether when he repudiates the false dichotomies established by dualism. Wingren argues that the human does not stand outside of nature and that the notion of unlimited dominion without restraint is unbiblical. This false understanding of dominion leads to the deification of production which is idolatry, and therefore sinful.³

There are similarities between Ruether's and Wingren's understanding of sin. Although Ruether and Wingren discuss sin using different images, both theologians understand sin as something that is both within the hearts of humans and is reflected in human structures. For both theologians sin is

¹Gustaf Wingren, Flight From Creation, pp.82-83. See also, Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 157-158.

²Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, see pages, 101-112 and 157. See also, Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, pp. 50-55.

³Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 54-55.

alienation; alienation from God, from others, from the true self and from creation. For Ruether alienation is distorted relationality and oppression. While Wingren does not use the word "alienation" he does indicate that humans' separation from God and their unwillingness to depend upon God for life is the foundation for sin.

As a corrective to the understanding of sin as only a privatized and personal spiritual issue, Ruether emphasizes the political and social nature of sin. For her, sin is manifested in the oppression of human community. Sexism, according to Ruether, is at the root of oppression in so far as the dualistic split between spirit and matter has connoted male superiority. And the accompanying world view of that assumed superiority has given one gender the right to dominate that which is deemed inferior, namely, women, but also "lower classes" of people as well as nature. Broadly speaking, Ruether describes sin as unjust relationality. When relationships are unjust and oppression is present, God's will for creation is thwarted.

While Ruether does not emphasize the personal nature of sin, she does acknowledge that the over all structures of society are formed by alienated individuals and that eventually oppressive structures take on a power of their own which is perpetuated by humans. In this way she does acknowledge that individual human sinfulness is present. Moreover, when she discusses conversion, she indicates that the individual human does have the capability of turning away from sin and turning toward what is good, right and just, suggesting that there is a personal nature to sin.

Wingren, too, understands sin as alienation. In his description of sin he states that humans mistakenly believe that they themselves can create, manage and sustain life apart from the creator. In this separation and alienation from God, humans do not acknowledge God as creator and do not willingly do service to the neighbor which is required of them. Sin, for Wingren, also encompass both the personal and the social in that the forces of destruction are found in human's disbelief in God as the source of all life and experienced as forces around us that threaten all of God's creation. In other words, one might say that sin is both a fact and an act. Wingren does not want to separate the personal from the social when describing sin because he understands that the

world is the arena in which God creates. It is in this world where we find our neighbors and we as humans can either build up or destroy our neighbors' well-being.

Ruether and Wingren both uphold a dynamic unity between creation and redemption. The God who creates and redeems is one and the same God. To imagine redemption as only a spiritual and asocial event, by separating it from the world in which humans live and work, is an inappropriate understanding of God's being and activity. One cannot separate spiritual redemption from physical redemption just as one cannot separate God from creation, the spirit from the body, human from creation and the human from history.

There is one distinctive similarity between Ruether and Wingren regarding redemption and the person of Jesus Christ. Ruether uses the term "paradigmatic human" to describe Jesus. Wingren understands Jesus as the true human who points us to our true humanity. In both of these descriptions Jesus comes to humans from the future and points humans to hope.

Jesus, as the paradigmatic or true human, announced the kingdom of God in both word and deed. People experience liberation (Ruether) or a new will for life (Wingren) in every encounter with Jesus. Jesus also, in announcing the kingdom of God does something new because he did not go about establishing the kingdom in an expected fashion, namely, using force or power. Rather Jesus, according to both theologians, concentrated on those who were threatened and in need. Ruether states that Jesus' deeds denounced and dismantled the web of oppressive social structures. While Wingren does not explicitly state this, he does indicate that Jesus challenged the norms of his time, particularly the religious laws.⁴ In this way one might say that Jesus, in pointing to authentic personhood, denounced systems that thwart God's intent for creation.

The new (Ruether) or true (Wingren) humanity that Jesus reveals is one of emptying all claims to power or personal gain and working toward the empowerment and liberation of (Ruether) and service (Wingren) for others. The

⁴Ibid., pp. 100-102.

notion of Jesus as one who serves is prevalent in both Ruether's and Wingren's christologies.

There is a partial agreement between Ruether and Wingren with regard to the nature of salvation. Wingren understands salvation as recapitulation, the restoration of health and wholeness. Redemption is not something that is alien to our natures but rather is the restoration of the humans' true self. While primarily understanding salvation as liberation, Ruether uses the concept of the restoration of the human to its true self to describe one aspect of salvation.⁵

A concluding observation of compatibility between these two theologians pertains to human ethical behavior. Humans are ethical agents. They have the capability to either participate in God's intent for creation or they can thwart it. However, the nature in which this ethical behavior occurs and the source from which it arises is quite different in their respective theologies.

While there are areas wherein these theologians express similar concerns there are likewise significant differences in their theologies. These differences primarily occur in the areas of anthropology, christology and theological ethics, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power, p. 9.

Chapter Ten

DIVERGENT VIEWS IN RUETHER'S AND WINGREN'S WORKS

The primary objective of this project is to examine the use of the law in Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist theology and in Gustaf Wingren's creation theology. The analysis of Ruether's theology has shown that she does not use the concept of law as a formal theological category. The absence of the law most distinctly differentiates Ruether's theology from Wingren's and this has implications for theological ethics.

Wingren uses the law/gospel dialectic as the organizing principle for each locus of his theology. The purpose for this is to adequately describe the actual situation in which humans find themselves so that the gospel message can truly address the human situation. To accomplish this he believes theological reflection must begin with the first article (creation) rather than the second article (christology) of the trinitarian creed.

Beginning theology with redemption rather than creation is problematic for Wingren. He is concerned with first describing a universal ethos and, from that vantage point, describing what is distinctive about the Christian faith and ethos. Theology that begins with redemption places revealed knowledge of God (revelation in Jesus Christ) as its focal point and leads to the Barthian notion that "without the revelation of Christ . . . human life is an ethical vacuum, a nihil."¹ This prompts Wingren to address the question: if the revelation of Christ is what makes humans ethical, then how does one explain the fact that non-Christians are also ethical?²

Furthermore, if the revelation of Christ alone is what makes human life ethical, then knowledge of God, rather than the gospel, becomes the principle whereby one is saved. Wingren, examines Barth's notion that without Christ the human

¹Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, p. 70.

²Ibid., pp. 65-68. See also, Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, pp. 37-39.

lacks knowledge of the good, and concludes that:

If one makes the question of knowledge the principle question, then that which is given by Christ, the gospel, is also transformed into a question of knowledge. The doctrine of how faith arises becomes a sort of specific theological theory of knowledge.³

According to Wingren, the notion that knowledge of God through Jesus Christ makes Christians more ethical, "may lead to a very dangerous self-righteousness on the part of the church."⁴

Another outcome of beginning theology with redemption rather than creation is the collapsing into one entity the distinct contents and functions of the law and gospel. If ethical behavior occurs as a result of the revelation of Jesus Christ, then the role of Jesus is pedagogical, lending itself to the so called "third use of the law." The third use of the law is that which provides a guide to life for the person who has received the revelation of Jesus Christ. Wingren states that the third use of the law is emphasized "where obedient submission to the Law is thought to be what God intends for his creatures."⁵ The third use of the law, in effect, collapses into one the distinction between the contents and functions of law and gospel; for the follower of Jesus hears that following a particular ethical code is redemptive. Ethical behavior then becomes a way to earn righteousness before God. When the contents and functions of the law and gospel become indistinguishable, the freedom from the condemnation of the law, given in the gospel, is nullified. Wingren understands that freedom from the law, not submissiveness to it, is God's intent for creation. Furthermore, the law is not eternal and cannot save, according to Wingren. According to Wingren, ethical behavior makes us righteous before our neighbor, but does not make us righteous before God.⁶ In effect, the third use collapses into one, righteousness before God and righteousness toward our neighbor.

³Ibid., p. 73.

⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁵Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 126.

⁶Ibid., p. 127.

Wingren's theology, as a corrective to problems arising from beginning theology from the perspective of the second article, aims at preserving the integrity of the law as that which is operative prior to the hearing of the gospel. He locates theological ethics primarily in the doctrine of creation, the arena in which the law operates.

In Ruether's theology there is evidence that her starting point is revelation, rather than creation, even though she devotes much of her writing to creation and ecofeminist theology. She writes:

We must postulate that every great religious idea begins in the revelatory experience. By *revelatory* we mean breakthrough experiences beyond ordinary fragmented consciousness that provide interpretive symbols illuminating the means of the *whole* of life.⁷

She continues:

A religious tradition remains vital so long as its revelatory pattern can be reproduced generation after generation and continues to speak to individuals in the community and provide for them the redemptive meaning of individual and collective experience. Such has been the Exodus-Passover pattern for Jews and the death-resurrection paradigm of personal conversion for Christians. The circle from experience to experience, mediated through instruments of tradition, is thus completed when the contemporary community appropriates the foundational paradigm as the continuing story of its own redemption in relation to God, self, and one another.⁸

⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 13.

⁸Ibid., pp. 15-16.

The center of the Christian story, according to Ruether, is the kingdom of God, characterized by "a society of peace, justice and mutuality."⁹ The kingdom, states Ruether:

comes about through liberation, through the freeing of people from bondage to sin and evil and so is experienced as an inbreaking of grace. It cannot be incarnated completely in any particular social system. It transcends the limits of social systems, even revolutionary ones, and judges their inadequacy, pointing to the further hopes that are still unrealized. Yet this does not reduce all social systems and situations to the same level. There are some situations which are 'closer' to the kingdom than others, not in an evolutionary progressive way, but in the sense of signs and mediations of the kingdom which better disclose what God's intention is for humanity.

. . . Closeness to the kingdom is a matter of concrete reality, not ideology or institutional privilege. It is a matter of discerning the realities of bondage and the realities of liberation that are actually taking place. This is why those who discern signs of the kingdom are prophets and not merely sociologists.

Nevertheless it is possible, in the midst of the limits and transitoriness of human existence, to make societies which are more liberating and less oppressive, and hence closer to the kingdom.¹⁰

The kingdom of God was manifest through concrete acts of liberation in Jesus' time; acts of love and healing that revealed Satan's power over human life could be broken. The death of Jesus revealed that Satan still has power. But the resurrection indicates that evil will not have the final word. Ruether writes:

In the face of the assassination of prophets, Christian faith reaffirms that life and liberation are possible and God will win in the end. Jesus, the crucified prophet, thus becomes the name in which we continue to reaffirm this faith, his own faith, that the kingdom is at hand. But we affirm this faith not simply by verbal affirmations, but by following his liberating praxis¹¹

⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism, p. 23.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 23-24.

In other words, one experiences the kingdom, God's intent for creation, through an act of liberation, an inbreaking of grace. This experience of liberating grace is what motivates people to participate in Jesus' liberating praxis. Ruether clearly states that no one system can completely incarnate the kingdom, and she is careful to acknowledge Jesus as one of many prophets. However, by affirming this faith in the kingdom through Jesus' name and by following his liberating praxis, the revelation of God's intent for creation through Jesus' behavior can be construed as being normative for human ethical behavior. It is clearly not Ruether's intent to make Christians' ethical behavior normative for all humans. But by lodging ethical behavior in the liberating praxis of Jesus she runs the same risk as Barth, namely, the creation of a legalistic understanding of the Christian church whose function becomes that of providing ethical codes for Christians.

Ruether and Wingren have different starting points for their theology, which become even more evident in the following areas of their respective theologies.

10.1 NATURAL LAW

In his discussion of creation, Wingren states that because God's intent for creation is thwarted, God needs to employ God's law to restrain the forces of destruction and to assist in the ongoing creation of life. The human life under the law is in bondage to the law and cannot be free from the law's demands and judgment. Wingren's use of the law creates an interdependence between the created and the Creator. When humans do not acknowledge God as the source and giver of life, they have an unhealthy relationship with God, and hence with the neighbor and with creation. God's intent for creation is healthy, whole and fulfilling life. God will use all means to accomplish this, including the law.

Wingren uses the words "natural order" to describe the universal knowledge given through creation, noting that "God is actually working in this Creation, speaking to man, and ordering and compelling him to goodness and to

outgiving love."¹² Natural law is a "force prompting man in his external relationships in the same direction as the command of love."¹³

Wingren's understanding of natural law is not to be confused with *Schöpfungsordnungen* (fixed ordinances of creation). Wingren describes *Schöpfungsordnungen* thus:

The doctrine of Creation which prevailed in Europe, especially in Germany, a generation ago, presupposes what Luther opposes, namely that God's work of Creation took place "in the beginning" and that God, therefore was once upon a time a Creator but is now something else, that is, Savior. As a result of his actions in the beginning, according to this static way of thinking, there are now certain ordinances on earth (*Schöpfungsordnungen*).¹⁴

This view of creation, *Schöpfungsordnungen*, which favors the existing social orders is in sharp contrast to that of Wingren. The law, for Wingren, is mutable and must change as the forces of destruction change, and the law is finite and requires its own disappearance. The law then, for Wingren, is not associated with maintaining unjust social orders but rather exists to further God's creative activity by exerting pressure on "human beings who do not freely and spontaneously will what God wills."¹⁵

Ruether opposes the notion of natural law because it tends to legitimate fixed orders of creation and, therefore, does not use the concept of natural law in her theology. Ruether claims that patriarchal anthropology understands the male-female hierarchy as "part of the natural order created by God."¹⁶ This is

¹²Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 42.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁴Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 122.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 97.

exemplified by her remarks regarding the Calvinist understanding of social orders, noting that:

The subordination of women to men is not an expression of an inferiority either in nature or in fallen history. Rather it reflects the divinely created social order by which God has ordained the rule of some and the subjugation of others: rulers over subjects, masters over servants, husbands over wives, parents over children. This hierarchical order is not a reflection of differences of human nature, but rather of differences of appointed *social office*. The man rules not because he is superior but because God has commanded him to do so. The woman obeys not because she is inferior but because that is the role God has assigned her. Social offices are necessary for good order in society.

. . . Any effort to change this order and give woman equality with man would itself be a sinful rebellion against God's divinely enacted ordinances of creation and redemption.¹⁷

Hence, Ruether does not find the concept of natural law to be a helpful theological category for feminist theology. However, one might point out that even though she doesn't label it as such, she understands just relationality as that which is natural for God and what God demands from God's creation. In this case Ruether does operate with a concept of natural law.

10.2 LAW AND GOSPEL

Ruether repudiates the notion of law and gospel and claims it is yet another dualism.¹⁸ The schism between law and gospel arises from the dualistic understanding of "letter and spirit, outwardness and inwardness, body and soul."¹⁹ She claims that law and gospel have been polarized. The gospel in this polarization, supersedes the Jewish law which leads to a "mystification" of the Christian reality and the subsequent projection of the shadow side of life

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 98-99.

¹⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, pp. 68-71.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 68.

onto the non-Christian life.²⁰ Furthermore it leads to a schism between the outward life (social) and the inward life (spiritual).

Ruether does, however, understand that there is a dialectical relationship between the law and gospel, the outward and inward life. She writes:

All religions, indeed all human cultures, are a complex dialectic of letter and spirit, faith and law. Religious renewal always wishes to make the content, the inner experience, predominant. But this never takes place without mediating community structures, patterns of prayer, creed, liturgy, ethics, and community life. Christianity has certainly not been without all these embodiments. Indeed, ironically, its constant search for renewal of the inward experience means that it has proliferated far more "embodiments" of itself than any other historical religion. But it has also mystified the relationship between the spirit and the institutional embodiments, either trying to deny historical embodiments, as in spiritualist, charismatic movements, or else idolizing its historical, institutional form as perfect and divinely given. Christians have yet to develop a realistic account of the relative, yet necessary, relationship between inner content and historical embodiment.²¹

Ruether elects not to use the categories of law and gospel because of the hierarchalizing of the spiritual over the physical, the inward over the outward. She does, however, use the category of grace in her theology. "Liberation," she writes, "begins in grace and moves from this foundation in grace to the possibility of self-judgment and repentance."²² This statement reveals that, for Ruether, grace functions much like Wingren's second use of the law which accuses the conscience and prepares the human for the gospel.

The analysis of Wingren's theology has revealed that the law-gospel dialectic is foundational to his understanding of the Christian faith and life. He does not

²⁰Ibid., p. 69.

²¹Ibid., pp. 69-70.

²²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power, p. 9.

interpret them as polar opposites or in a dualistic fashion. He, too, understands that they are in a dialectical relationship in that humans are simultaneously sinful and righteous, under the law and freed by the gospel. However, he clearly distinguishes law from gospel. Gospel is an entirely different message from command just as grace is from judgment. Wingren states that it is the law which functions as accuser, in contrast to Ruether who understands grace as creating the possibility of self-judgment and repentance. Wingren does state that the proclamation of the gospel brings to light the totality of one's guilt in the context of the totality of forgiveness. But the ultimate accusation is the realization that there is no accusation in the gospel but rather a description of what has taken place, namely, the complete and unearned forgiveness of sins.

Hence, the gospel is not the source of ethical behavior for Wingren. The gospel does have an effect on ethical behavior in so far as it gives freedom to the hearer to sift through the multifarious demands that the law makes, and to choose in that freedom which demands he/she will accept. For Wingren, there is no false dualism between law and gospel. They work together for service to the neighbor and for the righteousness of the human.

10.3 ANTHROPOLOGY AND *IMAGO DEI*

Ruether's anthropology is concerned with inclusivity, particularly as it relates to gender equality and just relationality. She notes that "the primary issue in feminist anthropology, secular as well as theological, is the question of how gender is related to humanness."²³ The patriarchal understanding of the human has been projected onto God and subsequently *imago dei* has become gender exclusive. Feminist theology, according to Ruether, must start with anthropology "rather than deducing male-female relations from an *a priori*

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics," p. 275.

definition of God."²⁴ She writes:

A feminist reconstruction of the images of God thus starts by seeking a just and truthful anthropology. It then constructs images of God that will better manifest and promote the full realization of human potential for women and men. It assumes that all of our images of God are human projections. God in Godself is beyond human words and images, only partly and metaphorically exposed in any images. The question is: what are worse projections that promote injustice and diminished humanness, and what are better projections that promote fuller humanness?²⁵

Ruether uses the concept of *imago dei* to describe God's intent for the fullness of humanity. Ruether wants to preserve the original goodness of humanity by saying that our sinfulness does not obliterate but rather distorts *imago dei*. Therefore she speaks of the dialectical nature between potentiality and actuality of humans in her definition of *imago dei*.

She defines *imago dei* as the fullness of redeemed humanity which is only partially disclosed in history. The fullness of redeemed humanity is discovered as our true self in moments but it is not yet fully achieved or revealed.²⁶ The experience of *imago dei*, according to Ruether, occurs through encounters with other people:

whose own authenticity discloses the meaning of such personhood. By holding the memory of such persons in our hearts and minds, we are able to recognize authenticity in ourselves and others.

The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is one such memory, one such paradigm.²⁷

²⁴Ibid., p. 277.

²⁵Ibid., p. 277.

²⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 114.

²⁷Ibid., p. 114.

Ruether implies that there is a true, authentic personhood that has been created as the image of God, yet she uses the words "redeemed," "not yet fully achieved," and "not yet fully revealed" to describe *imago dei*. Ruether also understands that it is possible for humans to seek holistic psychic integration as a more accurate reflection of the image of God. She writes:

Thus the recovery of holistic psychic capacities and egalitarian access to social roles point us toward that lost full human potential that we may call "redeemed humanity." Redeemed humanity, reconnected with the *imago dei*, means not only recovering aspects of our full psychic potential that have been repressed by cultural gender stereotypes, it also means transforming the way these capacities we have been made to function socially. We need to recover our capacity for relationality, for hearing, receiving, and being with and for others, but in a way that is no longer a tool of manipulation or of self-abnegation.²⁸

Her anthropological descriptions center around the hope for redeemed humanity. Her anthropology is not a phenomenological description of the human as he/she is created. Rather it is a description of the potential in the human community for social egalitarianism and just relationality. In other words, she approaches her discussion of *imago dei* from a redemption rather than creation point of view. In this way she subordinates creation to redemption. This has implications for human ethical behavior.

If redeemed humanity is the true picture of humanity, and the human has the potential to achieve it by recovering the capacity for just relationality, then redemption is a human accomplishment. Human works establish righteousness before God as humans become more just with their neighbors.

Wingren, on the other hand, describes *imago dei*, as being created like God. Humanness is not something foreign to God's self. The term *imago dei* is a relational term. It describes the dependency upon God for all life. Wingren holds that, "the Creator who lets man live and who thereby creates him,

²⁸Ibid., p. 113.

creates him in His image (Gen. 1.26 f.).²⁹ The relationship with God is given with life itself.³⁰ "At the same time," states Wingren, "God demands credence, willingness to receive, and a love which gives freely. This demand is implicit in Creation"³¹ Humans do not meet this demand willingly. Therefore God must work to preserve and restore the image in which humans are created. God creates and preserves life through the law and restores health and gives new life through the gospel.

In contrast to Ruether's anthropology, Wingren does not speak of *imago dei* as redeemed personhood but rather as created personhood. He also provides a vehicle in his anthropology, namely, the law, for God's creative work to occur. Hence, it is God's work though humans that moves creation toward faithfulness, toward receiving God's gifts and toward giving love freely.

For Ruether, the moments wherein authentic, redeemed personhood is revealed serve to motivate the human toward faithfulness to God's intent for creation and to service to the neighbor. Although the liberating and grace-inbreaking moments are gifts from God, the actual ethical works are attributed to the human.

10.4 UNIVERSALISM AND PARTICULARISM

Wingren's aim is to provide a universal theological anthropology which he does by describing the nomological existence of the human. In this all humans are equal, oppressors and oppressed alike, because none can free themselves from the bondage and condemnation of the law. What differentiates Christians from the broader human community is the belief that through the deeds of Jesus Christ, the bondage and condemnation of the law are not eternal. The gospel does not add special ethical knowledge to the believer. God is concerned with all of creation, not just Christians, and therefore gives life equally to all. In this way Wingren cannot say that God gives preferential treatment to particular

²⁹Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Law, p. 35.

³⁰Ibid., p. 21.

³¹Ibid., p. 23.

people or groups of people. However, because God wants full life for all of God's creation, the law will work against all sinfulness, including oppression, and this is a universal phenomenon.

God gives life even without our knowledge of who it is that gives life, according to Wingren. God works with existing social structures to ensure the well-being of all that God creates. Structures that oppress are contrary to God's intent for creation and God works to change them. And as the forces of destruction shift, the law shifts too, to continue its work against sin. In this way one could say that God abhors oppression and injustice and works to change oppressive structures and relationships in accord with God's will for full, healthy life. This work is God's universal work operating in particular events.

Wingren wants to maintain that the Christian church, having received the revelation of Jesus Christ, does not have a superior ethical knowledge which it can use to dictate social norms. Regarding the church's role in discussions of general morality he writes:

If the church rushes in, Bible in hand, to give an opinion on insemination, abortion, the marriage of divorced persons, euthanasia, and such matters for which there are regulations in the laws of the country that apply to all the citizens, the scripture will be seen as a legislator making demands on the citizens. But if we make the law the result of the scripture, we are failing the Bible. Christians should undoubtedly take part in public discussion of the laws of society: they ought to take part far more than they do. But they should do so as *citizens*. Their arguments in *these* questions should start from the common desire of *everyone*, i.e. the citizen's best The law that is passed concerns everyone, non-Christians and Christians alike.

If the church wants to confess her Lord she does so much more clearly and with a considerably stronger magnetic and attractive power by making known the *joy* she possesses The word of the church to people is a word telling of a gift it has received: it is the word of the gospel and not the word of the law. If the church, besides confessing Christ by word of mouth and in song, wishes to do social deeds, it has plenty of work to do

This service is the classical picture of the church in the world. Its model is Christ humbling himself as a servant³²

Implied in Wingren's anthropology is the fact that the church does not have the definitive word with regard to ethical behavior. His universal anthropology recognizes pluralism within the human community and recognizes that the law will function in each particular context to promote life and assist in God's creative activity. Ethical pluralism in human society is part of creation. The particular and unique word of the church is the preaching of the gospel.

Wingren writes:

The work of Christ is primarily the Gospel, and this Gospel which is proclaimed to all nations arises from His resurrection. The church can never abandon or curtail this objective, for there is nothing else which can take its place If a man asks for forgiveness, only the Gospel, i.e. "mission," can offer a solution. But if it is a matter of food or clothing, there are many who can be of help The unique and supreme function of the Church is the preaching of the Gospel. Here as elsewhere we lose our proportions when we lose sight of God's universal rule of law among men.³³

The gospel is not partisan. It cannot take sides with particular social and political opinions or ideologies. According to Wingren:

When the gospel, which is the basis of the church, ceases to be a motivation for concrete political measures, the church regains its universal task in relation to all different kinds of people, independent of their grouping in society. It would be disastrous for the mission in developing countries if the gospel was confined to one side of the conflicts The conflict between Nigeria and Biafra is a signal here. It cannot be fitted into an ordinary scheme of "left" and "right." Other conflicts of similar kinds may arise, this time supported by strong elements of Christian revolutionary theology on one or the other side. In this situation the church

³²Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, pp. 26-28.

³³Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel, p. 158.

cannot function with the gospel in relation to everyone, not when it has first been committed to one side.³⁴

Wingren's understanding of the universal work of the law and the particular word of the gospel is in sharp contrast with Ruether's views. Ruether's anthropology is inclusive in that it considers the full personhood and valuing of all people, exemplified by her description of *imago dei*. She also understands that God is the creator of all humans but the historical mediators of that knowledge are plural. She cautions against absolutizing one particularism.³⁵ She writes:

Christians have seen their faith as the universal religion, superseding the particularism of Judaism Christianity has seen itself as the *only* valid, redemptive identity. All other religions are spurious, demonic, and lacking true relationship to God. To be saved, all must incorporate themselves into the one true human identity, the Christian faith

Such imperialist universalism fails to be authentically universalist. It actually amounts to absolutizing one particularism

True universalism must be able to embrace existing human pluralism, rather than try to fit every people into the mold of religion and culture generated from one historical experience. Only God is one and universal. Humanity is finally one because the one God created us all. But the historical mediators of the experience of God remain plural. There is no final perspective on salvation available through the identity of only one people, although each people's revelatory point of reference expresses the universal in different contexts To impose one religion on everyone flattens and impoverishes the wealth of human interaction with God, much as imposing one language on everyone steals other people's culture, and memories. If there is a messianic end-point of history that gathers up all these heritages into one, it can only happen through incorporating them all, not through suppressing them all in favor of the experience of one historical group. In order to be truly catholic, Christians must revise the imperialistic way they have defined their universality.³⁶

³⁴Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, p. 52.

³⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, p.66.

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 65-67.

In Ruether's anthropology, which begins with the picture of redeemed humanity, the human must depend upon culturally specific mediated truth to obtain knowledge of God. She suggests that her anthropology is universal in that it understands pluralism as the wealth of creation and something that should not be suppressed. The notion of the Christian gospel as a specific word to all of creation is inappropriate for Ruether because no one group of persons has the final interpretation of salvation. In other words, the gospel of Jesus Christ is only part of the salvation story.

If knowledge of God comes through culturally mediated revelation and ethical behavior arises out of the in-breaking of grace, the question one must ask of Ruether is, how does this pluralist world come together to work for liberating praxis with various interpretations of what is appropriate ethical behavior? Rather than setting up a universal theological anthropology, it appears as though Ruether supports cultural anthropologies that exist in parallel courses. If this is operative then it is very likely that each group could align their "gospel" with the ethical behavior specially revealed to them. This makes the gospel partisan and could lead to the very imperialism she deplors.

This is exemplified in Ruether's position regarding God's preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. Through moments of liberation the oppressed understand that God's will for creation is just relationality and full personhood. This revelation speaks a truth for the oppressed. The oppressors, however, who have not received this revelation continue to perpetrate and perpetuate oppression believing that their "truth" (such as, 'prosperity indicates divine favor') justifies their behavior. When ethical behavior is based upon a variety of revealed truths, each group can argue that they have received a valid word for their situation, hence the gospel itself becomes polarized, diminished and in effect, nullified.

10.5 REDEMPTION, JESUS CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Three areas of Ruether's christology differ from Wingren's christology. The differences are evident in their understandings of redemption, the identity of Jesus Christ and the nature of the gospel message. The first area that merits

discussion is the nature of sin and redemption. While both theologians understand sin as broken relationality, they understand the consequences of sin differently, hence redemption means something different for each of them.

10.5.1 The meaning of redemption

Ruether understands the consequence of sin as the blocking of *shalom*. When *shalom* is blocked, God's full blessings are prevented from being fully manifested in community. Humans' alienation from God, from creation and from others does not allow them to experience the fullness of creation. Sin is both political/social and personal. Redemption liberates humans from oppressive social structures and restores just relationality, thereby redeeming both structures and individuals. Redemption is an ongoing process, never fully realized or fully revealed. Yet it occurs in present moments and is not understood to be a reality outside of human history.³⁷ Just as sin occurs in our historical time setting, redemption of sin is temporal and pertains to the daily working toward a just society. Redemption is not to be regarded as something that grants immortality, or eternal life. Ruether writes:

Acceptance of death is acceptance of the finitude of individuated centers of being, but also our identification with the large Matrix as our total self which contains us all. The problem of personal immortality is created by the effort to absolutize individual ego as itself everlasting, over against the total community of being. As we relativize egoism in relation to community, we perhaps can also accept death as the final relinquishment of individuated ego into the great Matrix of Being which grounds, not just our personal selves, but the community of beings in their relation to each other.

. . . . But what of the meaning of our personal lives? . . .

We do not know what this means. It is beyond our personal powers or capacity for conscious experience. We do not have to "be sure it happens," for it is not our responsibility. We can do nothing to assure that there will be an immortal dimension to our lives. Our responsibility is to use our temporal life-span to

³⁷To understand Ruether's views of eschatology see her article, "Eschatology and Feminism," in Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies From the Underside, ed. by, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990.), pp. 111-124.

create a just and good community for our generation and for our children. We need also to learn to become wise in the absorption of the tragic dimension of life which we cannot change or control. At death we hand these achievements and this wisdom over to Holy Wisdom, who will transmute it into a transcendent mode of being beyond our powers.³⁸

Ruether takes a pragmatic view of life and death and concentrates on the activity of creating a better world in the historical time frame wherein each generation of humans live. Redemption, as the ultimate forgiveness of sins and the promise of a life eternally spent in unbroken relationship with God, is not a primary concern for Ruether because it is beyond human conscious capabilities to understand it.

Wingren presents a different understanding of the consequences of sin which leads him to a different interpretation of redemption. The consequences of sin, according to Wingren, are bondage to the law and death. Hence redemption is freedom and life.

Because the law is operative in all people in the ongoing creation of this world, there is no escaping from its demands or its judgment of sin. The burden of the law (God's unrecognized demand) is experienced by everyone, regardless of whether or not they have heard the gospel, as evidenced by the universal experience of the conscience. Wingren writes:

The negative character of conscience must not be allowed to overshadow a surprisingly positive characteristic---its universality The fact that conscience in one culture may condemn me because I have been too obedient, and in another culture may condemn me because I have not been obedient enough need not be an argument against the concept of a natural law.

The point in both cases is the same: I am judged by conscience because I have not benefited others. We can obviously have different interpretations of what benefits others. But that I should act so that others are benefited is something that conscience asserts across cultural boundaries

³⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," p. 123.

What is universal about conscience then is that it condemns actions which do not benefit others.³⁹

Redemption is release from the burdens and judgment of the law experienced in the conscience. It is the restoration of health and wholeness. Redemption is *recapitulatio*, meaning, "humanity is coming to be" and "inhumanity is being conquered."⁴⁰ There is a forward movement in this process which is "liberation, the inner freedom of the created."⁴¹ Regarding the forward movement among people, Wingren writes:

In each individual the Spirit is in conflict with something (Gal. 5:17), and what it is in conflict with is destructive at every point, not only for the individual but also for one's environment: "enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy" (Gal. 5:20). All of them destroy fellowship. To grow forward toward one's own individual death implies, providing the Spirit is guiding, a maturing of this destructive state and liberation out of it, so that the individual may be "formed by God's fingers" to be like the image, Christ. This is to become *human* according to the original decree of creation (Gen. 1:27).

But this movement forward of one insignificant human being becomes a part of humanity's great forward movement toward Christ's definitive revelation, when he will be visible to all (Rev. 1:7). According to the original belief in the resurrection, Christ already dwells in the future. When people (that is, Adam) move forward through death, this implies that Christ, who is the Judge and Author of Life is coming closer. He is approaching, and he approaches *everyone*. There are no destructive forces which will escape the encounter with him in judgment. But what is judged and rejected is only that which has oppressed and destroyed his people. Whatever has been of assistance to the least and the despised (food, drink, shelter, clothing, health care, visits to the imprisoned) lives eternally, and it lives a song of praise (Matt. 2:31-46; Rev. 7:9-17). In the final judgment, there is no imperialism either.⁴²

³⁹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 70.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

In the process of moving forward, redemption is present now. Jesus, who speaks from the future to those who move forward, "judges them and makes them alive now through the words of life," states Wingren.⁴³

If the law is universal, then the gospel must hold universal significance. Wingren believes that God's desire is for salvation to come to all. He writes:

That everyone should be saved is not an assertion of fact that has any biblical support. But it is something that one can certainly pray for. Everyone who talks about life and judgment is included in the forward movement. No one has arrived. So, while we are in the process of moving toward the goal, we can pray what we cannot assert. For one thing, the New Testament clearly says that God wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2.4). To pray for that which God wants is naturally appropriate to the movement forward.⁴⁴

It is clear that Wingren understands sin and redemption as encompassing both the material and spiritual world. Like Ruether, he believes experiences of redemption occur in the daily lives of this created world. Ruether sees evidence of redemption in moments of liberation. Wingren understands redemption occurring in the daily creating of the new person in Christ. Unlike Ruether, he believes that humans become fully human only at their death when they are completely free from the bondage of the law and can experience an eternal life of praise and thanksgiving which is what the Creator wills from the beginning and throughout creation.

Ruether and Wingren's positions on redemption are based on their understanding of the person of Jesus.

⁴³ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁴ibid., p. 183.

10.5.2 The identity of Jesus

Wingren prefers not to discuss the identity of Jesus in the traditional categories of the two natures: divine and human. Rather he uses the terms "humiliation" and "victory."⁴⁵ Wingren describes Jesus' humiliation thus:

He [Jesus] wanted to renew God's own people. He lived on the basis of the holy writings of Israel, totally and without reservation. What his death on the cross implied was that he was both repudiated by God's chosen people and condemned by God's holy law. Both imply that he suffered in conscience and was unsure about his cause. Therein lay his humiliation.⁴⁶

Jesus' "victory lies at the deepest point of humiliation!" writes Wingren. He discusses Jesus' victory around four points:

The first is that since the destruction of creation comes from seeking after gain, the absence of any personal gain at the cross is a victory. Second, this absence of personal gain means that free course is restored to the previously blocked flow of the bubbling spring of creation. The third aspect is the harvest, the sacrificed grain of wheat yields a new abundant crop. Finally . . . through the cross God becomes different; his relationship to us and our access to him has been changed because of the cross.⁴⁷

In yielding himself in faith to God, Jesus gives himself in love and service to humankind. Wingren further notes that, "in this He is what man ought to be and was created to be."⁴⁸ Jesus is the image of God; true humanity. "But," Wingren states, "in what He does He also reflects, discloses and reveals God's nature."⁴⁹ The most profound truth of God is found in the furthest point of Jesus' humiliation. According to Wingren, "the most profound truth about God

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 97.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 98.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁸Gustaf Wingren, Gospel and Church, pp. 51.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 52.

is His willingness to give, and it is this depth of His being that is revealed in the humanity of Christ."⁵⁰

Jesus is a person like us, created to exist for others. Unlike us, Jesus did not build up walls against others by concentrating on himself, even when he was forsaken and condemned.⁵¹ Jesus remained faithful and obedient to God's intent for creation by existing for others. Since the law's function is to compel obedience and faithfulness to God's intent for creation, Jesus' faithfulness to God broke the law. His obedience turns the pattern of destruction around. "Consequently," states Wingren, "through the gospel, Jesus is present everywhere bringing salvation to all the suffering."⁵² His death silenced the law and removed it of its power. As a result, Wingren writes:

the new creation is active again. The hindrance is removed by a person who simply was "obedient," the New Testament way of describing an ethical victory (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8). When that which blocks the flow is removed through the obedience on the cross, the result has to be that a fountain springs up in the world, life flows from the crucified victor out to others in an ever-widening circle. This is what the resurrection means.⁵³

Creation and redemption are held together in the death and resurrection of Jesus because it is God who is active in both. "It is the Creator," states Wingren "working through a pure and healthy person, who makes new."⁵⁴ In this way God continues to be the active one both in creating and restoring life.

The restoration of creation occurred through this one person, Jesus Christ.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 52.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 111.

⁵²Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 105.

⁵³Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 111.

Wingren states that Jesus occupies a unique position compared to other messianic figures,⁵⁶ because, according to him:

There is no parallel either in world religions or in modern views of life (humanism, Marxism, existentialism) to the way Jesus functions in relation to the believer. The other forms of faith operate with the assumption that a certain truth has been discovered, or that a rule of action has been given, but the object of faith (or obedience) does not have the many-sided role Jesus has in Christianity. The unique position Jesus occupies compared to other messianic figures is based on two features firmly anchored in the gospel tradition: first, the combination of everyday deeds and death on a cross, and second, Jesus' two-fold attitude that combines ethical rigor with generosity and unconditional forgiveness. Here the demand and the gift are one.⁵⁷

From this brief description of Wingren's understanding of the identity of Jesus, it is clear that he sees Jesus as the one person who was truly human, the one who is victorious over the forces of destruction, the one who removes the condemnation of the law and is the final word of redemption.

Ruether describes the person and works of Jesus from a different perspective. As a student she became aware of a gap between the Jewish idea of the Messiah and the Christian idea of Christ. In her studies she discovered "that what Judaism meant by the word 'Messiah,' had very little in common with what the Catholic tradition taught as the meaning of the word 'Christ.'"⁵⁸ She explains it thus:

Christ was understood as a divine man, the incarnation of the Word of God who appeared to save us from personal sin, reconcile us with God, and make immortal life available to the redeemed.

The Messiah, on the other hand, was not an incarnate divinity, but a human king and warrior who represented

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, p. 46.

God . . . He has nothing to do with saving us from mortality or making available life after death.

. . . If Jesus never claimed to be a warrior and king who would end historical injustice by leading the forces of God at Armageddon, it was also apparent that he never claimed to be an incarnate divinity, to bestow immortality, or even to found a Christian church as a separate religion from Judaism.

It seemed to me very problematic to fault the Jews for not accepting Jesus as the Christ, when what their tradition meant by the Messiah had nothing to do with this Christian concept of the Christ. But, if one did not fault the Jews for their nonacceptance, then the whole Christian claim to inherit the religion of fulfilled Jewish messianic hope was thrown into question. The connecting thread linking Jewish messianic expectation, Jesus' historical life and acts, and Christianity was broken. They lay, like so many disparate pieces, tendentiously tied together by later Christian myth-making.⁵⁹

In her writing, she explores the origins and development of christology and how Jesus came to be understood as the Divine *Logos* as well as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies.⁶⁰ Ruether acknowledges that Jesus embodies "God's universal new Word" and in so doing understands God as incarnate in Jesus Christ.⁶¹ He is "the representative of liberated humanity and the liberating Word of God."⁶² However, she states, "Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated 'once-for-all' in the historical Jesus."⁶³ With

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁶⁰See Chapter 9, "Healing the World: The Sacramental Tradition," pp. 229-253, in Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, for her most comprehensive work regarding the relationship between the Judaic and Hellenistic roots of cosmological Christology.

⁶¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology From Patriarchy," p. 147.

⁶²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 137.

⁶³Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 138.

this claim she shares an affinity with Matthew Fox's understanding of the cosmic Christ. She writes:

Christ is not simply confined to the historical Jesus, nor only related to human souls. Christ is the immanent Wisdom of God present in the whole cosmos as its principle of interconnected and abundant life. The cosmic Christ is not only the foundational basis of original blessing in creation, but is its *telos* or direction of fulfillment. Creation moves toward increasing fulfillment of this abundance of life. The cosmic Christ is thus another name for original and final blessing. It is both the immanent divinity present in all things in their interconnection, and the fulfilled being of the cosmos, which it seeks to realize.

For Christians, Jesus is the paradigmatic manifestation of cosmic wisdom and goodness. But he is only one such manifestation. The same wisdom and goodness underlies all other religious quests and has been manifest in many other symbolic expressions, such as the Tao, the Buddha, the Great Spirit, and the Goddess. Thus the truth manifest in Jesus is in no way exclusive, but links Christians in "deep ecumenism" with other religions, not just the "Great Religions," but also native religions that have been despised as "paganism."⁶⁴

In contrast to Wingren, Ruether does not understand Jesus as accomplishing a final redemptive act. Ruether makes the following claim regarding feminist theology and the identity of Jesus:

Women must reject the idea that Jesus is the final word, even in order to affirm Jesus as one revelatory word in the midst of an incompleting redemption Women have a problem with Christology as the elevation of Jesus to the status of God's last word in history. Jesus is theologically credible, not as the final word, but as that crucified hope who locates us where we are in history, forsaken by the Father-God and looking forward to that new humanity which has not yet been revealed.

. . . Jesus is a smashed beginning, broken by the power of dominion, awaiting that future revelation which still eludes us

⁶⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, p. 241.

all From that realm of unfulfilled possibility he does not reign as Lord in order to sanction the earthly rule of a Church which re-establishes the male ruling class domination 'in His name.'⁶⁵

Jesus is not to be regarded as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes. "Rather," she claims, "he must be seen as one who announced this messianic hope and who gave signs of its presence, but who also died in that hope, crucified on the cross of unredeemed human history."⁶⁶ Followers of Jesus continue to proclaim that hope and in so doing experience its presence. But we still struggle here and now with "unresolved history, holding on to the memory of Jesus' resurrection from the grave as the basis for *our* refusal to take evil as the last word and *our* hope that God will win in the end."⁶⁷ Ruether refers to this as a "proleptic" understanding of Jesus' messianic identity.⁶⁸

Her conclusion, that Jesus is not the only nor the final fulfillment of the messianic hope, is followed by another conclusion. She sees Jesus as paradigmatic. In other words, the cross and resurrection of Jesus are limited to a particular historical community. These events are not the only way that hope is mediated in the face of adversity or struggle; other peoples may have other paradigmatic events.⁶⁹ Jesus is paradigmatic for the Christian community because he reveals authentic personhood by denouncing and dismantling oppressive social structures which communicates the universal truth of God's intent for just relationality. He represents "the overthrow of the present world system and the sign of a dawning new age in which God's will is done on earth."⁷⁰

⁶⁵Cited in Jack Rogers, Ross Mackenzie and Louis Weeks, Case Studies in Christ and Salvation, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.), p. 146.

⁶⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian, p. 72.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 138.

In contrast to Wingren's understanding of Jesus as the one true human who removes the condemnation of the law for all of humanity, Ruether understands Jesus as one paradigm out the whole of God's redemptive process. Jesus, from Wingren's point of view, is the Messiah although he was not the image of the victorious Messiah that the Jewish people anticipated.⁷¹ Ruether sees Jesus as not fulfilling the Jewish hopes for the Messiah. Instead Jesus represents the announcement of messianic hope and gave signs of its presence.

Wingren and Ruether's differing views of the person and works of Jesus are also reflected in their concepts of the function of Jesus' gospel message.

10.5.3 The effect of the gospel message on the hearer

The gospel message, from Wingren's perspective, produces a new creation in the hearer.⁷² In preaching and in the sacraments, Christ comes again and again. According to Wingren, the aim of preaching is:

to transfer the chief figure's activity to new recipients, over and over again. The text assures these recipients that they do not need to be hindered from accepting what the good news offers because of their faults, mistakes, or weaknesses.⁷³

Wingren further notes: "the Gospel declares that all that took place in the event of Christ's life is now becoming the experience of those who listen to its word."⁷⁴ Christ gives himself to us again and again through the gospel and, in so doing, "gives birth to the new man and from which also commandments,

⁷¹Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 99.

⁷²Gustaf Wingren, Gospel and Church, p. 21.

⁷³Gustaf Wingren, Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life, p. 135.

⁷⁴Gustaf Wingren, Gospel and Church, p. 25.

summons to good works, and exhortation come into being."⁷⁵ Wingren states:

When we take Christ's own giving as the pattern of what our response should be, our works will become like His. It is in the Church that we hear this summons to good works based on the Gospel. But when the Church responds in obedience to that summons, it is to mankind that it turns. The Church lives by receiving the Gospel anew each day, and the good works for which its members are responsible have the same goal and object as the Gospel itself---the restoration and healing of men.⁷⁶

The gospel restores and heals the human, thereby making him/her righteous. The gospel message puts God's activity in the center. The exhortation to do good works puts our neighbor in the center. Thus the gospel deals with our righteousness before God. The summons to do good works is a response to the news of forgiveness, not a condition placed upon the hearer. The new person is exhorted to serve the neighbor in his/her daily existence to continue God's intent for creation. Wingren emphasizes the freedom that is given in the gospel which gives the believer freedom to serve the neighbor. He writes, "I believe that the resurrection of Christ bestows upon the believer a triumphant sovereignty that extends into the realm of work and compulsion in the life we live in the here and now before death."⁷⁷

Wingren sees the gospel message as more than just a story or a memory but as a living Word, a Word that justifies and restores humanity to its original image. It is the vehicle through which Christ speaks from the future, addressing the human in his/her present situation and calling him/her forth toward total liberation and inner freedom.

Ruether primarily understands the message of the gospel as a prophetic message that exhorts the hearer to liberating praxis. The main emphasis of Jesus' message is the annunciation of the kingdom of God and the denunciation

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁷Gustaf Wingren, Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology, p. 137.

of the web of oppressive social structures. His words and deeds "renew the prophetic vision whereby the Word of God does not validate the existing social and religious hierarchy but speaks on behalf of the marginalized and despised groups of society."⁷⁸ Ruether writes:

The social praxis by which God's prophetic word reveals itself in Jesus is one which God comes in judgment on oppressive and unjust social systems. God's prophet demythologizes those religious ideologies that justify such oppressive systems as the will of God. Instead, the will of God is revealed as one that is putting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the oppressed. God's Word comes as a transforming power in history that overthrows distorted systems and restores God's shalom or God's kingdom as the place where God's will is done on earth. This means that God's prophetic word . . . comes to lead all humanity, both men and women, into that pleasant plain where we can live in peace and harmony with each other

. . . Jesus must be seen as paradigmatic of the redeemed humanity in his faithfulness to God's will, even to death. He is an exponent of God's Word, in his critique of oppressive structures and in his announcement of the kingdom. But, that which he announces is not himself, but the liberated humanity to come. It is we, the community of Christ, who must carry on that prophetic denunciation and annunciation and attempt to continue to model, in our converted humanity, that aspiration. That means that, here and now, we encounter Christ not only in the past Jesus, but in our sisters (and brothers) today as well.⁷⁹

10.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

The above discussion has attempted to illustrate that Ruether and Wingren begin their respective theologies from different starting points. Wingren chooses to begin with creation while Ruether speaks from a redemption point of view. The thesis of this project is that when the law is absent or misconstrued there are implications for theological ethics.

⁷⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, p. 136.

⁷⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," pp. 21-22.

Ruether's theology makes important contributions to theological ethics. She challenges a dualistic world-view that hierarchicalizes spirit over matter, the inward over the outward, the personal over the social. She restores the notion of the interconnectedness of all creation and exhorts the human community to abandon the alienation that accompanies a dualistic world view. In doing this she promotes an ethic of mutuality and just relationality as well as provides an ethical basis for the use and care of nature.

Ruether clearly makes strides in reconstructing the patriarchal Christian tradition, by taking the experiences of women and other marginalized groups seriously. Her emphasis is placed on liberation as salvation. This emphasis brings the kingdom of God to the center of the gospel message and makes theology a relevant instrument which challenges a world that sees domination and production as ethically normal. Her concern is for transformative praxis and the working toward a more humane and just society.

Her christological claims challenge Christian imperialist tendencies by respecting a broad variety of religious experiences and traditions and regarding them as all participating in the ongoing redemption of the world. In so doing, she creates an ethic of respect for and an appreciation of pluralism.

Ruether, however, by beginning her theology from a redemption perspective locates the source of theological ethics in the gospel message. She understands the gospel as both promise and command. God wills just relationality and liberation. We know this because Jesus, who is one embodiment of this will of God, announces it. He also denounces that which thwarts just relationality and liberation. Humans who hear this message and appropriate the paradigm of Jesus are challenged to participate in his liberating praxis to continue the work of redemption. In this way the human becomes more authentic and closer to *imago dei* which is the fullness of redeemed personhood.

Because the law as a formal theological category is absent from Ruether's theology she must rely upon the revealed word of God, the gospel, to instruct the hearer in ethical behavior. In this, she, like the proponents of the third use of the law, sees submission to the law of God, rather than freedom from the

law, as God's intention. In this case it is the law of just relationality. While she uses the concept of liberation as that which frees one to full personhood, in actuality the human is forever bound to God's law for just relationality since the work of redemption is only glimpsed in moments of the in-breaking of grace but not fully realized.

There is a clear emphasis on God's preferential option for the oppressed and marginalized in Ruether's theology. While this is a contribution to the discussion of theological ethics, it is not without its problems. If theological ethics is articulated through the gospel message then the gospel becomes limited to those who are in need of liberation while the oppressor hears only condemnation. However, Ruether claims that those who "hear the good news as a call to give up their false wealth and join Jesus in solidarity with the poor" have hope.⁸⁰ Their hope does not depend upon grace given to them freely; grace is given as a result of their actions.

Using the law as a formal theological category and establishing it as the source of ethical behavior resolves the problems arising from collapsing the law and gospel into one entity and provides a vehicle for God to perform works of love through the human. This is the main contribution made by Wingren to theological ethics.

By locating ethical behavior in creation rather than redemption, Wingren is able to design a universal theological anthropology. His anthropology recognizes pluralism, as well as provides a rationale for unity, in that all people are governed by the law of God which is operational for the good of the neighbor in all its cultural expressions.

Wingren's understanding of the law also provides a connection between human works and God's work. Human ethical behavior is not dependent on the will of humans to do good but rather good works are forced through the compulsion of God's law. Because good works are God's creative works, the neighbor will continue to be served regardless of our willingness to perform service. This is

⁸⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," p. 120.

not permission for complacency on the part of humans but rather a description of what God does to continue to create life.

Wingren's clear separation of content and function regarding the law and the gospel also contributes to theological ethics. By distinguishing righteousness before God from righteousness before the neighbor, he frees the human from the burden of knowing that he/she can never fulfill the demands of the law. Forces of destruction are all pervasive and no matter how ethical a person is there is always something left undone or neglected. If one's redemption depended upon meeting all the demands of the law, hopelessness would reign. The freedom in the gospel is not an excuse for ethical complacency but rather, as Wingren says, a support for the will to live. The gospel, the word of freedom from the bondage and judgment of the law, allows the human to continue to serve the neighbor without the preoccupation of one's own salvation.

Finally, another of Wingren's contributions to theological ethics is found in his understanding of the gospel. By locating theological ethics in the doctrine of creation he does not polarize the gospel message by making it the source of ethical knowledge. The gospel, according to Wingren, does not add special ethical knowledge to the Christian. Therefore the gospel cannot be aligned with particular political causes or ideologies. Rather it proclaims the forgiveness of sins which Wingren defines as restored health. The words "forgiveness of sins" do have ethical implications without being aligned with a particular ideology or cause. He writes:

The elemental human quality, that which lends life value, is always given. It is there before our decisions. It is creation.

But the words unique to the church, "the forgiveness of sins," are a typical gift. If anything lacks the nature of an act of will or a decision on our part, it is the forgiveness of sins offered to us by the gospel. Would this gift not create something new in human social life? Forgiveness is ethically re-creative even by the very fact that it wipes out and breaks down. What it breaks down is barriers that prevent a spirit of community, guilt barriers. Forgiveness is at its very purest when no audible word about forgiveness is uttered but the whole of life in society instead testifies that the earlier wrong no longer exists This miracle that human life is swept clean by the fact that one "does not

remember" is one of the most powerful re-creative ethical forces in existence.

Forgiveness in this sense, forgetfulness, makes ordinary human life possible again, even though it may be practically impossible to achieve by nature The church could be a return to unspoiled humanity by its preaching of the "forgiveness of sins."⁸¹

In conclusion, locating ethical behavior in the doctrine of creation, by using the law as a formal theological category, provides a useful foundation for understanding theological ethics. Incorporating Wingren's concept of the law into feminist theology, while not neglecting the critique of patriarchal theology and the concern for transformative praxis presented by Ruether, may serve to strengthen feminist theological ethics.

⁸¹Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, pp. 70-71.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Chapter Eleven A FEMINIST THEOLOGY BASED ON WINGREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW: A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

11.1 PRELIMINARY REMARKS

From the previous analysis and critique of the works of Ruether and Wingren, three seemingly irreconcilable differences have been discovered. One of these differences pertains to the identity of Jesus. To preserve the integrity of Ruether's thought, Jesus can only be regarded as one of many manifestations of the redemptive hope for humanity. If one attempts to interface Wingren's theology with Ruether's there will be a problem with Wingren's notion of the uniqueness of Jesus in relationship to the law. Another difference between the two theologians is Wingren's notion of the decisive nature of Jesus' redemptive activity and the promise of eternal life. This is in sharp contrast to Ruether's thoughts regarding the finality of redemption and immortality. Ruether does not believe that the finality of redemption can be found in the person of Jesus and refrains from discussing eternal life as something that preserves immortal individual consciousness.

The third possible irreconcilable difference pertains to the effect of the gospel message upon the hearer. To preserve the integrity of Wingren's theology one must uphold the notion that the gospel message brings new life to the hearer and creates a new person. To preserve the integrity of Ruether's theology one must understand the gospel message as that which announces the kingdom and denounces and dismantles the web of oppressive relationships. The gospel message, for Ruether, also elicits ethical behavior in the human.

The first two issues stated above, from this author's perspective, cannot be resolved. Therefore in this constructive piece, Jesus must be understood as the one individual who silenced the law, because emphasis is placed upon the function of the law. However, it is not necessary to exclude or negate the contributions of other prophetic individuals who proclaim God's goodness and

intent for creation. They are to be understood as participating in creation's work, which demands appropriate ethical behavior, but are not to be associated with offering redemption to humans.

If the law is seen as condemning sin, then the denunciation and dismantling of the web of oppressive social structures will still be accomplished by the hearing of the gospel message when Jesus gives "us a push in the same direction as 'nature,' the creation" to use Wingren's expression.¹ Jesus' denunciation and dismantling of the web of oppressive social structures is not understood as a function of the gospel message but rather as a function of the law. The gospel message concerns itself with the work of forgiveness of sins.

To begin the process of creating a feminist theology using the law as a formal theological category, the methodological claims must be made explicit. In accord with Wingren's two-fold phenomenological approach, we will begin with anthropology. It is this author's opinion that the gospel addresses the actual situation of the human and therefore it is necessary to begin theology with a description of the human situation. The following constructive theology will begin with a theological anthropology that describes God's relationship to creation, the human---both male and female---as *imago dei*, and humans' relationship to God and to creation. Once this anthropology is developed it will be important to describe the meaning and the content of the gospel as it addresses the human. Therefore, this constructive piece will be organized under the headings, "Creation" and "Gospel."

In developing the content of this constructive theology women's experience will be taken seriously. This will necessitate the reconfiguration of some of the traditional theological terms and concepts without destroying the integrity of Wingren's understanding of the law and gospel dialectic.²

¹Gustaf Wingren, The Flight From Creation, p. 53.

²In the preceding chapters the sources of Ruether and Wingren's theological concepts have been extensively cited. The following constructive statement is an integrating of their previously described theological thoughts, therefore only new concepts and direct quotes will be cited in this section.

11.2 CREATION

God's intent for creation is full and wholesome life as described in the biblical creation texts. The first story (Genesis 1), describes God as creating everything out of darkness and formlessness. The second creation story (Genesis 2), describes God as calling forth herbs and plants from the ground, forming one human out of dust, giving to that human animals and birds and other creatures to provide company and then giving the human the privilege of naming these gifts of creation. But the giving of life was still less than whole in God's eyes so God created human community by giving the lone human a partner.

In both of these creation stories God is pleased with what God makes and shapes. The words, "and God saw that it was good" appear six times in the first account (Gen. 1). These exclamations refer to nature, created matter. Then God creates the human, male and female, in God's own image, and God gives all of creation to humans to use for life. After everything was formed God said: "This is very good!" (Gen. 1:31).

11.2.1 God creates life

God creates life. This concept of life contains the creating and sustaining of body and spirit, the gifts of nourishment and shelter, the interrelatedness with the human community, the opportunity to work and everything that is needed in order to have a whole and healthy life. Because all of these things are given daily, it is understood that God's creation of life is on-going. It is not a static, once and for all act, but rather each and every moment is created by God. Each and every gift for life is given by God.

Regardless of whether or not humans recognize these gifts as bestowed upon them by God, these gifts are constantly given in order that all humans may live. Implicit in this description is the claim that the gift of life comes from outside of ourselves. Humans can be agents for giving life to the neighbor but humans cannot create life.

Life, as it is conceptualized here, includes the affirmation of both genders created in the image of God, of freedom as interconnectedness with creation

(not power over it), radical interrelatedness within human community and appreciation for the goodness of it all. God's intent for life includes freedom for all of humanity to participate in the blessings of all creation.

11.2.2 *Imago dei and anthropology*

The concept *imago dei* is a non-dualistic, inclusionary notion. God's image is a statement pertaining to the created nature of humans. It is a concept that speaks of interrelationship between the human and the Creator. Being created in God's image describes God's availability to humans and the gift of accessibility to God. It also speaks of dependency; the dependency upon God for all life.

Imago dei is true personhood in that it expresses God's intent for wholeness and healthy life. To be created in the image of God means that all humans, male and female, body and spirit are valued and are good. The whole of the human is affirmed in this image, including the body. If the body were not essential to that image, it would not be created. Therefore, the image of God is not a spiritual, transcendent image. It speaks of immanence; of God present and active in created matter. It describes a world that is not emptied of divine presence, but full of God in the ongoing creation of life.

11.2.3 The relationship between humans and nature

God, as creator of all life, provides the human with ample gifts in creation to sustain life. The ability to live interdependently with God, in human community, and with creation is a gift given in the image of God. *Imago dei* is a communal image. Because humans have the capacity to reflect upon their environment and make self-conscious decisions regarding the use and care of nature, humans are entrusted with the care and management of nature for the purpose of participating in God's intent for creation. The domination of nature, the domination of one group of humans over others, or holding to a hierarchical view of spirit over matter are inappropriate understandings of humans' relationship with creation. The gift of creation, given to humans to sustain whole and healthy life, does not describe or justify hierarchical static orders of creation in human relationships or with nature.

The notion of the human being entrusted to care wisely for creation is entwined with the notion of *imago dei* in that it describes the interdependence of the human with the Creator of life. Although the notion of creation as gift describes the freedom of the human to use creation, it acknowledges that all life is dependent upon God's continuous creation of it. To live in appropriate relationality with God is to live in grateful recognition of creation as God's providing of gifts for the continuation of life for all humanity. Therefore the gift of creation implies God's desire for justice in relationships and service to the neighbor.

11.2.4 Radical interrelatedness in human community

Radical interrelatedness within the human community and with creation is necessary for just relationality and service to the neighbor to occur. When God creates the human in God's own image, God is valuing all of humanity. To be truly human, then, is to experience a healthy, full and uninjured life. The concepts, 'image of God' and the 'proper relationship with creation,' mean a life lived in interrelatedness with God and with the gifts for life given in creation, including our neighbor.

When God gives life and the gifts of creation to sustain life, they are not intended to be misused for domination by humans over creation or by some humans over other humans. Oppression in the human community and the misuse of the environment block the gift of life that God wishes to give. Therefore, liberation from socio-economic, political and ecclesiastical oppression, as well as ecological justice, is inherent in God's intent for whole and healthy life. The concepts '*imago dei*' and 'creation as gift' do not contain hierarchical or patriarchal prescriptions of radiated authority from the superior to the inferior. Nor do they imply human superiority over nature. Rather they suggest mutuality, power-sharing, interconnectedness with God and radical relationality within the human community and all of creation. This is expressed in the concept of *shalom*.

Shalom is communal well-being. It is life that is lived with justice, peace, full opportunities, and abundance for all. It is what God intends and what the human

hopes and strives for. *Shalom* is not present until all humans experience it. It is another way to describe the gift of life that God is continuously creating.

In giving the gift of life, God demands that the human acknowledge his/her dependency upon God for all life. This recognition and appreciation of God as the giver of all life, and creation to sustain life, is expressed by the human in joyful, praise-filled obedience and faithfulness to God.

In giving life, God also demands justice in relationships and service to the neighbor. For it is in just relationality and service to the neighbor that God can continue to sustain healthy and whole life. Mutual service and the recognition of radical relationality in the human community is God's *shalom*.

God demands that humans trust and praise God as the Creator of all life. God also demands radical relationality and service to the neighbor. Both of these demands are present in all creation. Since all humans are created by God, all humans, regardless of whether or not they know who it is that gives life, are included in God's demands. Though the demand for just relationality and to serve the neighbor is unrecognized, in so far as this demand occurs apart from specific cultural revelations of God, yet the demand is present in all relationships throughout the human community. It is a universal statement regarding the condition of all humans. This is expressed in the notion of human conscience.

11.2.5 Life is always given and always threatened

Because God is understood as creating now, this implies that life is always threatened. If life were not threatened, there would be no need for God to continue to create. Forces of destruction are those forces present in general existence that threaten God's gift of life and are those forces within the human that prevent the human from willingly doing what God demands.

The foundation of human sinfulness is the belief that humans can live independently from God and irresponsibly toward creation and the neighbor. Humans resist participating in the interconnectedness with God and with just relationality toward the neighbor and creation. Sin is the breaking apart of relationality in the relationship of the self with God, the self with the self, the

self with creation and the self with other humans. Sin manifests itself when humans give in to the forces of destruction, forsake faithful dependence on God and consciously or unconsciously perpetrate injustices toward the neighbor and creation.

It is sin when humans delude themselves into believing that they can create life apart from God. This is seen when humans with power grasp at equality with God. In this sense one can say that sin is pride. The shadow side of pride is seen when humans regard themselves as less than the image of God and doubt the worth of their createdness. In both of these descriptions, there is a break or alienation from God's intent for creation.

The experience of sin as alienation from God, from the self, from the needs of the neighbor and from the gift of life in creation are evidenced in destructive actions. Alienation is evidenced in such social illnesses as abuse, alcoholism, violence, sexual promiscuity, political oppression, the hierarchicalizing of spirit over matter, men over women, lighter races over darker races, unequal distribution of wealth and resources and so forth. All of these are manifestations of an alienated self. And all describe the manifestations of sin.

Sin is also manifested in the breaking of interrelatedness with creation. Pollution, nuclear weaponry, poor stewardship of resources, the exploitation of nature for the amassing of material gain and unlimited production, all are disastrous reminders of human sinfulness.

The social dimension of sin breaks apart community. Regarding one gender, race, or class of people as superior and subduing, discounting or suppressing all others is sinful. Oppression is sinful because it denies the oppressed full and whole life and access to all of God's gifts of creation. It is sinful because it separates the oppressor from the rest of the human community by establishing a false hierarchy of power. It is sinful when the oppressed participate in their own oppression as well as in the oppression of others. Manipulation, domination, self-hate and the perpetuation of systems which distort true interrelatedness are all manifestations of sin.

In all of these manifestations of sin, the gifts of life are threatened and true life, as God intends, is always being destroyed. Humans have been created for life and for the agency of life with the privileges to care for and nurture one another as well as creation, and yet humans fail to participate in God's creative work. Therefore God must use other means to continue to create life. God uses the law as the means to ensure that life is given to all.

11.2.6 The law

The first use of the law, commonly known as the political or civil use of the law, is that which coerces and compels the human to serve the neighbor. Every act of service is a means for God to give life. Assistance to the neighbor, protection of children, scrambling for daily bread, all of these things sustain life. People in power, even when they misuse their power and exploit others and creation, still promote life in their immediate spheres such as providing food and shelter for their families. The law compels ethical behavior regardless of the good or ill-will present in the human actor.

God's ethical demand for radical and just relationality is constantly in force, even when it is unrecognized as God's demand. It is a universal experience that all people live and breathe and want full and wholesome life. This phenomenon does not come from a revelatory experience, rather it is basic to human life. The compelling function of the law operates through all humans to guarantee that the human does what he/she does not willingly do, namely: serve the neighbor and promote full and wholesome life for all humans, whether or not they claim a faith in God.

The law functions to bring life to all and when those forces of destruction such as sexism, racism, and classism become institutionalized, life is threatened and those structures must be denounced and dismantled. The struggle for freedom and a full life is a universal phenomenon, in other words, basic to all human life. The law functions to fight against those things which thwart God's intent for the human. Because the forces of destruction always change, the law must be mutable to fight against the ever emerging manifestations of sin.

Social and political structures are ways to guarantee life for all but when they become accomplices with the forces of destruction, the law compels those structures to be re-defined and re-shaped. While this does not legitimize every revolutionary movement, it does acknowledge that de-humanizing structures and governments are not to be sacralized. Persons who denounce injustices and work at dismantling oppressive social structures are participating in God's creative work. This occurs in all cultures because the work of the law is universal.

Because humans thwart God's intent for creation, the law is constantly in force to continually coerce appropriate ethical behavior. But, the law is also finite, functioning until it is no longer necessary and then will cease when its work is finally accomplished. Since the law is necessary in order for God's creative activity to continue in the face of opposition, humans are bound by the law and cannot escape it. The law is relentless. It continuously puts to death those things which destroy life and thwart God's intent for creation. Furthermore, the law judges human actions and accuses the conscience as another way to promote life for the neighbor.

Guilt is basic to human life. The law not only compels and coerces but also accuses and judges the human. This is the second use of the law, the spiritual or theological use of the law. Because radical interrelatedness with just relationality is God's intent, disconnectedness and unjust relationships are unnatural. The tension present in the clashing of the human will, that is, an alienated will, with God's will, namely, an interrelational will, causes the human to experience guilt.

Guilt is experienced when the neighbor's requests for assistance are denied or go unheeded. In the refusal to respond to the demand for radical interrelatedness with just relationality, the conscience is stabbed and the human experiences judgment. Every human is held accountable by God for what they did or did not do in response to the guilt they experienced. Forgiveness and new life is granted for those who have gained insights regarding appropriate relationality and exhibit changed behavior. But for those insights gained and ignored, the condemnation of the law is still in effect.

Humans also feel guilt when they realize the multifarious ethical demands placed upon them and their inability to meet those demands. The burden of this powerlessness can either lead to ethical lethargy or frantic works of righteousness. In either case, the human is accused. In the first case, humans are accused of neglect and in the second instance they are accused because they can never completely meet all the demands of the law.

The first use of the law serves the second use in its compelling activity. When the human resists the compulsion of the law, the law accuses and strikes the conscience. When the second use of the law is present it exposes to the human the emptiness experienced in disconnectedness and also exposes the human's powerlessness to live in full accord with God's demands for interrelatedness with just relationality, which is to say, the demands of the law. When humans' powerlessness and need for interdependence are made known to them they are ready to hear the gospel.

11.2.7 Creation summary

This theology of creation incorporates complimentary components of Wingren's theology with Ruether's theology. The concept of God's on going creative activity through the law (Wingren's notion) is a benefit to Ruether's theology. Ruether's description of God as Primal Matrix understands God as identified with and the renewal of creation. Primal Matrix is the energy which is the source and continuity of actual and potential existence. It isn't clear in Ruether's theology of creation as to how this energy is mediated. Therefore she relies on the revealed word (Jesus and other prophetic individuals) to announce God's intent for creation. In this constructive statement, Wingren's use of the law as the agent for God's creative activity is an addition to Ruether's notion of Primal Matrix. Using the agency of the law to create and thereby direct ethical behavior (service toward the neighbor, just relationality, and an appropriate stance toward nature) locates justice in the very being of God and defines it as an integral part of God's intent for creation. Thus just relationality is not merely an ideological notion announced by prophetic or concerned individuals but rather is the very definition of God and what it means to be truly human, in other words, to be created in the image of God.

Locating just relationality in God's creative activity through the law as it operates to make humans fully human has positive implications for feminist theology. First, service to the neighbor will occur regardless of the good or ill will of the actor. Ethical behavior is not something done by human will alone but rather because God compels it. Liberation from oppression is God's agenda through the first use of the law, and through the law God will accomplish liberation for all. If feminists make this theological claim then they cannot be accused of misusing the gospel message to support their own special interests. Rather, it is understood that the liberation of all, including women, is essential to what it means to be created in the image of God.

Another implication of using the law as a formal theological category for feminist theology pertains to the theological discipline itself. Ruether is primarily concerned with re-examining the historical development of doctrine to reveal the androcentric bias and with theological ethics. Using Wingren's theology as a framework for Ruether's concerns blends systematic theology and theological ethics in that Wingren locates the source of ethical behavior in the doctrine of creation. This blending provides a more comprehensive theological grounding for Ruether's concerns for liberation and a just society.

What makes this constructive theology feminist is that it takes women's experience and concerns seriously. Concepts such as 'just relationality,' 'radical interrelatedness within human community and with nature,' and '*imago dei* as gender inclusive,' for example, make explicit claims for the recognition of the value and worth of all creation, including women. These concepts dismantle a hierarchical organization of spirit over body, male over female, and human over nature which is paramount for feminist theology.

Another distinctively feminist feature of this constructive theology of creation is the notion of 'sin as systemic.' While Wingren's concept of the 'forces of destruction' defines sin both as a phenomenon and caused by human actions, he is not as thorough as Ruether in describing the social and political nature of sin. Hence in this feminist constructive theology the social, systemic and political nature of sin is explicitly stated.

Finally, the feminist concern for liberation from oppression is taken seriously in this constructive statement. The notion of liberation from oppression is compatible with Wingren's notion of service to the neighbor. In order for God's intent for full and wholesome life for all to be realized (Wingren) justice in relationships must occur. While Wingren's theology implies a communal ethic, Ruether makes this claim explicit which, from a feminist perspective, is a contribution to Wingren's theology. Ruether's concern for liberation from oppression stresses the communal nature of ethical behavior as well as focusing on one's personal relationship to God and this point is highlighted in this constructive theology.

11.3 THE GOSPEL

The law is not the only means by which God generates life. The gospel word is that which frees the human from the bondage of the law and removes the judgment of the law. The human who hears the gospel message hears that oppression and bondage are not natural. They are contrary to God's intent for life. The gospel is the inbreaking of grace and is experienced in moments of liberation. In moments of liberation the human recognizes his/her true personhood, namely, a person that is valued and accepted by God. The experience of liberation is one that reveals to the human that whole, uninjured and free life is God's intent for creation.

While the law is God's general ethical demand communicated through creation, the gospel is God's specific word of redemption and restoration addressed to each individual. The word of redemption creates a new life in the hearer. The words, "forgiveness of sins," addresses the guilt of lethargy and the guilt of those actions left undone. It speaks a word of unconditional acceptance to the human and in so doing, creates a new will for life in the hearer. The recipient of the gospel message no longer needs to be obsessively preoccupied with righteousness before God. Instead, through the power of the liberating word, the hearer can focus on doing creation's work by promoting full life for the neighbor.

The gospel message restores the human to true personhood, which is described as radical interrelatedness and just relationality with God, with the self, with the

neighbor and with creation. The restored and redeemed human is free to continue creation's work knowing that the relentless work of the law is a gift given to ensure that all people have the opportunity for full and wholesome life. The gospel is gift, too, in that it liberates humans from the burden and condemnation of the law and restores humans to right relationality with God. Jesus Christ, according to the Christian faith, is the individual who brings this word of redemption and restoration.

11.3.1 The person of Jesus

Jesus Christ is the individual who redeems humanity and restores full personhood. He removes the burden and the judgment of the law and continues to call forth, from the future, true humanity in the present with the words, "forgiveness of sins."

The person of Jesus is the presentation of the healed and uninjured human. In this way he presents to humanity the true picture of its createdness as image of God. This is not revealed in his gender but rather through his words and deeds. What makes him fully human is his radical interrelatedness with God, with his self, with humans and with creation.

Like all humans, Jesus had to contend with God's demand for radical interrelatedness and just relationality. In other words, Jesus, too, lived with the coercion and accusation of the law. What differentiates Jesus from other humans is that he did not give in to the forces of destruction that tempted him to alienate himself from God, from human community or creation. Nor did he use his position in society (his maleness) to oppress or discount others. Jesus denounced systems of oppression, announced the kingdom of God and emptied himself of all patriarchal privileges. He participated in God's intent for creation without resisting. In his obedience to God's intent for creation, he disobeyed the law, which requires the human to do what he/she does not willingly do. In other words, he did not need to be coerced into radical interrelatedness and just relationality because he willingly remained faithful to God's intent for creation. Jesus succeeded where the rest of humanity fails, namely, remaining fully and truly human. In this way, Jesus can be described as the paradigmatic human.

When Jesus was tried, convicted and sentenced to death by his contemporaries, even then he did not alienate himself from God or from the human community. He suffered for the cause of liberation and held fast to the truths he claimed, namely, just relationality.

In this way, God is revealed at the deepest point of Jesus' humiliation. Jesus, in the profundity of the total and complete giving of himself, showed the world the depths and breadth of God's self giving. Jesus also revealed his faith and trust in the radical interconnectedness God has with God's creation. His resurrection shows the believer that full, wholesome and uninjured life is the first and final word of God. Whether one chooses to believe in immortality or not, the claim that Jesus rose from the dead still communicates to the believer the possibilities of life and liberation. Resurrection faith means the believer can reaffirm that the kingdom of God is at hand and refuse to believe that the forces of destruction will win in the end.

11.3.2 The gospel message

The liberating word that Jesus brings in his resurrection as well as in his ministry and death, is life. Jesus' resurrection announces that the forces of destruction are not the final word. As Luther describes it in his explanation of the second article of the Apostles' creed, Jesus has redeemed humanity, restored it, healed it and saved humans from sin, death and the power of the devil. All this he has done so that humans can live in freedom and blessedness and experience the kingdom of God.³ The words that Jesus boldly and authoritatively dared to proclaim, "forgiveness of sins," are the words that silence the law and remove all the sting from the forces of destruction.

In the words "forgiveness of sins," humans are restored and given new life. With these words Jesus continues to call forth from the future, whole, healthy, uninjured personhood. These words give the hearer the will and courage to live in the world where the forces of destruction still threaten. As the law continues

³Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans. The Book of Concord, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 345.

to put to death, the gospel continues to call forth life. This is the content and purpose of the gospel.

The content of the gospel frees humans from the preoccupation with their own salvation so that they can concentrate on serving the neighbor. When humans receive assurance with regard to their relationship with God, it frees them from the desperate attempt to earn righteousness with God. When humans hear the words "forgiveness of sins" they no longer need to exercise power over people to prove their superior worth. They no longer need to feel inferior to those around them and deny their potential. Humans no longer need to exploit creation, or hoard life for themselves. Humans no longer need to be victims of corrupt structures in society. The perspective on all of these things has been changed by the words, "forgiveness of sins."

11.3.3 The gospel message and ethical behavior

Through his person, deeds and words, Jesus makes God's universal and unrecognized demand recognizable. This demand is a demand for faith and trust in God, for radical interrelatedness with God, the neighbor and all of creation. When this demand is addressed specifically to individuals, they recognize God's intent for their full personhood as well as God's desire for full personhood for the neighbor. The individual also understands that all that is given in creation, is God's gift to be used to sustain and promote life for all. When Jesus speaks the prophetic word, he does so as one who stands in concert with the law's life-supporting function, and works with creation. He articulates that sin is everything that blocks the full life that God intends for humans. Jesus gives voice to the meaning of the law for humans.

Jesus is catalytic in helping the human see what it is that God intends for creation. In this sense one might say that Jesus helps humanity to see what is natural, real and true for life when the forces of destruction are removed. Jesus denounced those things which are unnatural for human life: oppression, sickness and social ostracism to name a few.

In announcing the kingdom of God, the intent of God for creation, he did denounce and destroy those structures which block *shalom*. The prophetic word

of Jesus is continuous with creation's word, namely, the law. The exhortations and prophetic utterances of Jesus nudge the human in the direction of creation's work, the work of the law. They point the hearer in the direction of the neighbor and deal with the matters of ethical behavior in our daily living.

The words, "forgiveness of sins," are the words of the gospel. They pertain to salvation, not to works, and deal with humanity's righteousness before God. Humans receive salvation's work in their actual situations which enables them to carry on with the will to live as they labor in this world. Humans do not do these labors because they want to earn righteousness before God, they do them out of thankfulness for what has already been given: life and the restoration of life. Human labors are graced with the gifts of liberation and blessing. These gifts are given to humans in the present and call humans forth to the future.

When humans live in the fullness of true personhood, i.e. when they follow Jesus, *shalom* is realized. *Shalom* does depict agrarian imagery but it also defines a socio-political agenda of justice, peace and freedom for all. This vision is contained in the message of hope given in the gospel. It is both the vision for and the reality of a healed world where all live in radical interconnectedness and relationships that are just, with God and with the cosmos.

When humans follow Jesus they become representatives of true humanity to the world. In this representation humans assist in creation's work to promote true life for all. Humans who proclaim the joy and freedom they have received in the gospel by words and deeds, represent Jesus' redemptive activity. The gospel message Christians proclaim does not prescribe specific ethical behavior, rather it describes what God has done and is doing for us. Redemption restores the brokenness of relationality. As humans hear and proclaim redemption's word through and with each other in deeds of service, both creation and redemption's work is continued and God's intent for creation is realized in whole and healthy community. This working together, in just relationality, under the law, in the freedom of the gospel, is transformative praxis.

11.3.4 Gospel summary

This constructive statement incorporates components of Wingren's christology with Ruether's christology. While their respective understandings of the person of Jesus, the gospel message and the gospel message and ethical behavior differ significantly, this constructive statement has attempted to describe Jesus in relation to the law with a sensitivity toward Ruether's concerns.

The noticeably feminist themes in this constructive statement are the gender of Jesus, the *shalom* imagery, the denouncing of oppressive social structures and the announcing of the kingdom of God.

Wingren's description of the humiliation of Jesus is a useful addition to Ruether's notion of the *kenosis* of patriarchy in reference to Jesus' gender. Jesus' humiliation, according to Wingren, occurred because he was under the law and tempted as all humans. In his temptation Jesus refrained from seeking to be like God and instead took on the form of a servant. In so doing, according to Wingren, Jesus achieves the image of God, i.e. true humanity, in the act of humiliation. Jesus emptied himself of both patriarchal privilege granted by his gender as well as any claims to be like God. Jesus' humiliation and the emptying of power makes him a paradigmatic human for both genders.

The *shalom* imagery in this constructive theology is based on a feminist perspective. However it does not contradict Wingren's theology. Ruether emphasizes the communal and societal nature of justice. Wingren's theology is communal in that he emphasizes service to the neighbor as promoting God's creative activity. But Wingren does not address the radical nature of *shalom* in his theology. *Shalom* is a critical feminist concept and it states that no one has *shalom* until all people have it. This is a radical notion for theological ethics in that it challenges the privatization of religious expression.

Finally, the 'announcing' and 'denouncing' themes in this constructive statement are also feminist notions. Ruether claims that Jesus denounced systems of oppression and announced the kingdom of God. Command and promise are the gospel message. By using Wingren's differentiation between the functions of the law and gospel in this constructive statement, Ruether's

concern for the denunciation of oppressive systems has been respected. Jesus denounces systems of oppression as one who is under the law and gives voice to the demands of the law. The gospel message, the announcing of the kingdom of God, is a specific message of unearned and unconditional forgiveness of sins.

Transformative praxis, which is a concern for feminists, may be described in Wingren's terms as liberation of guilt (offered through the gospel) which frees the human for service to the neighbor. This freedom allows one to follow Jesus, to denounce and dismantle systems of oppression while confidently announcing the reign of God and living in the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

11.4 CONCLUSIONS AND BENEFITS

This skeletal presentation of a constructive theology that is inclusive of the law/gospel dialectic and respectful of feminist concerns, has attempted to focus the origins of ethical behavior in the doctrine of creation, not in revelation. The concern has been to clearly articulate the different functions of law and gospel so that the gospel maintains its ability to be heard as promise rather than command.

This constructive statement has also attempted to dismantle the dualisms between spirit and body, personal redemption and social-political redemption, male and female. Understanding *imago dei* as gender inclusive and the representation of created humanity, is basic to valuing the whole person, body and soul. Defining sin as broken relationality includes and incorporates the concept of alienation; the alienation of the human from God, from the self, from others and from creation. In so doing it emphasizes the personal as well as social dimensions of sin. Providing a universal theological anthropology, which states that all humans are under the law, dismantles the hierarchicalizing or valuing one group of persons over another. It also prevents associating the gospel message with a prescribed ethical content, which runs the risk of aligning the gospel with particular political agendas. The law functions to restrain sin and in so doing works against oppression in all cultural contexts.

This constructive statement has also attempted to maintain a dynamic unity between creation and redemption thereby valuing the created world and

providing a basis for the care of creation. Creation is the gift given regardless of our appreciation of it. Redemption restores the damage and injury that is present as a result of the forces of destruction. Just as creation is the creation of this world, redemption restores this world. Redemption is not a flight from the created world. It does however give the hope, promise and reality of eventual true and full personhood and a life lived in ultimate freedom from the bondage of the law. There is an eschatological dimension to redemption with a now and not yet character to it.

Finally, this constructive statement has set forth an ethical imperative. Redemption does not imply ethical complacency. As long as God continues to create and as long as the forces of destruction remain, the law will be in effect. It is this law that compels ethical behavior and none can escape from its compulsion. Ethical behavior does not depend upon the assent to a revelatory word but is inherent in God's creative activity. God will continue to work for radical interrelatedness, for just relationality, for whole and uninjured life, with, in spite of and for the human. This is inescapable and humans are the agents of this whether they will the good for the neighbor or not. God's intent for creation will be realized.

There are benefits in beginning theology with the doctrine of creation and using the concept of the law as a formal theological category. One benefit is the development of a universal theological anthropology which is inclusive of gender, class, race, Christian and non-Christian. A universal theological anthropology can be beneficial in the pluralistic world for theologians who wish to reflect upon the particulars of their context while incorporating those particularities into the universal human experience. This could provide a common starting point for understanding an inclusive theological ethic regarding just relationality in human community and the care of the earth in our global context. The statement that all humans are under the law is a condition all humans share regardless of their context. This unites people with others and with creation and avoids polarizing the gospel message by aligning it with a particular group or using it to dictate specific ethical behavior.

Another benefit of lodging theological ethics in creation rather than revelation and redemption is that it frees the gospel to be good news to both the

oppressed and the oppressor. Using a universal theological anthropology, which states that all people stand under the law, as a starting point for theology can only enhance the good news of the gospel which is liberation from the condemnation of the law for all people. The point of view taken in this project is, that the law drives the human to serve the neighbor and care for creation. In other words, the oppressed can demand liberation and the oppressors can liberate because that is God's intent for life and God does that work through the first use of the law. The law is what binds all of humanity to social ethical behavior and accomplishes good works. The gospel liberates the human from the condemnation of the failure to consistently make good ethical decisions. The good news of the gospel is that even in the human's failure to live up to God's intent for humanity and for creation, and/or even in the despair of social and political subjugation, humans are still loved and accepted unconditionally. God's love includes liberation from all those forces that thwart the fullness of life God intends for creation. The confidence in God's liberating power gives both the oppressed and the oppressors renewed strength and hope to continue to do the law's work.

Deriving theological ethics from a doctrine of creation also can make great strides in bridging the gap between spirit and matter, particularly with regard to ethical behavior in human community, the care of the earth and creating a balance between God's transcendence and immanence. One premise of this proposed creation-based theology is that God is creating now; creation is not a static event but rather an ongoing process. It is a concept that understands God as transcendent, in that God is the source of all life, but immanent, in that God's arena of activity is in creation. If God decided to stop creating, all life as we know it would cease. In God's creative arena all humans are significant participants in the creative process because it is through the human that the neighbor is served and fullness of life is received. Furthermore, the created world is important and valued since it is through the gifts of creation that life is sustained. God's redeeming of creation is God's way of continuing to create life against the forces that constantly threaten life. The dynamic unity between creation and redemption, in this scheme, is found in the ongoing simultaneous process of God creating and restoring with the assurance that full and unencumbered life is the first and final word. In order to appreciate redemption, the theologian must clearly articulate what it is that is being redeemed. This

necessitates a comprehensive understanding of creation as a starting point for theology, which supplies the backdrop for the understanding of redemption, and builds the unity between the two.

Another premise of this project is that God's intent for creation is fullness of life for all. The law is how God protects it and the gospel is how God restores it. This premise requires that theological reflection must begin with creation, not redemption. Beginning theological reflection with redemption could imply that God's intent for creation is salvation, suggesting that creation is less than perfect to begin with. This notion may even perpetuate the very problem that Ruether wants to avoid, namely, that somehow creation and all that is associated with the material world is less valued than the spiritual world. This misinterpretation clearly fosters the ongoing problem of dualism by hierarchicalizing redemption over creation.

Finally, it is the hope of this project that it will make a contribution to liberation theology, specifically feminist theology, by developing a theology of works (theological ethics) that will enable both the oppressed and the oppressors to work side by side in promoting the full life that God intends for all of God's creation.

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