Gustavus Adolphus College

# A Proposed Re-Contextualized Lutheran Doctrine of God

## God in a Post-Holocaust World

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## Introduction

The effects of the Holocaust[1] as a historical event are unprecedented and far-reaching. When a modern state so systematically, pitilessly, and thoroughly eliminated its own people, the world was changed. The effects of the Holocaust as a theological event are just as significant. For Jews and Christians alike, the Holocaust signals a need to reevaluate the way we think about God. In the words of Rabbi Irving Greenberg, "so evil is the Holocaust, and so powerful a challenge to all other norms, that it forces a response…[;] not to respond is to collaborate in its repetition."[2] If we cannot find a way to come to terms with what happened during the Holocaust—how this event affects our theology and politics—we risk allowing for the possibility of another Holocaust. The focus here will be on theology. Coming to terms with *God* during the Holocaust is supremely important because, as Terrence Fretheim puts it, "the images used to speak of God not only decisively determine the way one thinks about God, they have a powerful impact on the shape of the life of the believer."[3] How we understand God—and the images we use to express this understanding—affect our very action. Thus, if how we understand God's relation to what happened in the Holocaust affects our overall understanding of God, then this understanding naturally affects the way we act in the world.

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[1] This thesis will make use of the traditional term "Holocaust" (meaning "burnt sacrifice") rather than the increasingly popular term "Shoah" (meaning "destructive whirlwind"). While Shoah may indeed be the more appropriate and acceptable term, Holocaust remains the norm in scholarly writing. To maintain congruity with other academic writing on the topic, and to avoid terminological confusion when citing sources, "Holocaust" will be used throughout.

[2] Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, ed. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman and Gershon Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 505.

[3] Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1.

That the Holocaust occurred poses a fundamental question about God: How can we believe in a God who is *good* when we live in a world where such evil is possible? Is evil a part of God's will for the world? Traditionally, God has been viewed as an omnipotent controller of all that occurs on earth. "Like some kind of heavenly dictator, God was thought of as permitting evil in the present, for the sake of a greater good to be achieved in the future. Even Auschwitz, according to this theology, had a place in divine providence."[4] This view of God seems unthinkable in the face of such grave evil, making the topic is supremely important for Jewish and Christian thinkers alike. Operating with this view of God, many who have experienced, witnessed, or learned about the Holocaust have concluded that God is no longer present in the world. One famous espouser of this response is Richard Rubenstein, who argues that "the only honest response to the death camps is the rejection of God, 'God is dead.'"[5] God, understood as an omnipotent controller, cannot exist in a world where a Holocaust is possible. For God to exist, God would have to be evil in God's own self, which is unacceptable for Rubenstein. Countless others, seeking to maintain their belief in God, have accepted a second response—that God is unknowable.

Neither response, in my opinion, is appropriate. Rejecting a God whose presence in the world is evidenced so strongly in other times and places in history is unwise. On the other hand, assuming that the actions of the "God of Truth" are unintelligible fails to take the issue far enough.[6] My hope is to find a third option: a description of God that allows one to account for

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[4] Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 166.

[5] Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), 146.

[6] Howard R. Burkle, *God, Suffering, and Belief* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 52.

God during the Holocaust while at the same time affirming God's unfailing goodness, justice, and power. This means an awakened recognition of human freedom and responsibility in the world, and, according to Father John Pawlikowski, "an understanding and experience of the God-human relationship which can guide this newly found power creatively and constructively."[7] I am drawn to the topic of post-Holocaust theology for precisely this reason: If God is to provide spiritual guidance for human action, we humans ought to describe God in a way that allows for such a relationship. What we say about God matters.

This thesis will look at the problem from a re-contextualized Lutheran perspective, comparing the theology of Martin Luther with contemporary, post-Holocaust writers. Luther's thought will be examined in light of contemporary history and theology. This thesis will begin by showing that, in a broad sense, the descriptions by Martin Luther about God's attributes and action can be placed in overall agreement with post-Holocaust writers on the same topic. While post-Holocaust theology at times stretches beyond the scope of Luther's thought, and while each writer is coming from a slightly different context than the others, the thought of these authors can be used to express and re-contextualize the ideas found in Luther in a way that is coherent for a modern reader. Secondly, this thesis will distill a new and transformed doctrine of God from these pre and post-Holocaust theologies, and propose this doctrine of God as a third theological option for believers—apart from the rejection of God or the claim that God is unknowable—forming a more adequate and consistent doctrine of God for Lutherans, as well as non-Luthernas, living in a post-Holocaust world.

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[7] John T. Pawlikowski, *The Challenge of the Holocaust for Christian Theology* (New York: The Center for Studies On The Holocaust Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1978), 9.

After some introductory material on Luther's concept of evil, the first part of the thesis consists of two main sections focusing on topics of God's action and attributes. Each section begins with Luther's comments on the topic, followed by the contemporary writers. I have chosen to begin by describing God's action and then move to God's attributes. What these writers say about God's attributes informs their opinions about God's actions; however, for Luther, his arguments about God's action give insight into God's attributes. Thus action comes before attributes here. The concluding portion of the thesis will present a *proposed re-contextualized Lutheran Doctrine of God* which brings together the ideas from the first portion of the thesis. This will provide a more viable post-Holocaust theology for modern Lutherans.

## Luther on the State of Evil in the World

In order to understand any number of Martin Luther's reflections about God, particularly his probing comments on God's very nature, one must first uncover his understanding of the condition of the world and of humanity. Luther discusses human nature in terms of the "necessity of immutability."[8] According to Luther, the human will is unchangeable with respect to its enslavement to sin; humans are perpetually and uncontrollably compelled to do evil rather than good. "And this readiness or will to act humans[9] cannot by their own powers omit, restrain or change.…"[10] It is a force distinct from God which pulls humans away from God. In order to make sense of Luther, one must look at his writings through the lens of this concept of evil.

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[8] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* in *Career of the Reformer III*, vol. 33 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Philip S. Watson, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 64.

[9] In order to represent Luther and the post-Holocaust writers most accurately, all citations in which the word "man" is used in a universal sense will be altered, substituting man with human. Hereafter, these changes will be denoted by the letters PMA (pronoun for man altered) following the citation.

[10] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 64. PMA

Similarly, in order for us as humans to understand God, we must look at God through this lens. Understanding the unchangeable nature of human will allows one to grasp fully what one is capable of, and in turn, what God must be responsible for. Thus Luther says, "if I am ignorant of what, how far, and how much I may do in relation to God, it will be equally uncertain and unknown to me, what, how far, and how much God can and may do in me…."[11] In order to understand God, we must understand ourselves and the influential force of evil in the world.

Luther often uses the image of "Satan" to express this force. Thus, "the world is the kingdom of Satan, where… we are under the dominion of the most mischievous Spirits, so that we are hardened… and imprisoned in a darkness no longer human but demonic."[12] It is important that one not focus on the idea of Satan as an individual creature wreaking havoc on the world, but rather focus on the idea of Satan as the personification of the world's complete enslavement to evil. When we see Luther alluding to Satan, he is chiefly illustrating the pervasive and controlling character of evil. The all-pervading presence of evil in the world deeply affects our ability, as humans, to comprehend God. In the same way that the immutable human will is unable to act rightly, so is it unable to understand God rightly. Human will is "so held down by the power of Satan that unless it is miraculously raised up by the Spirit of God it cannot of itself either see or hear things that strike the eyes and ears themselves so plainly.…"[13] Yet, here, in the midst of a discussion of the seemingly hopeless state of affairs for humanity, Luther introduces a ray of light; this light is the Spirit of God. Without the intervention of the

[11] Ibid, 35.

[12] Ibid, 98.

[13] Ibid.

Spirit, there would indeed be no hope. “For what is the whole human race without the Spirit but… the kingdom of the devil, a confused chaos of darkness [Gen. 1:2]?”[14]

Yet, when the Spirit begins its workings, when humans begin to comprehend God with their minds and allow God to enter into their hearts, this darkness is dispelled and the immutable will is miraculously changed. “For if God is in us, Satan is absent, and only a good will is present; if God is absent, Satan is present, and only an evil will is in us.”[15] More focused discussion on the Spirit and its ability to transform is necessary; the topic will soon be revisited in connection with a discussion of God’s relative hiddenness and revelation. First, however, one final implication needs to be drawn out of this discussion of evil in the world.

As humans, we are naturally drawn to evil and can only act rightly (or even think rightly) when God’s Spirit is within us. This speaks to God’s connection to and potential culpability for evil itself. For Luther, God can neither be blamed for evil nor completely disconnected from it. Because God, as will be discussed further in more detail, is the source of all power for the world, God necessarily “moves and acts also in Satan and ungodly humans.”[16] God’s power is moving in the world *through* humans and is thus inescapably connected to evil. This does not, however, mean that God is guilty of this evil. Instead, it is humans, or rather the very immutable nature of humanity that is to blame. Luther puts it this way: “God works evil in us, i.e., by means of us, not through any fault of God’s, [17] but owing to our faultiness, since we are by nature evil and God is

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid, 115.

[16] Ibid, 176. PMA

[17]In accordance with the academic focus of this thesis, I wish to refrain from the use of gendered pronouns for God. This requires frequent alteration of the original sources which often use masculine gendered pronouns. I do not wish to undermine the value of a masculine God in scripture and liturgy, nor the history of the importance of the

good…."[18] Evil in the world, for Luther, is a direct result of human sinfulness rather than from any fault of God's.

As we turn to a discussion of God's action in the world and later to a discussion of the attributes of God, it will be important to bear in mind that, for Luther, evil is an unavoidable characteristic of the world which greatly alters the relationship between God and humans; yet, God is not at fault for this evil. Rather, God chooses to work in the world and through humans *despite* our propensity for evil. It is a characteristic of human nature to be inescapably bound to sin. This, in turn, affects the world around us. This concept of evil lies behind much of Luther's subsequent thinking, and will be important as we continue.

## Luther on God's Action

Luther's understanding of God's action can be discerned in outline by examining a few key sources: his lectures on Genesis and Deuteronomy, his commentary on *The Magnificat* and his treatise on *The Bondage of the Will*. This thesis begins with the topic of action, because so much of what we can determine about Luther's thought on God's attributes stems from his understanding of God's action. The ways in which we see God acting in the world reveal certain aspects of God's character. Focusing on how God is able to act in the world as well as the ways God's action is revealed to us is a starting point for understanding, at least in part, God's nature. This section, then, is made up of a collection of Luther's thought on God's action, focusing on topics of God's masks, human agency and responsibility, the hiddenness and revelation of God,

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image of God as "Father." These images remain Spiritually important. I simply wish to omit a discussion of gender from my discussion of the very nature of God. Hereafter, these changes will be denoted by the letters PDA (pronoun for the divine altered) following the citation.

[18] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 178.

and God's work through the depths of the world. These points will be the basis for a subsequent comparison with the writings of some selected post-Holocaust theologians on the same topics.

*The Masks of God*

Luther, drawing on the earlier teaching of Gabriel Biel, describes God's action in the world within two broad categories of power: God's *absolute power* and God's *ordered power*. Absolute power is that which God wields with God's own hand in the world, without the aid of any agent. Ordered power is the power with which God "makes use of the service either of angels or of human beings" to carry out God's will in the world.[19] Luther asserts that while God may have worked in the world through absolute power prior to the fall of Adam, God now wishes to work only through ordered power. Luther quotes a passage in Amos (3:7) which states that "God does nothing that God does not first reveal to God's prophets."[20] It is significant that the fall of Adam would, for Luther, affect God's action in the world in such a considerable way. Luther posits, "Perhaps God appeared to Adam without a covering, but after the fall into sin God appeared in a gentle breeze as though enveloped in a covering."[21] Something about the sinfulness of humans prevents God from being fully revealed.

Understanding Luther's description of the immutability of the human will, which has previously been discussed in detail, will be important in beginning to uncover his thoughts on the "masks" of God's action. According to Luther, "this nature of ours has become so misshapen

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[19] Martin Luther. *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20*, vol. 3 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 274.

[20] Ibid. PDA

[21] Martin Luther. *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, vol. 1 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 11. PDA

through sin, so depraved and utterly corrupted, that it cannot recognize God or comprehend God's nature without a covering."[22] This idea of a covering is the premise of Luther's "masks of God" theology wherein God does not interact with the world directly but instead works through people and religious traditions. Among these "masks" are the created world itself, the person of Jesus Christ, the rites of baptism and absolution, and the Word. God calls humans to seek the divine in these; by doing so we are able to experience God "properly"—in a way that allows the nature of God to become clear.[23] One important mask of God must be added to this list; God also works through humans themselves. In describing humans, Luther uses another, perhaps more familiar, illustration—describing humans as the "image of God." While God interacts with the world through all animals, as part of the created order, these are only "footprints of God" whereas humans alone are the image of God. Our ability to display wisdom and knowledge as well as carry out justice distinguishes us from the rest of creation and compels us to represent God well in the world.[24] It may also be possible to include such characteristics as creativity, stewardship and responsibility here, because, as we will presently see, these characteristics are important for Luther's interpretation of the greater role of humans on earth. Indeed, because of these characteristics God not only calls us to be representatives in the world but also to work cooperatively with God in the ongoing creation of the world, moving toward a better future.

[22] Ibid. PDA

[23] Ibid, 15.

[24] Ibid, 68.

*Human Agency*

Luther describes this notion of co-creatorship by returning to the creation narrative and Adam. For Luther, it is significant that in Genesis 1:28, God gave the command to Adam and Eve that they ought to "be fruitful and multiply." God could have simply created every life in turn as God created the first life, forming each of us by hand out of the earth and using absolute power. But instead, God calls humans to create life themselves. "It was as though God were saying: 'Now with your cooperation I will create children.'"[25] Two things are important here. First, God chooses to authorize humans to do some creative work in the world. Office and responsibility are given to humans in order that they themselves might work toward the future that God has in mind. Second, this work can only be done *through God's own power*. Notice that God says "with your cooperation *I will create* children." Even though humans are a part of the process, it is God's power and not human power that accomplishes the task. Luther asks, "what, then, are human powers, where faith and the Word reign, except masks of God, as it were, under which God hides and does God's wonders…?"[26] Thus, according to Luther, the human role in the world is to act as masks and images of God.

Yet, how can humans carry out this role when we are, as Luther constantly emphasizes, so bound by our sinfulness? Luther argues that God is constantly at work in humans, making them free. Freedom, in this instance, is the release from a state of lacking self-control, a release from the bondage of sin. In arguably his most famous writing, Luther asserts that as humans and Christians, we are simultaneously freed and bound: "A Christian is lord of all, completely free of

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[25] Martin Luther. *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 45-50*, vol. 8 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Paul D. Pahl (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 95. PDA

[26] Martin Luther. *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, vol. 9 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. by Richard R. Caemmerer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 41. PDA

everything. A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all."[27] We are *freed from* sin and *freed for* the service of others. This is how we are able to do God's work at all. While we are still in bondage to sin, we are also constantly being freed by grace.[28] This freedom allows us to do God's work by serving our neighbors.

One additional metaphor from Luther will be helpful here. In another place Luther describes God as acting through humans as though they were clouds. "All God's activity is through the agency of the evangelists and God's Word. They are God's clouds.… God's power and activity are as free and untrammeled as the clouds."[29] The importance of this final cloud metaphor is that God gives power to human agents in the world, who use it with cloud-like freedom. This means that while it is God's power that accomplishes any given task, the will of the human controls the task in freedom. A kind of mutual working relationship is thus formed between God the energizer, and humans the decision-makers.

This kind of mutuality between God and humans seems utterly natural for Luther. After all, we are the ones who are made in God's image. Because of this, it is only fitting that we also carry out the work of God on earth. This work is not simply procreation either, "for to forgive sins, to retain sins, to make alive, etc., are works of the Divine Majesty alone; nevertheless, the same works are given to human beings and are done through the Word which human beings teach."[30] In this way it is clear that humans are truly an important mask of God in the world

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[27]Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 50.

[28] *Simul iustus et peccator*

[29] Martin Luther. *Selected Psalms II*, vol. 13 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 36. PDA

[30] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 12.

because our carrying-out of these works provides a concrete and tangible experience of God. When we, as humans, carry out the sacraments of the church, God becomes available for us in a real, physical way. The tangible experiences of God are especially important; they allow us actually to touch and feel God. In order that we might come to know God more fully, God is disguised "in flesh and blood, in the word, in the external ministry, in baptism, in the sacrament and Lord's Supper, where God gives us God's body in the bread and God's blood in the wine, to eat and to drink."[31] In this instance, Luther uses a new illustration, bringing in language of a "hidden God" which will now be explored further.

*The Hidden God*

Thus far, our focus has been on the action of God which is revealed through masks. Yet, God is, in some ways, hidden. A paradox of revelation and hiddenness reveals itself in Luther's thinking, leading him to conclude that God is simultaneously hidden and revealed. This is God's "peculiar property,"[32] that God is hidden from our eyes because of our finitude and sinfulness while at the same time being revealed. Luther cites Isaiah (45:15) who calls God "a God who hides Godself."[33] For Luther, God's often "hides" in the form of the opposite—coming to us in the form of the lowly when God is in fact almighty. God literally hides" in these worldly and humble places. In one instance, Luther describes this hiddenness in the following way:

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[31] Martin Luther. *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 6-8,* vol. 23 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959) 123. PDA

[32]Martin Luther. *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 31-37*, vol. 6 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Paul D. Paul (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 148.

[33] Martin Luther. *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 21-25*, vol. 4 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 7. PDA

> For under a curse a blessing lies hidden; under the consciousness of sin, righteousness; under death, life; and under affliction comfort. But one must look at the Word, for those who do not have the Word follow their own feeling and remain without comfort in their tears and sorrow.[34]

Two points are important here: first, it is clear that humans ought to find comfort in the fact that God hides in (and is thus present in) the lowly and painful parts of life. Second, the recognition of God as God is hidden in these places only comes through the Word. It becomes clear here that for Luther the scriptures, as they are written and spoken, are the chief means of revelation in the world.[35] Or, to return to previous language, this Word is God's chief mask. In this way the masks of God and God's hiddenness are related: God is literally "hiding" in these means as God works through them.

Luther eloquently puts it this way: "the Word comes forward like a little flame shining in the midst of darkness and scattering its rays through its doctrine and the sacraments; these rays God orders to be apprehended. If we embrace them God is no longer hidden to us in the Spirit but only in the flesh."[36] It is clear that, as humans in the flesh, God will never be fully revealed to us; yet, the Spirit is able to reveal God to us, at least in part, in a way that is truly transforming. God can, in fact, be knowable—but only partially, and only in the ways in which God desires to be known. This revelation—the way in which we are able to know God—is a gift of the spirit. Returning to Luther's discussion of the human will, we see the Spirit's transforming power. He avers that when the human will is "breathed upon by the Spirit of God, it again wills and acts from pure willingness and inclination and of its own accord… it goes on willing and

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Luther argues that Christ is the clearest revelation of God. Scriptures, for us now, are the chief means of revelation because they hold the Gospel and the message of Christ.

[36] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 31-37*, 148.

delighting in and loving the good, just as before it willed and delighted and loved evil."[37] Caution must be taken here, lest we interpret Luther to be saying that the Spirit makes the will to delight in the good as a means of achieving salvation—a right or whole relationship between a person and God. The Spirit does aid the human will in its struggle between good and evil, but this struggle involves the state of one's actions and has no impact on the state of God's favor toward a person. God's grace alone achieves salvation.

With that important distinction made, however, some additional points can be made about the effect the Word and Spirit have on human life. According to Luther, only with the aid of the Spirit is one able to interpret scripture, gain knowledge of God and theologize properly. It is only with the Word as a foundation that a community of believers carries out God's work properly. Luther, in a rejoinder about the location of the "true church" states that "the church must be sought where the sacraments are purely administered, where there are hearers, teachers, and confessors of the Word."[38] Without this sense of Spirit-filled and Word-based connection with God, we are unable truly to know God. "Therefore where there is no Word of God, there is no true knowledge of God; where there is no knowledge of God, there are godless ignorance, imaginations, and opinions about the true God.…"[39] This seems to suggest that in Luther's thought, one can differentiate between teaching and action that is supported by God's Spirit and the Word on one hand, and teaching and action that go against God's Spirit and the Word. In this way, some action is unsanctioned by God and thus, as has been noted above, God is not the

[37]Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* 65.

[38] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 31-37*, 149.

[39] Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, 53.

active cause of evil. Instead, we do evil when God is not present in us through the Spirit because of the propensity of the human will to sin—its immutability.[40]

It is evident that God is both hidden and revealed to us, yet the question remains: *why* does God hide? Luther interpreter Steven D. Paulson argues that God's hiding is a way of leading humans in the right direction. "God hides," according to Paulson, "in order *not to be found* where humans want to find God. But God also hides *in order to be found* where God wills to be found."[41] By seeking God in the "right places" humans are able to discern God's will for their lives and for the world. Even in the places where God is found, however, some part of the divine nature remains unknowable to us. This explains, in part, the immense mystery surrounding God. Paulson asserts that God actually hides "*beyond our speculation* [emphasis added] in order not to be found outside the preached word who is Jesus Christ incarnate."[42] That we cannot find God anywhere but in the Word, manifest in Christ, does not make God absent; in fact, God's limited revelation itself provides instruction. More about God's choice to be revealed in Christ, and especially Christ's suffering, will be discussed later. Now, one more important aspect of God's action needs to be examined.

*God in the Depths*

Luther, in his writing, repeatedly returns to an image of God working in and through the depths of the world. Perhaps the clearest example of this imagery can be found in Luther's commentary on *The Magnificat*. Discussing God's selection of Mary to be the mother of God,

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[40]Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 64.

[41] Steven D. Paulson, "Luther on the hidden God." *Word & World* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 366.

[42]Ibid, 368.

Luther declares that for her to give birth to the divine was as unlikely as a flower springing from a "dry and withered stem and root."[43] Mary, no more valued by her neighbors than a servant, does not seem like the appropriate choice for such an important role. Yet, for Luther, precisely that God does choose Mary tells us something about God's character. "Thus God's work and God's eyes are in the depths, but the human's only in the height."[44] It is a distinctive character of God to work in ways and through people that seem unworthy in the eyes of the world.

Quoting Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1:27f), Luther speaks of a God who finds power in weakness and wisdom in foolishness. "In this way God turns the world with all its wisdom and power into foolishness and gives us another wisdom and power."[45] This wisdom and power of God which is wholly-other, seeks to work through the lowest on earth, the "least of these." In fact, according to Luther, lowliness is also a characteristic of the church, the church which acts as God's instrument and representative on earth. Luther says, "God has preserved for himself a Church among the *common people* [emphasis added]…. For it is characteristic of God to lay low the picked men of Israel and slay their strong ones (Ps. 78[:31]), but to preserve the dregs and remnant of Israel.…"[46] If one seeks to find the true church, consequently, one need not seek among the lofty but among the lowly; these are who God chooses to work with and through.

Along this line of thinking, it is also possible to theorize about what Luther might say about God working through "non-believers"—those who are not connected with the church in any way and thus seem to not have a spiritual connection with God. While there appears to be no

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[43] Martin Luther, *The Magnificat,* in *Sermon on the Mount and The Magnificat*, vol. 21 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. A.T.W. Steinhaeuser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 302.

[44] Ibid. PMA, PDA

[45] Ibid, 314. PDA

[46] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 86.

place where Luther specifically discusses this issue, one can argue that because Luther is so adamant about God being the *source* of all power for the world, God's power is therefore at work in all human action. "We have not been made by ourselves, nor do we live or perform any action by ourselves, but by God's omnipotence."[47] In this way, even the actions done by those who are not cognizant of God's presence in their lives can be said to be done through the power of God. Luther would, of course, insist that if one desires to most fully and fittingly carry out the divine will, some sense of transcendence and connection with revelation is necessary. However, even those who have no spiritual connection with God, do their work through God's creating power. Therefore, all of creation is a means for God's work.

*God's Purposes*

Before concluding this section, some comments ought to be made about what God's goals and purposes for God's action might be. It has become clear for Luther that these goals are laid out in scripture, and in the message of Christ. In his commentary on *The Magnificat*, Luther gives some more specifics about the goals of God's action. For Luther, God acts to provide mercy to humanity, to make humble the proud and to put down the mighty while at the same time uplifting and exalting the lowly, and to send away the rich while at the same time feeding the hungry and providing for the poor.[48] Thus God acts, not to lift up those who are mighty and powerful –as we humans often do—but instead to lift up the lowly and help those in need. These are the purposes of God's action in the world.

[47] Ibid, 189. PDA

[48] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 332-351.

*Summary; God as an Involved Commissioner*

A Lutheran doctrine of God's action is beginning to coalesce, one that depicts God as acting through masks—God's agents in the world. These masks range from the created world itself to human advocates who, though they may be humble, are called upon by God for service. Our attention is especially drawn to the mutual relationship between God and humans; God gives God's power to humans to do work in the world, and humans use their gifts of wisdom, knowledge and freedom to carry out this work. Humans are given freedom with which to act in the world, which, because of human sinfulness, inevitably opens the door for the possibility of evil. Though the immutable will of the human is perpetually bound to this sinfulness, God continues to work with us—freeing us with grace for the service of others. For Luther, God is both hidden from our eyes and yet revealed. God hides in and through God's "masks" in the world, and often in a lowly and humble state—revealing truths about God's nature through the form of their opposite. Two essential masks that reveal God are the Word and Spirit. When one is informed by and connected to these revelations there is a possibility for personal and worldly transformation. God desires true transformation on the part of his creation and acts through these means of revelation to work toward the divine will for the future. Bearing this summary in mind, it seems that God, for Luther, is *an involved commissioner*—granting authority to God's masks on earth while maintaining a sense of guidance through revelation. This Lutheran pre-Holocaust theology can be placed in concurrence with post-Holocaust writers who speak about God's action in the world. It is to a discussion of these theologians that we now turn.

## Selected Post-Holocaust Theologians on God's Action

The task of compiling the vast amount of post-Holocaust theology on the subject of God's action in the world is too great for the purposes of this paper. This section, then, represents a selection from the many theologians who powerfully and effectively address the topic. Included here are Christian theologians Douglas John Hall, John Haught, Terrence Fretheim, John T. Pawlikowski, and Gregory Baum and Jewish theologians Eliezer Berkovitz, Abraham Heschel, and Jack Bemporad. These writers present a vibrant and full discussion of God's action in the post-Holocaust world, in this way representing the fuller body of scholars on the topic. Their context for writing, however, varies slightly. The writings used here from Pawlikowski, Baum, Berkovitz, Heschel, and Bemporad all address the specific problem of explaining God's relationship with evil in light of the Holocaust itself. Hall, Haught, and Fretheim are writing from a more abstract theological context, seeking to explain God in a modern context without specifically referencing the Holocaust.[49] Regardless of these contextual differences, there is a broad coherence between these authors, with little disagreement—at least as their thought is represented with respect to the questions under discussion. This combination of their thought is not meant to suggest that these authors agree with one another in all places, nor that they would choose to organize their arguments in this way. Instead, the following section is written so as to draw out contemporary ideas about the themes found in Luther's writing, extracting theology that expresses Lutheran ideas in a modern way. This section covers ideas about God's action in the order in which they were covered above. The structure, therefore, is thematic rather than authorial. Each author will enter and exit the discussion as their thought fits the topic at hand. In

[49] An annotated bibliography has been included at the end of this thesis which further explicates the background and purposes of each of these post-Holocaust writers.

most cases, the contemporary authors simply express ideas which are already present in Luther's thought in ways that are perhaps more easily relatable to modern readers. In some cases, these authors go beyond or outside of Luther's thought, and in this way serve to continue to expand Luther's thought in a modern context.

*The Masks of God*

John Haught, a contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, describes God as the "ultimate power of being," an "ultimately grounding and courage bestowing horizon of freedom that becomes transparent in acts of courage.…"[50] For Haught, God is the source of power for the world and God is revealed through action. This revelation must be in the form of "finite media,"[51] that is, God cannot become known to us except through physical realities. Haught calls these finite revelations "symbols"[52] of God, nicely paralleling Luther's "masks of God" imagery. These symbols are found within the created order itself. John Hall, a Canadian Methodist theologian who is quite influenced by Luther, describes God's action through finite means in this way, "biblical faith insists upon the active agency of God in the preservation of creation.… the laws [of creation] are *means* of God's preserving work.…"[53] The very way in which the created world functions, including all parts of creation, can serve as agents for the action of God.

To this, Haught adds the insight that because creation and its laws are *means* of God, greater importance and value should be given to creation itself. Instead of abandoning the world,

[50] John F. Haught, *What is God? How to Think About The Divine* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), 58.

[51] Ibid, 66.

[52] Haught is drawing heavily on the ideas of Paul Tillich here, *Dynamics of Faith*, chapter 3.

[53] John Hall, *Professing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 83.

Haught proposes a greater connection with the world. "A symbolic sense does not call for an abandonment of or withdrawal from our 'secular' surroundings. For inasmuch as it sees all things as participating in an ultimate power of being it pronounces them good."[54] Because God is working in and revealed through these symbols in creation, creation itself is worth valuing. Furthermore, when one sees the world functioning as a symbol for God, one is unable to "despair of our world and its history."[55] Despite the many instances in history when humans ignored the divine will, one cannot renounce all association with history. Instead, Haught argues that we must look within our history for "new and deeper manifestations of [the world's] ultimate horizon."[56] This "ultimate horizon" represents a future for the world that is in keeping with the divine will. More on the divine will with regard to the future will follow.

Turning to a different post-Holocaust theologian on the idea of God's symbolic action in the world, Eliezer Berkovitz, an Orthodox Jew, asserts that "there is no other witness that God is present in history but the history of the Jewish people."[57] To be sure, this statement disconnects Berkovitz from other Christian post-Holocaust writers, as well as from Luther. Luther, as a supersessionist, would uphold that God's activity has been transferred, and that God now works *only* with and through Christianity. Most, if not all, Christian theologians, however, would at least agree that the history of the Jewish people is, or at least *was*, a place where God's action in the world is revealed, so the Jewish people act as a *means* of God. The post-Holocaust writers

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[54] Haught, *What is God?*, 67.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Eliezer Berkovitz, "Faith after the Holocaust," in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, ed. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman and Gershon Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 474.

often go even further, maintaining that the Jewish people are still valued by God, that the covenant God made with them still stands, and that they continue to be a blessing to all nations. Christian thinkers, however, would reject the idea that God is not also working through the Christian church. Despite these differences, Berkovitz brings to light an important connection between one Jewish post-Holocaust theologian and Luther's assertion that humans are truly an important "mask" of God. Berkovitz's theology will again become important in the discussion on God's attributes that is still to come. For now, the focus will remain on the role of humans as agents of God in the world. This role, while it elevates humanity, also comes with a great deal of responsibility.

*Human Agency*

Hall describes God's use of humans in the world as a "covenant-partnership"[58] wherein humans are charged with the care of what God has created. Hall avers that God calls humans to work with God in order to bring the world closer to divine intention. One cannot examine history without concluding, as Hall does, that "the world as it is is not to be identified with God's intention for it…." Rather, we live in an imperfect world and "therefore we must resist the temptation to accept [the world] as we find it."[59] This care ought not to be characterized by passive maintenance but rather by an active desire for improvement; humans are called, in a certain sense, to redeem the world. Hall sets up two theses in his description of this redemption process. First, God is at work redeeming humans, and second, humans are at work redeeming the

[58] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 86.

[59] Ibid, 173.

world.[60] The order here is important; it is only by divine intervention in the very essence of our humanity that we are able to do any redeeming work ourselves. This relationship is one of mutuality, similar to the image of cooperation and co-creatorship we found in Luther.

A similar idea is expressed by Terence Fretheim, a Lutheran theologian specializing in Old Testament studies. He describes the mutual relationship between God and humans as both "organismic" and a "relationship of reciprocity."[61] Humans cannot do what God wills without the assistance, or more accurately the power, of God. God, at the same time has chosen to carry out the divine will primarily through the agency of humans. God depends on human actors in the same way that humans depend on God's power. Fretheim substantiates this claim of reciprocity with the many examples from the Old Testament which show God consulting with humans. He cites the example of Abraham beseeching God on behalf of the residents of Sodom in Genesis 18:21. Because of God's dependence on human action, it seems that "human thought is taken into consideration by God in the shaping of the future."[62] More about God and the future will be discussed later. The significance of this passage for our purposes now is that it illustrates the mutuality of the divine-human relationship in a way that nicely mirrors the language of "cooperation" used earlier in Luther.

Fretheim further extrapolates that if the relationship between God and humans is in fact reciprocal, then there must be a "sharing of power" on the part of God.[63] This is not, however, meant to suggest that God becomes secondary in the equation. In fact, according to Roman

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[60] Ibid, 175.

[61] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 35.

[62] Ibid, 51.

[63] Ibid, 72.

Catholic priest and theologian, John Pawlikowski, the opposite is true. Pawlikowski argues that "the affirmation of co-creatorship must be tempered by the notion that the Creator God retains a central role."[64] "Central" here indicates Pawlikowski's care that the image of co-creatorship does not go so far as to make God the "junior partner"[65] in the equation. God must always be thought of as the more central, or I would argue more substantial partner. This is a necessary distinction for three reasons, all of which are key concepts for Luther as well. First, God must be at the center because God is the source of power for the world. Second, because of the tendency on the part of humans to do evil rather than good, humans are only able to do God's work when God is working within them as well as through them. Luther described this process in terms of the way in which God is working to free us from sin so that we might use our freedom to serve others. It is true that humans do not always act in a way that fits with God's intention, yet God still chooses to work through humans. This, for Pawlikowski is the miracle of the mutual relationship. The gap between finite reality and divine intention has not been totally bridged, as humans still misuse power, but God continues to call humans forward toward "wholeness."[66] What Pawlikowski means by "wholeness" here is a world that most closely or wholly depicts the fulfillment of the goals of God. Which brings us to the third reason for God's centrality: that it is God who creates the purposes and goals of this action. God works through humans in order to carry out God's purposes of mercy and justice, bringing down the mighty of the world in order to uplift and exalt the lowly.

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[64] John T. Pawlikowski, *God: The Foundational Question after the Holocaust*, in *Good and Evil After Auzchwitz: Ethical Implications for Today*, ed. Jack Bemporad, John T. Pawlikowski and Joseph Sievers (Hoboken , New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 2000), 57.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid, 59.

*The Hidden and Revealed God*

How, then, is God able to do this calling-forward? The key issue at stake here is really how to understand God's relative hiddenness and revelation. Hall describes God as, by nature, obscure and intangible.[67] God is hidden, and "does not show up with the usual accoutrements of might but quietly, inconspicuously, privately, often incognito, and always in ways that are frustratingly roundabout."[68] This is how God relates to the world: in ways that are frequently concealed. This way of relating to the world, according to Hall, is due in part to human finitude and sinfulness. God is a "revealer" in the sense that all we know about God comes through the ways God chooses to be revealed to us. Perhaps in a "pre-fall" world we might know God fully, but as it is now God must be hidden. We cannot see or comprehend what is left unrevealed because we are limited by sin.[69] The idea, expressed here by Hall that humans cannot fully comprehend God because of our sinfulness echoes Luther's arguments about sin clouding our ability to see God's fullness.

The influential Jewish theologian, Abraham J. Heschel, picks up on the connection between God's hiddenness and human sin. He argues that God is hidden because humans first hid, and continue to hide from and reject God. God, however, is hiding but not forever hidden. God only hides "when the people forsake God, breaking the covenant which God has made with

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[67] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 151.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid, 44.

them.…"[70] In a way, the more clouded our lives are by sin, the less we will be able to see God. Fretheim also argues this point, saying that sin can affect the intensity of God's presence.[71] "God can be driven away or forced into hiding as a result of what people do, with the result that God cannot or will not be present in ways that God would like to be."[72] Thus, for Heschel, the task of humans now is to "open our souls to God, to let God once again enter our deeds."[73] These writers are calling for a renewed spiritual connection with God so that we, as humans living in a post-Holocaust world, might understand God's will for the world more fully and allow God to work through us. Fretheim and Heschel go into greater detail than did Luther about the dynamics of the relationship between the sinfulness of humanity and the hiddenness of God. In doing so, they also break from Luther in some ways. Luther maintains that God is revealed to us and comes to us precisely when we are the most distant from God, saving us while we are still enslaved to sin. Perhaps the insistance on the part of Heschel and Fretheim to talk about God's hiddenness in this way stems from a desire to explain how God could have been so seemingly absent during the Holocaust. In this way, Heschel and Fretheim are expanding and transforming a fundamentally Lutheran idea—that God is hidden—to make sense of modern questions and challenges.

Fretheim later posits another reason for God's hiddenness. In order to ensure human freedom of action, he argues, humans must not be able to see God completely. Some distance on

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[70] Abraham J. Heschel, "The Hiding God" in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, ed. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman and Gershon Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 378-379. PDA

[71] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 65.

[72] Ibid, 72.

[73] Heschel, "The Hiding God," 379. PDA

God's part is necessary to ensure human freedom; seeing God completely would give humans *no choice* but to believe and they would thus be coerced. Therefore an element of "ambiguity" is necessary in God's presence.[74] Berkovitz takes this idea further, saying that if God wills that humans be free while at the same time wills to be present in the world, God must be simultaneously hidden and revealed. More precisely:

> If humans are not to perish at the hands of humans, if the ultimate destiny of the human is not to be left to the chance that humans will never make the fatal decision, God must not withdraw God's providence from God's creation. God must be present in history. That humans may be, God must be absent Godself; that humans may not perish in the tragic absurdity of their own making, God must remain present, The God of history must be absent and present concurrently. God hides God's presence. God is present without being indubitably manifest; God is absent without being hopelessly inaccessible.[75]

This balance of hiddenness and revelation serves to allow human freedom while at the same time maintaining a guiding presence in an attempt to counteract and prevent those times when humans make the wrong choice. Berkovitz's argument here is a reminder of Luther's assertion that God is constantly at work in the lives of humans—granting them grace to overcome their sinfulness—while at the same time allowing humans to freely use diving power in the world.

Some are keen to interpret a theology of the hidden God as a statement about the absence of God, saying that because God is hidden, God must not be present. John Haught seeks to explain the apparent absence of God by "locating God's presence in the arena of the future."[76] In this way, for Haught, God's presence is still active in the world, even when it *seems* that God is missing in action; the action is simply taking place where one does not expect. When God is hidden in one place, God is being revealed in another as a way of drawing humans toward a

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[74] Frethiem, *The Suffering of God*, 67.

[75] Berkovitz, "Faith after the Holocaust," 470. PMA, PDA

[76] Haught, *What is God?*, 36.

better future. Let us be reminded of the analysis of Steven Paulson, who argues that God hides so that God will only be revealed where God chooses.[77] This revelation becomes a means of guidance for humans.

Gregory Baum, a German-born Canadian Roman Catholic theologian, further discusses this guidance through revelation. For him, a sense of transcendence, or an experienced connection to God through revelation, is meant to allow humans to become "more fully human." Scripture is one place where this identity-forming revelation occurs; for Baum, Scripture is where the dialogue between God and humans begins.[78] This revelatory dialogue is meant to aid humans in becoming who they truly ought to be as well as aiding humans in making the world what it ought to be. This working can only be carried out well when the human actors are in tune with the divine. Thus, according to Hall, God's revelation to us is not meant to create a list of information or facts about God; instead, revelation is an invitation to experience God's presence. What God reveals is "not 'what' but God's own person."[79] This spiritual connection is a way of guiding humans as they work in the world. Jewish theologian Jack Bemporad writes expressively about the revelatory relationship between God and humans. He argues that it is "only through belief in God as Creator and sustainer, as the ground of being and order, as the source of inspiration in worship, as the ground for the values humans must realize—only through such a belief in God can humans find meaning and value to their existence."[80] I would add to this

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[77] Paulson, "Luther on the Hidden God", 366.

[78] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 45.

[79] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 140.

[80] Jack Bemporad, "What Can We Jews Affirm About God After the Holocaust?" in *Good and Evil After Auschwitz: Ethical Implications for Today*, ed. Jack Bemporad, John T. Pawlikowski, and Joseph Sievers (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 2000), 41-42. PMA

statement that it is also only through such a belief that humans are able to carry out successfully God's will in the world. When these authors use language of "identity forming revelation" and "dialogue" between God and humanity, they are reusing and transforming the Lutheran idea that God is revealed to us through Word and Spirit in a way that might make more sense to a modern reader.

There is a certain comfort that comes with this understanding of God's revelation. Because God has been and is being revealed to us, albeit in unclear ways at times, we have felt God's presence. In the words of Eliezer Berkovitz: "No matter how silent God may every so often be, we have heard God's voice and because of that we know God's word; no matter how empty of God vast tracts of the wastelands of history may appear to be, we know of God's presence as we stand astounded contemplating our own existence."[81] This is also a call for humans to be ever-vigilant in their representing of God on earth. Berkovitz argues that as long as the People of God are present and active in the world there is hope for the future—hope that the world will become closer to what it ought to be.[82]

*Summary; God as a Power Sharing Guide*

A re-contextualized Lutheran doctrine of God's action in the world formed from the ideas of these theologians would, in brief, include the following: God is the source of power for the world, energizing and thus being present in all that occurs. God cannot be known to the world except through finite realities; because of this, we cannot despair of our own history but ought rather to work within the world to make it better. Humans are one of the primary agents of God

[81] Eliezer Berkovitz, "Faith After the Holocaust," 473. PDA

[82] Ibid.

in the world, working with God in a mutual relationship of shared power and responsibility; God maintains the more significant role in this relationship. It is a characteristic of God to be hidden. This hiddenness is due to the inability of the finite and sinful world to comprehend God, as well as God's desire to maintain human freedom. God is revealed in such a way as to draw and guide humans toward a better future. Thus, a transcendent connection with God is necessary if one wishes to consciously carry out God's will in the world. Bearing this summary in mind, it seems that God, for these post-Holocaust theologians, is a *power-sharing guide*—charging humans with the tasks of using divine power on earth while guiding them toward a better future.

## Luther on God's Attributes

Luther's thinking about the attributes of God can be discerned by examining numerous of his works. Here we will look a few key sources: his commentary on *The Magnificat*, his commentaries on Genesis, his treatise on *The Bondage of the Will*, the *Heidelberg Disputation*, and his "Sermon on the Ban." Much of what can be determined from these sources is supported and preceded by Luther's thought on God's action which has been previously discussed. Moving from this foundation, then, this section discusses Luther's though on God's attributes, focusing on topics of immutability and faithfulness, foreknowledge and providence, power and control, and the suffering God. These points will be the basis for further comparison with selected post-Holocaust theologians who write about similar topics.

### *Immutability and Faithfulness*

For Luther, one important self-evident truth about God is that God's will is unchangeable. It is clear in Luther's writings that while the human experience of God is likely to

change over time, God remains constant. Our representations and "magnifications" [83] of God present ever-changing images of a deity who is never-changing. The grounding hope of all believers rests upon the idea that God is constant and faithful. How else, without this immutability, is one able to trust in God? "For this is the one supreme consolation of Christians in all adversities, to know that God does not lie, but does all things immutably, and that God's will can neither be resisted nor changed nor hindered."[84] When Luther talks about God's immutability, it is important to distinguish that he is referring to the unchanging nature of God's will toward humanity. It has already become clear that, because of the propensity of the human will toward sin, God is unable to carry out God's active will in the world at all times. It seems then, that in worldly places and situations, God's will is sometimes thwarted, and therefore *God* must change and adapt. Yet, Luther maintains that God's *saving will* is immutable—this will is what grounds Christian hope. It is imperative that one make the distinction, as Luther does here, that the unchanging will of God pertains exclusively to matters of salvation. God is unchanging, and although God's will is at times sidetracked by the sinful state of the world, God cannot be sidetracked when it comes to God's gracious stance toward humans. Luther, commenting on the promises that God made to Israel says, "In pure grace God made the promise, in pure grace God also fulfilled it."[85] The concept of promise is linked with another important attribute of God in Luther's thinking: foreknowledge. We turn now to a discussion of how God's foreknowledge affects God's ability to be faithful to God's promises.

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[83] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 307.

[84] Luther, *The Bondage of the* Will, 43. PDA

[85] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 352. PDA

*Foreknowledge and Providence*

According to Luther, "God foreknows nothing contingently;" instead "God foresees and purposes and does all things by God's immutable, eternal, and infallible will."[86] There is a connection here between foreknowledge and immutability, or more specifically, between foreknowledge and faithfulness. If God foreknows all things, then all that God wills is bound to occur; indeed God's will *must occur*. "If God foreknows as God wills, then God's will is eternal and unchanging (because God's nature is so), and if God wills as God foreknows, then God's knowledge is eternal and unchanging (because God's nature is so)."[87] Again, care must be taken here in the distinction between God's saving will and God's active will. God can only be faithful to God's promises if God foreknows all things that pertain to these promises—hence, God's *saving will* must be unchangeable. Indeed, in each instance that Luther uses the term "foreknowledge" in his writing,[88] he is referring to God's plan for salvation.[89] That God certainly and unchangeably foreknows God's saving plan for humans, is of the utmost importance for believers. "For if you doubt or disdain to know that God foreknows all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe God's promises and place a sure trust and reliance on them?"[90] Thus, the interrelatedness of God's foreknowledge and immutability, for Luther, provides the ground for faith and trust in God.

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[86] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 37. PDA

[87] Ibid, PDA

[88] This only takes into account those writings which are included in the American Edition of *Luther's Works*.

[89] *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 26-30*, volume 5, 42, 44; *Lectures on Romans*, volume 25, 95f; *The Bondage of the Will* in *Career of the Reformer III*, volume 33, 36-43, 184-193.

[90] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 42. PDA

Perhaps a more concrete illustration will allow us to understand more fully this duality of foreknowledge and immutability. Luther cites the example of Judas, saying that God foreknew that Judas would betray Christ. Because of this foreknowledge, "Judas necessarily became a traitor, and it was not in the power of Judas or any creature to do differently or to change his will, though he did what he did willingly and not under compulsion, but that act of will was a work of God, which God set in motion by God's omnipotence…."[91] Again, let us remember Luther's focus on the immutability of the human will because of its slavery to sin. It is this immutability that necessitates the action of Judas. God also may have been able to predict that Judas would betray Christ simply because of the intensity of God's understanding about Judas' character and purposes. Several other important observations about Luther's doctrine of God can be drawn out of this discussion. First, it is clear that God's foreknowledge is infallible—all things that are foreknown by God do come true, indeed they *must* come true. Second, this coming true does not occur out of "compulsion" but rather out of the freedom of human actors. That God foreknows what will happen does not mean that God controls what will happen. It is true, however, that God's power is the source of all that happens. Luther makes a distinction between God as a source of action and God as a controller of action. In the case of Judas, his "act of will was a work of God," meaning that Judas's human capacity to will came from God. In this way, God was the source of power for Judas's action, but not the director of this action.

Luther himself admits the difficulty of this distinction between God's foreknowledge and human freedom.[92] The key to unlocking the puzzle comes from understanding whether it is a person's salvation or worldly-fate that is at stake. When it comes to salvation—understood not

[91] Ibid, 185. PDA

[92] Ibid, 188.

only in terms of the afterlife but primarily as a right relationship with God here and now—humans have no freedom with which to act; no action on our part will affect God's grace toward us or positively contribute to our salvation. God has complete foreknowledge of God's intentions, and, in this case, "God's foreknowledge and omnipotence are diametrically opposed to our free choice…."[93] Yet, when it comes to our earthly actions, we humans have the freedom to act as we choose, though this action may still be clouded by our sinful will. It is unclear in Luther's writing whether God has foreknowledge about human action in these cases; as mentioned above, all of Luther's comments about foreknowledge pertain to salvation only. Therefore, the most that one is able to say about Luther's view of God's foreknowledge is that God knows all things about the salvific future for humanity, and that God may or may not have foreknowledge about future action and events *in the world*. The post-Holocaust theologians will have more decisive opinions about this topic, arguing that God does not have complete foreknowledge of the earthly future.

When Luther uses the world "providence," he is most often speaking about God's protective and saving plan for humans, specifically with regard to the ways in which God has set up the world to benefit and protect humans. One such example comes in Luther's examination of the story of Noah and the flood. Luther states that it was God's providence which ensured there was ample food for all the inhabitants of the ark.[94] After the flood, God's providence ensured that only small, non world-eliminating, floods were possible.[95] A provident God, for Luther, is a

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[93] Ibid, 189.

[94] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 6-14*, vol. 2 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 75-76.

[95] Ibid, 93.

God who graciously plans for the safety and wellbeing of creation. God's providence is also worked out through creation itself—and through humans as agents of God. In one instance, when discussing unjust rulers, Luther states that they ought not to be surprised "when at times, through God's providence, they are beaten over the head because of the unjust, tyrannical ban, and when their commandment is despised because they act so arrogantly and ceaselessly against the commandment of God."[96] These rulers receive their punishment from God in the form of earthly opposition and trouble. Thus, God works out God's providence through God's "masks" on earth.

The issue of continuing creation on the part of God is linked with these ideas of foreknowledge and providence. It will be important for our purposes here to determine whether or not Luther believed that God *finished* creating on the sixth day, or whether God *continues* the creative process as the history of the world unfolds. This will be especially important when we compare Luther's thought with that of the post-Holocaust writers, who argue—in order to maintain that God does not have complete foreknowledge—that creation itself remains unfinished. Luther makes a distinction between God's "establishment" and "governance" of creation. He argues that on the sixth day of creation, God finished God's creative task in the sense that God did not need to create another heaven or another earth. Yet, God's work within creation did not end there. Because God created all things "through the Word" and because this Word is still at work in the world today and into the future, God's effectiveness and influence on the world never ceases. For Luther, "God works till now—if indeed God has not abandoned the world which was once established but governs and preserves it though the effectiveness of God's

[96] Martin Luther, "A Sermon on the Ban," in *Church and Ministry I*, vol. 39 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 17.

Word. God has, therefore, ceased to establish; but God has not ceased to govern."[97] This idea of governance is linked with Luther's definition of providence: that God continually provides for and cares for creation.

*Power and Control*

The balance between describing God as the source of all action while not as the controller of all action is a complex one. For Luther, God is omnipotent in the sense that all things happening on earth occur because God gave them the energy to occur. God's power is not working in one place at one time, but rather in all places. For, according to Luther, "the power of God cannot be so determined and measured, for it is uncircumscribed and immeasurable, beyond and above all that is or may be."[98] God's power is universal, yet present in each individual "kernel" of the world. Luther says that "the entire divine power must be present throughout, in and on the kernel. For God alone makes it all. On the other hand, the same majesty is so great that neither this world nor even a thousand worlds could embrace it…."[99] God's power is simultaneously intensely present in each corner of the world and intensely transcends the world. God is mighty, but in an unconventional way, "for the word 'mighty' does not denote a quiescent power, as one says of a temporal king that he is mighty, even though he may be sitting still and doing nothing. But it denotes an energetic power, a continuous activity, that works and operates

[97] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 75. PDA

[98] Martin Luther, *This is my Body* in *Word and Sacrament III*, vol. 37 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Robert H. Fischer, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 57.

[99] Ibid, 59. PDA

without ceasing."[100] God's omnipotence functions as a sort of generator for the world, providing the energy to move the world forward.

Because God is the *source* of all action in the world, it follows, as has been noted before, that God's power is necessarily at work even in "Satan and ungodly humans."[101] It seems that in these situations, although God provides the power, God does not control the actions of the sinful. Luther uses the metaphor of a horseman riding a horse that is injured or lame in one or more of its legs. The horseman causes the horse to run, but cannot control the grievous results.[102] So it is with us; God gives God's power to humans who act on God's behalf in the world. Yet, God does not control our actions; instead, we are given the office and responsibility to use them for good or ill. This means that at times, human action frustrates divine purpose. Though God has a certain future in mind for creation, human sinfulness often spoils this future. In the same way, human action can also serve to misrepresent God in the world, or prevent God's appearance altogether. "Alas, the world with its proud eyes constantly thwarts God in this, hinders God's seeing, working, and helping, and our knowledge, love, and praise of God, depriving God of all God's glory and itself of its pleasure, joy, and salvation."[103] We, as humans, are free to do all things on earth, even unto harmful ends—this is a truth which has been made all too evident over the course of history.

A difficulty arises here when one tries to reconcile whether Luther's theology reflects a belief that God is able to control human action and simply chooses not to, or a belief that God is

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[100] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 328.

[101] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 76. PMA

[102] Ibid.

[103] Martin Luther, *The Magnificat*, 301. PDA

in fact unable to control this action. On this surface, it seems that Luther leaves this question unanswered. Yet, when one looks at the whole of Luther's thought, a sense of his greater understanding of God becomes clear. For Luther, it is God's will, and how that will is reflected *relationally* between God and humans, that is most important. What we see about God's will through the lens of relationship is the full extent of our knowledge about God's identity. God's nature, it seems, is divided into two spheres. God's *abstract* identity, which we cannot and do not know anything about, and God's *relational* identity, which we discern from observing God in relationship with us and the world.[104] The relationship between God and humans is one of mutuality and shared power; God is the source of life, but humans are given responsibility and choice. Thus, when one looks at God's *relational identity*, God is unable to control our action.

There is a way in which the relative spheres of control on the part of God and humans serve to complement one another. Luther describes the relationship in this way:

> Humans should know that with regard to their faculties and possessions they have the right to use, to do, or to leave undone, according to their own free choice, though even this is controlled by the free choice of God alone, who acts in whatever way God pleases. On the other hand in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, humans have no free choice, but are captive, subject and slave either of the will of God or the will of Satan.[105]

Unpacking this description, it becomes clear that while humans possess control and freedom over all things on earth, it is God who has control and freedom over all things divine—especially things pertaining to salvation. The human is free to act in whatever way he or she sees fit; yet, Luther makes the claim that even this action is "Controlled by the free choice of God alone." This means that the balance of power and control which we see here was created, indeed chosen,

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[104]This language of *abstract* and *relational* is borrowed from Dr. Darrell Jodock.

[105] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* 70. PMA, PDA

by God. The world works in the way that it does because God chose to make it thus. God forfeited complete control in favor of human freedom.

This does not, however, mean that God is absent while this freedom is being carried out. Even when humans use their freedom to do the utmost evil, God is ever present, drawing them toward a better future. Luther affirms that a "godly mind is not shocked to hear that God is present in death or hell… indeed, since Scripture testifies that God is everywhere and fills all things."[106] Accordingly, it could be said that part of God's omnipotence lies in the fact that while God relinquishes earthly control, there is no earthly situation where God is not able to be present. In fact, according to Luther, it is one of God's primary attributes that God is compassionately present in all human situations; in a way, God "suffers with" humanity.

*The Suffering God*

Let us remember Luther's discussion on the "Hidden God" wherein he describes how human finitude prevents God's full revelation. Instead, God's fullness is hidden.[107] God can only be revealed through various means. Luther calls God's suffering one of these means; that God suffers is a revelation into the very nature of God. In fact, God is literally "hidden in God's suffering."[108] This hiding reveals a peculiarity about God's nature: that God hides the truths about Godself in their opposite. So, according to Luther, "the manifest and visible things of God

[106] Ibid, 47.

[107] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 31-37*,148.

[108] Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" in *Career of the Reformer I*, vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, trans. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 52. PDA

are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, God's human nature, weakness, foolishness."[109] Thus, if God is seen, most manifestly in Christ, as lowly and suffering, God is actually mighty and exalted. Only a God who is able to be humbled, a God who suffers with and for the lowliest, is also able to be glorified because the visible truths about God are in direct opposition to the invisible truths. Luther further warns that "it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in God's glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."[110] Mary Solberg describes Luther's thinking in this way: "God's works… are hidden in the form of their opposite (*sub contrario suo abscondita sunt*), and the cross is the ultimate instantiation of this apparent paradox."[111] It is clear that for Luther, the cross and Christ's suffering there is the key illustration of God as a "suffering God."

Jürgen Moltmann provides a helpful insight in his analysis of Luther's writings on the suffering God. He verifies that, for Luther, God is most clearly revealed in Christ's suffering, saying that "Christ the crucified alone is 'human's true theology and knowledge of God.'"[112] Then Moltmann takes it further, quoting Luther that God was not only present with Christ on the cross, but that God *was* Christ on the cross: "what happened on the cross was a happening between God and God; there God disputes with God; there God cries out to God; there God dies in God."[113] Christ's divinity on the cross, as Moltmann describes it, is certainly important for

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[109] Ibid. PDA

[110] Ibid, 52-53. PDA

[111] Mary Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 71.

[112] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974), 212. PMA

[113] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 65.

Luther. Yet, Moltmann appears to have omitted the importance of Christ's humanity for Luther. The face that Jesus suffered *as a human* provides great comfort for Luther, and should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, both men would agree that we can say about Christ and what he experienced on the cross, we can also say about God. Moltmann argues that Jesus' death is meant to say something about God, not just something about our salvation.[114] That truth about God is that God is deeply connected to the world, to the point of suffering with humanity, and God's humility in this regard only serves to glorify God more. Moltmann also points out that traditionally, suffering has been seen as a way for humans to bring themselves closer to the divine through asceticism. However, Luther argues the reverse—that God suffers in order to become closer to humanity.[115] In God's suffering, God not only performs a saving act, but God is also simply drawn nearer to us in the process. Solberg argues that Jesus on the cross provides "a glimpse into God's heart, God's disposition toward humankind."[116] This disposition is an unchanging one of grace and compassion.

*Summary; God as a Relational and Cooperative Savior*

A summary of Luther's doctrine of God's attributes includes the following: God's saving will for humanity is unchanging; Because of this immutability, we are able to trust in the saving promises of God. Similarly, that God foreknows all things is necessary in order to trust in these promises. While God's will can be thwarted in the world, God's grace-filled disposition toward humanity cannot. God is omnipotent in the sense that God's power is the source of energy for the

[114] Ibid, 62.

[115] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 213.

[116] Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*, 80.

world. God, however, is not always the controller of this power as humans have been gifted with the responsibility and freedom to use this power in the world. God is in control of all things pertaining to God's salvific action while humans are in control of their own earthly action. God is ever-present in the world, compassionately suffering with humanity even when we misuse God's power. Christ's suffering especially reveals how deeply God is involved in the world and in the lives of humans. God is often "hidden" in this suffering, revealing—in the form of its opposite—the might of God's character through humility. This summary reveals that, for Luther, God is a *relational and cooperative savior*—constantly sharing both grace and power with the world.

## Selected Post-Holocaust Theologians on God's Attributes

As in the previous section of contemporary thought, the following is a compilation of selected post-Holocaust writers who felicitously articulate some similar ideas about God's attributes in light of the Holocaust. Included here are Christian theologians Jürgen Moltmann, Douglas John Hall, Terrence Fretheim, and Gregory Baum, as well as Jewish theologians Hans Jonas, Jack Bemporad, and Eliezer Berkovitz. These writers present an engaging and coherent discussion of God's attributes in the post-Holocaust world, in this way representing the fuller body of scholars on the topic. Baum, Jonas, Bemporad, and Berkovitz are writing to address the problem of God and evil specifically with regard to the Holocaust. The writings of Hall and Fretheim come from a more general theological context, seeking to make God more discernable in a modern world. Finally, Jürgen Moltmann writes about the theological concepts of eschatology and God's suffering. While his purposes depart from the other authors', both of

these topics thematically match our discussion here.[117] Despite their contextual differences, all of these authors cover topics found in Luther's writing above. As in the previous contemporary section on God's action, this summary of their ideas is not meant to suggest that no disagreement exists between the authors, but instead that the arguments from *these specific sources* do a good job of expressing Lutheran ideas in a modern, post-Holocaust context. As before, the structure of this section will be thematic rather than authorial, matching the categories covered by Luther above.

*Immutability and Faithfulness*

It is of the utmost importance to these writers, and, as we have seen, to Luther, that God's will be unchanging. Moltmann, a German Protestant theologian, describes God as apathetic, meaning unaffected by outside sources, in the sense that nothing can hinder God's unconditional love toward humanity.[118] At least when it comes to God's disposition toward humans, God does not, indeed God cannot, change. Returning to an idea found in Luther's thought, God's *saving will* is immutable. Hall states the matter another way, asserting that redemption has always been a part of God's plan. For Hall, "the redemptive activity of God commences, perhaps, already prior to history."[119] Being grace-filled toward humans is an unchanging attribute of God that has been ever-present since the time of creation. In this way, God is unchanging. This idea of God's immutable grace is distinctly Lutheran. Yet, according to German-born Jewish philosopher and

[117] An annotated bibliography has been included at the end of this thesis which further explicates the background and purposes of each of these post-Holocaust writers.

[118] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 269.

[119] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 89.

theologian Hans Jonas, some aspects of God are subject to change. For Jonas, God is "becoming," meaning that God emerges, changes, and becomes more complete as time goes on. Jonas contrasts the idea of a becoming God with a God who possesses "a completed being that remains identical with itself throughout eternity."[120] A God who is able to change as the world changes surpasses a completed God by becoming more relationally involved in the world. A becoming God is "affected by what happens in the world, and 'affected' means altered, made different."[121] This ability on the part of God to be affected is an expansion upon the Lutheran concept of God's nature. Luther does mention that our human experiences of God change over time, and that God must at some times change God's plan for the world because sin has thwarted God's original purposes. Yet, he does not raise the issue of whether God in God's own self changes. However, because Luther so strongly emphasizes God as relational, this concept of God changing to maintain relatedness with a changing world does not seem to be a complete departure from Lutheran theology. Luther also paints a picture of a dynamic God in order to avoid the creation of so detailed description of God as to box God off and diminish the mysterious nature of God. A dynamic God, one that often defies our explanation, seems to fit with the idea of a changing God. In addition, this changeability of God does not mean that God's *saving will* toward humans is ever altered. God, in an expanded Lutheran theology, is simultaneously unchanging and changeable.

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[120] Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice" in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, ed. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 631.

[121] Ibid, 632.

*Future Possibilities: Redefining Foreknowledge and Providence*

The world, because of the possibility of human choice and freedom, is changeable as well. Jack Bemporad avers that the world is unfinished. Instead of a world that remains constant from the time of creation, "God has created and is creating with God's creatures a basically unfinished universe. The goal of creation is the actualization of an ideal order of things."[122] Just as God is able to change over time, so creation is in a constant state of change through time. At times, this change brings the world closer to what Bemporad above called the "ideal order of things" or the divine intention. Of course this "ideal order" is not always achieved, and the Holocaust is a sobering example of how far creation has yet to go to achieve the divine intention. Humans, as we have seen, are an important part of this process, working in the world to achieve the divine will. Because humans are the actors, however, there is an allowance for possibilities. Since humans have "genuine freedom," then humans have the option to "complete the world for good or for evil.[123] Because of this possibility, Bemporad and others have concluded that God has not predetermined everything that will happen on earth.[124] This idea of an unfinished creation does not depart completely from Luther's thought. In fact, Luther's emphasis on God's continued providential presence in the world is consistent with an unfinished creation—one that God continues to work in and create for. Yet, Luther makes a distinction between this continued action, which he calls "governance," and the act of creation itself, which he calls "establishment,"[125] saying that the former continues to occur, while the latter was finished on the

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[122] Jack Bemporad, "What Can We Jews Affirm About God After the Holocaust?," 41. PDA

[123] Ibid, 33.

[124] Ibid, 35.

[125] Luther, *The Magnificat*, 75.

sixth day. Therefore, the post-Holocaust notion of unfinished creation is a change from Lutheran thought; yet, because Luther focuses so much attention on God's continued action in creation and the potential for human error in carrying out the divine will, this transformation of ideas about the unfinished nature of creation seems appropriate in light of our new post-Holocaust context.

Terrence Fretheim also claims that God has not predetermined all earthly events, saying that because God consults with humans in scripture, God cannot know everything about the future. He cites, among others, God consulting with Abraham about the fate of Sodom in Genesis 18, and Moses' success in reversing God's decision to act with wrath against the Israelites in Exodus 32.[126] These examples, along with the divine tendency to use the word "if"[127] in scripture, indicate to Fretheim the future of the world is unknown even for God. Fretheim also cites places in scripture (Hosea 6, 11, and Jeremiah 5) where God seems to be struggling and "engaging in self-questioning" with regard to the future. God self-reflects about how to proceed with a certain group of people. For Fretheim, these questions ought then to be transferred onto the people themselves. "The people now have a role to play in determining what the answer will be."[128] The hope, for Fretheim is that we as humans can work to answer these questions through our action in a way that is pleasing to God—in a way that brings the world closer to the divine intention. Yet, the future remains undecided. This concept of God's knowledge of the future goes beyond what Luther was able to assert.

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[126] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 49-51.

[127] Ibid, 47.

[128] Ibid, 55.

Because of the uncertainty of the future, one can no longer say that God is omniscient with regard to the future, or that God has complete foreknowledge. Here these post-Holocaust writers go beyond Luther, who only asserts that God knows all things with regard to salvation. They choose to expressly deny God's total foreknowledge, and instead to focus on a God who is relationally involved in the world. According to Gregory Baum, "God is provident in the sense that in whatever trap a human falls, a summons continues to address them and offer them new life that makes them more truly human."[129] This providence means that rather than knowing all things with regard to the future, God instead offers possibilities to move humans out of every situation toward a *better future*. Baum also argues that "God is omniscient in the sense that there exists no human situation, however difficult, however obscure, however frightening, in which God remains silent or… in which a summons to greater insight is not available."[130] Again, omniscience here means not knowing-all, but instead knowing a way to aid humans in all places. Baum has transformed these traditional attributes of God to fit a more relational model—going beyond but not contradicting Luther's thought on the topic. In fact, this idea of God speaking to humans in difficult situations and providing a summons for humans seems to fit quite nicely with Luther's concept of God's providence—that God graciously works to benefit, protect and save humans in all times and places. This move beyond stems from their post-Holocaust context; these writers are dealing with issues that were not in the forefront in Luther's context. The Holocaust brings the issue of evil in the world, and God's knowledge of this evil, into the forefront of theological discourse—explaining the desire of these writers to make a stronger claim about foreknowledge than did Luther.

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[129] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 242. PMA

[130] Ibid, 243.

*Power and Control; Redefining Omnipotence*

A third attribute, traditionally ascribed to God, will now be discussed: that God is omnipotent. According to Jonas, God is not omnipotent. God has, "by the act of creation itself, forgone being 'all in all.'"[131] What Jonas is really getting at here is that when one takes human freedom and responsibility into account, as well as the horror of the Holocaust, a traditional understanding of God's omnipotence, which gives God complete control over what occurs on earth, does not hold up. Because of the undeniable presence of evil and destruction in the world, God cannot be simultaneously all-powerful (as omnipotence is traditionally defined), absolutely good, and intelligible. All three attributes cannot be concurrently true. "Seeing the existence of evil in the world, we must sacrifice intelligibility in God to the combination of the other two attributes."[132] Jonas is, as I am, unwilling to accept this sacrifice. It is necessary, then, to redefine what an omnipotent God means. The new definition needs to take into account the ways in which God's power is channeled into the world, limiting God's control but maintaining that God is still the *power source*. Interestingly enough, what this *new definition* takes into account are actually two important, and not-so-new concepts from Luther himself: that God is the source of power for the world but shares this power with agents who carry it out on earth. Gregory Baum provides another fitting definition of omnipotence:

[131]Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz," 632.

[132] Ibid, 633.

> God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no earthly power oppressing humans that is stronger than the divine grace that frees them to wrestle with it in some way and to become more human in the process.… divine omnipotence means that there is no situation, however destructive, in which an inner strength is not offered to humans, allowing them to assume greater possession of this humanity.[133]

This definition moves our focus from God's controlling power to God's powerful strength-giving presence. God's power is not diminished with this definition, but rather it is redirected.

The world we live in is only made possible through God's conscious limitation of God's control. As has been noted above, this limitation creates a possibility both of good and evil in the world. According to Berkovitz, "God cannot as a rule intervene whenever humans' use of freedom displeases God. It is true, if God did so the perpetration of evil would be rendered impossible, but so would the possibility for good also disappear."[134] So God limits God's control and allows humans the freedom to use God's power in whatever way they choose. Only by allowing for the possibility of evil in the world through this freedom could God ensure that humans had the possibility to choose good for themselves. To talk about God's power in relation to the world, is to distinguish between power and control. God's control on earth is limited, this however, does not mean that God's power itself is limited, just the options for this power. This idea has been expressed by Luther, in terms of God's *relational identity*. God, in relationship with humans, has limited God's control over our action while maintaining—and sharing—God's infinite power.

Fretheim, to further substantiate the idea that God's control is limited, argues that the very fact that God makes promises in scripture means that God's options are limited. "God will do what God says God will do; God will be faithful to God's own promises, and that is a

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[133]Baum, *Man Becoming*, 244. PMA

[134] Berkovitz, "Faith After the Holocaust," 469. PMA, PDA

limitation of freedom."[135] God has even created the world itself in such a way as to limit God's options. God has chosen to work primarily through humans, who Luther describes as one of God's "masks," rather than to work directly in the world. For Fretheim, because God has limited options, God's power is "limited, in some ways; this is necessary in order for God to be consistent with the way in which God has chosen to relate to the world."[136] It is a choice, on the part of God, to be limited. Yet, Fretheim's language of "limited power" here is troublesome. What truly seems to be at stake for him is God's worldly control, not God's divine power. Caution must be taken to ensure that the discussion of God as limited does not go so far as to say that God is lacking power. God the source of all power in the world cannot have anything less than infinite power. Bemporad clarifies the issue by saying that God's "limitation is not such as to render the divine powerless or impotent." That God is limited in control is a "necessary condition of there being a world at all.[137] Because God wills a world where humans are given freedom and responsibility, God has elected to limit God's options when it comes to how much control God has over worldly events. Fretheim's language of limited freedom makes sense in this context, in the sense that God's freedom to do some things is limited along with God's control over earthly events. This, however, does not diminish the amount or efficacy of God's *saving power* when it comes to spiritual matters—an important concept to remember because we are seeking to maintain a Lutheran perspective here.

Just as this limited control does not limit the quantity of God's power, so also it does not limit the quality of God's godliness. Father Pawlikowski argues that the idea that God limits

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[135]Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 36.

[136] Ibid, 77.

[137] Bemporad, "What Can We Jews Affirm  About God After the Holocaust?," 40.

God-self in order to allow human freedom, "reminds us that one need to exercise power and dominance to be Godly."[138] In a way, God becomes more honorable because God is able to share authority with humanity. This idea is echoed by Bemporad, who says that "a concept of God which allows free beings to exist beside God is a much worthier concept than that of a God who is the cause of everything that happens."[139] God's limited control also opens the door for additional possibilities for God's nature. In fact, for Fretheim, to say that God's control is not limited would be to limit God in other ways. If God were the controller of all things:

> God would not be able to make free, spontaneous decisions in the light of the spontaneities of human action. God would also be deprived of the experience of novelty or of the joy of discovery. God's activity in the world would become a kind of production, a mere drawing out of what God has always determined. If it is not too flip, God thereby would become an already programmed computer. The truly personal dimension of the divine life would be sharply diminished.[140]

Thus, a God of limited control is a God of relationship. Only a God of limited control is able to experience a genuine connection with humanity and the world. This is a concept that is not expressly covered by Luther. Yet, it is possible to see how the idea of God being more able to relate personally with the world by limiting God's interference, would fit with Luther's continual insistence that God is relationally involved in the world.

*Presence in the World; Redefining Omnipresence*

In order to be in this kind of relationship with the world, God must therefore be fully present in the world. By becoming accessible from within creation itself, God is able to maintain

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[138] Pawlikowski, "God: The Foundational Ethical Question after the Holocaust," 60.

[139] Bemporad, "What Can We Jews Affirm About God After the Holocaust?," 34. PDA

[140] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 44.

connectedness with humanity. Jonas describes God as "temporalized,"[141] saying that God is present in the world in such a way as to move with the world *in time* rather than from a distance. God, for Jonas, is not a remote being, but a deity who is intimately involved with its creation. Fretheim takes this idea further, using the image of God dwelling inside the world. God is so intimately related to the world that God has literally created a living space within creation itself.[142] The "all pervading presence of God in creation,"[143] means that there can be no time in which God is totally absent. Hall expresses this same idea by saying that when one speaks of God's presence, one ought to use language of "within" rather than language of "with."[144] God is not working alongside creation, but rather through and within creation, to achieve the divine purpose.

Hall goes on to claim that we must consider all attributes of God as they are affected by God's loving presence in the world. God's presence in the world and God's desire to maintain a relationship with God's creation informs all else that we know about God. This nicely parallels Luther's concept that we can only know God through God's *relational identity.* All that we can discern about God is revealed through God's relationship with the world. Because of this, Hall argues, the attributes we ascribe to God—especially those which emphasize God's superiority—must be understood through the lens of relationship. More specifically:

> If it is proximity to the creature that God chiefly desires, then every potentiality that may be attributed to God has to accommodate itself to that end. Not even God can force creaturely reciprocity. Power, even God's power, cannot behave powerfully when its object is loving proximity to that which is weaker. All-knowingness, even God's

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[141] Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz," 632.

[142] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 37.

[143] Ibid, 61.

[144] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 159.

> omniscience, cannot act all-knowingly when its object is fellowship with beings whose knowledge is strictly circumscribed. Ubiquity of being, even when it refers to the divine omnipresence, can only hope to communicate with creatures of time and space if it focuses itself in particularity—in being-*there*. Likewise must eternality subject itself to temporality, immutability to change, simplicity to complexity, incomprehensibility to comprehension, Spirituality to materiality, holiness to the ordinary, and infinity to finitude—if, in each case, its object is to be "with us."[145]

For God to make God's presence known to humanity, God must, at least in the ways Hall indicates here, forfeit God's superior status in order to meet us where we are: in lowliness and suffering.

*The Suffering God*

Moltmann describes God as so closely connected to the human situation that God literally "suffers from God's 'indwelling' in Israel."[146] Because, as Hall has expressed, God dwells within humans rather than simply alongside them, God fully experiences all that we experience. What humans suffer, God suffers—even to the point of pain and death. This suffering comes out of the eternal and unending love that God has for humanity. Hall tells us that "God suffers because God loves. And until that which God loves—the creation—is healed, the glory of God can only be glimpsed by those who in some measure are given to participate in God's suffering love."[147] God, therefore, will continue to suffer as long as the world is suffering. This is a continual process. Jonas also describes God's suffering, not as a onetime occurrence, but as an unchanging characteristic of God. Indeed, God's relationship with the world, "*from the moment*

[145] Ibid, 149.

[146] Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, 71. PDA

[147] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 183.

*of creation*, and certainly from the creation of humans on, involves suffering on the part of God."[148]

According to Fretheim, God suffers for three reasons. First, God suffers with humans, maintaining a compassionate presence as they suffer. "God sees the suffering from the inside; God does not look at it from the outside as through a window. God is internally related to the suffering of the people."[149] Here, God is suffering *with* humans. Secondly, Fretheim argues that God suffers *because* of humans—suffering as a result of human denial of God. God laments and grieves because humans have so deeply rejected the promises and intentions of God.[150] Finally, there are times when God suffers *for* humans, as an atoning sacrifice; this is a third reason for God's suffering according to Fretheim. Perhaps this suffering is most clearly seen in Christ's death and resurrection. Fretheim, however, argues that the atoning suffering of God is initially seen in the Old Testament. Over and over, God bears the brunt of Israel's disobedience and lack of faith; yet, God remains with God's people. For Fretheim, in these cases, God is subjected to "a humiliating situation, and thereby gives up something of what the divine life must be, for the purpose of Israel's salvation. It is only by entering deeply into the situation so fraught with death that the death-dealing forces are conquered and life is made possible again."[151] Here God provides salvation to God's people by remaining in a covenantal relationship with them. This maintenance of relationality involves some suffering on God's part—making this suffering for atonement. Yes, the Gospel stories and the humble example of Christ do reveal God as a

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[148] Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz," 631. PMA

[149] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 128.

[150] Ibid, 107-113.

[151] Ibid, 148.

suffering God. Yet, Fretheim has also shown here that God's atoning suffering is not exclusively Christo-centric, supporting the idea from Jonas above, that God's suffering is continual rather than a onetime event. Luther's concept of the suffering God is not Christo-centric either; for Luther, Christ's suffering serves to reveal truths about the nature of God in God's own self—making this a Theo-centric theology.

That God suffers further suggests a few things about the nature of God. Initially, one might think of suffering as a sign of weakness. Berkovitz argues the opposite; just as God's sharing of power did not diminish the infinite power of God, so God's suffering does not diminish the mightiness of God. Rather, God's suffering reveals even greater strength and majesty. This concept nicely matches Luther's insistence that, since God is often revealed in forms opposite to the true nature of God, God's suffering actually reveals God's mightiness. For Berkovitz, true strength is found when one can "endure the mocking of one's enemies when one could easily eliminate them."[152] God's might is shown in the fact that "in spite of God's infinite power, God does not frighten humans but lets them find their own way, extending to them God's long-suffering. God is mighty in the renunciation of God's might in order to bear with man."[153]That God is able to forfeit God's superior status and enter into a compassionate relationship with humans, that God suffers with and for humans, shows God's true strength.

This suffering also affects the way we look at the other attributes of God. The suffering of God contradicts traditional ideas about God's superiority; Christ, as one example of God's suffering, reflects a deity who subordinates itself to others. Moltmann argues that a God of "omnipotence, perfection and infinity at human's expense cannot be the God who is love in the

[152] Berkovitz, "Faith After The Holocaust," 471.

[153] Ibid, 472. PDA, PMA

cross of Jesus, who makes a human encounter in order to restore their lost humanity to unhappy and proud divinities, who 'became poor to make many rich.'"[154] God's suffering reveals the power of self-sacrificing love. God suffers to maintain a relationship with suffering humans. While there remains a sort of paradoxical relationship between suffering and power, the fact that God's suffers in order to sustain a meaningful relationship with us is, in fact, one way in which God is God almighty. These ideas about the suffering of God should not be taken to mean that God is *only* present in the world through suffering—indeed, God is present in all times and places because God's infinite power has created and is working in all things—nor should it be taken to mean that God's strength is *only* revealed through God's suffering—indeed, perhaps the most clear revelation of God's strength, especially for Luther, is God's ability to providently provide for humans and save humanity through grace. What these ideas about God's suffering do tell us is that, for Luther as well as these post-Holocaust theologians, God's suffering is *one clear place* where a bit of God's compassionate and grace-filled nature is revealed to us, though this is not the only place.[155]

*Summary; God as Relationally Bound to the World*

A Passage from Fretheim's *The Suffering of God* nicely summarizes what a re-contextualized Lutheran doctrine of God's actions formed from the ideas these selected theologians would be:

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[154] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 250. PMA

[155] God's action to carry out God's purposes of granting mercy to humans, tearing down the mighty and lifting up the lowly—which we saw from Luther in his commentary on *The Magnificat*—is another place where God's nature is made known to us. One can see how the eventual demise of the Nazi regime fits into these purposes and how this event also shows God's might and majesty.

> The world is not only dependent upon God; God is also dependent upon the world. The world is not only affected by God; God is affected by the world in both positive and negative ways. God is so sovereign over the world, yet not unqualifiedly so, as considerable power and freedom have been given to the creatures. God is the transcendent Lord; but God is transcendent not in isolation from the world, but in relationship to the world. God knows all there is to know about the world, yet there is a future which does not yet exist to be known even by God. God is the Lord of time and history, yet God has chosen to be bound up in the time and history of the world and to be limited thereby. God is unchangeable with respect to the steadfastness of God's love and God's salvific will for all creatures, yet God does change in the light of what happens in the interaction between God and world.[156]

All that is missing from this summary is a greater emphasis on God's suffering as a means of relationship and salvation for the world. Because God suffers, God is better able to relate to creation. A summary of these post-Holocaust theologians reveals their depiction of God as *relationally bound* to humanity and to creation. Because God wishes to maintain a relationship with humans, the above nuances on the traditional attributes of God must be true.

### Selected Post-Holocaust Theologians on the State of Evil in the World

At the opening of this thesis, we were introduced to Luther's concept of sin and evil and how this affected the rest of his theology. In the same way that Luther's explanation of evil in the world created the *backdrop* for his theology, it seems that an explanation of evil in the world is a *goal* for post-Holocaust theology. Explaining how evil, especially such great evil as was present during the Holocaust, can exist in a world where God is present, drives these theologians. Bemporad states that "in creating the world, God gives full significance to creation so that God acts not through coercion or manipulation but through persuasion, appeal and revelation."[157] In this way, God cannot be directly responsible for evil in the world. To be clear, a God who

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[156] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 35. PDA

[157] Bemporad, "What Can We Jews Affirm About God After the Holocaust?," 34. PDA

persuades rather than coercing is not a God who lacks power. As stated above, a God who, by sacrificing coercive control, allows human freedom is truly a more powerful God. Bemporad goes on to say that "God would be responsible for evil if God were the sole agent of all that happens, and all other beings merely instruments or vessels of God's will. But in a world where there is genuine freedom… God can only work as a persuasive being, and not as a coercive being."[158] What Bemporad means here is that, when it comes to human action, God has limited God's own options to revelatory guidance and persuasion. Especially since our purpose here is to maintain a Lutheran perspective, it is important to distinguish more specifically what Bemporad is getting at. Surely when one takes into account that God's power created and sustains the world, as well as God's unlimited power in matters of salvation, God's power can do more than persuade. Yet, Bemporad's point speaks to God's limited options with regard to human action. Consequently, when humans—who, as Luther tells us, are in bondage to sin—act wrongly, their actions bring evil into the world.

This does not separate God from the problem of evil altogether, however. Berkovitz reminds us that God *created* the possibility for evil—God "had to create the possibility for evil, if God were to create the possibility for its opposite: peace, goodness, love."[159] Freedom and responsibility on the part of humans means that the option for both good and evil remain open. Yet, because God wills that there be human freedom means that some other options, especially the option to control all earthly events, become closed to God. Berkovitz ought not to be interpreted to be telling God exactly what God needed to do in order to create a successful world. Perhaps, in our finitude, we can only conceive of this one means of creating a world with human

[158] Ibid. PDA

[159] Berkovitz, "Faith After the Holocaust," 469.

freedom; yet, God in God's infinite wisdom may know many alternative solutions. All that can be confirmed is that, because the world functions the way that it does, that God has elected to allow human freedom and, in doing so, has allowed for the possibility of evil.

Because God allowed for both the possibility of good and evil, Hall maintains that God engages in "extraordinary work" in the world to counteract the effects of evil—working through creation toward "the transforming of the negations brought about my human mismanagement, exploitation, and hostility in relation to extrahuman and human creation.[160] God is not detached from evil in the world, even if not directly to blame, because God has committed to a relationship with humans regardless of their choices. Yet, evil is certainly against the divine will. Indeed, Baum not only argues that God in no way permits evil, but also that 'God overcomes evil. God is constantly at work among humans, summoning them and gracing them to discern the evil in human life, to wrestle against it, to be converted away from it, to correct their environment."[161] While evil is not part of the divine plan, God does find ways to guide humans in the midst of evil. Perhaps, then, the question to ask in the wake of the Holocaust is not 'was God to blame for this evil?' but rather 'was God present during this evil?' The answer, for the post-Holocaust theologians under examination here is undeniably, yes. All the more glory ought to be given to God because God continues to work with and help humans in the midst of evil that God did not cause—using them as God's agents and continuing to provide them with guidance and revelation.

[160] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 86.

[161] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 245. PMA

**Piecing it Together; A Proposed Re-Contextualized Lutheran Doctrine of God**

The primary task of this thesis has been to draw out and compare ideas from Martin Luther and some selected post-Holocaust theologians about the nature of God. Much remains unknown, yet what we do claim to know has amounted to a whole doctrine of God: God as an *involved commissioner*, doing divine work through the means of creation and revealing divine intention through various means; God as a *power sharing guide*, authorizing humans to do God's work in the world while guiding them toward a better future; God as a *relational and cooperative savior*, with an unchanging saving will for humanity and the world that aids humans in their task of carrying God's earthly will; and finally, God as *relationally bound* to creation, maintaining divine might while prioritizing a relationship with humanity instead of superiority.

The task of historians, political scientists, exegetes, and theologians in interpreting the significance of early writings for modern society is a difficult, yet important one. It is often a necessary and important undertaking to combine the original and contemporary thought into a new and transformed theology, using the best out of both elements. The following ten points represent my combination of Luther and the selected post-Holocaust theologians, amounting to a re-contextualized Lutheran doctrine of God. Lutheran theology provides the basis for this proposal, while the post-Holocaust writers help to draw out Luther's ideas—in language that may be more helpful in our modern context—and to expand on areas of Luther's thought that are less clearly formulated. Putting their ideas together in this way forms a more complete doctrine of God—one that allows Lutherans to make sense of God in a world where a Holocaust is possible, without either rejecting God altogether or resigning themselves to belief in an unknowable God.

*1. God does not work directly in the world, but instead uses aspects of creation as channels of God's power.*

Luther calls these channels "masks" or "wrappers"[162] of God, while language of "finite media" and "symbols"[163] of God come across in the post-Holocaust writing. Scripture, the natural world and humans themselves all function as these symbols of God's action. That creation—especially, though not only, those parts of creation which are considered lowly—are used by God signals a need to uphold the value of creation as well as human history.

*2. Humans, in particular, are given responsibility to be God's agents in the world. God gives power, responsibility, and freedom to humans to act out the divine will for the world.*

Humans work, according to Luther, in "cooperation"[164] with God, using God's power and their own freedom. The contemporary writers describe this as a "covenantal"[165] or "reciprocal"[166] relationship—each member giving and receiving. This relationship means that humans have a responsibility to better the world. God continues to work with humans even though we are sinful, continually giving us grace so that we might do God's work.

*3. God is characterized by a great deal of hiddenness and mystery.*

Human sinfulness, in part, is responsible for this hiddenness. We cannot, in our finitude, fully comprehend God. This hiddenness is also necessary to ensure human freedom and evade divine coercion. Yet, where God is hidden serves to guide humans toward a better future; God is

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[162] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, 11-15.

[163] Haught, *What is God?*, 66-67.

[164]Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 45-50*, 95.

[165] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 86.

[166] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 35.

hidden so as only to be found where God wills to be found.[167] The works of God are also frequently hidden "in the form of their opposite,"[168] so that we see God more clearly through humble means. The post-Holocaust writers claim to know a bit more about this "hidden God" and why God is hidden than does Luther. This stems from contextual differences; because of their desire to explain the apparent absence of God during the Holocaust, the post-Holocaust writers have a more firm stance about God's hiddenness.

*4. God is also characterized by revelation.*

For Luther, Scripture and the Gospel are the chief means of revelation. Luther and the post-Holocaust writers both argue that some sort of spiritual connection to God through revelation is necessary if one wishes to do God's will in the world most effectively.

*5. God's will is immutable and God is therefore faithful to God's promises.*

God's *saving will* does not change; God will always look upon humanity with grace-filled compassion. Trust in this immutability is necessary if one wishes to trust in divine promise. While nothing can hinder God's unconditional love, there are ways that God's will for how the world should be can be thwarted. In this way, God's will is unchanging but God at times must change and adapt other aspects of God's nature as the world changes.

*6. God has complete foreknowledge about God's relatedness with humanity.*

Examining Luther's writing, this is the most that one is able to assert with regard to foreknowledge. God knows all things pertaining to the way that God will relate to humans—namely that God will always be grace-filled with humanity. This, again, is necessary in order for God to remain faithful to God's promises. Luther does not assert whether he thinks God has

[167] Paulson, "Luther on the Hidden God," 366.

[168] Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*, 71.

foreknowledge about earthly events or not. The post-Holocaust writers, however, go further. These contemporary thinkers assert that the world has an open future about which God does not have complete foreknowledge. Human freedom allows for possibilities in the future, both positive and negative. Because Luther does not argue for or against divine foreknowledge of worldly events, these contemporary writers do not contradict Luther, but simply expand into an area Luther did not examine.

*7. God is the infinite power source for the world, but has limited control in the world.*

Luther distinguishes between the earthly and the spiritual, saying that in spiritual things God has complete power and control while in earthly things God relinquishes control to allow for human freedom. Yet, God's power is present in all human and worldly action. Similarly, post-Holocaust theology describes God's omnipotence as a strength-giving, rather than controlling.[169] Emphasis is also placed on the fact that God's lack of control does not suggest that God lacks power; instead the ability to give up control actually shows God's incredible strength.

*8. God is profoundly and deeply present in the world.*

Luther emphasizes God's presence in the world as God works through the depths of creation—even unto death. Post-Holocaust writers use language such as God "dwelling"[170] in creation, or describing God's presence is "within" rather that "with"[171] God's creation. All of God's attributes ought to be understood through the lens of God's desire for closeness with humanity. God necessarily sacrifices some superiority to maintain this closeness, not in the sense

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[169] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 244.

[170] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 37.

[171] Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 159.

that God's might or strength is lessened, but that God sacrifices the ability to have full control over the world in order to be in a mutual relationship with creation.

*9. God is able to suffer with and for the world.*

For Luther, Christ shows God's suffering most clearly, and reveals God most clearly. This suffering demonstrates God's compassionate relatedness to the world. Because God is often revealed in the form of the opposite, this suffering also reveals God's mightiness. The post-Holocaust writers expand the ways that God's suffering is revealed—including, among other means, the history of the Jewish people.[172] God's suffering is also described, by both Luther and the contemporary writers, as a continual action of God, not a onetime event.[173]

*10. Evil is undeniably present in the world, but God is not directly responsible for this evil.*

Luther constantly emphasizes that the human will is immutably bound to sin. Because humans are free actors in the world, evil comes into the world when our actions are affected by this sinfulness. Yet, God works with and through us despite our sinfulness; while God may be working with and through means that are bound to evil, and while it must be acknowledged that the way in which God created the world necessitates the possibility of evil, God is not the direct cause of this evil. God is constantly present, even in the worst of situations, drawing humans forward to a better future. More glory ought to be given to God who continues to be present in the world in the face of such evil.

There are some questions which are outside the scope of this project, and which this proposal leaves unanswered. Though I have cited from both Jewish and Christian sources, only a

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[172] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 148.

[173] Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz," 631.

very little has been said about the significant theological differences between these traditions and how these differences affect might affect one's doctrine of God. It remains to be seen what of God's nature is left *unrevealed*—a question that is left unanswered not because it is thematically distinct from this project, but because, in our present time and in our finitude, we are unable to fathom a response. Finally, this project offers no explanation for the *distribution* of evil on the world, or why a certain person experiences a certain evil. Nevertheless, the above proposal comprises a doctrine of God which more than adequately fulfills the needs of Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike who seek to explain God in a post-Holocaust world.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, two issues were raised. First, how can we continue to believe in a God who is good when evil is so pervasive in our world? Second, what are the implications of the answer to this question for our actions? The tenth point above gives us a simplified answer to this first question. The evil we see in the world exists because God allowed for the possibility for evil in creation; yet, God is not directly responsible for this evil. Rather, we as humans bring evil into the world when we act against the divine intention. In reality, however, the entirety of the proposal above is a way of making sense of a good God in a world full of evil. If we believe the above points about God's action and attributes, we can continue to affirm God's goodness even in a post-Holocaust world. And if, as mentioned in the introduction, what we say about God affects our individual action, the above proposal should have some implication for our action. As Lutherans living in a post-Holocaust world, the above combination of Luther's ideas with post-Holocaust theology ought to have some effect on the way the church acts *as a community* in addition its effect on individual action.

Because God has granted humans agency and authority on earth, we are charged with a sense of responsibility. As humans, we have control over our action *on earth* as well as the implications of this action. We are thus called to commit ourselves to bettering the earth. Maintaining and caring for the natural creation by being good stewards of our resources is one component of such a commitment. Another involves reaching out to our neighbors. Because God works through the lowly, we ought to value and care for the lowly around us—our mission as a church ought to be to reach out to "the least of these." As masks or finite media of God's power on earth we ought to carry out the divine purpose of caring for humanity. Scripture, as a means of revelation provides guidance in this task, calling us to feed the hungry, give drink to those who thirst, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit those who are sick and in prison.[174] Moreover, because God suffers for and with us, we are called to suffer with and for those around us. In the words of Jürgen Moltmann,

> Love for the person who is different, for the stranger and the enemy, is the social and ethical form of justification of the other. Love for the person who is different is the opening for the sympathy which takes upon itself and endures the pain of indifference and enmity, and which seeks for correspondence in contradiction.[175]

In a way, the human equivalent of "suffering with" is simply to follow the above imperative from scripture by reaching out to and serving those who are different from us. Perhaps one way to accomplish this task is by doing more, as Christians, to recognize and celebrate our connectedness with and indebtedness to Judaism. Re-claiming our roots in Jewish history can be a starting point toward fostering a better relationship between our two faiths and perhaps

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[174] Matthew 25:42-44

[175] Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, 79.

working against some of the veins of thought in Christianity that contributed to the Holocaust in the first place.

A few other points can be made about how the above ten points ought to affect our attitude and action. Because the world has an open future, we are called to strive to mitigate the negative possibilities and promote the positive possibilities that come with this freedom. Because we cannot directly *blame* God for the evil that is present in the world, we are called to look at our own responsibility and strive to do better. Perhaps this will mean taking a closer look at the role that Christianity played in the time leading up to and during the Holocaust, and working to make amends for the destruction that our tradition was an integral part of. Because God's *saving will* for us is never-changing, we are able to continue to trust in divine grace and promises—even when doubt and sin cloud our vision of these promises. Because God prioritizes relationality over superiority in God's relationship with us, we ought to make the same priorities in our own relationships with each other—humbly serving one another instead of engaging in a constant battle over superiority and status. Because God has complete foreknowledge of God's carrying out of this saving will, we can be assured that God will be ultimately triumphant in saving the world and fulfilling God's purposes of granting mercy to humanity, and casting down the mighty to uplift the lowly. Because God gifts humans with God's saving and freeing grace here and now, freeing us from the bondage of sin, we can be assured that our actions to better the world will be effective. Because God works within and through humans to carry out divine purpose, we can see God through the action of others, recognizing God's goodness and mercy in our neighbors as well as ourselves. Because God dwells within the world and within our lives, we can always trust that God is present with us, even in the most difficult of situations. Because God is only revealed in certain places and through certain means, we are called to continue to seek

God in these places in order to maintain the transcendent connection with God. This connection to God through revelation is necessary if we wish to consciously and most fully carry out God's will for the world.

Because we wish to maintain belief in a God who fits with the above descriptions, we are called to act in ways that fit with these descriptions. Some potential ways of acting out this calling have been expressed above, yet there are many others. Belief in a God who is relationally involved in the world, yet authorizes human freedom, allows us to take up these responsibilities. When we enter into relationship with this kind of God, according to John Pawlikowski, we will experience a "healing, a strengthening, an affirming that will bury any need to assert our humanity, to try to 'overpower' the Creator God in Nazi-like fashion through the destructive, even deadly, use of human power."[176] Thus, the above Lutheran post-Holocaust doctrine of God will help us not only to know and understand God better in relationship to the world *as we experience it*, but it will also help us make the first steps in creating a world where a Holocaust is no longer possible.

[176] Pawlikowski, "God: The Foundational Ethical Question after the Holocaust," 58.

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Hall, a Canadian Methodist theologian who is quite influenced by Martin Luther's theology, seeks to redefine Christianity for a modern North-American context. In his writing, Hall suggests a more fluid and changeable theology that adapts along with the world.

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Haught is a Roman Catholic Theologian who uses new terminologies to think about God in a modern context. In this work, Haught uses the uniquely human experiences of depth, future, freedom, beauty and truth, describing them as transcendent experiences that point beyond themselves to God. Equating each to God, Haught seeks to make God discernable to non-believers.

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Heschel is an incredibly influential—for some prophetic—Jewish theologian. Having lost family in the Holocaust, he writes to directly respond to the Holocaust. He emphasizes human fault over divine fault when discussing evil in the world.

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Moltmann is a German-born Protestant theologian who fought for Germany in World War II, and was disgusted and disappointed in the action of his nation's government during the war. In this work, he writes in this work about relating Christian eschatological hope into creation itself.

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