



## *Detrimental to Women? Responses to Hampson on Luther*

THE ARTICLE BY DAPHNE HAMPSON ON "LUTHER ON THE SELF: A FEMINIST Critique" (*Word & World* 8/4 [1988] 334-342) makes a challenging claim: Christianity, particularly in its Lutheran form, is "highly detrimental" (339) to the well-being of women.

Hampson's article begins with an appreciative characterization of the Lutheran tradition. Luther's achievement, she writes, was his reconceiving of the human relation to God. In contrast to medieval catholicism, Luther does not begin with the self or the self's transformation by grace, but with a relational model of human life. Christian life is ec-static; as Luther puts it, the Christian lives "not in himself" but "in Christ through faith, in his neighbor by love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God." This is the source, she argues, of a dichotomy that runs through the center of Lutheran thought, from Luther to Kierkegaard to Bultmann: the dichotomy between trying to exist in oneself (sin) and living from God, transferring one's center of gravity to one who lies outside the self.

This dichotomy is also the root of three major problems, she argues. The first problem is the understanding of sin. Women are not typically self-enclosed (*incurvatus in se*) and in need of being opened to relationship. Rather, women's sin more often is that of being too diffused into others' lives, with a lack of a sense of centeredness in the self. The second problem has to do with the androcentrism of any religion which focuses on death and resurrection, a breaking and reconstructing of the self. While males develop a gender identity by separating and individuating from the mother, the female developmental pattern has no such break, but is rooted in a sense of continuity and growth. The third problem is the conception of God as a personal "other" distinct from the world. Rather, she argues, God must be reconceived in a post-Christian feminist theology as the non-personal ground of the relational web of life.

On February 4-5, 1995, a conference on "The Lutheran Theological Tradition: Can It Speak with Grace and Power in the 21st Century?" was held on the Luther Seminary campus, sponsored by Awakening Voices, a campus group concerned with exploring the mission of the gospel in the context of contemporary changes in women's, men's, and family life. The purpose of the conference was to hear and respond to some major feminist critiques of the Lutheran tradition. We are pleased to present on the following pages the responses to Dr. Hampson by Professors Fred Gaiser and Paul Sponheim. ⊕

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