

**The Spirituality of Martin Luther as Exemplified in his Letters
to Philip Melanchthon**

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

In this study the researcher will reflect on the spirituality of Martin Luther as expressed in his letters to Philip Melanchthon written from Wartburg. Through such a reflection, based on biographical material, the researcher wishes to contribute to research that reflects on the spirituality of historical individuals.

The first chapter will present a general introduction on how the researcher came to study the Spirituality of Martin Luther *via inter alia* a study on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A short motivation will also be given on why biographical material (such as letters), the primary source for this study, should be seen as a suitable source for theological inquiry. The second chapter will reflect on a few contemporary works on Luther's spirituality as well as the works of Scott Hendrix, Egil Grislis, Mark McIntosh and Sandra Schneiders to gain insight into the development of spirituality as a field of study and its current focus.

The third chapter entails biographical accounts of Luther and Melanchthon with a primary focus on their lives up until Luther's safekeeping at Wartburg as well as a reflection on their friendship. The purpose will be to contextualize the letters and to give a better understanding of the people involved. The fourth chapter will summarize the content of the nine letters Luther wrote from Wartburg to Melanchthon. The summary will indicate the matters which were discussed between the two reformers and will be reflected on in order to find deeper insight into Luther's spirituality. Chapter five will consider matters of importance identified in chapter four, such as the Luther's identity and spirituality and his understanding and reference to Christ and God, while at Wartburg.

The final chapter will reflect on the content of this study and the contribution that a study based on biographical material has to offer to spirituality as an academic discipline.

OPSOMMING

In die studie wil die navorsers reflekteer oor die spiritualiteit van Martin Luther soos dit uitgedruk is in sy briewe aan Philip Melanchthon, geskryf vanaf Wartburg. Die hoop is om deur hierdie refleksie, gebaseer op biografiese materiaal, 'n bydrae te lewer tot navorsing wat reflekteer op die spiritualiteit van historiese individue.

Die eerste hoofstuk van die studie behels 'n algemene inleiding wat sal verduidelik hoe die navorser daartoe gekom het om 'n studie te doen oor die spiritualiteit van Martin Luther via, onder andere, 'n voorafgaande studie oor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'n Kort motivering sal ook gegee word hoekom biografiese materiaal (soos briewe), die primêre bron van dié studie, gesien kan word as 'n gepaste bron vir teologiese ondersoek. In die tweede hoofstuk van die studie word daar gereflekteer oor sommige kontemporêre werke aangaande Luther se spiritualiteit asook die werke van Scott Hendrix, Egil Grisli, Mark McIntosh en Sandra Schneiders wat insig sal gee tot die ontwikkeling van spiritualiteit as 'n studieveld.

Die derde hoofstuk behels biografiese refleksies oor die lewens van Luther en Philip Melanchthon, met 'n primêre fokus op hul lewens voordat Luther na Wartburg geneem is vir beskerming, asook 'n refleksie op hul vriendskap. Die doel hiervan is om die briewe te kontekstualiseer en 'n beter begrip van die betrokke mense te kry. In die vierde hoofstuk gee die navorser 'n opsomming van die inhoud van die nege briewe wat Luther vanaf Wartburg aan Melanchthon geskryf het. Dit sal 'n aanduiding gee van die sake wat tussen die Hervormers bespreek was en waaroor verder reflekteer moet word vir dieper insigte tot Luther se spiritualiteit. Hoofstuk vyf fokus op die sake wat in hoofstuk vier geïdentifiseer is, asook Luther se identiteit en spiritualiteit en sy verstaan en verwysings na God en Christus.

In die finale hoofstuk van die studie word daar gereflekteer oor die inhoud van die studie en die bydrae wat 'n refleksie gebaseer op biografiese materiaal, te bied het aan spiritualiteit as 'n akademiese veld.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Theme

Recently Christine Helmer edited a book titled *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times* (2009)¹. It is a collection of contemporary discussions of the ideas and actions for which Martin Luther has become known and the contribution they have to offer towards the matter of peace among global religions. This collection illustrates that Luther's thoughts and ideas have transcended their original context, the geographical and denominational boundaries it once adhered to, and have now taken on a life of their own in our contemporary world. It also reaffirms the influence, relevance and greatness of the man whom has been ascribed the genus "the reformer," and who has become the benchmark against whom all forms of political, cultural, religious and historical reforms are measured.

Helmer supported this statement with two references:

Most recently, "Luther" has been used to designate religious and political reformers in Islam.² And in the fall of 2008, the Chilean government instituted October 31 as a national holiday, provocatively celebrating Protestant churches in a country that is dominantly Roman Catholic.³ (*Helmer, 2009, p. 2*)

¹ This new volume includes reconsidering our understanding of Luther's popular image, his effect on the Peasants' war, his contribution to language and letters, his chief theological insights, his relation with Muslims and Jews. Especially fruitful is the rethinking of his piety, his notion of justification, freedom in relation to modernity, a theology of the cross and the priesthood of all believers. Other contributors to the work are Peter J. Burgard, Jacqueline A. Bussie, Theodore Dieter, Krista Duttonhaver, Hans-Peter Grosshans, Paul Helmer, Peter C. Hodgson, James W. Jones, Allen G. Jorgenson, Volker Leppin, Antti Raunio, Risto Saarnin, Brigit Stolt, Ronald F. Thiemann, Vitor Westhelle, Munib A. Younan.

² Cf. Paul Donnelly, "Tariq Ramadan: The Muslim Martin Luther?" (Feb. 15, 2002) <http://dir.salon.com/story/people/feature/2002/02/15ramadan/>

³ Cf. "Hola, Luther: A holiday that is a cultural milestone." (Nov. 6, 2008) <http://www.economist.com/node/12564066>

About Luther's influence and important legacy there can indeed be no doubt. In the light of Luther's ongoing influence the research aims to focus on the man behind the legacy. Who was this person who had such great influence, who is still shaping our faith, our thoughts and our spirituality? What was he like and what was it like to know him? What drove him, what scared him and what did he believe? How did his experiences of faith and God influence his actions? These questions assume that Luther's legacy will be understood better in the light of his own personality and biography. Thus, in order to obtain insight into the man behind this legend this study will take a closer look at the spirituality of the reformer.

Today various studies, papers and compilations have been published on Luther's spirituality and his spiritual guidance, for example Theodore G. Tappert's compilation, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (2003), and editors Philip Krey and Peter Krey's publication on *Luther's Spirituality* (2007). These expose the reader directly to Luther's thoughts and counsel over a broad spectrum of his writings (within different genres) on spiritual matters. As said, however, the researcher is interested in the spirituality of the person behind the counselling and particularly the expression of spirituality within his own life. This implies a narrower approach to the topic, with the focus on Luther's expression of his own spirituality, not in the form of his counsel or the expression thereof before an audience, but his private formulations towards Philip Melancthon, one of his greatest and most trusted friends. It is this objective that brings us to the theme of this study: *The spirituality of Martin Luther as exemplified in his letters to Philip Melancthon*.

1.2 Background and Motivation for the Study

As a child I was baptised and raised within the tradition of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa. My parents were committed Christians and as a result going to church and

being actively involved in church activities was part of my upbringing. Both my parents, especially my father, also served on church councils for many years and this exposed me to ongoing discussions within the church. One that I can remember clearly took place when I was in high school, between 1997 and 2001, regarding the relation between the pastor and the church council. The details are not important, but during this time (even as a teenager caught up in conversations that he knew little off) I sensed a need for leadership and guidance within the church.

When I moved on to university these questions stayed with me. As I learned of the history of the DRC and the challenges they faced in the last three decades I became more sympathetic towards the situation within the church.⁴ This, along with the global challenges of contemporary tendencies such as postmodernism, secularism and globalization, which I realized all denominations were facing worldwide, made me realize that a present call for leadership within the church was not only a local but also a global challenge. Based on this new-found knowledge I realized that my concern regarding leadership was not necessarily confined to the DRC, but has shifted from an interest in the leadership within the DRC to a general interest in church leadership.

Then, during my M.Div. degree study I had an opportunity to write a thesis on any chosen topic. I was sure that my thesis would have something to do with leadership and authority, only to discover that my point of interest would be redefined once more. It was only in my M.Div. year, through a course facilitated by Denise Ackermann, that I was formally

⁴ The Dutch Reformed Church was the church that gave a theological justification for apartheid and, at that stage was still struggling to find its identity in the new South Africa. At the same time the church was also engaged in structural challenges based on the relation between the church and the minister (as mentioned), ecumenical challenges regarding the possibility of reunification with the United Reformed Church (URCSA) and social and spiritual challenges which included the question of how to respond to homosexuality.

introduced to spirituality and spiritual theology and this discipline astounded me. I came to realize that spirituality would redefine my interest in church leadership as it would serve as a useful approach to emphasize the spiritual aspect and Christian distinctiveness of leadership within the church. I thus found that my interest was not in the corporate leadership of the church, as I had thought originally, but in the spirituality of the individual and his/her relation to leadership.

As a result of my interest, I wrote a thesis on the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the theological seminary which he founded at Finkenwalde⁵ on the advice of Dr. Robert Vosloo, who suggested him as a possibility, because the German theologian had struggled, in his own context, with the same issues of leadership, authority and spirituality. The study focused on Bonhoeffer's views on leadership according to his lecture: *Der Führer und der einzelne in der jungen Generation*⁶ as well as his work, *Gemeinsames Leben*,⁷ regarding the Christian community, based on his experiences at the seminary at Finkenwalde.

Needless to say, I have since become more and more interested in spirituality and eventually decided to continue my studies in the field.

1.3 Attending to Lived Lives

The parameters of this study, and more specifically the choice for Martin Luther as subject, were initially influenced by my previous study as it was Bonhoeffer who reintroduced me to

⁵ See Bester, G.C., 2007. *Leierskap, Spiritualiteit en Teologiese Opleiding: Histories-teologiese perspektiewe in gesprek met die lewe en werk van Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Leadership, Spirituality and Theological Training: Historical-theological perspectives in discussion with the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.)*. Unpublished MDiv thesis, Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

⁶ Cf. Bonhoeffer, D. 1965. *No Rusty Swords: Letters and Notes*. London: Collins (the text used in the study) Cf. Bonhoeffer, D., 1933. "The Younger Generation's Altered View on the Concept of Führer." In *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Berlin 1932-1933*. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 12. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009)

⁷ See *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life Together and Prayer book of the Bible* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 5. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996)

the works of the great reformer. Luther, as such a gifted and influential spiritual leader of his time, fitted perfectly into my developing field of interest. His seemingly perennial influence and relevance alone, evident in the very first paragraph of this study, was in itself enough reason to consider him. But this, along with his convincing historical personality and the accessibility of his struggles, doubts, mistakes and fears appealed to me.

Another convincing reason was the upcoming 500 year anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses against the misuse of indulgences in 2017. The celebrations for this event have started in Germany in 2008 with the launch of the Luther Decade. During these ten years, different aspects of the Reformation will be celebrated every year.⁸

The next task was to decide what sources to use as there was quite a number available to consider for this study, such as Luther's hymns, sermons, prayers and letters. Since the objective was to focus on the most personal expression of Luther's spirituality and to move away from the broader spiritual guidance the reformer offered, I decided to focus on Luther's letters. Under the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Vosloo and a visiting professor at the time, Prof. Wendebourg from the Humboldt University in Berlin, I chose Luther's letters to Melanchthon written from Wartburg. We agreed that these letters – written during a time of trial and seclusion – could be very valuable for finding insight into the way Luther embodied and expressed spirituality in his personal life. These choices finally gave shape to the research question of this study: "What insight can be found into the spirituality of Martin Luther based on the letters he wrote to Philip Melanchthon from Wartburg castle?"

As the motivations for this study are explained and the parameters are set one question still needs to be discussed from a theological point of view: Do the letters represent a sufficiently

⁸ For more information of the Luther decade see: www.luther2017.de

reliable or authentic source of data as biographical material? To answer this question I will be referring to the work of James McClendon Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (1990). McClendon's concern is to find a new approach to ethics since he believes that utilitarian decisionism and Christian realism have become inadequate for our contemporary questions. As an alternative he suggests a 'character ethics' or 'the ethics of character-in-community.' This is ethic based on people who 'have character' and people who make responsible choices:

To have character, then, is to enter at a new level the realm of morality, the level at which one's person, with its continuities, its interconnections, its integrity, is intimately involved in one's deeds. By being the persons we are, we are able to do what we do, and conversely, by those very deeds we form or re-form our own characters. (McClendon, 1990, p. 16)

McClendon believes that such an ethical character, who shares the community's vision and exhibits their style with new power and significant difference, has the capability to disclose, correct or enlarge a community's moral vision and to stir up new convictions. It may be possible since a community's and people's convictions, rather than beliefs, are the very backbone on which they base their decisions. When a community recognizes a person as personifying its convictions, that person is imbued with the ability to lead, inspire and bring forth change within the community.

According to McClendon this ethical system based on such character has many features that are also compatible with Christian morality, even as widely as Christian morality was understood by Christians over all ages. This could be illustrated by simply looking at Jesus as an example for his ethical character. Jesus' character has been a touchstone for Christian life

over centuries. As long as Christianity has existed Christians have used the character of Jesus to determine/derive a suitable Christian morality for their day and age.

McClendon believes that a character's life, by its attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for the Christian thinker, enabling him or her to reflect more truly upon the tension between what is and what ought to be believed by all. To engage in such a reflection is the proper task of Christian theology, according to McClendon.

By recognizing that Christian beliefs are ... convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one that begins by attending to lived lives. Theology must be at least biography. If by attending to those lives, we find ways of reforming our own theologies, making them more true, making them more faithful to our ancient vision, more adequate to the age being born, then we will be justified in that arduous inquiry. Biography at it best will be theology. (McClendon, 1990, p. 22)

The researcher strongly believe that McClendon is not only building a strong case for Christian ethics, but also for Christian spirituality, since Luther achieved exactly what McClendon mentions above and more. Luther was not only an ethical character who stirred up convictions and gave new shape to lives and communities in Germany during the 16th century, but he was also a spiritual character and a character of faith who influenced/changed the lives of communities for generations to come.⁹ Because of his legacy his biography should be considered *as theology*.

1.4 Research Questions, Hypothesis and Methodology

McClendon's focus on the attractiveness and beauty of lived lives and his impression that this may serve as data to the Christian thinker along with the researcher's preference to

⁹ More reference will be made to this in the following chapter.

study a more personal expression of spirituality brings us to a point where one can reemphasise the research question of this study: “What insight can be found into the spirituality of Martin Luther based on the letters he wrote to Philip Melanchthon from Wartburg castle?” This is a question that will explore the contribution that letters can make to the field of spirituality and also on a greater scale the interrelationship between theology and biography.

The hypothesis is that focusing on the convictions expressed in Luther’s letters could provide insight into the spirituality and the legacy of the reformer. If so, it will confirm both McClendon’s and my own opinion of the relation between theology and biography.

Engaging with history should not, however, be considered an easy task – especially, when reflecting on a term like “spirituality” with a long diverse history and a wide range of contemporary applications. In undertaking such an investigation one should at least consider a responsible historical hermeneutical methodology. In his article, *Herinnering, tradisie en teologie: Op weg na ’n verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek* (2009), (*Memory, tradition and theology: Towards a responsible historical hermeneutics*) Robert Vosloo reminds us that part of responsible historical hermeneutics involves acknowledging the strangeness of past:

’n Verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek behels eerstens die herkenning van die vreemdheid van die verlede... Die verlede is onherhaalbaar verby, en wat ons geskiedenis noem is net ’n konstruksie van die verlede, nie die verlede self nie. Dit beteken dat ons deurgaans ons historiese konstruksies van die verlede krities in oënskou moet neem¹⁰ (Vosloo, 2009, pp. 282-283)

¹⁰ "A responsible historical hermeneutics firstly involves recognizing the strangeness of the past... The past is irrevocably gone, and what we call history is only a construction of the past, not the past itself. The implication thereof is that we should continuously and critically reevaluate our historical constructions of the past" (My Translation)

Vosloo states that such a critical understanding should not be a reason that one has nothing to say regarding the past. He recommends rather that it should serve as encouragement to use the best possible methods to engage with history and to be arduous with the sources. One should, however, acknowledge that there is a certain strangeness attached to the past and a certain discontinuity. But there is also another side to the argument and this Vosloo argues in reference to the work of Rowan Williams (2005), *Why Study the Past?*¹¹ Williams emphasises that the past is also *our* past and “...a set of stories we tell in order to understand who we are and the world we're now in...” (2005:1). The past is important, because it also forms part of our own identity and this implies that there is some continuity with the past. Thus, by acknowledging the strangeness of the past and at the same time recognising that the past is *our* past, Vosloo finds continuity in the midst of discontinuity. He concludes that responsible historical hermeneutics should aim to emphasise the continuity and discontinuity between us and the past.

Acknowledging that there is continuity and discontinuity with the past implies that there should be a certain sensitivity and awareness. This can be explained based on the book of Gordon Heath, *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (2008). Heath distinguishes between primary and secondary sources: primary sources are from the time period being studied and secondary sources are based on primary sources, but compiled on a later date. The advantage of primary sources is that it helps the research to stay close to the topic being studied.

According to Heath the challenge of primary sources is time, number and reliability. The challenge of *time* and *number* relates to Vosloo's recognition of the discontinuity that exists

¹¹ Williams, R. (2005) *Why Study the Past?*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

with history. The problem of *time* refers to the fact that the material studied in a historical study is usually far removed from researchers today; this implies that there are language, cultural, religious and political differences (one might also add social differences) that should be considered. The challenge of *number* is the number of sources that are available. In a study that focuses on Martin Luther a researcher is fortunate to have an abundance of sources available. That said one should keep in mind that “There is never enough evidence to gain a complete picture of the past” (Heath, 2008, p. 65). The final challenge of primary sources is that they are not always *reliable*. Heath distinguishes between two main reasons that documents can be untrustworthy: intentional and unintentional. Intentional inaccuracies come in many forms, but deliberately aim to mislead the reader or hide certain truths. Unintentional inaccuracies result from basic recording, spelling and translation mistakes. Other causes include the subjectivity of the writer.

Secondary sources, on the other hand, help one to understand and interpret primary sources. They can explain the social, political and economic environment in which the primary sources were written or provide background information to the situation in question. These sources are subjected to the same challenges as primary sources, but Heath also emphasises the importance of their periodization. This refers to the way in which the historians categorise and group research material and researchers should be careful not to look at the past through the way it has been periodized by others.

The work of Vosloo reminds us that in this historical literature study the researcher will engage with the work of Luther, an isolated individual (at the time) who wrote his letters in 16th century Germany – a man about whom there will always be a certain inaccessible strangeness. At the same time Luther is also an individual whose action shaped the very

world we live in, and accordingly, our very identities. The continuity and discontinuity we share with Luther and his legacy should be considered responsibly, given that we will always be able to learn from his history, but will never comprehend it completely. In addition, the work of Heath reminds that one should be critical when engaging with Luther's letters as primary source to the study, as well as the biographies and sources on spirituality, as secondary sources. Critical investigation should not be only on the content of the sources, but also the perspectives taken by their respective authors.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

In this study the researcher will reflect on the spirituality of Martin Luther as expressed in his letters to Philip Melanchthon written from Wartburg. Through such a reflection, based on biographical material, the researcher wishes to contribute to research that reflects on the spirituality of historical individuals.

The first chapter presented a general introduction on how the researcher came to study the Spirituality of Martin Luther *via inter alia* a study on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A short motivation was given on why biographical material (such as letters), the primary source for this study, should be seen as a suitable source for theological inquiry. The second chapter will reflect on a few contemporary works on Luther's spirituality as well as the works of Scott Hendrix, Egil Grisli, Mark McIntosh and Sandra Schneiders to gain insight into the development of spirituality as a field of study and its current focus.

The third chapter entails biographical accounts of Luther and Melanchthon with a primary focus on their lives up until Luther's safekeeping at Wartburg as well as a reflection on their friendship. The purpose will be to contextualize the letters and to give a better understanding of the people involved. The fourth chapter will summarize the content of the

nine letters Luther wrote from Wartburg to Melanchthon. The summary will indicate the matters which were discussed between the two reformers and will be reflected on in order to find deeper insight into Luther's spirituality. Chapter five will consider matters of importance identified in chapter four, such as the Luther's identity and spirituality and his understanding and reference to Christ and God, while at Wartburg.

The final chapter will reflect on the content of this study and the contribution that a study based on biographical material has to offer to spirituality as an academic discipline.

Chapter 2: Spirituality and Theology

In the first part of this chapter the researcher would like to discuss the initial challenges faced when trying to find sources on Luther's spirituality and how a change in perspective brought new insights. Thereafter the researcher will discuss the diversity among contemporary works on the spirituality of Martin Luther. The reason for this diversity will be discussed in two parts: historical and contemporary reasons. Finally, these contemporary reasons will also be used as a frame of reference for the rest of the study and the way we approach Luther's history and his letters.

2.1 Luther's Spirituality?

Initially the plan was to base this study only on sources that combined the exact words "Martin Luther" and "Spirituality," but it soon became clear that only considering the word "spirituality" is not enough. Such an approach would restrict one's findings since insight into Luther's spirituality encompasses more than merely the word "spirituality". A broader perspective is necessary firstly, because the term "spirituality" and spiritual theology are fairly new discipline terminologies that have only recently become operative in studies of historical figures, communities and traditions. Secondly, "spirituality" was not a popular term known or used by Luther or his contemporaries. If had used the term "spirituality" as they used, for example, "justification" or "baptism" an infinite amount of sources would be available on the topic. Luther did, however, use a term similar to spirituality once. He used the German word *Geistlichkeit* (the equivalent for the Latin *spiritualitas*) in an exposition he

did of John 15:5. Unfortunately, he uses it in a negative sense to refer to the religious activities of professional religious people.¹²

Reference to the works of Bernhard Lohse and Heiko Oberman, two of the most respected authors on Luther of the 20th century provide further insight into Luther's spirituality. Lohse's work *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (1986) introduces the reformer's life, writings and theology and discusses the vast corpus of available literature, major issues that need to be addressed by Luther scholarship and also lists available scholarly editions, translations and resources. This work, as a guide towards further study one finds insight into the spirituality of Luther, through the numerous references to the reformer's *faith* and the role it played in his life, for example:

Finally, Luther's personal confession of faith at the end of this book¹³ is of great significance. This personal confession of faith greatly influenced the development of Protestant confessions up to and including the Augsburg Confession. It clearly illustrates the way in which Luther combined his soteriological focus with his reception of the creeds of the early church. (*Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work, 1986, p. 134*)

Lohse focuses on how Luther's faith influenced his theology and more specifically how his confession of faith influenced the theology underlying the creeds of the church.

In an impressive biography, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (1989), Oberman emphasises Luther's distinctive understanding of life as a position within a cosmic battle between God and Satan. The work, widely praised for its attempt to emphasise both the

¹² Cf. (Hendrix, 2004, p. 243) and (Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons on the Gosple of St. John Chapters 14-16*, 1961, p. 229)

¹³ Lohse is referring to Luther, M. (1956) 'Confession Concerning Christ Supper, 1528', in *Luther's Works: Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. p.297-358

courage and the limitations and struggles of the reformer also offers insight into the central role *faith* played in Luther's life:¹⁴

[For Luther] Arguments are of no help against the Devil; only Christ can come to our aid. Satan's wisdom is thwarted by the statement "the just shall live by faith" –faith not in an idea but in a God who, under the banner of the cross, is fighting for a world the Devil, too, is trying to win. (*Oberman, 1989, p. 156*)

Whereas Lohse stressed Luther's faith and theology relationship, Oberman's contribution lies in his emphasis on the realness of Luther's experience to the reformer himself and the influence it has on his understanding of life and the way the world functioned. As a result he encourages us to believe in this realness, apart from our own understanding and interpretation, for a true understanding of the reformer himself. It is clear that older biographical sources could give great insight into Luther's spirituality even though these authors did not use the term itself. They also reveal that a spiritual reflection on a subject can follow different emphases. Contemporary sources depart from the basis of this diversity as the contemporary interest in the field of spirituality has evolved greatly, as can be illustrated by examples of some valuable contributions.

In *Luther's Spirituality* (2007) edited by Philip D.W. Krey and Peter D.S. Krey, the editors accumulated different works of the reformer dealing with his spirituality. Their selection resembles Luther's critique on the late-medieval spiritualities that he inherited, as well as his various constructive proposals. Anna Marie Johnson summarises the publication well in her 2008 review:

¹⁴ Bernhard Lohse confirms this: "*Luther personally, however, saw his action as primarily an act of faith in opposition to the devil and apocalyptic expectation.*" (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, p. 33)

This collection of thirty-four writings by Luther offers something for everyone. Students unfamiliar with Luther and veteran scholars alike will appreciate the way the selection in this volume present a glimpse of Luther's pastoral activities and practical concerns. The editors have done a fine job of searching out little-known yet illustrative works: letters, hymns, treatises, table talk excerpts, and explications of scriptures. Some readers may object to using the term "spirituality" in relation to Luther, yet the diverse genres and topics included here ably demonstrate his differentiated view of piety, which evaluated forms of devotion for their ability to engender (or hamper) proper faith. (*Johnson, 2008, p. 232*)

Krey and Krey's approach reminds us of Timothy Lull's¹⁵ request to read more of Luther's own words. This approach has become popular today and is useful since reading Luther's own words is the closest any researcher could get to the reformer himself. Such an approach is also valuable since it reveals intimate accounts of Luther's experience, beliefs and battles. Krey and Krey's approach illustrates aspects of Luther's faith that encompasses the boundaries of late medieval piety and stretches into the realms of a contemporary understanding of spirituality.

Another example showing the variety of approaches taken towards studying Luther's spirituality is illustrated in the work of Jane Strohl titled *Luther's Spiritual Journey* (2003).¹⁶ In

¹⁵ Timothy Lull is the author of *Luther's Basic Theology and Writings* (1989) and *My Conversations with Luther* (1999).

¹⁶ See Strohl, J.E. (2003) 'Luther's Spiritual Journey', in McKim, D.K. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, Cambridge University Press.

her article Strohl discusses the relation between some of Luther's theological paradoxes¹⁷ and his spirituality, explaining how some of these paradoxes were applicable to, or shaped by the reformer's practical encounters.

For Luther, the life of the Christian on earth is necessarily characterized by the presence and regular manifestation of a series of contrasting realities. His spirituality is built around these polarities that cannot be resolved. (Strohl, 2003, p. 150)

In her work Strohl closes a gap between Luther's theology and his spirituality. This is an approach that supplements Lohse, who emphasised the relation between Luther's confession of faith and theology. She reminds us that Luther's theological findings should be seen as something beyond doctrinal and structural innovations, but also as a Reformation of the imagination that shaped a new development within the life of faith.

A final approach worth mentioning is based on the work of Scott Hendrix. In his article *Martin Luther's Reformation of Spirituality* (2004) Hendrix tries to illustrate the radical change that Luther promoted for Christian living during the Reformation. He states:

If spirituality is taken in the sense of piety or living the Christian life, than I am convinced that Luther initiated a reformation of spirituality... Luther did not just write about living more devotionally as a Christian in the same way he might have done if there had been no Reformation. Instead, once the reformation was underway, Luther and the evangelical movement proposed to change the actual

¹⁷ Strohl discusses these paradoxes under the following theological headings: evangelical gospel, baptism, *simul iustus et peccator*, holy communion, vocation, and faith and practice. These paradoxes refer to a style of argumentation that is evident in Luther theology, best resembled in, for example, Luther's argument regarding the human condition: *simul iustus et peccator* and his perception on the nature of God in *God Hidden and Revealed*.

movement pattern of Christian living and they urged that pattern upon the faithful as the genuine way of being spiritual, as authentic Christian spirituality.

(Hendrix, 2004, p. 242)

According to Hendrix, Luther's understanding of spirituality was based on his connection to Christ. During the 16th century this introduced a new perspective on Christian self-understanding. It implied that Christians were not to live or strive to be Mystics attempting to achieve some sort of transcendence from this world. Nor should a Christian live as a monk practicing the external piety of the time. Christians were meant to live as guests in this world with a "guestly spirituality" as Hendrix likes to call it (Hendrix, 2004, p. 19). This gave Christians the freedom to live their lives bravely, yet provisionally, as they could now partake in the activities of this world whilst on their Christian journey. Hendrix's approach resembles the more recent and popular foci of spirituality as it emphasises the implication posed to the world outside and the people around the individual.

Egil Grislis has also noted that contemporary research was taking insightful approaches to the spirituality of the Martin Luther. This he acknowledges in his informative article *The Spirituality of Martin Luther* (1994)¹⁸. Before stating his preference for the widest and most inclusive approaches to the subject he suggests that the role of spirituality may be best understood when viewed in a line of succession, fulfilling the role first occupied by "piety" and then "faith."¹⁹ He motivates as follows: from the enlightenment to Schleiermacher piety and reasonableness were the main foci of theological and personal analyses of Luther, since piety and his devotional inwardness were considered the appropriate concerns of Luther's

¹⁸ Grislis, E. (1994) 'The Spirituality of Martin Luther', *World and World*, vol. XIV, no. 4, Fall, pp. 453-459.

¹⁹ Grislis is thus suggesting that through the three models of "piety," "faith" and "spirituality" one can distinguish three identifiable -though overlapping- approaches of interpretation.

religious heart and central to his religious motivated personality. As a result Luther was encountered as a believer, a genius and a hero, but it was a limited perspective because it did not integrate celebration and critique. Then Theodosius Harnack changed this position and turned attention to Luther's "faith" – his theology. "Faith" replaced "piety" as dominant model for Luther's spirituality. It retained attention to Luther's personality and inwardness, but became preoccupied with specific understandings of particular doctrines. It recognized that Luther's "faith" was not exclusively his own – some aspects were borrowings and his reworking of them needed to be understood. But while it was valuable to know what Luther said and thought this model often ignored common misunderstandings and some of Luther's limits. This brings Grislis to the model of "spirituality." Grislis is not naive that this model, already in use, has shortcomings such as the fact that the term "spirituality" has been used vaguely and vacuously. Nor does he overlook the fact that the contemporary use of "spirituality" sometimes includes discussion that would have previously come under the rubrics of "piety" or "faith." He believes that "spirituality" is a model that gives the opportunity to study Luther with continuous consideration of his inwardness and piety as well as his understanding of faith, specific doctrines and significant motifs. It is a chance to give a balanced account of Luther's greatness with his short-sightedness and sins. The awareness that both light and shadow are mutually inclusive can be expressed in this model and both need to be understood if Luther is to be understood. This can be done now knowing that Luther was neither infallible nor equally relevant on all issues.

Grislis thus believe that the diverse approaches that exist towards Luther's spirituality represent perspectives that recognize authentic dimensions of Luther's life and thought through a certain focus of attention. Some of these foci can even be recognized in the works discussed above such as the emphasis of "faith" (doctrine) in the work of Strohl. Most

interesting is that Grislis sees the work of Oberman (who barely even uses the term spirituality) as an example for his “spirituality” model, “because it recognize Luther’s relative place in history and look at him both sympathetically and critically” (Grislis, 1994, p. 458).

The references emphasise that much work has already been done on the spirituality of Luther and that researchers are taking a variety of approaches. To access these contributions and the riches of some of these works one should consider thinking more broadly, because insight into the spirituality of Luther is not necessarily bound to the use of the word “spirituality.” The work of Grislis reminded us that the current diversity experience in spirituality as a field of study does not rely solely on the creativity of the contemporary researchers, but is influenced by developments that occurred within the field over time. From this point forward the author would like to delve deeper into the reasons why these different approaches exist and reflect on the contemporary foci of spirituality as a field of study.

2.2 Reweaving Spirituality and Theology

Apart from Grislis' insightful article two other aspects relevant were identified concerning the diversity within contemporary approaches to spirituality as a field of study. The first concerns the origin of spirituality and the second, two paradigm shifts that occurred within the field over time. Both contributed to the diversity in their own right and should not be left unnoted.

Firstly, Christian spirituality has no single origin since various traditions such as the Anglicans, Protestants, Catholics, and others have practiced and studied the field for centuries. Within these traditions spirituality has been known by different names such as piety, devotion, mysticism and asceticism. They refer to the different practices of different

traditions and should not be confused as being synonymous. Even though they share similar characteristics of religious experience, each reflects an interwoven expression of practice, experience and doctrine. During the Reformation the various understandings of spirituality caused tension among the traditions; for example, at that time Protestant orthodoxy became suspicious of “mysticism” insofar as the term referred to elitism, paranormal experience or a works-righteous approach to the life of faith. Protestants preferred to speak of “piety,” a daily discipline of personal and familial Scripture reading and prayer. In later years the Anglicans came to prefer the use of the term “devotion,” but they also spoke of an “inner life” and the “life of perfection,” comparable with Catholic practices (Schneiders, 2005, p. 22).²⁰

Diversity within spiritual studies is not a contemporary development within the field, but part of its very origin among different traditions. The diversity was not always embraced. In medieval times the experienced differences were seen as a valid reason for traditions to develop their own theologies further in this regard.

The second aspect involves two major paradigm shifts that influenced the way spiritual theology, in general, is being studied today. The first was the shift that occurred after spirituality was introduced into the academy by the Roman Catholics (the influence will be discussed in the next section). The second shift happened during the 20th century where the academy in general went through a phase of doubting the trustworthiness of *experience* as a source for research. Since spirituality relied on “experience” as a source, a wedge was driven between theology and spirituality. Mark McIntosh explains in his book *Mystical Theology:*

The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (1998):

²⁰ Evidence of these tensions will be portrayed in the letters when Luther advises Melancthon on a situation regarding the Zwickau Prophets which will be discussed later.

This may be, therefore, an appropriate moment for questioning the status quo of their divorce [of spirituality and theology]. It has been suggested that the name that we often give for this era – postmodernity – was born in Auschwitz, out of the death of the old certainties about reason as purely discursive rationality, about history as progressing according to some clear and coherent narrative, about truth as the supposed adequacy of proposition to purely objective entities. All these old verities of modernity demanded for their pure observance a harsh and pristine separation of thought from feeling, form from content, and most devastating theory from practice. In the maelstrom of the twentieth century such clinical divisions of existence have come to seem dangerously naïve, repressive of wholeness, and hopelessly flatfooted in negotiating both the traumas and the possibilities of real life. Perhaps today the grounds upon which spirituality and theology were clinically isolated from each other no longer exist. It was doubtful whether we could ever afford to maintain such a division in any case. The question is now whether we may find... the pattern for the re-weaving of spirituality and theology (*McIntosh, 1998, p. 4*).

Unfortunately, this division between spirituality and theology seems to have become a chasm already, which makes the attempt of reweaving extremely difficult. Even today, the re-introduction of feeling, which McIntosh refers to above, still seems difficult because of the subjective character that we ascribe to it. Hopefully a study that utilises biographical literature as a source will serve to relieve this tension to some extent.

The first reason for the different approaches in the field of spirituality resides in the diverse origins of the discipline. On encountering each other during the Reformation, the different

schools of thought (primarily) strove to delineate their individual approaches rather than to find points of congruence. Additionally the introduction of the discipline from the side of the academy demanded certain additional standards. A final reason for the divergent approaches results from influences exerted on research foci by major trends outside the realms of the academy. It remains to determine where we are today; which approaches we find relevant and necessary and which world events have influenced the foci of this field of study within the twenty-first century. For answers to these questions we turn to the work of Sandra Schneiders.

2.3 Three Approaches (Schneiders)

Based on over thirty years of experience Sandra Schneiders identified three major approaches of Christian spirituality which she lays out in her important and insightful article *Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality* (2005), viz. the historical, theological and anthropological approaches. Each of these is applicable for this thesis. Not only will they indicate the current trend of spiritual theology, but they will also serve as background to the questions pertaining to spirituality addressed in this study. The historical and theological approaches will help us with 'how to' reflect on Luther's spirituality and the anthropological approach will give us insight into how many people perceive spirituality today. The researcher will discuss each of these approaches in the following sub-sections.

2.3.1 Historical Approach?

Until recently history, as a modern academic discipline, has accepted subject matter specialization. Studies focus on concrete historical events or people, such as the Enlightenment or the pope. As long as something happened or existed, it could be studied legitimately within the discipline of history. Schneiders explains:

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, historians of spirituality shared with other historians, including most biblical scholars, a modernist understanding of history itself and of its methods and results. The modern historian was preoccupied with “what really happened” as that could be determined by the use of historical critical methods. And what “mattered” historically was the activity of major figures (almost always hegemonic Western males) and major movements (almost always those of the historical winners). Economic, political, military, and religious events dominated the concerns of modernist historians, biblical, social, cultural, and religious. Historiography was largely the attempt to construct uni-directional, periodized, cause-and-effect, metanarratives that explain how and why things came to be a certain way. Furthermore, historians tended to see this diachronic analysis of “the past” as genetic and the genetic as sufficient explanation, at least on a human level, of whatever took place in space and time.

(Schneiders, 2005, p. 20)

The influences of postmodernism became evident in scholarship in the final quarter of the twentieth century as historians began to question the basic assumption of the historical critical method and the attempt to determine an “objective history” or “true story” as told by an independent figure. Revisionist history²¹ made it clear that any historical account could only be a perspective, one of many possible constructions of the partial available data, presented by an historian. Historians thus realized that the subject matter is only one part of historical research; the other is the historian him/herself.

²¹History written from the underside and the margins, it is the stories of the historical losers and victims, and the aspects and dimensions of the past that previously seemed unimportant or uninteresting.

Based on this realization Schneiders distinguishes two kinds of scholars of historical spirituality; there are those who are primarily *historians of spirituality* as opposed to *scholars of spirituality*. Both groups represent trained historians who agree on method, understanding of historiography, etc., but differ with regard to their research focus, namely, spirituality as a Christian religious experience. *Historians of spirituality* would be studying spirituality as a Christian religious *experience* and seek to interpret this experience within the context of Christian theology. *The scholar of spirituality*, on the other hand, focuses on the *expression* of spirituality during a certain time and context or in a particular text.

A scholar should have the ability to function as both especially when studying Luther, given the close relation between Luther's religious experience and his expression of spirituality which initiated a whole new understanding and *expression* of faith altogether. So, in the following chapters we will be focusing on both. Schneiders warns that the challenge of approaching spirituality historically lies in not reducing the spiritual account to “what has happened,” since that would turn a study into nothing more than an old fashioned, “uni-directional, periodized, cause-and-effect metanarrative” but to emphasise Luther’s spirituality within the history (Schneiders, 2005, p. 20).

2.3.2 Theological Approach?

To understand Schneiders’ theological approach, we will have to return to the history and development of spiritual theology as a field of study.²² During the 13th century the Roman Catholics incorporated Spiritual Theology into the academy, after which theology came to be

²² The previous section referred to the two major paradigm shifts that influenced the way spiritual theology is being studied today. The first was the shift that occurred after spirituality was introduced into the academy by the Roman Catholics. The second shift happened during the 20th century where the academy in general went through a phase of doubting the validity of experience as a source for research. This section will further explain the first.

understood as a philosophically elaborated academic specialization with spiritual theology as a sub-discipline. It was no longer considered an intellectual scrutiny of spiritual experience that pondered new ways to channel the spirit through reading and meditation. The new question concerned the subject matter and the method of study, in order to understand the content and dynamics of the spiritual life. Later, during the seventeenth century theologians tried to systemize the available knowledge of spiritual life in terms of the predominant scholastic theologies. Thereafter, from the seventeenth until the mid-twentieth century, spiritual theology was understood as the theoretical study of “the life of perfection.” This life was perceived as active and passive and based on this understanding spirituality theology was divided into mystical and ascetical theology. By the mid-twentieth century the study of mystical theology had become seriously questioned. It was systemized beyond recognition and had a doubtful scriptural basis. It was overly concerned with the “inner-life”, highly prescriptive and neglected the “ordinary Christian” who was not “seeking perfection.” The tradition needed to be reformed, but a truly unforeseen series of events was to follow:

By the time of the Second Vatican Council, which reaffirmed the universality of the call to one and the same holiness, classical modern “spiritual theology” was giving way to what many modern believers found much more interesting, namely, “spirituality.” This term gained currency throughout the second half of the twentieth century, gradually being adopted by Jews and Muslims as well as Christians across the denominational spectrum, Buddhists, Hindus, primal peoples, and adherents of other non-Christian traditions, and even by non-religious seekers such as some feminists, ecologist, New Agers, and eclectic practitioners who denied any interest in religion. (*Schneiders, 2005, p. 24*)

This unforeseen extension of the use of “spirituality” beyond the borders of its Christian conception raised the question of the distinctiveness of the Christian discipline. Suddenly spiritual theologians could not claim that spirituality was Christian by nature hence it was only Christian when based on Christian creeds, codes, cults and tradition.

According to Schneider the contribution of the theological approach to spirituality is that it retains a focus on the unique Christian character of the discipline while it reminds everyone in the field, whatever their preferred approach, that Christianity is a specific faith tradition that has content and dynamics it does not share with other traditions, even those with comparable concerns. Schneiders’ theological approach reminds one to emphasise Luther's unique Christian contribution to spirituality. Now, one should not assume that since Luther was a Christian theologian, a reflection on his spirituality would resemble the uniqueness of Christian spirituality *per se*. One should consider carefully how to emphasise the uniqueness while avoiding the risk of over-emphasising the emotional, social or political aspects within Luther's experience and expression of faith.

2.3.3 Anthropological Approach?

According to Schneiders the anthropological approach is the most recent development in the field, with clear influences from the academic and cultural spheres of postmodernity. It recognizes that spirituality is an anthropological constant, based on human beings' capacity for self-transcendence towards an ultimate value. This spirituality is an existential characteristic of the human being that exists prior to a particular form of actualization.

The anthropological approach to Christian spirituality, while taking seriously the historical and theological dimensions of the subject matter of the field, is also explicitly concerned with the dimensions of spirituality that are accessible only to

non-theological disciplines, such as aesthetic, linguistic, psychological, or cosmological; with the “edges” where the field of spirituality is influenced by important aspects of contemporary experience that are not intrinsic to Christianity itself, such as the meaning of experience, ecological concerns, and gender issues; with the analogies with, challenges to, and affirmations of Christian experience coming from the spiritualities of other religious traditions or the spirituality of contemporary seekers who repudiate or ignore institutionalized religion. (*Schneiders, 2005, p. 26*)

The primary focus of this approach is the interpretation of the subject matter and the secondary is the widening of the horizon of the interpreter. The researcher is not so much learning what to do or how to do it better or how to help others in the spiritual life, but rather becoming a spiritually richer and deeper person. The anthropological approach is a Christian spiritual response to the increasingly diverse interaction between different scholars from a variety of religious traditions and scholarly disciplines. Scholars of this approach recognize that spirituality is a universal human concern that is significant to the human enterprise as a whole.

The anthropological approach focuses characteristically on the interpretation of the religious experience in the most adequate framework for generating responses to contemporary questions rather than theological and historical ones. The contribution of this framework is its openness to investigate such a large range of questions, its insistence on and ability to keep spirituality in the realm of public discourse and its natural affinity to the postmodern agenda and sensibility. Its challenge, however, is to “keep the specifically Christian character of the discipline in focus and to resist the postmodern lure of universal relativism, nihilistic

deconstructionism, rejection of all tradition and authority, and suspicion of personal commitment.” (Schneiders, 2005, p. 28)

One may query how Schneider’s anthropological approach will influence this study, but this approach rather represents the contemporary context in which spirituality are practised. The context influences the author's approach as well as the reader’s reception of the subject matter. Moreover, the approach is interlinked with the other approaches as it also calls, on its own terms, for an emphasis for the uniquely Christian character of spirituality.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter various ways in which Luther's spirituality has been approached and discussed over time have been discovered. It was found that the earlier work of Oberman and Lohse demonstrated why one should consider a broad perspective, at least in terminology, to study Luther's spirituality. The more contemporary work of Strohl, Hendrix, and Krey and Krey emphasised the variety of approaches that could be applied in a study of spirituality.

The work of Grislis and McIntosh along with a reflection on the origin and history of spiritual studies (which included the references to two paradigm shifts of the last century) gave insight into why such an array of approaches existed to the field of study. Schneiders also contributes to understanding the different contemporary approaches towards spirituality, with her emphasis on their different modern-day applications.

As part of her historical approach, she distinguished between two perspectives to spirituality as a field of study that are currently being used by historians. For this study the researcher found both perspectives, that of the historian of spirituality and that of a scholar of

spirituality to be important. This implies that Luther's Christian religious experience as well as his expression of spirituality will be emphasised.

As we now have an understanding of the development of spiritual theology and the contributions of contemporary works on Luther's spirituality we can turn to the life of the reformer and his theological concerns. The following chapter will introduce Luther as a historical figure and will emphasise the events that led to his "imprisonment" at Wartburg where his letters originated. In addition a short, biographical account will be given of the life of Philip Melanchthon, the recipient of the letters.

Chapter 3: Luther, Melanchthon and their Friendship: A Biographical and Theological Orientation

Even today people are left in awe when they discover the amount of work Martin Luther produced in his life; the *Weimarer Ausgabe* is one of the greatest examples of this and consists of 127 volumes. Of his letters alone 2580 are in existence and we are truly fortunate to have access to the preserved and translated words of the reformer (Krodel, 1963, p. xiii). Ironically we have hardly any authentic information regarding Luther's youth (Oberman, 1989, p. 102), and most of the information that we do have are recollections from an older Luther which was written years later. The reason for the lack of data is because Luther was born in a time when it was not seen as important to keep track of information as we do today.²³ This led researchers, such as Erik Erikson²⁴, to deduce questionable conclusions regarding Luther's youth. Bernhard Lohse explains in his work *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (1986):

Erikson asserted that the young Luther was involved in an oedipal struggle with his father and that this resulted in an identity crisis. Since there was no adequate, solid basis for such an interpretation in the sources, however, Erikson was only able to reconstruct it on the basis of questionable reports and by sometimes misinterpreting statements. (1986, p. 26).

Conclusions such as these have resulted in some of the foremost biographers of the 1980's spending part of their time and energy countering these arguments.²⁵ Another irritation

²³ As a result we have no official record of Luther's date of birth. Not even Luther or his mother knew when he was born. He thought it was 1484, but a horoscope based calculation by his friend Philip Melanchthon determined the date to have been 1483. (Oberman, 1989, p. 83)

²⁴ See Erikson, E. (1962) *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

²⁵ Cf. Lohse, 1986: 26, Aland, 1979: 12, Oberman, 1989: 82, Von Loewenich, 1986: 40-42.

caused by the lack of information is the different accounts of minor details that still exist in Luther biographies. It is evident that the lack of authentic information regarding Luther's youth does somewhat complicate a biographical reflection. Many aspects thereof are still debated by historians and theologians. However, for the purpose of this study the researcher would like to give only a basic account of Luther's history based on the sources that were to my disposal.

3.1 Luther

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in the small town Eisleben in the county of Mansfeld, Germany. On the following day, St. Martin's Day, he was baptised and named after the saint who was commemorated that day, St. Martin of Tours. His father, Hans Luder, was a peasant from a prosperous farming family in Möhra. According to the practice of the time, the youngest son would inherit the property of the father and since Hans was not (the youngest) he had to find his own means. He excelled at the vocation of his choice, namely a miner. Shortly after Martin's birth his father became a Hüttenmeister which provided a good income and in later years he was able to lease his own melting furnace. Eventually he came to own half a dozen foundries (Bainton, 1987, p. 26). As a Hüttenmeister Hans gained a lot of respect and during 1491 he was selected to be one of four leading citizens who represented the interest of the community before the town council (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 39). Even though he was quite an investor he was never really wealthy. As soon as money was earned it had to be spent and as a result Hans spent almost his entire life in debt, which was only cleared a year before his death (Oberman, 1989, p. 85) and may explain why young Martin was under the impression that they were poor (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 39).

Unfortunately, far less is known about Martin's mother, Margarethe. According to Luther's recollection, work filled her days. She collected firewood for the kitchen herself; honesty was a matter of course, and once she gave Luther a great thrashing for stealing a nut. More recently, however, it was discovered that Margarethe's maiden name was Lindemann and she was from an established burgher family in Eisenach (Oberman, 1989, p. 90). This influenced the way in which Luther's formal education was perceived and the very fact that he even went to school may have been based on an established Lindemann family tradition. It is suspected that Luther may have been moved around from school to school due to family connections in the various towns and because of his parents' demand for a quality education.

At home Luther seems to have been raised according to the strict German standard of the time when a good hiding was seen as the proper answer to most situations. Fortunately, it was not all that they believed in. Father Hans was a man of faith, but not a critic of the church like his son would turn out to be. He lived and took part in the religion of the time and probably taught young Martin of St. Anne, the patron saint of the miners. It was to her that Luther called out during the distressful tides of his youth. Medieval faith was, however, only a part of the beliefs Luther inherited from his parents. The others were the tales and superstitions of German paganism. For example, Luther recalls that his father once almost died after he had seen the back of a man who was severely beaten by devils in a mineshaft. His mother believed that one of their neighbours was a witch who had the ability to curse children to cry to such an extent that they eventually succumbed of it. Luther initially shared these beliefs with his parents and even at a later stage after he denounced many of them he was never free from them.

Luther's formal education started during 1490 when he was 7 years old in his hometown, Mansfeld. It seems as if young Luther did not enjoy school here, since it was very strict and brutal. Most of his recollections of this time are of beatings or thrashings. Shortly before Easter 1497 Luther's father moved him to a cathedral school in Magdeburg where he was lodged by the Brethren of Common Life. According to Bernhard Lohse these Brethren introduced Luther to what was probably the deepest kind of lay spirituality that was practiced during the Middle Ages (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, pp. 10-11). The Brethren were a community whose practice consisted of a simple piety as they lived vowlessly among each other. This piety refers to a practice of spirituality in imitation of Jesus Christ (Oberman, 1989, pp. 96-99). Accurate information on the exact practices of the Brethren seems to be hard to find. Lohse describes them as Martin's teachers, but he does not mention that they provided him with lodging (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, pp. 10-11). Von Loewenich also called them teachers, but according to him they only taught at the school where Luther was enrolled (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 44). Oberman's account, however, seems clarifying as he attests that the Brethren formed a devotional group, not a school, who offered lodging and supervision for pupils who studied away from home, in the interest of promoting a sound education and pedagogic reform.

Within a year after his arrival at Magdeburg his father moved Luther back to Mansfeld and on to Eisenach. Details regarding his stay at these locations are not known due to limited source material. What we do know is that he meant to stay with a relative, Konrad Hutter, but since Konrad was too poor, Martin lived in a St. George parish school. We also know that Martin made contact with Heinrich Schalbe and his family, which was known to be the most

devout family in Eisenach (Oberman, 1989, p. 96). In 1501, three years after his arrival, Luther finished his basic schooling in Eisenach.

3.1.1. Luther and the Augustinian Monastery

Having completed his schooling Martin Luther continued to university to fulfil his father's dream of becoming a lawyer. Of the two universities, Leipzig and Erfurt, Leipzig would have been closer to home, but at the time Erfurt was more progressive, flourishing economically and was closer to Martin's beloved Eisenach (Oberman, 1989, p. 114). Martin went off to Erfurt where he pursued the Master of Arts programme, the preparatory degree for theology, law or medicine. He completed his degree on January 7, 1505, and all that was left for him to do was to continue on to law. At this point Luther's father was so excited that he sent Martin money to buy the *corpus juris*, a set of legal textbooks, which he bought.

As part of Luther's new studies he had to lecture classes in the Master of Arts programme at Erfurt, which started on April 24, 1505 while his legal classes started officially only on May 20. Both programmes began as scheduled and Martin complied as was expected of him. One month later, June 20, 1505 Luther went to his parents in Mansfeld apparently for a casual visit whence he returned to Erfurt on July 2. On his return Martin walked right into a thunderstorm and lightning suddenly struck beside him. Out of sheer terror Martin yelled: "Help me, Saint Anna, I'll become a Monk!" It seems as sudden as that, that Luther decided to join a cloister. There is still speculation of whether this vow made by Martin was premeditated or not, but the truth in this regard may never be known. Authors agree widely that at the time Martin Luther joined the cloister for the same reason anyone would have

done so in order to save his soul (Bainton, 1987, p. 34).²⁶ All we know for sure is that Martin took his vow seriously and two weeks later on July 17, 1505, he joined the convent of Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt (Beutel, 2004, p. 4).²⁷

In the two weeks between Martin's decision and the day he knocked on the monastery's door he probably had to consider which cloister to join. At the time there were no fewer than six cloisters in Erfurt: the Benedictine, Carthusian, Dominican, Franciscan, Servite and the "Black Cloister" of the Augustinian friars (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 58). According to Oberman and Von Loewenich the Black Cloister was probably the logical choice for Martin, as it was known for its severity and high esteem towards academic pursuit. It was also the cloister of St. Anne, the saint to whom Luther had called out to upon when he made his vow (Oberman, 1989, p. 130).²⁸ Another reason may be the fact that Martin was possibly familiar with the cloister since some of his professors at Erfurt were from this monastery. Martin's friends tried fruitlessly to dissuade him, but all they could do was to see their friend off at the cloister and witness his final act as he turned away from the world. Martin greeted his friends with the words: "You see me today and never again" (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 56). One person who was not pleased to hear of young Martin's decision was his father. In fact he was furious, for he only heard of his son's decision afterwards by means of a letter. Immediately his dreams for Martin were shattered and what was worse was that his God given right of a son's obedience was disrespected, not to mention that the money he had

²⁶ Cf. Oberman, 1989: 127

²⁷ Cf. Von Loewenich, 1986: 53-56

²⁸ Cf. Von Loewenich, 1986: 54

spent on his son's future was wasted.²⁹ But Martin's father's fury was to no avail for nothing could be done.

A few weeks after Martin entered the monastery he was received solemnly. He answered satisfactorily to the questions put to him at the reception, the harshness of the order was explained to him and he received his clothes and tonsure. This made Martin a novice and as a novice he was to practise monastic humility and do menial tasks such as cleaning. This may have been boring for Martin since we know that he later requested a job more fitting for a magister. His wish was granted and he was appointed to memorise the Scriptures. A year later, during September 1506, Martin completed his noviciate to the total satisfaction of his superiors and became a fulltime monk. Shortly after his acceptance Martin was informed that he had been selected to become a priest and his first mass was scheduled for May 2, 1507. This was to be a joyous event for Martin and to celebrate he invited his father and an old spiritual counsellor from his days in Eisenach, Johannes Braun. Old Hans joined the celebration in style and definitely set the tone when he arrived with a cavalcade of twenty horsemen. Even though he was disappointed and troubled by his son's decision he was still his son. After arriving everyone joined for the mass and everything seemed to have gone fluently, until the moment of consecration. Martin was suddenly overcome with terror at the thought that he was making the majesty of God present through his actions.³⁰ With the help of a prior, who prohibited him from leaving the altar, Martin finished the service.

²⁹ All major sources emphasised Luther's father's disappointment and that his father only came around after Martin got married in 1525. The researcher suspects, however, that Hans's rejection of Luther's decision may have been over-emphasised, since Hans gave his consent for Luther to join the monastery in writing before his son was admitted. Hans was definitely disappointed, but if he really rejected Luther's decision, why would he have consented? Cf. Von Loewenich, 1986: 58

³⁰ Through transubstantiation it was believed that Christ was actually on the altar and for Luther Christ was God himself. See Von Loewenich, 1986: 61.

This was an experience Martin remembered for the rest of his life.³¹ The turmoil Luther experienced was still to come to a climax when his father said to him something he would have remember for years to come and which he recalls in his letters:

I remember when I made my vow, my earthly father was terribly angry with this; after he was reconciled to the idea, I had to listen to the following: Let's hope that this was not a delusion from Satan. This word took such deep root in my heart that I have never heard anything from his mouth which I remembered more persistently. It seemed to me as if God had spoken from afar, through my father's mouth-it was late, it was late yet it was enough to punish and admonish me. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 301*)

The year after Luther's first sermon he committed himself to his studies in theology and other general studies that the monastery required. In the fall of 1508 Martin was summoned to Wittenberg to temporarily fulfil the responsibilities of the chair of moral philosophy. This was one of the two chairs at the university that was filled by Augustinian friars. The other was filled by Johann von Staupitz who was to become a great spiritual guide to Martin. However, during 1509 Luther was recalled to Erfurt where he continued lecturing.

At this point Martin was still a fulltime monk even though his career as a lecturer had started, because being part of the Augustinian Order did not imply a life of total seclusion from the world. It was possible for the friars of the order to become priests and lecture to the outside world. Thus, when Martin was lecturing he was only fulfilling the duties bestowed upon him by the monastery and he had not yet become the outspoken reformer for which he came to be known. In accordance, Luther's journey to Rome during 1510 was

³¹ Cf. Bainton 1987:41

also part of his monastic duties. As a monk he was to be a representative in an internal debate regarding reformation within the Augustinian Monasteries. The detail of this debate is not important for the sake of this study but it did influence Luther's future. The unresolved debate created tension between the monks of the Erfurt monastery, and this probably influenced his decision to move permanently to Wittenberg during 1511.

3.1.2 Luther's "*Anfechtungen*"

Given the topic of this thesis, it is appropriate to consider also Luther's spiritual experiences up to this point. As a boy, Luther had been exposed to the common beliefs of 15th century Germany, as imparted to him by his parents and his community. Bainton gives an example and how it applied to Luther's faith:

For them [the Germans] the woods and winds and water were peopled by elves, gnomes, fairies, mermen and mermaids, sprites and witches. Sinister spirits would release storms, floods, and pestilence, and would seduce mankind to sin and melancholia. Luther's mother believed that they played such minor pranks as stealing eggs, milk and butter; and Luther himself was never emancipated from such beliefs. "Many regions are inhabited," said he, "by devils. Prussia is full of them, and Lapland of witches. In my native country on the top of a high mountain called the Pubelsberg is a lake into which if a stone be thrown a tempest will arise over the whole region because the waters are the adobe of captive demons." (*Bainton, 1987, pp. 26-27*)

These beliefs formed the basis of Luther's early faith and, ironically, his education in the schools brought no emancipation from this, but rather reinforced it (*Bainton, 1987, pp. 26-27*). The question may now be: What do we do with these ideas? Oberman states that,

today, these reminiscences are rarely mentioned, and if they are touched at all, they are glossed over or dismissed as insignificant medieval remnants. This is also true in terms of Luther's experience of the Devil as he is normally reduced to only an abstraction. Oberman pleads against such a practice, for if Luther's conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon then his whole world of thought becomes distorted and apologetically misconstrued. Christ and the Devil were equally real for Luther; one was the perpetual intercessor of Christianity and the other a menace to mankind (Oberman, 1989, pp. 102-104). He concludes:

There is no way to grasp Luther's milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil: without the recognition of Satan's power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ-and Luther's faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time (*Oberman, 1989, p. 104*).

This world Luther lived in, full of spirits, witchcraft, Christ and the Devil was dominated by the fear that was installed by medieval religion. At the time, the church used two popular ways to achieve this. The first was an alternation of the concepts of fear and hope: Fear was induced by stoking hell and reminding people of their hopelessness. One's only hope was by means of the sacraments of the church. Fear was also installed based on an alternation between wrath and mercy. This was portrayed within the lineage of the divine hierarchy where God was portrayed as the Father, but also the wielder of thunder. Jesus was seen as the kindlier, because he interceded for humans, but was also an implacable judge. The included sketch (see below) by Hartmann Schedel, in *Das Buch der Chroniken* (1493), represents the pantocrator – the ruling and judging Christ – whom Luther feared with a fear

that could not be cured by his extensive practice of confession. In the sketch Christ is

illustrated as a judge sitting on a rainbow. A lily extends from his right ear, signifying the

redeemed, who are being ushered by angels into paradise. Out of Christ's left ear comes a

sword, signifying the damned, whom the devils drag from their tombs and cast into the fires of hell (Bainton, 1987, pp. 27-30).



The image that the church portrayed of God and Christ was one of the reasons why Luther experienced great episodes of depression and anxiety, which he called his “*Anfechtungen*.” It was this fear of God that overcame him when he spoke the words, “We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God” in front of the altar at his first mass. Luther explains:

At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, "With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say 'I want this, I ask for that'? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God." (*Bainton, 1987, p. 41*)³²

Luther's experience of “*Anfechtungen*” was intensified through the penitential tradition that he chose to follow. At the time there were two options: the first stressed the authority of the church and its sacraments, the power of priestly absolution, and the consolation which the faithful can find in the efficacious rites and ceremonies of the church. The second stressed the importance of the disposition of the penitent in the confessional, and the sincerity and completeness of the penitent's confession (Steinmetz, 1986, pp. 2-3). By the same way Luther had chosen the most rigorous monastery he also chose the most meticulous form of confession. As a result he exposed himself to an extreme form of self-examination and a judgmental attitude towards his capability to fulfil the work of sanctification. This was dispensed by a priest as part of absolution (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, p. 32). Luther confessed:

³² Bainton quotes from *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung* (Otto Scheel, ed., 1929)

I tried to live according to the Rule with all diligence, and I used to be contrite, to confess and number off my sins, and often repeated my confession, and sedulously performed my allotted penance. And yet my conscience could never give me certainty, but I always doubted and said, "You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession." The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak and afflicted conscience with the traditions of men, the more each day found it more uncertain, weaker, more troubled. (Steinmetz, 1986, p. 2)³³

Eventually Luther desperately needed spiritual guidance and this came from Johannes von Staupitz. He was the vicar general of Augustinian Hermits in Germany and later also Luther's father confessor and supporter. Staupitz managed to move Luther's focus from the penitential traditions mentioned above and convinced him that it is not the sacrament but the faith in the sacrament that justifies (Steinmetz, 1986, pp. 10-11). Later in his life Luther's *Anfechtungen* were fuelled not only by his initial image of God and his struggle with penance, but he was also led into depression by different situations. Eventually Staupitz advised Luther to see these temptation and trials as tests which he needed to endure. He told him that they were good for him as the devil never disturbed the tranquillity of people who were safely in his camp.

3.1.3 Luther at Wittenberg and the Road to Wartburg

Luther left Erfurt for the University of Wittenberg, a move prompted not only by the tensions that the monks experienced at the Erfurt monastery, but also by unfortunate circumstances experienced at Wittenberg. At the time the university was not flourishing as

³³ Cf. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, Vol.: 1. p.50

Elector Frederick the Wise had expected and he appealed to the Franciscans and the Augustinians to suggest him with new, better and more influential professors. One nominee was Friar Martin Luther (Bainton, 1987, p. 53).

In Wittenberg Johann von Staupitz persuaded the unwilling monk to continue his studies in theology. With reluctant obedience Martin agreed and a year later, on October 19, 1512, he received his doctoral degree, which entailed the right of independent academic work and the opportunity to voice his own opinion publicly. This was, of course, allowed only if his opinions were in some way coherent with the accepted teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Martin did not seize this opportunity right away. For the next few years the lecturing monk focused on his research and lectures on Psalms, the Letters to the Romans, Galatians and Hebrews and from at least 1514 he was the practising preacher at the Wittenberg parish. During these years Martin shaped the fundamental principles of his reformation theology through devotion, research, teaching and preaching.

Five years after obtaining his doctorate Luther decided to voice his opinion openly (apart from preaching), thereby unknowingly embarking upon his public career. This happened on September 4, 1517 when he posted his theses "*Against Scholastic Theology*" for public debate. Posting was an academic tradition of the time through which Martin was hoping for a proper discussion. The result must have been disappointing since nothing really came of it and no debates were scheduled. Two months later Martin tried again and on October 31, 1517 he posted another set of theses titled "*On the Power of Indulgences*" (Beutel, 2004, p. 8). Again, Martin invited fellow theologians to participate and also forwarded a copy to the archbishop of Magdeburg, Albert of Mainz. Again there was no reply. Martin persevered and on November 11 he sent out additional copies. This time he got results. The thesis that was

meant for academic debate was suddenly and without his intent distributed among the laity and within two weeks the whole nation was complaining about indulgences. Luther had drawn the attention of the people accidentally. The academic and political response and influence of the thesis was slower. Albert of Mainz was advised not to become involved and sent his copy on to the curia in Rome where it was seen as nothing more than a mere quarrel between monks. The only action taken by Rome was a letter written Gabriel Della Volta, the promagistrate of the Augustinian order on February 3, 1518, requesting him to caution Martin against any further statements, but whether Luther ever received this caution is unknown.

Subsequently Luther continued to use all opportunities to voice his opinion. On April 6, 1518 Martin had the chance to introduce his theology to his fellow Augustinians at the order's general meeting in Heidelberg. As part of the occasion Martin was granted the honorary task of presiding over a customary scholarly dispute. This time Luther presented a new thesis on his views concerning law, righteousness and the cross. This debate known as the "Heidelberg Disputation" became his principle exposition of his theology of the cross:

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

The "back" and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness. The Apostle in I Cor. 1 [:25] calls them the weakness and folly of God. Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering. As the Apostle says in I Cor. 1 [:21] "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through

wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise... (*Luther, Heidelberg Disputation, 1989, pp. 43-44*)

Having returned to Wittenberg he preached a sermon on excommunication. This was the start of Luther's real problems. Partial statements of his sermon reached Augsburg where the legate and general of the Dominican order, Cardinal Cajetan, was partaking in an imperial diet. Cajetan forwarded the statements to Rome hoping that they would denounce Luther. This was, however not the first attempt to denounce him. Earlier that same year, Johannes Tetzel also tried to denounce Luther on the basis of his thesis on indulgences. His attempt had failed but provoked Rome to pay more attention to Cajetan's appeal which was then successful, and Luther was summoned to appear in Rome. Luther's opponents went even further and took a selected few of his statements from the same sermon and restated them in the form of a thesis. Cajetan also forwarded a copy to Rome and included a letter from Emperor Maximilian requesting the curia to ban Luther as a heretic. Pope Leo X complied and on August 23, 1518, he ordered Cajetan to arrest Luther, the elector of Saxony to deliver him, and Gabriel Della Volta to imprison him. Nothing good was foreseen and now Luther's life was in danger.

Fortunately, at the time Elector Frederick the Wise was in a powerful position and even considered by the Pope as a possible candidate to become the next Emperor. Frederick used this power and requested that Luther be examined by Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg, as a father rather than a judge. Cajetan reported this to Rome and the request was granted. Luther was to appear in Augsburg as soon as possible and he complied. On his journey the

tenseness of the situation started to unnerve and he became depressed for he heard that he would be no match for the Italian Cardinal (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 135). On October 12, 1518, Luther appeared before Cajetan, but he did not seem to be a father figure as expected. Cajetan demanded only three things from Luther: To recant his errors; to promise to refrain from ever teaching them again; and to refrain from activities that destroyed the peace of the church. Luther responded by questioning his allegations and this turned his hearing into a three day debate. During this debate the doctrines of the treasury of the church, the authority of the papacy, the relationship between Scripture and the ministry, and the necessity of faith for the saving reception of the sacrament were discussed. Ironically Cajetan understood some of Luther's arguments, but insisted that he recant. This made Luther's situation even more dangerous. In response, Staupitz released Luther from his monastic obedience so that he could have freedom to act without concern for the order (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 140).

Luther decided to escape from Augsburg and returned to Wittenberg, to receive the papal brief issued on August 23 which requested his arrest. With the situation now life-threatening Luther decided to flee to Paris, but on December 18, 1518, Elector Frederick the Wise ordered Luther to stay.

Back in Rome, Pope Leo X was disappointed with the outcome of Luther's inquiry and decided on further action, so he assigned Karl von Miltitz to reconcile Luther with the Pope. Miltitz was geared for the operation with gifts and bribes for the Elector and a bull excommunicating Luther, ready to accept any outcome and convinced that he would return with satisfactory results. Surprisingly, none of his schemes were necessary, because after a mere discussion between Luther and Miltitz, on January 4, 1519, both parties agreed to

refrain from dealing with indulgences. Miltitz seemed content even though he did not fulfil his mission but the agreement was short-lived. Luther soon realized that it was not honoured by the opposing party and in response he continued debating and publishing articles as he pleased.

Luther's initial hope for public debate was rewarded only in 1519 when he and his colleague, Andreas Karlstadt, finally came to debate Johann Eck, the leading theologian from Ingolstadt University. This debate was long overdue because Luther and Eck had been engaged in a polemic ever since he posted his 95 theses. A date and venue was set and from June 27, 1519, the theologians had an opportunity to state their cases in Leipzig. This was far from a casual debate, for the spirit of the on-going events in Germany was rising and was symbolised by the two hundred students who accompanied Luther, armed with spears and halberds. During the first week Eck and Karlstadt discussed free will and Eck was clearly the more skilled debater. Thereafter Luther debated Eck on the papal authority. Eck was a cunning debater who continually succeeded in portraying Luther's argument as bohemian heresy. This accusation was, for historical reasons, particularly unconventional in Leipzig and reflected negatively on Luther. Other topics that were discussed included the ability of the councils to err, purgatory, indulgences, penance and the doctrine of grace. This dispute was concluded on July 16, 1519 and the outcome was disappointing, as Luther knew Eck had had the greater impact.

Back in Rome Pope Leo X was disappointed in Miltitz' failure to deliver satisfactory results. In November, after the Leipzig disputation, Johann Eck was summoned to report on Luther's latest heresies. Rome was ready to resume official proceedings, but wanted to give elector Frederick the Wise a chance to surrender Luther. Frederick preferred to remain impartial

since he found no fault on Luther's behalf and left the proceedings in the hands of Rome. From January to May 1520, proceedings were set in place to compile a draft warning of excommunication against Luther. This was finalised on June 15, 1520.³⁴ Fortunately for Luther only his work prior to 1520, and not his greatest “heresies,” were considered, otherwise the outcome could have been far worse.³⁵ On October 10, 1520 Luther received the bull allowing him 60 days to recant his teachings or be formally excommunicated, but what the Pope didn't know was that Luther was far beyond reconciliation.

On December 10, 1520 Luther's opportunity to recant expired. This was, however not a day of question, fear or uncertainty for Luther, but a day of action. Luther learnt that his work was burned in Cologne and in response “all friends of the evangelic truth” were summoned in Wittenberg to burn the books of papal law and scholastic theology. At this occasion Luther also burned his warning of excommunication, but in a rather more conspicuous way than is usually portrayed. At the time this seemingly went unnoticed (Von Loewenich, 1986, p. 187).

On January 2, 1521, the actual bull of excommunication was published, but it was still not the final word. Elector Frederick the Wise chose to appeal again, and again the emperor allowed Luther to be heard, but this time in Worms before the emperor himself. In accordance with the Emperor's request Luther arrived in an overcrowded Worms on April 16, 1521 where the proceedings were to be very simple. Luther was to be interrogated by

³⁴ This first draft is commonly referred to as a bull of excommunication, but it was rather a warning of excommunication. In reality, however, it seems as if there was no real distinction. See Von Loewenich, 1986: 180

³⁵ This implied that Luther's warning of excommunication was based on his views regarding the sacraments of penance, indulgences, on excommunication, papal primacy, the authority of councils and purgatory. His works that were fortunately not considered include: *Sermon on Good Works*, *On the papacy at Rome*, *Against the most celebrated Romanist in Leipzig*, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The freedom of a Christian*.

Dr. Johann von Ecken,³⁶ who had the simple task of asking Luther if the collected body of work that was present was his and whether he would recant their teachings. Luther could not answer directly and asked for time to consider this. This was granted and when his hearing reconvened he gave a detailed answer, which unfortunately only confused everyone and Luther was asked to give a straight answer. This event is reported as follow:

[T]he secretary spoke up in these words:

“Come then: answer the question of his majesty, whose kindness you have experienced in seeking a time for thought. Do you wish to defend all your acknowledged books, or to retract some?” This the secretary said in Latin and in German.....

Dr. Martin himself replied in Latin and German,...

“Most serene emperor, most illustrious princes, concerning those questions proposed to me yesterday on behalf of your serene majesty, whether I acknowledged as mine the books enumerated and published in my name and whether I wished to persevere in their defense or to retract them, I have given to the first question my full and complete answer, in which I still persist and shall persist forever. These books are mine and they have been published in my name by me.....

“Therefore, I ask by the mercy of God, that your most serene majesty, most illustrious lordships, or anyone at all who is able, either high or low, may bear witness, expose my errors, overthrowing them by the writings of the prophets and the evangelists. Once I have been taught I shall be quite ready to renounce every error, and I shall be the first to cast my books into the fire....

“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the

³⁶ This is not the same person as Johann Eck whom Luther and Karlstadt disputed Leipzig in 1519.

pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against Conscience.

I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.

*(Luther, Luther Before
Emperor and Empire at the
Diet of Worms (1521),
2000, pp. 42-43)³⁷*

With these words Luther took his stand and he stood firm. Since no further inquiries could sway his point of view Luther was ordered to leave. On April 26 Luther left Worms and returned to Wittenberg, on what turned out to be a dangerous journey. His public refusal to comply with the wishes of his inquiry was an indirect denunciation of the authority of the pope and the church. Frederick the Wise knew of this danger and because of it, he decided to intervene again on Luther's behalf. Since another inquiry or examination was definitely out of the order, he chose to send Luther into hiding after a staged kidnapping. On May 4, 1521, near the castle Altenstein Luther and his company were "attacked," he was torn from the wagon and taken to Wartburg castle where he was to stay until the official outcome of his inquiry became known. This happened only three weeks later, on May 26, 1521, when Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms. It stated that:

... Luther was to be treated as an excommunicated heretic and as one who was banned. No one was to house or feed him, and his books were to be burned. Anyone who saw Luther was required to turn him over to the Imperial authorities; if he did not do so, then he himself was guilty of treason, which was

³⁷For the full text see Luther, 2000: 42-43 Cf. Luther, M., 1521. Luther at the diet of Worms, tr. by Roger Hornsby, in *Luther's Works, Vol. 32*. (Muhlenberg Press, 1958) pp. 112-113. It is debated that last words "Here I stand..." was included only in the printed editions of the speech. Cf. Von Loewenich, 1986: 195

punishable by confiscation of property and all properties and privileges and even the death sentence. (Krodel, 1963, p. 210)

Suddenly, after a flurry of publications, disputation and inquisitions Luther was an outlaw. He had nowhere to go, since nowhere was safe. Luther had no choice but to stay in hiding and exchange the platforms and pulpits from which he spoke so eagerly to a little room in the castle of Wartburg. From here Luther wrote his letters to Philip Melanchthon.

3.2 Philip Melanchthon

From the biographies on Luther one can easily find oneself under the impression that Melanchthon was a person in Luther's shadow who sometimes struggled to live up to expectation. Contrary is the impression in Luther's letters where Melanchthon was met with praise, encouragement and admiration for his abilities and potential. These different portraits urge the researcher to turn to the biographies on Melanchthon himself to discover more about the humanist he was and the true contribution he made during the Reformation. The researcher came to realise that his initial misperception of Melanchthon is a common error that has escalated into labelling over the years.³⁸ Fortunately, today, this mistake is not only acknowledged by some of the greatest theologians in the field but has also been rectified. Timothy J. Wengert writes:

Yet, despite earlier attempts to label him as the unknown reformer, the quiet reformer, the reformer without honor or even as a blight, Philip Melanchthon in

³⁸ Kurt Aland depicted him as man who yielded under the pressure of the Reformation: *"This outstanding thinker and theologian was at the same time a hesitant and weak person."* Wilhelm Pauck portrays him as a man who almost entirely gave up his humanist interest to spend all of his time on theology and who eventually became more of a theologian than a humanist. Against these opinions Albert de Lange reminds us that he was primarily a humanist with a passion for unity and harmony, something he believed was achievable through education and reformation. See Aland, 1979: 56, Pauck, 1969: 4-8 and De Lange, 2007

his own day was one of the most important and creative reformers of the church and, by virtue of his mastery of grammar, rhetoric and dialectics, worthy to be called the premier speaker of the Reformation. (*Wengert, 2010, p. xi*)

The acknowledgement of the “*premier speaker of the Reformation*” is advanced by a number of new publications in honour of the 450 year anniversary of his death. In light of the misperceptions mentioned above the researcher felt the need to include a short introduction to the life of Melanchthon to highlight his brilliance, widespread interest and the contribution he made at Wittenberg.³⁹ Most importantly, it will provide a better understanding of the person with whom Luther corresponded.

3.2.1 Melanchthon’s Youth

Philip Melanchthon was born in Bretten on February 16, 1497. His father was Georg Schwarzert⁴⁰ and his mother was Barbara Reuter. The name Melanchthon was bestowed on him by his great-uncle, the famous humanist Johannes Reuchlin, because he was so gifted with languages (De Lange, 2007, p. 23).

Melanchthon’s educational history was phenomenal. As a young boy he was instructed privately, but after the untimely death of his father he was sent to live with his grandmother in Pforzheim where he was enrolled in a Latin school. In 1509, at the age of 12, he started University in Heidelberg and obtained his Bachelor of Arts in 1511. In the same year, he continued with his Masters of Arts at the University of Tübingen after Heidelberg ironically refused him because of his young age.

³⁹ Cf. Zophy, 1998

⁴⁰Schwarzert literally means “black earth” and Melanchthon is the Greek translation. Kurt Aland gives it as Schwarzert and William Pauck refers to Schwarzerd. Aland, 1979: 55, cf. Pauck, 1969: 4

Between the age of 17 and 21 Melanchthon was already making noticeable contributions to Humanistic thought.⁴¹ Some of these include a preface to the work of Reuchlin and a Latin and Greek grammar. At this young age he was already praised by Erasmus in his *Annotations to the New Testament*. It was obvious that Melanchthon had a promising career ahead of him, yet in 1517 it seemed as though he had no idea of the theological contribution he was going to make.

3.2.2 Melanchthon at Wittenberg

In 1518, Elector Frederick the Wise was recruiting for a professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg. He and Luther thought it would be in the university's best interest to offer classes in Greek and Hebrew, which would enhance the student's capability to interpret the Bible. This idea was most likely based on the "*ad fontes*" initiative, a humanistic response to scholastic thought in which scholars return to the sources. Reuchlin recommended Melanchthon based on his capability in grammar. The promising humanist was thus summoned to teach and from the moment Melanchthon arrived he was respected for his knowledge. Luther himself was so impressed that he immediately wrote a letter to George Spalatin, the court chaplain and secretary of Frederick the Wise, to ensure that the humanist was well taken care of so that they would not lose him to another university.⁴² Melanchthon's popularity grew at the university and during 1520 he had round about 600 students in his class, where Luther had barely 400 scholars.

⁴¹ For the humanist language has fundamental importance, since it distinguished humankind from animals. Thus, humanists consider the education and training of young people to be their most important responsibility in an attempt to "de-rough" the uneducated. An important aim was to improve the foundational studies offered by the Philosophy faculties and as a result they compiled the "seven liberal arts" (*septem artes liberalis*: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics; arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). So even though the European humanists formed a loose network, they were united in a calling to reform the University (De Lange, 2007, pp. 25;29-31).

⁴² George Spalatin was the official at the court of Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony, and responsible for the University of Wittenberg.

Apart from Greek and Hebrew, Melanchthon's initial responsibilities also included teaching Philosophy and History. His interests, however, lay far beyond these disciplines and he was allowed to lecture additionally on Geography, Mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine. From 1525 he was finally given permission to teach anything he considered necessary. Because of his wide-ranging academic interest and the possibly under the influence of Luther, Melanchthon also became captivated by the field of theology immediately after arriving at Wittenberg. Within a year he attained his Bachelor of the Bible degree and also started as lecturer on Romans. These classes eventually became the basis of his most famous work, the *Loci Communes rerum theologicarum*,⁴³ repeated during 1520-1521. In the letters we are about to discuss, Luther will comment on this work. Melanchthon contributed a great deal to the theological department by lecturing thirteen theological modules in his first six years (1518–1523) at Wittenberg. Luther was so fond of Melanchthon's theological contribution that he later requested Spalatin, and eventually Elector Frederick the Wise, to move Melanchthon to a full-time position in Theology. Eventually the Elector complied with Luther's request and offered Melanchthon a raise which would have doubled his income, if he would give only one additional lecture in Theology, but he declined due to his workload.

Although Melanchthon was a brilliant theologian, he spent most of his time on other courses. Between 1524 and 1546 he presented 70 modules in non-theological disciplines, but only 12 in Theology. Melanchthon made his main point of interest known upon his arrival at Wittenberg in an inaugural speech regarding the reform of universities.⁴⁴ This became significant because between 1522 and 1527 there was a tremendous drop in the

⁴³*Loci Communes rerum theologicarum* "Fundamental Theological Themes" was first published in December, 1521. This was his most famous work in Theology and the first Evangelical dogmatic textbook.

⁴⁴ Philip Melanchthon's inaugural address at Wittenberg on August 29, 1518 was titled: *The Reform of University Studies* See Aland, 1979: 63.

number of Theology students in the Evangelical and Catholic universities. Because of his interest, Melanchthon immediately recognised this anomaly and it gave him the impetus to practise his expertise. He started to reform the educational system of Wittenberg and eventually became responsible for either rewriting the constitutions or restructuring the educational systems of multiple universities.

Melanchthon's biography shows that he was a marvellous intellectual of his time with a wide spread academic ability. He should not be remembered primarily for his struggles in Wittenberg just before Luther returned from Wartburg or for the critique he received for the Augsburg Confession he wrote. These events are only supposed to be evaluated in the light of his *Loci* and other achievements. In all fairness Melanchthon should be remembered not as the man in the shadow of Luther, but as Günter Wartenberg states it so eloquently, he was the man beside him (Wartenberg, 1998, pp. 372-383). If Luther was the preacher and pastor of the Reformation, then Melanchthon was the orator and logician. He was a man fully immersed in the two intellectual movements of his era: Humanism and Reformation, and he was the one who wove them together (Wengert, 2010, p. vii).

3.3 The Friendship between Luther and Melanchthon

As we have better insight into the characters of the writer and recipient of the letters, we can now turn our focus towards their friendship. As mentioned, Luther was moved by Melanchthon's inaugural speech and he requested Spalatin to ensure that his new colleague was secured for the University. Luther knew from the very beginning, that Melanchthon would be a great asset to the university. The admiration was mutual because two months after Melanchthon's arrival at Wittenberg he wrote the following poem to Luther:

Oh sacred priest of Israel! You who are holier than peace-offerings,
Chosen servant of imperishable truth,
Oh immaculate commander of pious souls,
Oh man of devotion, oh God-breathed angel of wisdom,
Of eternal justice and of the divine Word;
Blessed initiate of that life-giving spirit,
You who spread the sweet balsamic fragrance of the true Christian
Church and the temple of the all-merciful God
By the preaching of grace;
You faithful and sleepless shepherd who
Thrust out the thievish wolf—drive out the sophist Belial!
Oh patron of truth, finally dispel with the wonder-working
Staff of Moses the idiotic minds of those who do battle in long-winded
Disputations—those ghostly conjurers! Set fire to their unending banter
With the burning juniper coals of the Word!
Fight the uphill battle, and follow ceaselessly the burning
Standard of Jesus! Protect with your shield the blessed lot of the faithful!

*(Melancthon, Herrmann, & Prothro, 2010, p. 99)*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The poem as written in Greek:

Ὁ ναζαραΐε Ἰσραήλος ζᾶθεε,
ὀσιώτερ' ὡ εἰρηνοποιῶν θυμάτων,
εκλεκτέ ἀφθόρου ἀληθείας λάτρι,
ὡ ψυχῶν κοσμήτορ ἀχραντ' εὐσεβῶν,
ἄνερ πόθων, σοφίας θεόπνευστ' ἀγγελε
δίκης τ' ἀμήτορος λόγου τε ἐνθέου
ζωάρκεός τε μύστα ὀλβιε πνοῆς,
ὁ τῆς εὐχρίστου εὐοδία βάλσαμα
ἐκκλησίας δεύων χάριτος κηρύγματι
καὶ τοῦ νεῶ τοῦ πανελεήμονος θεοῦ
πιστός τε ἀγρυπνος τε ποιμὴν τὸν λύκων
τὸν ἀραβ' ἀπωθῶν τὸν σοφιστῶν βαιλιάρ
ἐκπληξῶν, ὡ χορηγ' ἀληθείας ποτέ
τάς βεκεσελήνους τὸν γε λογομάχων φρενας
τῆ θαυματουργῶ Μωσεως ράβδω βόλει,
βλεπεδαίμονάς μάγους, τὰ γλωτταλήματα
ἀρκευθίνοις ἀνθραξί του λόγ' ἐκφλεγε,
μάχου ἀναρρόπως τε κἀλήκτως ἔπου
τῷ πυρφόρῳ Ἰησοῦ ὑπερασπίζω
τοῦ εὐλογημένοιο τῶν πιστῶν λάχους.
(Melancthon, Herrmann, & Prothro, 2010, p. 98)

Cf. *Mehntbons Werke*, Bd. VII, ed. Hans Volz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 46-48, Nr. 8.

The wonder of this poem is not only in the extensive praise and adoration that Melanchthon expresses, but also in the words he chose. In the original Greek he uses terminology that reveals his knowledge of patristic literature, biblical corpora, Homer's *Iliad* and the work of Socrates (Melanchthon, Herrmann, & Prothro, 2010, p. 100). This emphasised the high regard of a well versed scholar, who, in spite of his own capabilities, found someone to admire. A relationship grew from the mutual admiration: Melanchthon helped Luther with his Greek, history and the systemisation of his thoughts, while Luther assisted Melanchthon with his theology. This relation is expressed eloquently by Herman Selderhuis:

Melanchthon blijft – tot in het graf – altijd de man naast Luther. Er wordt gezegd dat Melanchthon zonder Luther nooit bekend was geworden, maar tegelijk geldt dat Luther zonder Melanchthon ook een geheel andere zou zijn geweest. Luther is een bron, Melanchthon een kanaal. De bron is het voornaamste en ook het eerste, maar zonder kanaal komt het water niet bij zijn doel. Melanchthon vangt het water dat uit Luthers prekende en schrijvende mond komt op en kanaliseert het, leidt het in goede banen zodat het vruchtbaar wordt, zodat het ook bevaarbaar wordt. (*Selderhuis, 2001, p. 10*)⁴⁶

Even though their working relationship complemented each other, they also became aware of their academic differences. As mentioned, Luther wanted to move Melanchthon entirely to the faculty of Theology, but his colleague declined. Melanchthon believed that the balance between language, logic and theology was a necessary requirement in order for

⁴⁶ "Melanchthon remains - to the grave - always the man closest to Luther. It is said that, without Luther, Melanchthon would never have become known, but at the same time without Melanchthon Luther would also have been entirely different. Luther was the source, Melanchthon was the channel. The source was best known and came first, but without a channel the water would have never reached its destination (goal). Melanchthon caught the water spoken and written in Luther's sermons and works and guided them through the right channels so that they could become fruitful, so that they could become navigable." (My Translation)

Reformation theology to achieve consistency and avoid error and division (Wartenberg, 1998, p. 375). Personal differences also presented themselves. Melanchthon was often pained by Luther's harsh rhetoric and verbal combativeness while Luther was troubled with Melanchthon's willingness to compromise (Zophy, 1998, p. 437). These opinions and others were expressed openly. For example, from Wartburg Luther wrote to Melanchthon: "Your high opinion of me shames and tortures me..." (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 257). Nevertheless, Melanchthon could be equally harsh towards Luther. In 1525, years after the letters were written, he disagreed with Luther's decision to get married to such an extent that he eventually refused to attend the ceremony. Such brutal honesty can only be shared between true friends.

From these few paragraphs and the biographical account of Melanchthon, the researcher came to realize that this relation was more balanced than initially thought. But what surprised even more was that the periscope of the study (in terms of the letters) ended due to Luther's dependence on Melanchthon. Luther returned from Wartburg, not only because of the social circumstances at Wittenberg, but because he needed Melanchthon's help with one of his greatest achievements which was his translation of the Bible:

Melanchthon was een meester in het Grieks en Luther kan zonder zijn kennis niet verder komen. De Luther-bijbel is derhalve op een bepaalde wijze ook de bijbel van Melanchthon. (*Selderhuis, 2001, pp. 10-11*)⁴⁷

⁴⁷ "Melanchthon was a master of Greek and without his knowledge Luther would not have excelled. In a certain way the Luther bible is therefore also the bible of Melanchthon." (My translation)

3.4 Summary

The purpose of these biographical remarks was to reveal the context from which Luther and Melanchthon came as the two main characters of this study. It revealed that Martin Luther came from a spiritually rich and diverse background influenced by German paganism, the Brethren of Common Life, the devoted Schalbe family, the fears of the medieval religion and the Augustinian monastery. Reference will be made to some of these exposures later on and the influence they had on Luther's spirituality as reflected in the letters. Unfortunately, only little can be said regarding Luther's experience of spirituality at the time, but probably his greatest expression thereof was when he decided to join the monastery in an attempt to save his own soul.

The biographies also revealed Luther's journey from the monastery to Wittenberg and the road he travelled as a public debater. This was a something that started out gradually, but after only three years the reformer found himself excommunicate and in hiding. It is here where Luther's biographical account comes to an end, and what happened from this point will be discussed in the following chapter where the content of his letters will be used as the main source.

In addition, the biographical account on Philip Melanchthon has shed new light on this colleague of Luther's and helped to eradicate the stereotypical view under which the great humanist was maligned for centuries. The new image of the Melanchthon and the data found on their friendship will further serve as a canvas against which the interaction and the dynamics between them will be discussed or questioned.

With this brief biographical orientation in mind, we can now turn to the content of Luther's letters.

Chapter 4: Luther's Letters to Melanchthon from Wartburg (May 1521 – January 1522)

In the previous chapter we followed a young Martin Luther's development from a German boy to monk and eventually to a professor of Biblical Studies. We gained insight into the life experiences and spiritual exposure of the reformer. Along with his theological studies and faith, they served as the foundation to his spirituality as it was expressed in his letters. The final step is to consider the content and context of the letters in order to gain insight into the way Luther expressed his spirituality during his confinement. Based on the conclusion of the following reflections, themes the author finds important will be identified and considered in the final chapter of this study. Additional information will be provided where necessary in order to elaborate the context of a situation sufficiently.

Identifying themes without a definition of spirituality will be problematic. Even though we live in an era where it seems to be more and more popular to do so, it is inconceivable for this study. How does one know what to look for if one cannot define it? Although there is no single accepted definition of spirituality today, contemporary definitions of spirituality do combine three general aspects; experience, practice and doctrine. Schneiders (2005), whose work was discussed in the second chapter of this study, provides us with a broad definition of spirituality fitting for the context in which the different approaches identified would be used:

Spirituality is the actualization of the basic human capacity for transcendence... the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence towards the horizon of ultimate value one perceives. *(Schneiders, 2005, p. 16)*

Experience, practice and doctrine could also be identified in the following, narrower, definition by Denise Ackermann as defined in her paper *Spirituality in the Academy - Orientations for Today and Tomorrow* (2009):

...Christian spirituality is about a living relation with God in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, lived out in the community of believers and in the world. Spirituality draws on and is formed out of prayer, the Bible, Christian practises and theology. (Ackermann, 2009, p. 2)

The parameters of Ackermann's definition will be the focal point when we engage with the letters of Luther. We will be looking at his experience of God and Christ and his beliefs regarding their influence on daily life as well as Luther's daily actions. First, however, some background to his stay at Wartburg.

4.1 Luther at Wartburg

On arriving at Wartburg Castle on May 4th, 1521 Luther was ordered to disguise himself as a knight by growing a beard and having a change of clothing before he would be allowed to leave his room (Von Loewenich, 1986, pp. 201-202). These precautions were taken to ensure his safety. Inside the castle Luther led the life of a nobleman and after his change of appearance he was free to roam outside under the watchful eye of a servant.

At the castle Luther spent most of his time writing and the quantity of work he produced is still praised as one of the greatest literary achievements. He wrote numerous letters (his only form of communication),⁴⁸ sermons and treatises, but central to his achievement was

⁴⁸ The fact that Luther wrote a large number of letters to George Spalatin from Wartburg and that he was the man "to whom more of his [Luther's] letters are addressed than any other person" may make Spalatin seem a

his translation of the New Testament into German. He embarked upon this project in his final days at Wartburg and it took him only 11 weeks to complete.⁴⁹ It was such a popular piece of work that it saw a total of eighty-five editions between 1522-1533 and it is said that the print, shop of Hans Lufft in Wittenberg sold about 100 000 copies over fifty years (Beutel, 2004, p. 6).

Of the letters Luther wrote from Wartburg, forty-five are still extant and forty-two of them were published in the American Edition of *Luther's Works*, Vol. 48.⁵⁰ Of these forty-two letters, eighteen were written to George Spalatin, nine to Philip Melanchthon and four to Nicholas von Amsdorf. The others were written as called for by the circumstances of the Reformation. Before these nine letters to Melanchthon are discussed it should be noted that the first, second and sixth are fragments. These letters lack a formal greeting, farewell and signature. In the others these were used creatively and for specific purposes. In his greetings Luther usually emphasises the vocation of his correspondent as an aspect of their relationship. For instance, in Luther's 3rd letter to Melanchthon he greets him as "evangelist of the congregation at Wittenberg, and as dearest brother in Christ" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 215). This may have been done as a form of acknowledgement, to boost the morale, to enhance the recipient's self-esteem or all of the above.⁵¹ The first two letters also seem to lack content. This complicates the interpretation process and makes it more difficult to follow progression in Luther's train of thought and expression of his spirituality.

possible candidate for a study like this. The main reason why he was not considered was that he and Luther had actually hardly met in real life. See Smith, 2006: 27.

⁴⁹ "Luther's German translation of the Bible outshone all those before him by far: in their linguistic beauty and power, but also in their spiritual authority and theological precision" (Beutel, 2004, p. 12).

⁵⁰ The three letters which were not added are prefaces to some of his writings. See Krodel, 1963: 212.

⁵¹ This particular style is not only restricted to the letters to Melanchthon, but is used generally by Luther.

Nonetheless the author is of opinion that more than enough of these letters were preserved to conduct a thorough study.

4.2 Adapting to Wartburg: Letters 1-3

Luther's first three letters from Wartburg were written within his first eight days of arrival. They were all addressed to Philip Melanchthon⁵² and based on their content it is clear that Luther was adapting to his new circumstances. As he ponders the on-going events he reveals his thoughts and concerns regarding matters and events, as well as his spiritual interpretation of them. All of these letters were written before Luther received any correspondence from Melanchthon and because of this they share a similar style. These letters present pieces of information Luther received via other sources, primarily Spalatin, and as a result they are less detailed than those that would followed when Luther received other correspondence.

Letter 1: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, about May 8, 1521

Within the few lines that were preserved of Luther's first letter he expresses his initial challenges, fears and thoughts regarding his situation along with rumours he heard concerning his enemies.

Luther starts with the first obstacle he had to face which was the mere challenge of sending a letter. He feared that if his correspondence were to be entrusted to the wrong hands his whereabouts could be revealed. He had to exercise extreme caution and asks Melanchthon to share his concerns and keep his location discreet. This was under prerequisite:

⁵² This may emphasise the value, role and or priority of his colleague's friendship. During this time he also tried to send letters to George Spalatin, his political correspondent, but this proved to be a security risk. In Luther's first letter to Spalatin he mentions that he purposely did not immediately reply to his correspondence due to safety issues. See Luther, 1963: 222-223.

I had so much ado to get this letter off, so great is the fear that my whereabouts may somehow be revealed. Therefore you people, too, be careful. If you think it is to the glory of Christ that the question of my disappearance (that is, whether friends or enemies hold me) remains or becomes dubious, then be silent. With the exception of you and Amsdorf, it is not necessary that other people know anything else than that I am still alive (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, pp. 212-213*).

Luther asks Melanchthon to aid him in safeguarding the details regarding his disappearance and proposes that the glory of Christ should be the measure for the decision on how to handle the situation. The matter regarding Luther's secrecy is not entirely left in Melanchthon's hands, as the reformer contributes to the concealment of his whereabouts in his own way. In the signature of his Wartburg letters he omits mentioning the location where the letter was written, something Luther normally added. He refers to his location only vaguely, such as: "the land of the birds that sing sweetly in the branches and praise God with all their power night and day" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 236*) or "from my wilderness" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 263*)⁵³. Luther had reason to maintain such secrecy and to fear, for he knew all too well what was to become of heretics. Two years earlier, in 1519, Luther was compared to John Huss (1369-1415) at the Leipzig Disputation.⁵⁴ Huss was a Bohemian evangelical preacher and one of the so-called forerunners of the Reformation, who, like Luther, was asked to recant his teachings. Huss refused to do so and despite the emperor's official guarantee to return home he was burnt at the stake as a heretic (*Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work, 1986, p.*

⁵³The most famous of these aliases is his reference to Wartburg in a letter to George Spalatin where he describes Wartburg as "From *the Isle of Patmos*" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 256*). See also the footnote on this page. Over the years the intensity of Luther's secrecy varied according to the circumstances. Years later when Melanchthon and other delegates were at Augsburg for discussions and Luther had to stay at Coburg for safety reasons he used similar greetings to those at Wartburg.

⁵⁴ June 27 to July 16, 1519.

11). Luther, who eventually became aware of the similarities between him and Huss, may have realized that he could possibly suffer the same fate.

After discussing his initial troubles Luther turned to ponder the on-going events in Germany and reveals another theme of his spirituality – his faith in the fact that the on-going events were happening according to God’s plan.⁵⁵ What the plan involved was not known to Luther, nor does he display any need to find out. In this letter, and more specifically, in reference to his enemies it is rather portrayed as something to be observed as it unfolds. When Luther ponders events in Germany he voices only one concern. Luther knew that his enemies were experiencing more threats since his followers were taking matters into their own hands after his sudden disappearance. They were struggling to bear or escape them and without a mediator no-one was sure to what lengths these people might go. The very situation posed a great threat to the Catholics, who were still taking it frivolously at this stage. Luther mentions that a certain “Romanist” joked about the status quo (of Germany) in a letter to Cardinal Albrecht. He mentions that the common people are in such a volatile mood that it would have been almost easier to invite Luther to return, just to have better control of the situation. This left Luther pondering, but he did not elaborate on his thoughts.

Letter 2: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, about May 8, 1521

In the second letter, which is also a fragment, Luther continues to discuss some of the on-going events of the Reformation. Following the threats of the common people mentioned above, Luther turns to the issue of vandalism that occurred at Erfurt. Luther knew very little

⁵⁵ “*Who knows what God plans to work with these mighty men by this counsel of silence?*” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 213). Even though the above statement is framed as a question it is clear from the context of the letter that Luther conveys trust in these “plans”. More about this and other similar questions will be discussed in the following chapter.

of the fact that violent action had been taken against the houses of priests. In order to understand the content of the letter the situation needs to be reconstructed.

Weeks earlier on the way to his final inquisition at Worms Luther had stayed over in Erfurt where hospitality was offered to him by Master Draco, a member of St. Severin. Unfortunately, this was an unlawful act, since the papal bull against Luther determined that anyone who hosted the reformer could also be excommunicated. This was to be Draco's fate and the morning after Luther left, he was excommunicated by the Dean of St. Severin, and thereby so infuriating the laity of Erfurt that they took violent action was taken against the houses of priests who had supported the excommunication.

It is believed Luther knew very little of the above because there is no indication of any relation to the situation in Erfurt. He was only aware of two facts; one: that violence had occurred, and two: that the city council did not respond. While he favoured the actions taken against the priests his main concern with this affair was the town council's silence, because there were supporters of the Reformation among them. He interpreted the lack of support as a lack of worthiness before God:

I hear that there has been violence in Erfurt against the houses of priests. I am amazed that this is tolerated and bypassed by the city council and that our Lang is also silent on this. Although it is good that those lazy, ungodly priests are being harassed, yet this method creates disgrace and a just repulsion for the Gospel. I would have written to Lang [about this], but I still can't. This kind of service towards us on the part of these people shocks me tremendously. We clearly see from it that we are not yet worthy before God to be servants of his Word, and

that Satan mocks and ridicules our efforts (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 214*).

Historically the matters discussed in these first two letters build on each other as the threats in the first are succeeded by violent actions in the second. While the relation between the events is unclear, they do represent the gradual progression of aggravation experienced by the laity in Germany. Martin Brecht mentions that these disturbances at Erfurt, which recurred a few weeks later at the beginning of June, resemble the first time that the Reformation movement went beyond academic circles (Brecht, 1990, pp. 2-4). Even though Luther was the foremost representative of the Reformation it is clear that the further development in the on-going situation depended neither on the reformer nor his consent. The people were ready to speak out and revolt.

Letter 3: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, May 12, 1521

In Luther's third letter he turns his focus away from the protest and violence of the previous letters and focuses primarily on his own thoughts, the Edict of Worms and his health. Since he had not yet received word from Melanchthon, Luther expresses his eagerness to hear his colleague's opinion regarding his disappearance. It does not seem as if Luther knew exactly what Melanchthon had been told about his disappearance and he thus finds it necessary to assure him that the situation was not his own choice and if it was up to him he would have been out there, facing his opponents head-on.

Luther then turns to reflect on the state of the Roman Catholic Church which he believed was a depiction of God's wrath. Pondering this he expresses disappointment in his lack of compassion towards the church:

Sitting here all day, I picture to myself the state of the church and I see fulfilled the words of Psalm 89 [:47] “has thou made all sons of men in vain?” God, what a horrible picture of God’s wrath is that detestable kingdom of the Roman Antichrist! I abhor the hardness [of my heart], that I’m not completely melted to tears, so that I too might shed fountains of tears for the slain sons of my people (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 215*).

In this light of the above Luther warns Melanchthon to prepare himself for future attacks, since he considered it likely that the Emperor and the Church would now turn their attention to Melanchthon. This did not happen as Luther predicted, since Emperor Charles V had other concerns at the time.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Luther encourages him to be steadfast as minister of the Word and reminds him of his calling and his gifts. The rest Luther leaves to prayers as he doubtlessly believed in their power:

You therefore, as minister of the Word, be steadfast in the meantime and fortify the walls and towers of Jerusalem until [the enemy] also attack you. You know your call and your gifts. I pray for you as for no-one else, if my prayer can accomplish something-which I do not doubt. Return, therefore, this service so that we carry this burden together. So far I stand alone in the battle; after me they will seek you (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 216*).

Luther also mentions that he received word from Spalatin of an extremely harsh edict that was being prepared against him, but at first this does not seem to bother him. Towards Melanchthon he expresses his belief that the edict can do little damage anywhere except in

⁵⁶ The Emperor needed to turn his attention away from Germany’s internal affairs and towards the preparation of his first war against France.

the territories of Duke George and Elector Joachim I of Brandenburg. Two days later, in a letter to Spalatin, he reveals that the severity of the edict grieves him. Surprisingly, this is not on his personal behalf, but for the very people responsible for it (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 223). At the time one of Luther's greatest threats was not the Emperor, the Church or the edict, but it was his health. In this letter Luther makes his first reference to the chronic constipation he was experiencing and for the time being he was relying on the power of intercession as remedy.

The first three letters already provide insight regarding Luther's spirituality. His concern with his own safety, as expressed in the first letter, is based on his expectation that things should be done for the glory of Christ. He also expresses his thoughts on the circumstances in the rest of Germany and wonders what God's plan is for the future of the Reformation itself. In his second letter, when discussing the Erfurt situation, he reveals something that can be closely related to his understanding of God's plan – God's providence, or in this case the lack thereof. In light of this he introduces a third character as he refers to his experience of Satan. In the third letter, he continues to ponder the role of God, as he considered the church to be a symbol of God's wrath and the cause of his own constipation. The roles of these characters will be followed throughout the rest of the letters and considered for the final chapter of this study.

4.3 Re-engaging in Theological Discourse: Letters 4 and 5

After Luther received his first correspondence from Melanchthon he organized his time for adaptation at Wartburg to re-engage in on-going theological debates and to shelve general matters, in favour of focusing on responding to the issues in Melanchthon's correspondence. In addition, these letters reveal the effect of Luther's isolation from his friend, other

personal challenges and the threats posed by his health. They also introduce a sternness and a critical side of Luther that was not yet evident in the letters considered.

Letter 4: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, May 26, 1521

In Luther's fourth letter the reformer covers a great deal of topics of the most diverse nature. First he announces that he will re-engage in some of the on-going theological polemics. He refers to the death of a friend, the marriages of others and the work of his allies. He questions Melanchthon on the situation at Wittenberg, the purpose of his life in seclusion and he encourages his colleague to act as his successor. Luther also concurs shortly that there are a lot of *Karsthansen*⁵⁷ who supported the Reformation, as mentioned in the first two letters. Finally, he encourages the other reformers and sends greetings to a number of friends.

Luther's decision to return to the on-going polemics was not from his own volition. He wanted to focus on quiet studies, but after he became aware of some of the written works that were circulating, he felt compelled to take up his pen.⁵⁸ The decision co-incided with a change in attitude towards Melanchthon. In short references he conveys his delight with Melanchthon latest publication, *Passional Christi et Antichristi*,⁵⁹ an illustrated work on the Passion made possible with the help of John Schwertfeger and Lucas Cranach. Then moments later he berates Melanchthon, since he hasn't received a copy of his *Loci*

⁵⁷ *Karsthans* was the common name for the German peasants who opposed the pressure of the clergy, especially their tax demands.

⁵⁸ Luther was referring specifically to the work of James Latomus.

⁵⁹ The Passion of Christ and Antichrist

(annoyance expressed in vain, since this work had not been printed yet). This is followed again by praise and the following nourishing words:

You surpass me now [in teaching the Gospel] and succeed me as Elisha followed Elijah with a double portion of Spirit – which may the Lord Jesus graciously bestow upon you. Amen (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 232*).

These words must have been encouraging to Melanchthon as the successor of the great reformer, especially since he had such admiration for his predecessor, but the praise is short lived. Luther finds it necessary to reprimand Melanchthon who revealed in his letter that he was going astray without the guidance of his colleague:

I cannot believe what you write, that you are going astray without a shepherd. This would be the saddest and bitterest of news. As long as you, Amsdorf, and the others are there, you are not without a shepherd. Don't talk that way, lest God be angered, and we be found guilty of ingratitude. Would that all the churches, at least the collegiate churches, had one-fourth of your share of the Word and its ministers! Thank the Lord who has enlightened you (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 234*).

Luther does, however, conclude his spiritual counsel towards Melanchthon (and the other theologians at Wittenberg) with words of encouragement:

I want you all to rejoice and glory [in the Lord]. I cannot tell you how much you will all gratify me by doing this, and how you would also please God and scorch Satan and his armour. Your sadness is my greatest misfortune, while your gladness is also mine. And so farewell in the Lord, to whom you will commend

me, I am sure; as much as I am able, I shall also remember you [in my prayers].
Keep watch over the church of the Lord, in which the Holy Spirit has appointed
you as bishops and not mere imitations of bishops (*Luther, Luther's Works:
Letters I, 1963, p. 235*).

Luther's comments and counsel towards Melanchthon alters continuously between praise and criticism. It seems as if Luther had quite a talent to extol a person where he thought necessary and chide him the very next moment. This seems to become the way in which Luther would counsel Melanchthon. Luther's chiding Melanchthon does raise new questions regarding their friendship, but a conclusion cannot be drawn from one letter only. Nevertheless, it does seem as if Luther's negative response to what Melanchthon is doing is a bit overwhelming, for up to this point Luther responded negatively to everything Melanchthon did apart from his publications.

A similar alternating way of reasoning is portrayed by Luther when he discusses his thoughts on being isolated. On the one hand he views his life in seclusion as meaningless and on the other the liberation from his responsibilities provide him great peace of heart.⁶⁰ Fortunately, the latter was not the reformer's priority. Something else was driving him, something that made him restless and this was the glory of the Word. Luther was eager to return to the heat of the battle for the glory of the Word, as soon as he could, but standing between him and his quest was his understanding of '*Christ's plan*.'⁶¹ He interpreted his confinement at Wartburg as being part of this plan and he would not waver from it. Luther advocated that they should rather trust in it:

⁶⁰ "My life in seclusion means nothing. Since I never was engaged in the exposition of the Word by my own validation, I am now excluded from it with great peace of heart." (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 232*)

⁶¹ However in the first letter it was "God's plan." See Luther, 1963: 221

But who knows whether Christ does not wish to accomplish more by this plan, not only in my case, but also in others? We spoke so many times of faith and hope for the things not seen! Come on, let's test at least once a small part of [Christ's] teachings, since things have come to pass this way at the call of God and not through our doing. Even though I should perish, the Gospel will not lose anything (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 232*).

Luther's encouragement of trust in Christ's plan is a way in which he acknowledges his understanding of the minor role he was playing within the greater scheme of things. Luther does this blindly, since Christ's plan, as God's plan in the first letter, is neither known to Luther, nor is it something he understands. It is something greater than him. Partaking in this plan and doing so while acting according to the Word was a way in which he experienced God's providence. It influenced his choices and the way he expressed himself within the community; as a result it shaped his spirituality.

Letter 5: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, July 13, 1521

In the fifth letter Luther's disappointment with Melanchthon comes to a climax. He chides him repeatedly for various reasons, such as his high opinion of the reformer. In contrast Luther discusses his dissatisfaction with himself and gives more feedback on the situation regarding his health. Luther then turns to the academic work he is focusing on and makes some suggestions to Melanchthon which he thinks could be applied at Wittenberg. The largest part of the letter is however, dedicated to a discussion regarding secular authority, one of the themes touched on by Melanchthon in his *Loci*.

It becomes more evident that Luther's image/identity, as conveyed by the letters, is changing as he assumes the role of spiritual guide and counsellor. His frustration with

Melanchthon reaches a pinnacle as he notes that he is displeased with Melanchthon's bearing his cross too impatiently, giving into his emotions too much, being too gentle and because he praises the reformer too much. Why Luther is saying this is hard to determine, since the letter to which Luther is replying is not extant. The source for Luther's frustration is most likely not only Melanchthon's actions, but his own situation as well. In both letters Luther's aggravation is surrounded by comments regarding his illness and his lack of productivity. In the fifth letter Luther states:

Your high opinion of me shames me, since – unfortunately – I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. I do not know whether God has turned away from me since you all do not pray for me. You are already replacing me; because of the gift you have from God, you have attained greater authority and popularity than I did (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 257*).

At this point one should consider the possibility that Luther was undergoing his *Anfechtungen* as he experiences forsakenness and total loss of productivity. Finally Luther considers that he might also be to blame and he considers the possibility that all of his burdens may actually be inflicted upon him by the Lord himself in order to push him out of his hermitage and into the public.

After Luther's accusations he continues and turns to current publications within the literary world. Jerome Emser had resurfaced with his *Quadruplica*: a rebuttal of Luther's *Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser*. At this point Luther

felt that he was not going to reply, nor should Amsdorf, because it was beneath them. He also decided to translate Melanchthon's *Defence* which was a response to the University of Paris' condemnation of Luther, the result of the Leipzig Disputation. This would have happened as soon as he finished the German *Postil* to the Gospel.

Luther then revisits a prior discussion on a matter that resurfaced in Melanchthon's correspondence regarding the law of the sword (the civil laws and ordinances).⁶² The question posed was whether Christians may practise these laws; serve in secular offices and through their participation help to maintain law and order. Luther agreed with parts of Melanchthon's argument, but he was not fully convinced so he challenged some of his ideas and offered some advice. The details of the argument are not important, but through an extended discourse Luther argues that the law of the sword is not commanded nor prohibited, but rather affirmed and commended by Scripture.⁶³ By means of this argument Luther gives insight into his interpretation and understanding of biblical text and how it influences and shapes the spiritual advice he gives. Throughout Luther's letter he continuously refers to Scriptures and compares his situation, as well as that of Germany and the Roman Catholic Church, to different passages. He does this to make sense of or to illustrate the magnitude of the given circumstances. Measuring his circumstances and situation with the Word was something Luther did throughout his letters and presented a way through which he achieved a spiritual understanding of his situation.

In the final section of the letter Luther focuses on the situation at Wittenberg and admires the prosperity of the faculty. As part of his pastoral role he requests them to consider the

⁶² This was a discussion that probably took place while Luther was still at Wittenberg.

⁶³ Luther's theological opinion here is supported by his actions earlier on in the second letter when he was disappointed with the town council's lack of action against the violence that was taken in Erfurt.

possibility of distributing their wealth and abilities to neighbouring universities. Luther mentions his own willingness to continue onto new pastures if the option was laid before him. In his final comment he discusses electoral interference which occurred two weeks earlier. Karlstadt had prepared a thesis for two disputations which were held on the 21st and 28th June, 1521. The former dealt with the vows of clerical and monastic celibacy and the second with the question of auricular confession. Elector Frederick intervened and as a result the last discussion did not take place. Luther encouraged the reformers at Wittenberg not to be content with such outcomes, but to anticipate the court's verdicts and to challenge them if necessary, as he did. This thesis of Karlstadt would become the focal point of Luther's two subsequent letters, which will be discussed in the following section.

In these letters it is evident that Luther is experiencing aggravation, irritation and annoyance. These emotional expressions are central to the content of these letters as they are the only consistent recurring matter among the numerous topics he considered. This in itself is not the spiritual matter that needs to be considered in the following chapter, but it influences the way in which his role as spiritual guide and counsellor is perceived. This seems to be one of the greatest variables in Luther's letters since it evolves greatly from the first to the last. These concerns raise questions about the exact perception of his occupation at the time he wrote these letters. Another matter that must be considered now in terms of his Spirituality is the case of his *Anfechtungen*. What was initially ascribed to God's doing now became the cause of his experience of aggravation and passiveness.

4.4 On Vows and Confession: Letter 6-8

The initial changes in Luther's letters before and after he received correspondence from Melancthon have already been explained, but the focus of his letters was to change once

more. Previously Luther had been discussing numerous affairs in a single letter, but after he received notes on a thesis of Karlstadt⁶⁴ on celibacy, monastic life and widowhood, he showed his ability to focus on a single subject. It seems that Luther was fascinated by any opportunity to give a theological interpretation on practical matters, to be a practical theologian. As a result Luther starts to focus on the questions raised by the work of a fellow theologian. As he approaches each topic thoroughly as a theological exposition, he also reveals his concern and the lengths to which he would canvas/probe a theological matter in order to give sound answers to affairs that influenced the faith of the people of Germany.

Letter 6: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, August 1, 1521⁶⁵

Luther was unconvinced by Karlstadt and Melanchthon's argument that the celibacy vows of priests and monks should be considered in the same category. He argues that the roles were founded on different premises. The order of priest was a free order established by God and monkhood was a chosen estate, an offering onto God made on one's own accord. Accordingly Luther finds it easy to abolish the validity of the priests' vows through mere reference to Scripture.⁶⁶ Based on this and knowing the true state of the case Luther advises that these contracts could be boldly broken. This becomes a simple matter for Luther as he concludes:

Moreover, celibacy is a mere human institution. Man, who has instituted it, can also abolish it; therefore any Christian can abolish it. I would say this even if it

⁶⁴ The work was titled: *Super coelibatu, monachatu et viduitate* (On Celibacy, Monastic Life, and Widowhood)

⁶⁵ As mentioned, the sixth letter is a fragment, but it differs a great deal from the first two. This letter is not only a mere paragraph or two like the others, but seems to be complete apart from a missing address, salutation and signature.

⁶⁶ Cf. Luther: 1963: 279-181. Luther refers to 1 Tim. 4:1 ff. (Vulgate) and believes that demons have forbidden priests to marry.

had been instituted by a good man instead of demons (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 278*).

The question regarding the vows of monks was not as straightforward to Luther as the vow of celibacy. He did not have a similar Scriptural declaration from God through the words of an apostle regarding the vows of monks and therefore he would not apply a similar understanding. He does comment on Karlstadt's understanding, but in the end he refrains from giving a final answer, as he hoped for further discussions.

Luther then turns to the case of the Eucharist. The argument here was that if people had sinned, they received communion only in "one kind."⁶⁷ Luther again turns to Scripture for answers, but finds that Christ did not require either kind. This leaves the reformer to resort to reason, and as a result he questions whether sin does not rather lie with the papist, the one who deprives the Christians from both kinds. Luther concludes that since receiving communion in both kinds is not required by Scripture he cannot say that receiving only "one kind" is a sin.

In the final part of the letter Luther shares his delight with Melanchthon at the fact that he was restoring the Eucharist at Wittenberg. He confesses that he had been hoping to attend to it himself when he returned. This discussion did not only change things in Wittenberg, but also in Luther's personal conduct, as he realised that in the light of the arguments made he would never perform a private mass again. Luther ends his letter with a last word of encouragement:

⁶⁷ "One kind" refers to either the bread or the wine.

If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin death and the world (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, pp. 281-282*).

Letter 7: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, August 3, 1521

In Luther's seventh letter to Melanchthon he continues his discussion of Karlstadt's work on celibacy and monastic vows. He returns to the words of Paul in his first letter to Timothy and reconsiders it for any solution it can contribute to the problem, but it is to no avail. It seems as if the distance between the passage and the situation they were facing was too far apart. After considering various other Scriptures Luther reasons:

I am absolutely certain that there is quite an easy solution to all these problems, even though we don't as yet see what it is. For if Christ was here, I do not doubt that he would dissolve these chains and would annul all vows. He would not allow anyone to be oppressed by an unbearable or involuntary burden, since he is Saviour and Bishop of all souls (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 286*).

Luther accepts the fact that he still cannot give an answer to the question regarding the vows of monks, and leaves the solution to the theologians at Wittenberg. As in the previous letter one can see that "reason" now becomes a prominent point of reference in his theological arguments. On the first impression it does seem as if reason seems to play different roles in Luther's theology. When Luther contemplated the matter of receiving the

sacrament in the Eucharist, it was reason that led him to his conclusion, but above, when discussing vows, reason seems to impede his drawing a conclusion.

After struggling to reach a conclusion on vows Luther turns to his final remarks, in which he wishes that his fellow reformers should stop being concerned with his health take a central position. He does not elaborate, but from the request we can derive that it was still an issue. Finally he encourages, uplifts and entrusts Melanchthon to help Spalatin with organization plans regarding a Christian University, something that was of particular interest to his colleague.

Letter 8: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, September 9, 1521

In Luther's eighth letter he congratulates Melanchthon briefly on his *Loci* before continuing with the debate on monastic vows. He confirms that it remains a challenge to debate this matter via letters and notifies his colleague that he will arrange a secret meeting for them to discuss the matter personally. In the final parts of the letter Luther replies briefly to Melanchthon's question regarding unforgiveable sin.

Luther begins his argument in reply to a remark Melanchthon made in his previous letter, namely that he had come to the conclusion that vows should be nullified if they could not be kept. At first Luther finds this preposterous and believes that such thoughts can even give grounds to the nullification of the Commandments. Then he realises a difference between these two; Commandments are imposed on us and vows are taken voluntarily. Can the nature or circumstances under which these vows have been taken, influence their validity? This question leads Luther to consider whether a vow is even binding at all. To answer this, the reformer is inspired again by the work of Melanchthon, and particularly a section in his *Loci* on the slavery of the vows. He finds that as Paul could experience freedom under the

law, which Luther acknowledged as a contradictory idea in itself yet possible, a monk can experience freedom under a vow. This is the character of the evangelical freedom, and because of this the law of vows has to stand together with the freedom of the Gospel (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, pp. 297-299).

Under what circumstances can a vow be annulled? Luther turns to Galatians for answers, where Paul draws the people away from practicing the Law of circumcision. Here Luther emphasises that Paul did not draw them away because they were submitting themselves to the law, but because they submitted themselves with an enslaved conscience. This gives enough ground for Luther to conclude on the matter:

I think one must show some courage here and must reformulate [your] syllogism in the following way: Whoever has taken his vow with a spirit which is contrary to an evangelical liberty has to be released from it and his vow condemned; he who has taken his vow with the intention of seeking salvation or righteousness through it belongs in this category; therefore, etc., [his vow has to be annulled] (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 299).

The implication is that Luther believed all vows of monks should be annulled, not because they were too difficult to keep, but because they were taken in the hope of attaining righteousness or salvation. The only vows that should be kept and fulfilled are those made with a free, voluntarily and evangelical attitude. Luther even considered repealing his own vow or to at least to renew it under a different attitude.

As Luther is content with his final answer regarding the vows of the monks, he continues to a question posed by Melancthon in his previous letter regarding the sin against the Holy Spirit. Luther simply refuses to reply to the matter, since he felt that Melancthon was more

“learned and filled with the Spirit” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 303) and thus better equipped to answer it himself. The reformer does, however promise to ponder the sin of blasphemy. Then, finally, Luther offers a farewell.

In keeping with the previous section reference had been made to the attitude of Luther towards Melanchthon – which changes again in these letters. Luther does not seem as temperamental as previously and when he disagrees with Melanchthon and Karlstadt he supplies a reason. For example, he affirms Melanchthon’s choice to reinstate the Eucharist in both kinds; and when he struggles to find an answer to the question regarding the vows of monks he entrusts the matter to Melanchthon and his colleagues.

In addition to Luther’s role as spiritual guide to Melanchthon mentioned before, these letters present him in his role as guide to the rest of Germany, a view which gives insight into the reformer's character. The thoroughness with which he approaches the matters discussed in these letters is noteworthy. For the reformer it was of utmost importance that his guidance was based on the proper exposition and understanding of Scripture – a finding which is proven in the three letters above as he painstakingly tests, ponders and debates the topics posed by Karlstadt’s thesis. In doing so some matters are resolved easily and others are not. Luther proves that he is not a man to rush to any conclusion when it comes to matters of the Word. He decided twice rather to continue pondering the vows of monks than give a non-comprehensive answer.

Prominent in these letters is also the reformer's use of reason in his argument, as noted in his discussion regarding the Eucharist, and the importance of Christian freedom mentioned in his argument regarding vows. This along with Luther's character will be discussed in the following chapter of this study.

4.5 The Final Letter

Four months passed between the last two extant letters Luther wrote to Melanchthon, during which many things were changing in Germany. Monks and nuns were leaving monasteries and some of them, along with priests, were getting married. Priests no longer wore vestments, they grew their hair and they ceased to perform masses for the dead. Vigils were discontinued. Laity was allowed to share the communion in both kinds and to even handle the elements themselves. All these events were related to the themes discussed in the letters above. On September 29, 1521, Melanchthon was the first to administer communion in both kinds. Soon after, Gabriel Zwilling pleaded with his Augustinian brothers to celebrate only a reformed mass and Justus Jonas spoke out against indulgences, vigils and private masses. Unfortunately and predictably, these changes were not always received in good spirit and as a result violence commenced. Forced into action by the disarray Elector Frederick the Wise intervened and ordered that implementation of the changes should be deferred until unanimity has been reached, but this was not honoured by Melanchthon, Karlstadt or the others. Luther also wanted to contribute to the situation and he wrote tracts on the topics involved.⁶⁸ He sent them to Spalatin, but due to the unrest, the Elector thought it best not to publish them, knowing that Luther's approach might just cause additional aggravation. This infuriated Luther and because of this and the other tensions he decided to visit Wittenberg.

⁶⁸ These tracts were titled: *On Monastic Vows*, *On the Absolution of Private Masses*, and *A Blast Against the Archbishop of Mainz*. The latter was aimed at the Archbishop's decision to keep selling indulgences Cf. Bainton 1987:204.

At the same time that Melanchthon began to deliver communion in both kinds, Luther started working on another paper *Against the Idol at Halle*,⁶⁹ in response to Archbishop Albrecht's decision to resume selling indulgences in order to enhance his finances. The Archbishop anticipated Luther's attack and as a precaution he sent Wolfgang Capito to the Elector to prevent any response from reformers. On December 1st, 1521, Luther sent a letter of refutation to the Cardinal and received a reply. In the final letter Luther would comment on his correspondence.

On December 4, 1521, Luther arrived at Wittenberg incognito to observe the progression of the Reformation. He was instantly pleased with everything that had been introduced by his colleagues, although all was not well. Luther was shocked that the tracts he had sent on to Spalatin had not been published and found it necessary to chide the court chaplain. He also expressed his disappointment in Elector Frederick for still having his collection of relics. In response, the reformer threatened Spalatin to publish his tracts and demanded that the Elector should remove his relics or face further action. While in Wittenberg Luther also became aware of looming social tensions (Bainton, 1987, p. 205). At first he kept silent, but a few days later, after returning to Wartburg, he sent out a treatise to Spalatin in this regard. It was titled: *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to all Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion*⁷⁰.

As if the above were not troublesome enough another difficulty presented itself. On December 27, 1521 Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel and Markus Thomae⁷¹ arrived in the

⁶⁹ Comparing the work of Bainton and LW it appears that *Against the Idol at Halle* and *A Blast Against the Archbishop of Mainz* was the same work. See Bainton 1987:204 and Luther 1963:350.

⁷⁰ LW 45: 51

⁷¹ a.k.a. Mark Stübner. See Brecht, 1990: 36

city and were soon to become known as the “Zwickau Prophets.” These men were under the leadership of Storch who believed that he possessed the Spirit and, through a strong sense of mission he felt he was called to reform the church. Through their religious enthusiasm and social fanaticism they brought even more unrest to a town that already stood on the verge of religious anarchy. On their arrival they impressed Melanchthon greatly with their appeal to divine revelation, visions of the future and what seemed to be the possession of the church’s early spiritual gifts. In Wittenberg they took position against infant baptism and spread more confusion. Brecht wrote:

Melanchthon was no match for them. He had no other solution but to ask the elector to recall Luther, who alone was capable of making a competent judgement about the Zwickauers. (*Brecht, 1990, p. 36*)

In reply, the elector thought that Wittenberg was still in a too fragile state to call for Luther's return and for the time being he ordered that no disputation should be held with the Zwickauers. Melanchthon’s only option was to ask for advice on the matter and Luther spent the majority of the final letter ~~on~~ dealing with the prophets.

Letter 9: To Philip Melanchthon: Wartburg, January 13, 1522

Luther received a letter from Cardinal Albrecht, the Archbishop of Mainz, in reply to Luther’s refute of the Cardinal’s decision to sell indulgences. The letter was received via Wolfgang Fabricius Capito who included his own correspondence. The former’s letter brought great joy to Luther as the cardinal promised that the idol in Halle had already been abolished. However, the comfort was short-lived, since the words of the Archbishop were called into question by Capito’s letter. It left Luther furious and he promised to respond. Luther's disappointment can be understood better in the light of the previous correspondence he

had received from the archbishop when they corresponded regarding the same matter of indulgences. Years earlier his first correspondence was met with ingratitude and after the second he received a “harsh, improper, unepiscopal, and un-Christian answer” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 340). Even though the reformer mentioned earlier that the state of the church was a depiction of God’s wrath we can see here that he still had hope for individuals.

Luther then turns his attention to advice on the Zwickau Prophets. Before he begins he takes a moment to express his disappointment with Melanchthon for his timidity in the situation. According to the counsel of John he then advises his colleague that the visitors should be tested.⁷² Requests should be made for a sign or proof of their calling, since all biblical prophets had some sort of sign or proof. He should also inquire of them a description of their spiritual experiences, for a true prophet would have experienced spiritual distress, the divine birth, death and hell over against a pleasant, quiet and devout experience:

Do you want to know the place, time, and manner of [true] conversion with God? Listen “like a lion has he broken all my bones”; “I am cast out from before your eyes”; My soul is filled with grief, all my life has approached hell.” The [Divine] Majesty (as they call it) does not speak in such a direct way to man that man could [actually] see it; but rather, “man shall not see and live.” [Our] nature cannot bear even a small glimmer of God’s [direct] speaking. Why should I say more? As if the [Divine] Majesty could speak familiarly with the old Adam without first killing him and drying him out so that his horrible stench would not be so foul, since God is a consuming fire! The dreams and visions of the saints

⁷² 1 John 4:1.

are horrifying, too, at least after they are understood. Therefore examine [them] and do not even listen if they speak of the glorified Jesus, unless you have first heard of the crucified Jesus. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, pp. 366-367*)

After giving Melanchthon the necessary means to determine the authenticity of the Zwickau Prophets' faith, Luther challenges their theology through questioning their position towards infant baptism. He also defends his own with reference to infused faith, extrinsic faith and the Nicene Creed, but at the end it becomes a topic that Luther would like to discuss further when they meet again. In the meanwhile he provides Melanchthon with ideas to consider regarding the topic. Finally, he asks Melanchthon to prepare lodging for him as the translation of the Bible urges him to return to Wittenberg.

In the final letter Luther returns to discuss practical and immediate matters of the Reformation. It is clear to see that he prefers the same theological thoroughness when considering these matters as he does to those in Karlstad's thesis. He also continues to express his unprecedented knowledge of the Scripture and the relation he experienced between the on-going events of the Reformation and various Biblical accounts, again revealing his character. Also, from this letter, as from the previous, it is evident that his theology was always people-orientated and never removed far from practicality. He always challenges the principles and institutions that curtail the physical and spiritual freedom of the people.

Central to Luther's argument against the Zwickau prophets is his depiction of the role of Christ in one's calling, especially the crucified Christ a concept for which the reformer became known. Luther's depiction also relates closely to his own experience of *Anfechtungen*. These are matters that will be considered further in the following chapter.

4.6 Summary

From the contents of the letters it is clear that a number of matters occupied Luther's attention while he was at Wartburg. While he discussed them he continuously revealed some insight into his spirituality. The first three letters emphasised primarily his understanding of God and Christ. The fourth and fifth brought into emphasis his role as spiritual guide to his fellow reformers, his expression thereof and the matters that influenced it. In the sixth to eighth letters the role as spiritual guide evolves as Luther turns his attention to matters that will influence the spiritual and practical lives of the people of Germany. In the final letter Luther addresses a new threat posed to the people of Wittenberg by the Zwickau prophets. In helping Melanchthon to challenge their theology he rounds off his understanding of the role of Christ and God within the life of a Christian.

Throughout these letters we also find numerous hints towards the theology for which Luther was to become renowned such as his theology of the cross, his understanding of reason and Christian freedom and his experience of *Anfechtungen*.

These are then the matters that will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

Chapter 5: Martin Luther at Wartburg: A Seeking Spirituality

5.1 Spirituality and Identity

Three articles in the *Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (2004) by Robert Kolb⁷³, Hans J. Hillerbrand⁷⁴ and James Arne Nesting⁷⁵ convinced the researcher to pause for a moment and focus on the identity of Luther during the time he wrote the letters. The primary reason was that they convinced that the contemporary perceptions on Luther, the way we remember Luther, are not based only on the history, but were also shaped by years of interpretation of the character. The most common example of such an influenced perspective of Luther is that he is remembered as the “initiator of the Reformation.” This image portrays Luther the central figure within the Reformation and implies that without him, no Reformation would have taken place. Alister McGrath explains on the basis of the Reformation history, why such perceptions need to be revised:

Although popular accounts of the origins of Protestantism often identify Martin Luther’s posting of the Ninety-five Theses against indulgences on October 31, 1517, as marking the origin of the Reformation, the truth is much more complex and interesting. Although undoubtedly influenced and catalyzed by significant individuals - such as Martin Luther and John Calvin - the origins of Protestantism lie in the greater intellectual and social upheavals of that era, which both created a crisis for existing forms of Christianity and offered means by which it can be resolved. (McGrath, 2007: 5)

⁷³ Kolb, R., Luther’s function in an age of confessionalization. pp. 209-226

⁷⁴ Hillerbrand, H. J., The legacy of Martin Luther. pp. 227-239

⁷⁵ Nesting, J. A., Approaching Luther. pp. 240-256

McGrath is referring to a contemporary shift that is taking place within historiography that reflects a new-found emphasis on the complexity of history. This move is not intended to diminish the contribution that Luther made to the Reformation, but rather to stress other historical factors that also played a significant role in an event such as the Reformation. These would be social, political and economical factors.

After realising that our basic understanding of Luther today is based on the historical Luther as well as interpretation over time the author felt it necessary to reconsider the specific role he fulfilled during the time he wrote his letters. Since he assumed so many roles, it is easily possible to have a misconception about him during a certain time in his life, if one is not specific. These roles include Luther as theologian, professor, pastor, teacher, confessor, prophet, monk, political advisor, husband and father. As a collective these offices represent most of the offices Luther held during his life, but as a reflection on how the spirituality of the reformer is revealed in the letters, they are not equally relevant.

On what grounds will a person decide on which roles needs to be focused? His role as spiritual guide has already been mentioned but other primary roles, as reflected in the letters, should also be considered. One of these is his role as a professor of Theology.⁷⁶ It was his official title at the time that he wrote the letters, and in this capacity he had exercised his abilities based on his academic achievement. The importance of Luther's role as professor is also recognised by Gerhard Ebeling:

The various pictures that we have of him: the former monk, the preacher, the writer, the reformer of the Church, the spiritual leader of a popular movement

⁷⁶ In essence Luther was a professor and as professor he suggested reformation within the Roman Catholic Church. His position influenced every aspect of his life, even personal matters such as his decision to marry. Because of this position he got married. See Oberman, 1989: 277-283.

which spread throughout Europe, make it very easy to forget that his work as a university professor was not just incidental to his other work. In fact the rest of his work was intimately related to his university post... (*Ebeling, 1975, p. 15*)

And:

All Luther's most characteristic actions, his struggle and his testimony, his work as a publicist and his bitter polemics, his activities as a churchman and a popular teacher, can only be seen in their true light when we recognize in them the work of the professor of holy Scripture, whose teaching was the product of rigorous intellectual concentration... (*Ebeling, 1975, p. 16*)

The influences of Luther's role as professor in the letters are noticeable. He reacts in this persona automatically when he replies to the first, long awaited response from Melanchthon. Instead of expressing his joy about receiving a response and his happiness to find out that Melanchthon is well (something he inquired about in the prior letter), Luther announces that he will immerse himself again in the on-going theological discourses. From this moment on, the influence of his position as professor becomes more evident within the content of the letters. This is especially true in the latter half of the letters when he chooses to respond academically to matters such as the Law of the Sword, the Vows of priests and monks and the Eucharist. It is, however, not only the themes of the letters that reveal his professorship, but rather the way in which he approaches them. He does this in a theologically responsible manner, attending to each topic meticulously until a sound conclusion can be reached. When it came to theological matters Luther was open for discussion and hearing the opinions of his colleagues. Even though he mostly rejected them in the letters, he never did so without providing a logical reason or giving sound scriptural support (again noting the role of reason in Luther's thought). Luther's conduct, diligence,

way of argument and the structure he gave to the latter letters emphasise the influence his office as academic had in his expression of spirituality.

The second role to be refers to a position he had held earlier in his life and since he ascribes it to himself so clearly in the letters:

I have no more news, since I am a hermit, an anchorite, and truly a monk...

(Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 234).

When he arrived at Wartburg he was still dressed as a monk, shaven as a monk and the only reason why he changed his appearance was that because he had been ordered to do so. Technically, however, he did not carry the title anymore, since Staupitz had released him from his monastic duties almost three years earlier. Neither this nor the fact that he was excommunication seems to have influenced this self-understanding. What was influenced by his being a monk was knowledge of Scripture as expressed in his letters. This knowledge was most certainly influenced by his role as professor, but his monkhood must have been quite influential. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, we know that Luther was allowed to memorize the script shortly after his arrival, which marks the beginning of this knowledge (as mentioned). Secondly, usage of Scripture in his letters goes further than the primary books of the Bible – Psalms, the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, or Hebrews, the books on which he had lectured primarily between 1513 and 1518 at the University. In his letters he is as eager to quote from the Old Testament as from the New Testament.

On May 28, 1521 (the date of the quote above), Luther was still strongly convinced that he was a monk, but in the letters this was about to change. We know he came to question the legitimacy of his own vow during his confinement and that he considered renewing his vow. He concluded that all vows should be annulled as he pondered the legitimacy of his own:

“What now? Am I myself already free and no longer a monk?” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 303). It must be said that Luther posed the question sarcastically, joking with Melanchthon and telling him that he can find the reformer a wife. This was said while not knowing the great influence this argument would have on his own life, since four years later the reformer also chose to get married. Regardless of this doubt of his vow as a monk, the influence of monkhood was still strong and could not be eradicated from his character even if he chose to accept that he was no longer a monk.

Luther's role as Professor and Monk stand centrally to his expression of himself in the letters and together they contributed to his role as a spiritual guide. Reference was made to this role in the previous chapter and in the following few paragraphs, further attention will be paid to provide a more in-depth representation of this role. When previously discussed, reference was made to the aggravation he experienced and the rudeness with which he reacted to Melanchthon and other reformers, as well as towards the German people. However, Luther was not always aggravated and frustrated; the opposite also deserves emphasis and shows that his severity could have resulted partially from his experience of *Anfechtungen* at Wartburg.

In Luther's first letter he showed dependence on Melanchthon when he asked him to decide whether his whereabouts should remain secret. His willingness to trust Melanchthon with such a delicate task gives the impression of a perceived equality between them, a form of brotherhood. He also confirms this impression as he gradually starts to advise Melanchthon on how to behave in various situations. For example, in the third letter, based on his own experience, Luther advises Melanchthon against possible future attacks from the Roman Catholic Church:

You, therefore, as minister of the Word, be steadfast in the meantime and fortify the walls and towers of Jerusalem until [the enemy] also attack you. You know your call and your gifts. I pray for you as for no-one else... (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 216*).

Based on the content of the first three letters one has the impression that Luther, as spiritual guide, was positive and uplifting as he showed compassion and care. This creates the expectation that he would develop this attitude further after receiving correspondence from Melancthon. However, what follows contrary to expectation is sudden criticism, and it comes as a surprise.⁷⁷

What further highlights the contrast of Luther's attitude as spiritual guide is his attitude in the last couple of letters. Luther seems to become more and more positive towards Melancthon's practices and also more supportive. An example of this would be his reaction when Luther heard that Melancthon was reinstating the Eucharist in both kinds:

I am greatly pleased, of course, that you are restoring Christ's institution. I have especially intended to work for this had I returned to you; for now we recognize this tyranny and can resist it, and are no longer forced to receive only "one kind" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 281*).

The same applies to Luther's conduct towards the other reformers which becomes clear when he comments on Karlstadt's paper later on, mentioning that he: "highly approve[d] of

⁷⁷ However, since two of the initial three letters are only fragments it is difficult to reach a sound conclusion. Nonetheless, the little we have provides some insight and sets a positive tone and it is against the positive and uplifting background that the reformer's criticism, illustrated in the letters that followed, seemed so abrupt, extreme and sudden.

his efforts and diligence” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 283). This comes to a climax when he eventually comments on all of his colleague’s spiritual growth:

I see that all of you grow in spiritual matters, so it seems to me that I can decrease. I am proud of this, and I wish that I can become nothing and you would be everything. Pray for me that my faith in the Lord does not fail (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 288).

In the context of all the letters, these words that were penned without any build up or explanation, must have had a heavy impact on the hearts of the theologians at Wittenberg when they were read. The impact is, however not as important as why the change in attitude occurred and what we can deduce from it.

For the researcher these changes Luther’s experienced were so prominent that that they warrant further reference. It has also been mentioned that Luther's *Anfechtungen* might have played a significant role in these experiences (still to be discussed), but other reasons might also have played a role. At this stage the researcher should mention that one should take into account that some of these letters are fragments, the letters of Melanchthon are not extant and at times Luther wrote very cryptically, so drawing conclusions is extremely difficult, and might be subjective. Still there are ideas worth pondering.

The differences between the first three letters and the fourth and fifth might simply be the result of Luther having received correspondence from Melanchthon; he had something to comment upon and in this case to criticize, but this alone does not justify his rudeness. This may have been typical of German culture or perhaps Luther's wit, but it might also have stemmed from his isolation and poor health or *Anfechtungen* he experienced at Wartburg. The second change in tone between the middle and the latter letters might have occurred

because Luther was finally letting go of the assumption that Melanchthon and the other theologians at Wittenberg were replacing him for whatever reason (something which seemed to fuel his aggravation). Perhaps Luther was just coming to terms with the idea that the Reformation was moving forward and that he should let the other reformers take control of the on-going events at Wittenberg. The motivation behind the change of heart in the latter letters is not clear, but Luther was moving on, to such an extent that he was even considering moving to another University in order to spread the wealth of Wittenberg.

Thus, the reasons for the changes that occurred can for the most only be speculated, but a few remarks can be made with confidence regarding his role as spiritual guide. Luther was very critical, straight and honest, and he gave praise when praise was due and chided when he thought it necessary. He would tell Melanchthon directly when he thought his ideas were absurd. Never was there a moment when Luther did not reveal his true thoughts and feelings. It was a role he took very seriously and practiced even beyond their professional relationship. Luther would comment and congratulate on personal financial gain, their getting married, and most impressively, he would acknowledge it when he believed one of his colleagues, especially Melanchthon, to be “more filled with the Spirit” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 302) or more competent to address certain matters than he was.

5.2 Finding One's Way in the Wilderness

When contemporary works on Luther's spirituality were discussed in the second chapter of this study I referred to the work of Scott Hendrix who emphasised that Luther had a “*guestly spirituality*,” identifying the new understanding Luther brought to Christianity. This was that Christians were meant to live as guests in this world. Hendrix's decision to capture Luther's spirituality in one concept made the author wonder whether it is possible to do the same

with Luther's expression of spirituality, as it emerged from the letters examined. The thought that came to mind was that of a "seeking spirituality." Luther was always seeking understanding in his situation, the purpose of his isolation, and through his humble questions regarding the actions of God and Christ.

The first way through which Luther tried to make sense of his spirituality was through his Scriptural interpretations. From the letters it is clear that he used an older medieval method of interpretation called the fourfold interpretation of meaning. Of the four options Luther focused primarily on the allegorical method, which implied a metaphorical interpretation of Scripture. Through the interpretation Luther could draw comparison between the on-going events of the Reformation and those of his own time. For example, when Luther asks Melanchthon to correspond so that they can bear their new burden together (that of being isolated from each other) the words he uses resemble those of Galatians 6:2 (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 216). When he pictures the state of the church he chides himself for his lack of compassion "for the slain sons of my people," a reference to Jeremiah 9:1 (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 215). Luther even went further and compared some of his contemporaries to characters of Scripture; the pope was described as the antichrist (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 215), Duke George of Saxony as the Rehoboam of Dresden (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 216) and Melanchthon was once compared to Elisha (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 232). The letters contain numerous similar references, comparisons and allusions to Scripture.

Through the comparisons Luther drew, he familiarised his surroundings as he created a scriptural understanding of the on-going events, his actions and the actions of others.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Cf. Lohse, 1986: 146; Oberman, 1989: 270

Luther did not do this only through the older way of understanding, but it is also evident in the letters that he already and sufficiently embraced the new school of thought in which he practiced a very literal reading of Scripture. This is most apparent when Luther engages in theological disputation; for example, the argument on the Eucharist came to a point where Luther had to decide whether receiving only “one kind” was a sin. In this he let himself be guided by a very literal understanding of the Scripture:

In summary: since Scripture does not force [us to say] that [communion with] only “one kind” is a sin I cannot claim it (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, pp. 280-281*).

This literal reading of the text was a method influenced by the Humanist, namely “*sola scriptura*.” While Luther was thus seeking understanding he used both old and new hermeneutical systems. The fact that he used both seems to be troublesome, but Lee Gibbs explains in his article *Biblical Interpretation in Medieval English and the English Reformation* (2009), how this was possible:

The watchword of the Protestant Reformation was *sola scriptura* (“Scripture alone”). The tendency was to break with allegorical interpretation (which was included within the fourfold senses) and to concentrate on the literal and historical meaning. Luther appreciated and used the philological method that Erasmus developed from ad fonts: however, Luther and the first generation of Reformers remained deeply immersed in medieval categories of thought (*Gibbs, 2009, p. 385*).

Luther was part of the first generation of reformers who implemented this new hermeneutical method, but being part of a first generation implied that he was still growing

and was trained under the influence of an older generation. The imprint created by such exposure was not simply shaken off and as a result the traces are still evident in Luther's interpretation of on-going events.⁷⁹

The fact that Luther had more than one method of interpretation at his disposal did not imply that he had all the answers; nor did they supply an end to his seeking of understanding. Many things remained beyond his comprehension and they were expressed through questions: "Who knows what God plans to work with these mighty men⁸⁰...?" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 213); "...who knows whether Christ does not wish to accomplish more by this plan...?" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 232); "I do not know whether God turned away from me...?" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 257); "Who knows whether this should be the end of my ministry?" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 288).

As these questions are asked throughout the course of the nine letters they become another expression of Luther "seeking spirituality." In essence, the questions reveal the limitations of Luther's knowledge as he struggled to understand or interpret the immediate actions of God and Christ, and more specifically the purpose they had with his confinement. The reformer also knew that he would not receive answers, as he stated the questions rhetorically. What Luther finally expressed through these questions was that his fate was in God's hands, and his knowledge he testified that the on-going events had been set in motion by a higher authority than his own.

⁷⁹ The newer philological method mentioned by Gibbs was, however, evident and well presented in the letters, especially in the latter ones when Luther discussed the theological matters of Melancthon's *Loci* and Karlstadt's thesis.

⁸⁰ Luther's enemies.

Luther's "seeking spirituality" thus leads us right to the core of spiritual experience (according to Ackermann's definition) and that is the experience of God and Christ. As a result we now turn to consider how Luther portrayed his experience of God and Christ within his letters.

5.3 Luther's Reference to Christ

Let us return to Luther's initial two references to Christ. The first was in the first letter to Melanchthon, when the reformer left the decision to his colleague on whether to reveal his location based on what he thought was to the glory of Christ. This constituted a noble act by the reformer as the decision would most likely have determined Luther's fate. The second was made two weeks later in his fourth letter to Melanchthon and here, due to the first reference to Christ, it reads rather ironically. Luther was suddenly complaining, irritated with the outcome of events and concluding that his life in isolation meant nothing. Only, after a back and forth conversation with himself he asks: "But who knows whether Christ does not wish to accomplish more by this plan, not only in my case but also in others?" (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 232). In both references he ascribed great authority to Christ. This authority most likely influenced Luther's willingness to give up his life in the first reference and to bring about his return to humbleness in the second. Luther's first two references re-emphasise Luther's seeking spirituality, for even though he was willing to put his life on the line for his convictions he still did not fully comprehend what Christ plan's entailed within his given situation. These two examples represent the initial and total reference Luther made to Christ in the first four letters, almost half of the letters he wrote to Melanchthon.

In the latter half of the letters, when Luther discusses some of the on-going disputations, he elaborates on his understanding of Christ's authority. This is expressed in his argument regarding monastic vows and the question of their validity:

I am absolutely certain that there is quite an easy solution to all these problems, even though we don't as yet see what it is. For if Christ was here, I do not doubt that he would dissolve these chains and annul all vows. He would not allow anyone to be oppressed by an unbearable or involuntary burden, since he is Saviour and Bishop of all souls... (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 286*).

In the latter letters Christ's authority was seen as having closely connected to His ability to establish new institutions or annul them. This is the matter in the above quote, since Luther knows Christ has the authority to annul the question regarding the vows they were facing. The fact that Christ had the authority is not enough reason in itself to annul any vows. Christ's authority should not be seen as standing alone or dictated Luther's thought. In Luther's disputation regarding vows, reason had the final say and occupied a central role in Luther's argument, both in the letters as well as in a thesis written during the same year, titled *Judgement on monastic vows* (1521).⁸¹ Reason was, however, not only something Luther always interpreted positively, he frequently also criticized it, even though it played a certain role in Luther's theology. On the one hand, reason and faith conflicted with each other; and on the other, faith renewed one's reason. As a result Luther simultaneously experience faith and reason as in opposition and as coexisting in service to each other (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, pp. 162-163).

⁸¹ See LW 44:243-400. Cf. Lohse, 2011: 199-200

The functionality of reason was also proven when Luther discussed the matter regarding receiving only “one kind” in the Eucharist. Here Luther also turned to reason, as mentioned earlier on to determine whether Christ's institution was being contravened if one received only “one kind” since Scripture did not deliver a verdict.⁸²

The relationship between reason and Scripture is also central to Luther's final argument and statement at Worms:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. (*Luther, Luther Before Emperor and Empire at the Diet of Worms (1521), 2000, pp. 42-43*)⁸³

Lohse explains that conscience or the *ratio evidens* in the above should, however, not be seen authority independent of Holy Scripture. It was not an independent reception and appropriation of divine revelation, but rather the subjective side of preached Word. What Luther is saying is that anything that clearly contradicts the *ratio evidens* is also against the Word of God (Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 2011, p. 200), since “reason does not comprehend what God is, but it most certainly

⁸² Cf. Luther, 1963: 280

⁸³ LW 32:112-113

comprehends what God is not.” (Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 1986, p. 160)⁸⁴

Luther's discussion with Melanchthon regarding vows also touches the subject of Christian freedom, another well known doctrine of Luther. In a moment when Melanchthon concludes that vows should just be annulled because they cannot be kept, Luther disagrees but starts to questions the freedom within vows. He opens his argument in reference to Melanchthon's *Loci*:

You're *Loci* states very well that the slavery of the vows is strange to the gospel and contrary to the freedom of the Spirit. But here we really debate vows and not the slavery of vows. You know precisely what such freedom and such slavery are and where they exist: not in the vows themselves but in one's attitude [towards them]. For he who is free can, just as Apostle Paul, submit himself to all laws, and to the dominion of all men...

It is part of evangelical liberty that one can submit oneself to a vow and to laws. The law of God does not come from faith, says the Apostle [Paul]; it certainly does not have its origin in freedom and is contrary to the gospel, and yet we live under it in freedom. Consequently, many have lived as free under the under the slavery of the vows. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 298)

Central to Luther's understanding of freedom are the words of Paul in I Cor. 9:19: “Because I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all.” In *Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (2009), Oswald Bayer notes that Luther never became tired

⁸⁴ Cf. LW 44:336

from emphasising “the freedom and the spontaneity of the new obedience, of the way one who is reborn hears and acts.” (Bayer, 2009, p. 289) Luther's understanding of freedom, when discussing vows in the letters, was (already) firmly based on his finding in his treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520),⁸⁵ which is summarised as follows:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord off all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all.⁸⁶

Even though Luther disagreed with Melanchthon's dissolution of vows, his colleague's arguments still pointed him in a new direction regarding vows, as he started questioning the law of the vow. At this stage, however, it seems that whenever Luther refers to Christ, the reformer's theology follows shortly. That being said, Luther's understanding of Christ in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) and his work *A meditation on Christ's Passion* (1519), both written shortly before he arrived at Wartburg, still eludes this study until the reformer wrote his final letter to Melanchthon. This is the only place in all of the letters in which Christ and the cross are discussed together, when he addressed the situation with the visiting Zwickau Prophets and the question regarding calling.

In the letter Luther advise Melanchthon to test the visitors according to the council of John,⁸⁷ since he was suspicious of the legitimacy of their calling. For despite of all the marvellous things he had heard about them Luther was still waiting for a confession that proved they were carrying “the sign of the Son of Man,” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 366), the sign of the cross. This implied, according to Luther, that a person is only a true prophet if he/she had had his/her own experience of the cross, of spiritual distress,

⁸⁵ LW 31:327-377

⁸⁶ LW 31: 344

⁸⁷ I John 4:1

divine birth and hell. For these were the experiences of true prophets, based on the experience of Christ himself and proven by a number of prophets of the Bible⁸⁸.

In the light of these thoughts Luther advises Melanchthon to examine them with caution: “...and do not even listen if they speak of the glorified Jesus, unless you have first heard of the crucified Jesus.” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 367) The importance Luther is placing on “the sign of the Son of Man” (Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, 1963, p. 366) as a proof of calling resembles an understanding that the reformer had come to earlier in his *Heidelberg Disputation*, when he discussed the importance of a theology of the cross over against a theology of glory. Luther was obviously expecting foul play and most likely expecting theologians of glory. What was a theologian of glory, according to Luther? One of the descriptions Luther gave in the *Heidelberg Disputation* was as follows:

21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified.

⁸⁸ Cf. Luther, 1963: 336-337

It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's (*Luther, Heidelberg Disputation, 1989, p. 44*).

Based on what Luther heard, he suspected that the Zwickau Prophets lacked such or a similar understanding of the cross within their theology. Because of this he cautioned Melanchthon for Luther believed such a stance should be feared as made clear in his *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*:

He who is so hard-hearted and callous as not to be terrified by Christ's passion and led to a knowledge of self, has reason to fear. For it is inevitable, whether in this life or in hell, that you will have to become conformable to Christ's image and suffering. At the very least, you will sink into this terror in the hour of death and in purgatory and will tremble and quake and feel all that Christ suffered on the cross. (*Luther, A Meditation on Christ's Passion, 1989, pp. 168-169*)

Luther is expecting that the experience of faith of the Zwickau Prophets will prove to be too simplistic. Christian life without fear or distress is to say the least, unbiblical. Life without *Anfechtungen* was impossible for Luther. True faith is never without conflict, for if conflict is lacking the believer has already come to terms of peace with Satan. (Scaer, 1983, p. 27)⁸⁹

5.4 God's Providence and Wrath

In the nine letters Martin Luther wrote from Wartburg, he made numerous references towards God, from the very first letter to Melanchthon. In the letter Luther expresses the

⁸⁹ In his work Scaer draws on another important work that deals with Luther's *Anfechtungen*. See Buehler, P. 1942. *Die Anfechtungen bei Martin Luther* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag) p. 7

caution he took in order to send letters, his fear that his location might be revealed, and shows bravery when wishing that decisions should be taken for the glory of Christ. It was in these circumstances, while the memory of his appearance in Worms was new and the doubtful understanding of his own disappearance still fresh, that Luther chose to emphasise his faith that the on-going events, which included his disappearance and God's plans with his enemies, were happening according to God's will:

Behold, the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, what it accomplishes while we are silent, suffer and pray. Are not the words of Moses true: "you will be silent and they will fight for you"? (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 213*)

The first aspect Luther chose to emphasise of his experience and understanding of God is his faith in God's providence. He underlines it twice in the small fragment that was preserved and in both instances Luther reveals a positive and trustful understanding of God. For him God was the one at the steer of the Reformation and who had a plan for the new situation of the reformer's isolation. When reading the letters written from Wartburg this understanding Luther had of God becomes the standard, as it is the first, but as one continues to read it becomes clear that this was not the general picture portrayed in the first couple of letters.

The image the reformer portrays of God during his first month at Wartburg was rather grim and was primarily determined by the two following references. The first is from the second letter he wrote to Melanchthon when Luther pondered the rebellion at Erfurt and felt that the town council should have supported the priests who were victims of violence. They did not and because of this the reformer interpreted the lack of support as lack of worthiness before God to be servants of the Word. According to Luther they did not act in accordance with their teachings, although the teaching is not specified.

The second reference that supports the grim picture was used twice by the time Luther wrote his fourth letter. It was Luther's understanding of the wrath of God. The first representation thereof was the state of the Church, which he called the kingdom of the antichrist. This caused Luther to feel only regret that he could not feel sorry for these people as he thought he should. The wrath of God was not only something depicted against enemies, but (secondly) also something of which Luther himself was wary. Later as he pondered life and judgement in the light of a friend's death, the reformer reveals that it was something he actually feared:

God's wrath is so great I contemplate it daily more and more, since I have nothing else to do – that I doubt whether God will save, besides the little ones, and adults from that kingdom of Satan: so terribly has our God forsaken us!

(Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 230)

According to the article of David P. Scaer, *The concept of Anfechtung in Luther's Thought* (1983) Luther's experience of the Wrath of God was one of the many faces of the reformer's *Anfechtungen*. In his work he also discuss others under headings such as: *Anfechtungen* experienced through the flesh, through the world, as reasonable opposition to God, as death and as part of constant life. Scaer mentions that when *Anfechtungen* were experienced as the wrath of God, they also occur in different forms. In this instance, however, Luther was undergoing stress since he was experiencing that God was treating him, the believer, as an unbeliever, and as a result the salvation of Christ seemed to be removed from the reformer's view (for a second).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Cf. Scaer, 1983: 22-23

Luther's experience of the *Anfechtung*, mentioned above, occurred within the first few days after he arrived at Wartburg. A month later he experienced it again and from the intimations in the letters it seems to have become much worse. The second time Luther collapsed in self-pity when he heard of the praise that his colleague ascribed to him in one of his letters:

Your high opinion of me shames me, since – unfortunately – I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. I do not know whether God has turned away from me since you all do not pray for me. You are already replacing me; because of the gift you have from God, you have attained greater authority and popularity than I did. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 257*)

According to Scaer the spirit-flesh dualism was another expression of the experience of *Anfechtungen*. In this case it was a revival of a Pauline-Biblical view, where the reference to “spirit” referred to that part of human existence that belonged to God and the “flesh” to the human nature estranged from God. He explains:

The spirit, that part of human existence belonging to God, understands itself as a sinner justified before God. At the same time the flesh stands in constant opposition to God. The flesh, the human nature, estranges from God, co-operates with the devil and the world in opposing God and His will. It hates God, languishes in self-grief, is anxious about its own existence, murmurs with impatience against God, and stirs up the conscience with concerns about the Christian's own personal acceptability against God. (*Scaer, 1983, p. 20*)

Reference has also been made to the fact that feeling of disappointment, negativity and even illness accompanied Luther's experience of *Anfechtungen*. Feelings of depression were almost predictable, given the content of these experiences. However, his illness at the time was serious, his constipation being a chronic ailment that bothered Luther from shortly after his arrival in May up until October the same year, a period of five months. The researcher wonders whether this was also one of his *Anfechtungen*. Firstly, a short reflection on the reformer's experience. Luther's constipation seems to have been an excruciating experience from the very beginning:

The Lord has afflicted me with painful constipation. The elimination is so hard that I am forced to press with all my strength, even to the point of perspiration, and the longer I delay the worse it gets. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 217*)

From the very first moment Luther mentions his constipation he makes it clear that it was God who imposed it on him. This was definitely unexpected, but he does not note why he believed it to be so. He repeats this accusation in a letter to Amsdorf, written the same day but again he gave no reason for his conclusion (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 219*). What is also interesting is that the last word Luther wrote before making the accusation was "God lives and reigns in time and in eternity" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 217*). The fact that God imposed this on him did not influence his praise given to God. By the end of May, however, it seems as if Luther was recovering, or so he told his colleagues and placated them not to worry, but by the middle of June the reformer had hit a new low. To Spalatin he wrote that he was "more constipated than ever" (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 255*) and to Melancthon he writes the following:

Already eight days have passed in which I have written nothing, in which I have not prayed or studied; this is partly because of temptations of the flesh [such as constipation], partly because I am tortured by other burdens. If this thing does not improve, I shall go to Erfurt and not incognito. There you will see me, or I you, for I shall consult doctors and surgeons. It is impossible that I endure this evil any longer; it is easier to endure ten big wounds than this small sign of a lesion (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 257*).

After a month and a half of discomfort Luther was considering consulting a physician as his situation became almost unbearable. At this time he eventually did decide to consider the possible reason for his illness. On the one hand he considered that it was possible that God had turned away from him, since his fellow reformers at Wittenberg did not pray for him. On the other he was wondering whether it was not part of God's providence for him to become more involved in the Reformation again:

Maybe the Lord burdens me so in order to push me out of this hermitage into the public. (*Luther, Luther's Works: Letters I, 1963, p. 257*)

In the letters Luther speculates about possible reasons why he was suffering illness, but never comes to a definite conclusion which returns one to the question whether this was perhaps one of Luther's *Anfechtungen*. Again Scaer sheds light:

Attractive but false is the view that the *Anfechtungen* of the flesh deal with the physical side of human existence, such as sexual desires or bodily pain. Luther's anthropology is different from Roman Catholicism's with its idea that physical or material substance is the cause and abettor of sin. Luther sees struggles of the flesh as occurring within the soul and as "spiritual" in the sense that the body

need not be involved, even though the body may suffer in conjunction with the soul's struggles. Luther suffered headaches and woke up in drenching sweats, but he also suffered from the *Anfechtungen* even when there were no physical maladies. (*Scaer, 1983, pp. 20-21*)

Luther's illness, even though closely related to his experience of *Anfechtungen*, was not in itself a part of it. Since his *Anfechtungen* occurred in the soul it would rather be the thought of God punishing him that would be part of or closer related to his *Anfechtungen* than his experience of constipation itself.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has emphasised the influence a closer consideration of Luther's identity would have on a reflection of the reformer's spirituality. This was done in order to resist or counteract earlier misconceptions regarding the true role of Luther within the Reformation. With this in mind Luther's expression of himself in the letters were approached as the utterances of a professor, monk and a spiritual guide. Once these offices had been considered it was easier to gain insight into Luther's meticulousness when he discussed theological matters, his self-perception at the time and the versatile role he played as a spiritual guide.

Reflection on the letters as a whole led the researcher to identifying Luther's spirituality as a "seeking spirituality." Seeking occurred through Luther's hermeneutical method as his allegorical interpretation made it possible for him to draw close comparisons between biblical events and the events of the Reformation. At the same time Luther was also able to concentrate on the literal and historical meaning of the text through the influence of humanistic thought within theological debates. In the end his hermeneutical methods still

left questions for which he had no answers, but the questions in themselves also emphasise Luther's seeking spirituality.

In the letters Luther's reference to Christ first emphasised the authority accorded to Christ, but soon afterwards his discussion on vows proved the additional value of reason within the reformer's theology. In the matter of the vows reason also leads Luther to discuss the freedom of the Christian where he attests his own theology of freedom as Christian lord of all and servant to all. The images of Christ and the cross were also discussed as part of the problem, and challenges the Zwickau Prophets brought to Wittenberg. Central to this controversy was the matter of calling and the experience of calling, since Luther suspected that the experience of the Zwickau Prophets was neither true to the Word, nor true to his experiences of *Anfechtungen*.

Luther's concern with the providence of God, worthiness before God and the wrath of God proves that his spirituality at the time was firmly immersed in the theology or theologies of the time. The medieval theology to which he had been exposed to during his youth, at school, and at the monastery and was meant to create a fear based on the dichotomy or tension between wrath and mercy, was well evident. Luther diminishes the gap with shorter references to his understanding of God as presented by hope, encouragement, faith, proof, caution and affirmation.

In the first few letters providence was represented primarily by the guidance God has to offer Luther, Melanchthon and the greater Reformation, but soon after his arrival Luther starts to experience his *Anfechtungen*. First, Luther starts to experience that God is treating him as an unbeliever as he starts to doubt whether anyone will be saved. Later he also experiences *Anfechtungen* of the spirit–flesh dualism. Finally, the researcher investigates

whether Luther's experience of illness is also part of his *Anfechtungen* but finds that they cannot they be reduced to merely his illness.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

To conclude the author would like to reflect on the content of the study, questions posed throughout its progression and close with a final remark or two regarding the seeking spirituality of Martin Luther.

The first question that arose from this study was whether biographical material could serve as a proper source for theological inquiry. McClendon supported this idea based on his example that an ethical character has the ability to lead a community by manner of example. The researcher's suggestion was that Luther might have the same effect, maybe not primarily as an ethical character, but definitely as a spiritual character and a character of faith. Within the letters Luther gave an account of his faith - his understanding and experience of God and Christ, and these accounts are interwoven with his theological arguments, counsel towards Melanchthon (as well as the other theologians at Wittenberg) and his reflection of the on-going events of the Reformation. Within these accounts one finds references to some of the theological positions and doctrines for which Luther became known, such as his theology of the cross, and his understanding of reason and freedom. In the case of Luther the researcher finds that this reflection done on Luther's letters confirms McClendon's suggestion that "biography at its best will be theology."

The next matter discussed was based on the work of McIntosh who reminded of the divorce that occurred between theology and spirituality within modernity, a separation between thought and feeling, theory and practice. Regarding the challenge this separation is posing today the researcher has no clear answers, but based on the experience of this study the researcher would like to make few remarks. Through a study with a historical approach an author has the opportunity to reach into history, a bit of the unknown, to a time before this

“divorce” occurred. Effectively he/she reaches into the thoughts, work and theology of another whose work was created before the tragic separation and by doing this they have the chance to glimpse into a world where theology is more intertwined. This at least gives a researcher the opportunity to be confronted and be guided by what is now seen as divided.

Sandra Schneider’s contribution to this study consists of her exposition of contemporary approaches to spiritual theology. As part of her historical approach she distinguished between historians of spirituality who focus on spirituality as a religious experience within the context of Christian theology, and scholars of spirituality who focus on the expression of spirituality during a certain time and context. When discussed it was expected that both these perspectives would be considered by the researcher and both had a contribution to make. What was found, however, was that these perspectives held a very close relation in the letters and both were needed in order to gain a greater understanding of Luther’s spirituality.

This brings us to the point of returning to the research question of this study: “What insight can be found into the spirituality of Martin Luther based on the letters he wrote to Philip Melanchthon from Wartburg castle?”

Luther's letters to Melanchthon from Wartburg do provide insight into the reformers spirituality, but provides only a glimpse. These letters (and indeed all of Luther's other letters) should be seen as a window or a gateway through which one can peek at something strange, distant and foreign, but will never truly comprehend. Keeping this in mind the researcher found the following:

Based on the content of the letters, it can be said that Luther’s spirituality acknowledged the glory of Christ from the beginning, even though Luther did not always comprehend the

actions of Christ. It also recognized Christ's authority. When this authority was introduced in the letters reference was also made to Luther's understanding of reason. Reason played a major role in Luther's theology, as Luther experienced that faith and reason co-existed in mutual service. As a result Luther's theology was definitely not anti-intellectual and since reason forms a great part of Luther's theology, in thought and in practice (and thus not dislocated from the world) it also becomes part of his spirituality, a spirituality of reason.

Luther's spirituality was also drawn towards discussion of freedom, and in the letters when Luther discussed the matters regarding vows, it referred to the attitude of the Christian. Freedom had nothing to do with the physical freedom, but was rather spiritual as the Christian came to understand that he/she was truly lord to all and subject to none, yet dutiful servant to all, subject to all.

The final understanding of Luther's spirituality comes from the reformer's discussion with Melancthon regarding the Zwickau prophets. Here Luther interrogated these prophets for any sign of or experience of trials, doubt or forsakenness, anything that resembled "the sign of the Son of Man" or the sign of the cross. These questions were not merely based on Luther's own experiences, but also on his theology of the cross. He was investigating whether these men experienced anything that would indicate a spirituality of the cross – a spirituality known for its afflictions, pain, misery and or *Anfechtungen*. In short: A spirituality of the cross.

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