

## “Who Are You: Christ and the Imperative of Subjectivity”

Anna Mercedes, College of Saint Benedict/St. John’s University

Transformative Lutheran Theologies Conference, Chicago, IL

January 23, 2009

Discussion Starters

---

I presented several background questions, including the following two:

- 1) As Catherine Keller writes, “Christianity has been perennially tempted to glorify victimization in its glorification of its central victim.” *Is there a way to value the cross of Jesus without furthering conditions of victimization?*
- 2) Early feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared: “Self-development is more important than self-sacrifice!” *What exchanges can we imagine between self-care and self-giving?*

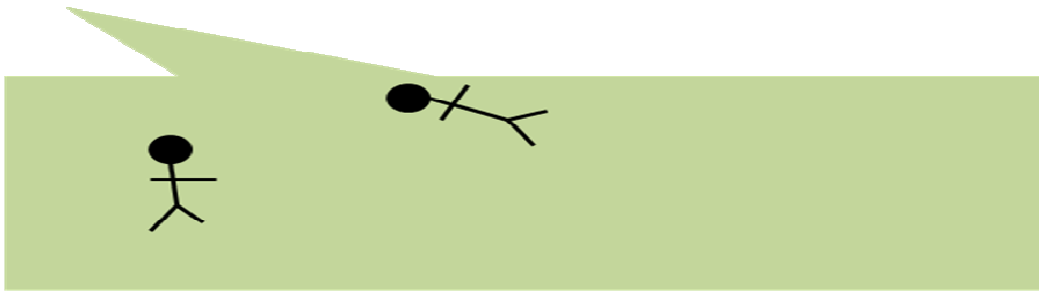
I worked with Luther’s commentary on the following text from Philippians 2:

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

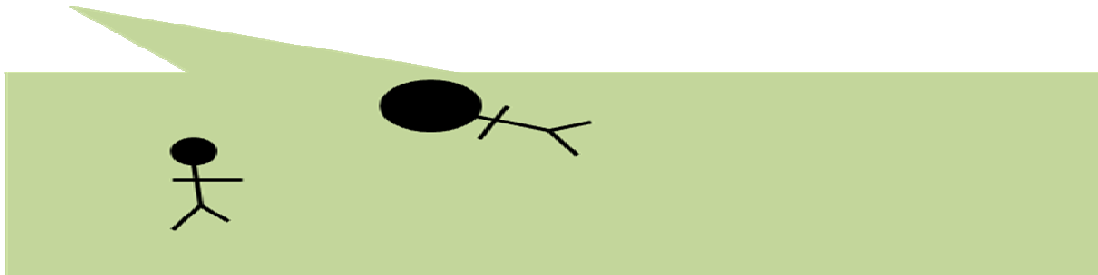
<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I provided some illustrations of Luther’s thought in his commentary on this Philippians passage.

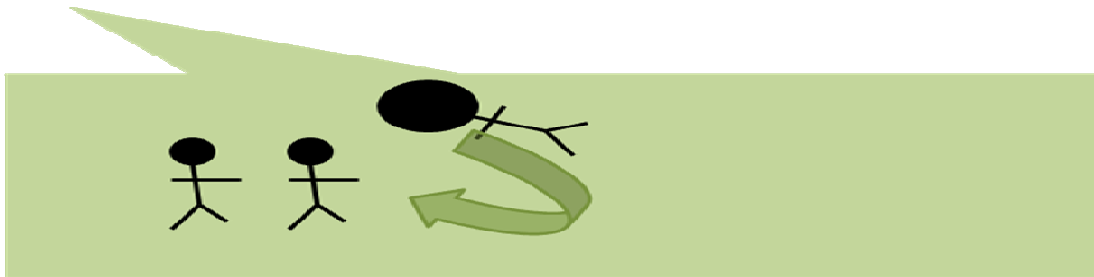
Christ (at left ☺ ) becomes incarnate among us.



But humans (at right) are too easily caught in the sinful predicament of pride, imagining themselves above humanity and exhibiting overblown egos:



Christ's humanity draws the sinful human's attention back down to earth, back to the fullness of humble humanity.



I then discussed a classic feminist criticism of Luther's understanding of sin as pride. Feminist theologians, starting with Valerie Saiving in 1960, have long asked: what about those persons whose sin is not pride but rather a *lack* of self-attention or self-focus?



Drawing upon Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures, I then discussed my own constructive proposals for ways in which Christ's incarnate presence with us, particularly in Jesus' experience of the cross, might beckon us into the fullness of ourselves.

#### Suggested Reading

On feminism and the cross: Deanna Thompson, *Crossing the Divide*; Cynthia Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*; Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations*; Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross*; Mary Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*. On the intimacy of salvation and transcendence: Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*; Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence*. For thinking theologically about abuse and the cross: Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*; Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit*; L.J. Tessier, *Dancing After the Whirlwind*; Monica Coleman, *The Dinah Project*; Mary Pellauer, "Conversation on Grace and Healing," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside*. For feminist criticism of sin-as-pride: Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation," reprinted in *WomanSpirit Rising*; Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of our Common House*; Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web*.