

2011

The Spiritual Dimension of Aging and Forgiveness

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THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF AGING AND FORGIVENESS

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

THESIS ADVISER: DR. MARY HESS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Spring 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I believe “It takes an entire village to raise a child” -- and to write a thesis. Thank you to the following community of faithful faculty, friends, and church family who have supported me throughout my seminary education and thesis writing. Thank you to Mary Hess, Christian Scharen, Janet Ramsey, Alan Padgett, Mary Hinkle Shore, Diane Doncits, and Peter Susag who all provided me their professional help and suggestions. Thank you to Pastor Ed Frederick, Pastor David Wrightsman, and the community at St. Philip’s Lutheran Church in Hastings, Minnesota for their encouragement and prayers. Thank you to Jo Marie Sweep, Diane Saed, Deb Lyness, Raul and Ruth Jackson, Betsy Benjamin, and Barb Jorenby for their faithful friendships, love for learning, and for me. To my parents Allen and Faye Keehner Poppe, my sister Cindy Lou, and grandparents whose faith and trust in the Triune God has sustained me throughout my life. Thank you to Pastor Philip Walen who inspired me to begin my studies at Luther Seminary when he was the pastor at SPLC. Finally, thank you to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for guiding me throughout this special thesis journey. To my readers: Come, join the Dance of Trinity, before all worlds begun—the interweaving of the three, the Father, Spirit, Son. The universe of space and time did not arise by chance, but as the three, in love and hope, made room within their dance. . . Let voices rise and shape the Dance of Trinity.

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CHAPTER ONE
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

The intersection between theological reflection and literary analysis connects theology and literature in ways that have inspired my own curiosity and interest. In William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Gail Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* the father/daughter characters are attempting to forgive one another. The need for forgiveness for past actions, or brokenness between people, becomes more important as the aging process and time "left to live" begins to be consciously recognized. This is where God and religious beliefs intersect; this is where God gets our attention. Throughout my thesis the human journey from brokenness to spiritual wholeness is discussed focusing on spirituality, aging, and forgiveness. The Trinity -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- is the gift of grace and hope for healing human brokenness. When human bonds are broken we seek the healing power that is possible with God who renews our wounded souls. As Fred Van Tatenhove has said, "to be human is to represent God."¹ Human beings are God's earthly representatives made in His image.

Throughout world literature biblical allusions, symbols, and themes are manifested. There are many OT and NT biblical references in literature; some of the literature has gained the "classic" status while other literary works have become best sellers. As I began to see numerous biblical references in the literature I was reading and

¹Fred Van Tatenhove, "Evangelical Perspectives," *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook, Volume 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 420.

teaching, the stories, characters, symbols, and allusions began to take on more theological connections. My thesis was in its infant stages. Now the time has come to focus on two specific selections for their theological and character development. In Shakespeare's *King Lear* the relationships between King Lear and his three daughters provide an opportunity to explore the journey of forgiveness and healing leading to reconciliation with his youngest daughter. In Gail Godwin's best-selling novel *Father Melancholy's Daughter* the relationship between another father and daughter provides another opportunity to explore the journey of forgiveness and healing leading to another kind of reconciliation.

In addition, the father/daughter relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter* anticipate the importance of the characters' relationships to the Trinity and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. The Trinity provides spiritual and psychological healing between people/characters moving them towards a hopeful future. Through the power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forgiveness and spiritual healing between people can be restored. During my theological studies at Luther Seminary I have concluded that in both Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* the relationship between the aging fathers and their daughters have spiritual journeys worthy of theological study. As King Lear and Walter Gower grow older and wiser, their father/daughter relationship(s) change.

In comparing Shakespeare's play and Godwin's novel with contemporary research on the spiritual dimension of aging along with the Trinity, I have discovered how God's grace heals the father/daughter relationship. In both of these fictional stories there is a reality waiting to be discovered. That is, "an important aspect of coming to

final meanings is the human need for reconciliation with the Ultimate in each person's life, be that God, or some sense of other, or indeed reconciliation with other people. Reconciliation involves the recognition of wrongdoing, the experience of guilt and the seeking of forgiveness."² Therefore the spiritual dimension of aging, explored through the theological lens of the Trinity, shows why people's need for forgiveness grows as their need for a hopeful future motivates their behaviors.

² Elizabeth MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 158.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DANCE OF TRINITY

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Soviet Union writer who won the 1970 Nobel Prize in literature, believed “literature, [is] one of the most sensitive and responsive tools of human existence, [it] has been the first to pick up, adopt, and assimilate this sense of the growing unity of mankind. . . .[It] has the power to transmit the condensed experience of . . .people accurately. . . as if it had lived through that history itself—and could thus be spared repeating old mistakes”¹ For some people, learning from their own life experiences has more impact than from listening to others’ stories. However, I believe stories from different sources and genres inform our understanding of human nature and our ways of being human.

The connection between the stories in both William Shakespeare and Gail Godwin and the stories of the OT and NT are rich in literary, theological, and psychological ways. The universal human story is told as the plot(s) and the relationships between characters/people make their journey through their lives. My understanding of the Trinity is based upon the relationship between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit to humankind. For those who follow Martin Luther’s theology, doctrines, and historical creeds, the significance of the Trinity to our faith must be acknowledged.

¹ Kate Kinsella, Kevin Feldman, Colleen Shea Stump, Joyce Armstrong Carroll, and Edward E. Wilson, *Prentice Hall Literature, Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes, World Masterpieces* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 1298-1299.

In *Principles of Lutheran Theology* Carl E. Braaten describes “The Trinitarian Principle.” Braaten explains how

Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century made a fundamental commitment to the basic decision of the ancient church at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C. E. in favor of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . To know the history of God’s Trinitarian activity in the messianic ministry of Jesus and the apostolic mission of the Spirit is to know the gospel and the starting point of the church’s mission to the world. The Bible tells the story of the living God who became human in the person of Jesus. In Jesus, God entered the world of time and history. The eternal Word of God became human flesh. That is the gospel truth of God incarnate that informs the core of the Lutheran reaffirmation of the Trinitarian confession. . . .²

From the early history of the Christian church to a contemporary understanding of the Trinity, the theology of Martin Luther, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann has informed my beliefs. Having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is fundamental to the doctrine of the triune God. Furthermore “we cannot know God unless and until he reveals himself under the conditions of [his] very limits. That is exactly the biblical claim of a special revelation of God in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ—a revelation that cannot be derived ‘from below,’ from any kind of natural theology, but only ‘from above,’ by a series of divine revelations as narrated in Scripture.”³ The importance of personal faith is without question. Therefore, “the God of the gospel is capable of an intrinsic openness to the identity, attributes, and experiences of human being in the world.”⁴ The intersection in most people’s lives between DOING AND BEING begins in their mid-life and continues until their death. Human beings are created in the image of God “and by extension those who are in Christ” through Jesus are also unique

² Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 73-74.

³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

creations. The image of God or *imago Dei* is intimately related to the human experience.

Indeed,

. . . in the Genesis creation account Adam and Eve are said to be created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27). Theologians differ on what the image of God actually refers to, but most agree that the image is not primarily physical. Instead the *imago Dei* may include the presence of will, emotions and reason; the ability to think and act creatively; or the ability to interact socially with others. Scripture attributes the *imago Dei* solely to humans, and it indicates that the image is in some sense still present even after the Fall (Jas 3:9). Above all, however, Christ—and by extension those who are in Christ—is the image of God.⁵

Since human beings have a spiritual dimension and are created to be in relationship to one another, starting with their family of origin, the spiritual journey and/or development in each person is also unique. The spiritual dimension of aging focuses on many changes and decisions humans often make as they grow older. One of the common relationship issues in aging is forgiveness and the hope for reconciliation.

Thus the intimate relationships between family members, and the Christian understanding of God as triune or relational to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, brings God's creation face-to-face not only with human relationships, but also with our spiritual selves. "Trinity means that the one divine nature is a unity of three persons and that God is revealed as three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ultimate basis for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity lies in the divine self-disclosure in Jesus, who as the Son revealed the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit."⁶

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 116.

⁶ Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 116.

An understanding of the economic and immanent Trinity is helpful before comparing its significant relationship to human being. A concise definition of economic and immanent Trinity is provided by Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling.

[Trinity]...refers to the manifestations of the three persons of the Trinity in relationship to the world, particularly in regard to the outworking of God's plan (economy) of salvation. . . .One of the most important contemporary theological questions surrounding the Trinity asks: Is there a difference between 'God in relationship to the world' (economic Trinity) and 'God in internal eternal relationship' (immanent Trinity)?⁷

Immanent Trinity is "the internal workings and relationships among the three persons of the Trinity. . . .The Scriptures suggest that Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 10:30) and that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ (1 Cor 2:10; 3:17-18). The Scriptures also suggest that love is the essence of the immanent Trinity (Jn 17:23-26; 1 Jn 4:8, 16)."⁸ Therefore the theology that supports my analysis is biblically based as well as guided by Martin Luther's carefully analyzed Lutheran theology. Furthermore, we also believe

God creates human beings through and for intergenerational life. God is present in all of life including the relationships and activities that begin and sustain human existence. . . . With God each human being has value simply because she or he exists. God has put life in every person through God's enlivening Spirit. No amount of failure or success can change this inborn presence and image of God in all humankind. Consequently, God is particularly intent on protecting the most frail in society: the old and the young.⁹

Thus the father/daughter relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter* are family stories in which the spiritual dimension of aging affects interpersonal healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁹ Vicky Goplin, Jeffrey Nelson, Mark Gardner, and Eileen K. Zahn, *Across the Generations Incorporating All Ages in Ministry: The Why and How* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 6.

CHAPTER THREE

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGING

The spiritual development of the journey in aging includes one's consciousness of aging and understanding of faith. Spiritual development and aging also includes making meaning of the aging experience. The spiritual tasks of aging include finding as well as searching for the final meanings of one's life. One of the leading pioneers in studying the stages of faith and religious development throughout life is J. W. Fowler. In Fowler's *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (1981)*, he notes ". . . there are stages of faith development across the lifespan just as there are stages of psychosocial development. . . His model of faith is one that allows for a universal understanding of faith and provides a structure that can be applied to any faith or religion."¹ Fowler believes "Faith has to do with the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning. . . .The major religious communities are the living repositories of the faith expressions of countless peoples in the past and present. These elements form traditions."² Family dynamics and relationships over time show how forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope develop throughout a lifetime of stories. The relational aspect of faith development within the individual's family, along with the

¹ MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, 119.

² James J. Fowler, "Dialogue Towards a Future," *Faith Development and Fowler*, C. Dykstra and S. Parks, eds. (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1986), 15-16.

spiritual/relational dimension of the Trinity, develops whether or not a specific faith community or denomination is named in the narratives.

Not only does Fowler see faith as relational, but he also sees “faith as way of knowing: ‘Faith is a way of being, arising out of a way of seeing and knowing.’”³ In his research Fowler has identified seven stages of faith development: (0) Undifferentiated Faith, (i) Intuitive-Projective Faith, (ii) Mythic-Literal Faith, (iii) Synthetic-Conventional Faith, (iv) Individuative-Reflective Faith, (v) Paradoxical-Consolidative or Conjunctive Faith, and (vi) Universalising Faith.⁴ Through Fowler’s own research and interviews, he discovered “older adults are more likely to be in stages three [Synthetic-Conventional Faith] to five” [Paradoxical-Consolidative or Conjunctive Faith].⁵ In Fowler’s opinion stage six or Universalizing Faith is “rare.” Significantly there is a changing relationship with God throughout one’s lifetime; that is, there is a “process of moving from doing to being that occurs with increasing age and perhaps even more so with increasing frailty.”⁶

In Elizabeth MacKinlay’s *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing* she explains how she studied independently living older adults and then developed an assessment tool for measuring their spiritual needs. MacKinlay discovered that “spiritual development continues across the lifespan and healthy ageing is dependent on spiritual health as well as physical and psychosocial health [S]piritual health in ageing can be enhanced by

³ MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-122.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

sensitizing older people to their own spiritual journeys, by assessing the spiritual needs of frail older people and by assisting older people effectively to meet their spiritual needs.”⁷

As I read the results of MacKinlay’s doctoral studies, I began to see the correlation between her research with living people to the characters in *King Lear* and *Father’s Melancholy’s Daughter*. In fact, MacKinlay applied a model of spirituality in aging which identified both spiritual themes and the tasks of aging. I visualized how her approach could also be applied to my own theological and literary analysis. MacKinlay discovered the tasks of aging “arise from the four themes that relate to ultimate meaning for each individual.”⁸

MacKinlay’s -- Table 14.1 Spiritual themes and tasks of ageing⁹

<u>Themes identified</u>	<u>Task of the individual</u>
Ultimate meaning in life	To identify source of ultimate meaning
Response to ultimate meaning	To find appropriate ways to respond
Self-sufficiency/Vulnerability	To transcend disabilities, loss [resiliency]
Wisdom/Final meanings	To search for final meanings
Relationship/Isolation	To find intimacy with God and / or others
Hope/Fear	To find [reconciliation] and hope

When MacKinlay summarizes her research interviews with aging informants, she asserts there are definite “characteristics of those who appear to be moving towards spiritual maturity” in their development task of aging.¹⁰ Survival and developmental characteristics include an openness to change and learning, an attitude of searching for the ultimate meaning in their lives, relationship with a confidante and/or membership of a long-term small group. It also included transcendence of disabilities and losses

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ Ibid., 223.

⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰ Ibid., 220.

encountered in ageing; acceptance of their past life and a readiness to face the future, including the ability to live with uncertainty, and finally, a sense of freedom and a move to a greater degree of interiority [inner wisdom].¹¹ Along with others who have studied the aging process, MacKinlay summarizes a key concept: “no person will ever reach perfection in spiritual maturity in this life, but we should continue to move towards it until death.”¹²

As the two fathers in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter* move toward their deaths, they are living their “last career.” In 1994 D. Heinz “sees the last career as having two parts, the making sense of our own lives as we have lived them, and second, passing on our heritage to the next generation. Thus our lives take on both a retrospective and a prospective meaning as we move towards our death.”¹³ In moving towards death, a heightened awareness of broken relationships often fills a person with guilt, regret, and perhaps a need for reconciliation. Sometimes in broken relationships there is an urgent need for forgiveness and reconciliation before physical death occurs and it is too late. In Shakespeare’s tragedy and Godwin’s novel the wounded relationships are either restored before death or reconciled after the death of the loved one.

Where despair, fear, and unresolved anger continue, the healing and reconciliation process is blocked. However, if restoration and reconciliation occur there is also hope for a better relationship. What is hope? In many resources including Viktor

¹¹ Ibid., 220.

¹² Ibid., 221.

¹³ D. Heinz, “Finishing the Story: Aging, Spirituality and Work of Culture,” *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 9, no. 1 (1994): 3-19 (quoted in MacKinlay, 221).

E. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and Mel Kimble's chapter "Aging and the Search for Meaning," hope is defined as a "sense of something in the future, a reason for living."¹⁴ Kimble states "the awareness of possibilities and the understanding that an individual is a deciding being conveys hope. Hope must be seen in relation to freedom. To be free is to stand before possibilities."¹⁵

Specifically in the father/daughter relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, there is a wonderful sense of freedom and love between them that was not apparent before their unselfish acts of reconciliation. As an aging person reviews his/her life and relationships, especially family relationships, the resulting attitude and/or wisdom gained may for some be that of despair, fear, and possibly hope. "In ageing, the hope that was present in mid life through meaning in roles or work, parenting and other achievements may seem to all but disappear. Hope in ageing must draw on new avenues. A growing sense of wisdom and transcendence, a deepening sense of interiority, [that is] the transition from doing to being allow new meaning to emerge after the middle years."¹⁶ It takes courage to face and hopefully transcend personal despair as well as fear, along with the physical and emotional changes of aging. Just as James Fowler, D. Heinz, Mel Kimble, so also has Elizabeth MacKinlay's research into the "last career" of life given me valuable insights into the physical and emotional aspects of aging. Their research into the spiritual dimension of aging has given me tools

¹⁴ MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, 177.

¹⁵ Melvin A. Kimble, "Aging and the Search for Meaning," *Spiritual Maturity in the Later Years*, James J. Seeber, Editor. (New York: Haworth Press, 1990), 118.

¹⁶ MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, 177.

for analyzing the interpersonal character relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*.

When suffering happens both the answerable and unanswerable questions are asked. These include what is the purpose of life, what is hope, why do human beings suffer, and how can peace, understanding, and reconciliation actualize? Whereas hope is important throughout the life span, it is especially needed when a crisis occurs and then is urgently sought. "Hope for the human being is essential for survival, it is what lights that spark at the core of our being. Hope is what energizes an individual to keep on, it is what motivates."¹⁷ Hope, in my opinion, is finding the courage to search for meaning in the "last career;" God our creator has given us the gift of enduring hope so we can persevere.

The Trinitarian concept is "the three in one"—God the Father, Jesus Christ his Son, and the gift of the Holy Spirit *through* Jesus to human beings. The relational nature of the Trinity is the archetype of imperfect human relationships. The sinful nature and sinful deeds of human beings result in unmanageable brokenness that can only be healed through the Crucified God. Forgiveness and reconciliation is a spiritual gift from God our Father who created us. In Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God* the origin of the Doctrine of Jesus' Two Natures (Divine and Human) and His suffering is explained. Regeneration, or rebirth and healing of one's Spirit, is related to the work of the Holy Spirit and its saving of human beings through their faith in Jesus Christ. Thus regeneration is a biblical theme of "salvation that emphasizes the rebirth or re-creation of fallen [sinful or broken] human beings by the indwelling Holy Spirit. One central biblical text depicting salvation as regeneration is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in

¹⁷ Ibid., 177.

which he emphasized the necessity of being ‘born again’ (Jn 3:1-21).”¹⁸ As a result of the gift of the Holy Spirit given by God the Father to humankind through Jesus, we have also been given the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith and by grace. We have inherited the potential for healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, and hope through Jesus Christ.

Theologian Karl Rahner has noted that “‘God’s relationship to us is three-fold. And this three-fold (free and unmerited) relationship to us is not merely an image or analogy of the immanent Trinity; it *is* this Trinity itself, even though communicated as free grace.’ Thus the unity and the Trinity of God belong together in one tractate [or treatise].”¹⁹

Moltmann notes how Martin Luther “never arrived at a developed Christological doctrine of the Trinity;” however, Luther did stay “within the framework of the early church’s doctrine of two natures.”²⁰ Luther “sees in the cross God’s descent to the level of our sinful nature and our death, not so that man is divinized, but so that he is de-divinized and given new humanity [and reconciliation] in the community of the crucified Christ.”²¹ Indeed in all Christian churches, “the cross has become the sign which distinguishes the churches from other religions and modes of belief. At the same time, it must be noted that in the ancient world of religion, the doctrine of the Trinity in the concept of God was the doctrine which marked off Christianity from polytheism, pantheism and monotheism.”²²

¹⁸ Ibid., 101.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 240.

²⁰ Ibid., 235.

²¹ Ibid., 213.

²² Ibid., 235.

The hope for healing broken relationships is possible; the spiritual journey and the psychological liberation and freedom from sin are a gift from God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christians know that reconciliation is possible through God and Christ. Furthermore, the biblical witness declared in Paul's letter to the Colossians describes the Supremacy of Christ who was created in God's image. Additional biblical references "on Christ as the *image* of God" can also be found in 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4 as well as in Philippians 2:6 and Hebrews 1:3.

From this Trinitarian perspective, to the psychological dynamics of imperfect human relationships, the searching for reconciliation and healing is found in the ways humans face and work through their shame, guilt, and salvation. Just as joy and love are human experiences, the depths of painful depression, despair, and loss of hope are also human experiences. The narratives of our lives create our past, present, and future stories. Depending on specific psychological and environmental factors and experiences, resulting memories can be pleasant or painful. "Christian faith understands itself as faithfulness to hope as it is mindful of the resurrection of Christ, and as faithfulness to the earth as it is mindful of the cross of Christ. Because it leads man into this history [with and] of God, it frees him for an acceptance of human life which is capable of suffering and capable of love."²³ Our unique life stories are profoundly personal and life-giving when shared across generations of imperfect human beings.

Since the sinful nature of humanity brings suffering, Christian theology provides relief from our suffering and hope for the future. Through suffering and the spiritual journey of healing, healthy relationships are possible. In humankind's search for

²³ Ibid., 313.

meaning and purpose, the hope for spiritual and psychological wholeness and salvation motivates not only real people but fictional characters as well. When relationships are broken then suffering occurs; the process of forgiveness takes time and faith. As Alan Padgett said, “Forgiveness is a personal action which implies a relationship and a history. [Forgiveness] presupposes a personal or corporate wrong-doing or offense. This offense is removed by the offending party [throughout the forgiveness process]. This allows for restored communion but does not require it.”²⁴

In understanding and analyzing the father and daughter relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, I believe Shakespeare and Godwin both understood how complex emotional entanglements can evolve into stories of redemption and healing. Thus “brotherhood with Christ means the suffering and active participation in the history of this God. Its criterion is the history of the crucified and risen Christ. Its power is the . . . liberating spirit of God. Its consummation lies in the kingdom of the triune God which sets all things free and fills them with [hope and] meaning.”²⁵ Within the narrative context “when relationships are broken, when people hurt and the world is dark, forgiveness mends, soothes and illuminates.”²⁶

Following are the stories of two families and how “forgiveness in the face of enormous obstacles” happened throughout (and even after) the lives of the main characters ended. In God’s time when the people/characters were ready for forgiveness, then reconciliation happened. These two families show how “forgiveness is an

²⁴ Alan Padgett, class lecture, February 11, 2010.

²⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 338.

²⁶ Janet Ramsey, “The Context of Forgiveness,” class handout, Spring 2010, 1.

achievement of the Holy Spirit, a sign of God's pure grace, breaking into [their] lives precisely in the midst of [their] greatest pain."²⁷ In the following chapter the relationship between King Lear and his youngest daughter Cordelia is descriptively analyzed as their father/daughter relationship changes from the beginning of their story until its end. The evolving father/daughter relationship shows how their reconciliation and forgiveness journey is arduous, but infinitely rewarding.

²⁷ Ibid.,1.

CHAPTER FOUR
AN AGELESS STORY

“Forgiveness and grudge are at the heart of many human dramas. People are humiliated, jilted, stabbed in the back, robbed of their inheritance, wounded by selfishness and inconsideration, steered wrong by a trusted person. . . .A parent leaves home and never returns.”¹ Fictional stories of human dramas are often based on real life narratives. William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is one of the

great stories of forgiveness [in which] a wronged person finds it within her heart to take back the person who betrayed [her]. . . . In *King Lear*, Shakespeare takes forgiveness to a still deeper place. . . . Cordelia’s heart goes out to her father even though she does not know whether his heart has softened toward her. . . .Cordelia will not debase herself, but she remains tender even in pride. . . .This healthy balance between love and pride, evident in [Cordelia] . . ., is a cornerstone of the forgiving spirit.²

Forgiveness can be “a bridge back from hatred and alienation as well as a liberation from two kinds of hell: bitterness and victimhood on one side; guilt, shame, and self-recrimination on the other. . . .The need to forgive--which may grow out of understanding, gratitude, sympathy, regret over the hurt one has caused by not forgiving, so simply a wish to reunite may be as strong as the need to be forgiven.”³

¹ Robert Karen, *The Forgiving Self: The Road from Resentment to Connection* (New York: Anchor Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 2001), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

King Lear is an ageless story of forgiveness. Through Lear's own suffering he was touched by the healing power of the Holy Spirit and was reconciled to Cordelia. His voluntary sacrifice as a loving father for his daughter Cordelia (and vice-versa for her father) can be compared to the voluntary sacrifice God the Father made for his son Jesus. In comparing the voluntary actions of God the Father and Lear for their beloved children, I believe we see how important it is for parents and their estranged children to be reconciled before death occurs if possible.

As Shakespeare's play begins we learn that King Lear has had many successful years controlling both his kingdom and family. However in the beginning of the play, Lear announces his retirement from his kingship. This action begins his inheritance struggles with his three daughters. The power of the play's themes move "across disciplines and inform our work with families. Sub themes include redemption; the wisdom of fools, the high costs of growth and decline; the hard-won nature of human maturity, the terrible results of false pride; [and] the pain all-too possible in cross-generational relationships."⁴

Just as Lear was faced with questions related to the meaning of his life, so too are most human beings who live to and through the "last career." King Lear's concerns are an example of the many questions older adults have as they age. Why I am still here? What good am I to anyone now? These questions surrounding life's meaning and purpose become more poignant within the later life stage. Change is a part of life. There are times when life transitions or changes are radically needed; for example, when a family member is born, moves, encounters a serious illness, or especially when there is a

⁴Janet Ramsey and Alan Padgett, class handout –IC2640, May 2010, 3.

death in the family. Thus a life span approach helps us to see the necessity for resiliency as we age.

According to Ramsey and Padgett there are numerous family stories that are “both interpersonal and intrapersonal”⁵ Every real person and/or three-dimensional literary character carries within himself/herself interpersonal and intrapersonal life stories. The fictional story of aging and forgiveness in *King Lear*, just as in real life, shows how contemporary and universal Shakespeare’s play still is today. Thus, it is easy to conclude that Shakespeare’s insight into human nature has been successfully and universally rendered in his playwriting; his writing reaches beyond his lifetime and his stories still empathically translate the human condition. Shakespeare was influenced by the history, beliefs, and practices of the Christian church. Shakespeare and Martin Luther both were interested in the conditions of daily life. They both explored change and life transitions. Aging, forgiveness, and man’s sinfulness were explored and analyzed in depth by these two great thinkers.

The Reformation came to England for many reasons including cultural, economical, social, political, and theological conflicts. Therefore it would have been impossible for Shakespeare **not** to have been touched by popular and official interactions between the church and the state; the English Reformation was inevitable with all the upheaval in Europe. Interestingly William Shakespeare’s father, John Shakespeare who was Stratford’s constable in 1558-59, (before his son William was born in 1564) kept

. . . the peace between Catholics and Protestants in the tense year of transition from the reign of the Catholic Mary to that of the Protestant Elizabeth. No doubt he [John Shakespeare] had difficult moments, but at least he could maintain . . . an air of studied neutrality. But as chamberlain, alderman, and bailiff, he had to

⁵Ibid., 4.

act to carry out the policies of the regime, and that meant something more than keeping the peace.⁶

Consequently William Shakespeare grew up in a Christian environment where there were private and public theological debates between Catholics and Protestants from the early Anglican Church. John Shakespeare and his fellow church council members were faced with theological changes that at times were frightening. As Greenblatt stresses, “it will not do to underestimate the mood of paranoia and the reality of threat all through these dangerous years [1580’s]. The assassination of Elizabeth, early in her reign, would almost certainly have changed everything in the religious climate of England.”⁷

Certainly William was influenced by what he saw as a child, youth, and young adult growing up in a family where theological discussions and differing viewpoints were a part of his daily experience. As William continued his education he had both professional and personal relationships with his schoolmasters. Along with his travels and life experiences the young Shakespeare was starting to gather ideas for his writing career. Eventually he would use much of his religious knowledge, historical research/chronicles, and experiences in his playwriting. As a result “the refashioning of traditional religious materials into secular performance, and the confounding of the sacred and the profane are characteristic of virtually the whole of Shakespeare’s

⁶Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 94-95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

achievement as dramatist and poet. “⁸ We know Shakespeare did a lot of research and drew his stories from a variety of resources.

Greenblatt points out while Shakespeare was writing *King Lear* he possibly referred to historical and legal documents to spark his creative playwriting. “Whether or not the Annesley [lawsuit] case actually triggered the writing of the tragedy, Shakespeare was singularly alert to the way in which the Leir legend was in touch with ordinary family tensions and familiar fears associated with old age. For the play’s central concerns, Shakespeare simply looked around him at the everyday world.”⁹ One of the real concerns for every past and present generation is retirement from the world of work, if one lives a long life. Even Shakespeare himself, who was only forty years old when he wrote *King Lear*, “seems to have begun contemplating the possibility of retirement—not so much planning for it as brooding about its perils—as early as 1604, when he sat down to write *King Lear*. The tragedy is his greatest meditation on extreme old age; on the painful necessity of renouncing power; on the loss of house, land, authority, love, eyesight, and sanity itself.”¹⁰

Some of the universal and generational experiences, issues, and concerns are part of “everyman’s” journey. The man Shakespeare, the character King Lear, and almost everyone sooner or later ponders, plans, and worries about their family relationships. In like manner throughout Shakespeare’s life he also questioned “his faith, his love, and his social role.”¹¹ Even Jesus’ questioned and even doubted his social role, his faith, and his

⁸ Ibid., 112-113.

⁹ Ibid., 357.

¹⁰ Ibid., 356.

¹¹ Ibid., 388.

interpersonal relationships.¹² Real life and fictional relationships provide ways for us to theologically investigate and reconcile broken connections so that answers to questions about faith, love, and social role can be explored throughout our lives.

The world of Shakespeare started in the town of Stratford and expanded beyond to many real and imaginary places. Upon Shakespeare's retirement from public life he returned to his hometown and lived in Stratford until his death in April 1616. In his private life with his family and closest friends there were interpersonal joys and sorrows. Shakespeare's familial relationships with his wife, Anne, and their children provided situations and conflicts that were reflected in his writing. Toward the end of his public career, especially in London, and into his own retirement in Stratford, Shakespeare struggled with his feelings for his eldest daughter Susanna and younger daughter Judith. In the end "the great bulk of the estate would go to Susanna and her husband [John Hall], but Judith would not be excluded entirely. . . .his daughter Judith was not getting much of her father's wealth, and her husband [Thomas Quiney]. . . would not get his hands on any of it."¹³ I am suggesting that there were uneasy, difficult circumstances between Shakespeare and his daughters. Not only in relationship to his daughter Judith, but also in relationship to Shakespeare's wife Anne. In fact, in Shakespeare's revised last will and testament, completed shortly before his death in 1616, he slighted his wife Anne, his daughter Judith and her husband Thomas Quiney. Apparently Shakespeare favored his daughter Susanna who was twenty years younger than he was when he retired. Thus,

¹² Matthew 6:23; Matthew 14:31; Matthew 28:17; John 8:45-47; John 12:37-38; Luke 5:12-14; Matthew 13:58; John 12:37; John 12:37-40; Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 14:26; John 19:26-27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 385-386.

It cannot be an accident that. . . his last plays—[*King Lear*—written in 1605], *Pericles* [1607], *The Winter's Tale* [1610-1611], and *The Tempest* [1611]—are centered on the father-daughter relationship and are so deeply anxious about incestuous desires. What Shakespeare wanted was only what he could have in the most ordinary and natural way: the pleasure of living near his daughter and her husband and their child.¹⁴

From this fact I conclude that Shakespeare combined his playwriting with his personal life. Certainly many writers can identify with using their personal experiences as part of their artistic expression. Indeed Shakespeare understood during the final hours of life our relational need to be together is stronger than any temporary satisfaction gained from either pride and/or angry separation. The need for parents and children to be reconciled is greater than estrangement when the end of life is near.

Retirement was viewed differently in Shakespeare's time than it is for modern Americans, who have at least some social security and medical care provided, even if their families abandon them. In Shakespeare's time parents depended upon their grown children to take care of them when they could no longer take care of themselves. Discovering why even King Lear, let alone the rest of society, was threatened by "retirement" helps to make sense of the personal threat Lear fears as he is aging.

In the culture of Tudor and Stuart England, where the old demanded the public deference of the young, retirement was the focus of particular anxiety. It put a severe strain on the politics and psychology of deference by driving a wedge between status—what Lear at society's pinnacle calls 'The name, all the additions to a king' (1.1.136)—and power."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 389-390.

¹⁵ Ibid., 358.

In contrast to our modern perceptions of retirement, *King Lear* focuses on a real fear in a world in which the needs of the old were not always provided for or even possible to establish. The fact was that in Shakespeare's time

once a father had turned over his property to his children, once he had lost his ability to enforce his will, his authority [and identity] would begin to crumble away. Even in the house that had once been his own, he would become what was called a sojourner. . . . [Thus] Parents facing retirement frequently hired a lawyer to draw up what were called maintenance agreements, contracts by which, in return for the transfer of family property, children undertook to provide food, clothing, and shelter."¹⁶

Shakespeare like so many others had saved money and prepared himself for the time when he would not be working. In fact, "from 1602 to 1613, . . . Shakespeare carefully accumulated and laid out his money so that in his old age he would never have to depend upon his daughters—or upon the theater."¹⁷ Shakespeare's hard earned fortune was important to protect; likewise, *King Lear's* fortune was important to protect.

. . . [A]t the core of the tragedy is the great fear that haunted the playwright's own class: the fear of humiliation, abandonment, and a loss of identity in the wake of retirement. Lear's maddened rage is a response not only to his daughters' vicious ingratitude but also to the horror of being turned into an ordinary old man, a sojourner begging his children for charity. . . . If *King Lear* is any indication, he [Shakespeare] shared with his contemporaries a fear of retirement and dread of dependence upon children.¹⁸

The retirement crisis in Lear's life, then, was not an unusual issue for Shakespeare to write about as he himself was considering the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimension of aging. Moreover Shakespeare was concerned in his own family about forgiveness. He knew that even in his own life the urgency to resolve familial and

¹⁶ Ibid., 359.

¹⁷ Ibid., 361.

¹⁸ Ibid., 360-361.

financial problems were part of life. And, this is what happens at the beginning of *King Lear*. Forgiveness and any kind of reconciliation between Lear and his daughters seem very remote. Certainly the father-daughter relationship between Lear and Goneril and Regan will never be reconciled or healed. However, Lear's relationship with his youngest daughter does have the potential for healing and reconciliation as their journey unfolds throughout the five acts of *King Lear*.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* provides lessons in the understanding of forgiveness and how hopeful reconciliation is possible even in the most damaged, broken relationships. According to Ramsey and Padgett "learning to forgive and be forgiven is a challenging process for all people. . . . What sort of real, yet spiritual, vision might enable us to forgive? What . . . is the place of intersection between Christ's work on the cross, together with his resurrection, and the estrangement and brokenness in our relationships?"¹⁹ For me, the intersection between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit within us, is where the Trinity meets us on earth and heals our broken selves along with other broken relationships. The play's plot encourages the reader/audience to see how a "retiring king and foolish father whose estrangements, brokenness, and reconciliations [especially with Cordelia] can broaden and deepen our perceptions of human nature and forgiveness."²⁰ Human nature and Lear's aging reality clash early in the play.

He wonders with us what it means to be human, what happenings might drive us to despair, and, finally, how we might experience the radically changed hearts required for a re-pictured world, a world transformed by the very events that threaten to undo us. In *King Lear*, specifically, he allows us to watch as one

¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁰ Ibid., 42.

nearly broken old man experiences a radical shift in perspective, granting us reason and space enough to enlarge our own [complex human natures].”²¹

An audience watches as Lear’s reality and ability to control his life and others brings him to the breaking point. Who could not empathize with Lear’s humanity? What does he need to learn about the human condition?

From the beginning of the play until the end the reader/audience is forced to consider how and in what ways the father/daughter relationship can be reconciled. At the beginning of the play could father and daughter be psychologically and spiritually still children? Since they were eventually reconciled something intrapersonally and interpersonally shifts in their self-understanding and of one another. Their spiritual growth was unexpected; however, this growth was needed for both the father and his daughter to regain their lost intimacy. The relationship between Lear and Cordelia was resurrected and lives again.

Arguments for understanding the Christian perspective in *King Lear* have been noted by Ramsey and Padgett when they assert the play’s theme of resurrection and hope.

. . . [I]t is not difficult to insist that *The Tragedy of King Lear* contains powerful Christian themes—in fact, that it captures the mystery of the death to self and resurrection of hope that lie at the heart of both the human experience and of our faith. . . . **Thus we learn with Lear that kingdoms fade and go, people get old and die, our life plot can horribly disappoint us, but, in the end, if forgiving love remains, there is always hope [my emphasis].**²²

I believe hope and trust is restored to Lear and Cordelia when a spiritual transformation was brought about by their significant soul-searching; that is, when the connection to the Holy Spirit is restored through God the Father to them.

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Ibid., 44-45.

Certainly we learn early in our families if it is possible to be forgiven or not. If a forgiving nature is not learned and practiced in our families, then there is potentially ongoing chaos, stress, discomfort, and even fear in interpersonal relationships. In *King Lear* as in real life, there are “beliefs that unduly complicate things as we try to forgive or accept forgiveness.”²³ What are some beliefs surrounding forgiveness? What has to happen before forgiveness is possible? Three beliefs surrounding forgiveness are identified by Janet Ramsey and Alan Padgett.

The first false belief identified by Ramsey and Padgett is “that forgiveness will occur as a single, one-time event.”²⁴ Forgiveness is a process that takes time. Are there steps to forgiveness and reconciliation? Yes there are “steps” according to the experience and research of Ramsey and Padgett; however, the process is not a linear one, but rather a growth process with individual psychological and spiritual dimensions.²⁵ In fact “. . . forgiveness and reconciliation, while closely related, are not the same. Both require a transformation of self and depend, from a faith perspective, on the abiding presence of God in our lives. In the end, injured persons stop ruminating and let go of their bitterness and hatred.”²⁶

The second false belief is “that forgiveness is mostly an individual matter, ‘just between us two.’ The reality of life is that brokenness, oppression, and hatred are intractable social realities as well, systemic in nature, even when the estrangement

²³ Ibid., 45-46.

²⁴ Ibid., 46.

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

²⁶ Ibid., 46-47.

appears to be located in individuals.”²⁷ Throughout the play we see that the complexity of the community connections along with the interpersonal and intergenerational relationships. The story (as in real life) is not just about two people attempting to sort out their issues; rather, it involved many different people/characters and their individual personalities and issues. The social connections go beyond Lear and Cordelia. Their world connects to the community as well as to their understanding and perceptions of themselves. What changed so that forgiveness was possible between these two? How did their understanding of love change throughout the play? Within themselves Lear and Cordelia experienced God’s grace and forgiveness in a new way.

Lear’s early understanding of love was similar, with his kingdom, rather than his affections, the reward he offered. . . . Cordelia’s understanding of love . . . stands as a corrective to this naïve concept of love and/or forgiveness *on demand*. . . . In its most profound dimensions forgiveness is never a human accomplishment, an act we do on our own, by our own power. . . . The truth . . . is rooted and grounded in the grace of God. Rather than an isolated, individual act, forgiveness . . . calls for a whole new way of life, located within a new community that embodies the grace that makes it possible.²⁸

The third belief surrounding forgiveness is that one must be foolish and even weak to forgive. “This lie stands in direct opposition to the journey of Jesus to the cross, which is a story of strength, wisdom, and the love of God, not a portrayal of the weakness of God as it appears to non-Christians.”²⁹ In summary, Ramsey and Padgett have found that (1) forgiveness is a process that takes a long time, (2) forgiveness is not an individual

²⁷ Ibid., 47.

²⁸ Ibid., 47-48.

²⁹ Ibid., 48.

matter but involves the interconnected community, and that (3) forgiveness is not an act of weakness, but an act of maturity and a spiritual gift from God.³⁰

Before King Lear was able to see his own contribution to his estrangement with Cordelia he needed to suffer and feel his own humanity. In classic Greek tragedy the term for damaging, excessive self-pride is *hubris*. “Lear’s hubris is beaten down by betrayal, rejection, and even by nature herself [in the storm]; this must occur before he can be reconciled with Cordelia, who has truly loved him all along.”³¹

In Act Five the reader/audience can see the transformation that has occurred within Lear from his suffering. Finally Lear truly understands and “owns” his sin of excessive pride and rage and is able to journey toward psychological and spiritual maturity. At this point in the play he wants more than anything to simply go away and be with Cordelia; he learns she has always loved her father. **I believe that through Lear’s own suffering he was touched by the healing power of the Holy Spirit and was reconciled to Cordelia.** In the end Lear says to Cordelia: “Come, let’s away to prison: / We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage, / When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness. So we’ll live, / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales and laugh / At gilded butterflies” (5.3.8-13).³² . . .

When I see the word “*butterflies*” I think of Jesus’ resurrection; I think of the hopeful promise of our future resurrection when we will be restored to full relationship and have been healed by the Holy Spirit. As we empathize with our brothers and sisters

³⁰ Ibid., 40-49.

³¹ Ibid., 45-46.

³² William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act 5, scene 3, lines 8-13.

in Christ and learn from our own sinful nature, so too have Lear and Cordelia learned that their father/daughter relationship is immensely more important than all the riches in the world. Clearly,

. . .his dreams now are filled with images of close relationality; narcissistic isolation has been overcome. Love has trumped his need for power: Cordelia's love, freely given. He visualizes his future time with her as a time of humble joy—song, laughter, prayer, and the telling of tales. These are now what he values in life, precisely the simple delights of life he overlooked as a king and, most likely, a father.³³

In the final moments Lear feels the urgency to resolve his differences with his daughter while he can and before it is too late.

Psychological and spiritual wisdom, forgiveness, and reconciliation are gleaned when the healing power of the Trinity is experienced. Ramsey and Padgett describe how God's gift of grace gives a sense of hope and new life when forgiveness occurs.

[W]hen persons who are estranged can put aside old goals and find a vision for relationality that hints of laughter, prayer, and the telling of stories great and small, then human forgiveness becomes possible. When, through God's help, we can leave the madness of our despair and accept the losses and hurts we have experienced, human forgiveness becomes possible. When we let God turn our suffering into empathy, such that we no longer see the beloved as a means to our own end but revel in simply being in her [or his] presence, then forgiveness *as a way of life* becomes possible.³⁴

Not only the father/daughter relationship in *King Lear* is “out of order” but also their world as they know it is greatly disturbed. In a disturbed situation there is a natural urgency to reclaim order from chaos and to restore equilibrium. The universal journey of all human beings from broken relationships to functional relationships requires the Holy

³³ Ramsey and Padgett, “The Wisdom of Forgiveness: Singing Like Birds in the Cage with Old King Lear,” *Word and World* 27, no. 1 (2007): 48-49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

Spirit to be working in people's lives. Lear encounters the Holy Spirit in the storm scene which is analogous to Lear's spiritual storm. This scene is when he "becomes aware of the common humanity he shares with the poor naked wretches."³⁵ His understanding of order in "his" universe has been greatly shaken. Then as Lear becomes aware of his own humanity and vulnerability in the storm, it takes

. . . only a little shock to drive him over the frontiers of sanity. The Bedlam beggar [Edgar disguised] provides him with a living example of the poverty he has been pitying. . . [and never experienced. This moment is] a dramatic answer to the Psalmist's question: 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him?' Stripped of his proud array, stripped of everything except the basic necessities, man's life is cheap as beast's."³⁶

In terms of Lear's spiritual growth, his journey toward understanding of his relationship to his own humanity (and others) is evolving as his personal story unfolds.

Where is justice for Lear, Cordelia, and everyman when the KING himself is subjected to such injustices? Has he suffered enough, and/or "emptied himself" enough, to allow the Holy Spirit to heal his broken heart? What has Lear done wrong to deserve such anguish? While Lear ponders this justice question for himself he begins to see what has happened in his relationship with his three daughters. Lear realizes that Cordelia really loves him; in contrast, Goneril and Regan love his property and their earthly kingdoms more than they love their father. The "evil" sisters Goneril and Regan are now seen in opposition to the "good" Cordelia. Ironically while Lear is becoming cognitively aware of his "mistake," he also becomes obsessed with justice for himself and others. Specifically,

³⁵ Kenneth Muir, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: KING LEAR* (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), xlvi.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xlviii-xlix.

. . .in the trial scene, Lear is concerned with justice—‘a kind of wild justice’—and with the cause of hardness of heart. When he next appears, in the fourth act, we see him in a new stage of self-knowledge. He realizes that he has been flattered like a dog, and that a king is merely a man. . . . [Lear now realizes] Justice is merely an instrument of the rich and powerful to oppress the poor and weak. But since all are equally guilty, none does offend. Since all are miserable sinners, all have an equal right to be forgiven. . . .³⁷

Here is where Lear appears to have “discovered” that we all are sinners and saints who deserve forgiveness, including himself. The intersection of Martin Luther’s theology with Lear’s spiritual discovery reminds us that we all have equal rights in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can be forgiven, repent, and move forward into a new life. To turn away from sin is to be healed by the Holy Spirit. The concept of the Old Adam and the New Adam is present in Lear’s spiritual journey and resurrection. Muir also notes how Lear changes as he suffers.

The old Lear died in the storm. The new Lear is born in the scene in which he is reunited with Cordelia. His madness marked the end of the willful, egotistical monarch. He is resurrected as a fully human being . . . [and his] awakening into life is a painful process. After the reconciliation, Lear makes only two more appearances. In the scene in which he is being led off to prison he has apparently overcome the desire for vengeance: he has left behind him all those attributes of kingship which had prevented him from attaining his full stature as a man; he has even passed beyond his own pride. At the beginning of the play, he is incapable of disinterested love, for he uses the love of others to minister to his own egotism. His prolonged agony and his utter loss of everything *free* his heart from the bondage of the selfhood. He unlearns hatred, and learns love and humility. He loses the world and gains his soul.³⁸

Shakespeare’s theological implications in *King Lear* came from his own experiences growing up with his Catholic mother alongside a father who was a Protestant. His first-hand knowledge came from his mother’s Catholicism and his

³⁷ Ibid., xlix.

³⁸ Ibid., xlix-1.

father's Protestantism at a time when the Church of England was the favored religion. With the theological debates and "double lives" lived by "two competing belief systems" during his own life, William Shakespeare used his creativity to blend pagan and Christian beliefs in his playwriting without making a commitment to either Catholicism or Protestantism.³⁹ John Shakespeare, his father, was "convinced that both [Catholic and Protestant] positions . . . were possible to hold at once."⁴⁰ It appears the adage "like father, like son" could also be used in describing the theological convictions of John and his son William. Making a choice between "being" a Catholic or a Protestant had consequences within his own community as the later Reformation and the early Renaissance years collided. Being "both" a Catholic and a Protestant was not realistic or even possible. In his writing William had the literary freedom to "play" with Catholic and Anglican theology, along with the mythological pagan Roman and Greek gods/goddesses. For me, what transcends and communicates beyond his specific plays is Shakespeare's ability to create from a variety of sources and viewpoints, while maintaining his aesthetic and theological distance.

As Muir notes, "Shakespeare goes back to a pre-Christian world and builds up from the [essential] nature of man himself, and not from revealed [or practiced] religion [of his time; instead he explores], those same moral and religious ideas that were being undermined."⁴¹ Ultimately compassionate forgiveness, reconciliation, and love rank above all needs. Our spiritual lives demand "mutual forgiveness" and "the exchange of

³⁹ Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, 102-103.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

⁴¹ Muir, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, 1.

charity” even before physical and material needs. Significantly, Shakespeare was aware of humanity’s spiritual dimension taking precedence over the chaotic pride of broken relationships. Thus, the broad nature of Shakespeare’s theological perspectives, including Christianity, “shows us his pagan characters groping their way towards a recognition of the values traditional in his [Christian] society.”⁴²

Lear and Cordelia grow psychologically and spiritually throughout the play. Their individual suffering reminds me of a painful metamorphosis or rebirth of their broken relationship. This healing takes time and patience. Psychological and spiritual suffering leads us once again to the suffering of Jesus on the Cross. When Jesus is betrayed, arrested, and brought before Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:1-4) he is angry, fearful, and feels God has forsaken him. We know the Father and his Son are reconciled, but Jesus does suffer psychologically and spiritually before this reconciliation.

Cordelia has suffered just as Jesus for honesty and virtue. In the end Cordelia and Jesus are rewarded by their fathers. Cordelia is forgiven by her father before she dies. And Jesus’ eternal reward comes after his resurrection when he is at the right hand of his Father in Heaven. Both King Lear and God the Father have loved and suffered with their children.

As Lear begins to recognize his reckless actions and their results, he eventually learns compassion for others during his suffering and stormy trials. When Lear kneels and asks Cordelia for forgiveness, the dramatic, psychological, and spiritual transformation of their father/daughter relationship empathically moves a

⁴² Ibid., li.

reader/audience. Shakespeare has shown us much about the universal condition of being human in *King Lear*.

Shakespeare's communities in real life and in his plays were vibrant, robust, and accessible. He knew what being in a Christian community meant to his own mother and father. He also knew the reality of daily conflicts and theological divisions within that community. As John Donne said "no man is an island;" Shakespeare was a keen observer of the world around him with all of its beauty, joy, and pain. In humankind's yearning for daily order and calmness, I believe Shakespeare saw that the "faith of a mustard seed" has the potential to bring renewed peace, reconciliation, and wholeness to those souls who are lost in the "wilderness."

Just as we know the peace that passes all understanding through Jesus, I truly see *King Lear* as a literary example of our human vulnerability and need for forgiveness and reconciliation. We have discovered forgiveness is both a gradual process and an event. Stories help us see our weaknesses and strengths as human beings. Elderly characters such as King Lear show us that "by releasing the burden of unfinished business through forgiveness, elders can achieve a sense of peace and closure in their lives."⁴³ There is a catharsis, or release and cleansing of pent-up emotions, by the end of Lear and Cordelia's lives. Thus in letting go of past and present burdens we can look to the future with hope.

F.LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage state: "Forgiveness will be sustained if people gain wisdom from their suffering and develop strategies for avoiding the same conflicts or problems in the future. Forgiveness is also associated with the capacity for hope, and hope is the crucial virtue that enables people to envision a positive future

⁴³ Fr. James P. Oberle, "Forgiveness: A Spiritual Value That Fosters Physical, Psychological and Spiritual Health," *Aging & Spirituality* 14, no. 3, (Fall 2002): 7.

horizon.”⁴⁴ Not only in our psychological understanding of forgiveness, but also in our spiritual understanding, OT and NT stories help us to recognize our own stories in them.

Therefore,

. . . forgiveness and reconciliation are also guiding themes in the plot of the Christian narrative. . . . **Our personal stories or autobiographies become theological by offering episodes of estrangement and forgiveness that invite theological reflection** [emphasis added]. . . . Our experiences of human faces of forgiveness can offer us just enough hope to keep searching for the divine face of forgiveness.⁴⁵

The “divine face of forgiveness” often parallels a long-suffering result reaped from life’s trials, challenges, obstacles, storms, estrangements, and temptations. Indeed Jesus emphasizes prayer and mutual forgiveness when he says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”⁴⁶

The process or journey to forgiveness takes place in God’s time. Perhaps the desired catharsis or cleansing purification will take only a few minutes. However, the desired reconciliation may take days, months, years, or even after death as is the case in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*. The duration of waiting for someone or something to heal shows us that God is in control of our lives; our human impatience will not hurry growth and/or changes.

In both *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, the process of transforming forgiveness and reconciliation takes courageous vulnerability to the healing

⁴⁴ F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Michigan: Baker Academic/Baker Publishing Group, 2003), 98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁶ Mark 11: 24-25.

power of the Holy Spirit. When significant familial relationships are neglected and/or broken there is an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. Since Shakespeare was astonishingly brilliant in his understanding of the human soul and our need for healthy connections, it is not surprising that he said, “Self love is not so vile a sin as self neglecting.” Shakespeare observed in his own life the complexity of familial relationships; he transferred these experiences and stories into his universal narratives/plays. The trials and temptations of real people provided Shakespeare with the material, motivation, and vehicle to dramatically communicate the brokenness of the human spirit and how it can be restored.

CHAPTER FIVE

“THIS ABOVE ALL: TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE”¹

As I move the focus of my thesis from the father/daughter relationship(s) in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to the familial experiences in Gail Godwin’s *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, the family of Father Walter Gower, his wife Ruth, and their daughter Margaret have also been struggling with their family relationships. Father Walter Gower is the Rector of St. Cuthbert’s Episcopal Church in twentieth-century Romulus, Virginia. Ruth Gower is a stay at home wife and mother. When the novel begins their daughter Margaret is an adult telling her story; she narrates memories of her family’s past life together and apart. She begins her reflections with memories from her first three weeks of first grade. On Wednesday, September 13, 1972, Margaret’s world (as she knew it) changed dramatically. Her mother Ruth leaves their Romulus home with a long-time artist friend for a “vacation” and never returns. As Margaret tells her family’s story, we learn how a “Black Curtain” of depression frequently descended without warning upon her father. The painful dynamics of their family struggles, including their loyalty to one another, their denial of her father’s mental illness, and its effects upon their family is the novel’s subject. Eventually “Father Melancholy’s” bouts of unpredictable and unrelenting episodes of psychological and physical pain take their toll on each family member. Their triangular brokenness and how Margaret grows up

¹William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3.

and through her crucible experience, as well as how she learns to eventually forgive both of her parents for their hurtful behavior, give the reader insight into the spirituality of aging and forgiveness. Throughout the novel Margaret keeps “searching for the [hopeful] divine face of forgiveness” *with and for* her father Walter and her mother Ruth. In contrast to *King Lear* that spans a relatively short period of time, Godwin’s novel spans decades of self-reflecting and experiences before Margaret comes to terms with her parents and her father’s “Black Curtain.” The spirit of melancholy is unrelenting and does not exclude any members of their family. *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* is “an emotionally tangled, subtle tale about the mysteries of family relationships, loss, forgiveness, and redemption . . . Godwin is a lovely, intricate writer, a creator of scenes of exquisite depth.”²

The American writer Gail Godwin was born on June 18, 1937, and continues to write and publish her journals, short stories, and novels. Five of her novels including *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* (1991) and its sequel *Evensong* (1999) have made the *New York Times*—Best Seller List. According to the National Book Foundation, characteristics of Godwin’s writing include an “empathetic method of entering many characters’ minds within a fluid narrative,” an “interest in allegory made real on a psychological level,” and “the effect of a powerful personality on a developing one.”³ In *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* the daughter Margaret Gower is the “developing one.” *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* is written in first-person narrative with a stream-of-consciousness style in which fluidity of the family’s past, present, and future are woven

² Gail Godwin, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1991), inside cover.

³ Ibid.

together throughout the 404 page novel. This 1991 best-seller “represented Godwin’s independence from the best-seller niche being marketed for her. The daughter of the title navigates her relationships with her father, an Episcopal minister [rector]; and with a classic Godwin character, a bewitching theatrical auteur [Madelyn Farley]. Theology, and its non-doctrinal meaning in spiritual life, became one of the areas in which Godwin began to act as a leading explorer” in American literature.⁴

From the first page Margaret draws us into her perception of the childhood events by reviewing the details leading up to the moment her mother abandoned their family. Her father’s manic-depressive bouts took a heavy toll on his marriage to Ruth as well as on his relationship with Margaret. In the second chapter Margaret is interested in Princess Diana’s 1981 marriage to the Prince of Wales; but, she admits her interest in their story was. . .

for a separate, personal reason. Hers was one more story that reinforced my own position. She, too, had been six years old when her mother had run away. . . This runaway mother had been thirty-one when she bolted. Three years older than [my mother] Ruth. As each of these statistics became available, I fitted it where it belonged in my system of comparisons. Diana’s mother had been married to Althorp thirteen years when she left home. Ruth had been married to Daddy only eight. But Diana’s mother had left *four* children behind, one of them only three years old. I had to admit that was more serious: three more children had been hurt and one very young.⁵

Early in the novel Margaret demonstrates her developing awareness of others’ suffering, as well as her beginning development of her immense compassion for others. The reader discovers Margaret’s ability to empathize with those she cares for more and more as she grows up. At the end of the novel, it is her honest, compassionate quality

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Godwin, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, 61.

that influences her decision as a young adult to study and become a writer and an Episcopal priest. Perhaps, “like father, like daughter” is emerging as Margaret’s character grows up in her troubled home.

As the plot develops feelings of anger, resentment, and unresolved issues erupt in the Gower family. Several of these events and feelings eventually lead to their estrangement and continued emotional denial of Father Gower’s serious illness. Father Walter Gower’s mental illness “infected” the whole family with resentment. Even though Walter knew he should take the prescribed anti-depressants, he refused. On more than one occasion Father Gower, affectionately called Daddy by his daughter, feels the medication that Dr. MacGruder periodically prescribes makes him too drowsy and interferes with his career. Father Gower and his wife Ruth know, along with their daughter Margaret, that “the big” depressions “could last for months,” and they “came on suddenly and often for no apparent reason.”⁶ Father Gower struggles to avoid getting and taking a prescription “’because [he says], I can’t help feeling that if I could just once get to the bottom of it . . . then maybe I could come out the other end triumphant.’ . . . Besides, they make me drowsy, or they make my mind go all mushy. . . .”⁷

Father Gower felt threatened by his anxiety and fear of losing his energy, professional status, and his focus as a pastor if he would take the medication. He is also worried certain individuals in his congregation will notice his symptoms. Sadly Father Gower’s family suffered the most, along with himself, during his frequent depressive

⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷ Ibid., 35-36.

episodes. The denial of his illness eventually leads to the family's physical and emotional separation and brokenness.

The familial dynamics in the Gower family changed as Walter struggled with episodes of depression. Early in the novel his wife Ruth shows her concern and frustration with her husband. The entire family becomes miserable when Walter is struggling with a "big depression." As Margaret narrates her story, she tells the reader how her parents respond to the illness:

My mother's way of dealing with a depression when it was in an early stage tended more towards teasing, though sometimes with a biting edge. . . [Ruth would say] 'Let me call Doc MacGruder and get a prescription, before it gets too bad. . . It takes so much out of you.' She didn't say, it *makes me miserable, too; it takes so much out of us.* But I could hear it in her voice, the way I often heard her saying things underneath what she appeared to be saying [*italics mine*].⁸

During a phone conversation later in the story after Ruth "moved to New York" with Madelyn Farley, a friend Ruth had known while at boarding school and who was a successful scenic designer in New York, Walter attempts to be overly cheerful while talking to his wife. He says "cheerfully, 'That's fine. . . . you do what you have to do, honey, Margaret and I are holding the fort.'"⁹ Below the surface of this comment is enormous pain as Walter (and Margaret) are "holding the fort" and taking care of everything in Ruth's absence. Margaret is afraid for both her mother and her father as she sees their marriage falling apart; she is only in the first grade when this event happens and her anxiety is profound. Margaret is also angry at her mother for leaving them without even saying good-bye to her. She came home from her first day of school and

⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹ Ibid., 129.

her mother was gone: “Although I did not know it then, my life of unpremeditated childhood ended on Wednesday, September 13, 1972. . . . I was, and was destined to remain, an only child, and was more practiced in the management of adults.”¹⁰

Godwin often uses the ordinary phrase “holding the fort” as Margaret and her father deny for months the terrifying and painful reality that her mother is not ever going to return to Romulus. Their denial manifests itself when Walter keeps telling the people at his church and his daughter that Ruth is on a “vacation” and will return some day. At this point in the story both Margaret and her father are confused, lonely, and angry at her mother for not coming home. As the waiting becomes days, weeks, months, and even years, Margaret’s relationship with her father changed. The longer her mother stays in New York Margaret begins to see herself as “her father’s mainstay, his intellectual and spiritual companion, his ‘little wife’ in social obligations.”¹¹ At one point Margaret’s closest friend Harriet observes how much time and emotional energy Margaret puts into taking care of her father physically and psychologically. Harriet tells Margaret she is overdoing the

. . . empathy thing. It’s not healthy. What about *your* point of view? You never *will* finish being a daughter. . . . You think about *them* [*her parents*] entirely too much. . . . Do you know what you do, nine times out of ten, when we get together and I ask you how you are? You start talking about your father. His depression. His garden. His sermon. His memories of the seminary or that dead priest. . . . His memories of England [with your mother]. . . . You talk about *his* problems, what *he’s* reading. You never start off with how *you* are.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹¹ Ibid., 59.

¹² Ibid., 129-130.

Harriet's critical and wise observations (and warnings) indicate how Margaret has changed since her mother left Romulus. She warns Margaret to "watch out that it [empathy and intense interest in others] doesn't become a form of escape [from yourself]."¹³ The situation for Margaret and her father continue and do not improve as they both grieve her mother's leaving them. – Only a year later Madelyn and Ruth were traveling together in England. One evening Ruth was killed in a car accident as she returned home alone from getting Madelyn "two Cadbury chocolate bars with the orange filling."¹⁴ This news changes the dynamics of the father/daughter relationship more as Margaret attempts to be the "perfect" daughter for her father. At one point after her mother's death Margaret recalls one of her father's manic episodes during Holy Week and thinks: "Perhaps if my father had been in charge of a busier, more demanding parish, he would have been less depressed. Perhaps he wouldn't have been depressed at all, there wouldn't have been time."¹⁵ Ironically Godwin named this chapter a "Reasonable and Living Sacrifice." Margaret is beginning to see how their father/daughter relationship has some self-sacrificing aspects.

Throughout Godwin's psychological and realistic novel, Margaret and her father develop an unhealthy co-dependence on each other which is both touching and sad. When her father is struggling with his "Black Curtain" they are unable to communicate their feelings of anger, loss, and buried resentment toward Ruth. At another point Margaret's father was manic with energy and was able to be prepared for one of his

¹³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵ Ibid., 278.

Lenten sermons ahead of time. He tells his sleepy daughter one night that “I haven’t been so well and so ahead of time for all my Passion Week sermons in years, Margaret. I can’t say where this surge of energy has come from, but it has certainly come when I needed it.”¹⁶ Father “Melancholy’s” Black Curtain was gone for a while; however, it did have consequences for his daughter as she was losing sleep trying to listen to him late into those nights before Passion Week. In fact she tries to stay awake and listen to her father who “was chattering animatedly about his boyhood” during one of his manic moods.¹⁷ But Margaret is suspicious of her father’s extra energy; she wonders how long it will be before he will fall into again another low depression. There are many other examples throughout the novel showing how the relationship between Walter Gower and his daughter Margaret has grown uneasy for both of them.

Sixteen years pass from the time Ruth leaves in 1972 until Walter dies in the spring of 1988. Margaret notices how her father is instantly “nameless to himself” and the paramedics from the moment he dies. In the brief moments before Walter died Margaret sees how even with “all their medical training and acronymic vocabulary” they could not fix her father. Simply,

he was a case. A statistic. Sixty-year-old men are statistically slated to fill a certain quota of strokes and heart attacks, and on today’s date, Good Friday, 1988, he had contributed his body to the statistical quota. . . . [But] When did he last truly register me, take me in, think to himself consciously, even if only as a sidebar to his main preoccupation, ‘Yes, there’s my daughter Margaret’ [standing near me].¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 278.

¹⁷ Ibid., 278.

¹⁸ Ibid., 318.

Later as their family story continues for Margaret, a time comes when she is able to grieve and accept the deaths of her mother and father. There are several crisis points in Walter and Ruth's life together and separately which influence Margaret's story with them. Her attitude toward her parents, her estrangement from her mother, and the kind of relationship she had with her father –all prepare her for the theological and spiritual questions she will seek answers to. Indeed the father/daughter relationship changes as episodes of depression continue, as life events in his church and community take a toll on her father's health, as Father Gower's theology and wisdom evolve, and as his daughter grows up. When Margaret's own personal development is challenged or threatened in their co-dependent relationship, she begins to see forgiveness and knowledge about her parent's lives as a way to reconciliation with each one of them.

When the novel ends sixteen years after it begins (1972-1988), Margaret's character has been transformed from her initial feelings of anger and abandonment to forgiving reconciliation. At the end of the story Margaret visits places in England where her father wanted to show her before he died. In a stream-of-consciousness style Margaret says, "Daddy claimed his two years in England had been the happiest time in his single life. Everything appeared to him rinsed and shining. All the corners of his days were filled in, as they are when someone has found the work that best suits his disposition."¹⁹ What happened in his married life? – is the question that haunts Margaret for years. Eventually "the peace that passes all understanding" fills her with healing answers to her many questions about her parent's relationship. Interestingly Margaret refers to her father as "Daddy" throughout the entire novel, even after she is an adult. In

¹⁹ Ibid., 132.

contrast Margaret refers to her mother as Ruth throughout the entire novel; she does not call her “Mommy” or “Mom.”

After Margaret’s mother leaves their home, she finds herself thinking intently and questioning why her mother left:

I’d thought about it all as much from Ruth’s point of view as from my own. I came to *prefer* thinking of it from her side. That way, I could remain cool and dispassionate. Besides, it interested me to imagine it, like a story, from her point of view. It didn’t even hurt. . .

I saw her year away from us as a journey of some kind. I mean an inner journey. At the beginning she may have taken it a day at a time. . . I just need a little vacation from *them*, much as I love them both; I need a vacation from wifeness, motherhood, from being ‘The Rector’s Wife.’ I need to *collect* myself. Surely there must be a central character in me behind all these parts; surely there is more than being cheerleader to a melancholiac, swimming teacher, and afternoon entertainer of a child. I am those things, but where is the person behind it, the person who wants . . . what? I once wanted . . . what *was* it I wanted? Surely I must have wanted *something*.

She must have been leery about facing the world as a woman traveling with another woman, whatever her feelings may have been about Madelyn Farley. Everything in my mother’s background would have revolted at such a comedown. . . . [even to] fetch the fatal chocolate bars with orange filling to share with her.²⁰

Compared to her feminist theatre artist Madelyn, who was outspoken, driven, and had a “provocative theology,” Ruth attempted to find what *she wanted* by running away from her provincial lifestyle. Margaret writes for some reason “. . . she took the light with her and went on to somewhere else.”²¹ As Godwin says, it was the feminist decade of the 1970’s and women’s liberation was moving across the country. Why else would have Ruth run away from home? Certainly not to deliberately break her daughter’s and husband’s hearts? Nevertheless the brokenness was real and there was so much suffering in their family.

²⁰ Ibid., 128.

²¹ Ibid., 223.

In parallel to Margaret's ruminating over each of her parent's lives, Walter also ruminates endlessly over the details of his life together with Ruth before and after they were married. Margaret notices this and writes:

What were my father's thoughts about his anointed power of repairing misfortune when, instead of driving his bride along the familiar English road, proudly pointing out to her the sites where he as a priest had first known the experience of grace, he found himself being driven along this same road, which was now the site of his wife's violent death, by the person [Madelyn] who had take her away from him?"²²

Several months after her father's death, and as part of her grieving, Margaret also visits the place where her mother was killed in the automobile accident. She also visited many of the sites where her father planned to take her on vacation. During this transformational visit Margaret "scattered part of" her father's hair (from an earlier haircut) and "mixed the hairs" in England as a symbol of her parent's original love and their life together *before* she was born. Throughout her journey Margaret comes to realize the depth of her parent's love for one another and for her. This pilgrimage reconciled her anger, forged her forgiveness, and gave Margaret the time she needed to "let go" of her parents so that she could move forward with her own life.

Margaret like her father had great empathy for others; hers was developed as a result of her painful childhood experiences living with her father's depression and her mother's abandonment. Similarly her father's empathy developed as a result of his own painful childhood and his father's abandonment. At the end of *Father Melancholy's Daughter* Margaret is confidently contemplating her own career in ministry. She has

²² Ibid., 132.

worked hard to understand her past, what it means to her present situation and decisions, and to envision her own hopeful future as a young adult.

After years of constant thinking about her parents, Margaret discovers grace for herself and the gift of forgiveness for her parents. Father “melancholy’s” daughter has reached a place in her own psychological and spiritual growth so that she is ready to move forward with hope into her *own future*. Margaret’s life experiences and familial relationships developed her own sense of self from the healing power of the Holy Spirit: she came to a place where her physical, psychological, and most importantly, her spiritual health were healed.

In the novel’s final chapter, “The Grace of Daily Obligation,” Margaret describes one of the theological lessons learned from her father. This awareness happens for Margaret when she is traveling on June 18 on the day of her 22nd birthday. In a letter to her friend Adrian, who was an Episcopal priest she was in love with, Margaret writes, “I am at the place where I most wanted to be on it [my 22nd birthday], but not with the person I had hoped to be with.”²³ (She had hoped to be traveling in England with her father but he died a few weeks before they could share this special trip together.) Surprisingly Margaret was traveling with Madelyn, (yes, there was a surprising reconciliation with Madelyn after Margaret’s parents were gone), on the days before her birthday and visited “old haunts around Guildford” where Madelyn and her mother had been.²⁴

Margaret tells Adrian in a letter from Holy Island (Lindisfarne) on her 22nd birthday,

²³ Ibid., 390.

²⁴ Ibid., 387.

. . . I am a great believer in rituals like my father was. . . I am trying to decide how I want to live my life. . . [A] few days before I left Romulus [home], I found a piece of his [Daddy's] hair from that haircut. . . I put it in a Ziploc bag and brought it with me to England, and I have just scattered part of it in the ruins of the presbytery. . . Oh, God, I miss him so. But I'm glad I could bring some little part of him here. It makes something feel complete.²⁵

Almost two months after this self-realization Margaret finds herself applying to seminaries in New York and Tennessee and writing to Adrian:

Dear Adrian, . . . I wrote to General [Theological Seminary in New York] and to Sewanee [School of Theology in Tennessee] for information. Then I got sidetracked by a requirement on Sewanee's application form. They ask you for 'a brief autobiographical sketch, including the major turning points and personal influences that led you to choose the ministry.' It's only supposed to be four pages, but I started writing, and I'm already on page 75 and haven't even become a teenager yet. I am liking the act of choosing words, evoking things with words. Bringing back places (like our corner) and people (like my father and mother) who are gone. I would like to be a writer and a priest. . . .²⁶

Sixteen years have passed since Margaret said good-bye to her mother on the first day of first grade. From her childhood until she grows into a young adult, Margaret's experiences prepare her for the "grace of daily obligation." On the last page of the novel (her journal) Margaret reflects on a passage from *Prayer and Desire* by Ulanovs:

"Surprises happen. . . We may discover we want more than we thought we dared. In the secret space of prayer, we may reveal to ourselves how much we want truth, beauty, love. . ."

Oh, You [God]. Who are You? What do You want of me? What will I be doing this day next year? . . . Do You know, Yourself, or is it left partly to me? Are You withholding my life from me, or unfolding it with me? Are You an eternal parent or are we eternal partners? Are You there for me now? I choose to think so. Otherwise it would be just too lonely. This is for Your eyes only. Here is what I

²⁵ Ibid., 391.

²⁶ Ibid., 401-402.

*want. Is it possible to have everything on this list, including the right to serve You? I warn You, I am going to try for it! [italics in novel]*²⁷

This is a happy ending as Margaret's transformation from a child filled with anger to a grace-filled reconciled adult shows the healing power of the Holy Spirit in her life. Throughout her faith journey Margaret continues to be enlightened and looks forward to her future. She has internalized the words from Jeremiah 29: 11-14 – “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord; plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.”²⁸ Finally, Margaret has been through a stormy crucible in her life and is ready to move out from the storm into her own life. She has survived the “wilderness.”

The spiritual dimension of aging is not only for those who are older adults, but for people of all ages as they are aging. The journey of forgiveness to reconciliation is intergenerational. Truly physical, psychological, and spiritual growth implies a transformation or metamorphosis. In other words, one does not necessarily need to be older (as in number of years lived), to have learned lessons about forgiveness and personal wisdom leading to interpersonal reconciliation. Just as brokenness of body, mind, and spirit can happen any time during a lifetime, so too can healing by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Godwin's book one of the symbols of healing and restoration is Father Walter Gower. When reading the book I found myself comparing the broken desecrated statuary of Jesus to the Gower's broken family. One evening during Passion Week, Father Gower manic with energy spoke to a small gathering of people in Father

²⁷ Ibid., 404.

²⁸ Jeremiah 29: 11-14.

Adrian Bonner's home. He explained how the Resurrection of Christ applies to all of us. Father Gower said, resurrection "means coming up through what you were born into, then understanding objectively the people your parents were [before you were born] and how they influenced you. . . . [Eventually] you have to slough off your 'original sin,' You have to go on to find out what you are in the human drama, or body of God."²⁹ In Father Gower's theological wisdom and understanding hopeful seeds were planted in Margaret's heart and soul. When the novel ends Margaret was beginning to understand how she was to live her own life as part of the body of God serving His people during her own lifetime. Margaret learns how to be the person God created her to be. Shakespeare sums up this self understanding in *Hamlet* when he wrote, "This above all: to thine own self be true"³⁰

Being true to one's own heart, feelings, and beliefs was important for both Cordelia and Margaret. Their earthly fathers loved them dearly just as God the Father loves his Son Jesus. The sacrificial actions and feelings in King Lear/Father Gower in relationship to Cordelia/Margaret and vice-versa provide literary, psychological, and theological case studies of the spiritual dimension of aging and forgiveness. The comparison of these major literary characters to God the Father and His Son Jesus gives us insight into human relationships. Since human beings are made in the image of God and are sinful by nature, when we turn our lives/relationships over to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we can trust the Holy Spirit to save us through Jesus. When we speak *The Apostles' Creed* declaring our belief in the Trinity we are reciting basic Christian

²⁹ Ibid., 276.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3.

doctrine. The creed helps believers begin to understand their relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God made us to be in relationship with Him and human beings. In Luther's *Small Catechism* he explains the three articles of *The Apostles' Creed* on creation, redemption, and on being made Holy. Luther includes certain scriptural passages to instruct us in the meaning of *The Apostles' Creed*. The First Article focuses On Creation (Genesis 1, Psalm 8), The Second Article On Redemption (Luke 23:39-46), and The Third Article On Being Made Holy (Acts 2). Luther's *Small Catechism* provides answers for why and how we need to repent and forgive others, including ourselves, and how we are all connected to God through the Holy Spirit and personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The following scriptural passages show that grace and mercy are indeed gifts of the Holy Spirit from God to humanity. In 1 John 1: 8-9 Jesus says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In John 20: 22-23 "[Jesus] breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" Moreover in Ephesians 2: 4-5 and 3:16-17 the role of grace and the spiritual power of personal faith is explained. In Matthew 18: 21-22 Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'" With scriptural guidance the healing process is possible with the Trinity.

In the OT and NT the evidence for God's insistence on healthy relationships, especially family relationships, clearly gives Christians specific spiritual direction. From the father/daughter relationship in both *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, I have shown how the urgency for forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be avoided if they have the courage to risk difficult conversations.

CHAPTER SIX

HEALING THE KINDRED RELATIONSHIP

The fundamental relationship between a father and his daughter, as well the Trinitarian relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been the focus of this thesis. Throughout my thesis Elizabeth MacKinlay's spiritual themes and tasks of aging, --- finding ultimate meaning in life, responses to ultimate meaning(s), learning self-sufficiency in response to vulnerability, finding wisdom and/or final meanings to life --- have been used to analyze the father/daughter relationship in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*.

In addition, MacKinlay's list of aging tasks -- including identifying the source of ultimate meaning in life, finding appropriate ways to respond to that meaning, ways to overcome grief and loss, and finding intimacy with God -- all point to the conclusion that hope is a possible outcome even in broken relationships.¹ Broken relationships can be restored and reconciled if the individuals involved are willing to become vulnerable with one another and are willing to talk with one another.

The healing powers of the Holy Spirit can be found through prayer, suffering, and grieving for what is lost. Hopeful discoveries and healing from estrangement, anger, and brokenness are possible with the Trinity. "Thus, for continued spiritual development [or restoration], it is necessary for the individual to identify and acknowledge their sense

¹ MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, 223.

of ultimate meaning in life, and then to be able to respond to this in some way. That is, ultimate meaning and response to this meaning are a starting point for spiritual growth in ageing.”²

Through suffering in the “wilderness” and life’s storms, both fathers (King Lear and Father Walter Gower) and their daughters (Cordelia and Margaret) learned how intangibly valuable their relationship is beyond material possessions, property, and even their lives. When all is lost or taken away, the love between King Lear and Cordelia, as well as between Father Gower and Margaret, transcends their earthly life. As a result of their estrangement, anger, and grief these three-dimensional literary characters inform us how forgiveness and reconciliation is possible in human relationships with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As Father James P. Oberle observes, “by releasing the burden of unfinished business through forgiveness, elders can achieve a sense of peace and closure in their lives.”³ By talking through the hurt, reframing the issue, offering forgiveness, and accepting our sinful human natures, there is hope for spiritual and psychological health.⁴ The need and urgency to find intimacy with God and others is the natural and theological order desired by healthy people. The need for peace, grace, and shalom naturally calls us from destructive behaviors and chaos back to God. Indeed “many find it difficult to ‘go

² Ibid., 223.

³ Fr. James P. Oberle, “Forgiveness: A Spiritual Value That Fosters Physical, Psychological and Spiritual Health,” *Aging & Spirituality—Newsletter of the Forum on Religion, Spirituality and Aging* 14, no. 3 (2002), 7.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

home to God' with unfinished business. If forgiveness can be granted or accepted, the burden lifts and frees the person to make life's final arrangements."⁵

Aging and forgiveness gives our lives meaning and insightful wisdom. Even if one has little formal psychological and theological knowledge, I believe the human experience of aging encourages the development of wisdom. This hard-won experiential wisdom gives humans insight(s) into the meaning of *their own life* and of others' lives. For many the theological importance of forgiveness, and its relationship to the Christian doctrine of salvation, are innately embedded and reflected in one's understanding of the Trinity.

From our birth the "self" image given to us by God, who created us in His image, to our parents who nurture and care for us, our personal "imago Dei" is being transformed or morphed throughout the life cycle. Researchers F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage explain the details of psychological self-development as well as summarize the theological history of forgiveness as it relates to facing ourselves and others through forgiving. Forgiveness and reconciliation are shared in relationships based upon faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Healing and hope can and does happen in a sacramental community.

Throughout this study my general knowledge and specific understanding of forgiveness and the Trinity have been informed by the work of Shults and Sandage and others. In reading and re-reading *The Faces of Forgiveness*, the authors' synthesis of theory, Biblical history, and the process of forgiveness provide insight into the father/daughter relationship(s) in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

Specifically, Shults and Sandage acknowledge the relational, the interdisciplinary, and sacred connections for forgiveness to occur. In the practice of forgiveness there is a gap between simply understanding what empathy is and actually feeling empathy toward one's self and others. This is part of the genuine process of forgiveness. Therefore the “psychological and theological insights that emerge when we consider the idea of forgiveness in the context of the relational interfacing. . . shape and transform the systems of human existence.”⁶ The most familiar “system of human existence” is the family and its familial connections.

From the beginning of creation our human understanding of the origin of man comes from Genesis 1: 27-28 – “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them. ‘Be fruitful and multiple, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . .’” Since human beings are created to live in families and communities, “. . . most of the key doctrines that emerged early in the Christian religion are inherently relational. . . .”⁷

Throughout the history of Christianity there has been an “ebbing and flowing” in people's lives between practicing degrees of relationality with the Trinity. There was a

. . . theological loss of relational categories [of Christian forgiveness] in early modernity and the broader philosophical factors in late modernity that have contributed to a renewed emphasis on the explanatory power of the category of relation over substance. This renewal took shape in the retrieval of the ideas of Infinity, Trinity, and Futurity in the doctrine of God in the twentieth century. The doctrine of God inevitably shapes the doctrine of salvation . . . [and there are] implications of these developments for understanding and practicing forgiveness.⁸

⁶ F. LeRon Shults and Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation*, 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Therefore the understanding of forgiveness was different when Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* (1605-1606) than the later understanding of forgiveness when Godwin wrote *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991). However, “the emphasis on relationality [in late modernity] leads to a new appreciation of the systemic and communal dynamics that are often overshadowed in traditional treatments that focus merely on the individual’s appropriation of divine forgiveness.”⁹ Indeed my goal, as well as the work of Shults and Sandage, is “to make sense *out* of the search for wholeness and salvation in a way that makes sense *in* and *to* contemporary culture.”¹⁰

In their intense study of facial hermeneutics, or interpersonal facial expressions, Shults and Sandage suggest

. . . we are constantly interpreting one another, making attributions about the motives and actions of others; [and these] interpretations significantly impact the process of forgiveness. The early experiences of being faced by caregivers may even serve the formation of internal representations of the face of God, affecting our attribution of emotions to the divine.¹¹

Therefore our self-image, self-concept, and *imago Dei* is developed in our earliest encounters with caregivers. Having a sense of one’s self in relationship to others can also produce interpersonal conflicts. Conflicts, as we have seen in both human and literary characters, can be complex, hurtful, painful, and contribute to the brokenness between family members. Learning how to resolve these interpersonal conflicts informs our “ . . . ultimate concerns about the relation of humanity to God. . . .[In] the New Testament

⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

. . . especially in the context of parables, . . . the overarching meaning of forgiveness is manifesting and sharing redemptive grace. In Christian theology, salvation is about grace.”¹² In *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* the main characters are searching for their own wholeness and hope for healing from their brokenness in their respective communities. “When forgiveness happens, the differentness and dangerousness of the offender are viewed from a new frame that mitigates this stranger anxiety and results in some sense of renewed meaning and security.”¹³ As the play and the novel conclude the father/daughter relationship has been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

In the analyzed father/daughter relationships the narcissistic pride of the fathers damaged the relationship with their daughters. What is narcissistic pride? According to Shults and Sandage,

Narcissistic pride is another personality trait closely related to the dynamics of selfhood and forgiveness. . . .Narcissism is usually defined as extreme self-admiration and grandiose self-involvement that goes beyond healthy personal pride and prevents empathy, intersubjectivity, and a willingness to lose face. . .¹⁴

Clearly Lear displayed narcissistic tendencies when he demanded his kingly powers even after he “retired” from being the king. King Lear reflected “a desire to use power against others and a sense of deserving excessive admiration and respect, both of which can greatly inhibit genuine forgiveness” with Cordelia.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 23.

¹³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁵ Ibid., 57.

Facing human weaknesses can cause personal vulnerability and feelings of shame. As Shakespeare develops Lear's character there is a change in Lear's sense of self. There is a change in Lear's sense of his own humanity, as well as in his empathy toward himself, Cordelia and others. Clearly early in the story Lear was focused on his own needs and did not consider the needs of Cordelia. In other words, he had a difficult journey to self-awareness before he was able to admit, first to himself and then to Cordelia, that he was arrogantly harsh towards her. With this self-awareness Lear could finally sincerely apologize to his daughter. Similarly throughout the gospels, Jesus is "the forgiving face of transformation to people who were hungry for the wholeness of salvation."¹⁶

Since "our internal images or representations of God or the sacred are formed through the various relational experiences and influences in our developmental histories, . . . [our] sacred and relational connotations of God images make them powerful symbolic resources" throughout our lives.¹⁷ Our image of God as a "powerful symbolic resource" does affect our ability to forgive ourselves and others. Consequently the process of forgiveness can take a very long time; in fact, there are times when forgiveness is not humanly possible. However, there are predictable patterns leading toward forgiveness, and possibly reconciliation, just as there are predictable patterns in the grief process. Yet it is important to realize, just as the grief process is not necessarily linear, so also the process of forgiveness is not linear. Both processes "ebb and flow" in sometimes unpredictable ways toward some resolution. Consequently the forgiveness process is

¹⁶ Ibid., 80.

¹⁷ Ibid., 89.

random, fluid, and is not easily accomplished. Steve Sandage sees the forgiveness process as having three phases:

. . . [M]y own version of the forgiveness process is a three-phase model based on review and synthesis of numerous models. . . . My three phases are (a) engaging in lament, (b) encouraging empathy and humility, and (c) extending narrative horizons. We should think of general phases of the forgiveness process rather than a tight system of sequential steps.¹⁸

Beyond the human forgiveness process, there is also the separation from God and the Holy Spirit that must be bridged before full forgiveness is possible. As we saw in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, the estrangement between the fathers and their daughters also was an estrangement from God. Therefore, when the relationship with self and God was healed the relationship with others becomes possible. Shults and Sandage suggest that "if people gain wisdom from their suffering and develop strategies for avoiding the same conflicts or problems in the future" a sense of hope "enables people to envision a positive future horizon" or life story.¹⁹ Wisdom was gained by Lear and Cordelia by the end of the play. In Margaret's case, her suffering lead to maturation, spiritual wisdom, and forgiveness after her father died.

Besides an understanding of the forgiveness process, there also is an ". . . intersection for two narrative horizons; [that is]—the personal horizon of our relational stories of conflict and the transcendent horizon of God's larger story of forgiveness and reconciliation. . . . Our experiences of human faces of forgiveness can offer us just enough hope to keep searching for the divine face of forgiveness."²⁰ In our

¹⁸ Ibid., 92-93.

¹⁹ Ibid., 98.

²⁰ Ibid., 98.

need and search for salvation, the Trinity helps to define our relationship to God the Father. The divine face of God as presented in the OT is fascinating, mysterious, and fearful to us. Then in the NT “the glorious mystery of God is made known in the face of Jesus Christ.”²¹ Thus from both a psychological and theological viewpoint, the relational dimension of the Trinity connects the narratives of *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* together. In other words the “relational dimension” is about living together in community.

When living together in community “the search for ultimate wholeness is the search for salvation, and for this humans are wholly dependent on divine grace.”²² During Jesus’ life he “. . . faced his contemporaries as the very presence of divine grace and peace. The Johannine Jesus tells his disciples that ‘whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). . . .Having faced this man from Nazareth, the church begins the journey of interpreting the mysterious divine countenance in trinitarian terms.”²³

The Christian church today continues to recognize that the Holy Spirit is Christ’s presence in our world. “The manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) make the church a *koinonia* as believers become ‘one body’ (12:12), baptized in ‘one Spirit’ (12:13) for the common good.”²⁴ Since sinful, broken humans are dependent on divine grace, forgiveness heals both our selves and the community spreading “divine forgiveness in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit” while giving Christians their

²¹ Ibid., 104.

²² Ibid., 104.

²³ Ibid., 113.

²⁴ Ibid., 122.

freedom in Christ. “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (James 5:15-16).

Turning away from sin, repenting, and seeking forgiveness in Holy Communion brings hope, new life, and restored relationships. The “Christian understanding and practice of faith, love, and hope in sacramental, baptized, and eucharistic community” gives us spiritual rituals that promote healing.²⁵ Therefore,

. . .divine forgiveness makes room for humans to share in the grace and joy of Trinitarian love, which provides an infinite resource for human forgiveness. . . . *Salvation is joyful participation in divine forgiveness, through which human life is drawn into the grace and peace of an eternal Trinitarian facing that ‘blesses’ and ‘keeps’ the interfacing of communal fellowship [emphasis mine]. . . .*²⁶

In 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13 Paul tells Christians we are one body with many members: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” In communal fellowship faith, love, and hope are shared. Paul reminds us that “faith, hope, and love abide” and “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Not only love, but also hope is important for healing interpersonal brokenness. Hope is nurtured in a community of baptized believers. When Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit he promised his followers that they would be forgiven for their sins, but not forgotten. Consequently,

Being-baptized in the Spirit is the ongoing salutary ordering of human life as it shares in the gracious being-in-relation of the Trinitarian God. The washing of water signifies a union with Christ in death and resurrection. This union is an immersion (*baptize*) in the Spirit that intensifies throughout life and takes shape in

²⁵ Ibid., 161.

²⁶ Ibid., 169.

community. This is life ‘in the Spirit.’ . . . As we also dwell in the Spirit, our lives are conformed to Christ.²⁷

Therefore as Shults and Sandage conclude “. . . the community that is being-baptized in the Spirit of Christ is immersed in the reconciling activity of God. . . .Unforgiveness and death do not have the final word: ‘For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his’ (Romans 6:5).”²⁸ It is this “hopeful forgiving” that we see in the father/daughter relationships in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*. Despite the fact King Lear lives only briefly after Cordelia’s death, their mutual reconciliation is still very powerful. In contrast, Margaret’s father Walter died before they had face-to-face communication. However, the spiritual dimension of their personal aging and forgiveness did intersect their interpersonal connection even though Walter was gone. The intimate father/daughter bond in these two stories ultimately transforms their previously broken relationship into a reconciled and hopeful one. Indeed “being forgiven means receiving new *being*. It means finding one’s very nature wholly renewed and open to a whole and healing future. Forgiving others donates the possibility of new being.”²⁹

Thus the *new being, new self, New Adam*

. . .is being ‘created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24); it is called ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son’ (Romans 8:29). The hopeful Christian finds her [his] being in this spiritual becoming, which is a being-transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ, through whom she [he] enters into the *koinonia* of divine glory. . . .The divine glory is the shared relational being of the triune God. . . .³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 201.

²⁸ Ibid., 205.

²⁹ Ibid., 211.

³⁰ Ibid., 212, 214.

Consequently, just as in the analyzed father/daughter relationships, so also are all humans looking for a face of complete acceptance and unconditional love forever. This is an impossible task without God, but with God “all things are possible.”

Therefore “Christians hope in fellowship with God, a *koinonia* in and through the Spirit of Christ . . . in and among us now. All of our lives are spent longing for a face that will grant us peaceful loving attention, a face that will secure us and call us into a hopeful future. In Christ, we find that face; by the Spirit, we become that face for one another.”³¹ Healing the broken father/daughter relationship is psychologically and theologically complex. In feeling and “facing” the anger, guilt, shame, and resentment in their intimate familial relationship, King Lear and Cordelia as well as Father Walter Gower and Margaret, discover we are all imperfect human beings. After painful feelings are acknowledged it is possible to connect and be healed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Linda Schierse Leonard explains in *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship*,

knowing what is behind the rage is very important. And this takes conscious differentiation—differentiating from the experience of the rage and differentiating the various elements of the rage. That takes sorting out what part of the rage is the unsolved anger of the father, and what belongs to the woman [daughter] herself and to the situation.³²

The process of “sorting out” the specific crisis and pressure points in the father/daughter relationship takes its own time. Similarly the process of healing and forgiveness takes its own time. “Ultimately, the transformation of rage results in a strong

³¹ Ibid., 216.

³² Linda Schierse Leonard, *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1982), 133.

woman who with her creative energy and feminine wisdom can contribute to the growth of herself, others, and the culture. The acceptance and transformation of rage can release and reveal feminine strength and spirit which can redeem the wounded woman and ultimately the wound in the father-daughter relationship as well.”³³ In Shakespeare’s play and Godwin’s novel, years of experiences between a father and his daughter simply can not be healed in an “instant” linear fashion. The range of emotions and the spiritual growth needed to restore the damaged relationship takes mutual small steps going forward and backwards with ups and downs in their reconciliation and healing journey.

Of course, Gail Godwin had the luxury within the structure of her novel to develop the story and its characters over a much longer time period than Shakespeare did in his play. Even though Shakespeare did not have this structural and conventional literary advantage, he still created transformed three-dimensional characters within the play’s five acts. The urgency to resolve interpersonal conflicts often becomes especially urgent when facing the death of either the father or his daughter.

Throughout their lives most people realize that death does not end a relationship; in fact, the angst and forgiveness issues between them may continue even after death. Frequently depression and significant losses in later life poignantly, and sometimes quickly, throw a troubled relationship into chaos. Will there be time to resolve the issue? At least in *King Lear* and *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* healing, understanding, and hope are renewed between the father and his daughter. Indeed human beings are God’s earthy representatives made in His image even if they are fictional characters.

³³ Ibid., 135.

One of the tasks of aging for King Lear, Walter Gower, and for all of us is to find intimacy with God and others. As Elizabeth MacKinlay discovered finding intimacy with God and others is an important task for people who are aging for several reasons.

The losses of later life, of partner, siblings, friends, and for some, the loss [and/or doubting] of God, may be linked to depression in later life. [This certainly was the case for King Lear and Walter Gower.] Some independent-living older people . . . find that the most important source of meaning in their lives is their relationships—with partners, if they had them, and from children and grandchildren. For many, these relationships provided a reason for living—that is, core meaning.³⁴

Therefore finding meaning and a hopeful purpose in living until the end of life is not only possible but also necessary for continued spiritual and psychological health.

Melvin A. Kimble, one of my former seminary professors, wisely states

. . . the price of arrival on this amazing planet remains the same—the necessity to leave it! Human life consists in a variety of virtues and graces, of foibles and failings blended together in the paradoxical unity that constitutes our humanness. This enigmatic amalgam of shadow and light, of angelic and demonic, does ultimately decay and end. Death is the extreme point of self-creation. Every person is called upon to create a self to the fullest degree. It is at death that the process of our own self-creation ends.³⁵

So we have the opportunity to self-create until death ends this process. To be human means to make sense of our lives; that is, from our birth/day to our death/day. We know even the most prideful, broken, and sinful person will die both a spiritual and biological death. Our mortality, our own death, asserts Kimble, “as a biological event related to the cessation of life is religiously neutral. We are all going to die, irrespective of our religious beliefs.”³⁶ Whether we chose to either deny or embrace this reality, death will

³⁴ Elizabeth MacKinley, “Pastoral Care for Depression in Long-Term Care Residents,” *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook, Volume 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 262.

³⁵ Melvin A. Kimble, “Final Time: Coming to the End,” *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook, Volume 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 449.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 450.

happen to us/me. Therefore while we are breathing it is our task to live and not merely survive.

The living Word of God, the moments that turn into years, and the quality of our interpersonal relationships with family and friends are what gives life meaning and purpose. Dr. Kimble reminds all Christians in “Final Time: Coming to the End,” how the “last stage of life” is part of the transitory life we share as earthly human beings.

The last stage of life loses all meaning if it is devoted to mere survival. This simply is a prolongation of biological life without a mission and without meaning. . . . There is a transcendent destiny built into my transitory life. Dying and death is the ultimate test of my spiritual thickness.³⁷

Karl Rahner reminds us that the “real high point of my life” is to “let go, to let God” catch us as we fall from life to death. Since Christians have the hope of resurrection after death, while we are alive we are called to “make disciples of all nations.” In Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus has called Christians to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I [Jesus] have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus comforts humans by reminding us God has prepared many mansions in heaven for Christians after their earthly life: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself.” (John 14: 26). We have a home in heaven waiting for us. Our belief in the Trinity and the Apostle’s Creed guide each Christian’s journey throughout life—from birth to death.

³⁷ Ibid., 457-458.

During the Reformation Martin Luther taught “how forgiveness liberates us *from* the power of sin and death, and liberates us *for* living according to God’s design in relation to other people and all God’s creation. [Therefore] Forgiveness frees us to be truly human.”³⁸ Recalling the words of Jesus to his disciples in Luke 17:1-6: “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come. . . . Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.” (Luke 17: 1-6 NRSV).

With a living faith -- hope, love, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation are possible in human relationships. With God’s love, mercy, and grace – forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation are possible in human relationships. With the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working in and through the human “being”—forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation are possible in human relationships. Facing our own imperfections allows God and the Holy Spirit to work in us.

In the end, the father/daughter relationships explored in this thesis have provided a literary vehicle that does intersect with the theological. I believe the spiritual dimension of aging and forgiveness, along with “our personal stories or autobiographies become theological by offering episodes of estrangement and forgiveness that invite theological reflection.”³⁹ Whether in personal stories, world literature, or in plots “of the Christian narrative. . . God’s larger story of forgiveness and reconciliation is the

³⁸ Robert Kolb, “Forgiveness Liberates and Restores: The Freedom of the Christian according to Martin Luther,” *Word and World* 27, no.1 (2007): 5.

³⁹ Shults and Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, 98.

Christian narrative horizon that provides the context of our personal life stories.”⁴⁰ Just as relational stories give us hope for real life forgiveness and reconciliation, so also do the spiritual tasks of aging intersect with the Trinity.

Since the Trinity is the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’s activity in our world, the restoration of broken human relationships through the process of forgiveness is integrated in the human being throughout our lives. Indeed the *imago Dei* of Christian theology and the spiritual tasks of aging are also related to hope for eternal life with God our creator. Fred Van Tatenhove helps clarify the significance of the *imago Dei* as we age:

From a theological perspective, the acceptance of aging as a part of the created order means that individuals are to be valued at any age. People are important because they are a special creation of God and have a covenant relationship with God. . . .The biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* emphasizes human qualities or characteristics that correspond to divine attributes. . . .Therefore, the image of God is not something people achieve or something people do. Rather, it is what one is to be in God’s intended plan.⁴¹

Certainly Shakespeare and Godwin knew the value of people, including their fictional characters, at every stage of life.

In *King Lear* and in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* the authors both show their compassionate understanding of human spirituality, aging, and forgiveness. Shakespeare and Godwin have shown us “life moves through temporal transitions from the past to the present to the future.”⁴² Shakespeare knew how a compassionate family narrative, telling the forgiveness and healing story of King Lear and his daughter Cordelia, would

⁴⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁴¹ Fred Van Tatenhove, 419-420.

⁴² Fred Von Tatenhove., 422.

move his audience/reader. Similarly Godwin's healing story of Father Gower and his daughter Margaret also moves her readers compassionately. As a result of these two authors, we are theologically enlightened as we follow their stories. Storytelling brings human beings hope for their earthly lives. In our own relationships, we all hope for the same compassion, grace, and mercy as we ultimately face the spiritual tasks of aging. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit will guide us through the spiritual dimension of aging and forgiveness until our own self-creation ends and we reach our heavenly home.

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