

# Luther on Spirituality and Meditation

Seminar leader: Jared Wicks

Reporter: Jared Wicks

This group added another »p« to the themes of the congress, namely that of prayer.

An opening review of recent literature on Luther included a report on the collaborative volume, »Thesaurus Lutheri« (Helsinki 1987). The Finnish and German contributors to that project are seeking to recover Luther's incarnational realism after the deep inroads made by idealism and personalism in the interpretation of Luther's doctrine. These currents of thought have obscured for many Luther's teaching on Christ's real union with the believer, his sacramental thinking, and his life-long struggle to master the problematic constituted by the unfulfillable yet unrepealed commandment of love.

The seminar also discussed at some length the ways for our research to advance beyond the exclusively Western and Northern character of most working bibliographies on Luther.

*Hellmut Zschoch* introduced the seminar to the penitential spirituality inspiring the work of Conrad von Zenn, OESA († 1460), an esteemed exponent of the ideals of the observant movement in Luther's order. The monastic life is for Conrad not an advance up the scala perfectionis, but instead a way of interior, daily penance which the monk embraces for the benefit of the whole church. The reform of the orders did have juridical and organizational components, but it would be wrong to follow Theodor Kolde's reduction of the observant movement to these aspects. There was a notable spirituality and ecclesiology embedded in the reform movement. Conrad von Zenn's »Liber de monastica vita« offered a coherent interpretation of monastic profession, the rule, monasticism in salvation-history, the monk's place in the

church, and the daily practice in the cloister-community of humility and charity. A detailed treatment of these points is now accessible in Zschoch's »Klosterreform und monastische Spiritualität« (TÜ 1988).

*Won Yong Ji* showed the seminar how Luther understood the Christian life as conflictual, painful, and threatened, because of ongoing tentatio or Anfechtung. Luther knew personally the terrors of distance from God, but thereby met the Gospel more authentically as grace and peace. The other Anfechtung, concerning predestination, is for Luther clearly Satan's work. The Reformer had been taught by Johannes von Staupitz a traditional but effective way of turning from such thoughts. Luther, though, maintains the positive role of temptation in his 1539 Preface to *Wi deutsch 1* (WA 50, 657-661), where trials and pain help deepen and personalize the believer's prayerful appropriation of the word of Scripture, as the devil's assaults make one a »real doctor«.

Numerous concerns of current Luther studies in Finland came out in the seminar's discussion of *Miikka Roukanen's* »Luther und Ekstase« (KD 32 [1986], 132-147). Ecstasy, for the Reformer, is not a natural capacity realizable in the human soul, but a fundamental component of revelation and faith. The patriarchs and prophets, like Jesus' apostles, received God's promises directly in ecstatic experiences of inspiration. Later believers are carried outside of themselves in a different manner, as they lay hold of the transmitted promises in faith. The ecstatic moment in faith, for Luther, lies in the way one is emptied of all inner-worldly securities. But faith does not transport one over to an ideal world, for Christian ecstasy, in Luther's

view, is a form of union with Christ and participation in the reality of the hidden God.

On the basis of *Jared Wicks'* paper, the seminar treated the ramifications for daily life and prayer of the simul iustus et peccator. In a characteristic early passage, Luther concluded from a cluster of New Testament passages, »deinde totam vitam esse poenitentiam et orationem et contritionem« (WA 2, 410, 14). In prayer the believer, as iustus, lays hold of God's unmerited grace and favor, in the ongoing renewal of God's covenant of forgiveness sealed in Baptism. But there is also a prayerful dedication to the long-term struggle against endemic sin, in the power of the donum – dona of the Holy

Spirit. Luther describes a paradoxical mode of spiritual progress, by which growth or advance is a way in which the person becomes more aware of his sinfulness and total dependence on God. Growing in this manner, one has no choice but to lay hold ever afresh of God's mercy and to yearn more ardently for the gifts in virtue of which the penitential struggle continues each day.

The seminar thus concluded that among the numerous achievements of Martin Luther a key place is held by his well-grounded instruction in a penitential spirituality, in the embattled life, and in daily prayer in relation to God's grace and gifts.

## Lutherverherrlichung, Lutherschmähung und Luthers Selbstbewußtsein

Seminar leader: Mark U. Edwards Jr.

Reporter: Mark U. Edwards Jr.

It was originally intended that this seminar examine how friends and foes depicted Luther in vernacular pamphlets, songs, and woodcuts and how he, in turn, presented himself in his popular, German writings. Given the interests of the individual seminar participants, however, the seminar expanded its ambit to include material not published in the sixteenth century, Latin writings, and later evaluations.

In his paper »Luthers Selbstverständnis in der Zeit seines frühen Romkonfliktes: untersucht von 1517 bis 1519«, *Bernhard Lohse* described how Luther felt special responsibility and calling to teach and proclaim the truth, beginning early on with the reform of abuses in the veneration of saints, moving a bit later to the reform of the study of theology at Wittenberg and university reform in general, and from February, 1518, onward to the reform of abuses in the church,

especially regarding indulgences. His self-understanding shifted in the course of this development. On several particularly important occasions early in this period, Luther stressed his sense of special responsibility by expressing his ideas »im Namen Jesu Christi«. By early 1518 he began speaking of expected martyrdom. Gradually, and with increasing frequency, Luther compared himself with biblical figures and with biblical accounts of suffering. As the conflict with Rome intensified, Luther began also making comparisons with the proceedings against Jesus. But it must be emphasized that Luther did not identify himself with the accused and tempted Christ although he did identify his theology with Jesus's proclamation. His certainty that he was correctly repeating Jesus's own proclamation constituted his unusual self-confidence.