

Luther's and Melanchthon's Concept of the Church

Seminar leader: Eric W. Gritsch

Reporter: Eric W. Gritsch

A late change in leadership delayed the call for papers on the state of research and on the locus »ecclesiology« in general. But the original intention of the seminar was preserved, namely, to focus on a comparative analysis rather than concentrate on Luther and Melanchthon separately. Consequently, attention was given to the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon and not to the question on how far Melanchthon was historically influenced by Luther (without ruling out the question of a historical-genetic relationship between the two). Seven of the twelve participants offered brief papers dealing with a broad range of topics related to the locus »ecclesiology«.

1. *Eric W. Gritsch* opened the seminar with »The state of research regarding Luther's ecclesiology« – »Addendum: Melanchthon's locus »Church««. The paper used the most recent work on Luther's theology – Bernhard Lohse: *Luthers Theologie* (GÖ 1995) – to summarize Luther's ecclesiology in terms of »the essence of the church«, »the true and false church« and »the marks of the church«. The paper found agreement in Luther scholarship that the word of God dominates Luther's ecclesiology. Luther, however, seems to be ambivalent in regard to his view of the papal church which is still faithful to the word of God but is so dominated by »human traditions« that it has become the devil's church. The »addendum« on Melanchthon tried to show that the younger Melanchthon agreed with Luther's ecclesiology – especially in »The Augsburg Confession« and its »Apology« –, but later differed from Luther in his emphasis on the church as the guardian of »pure doctrine« (*doctrina evangelii incorrupta*) and as a »scholastic assembly« (*coetus scholasticus*).

2. *Sabine Hiebsch* presented a paper on »Luther's concept of the church in his Sermon on Genesis 31« – 1524: WA 14, 423-433; 1527: WA 24, 540-656 – which is part of her doctoral thesis »Lea und Rachel in Luthers Genesispredigten«. She supplied the seminar with several texts for a joint exegesis which showed that Luther spoke of a church from creation to the end of time, often in a dialectical dualism of »inner and outer«, »true and false«. Questions were raised regarding the contemporary use of Luther's findings, also in reference to women.

3. *Jeffrey Jaynes* summarized the findings of his doctoral dissertation »Luther, Melanchthon and the ordinances of the church (Kirchenordnungen)«. He showed how the ordinances reflected the practical attention to the relationship between »doctrine« and »discipline«. Melanchthon seemed to be more comfortable than Luther with the creation of ordinances even though the understanding of the eucharist differed in various territories where the ordinances were introduced.

4. *George Posfay* presented a paper dealing with an earlier, extensive work »... The whole Christian church on earth ...: a study in Luther's conception of the universality of the church«. The paper was an updated version of part D, c. 13: »The importance of the gospel in Luther's writings about the renewal of the church«. The seminar discussed the key text in Luther's writings, his commentary on the third article of the creed with its focus on the unity between the individual believer and »the whole Christian church on earth« (BSLK, 512, 5 f). The paper tried to show how Luther understood himself as a reformer for the sake of Christian unity and not as a sectarian; for the gospel itself is

always universal and needs a universally undivided church to instrument the gospel in word and sacrament.

5. *Jari Jolkkonen* offered »A short presentation on the question whether Luther had any positive theory on the primacy of the Roman bishop«. The paper noted an ambivalence in Luther's view after 1522: Luther seemed open to a »reformed papacy«, but also frequently rejected every kind of primacy. The seminar also discussed Melanchthon's position, especially in »The Smalcald articles« (BSLK, 463, 10 - 464,7) where he affirmed a papacy »jure humano«.

6. *Günther Gassmann* presented a paper on »Luther and Melanchthon: central ecclesiological emphases in the Lutheran Confession«. The paper referred to a number of different emphases and perspectives in Luther's and Melanchthon's texts, e. g., between Melanchthon's concern with the true and false church in its wider and its proper sense and Luther's view of the church as a given reality which is the realm of our salvation. Yet these and other differences are to be seen as complementary emphases and not as contradictions.

7. *Rolf Decot's* paper dealt with »Einheit der Kirche und Papsttum bei Philipp Melanchthon

(und Martin Luther im Vergleich)«. The paper disclosed Melanchthon's emphasis of »reine Lehre« as a greater priority than the papacy as a sign of unity. It concluded with the notion that »a Roman Catholic perspective« could incorporate Melanchthon's view of the papacy »jure humano« as a symbol of unity based on a »biblically understood Petrusdienst«.

Major items of discussion were Luther's and Melanchthon's views of the ordained ministry in relation to ecclesial unity; the notion of »hierarchy« and its contemporary usefulness; Luther's distinction between »inner« and »outer« church; the notion of a »true« and »false church« in relation to contemporary views of Christian unity; and the sometimes still popular view of Melanchthon as a reformer who betrayed rather than preserved Luther's legacy. The seminar tended to view Luther and Melanchthon as allies in their concept of the church, with complementary rather than divisive features in their respective ecclesiologies. There was also discussion of major papers offered in the plenum of this Congress. On the whole, the members of the seminar enjoyed the wide-ranging discussion in the sessions, but conceded that more work on the seminar topic needed to be done.

Rechtfertigung und Heiligung bei Martin Luther und Philipp Melanchthon

Seminarleiter: Simo Peura
Berichterstatter: Rainer Vinke

Die elf Teilnehmer des Seminars hatten Luther- bzw. Melanchthontexte ausgewählt, um sie mit Blick auf die Fragestellung des Seminars zu behandeln und das Ergebnis in einem Arbeitspapier vorzustellen. Die Berichterstattung über

die Referate berücksichtigt die zumeist lebhafteste Diskussion.

Bo Kristian Holm untersuchte das Seminarthema anhand von Luthers »Tractatus de libertate christiana«. Ausgehend von der sozialanthro-