

Christianity and Culture in Luther and Melanchthon

Seminar Leader: Scott Hendrix

Reporter: Louis Reith

The purpose of this seminar was to investigate the extent to which Luther and Melanchthon thought the Reformation should intensify the Christian dimension of European culture. Both the presentations and the discussions focused on the following general questions: How did each reformer use the word »Christian« and could it mean the same for both of them? How did each reformer envision the place of a renewed Christianity in the culture at large? Did the humanism of Melanchthon cause him to be more interested than Luther in the specifically Christian identity of institutions like government, marriage, and schools? The discussion of such questions was structured around four presentations based on the following texts:

1. Martin Luther: *Vom ehelichen Leben*, 1522; led by Scott Hendrix.

2. Philipp Melanchthon: *Philosophiae moralis epitomes*, 1546; led by Risto Saarinen.

3. Philipp Melanchthon: *De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis*, 1518; *In laudem novae scholae*, 1526; *Encomium eloquentiae*, 1523; led by Ralph Keen.

4. Martin Luther: *An die Ratsherren aller Städte deutschen Lands, daß sie christliche Schulen aufrichten und halten sollen*, 1524; *Eine Predigt, daß man Kinder zur Schule halten solle*, 1530; led by James Kittelson, who offered to present these texts in place of the deceased Bernhard Lohse.

In his presentation on the treatise »*Vom ehelichen Leben*«, Scott Hendrix argued that Luther did not intend to submit a more secular notion of marriage than the medieval sacramental view. Instead, Luther offered a non-sacramental theology of marriage which he thought would enable believers to lead a more Chris-

tian life in the estate of matrimony. Luther did make some statements which have led to the opinion that he was trying to secularize marriage. He called marriage a »worldly affair« and stressed that Christians could marry non-Christians just as they could do business with non-Christians. Luther also allowed divorce on several grounds. At the same time, Luther stressed that marriage was a »werck« of God instituted with the creation of women and men whom God commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gn 1, 28). Furthermore, although divorce was permitted on grounds of adultery, Luther suggested that believers who were seriously trying to live as Christians would not make use of that ground. In the long third part of his treatise, Luther distinguished between marriage in general and the Christian practice of marriage and denounced what he described as the »pagan« disparagement of both marriage and women. In addition to these passages, the seminar also debated Hendrix's critique of Joel Harrington's emphasis on the continuity between medieval and Reformation efforts to christianize marriage within European culture.

Risto Saarinen presented Melanchthon's ethics as his attempt to answer the larger question of whether theology and philosophy could distinguish a specific Christian ethic from a general philosophical ethic. According to Saarinen, Melanchthon's »*Philosophiae moralis epitomes*« of 1546 did contain a specifically Christian ethic although that work distinguished sharply between moral philosophy and the gospel. In the first place, moral philosophy was based on natural law, which in turn arose out of divine law implanted in everyone by God at creation. In the second place, Melanchthon ac-

cepted the role of assisting or secondary causes in the production of virtue and assigned some of them to specific gifts of God. In the third place, Melanchthon argued that Christian doctrine and moral philosophy complemented each other. Only theology could point out the true cause of human weakness, while ethics demonstrated the usefulness of doctrine in everyday life. Discussion of this presentation focused on two sets of contrasts: 1. between a Christian and a more general theological ethic; and 2. between Melanchthon's ethics and the moral theory of other Reformation and pre-Reformation theologians. Saarinen emphasized that Melanchthon's treatise played an important role in the birth of a distinct discipline of Christian ethics.

In his analysis of Melanchthon's orations on education, *Ralph Keen* offered profiles of three different Melanchthons. First, the oration »De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis« of 1518 was the purely literary production of a young humanist who had no theological agenda at all. The same stance was taken by Melanchthon in 1526 when he delivered the oration »In laudem novae scholae« in Nürnberg. Second, the oration »Encomium eloquentiae«, delivered in 1523, showed Melanchthon as a humanist scholar who had developed a more practical and positive view of the service which clarity of speech could render to theology and to learning and morality in general. Finally, from the mid-1520s on, Melanchthon's orations revealed him to be a humanist theologian who had fully integrated scholarship with the church and Christian life. Keen argued that stage three should not be seen as evidence of Melanchthon's rationalism but as the culmination of his inclusive identity as a Christian intellectual, who could integrate Christian faith into the realm of human experience without secularizing it.

Discussion centered on this thesis and on the appropriateness of dividing Melanchthon's career into the suggested stages. Did Melanchthon have to be converted, as it were, by the Witten-

bergers to the integration of theology with humanism, or did Melanchthon find in the Christian humanist agenda at Wittenberg an environment that was already compatible with his own interests?

Introducing Luther's two educational treatises, *James Kittelson* noted how the reformer wrestled with the task of constructing a new German educational culture now that the old monastic schools were declared unchristian institutions. Luther graphically pointed out the neglect of schools and pupils in the Germany of his day, and he saw this neglect as one sign of the last days. Nevertheless, he assumed that it was necessary to construct a new evangelical society, however temporary it might be, on the foundation of genuine Christian schools. It was Luther's conviction that the urban patriciate and the territorial princes, though secular rulers, had a moral obligation to foster Christian learning and thus to promote a Christian culture within that society. That obligation included the training of clergy, to which Luther gave considerable attention in the sermon on keeping children in school. In these pamphlets, which were certainly intended for a more popular audience than Melanchthon's orations, it was difficult for readers to make the same sharp distinctions between spiritual and temporal or between »christlich« and »vernünftig« which modern scholars have been able to find in works of Luther like »Von weltlicher Oberkeit, ...«. Participants debated the use of terminology by Luther and the nature of the social vision which underlay that language.

The final discussion dealt with the issue of whether Melanchthon and Luther had a common agenda for the Christian reform of German society. Considerable support was expressed for such an agenda, but attention was also called to differences between the ways that each reformer utilized aspects of Christian humanism and articulated a theology of two kingdoms. The contrast between the audiences addressed by each reformer suggested to one participant

that the Reformation might be seen as a musical piece in which the popular melody was enriched by an erudite counterpoint. The multicultural experience of seminar participants – combin-

ing backgrounds from six countries and four continents – also enriched the seminar with insights on the relationship between Christianity and culture in today's world.

Education and Worship in Luther's Work

Seminar leader: Carl Axel Aurelius

Reporter: Carl Axel Aurelius

The seminar was bilingual with contributions both in English and in German. As the leader of the seminar *I* gave an introductory lecture. The focus was on the relationship between education and worship in the catechetical work of the Reformers, underlining the intended use of the catechism. In my perspective catechism should be understood primarily as an introduction, or a training, into the life and faith of the worshipping congregation, rather than a summary of doctrine.

In the following discussion the genre and function of the catechism was further developed through valuable contributions by *Mary Jane Haemig* on preaching the catechism as a trans-

formal enterprise and by *Oddvar Jensen* on the theology of the catechism.

Birgit Stolt focused especially on Luther's concept of faith, elaborating his understanding of the meaning of »von Herzen glauben« (R 10, 10) and the difference as well as the relation between »affectus« and »intellectus«.

Pekka Kärkkäinen reflected, among other things, upon Luther's exposition of the Creed in different texts.

The discussion about the original aim and function of catechism in the time of the Reformation was very fruitful and important, not the least with regard to the »distortion« of catechetical work in later centuries.

Education and Vocation in the Reformation

Seminar leader: Marilyn J. Harran

Reporter: Robert Rosin

The group began with an overview led by *Marilyn Harran*, noting Luther's educational ideas that might be seen contributing to *Bildung* and *Erziehung*. Along with humanist influenced

theological studies aimed at forming clergy, Luther's broader emphasis on universal (boys and girls) schooling sowed seed that likely would not yield quick results but that did hold