

The Legacy of Swedish Luther Renaissance

Seminar Leader: Roger Jensen

Reporter: Roger Jensen

The goal of the seminar was to discuss distinctive features of the twentieth century Swedish Luther Renaissance and its legacy for contemporary Swedish Luther research. The participants presented short papers focusing on historical and theological aspects. These aspects were explored in a comparative way in discussing the parallel development in the German Luther Renaissance.

Roger Jensen led the first seminar session by both providing a larger framework for use in the seminar discussions and discussing the methodological approach of Gustaf Wingren. In this framework, Jensen especially discussed the notion of vocation related to modernization and enlightenment, and the challenges this development meant to theology. The notion of privatization, the separation of public from private spheres, was exemplified in the debate, and different positions on Luther's understanding of vocation were presented. Jensen argued that Kantian philosophy was in many ways a precondition for this

development in representing an epistemological framework for the understanding of the teaching of the two realms on modern premises. Jensen pointed further to the influence of neo-Kantian epistemology in the Luther research of the 20th century.

One of the main differences from the German Luther Renaissance, according to Jensen, was the special focus on *God acting in history*. Yet, Jensen argued that the neo-Kantian influence in epistemology was also present in the Swedish Luther Renaissance, notably in Anders Nygren. Exactly this aspect was criticized by Gustaf Wingren, so Jensen. Contrary to the conceptual focus of Nygren and the motif research, Wingren sought a way of making the concrete, tangible and empirical the starting point of theology. In seeking an alternative way, Wingren developed what he called a *double phenomenological orientation* in theology, combining creational theology with the kerygmatic approach – a position

that avoided the pitfalls that came to characterize much of the German Luther Renaissance marked by neo-Kantian epistemology.

Maria Erling of Gettysburg Seminary discussed the various ways that Swedish perspectives on Luther's theology were transmitted to America in the wake of World War II. Particularly important was the need to salvage Luther's reputation after the capitulation of large parts of the German church to Nazism. Furthermore, Swedish Lutherans in the United States were interested in using Luther to promote their own goal of healing divisions among various branches of Lutherans. An essential transmitter of Luther's theology to America was Edgar Carlson. Another key source was the visit to post-war Scandinavia by Carl Rasmussen to solicit manuscripts for Muhlenberg Press for possible translations.

Critical discussions in the seminar centered on the nature of Rasmussen's work and the interpretive lens he used to ask questions of his subjects. Which theologians were visited and which books merited translation? Also, Rasmussen's idiosyncratic style raises issues for the historian about accuracy of transcription.

Karin Johannesson of Uppsala

University presented a paper on the Swedish theologian Arvid Runestam and his views on sanctification. Johannesson's desire was to take the present day »subjective turn« and the interest in spirituality seriously and to understand and shape it through the filter of the Lutheran theological tradition. Such a discussion naturally points in the direction of the meaning of sanctification and she enlisted Runestam to assist her with this project. Johannesson noted how Runestam identifies Luther's *Bondage of the Will* as an unavoidable challenge for any meaningful exposition of a Lutheran theology; he also used the turn of the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband to help explicate the various relationships between psychological and moral freedom in the human subject.

In the following discussion, it was pointed out that Runestam's interpretation of Luther might grant the human subject a degree of freedom never suggested by the reformer. The further conversation included Runestam's use of Windelband to help explain the freedom of the will in a modern context. It was noted that Windelband was pre-Freudian in his analysis of the will and that this meant his work

was unduly influenced by the optimism of the Enlightenment and a neo-Kantian epistemology.

Leif Svensson from Umeå University presented a critical note on the two kingdoms doctrine in the Swedish Luther Renaissance. In his paper, Svensson analyzes studies by Einar Billing, Gustaf Törnvall, Gustaf Wingren and Per Frostin in order to highlight and problematize what he sees as the »Troeltschian« nature of the Swedish two kingdoms interpretations, especially: a) the understanding of the church as a spiritual entity (Christian life is all about an inner community with God), b) the reduction of Christian ethics to an inner spiritual sphere of dispositions, and c) a conservative stress on obedience to authority.

Critical discussions in the seminar focused on the question to what degree the Swedish two kingdom interpretations are subject to Ernst Troeltsch's criticism of Lutheran ethics. The development of Troeltsch's critique by e.g. John Howard Yoder and Alasdair MacIntyre was suggested to be an important challenge for contemporary Lutheran theology.

Thomas Girmalm from Umeå University presented a text discussing Gustaf Wingren's theory of

preaching as it emerges in his book on preaching (G. WINGREN, *Predikan: En principiell studie*, 1949). Girmalm examines how Wingren brings the human and Christian together by using the notion of *communicatio ideomatum*, and how this methodological approach marks what came to be the hallmark of the theology of Wingren, combining creational and kerygmatic theology. The book *Predikan* represented a clash with the methods of Lundensian theology, i.e. the motif research, and with Anders Nygren. The bringing together of preaching *and* theology was criticized for being non-academic, but denotes the practical turn in Wingren's theology and the making of *the phenomena of preaching* into the starting point of theological work.

The following discussion pointed to how a new reading of the book *Predikan* can lead to new insights regarding Wingren's theological aim of bringing the divine and the human together, namely through a theology of incarnation and Christology – aspects neglected in the later Wingren-reception. The further discussion focused on *the problem of universality* in Wingren regarding his understanding of the Word, the preaching, the preacher

and the congregation, i.e. the lack of emphasis on contextuality and diversity.

Mark D. Tranvik from Augsburg College presented a paper on Luther and Wingren on baptism. In providing an overview of Luther's understanding of baptism, Tranvik argued that Wingren builds on the early church fathers and Luther. The overall goal of Tranvik was to promote a baptismal language and baptismal theology that focuses on the relationship *faith and daily life*. – Baptism for Luther is, so Tranvik, neither »just the sacrament of infancy« nor an initiation rite, rather, baptism spans the entire life of the believer. According to Wingren, man is through baptism restored in

Christ, recapitulated, brought back into proper relationship with creation, neighbor and God; in baptism, man truly becomes man. Yet, the »true and proper baptism for all humanity« is the death and resurrection of Christ, the reversing of the life-death pattern set by Adam; hence all the believer ever receives is a renewal and continuation of baptism. There were some questions raised concerning the bearing of the Luther-Wingren connection. It was argued that the understanding of baptism in Wingren seems to be drawn more from Irenaeus, hence the language of recapitulation and becoming man, and not that closely from Luther.

Sola Scriptura

Seminar Leader: Friederike Nüssel

Reporters: H. Ashley Hall and Friederike Nüssel

While the *sola scriptura* principle is widely regarded as an essential element of Luther's thought and Lutheran theology, it has gone through several transformations in the history of Lutheran thinking. The goal of the seminar was to identify and reflect some crucial

steps in this development and to discuss possible ways of re-thinking the way in which the principal role of the Bible could be defined today consistent with Lutheran thought.

The seminar participants included *Lubomir Batka* (Comenius-