

Vom Umgang mit Luther 2017

Drei Statements zur Podiumsdiskussion

How to deal with Luther in 2017?

By Ľubomír Batka

I understand this question in historical perspective as an invitation to reflect on the fruits of dealing with Luther in the last 500 years, to speak briefly about the present time, and to think about the future, too—from a Central-European perspective.

1. A look in the past

In the region of today's Slovakia, Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were read already in 1521. But, if Luther deserves special credit in Slovakia, then it is in relation to the phenomenon of his *Small Catechism*. The so called *Šarišské články* (1540), mention the oldest—no extant—translation of Luther's *Small Catechism* into Czechoslovak language. There are hints for the existence of another Slovak printing of the *Small Catechism* from 1556 and a translation of it done by Mikuláš Collaninus (before 1581), which are both no longer extant too. The first extant printed version, from the press of David Gutgesell in Bardejov, is the so-called *Bardejov Catechism* (1581) which is »the oldest known Slovak book printed in the area of present Slovakia.« Up to 2013, there were more than 300 printed versions of the *Small Catechism* in Czech and Slovak languages, in various forms and variations. In addition, there are handwritten copies and manuscript translations.

The Catechism formed common traits of Lutheran spirituality, educa-

tion and theology, and I dare to claim that there is no other book of Luther that shaped the identity and piety of Lutherans across the globe in the last 500 years more than the *Small Catechism* did.

My first thesis is: For the research of *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Luther's theology, the Catechism represents a tremendous treasure of Lutheran Theology that should be explored thoroughly.

For Bohemian Utraquists, there was no need to exchange the Czech John Hus for Saxonian Martin Luther. Slovaks or Hungarians did not have their Hus, but Luther became a single Father of the Reformation for neither group. The acceptance and spread of reformational theology was not only to Luther's credit. Melanchthon's role is equally important, and in Central Europe perhaps even more important than Luther's.¹ Leonard Stöckel, a Theologian, Humanist, Pedagogue, and a leading figure of the Reformation in Upper Hungary of the 16th century became rector of the town school in Bardejov. Later he earned the title *Praeceptor Hungariae*. He set up the school after Melanchthon's humanistic curriculum; for the school's use he wrote *Catechesis D. Leonardi Stockelli*—based on Luther's *Small Catechism*.² But his theologically most influential work was his dogmatic treatise *Annotationes locorum communium doctrinae christianae Philippi Melanchthonis*, published together with Melanchthon's *Loci communes* in Basel in 1561. In our context, Melanchthon's *Loci* became the most important theological treatise of reformational theology for decades.

Finally, for the development of the Reformation in our context, the importance of the *Augsburg Confession* has to be mentioned. The first reformation synod in Prešov (1546) introduced revisions in teaching, liturgy, and church structure according to Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* and the *Augsburg Confession*. The three early Lutheran confessions written in the area of contemporary Slovakia—the *Confessio Pentapolitana* (1549),

1 Cf. J. SOLOYOM, Melanchthonforschung in Ungarn (in: Luther und Melanchthon. Referate und Berichte des Zweiten Internationalen Kongresses für Lutherforschung, hg. v. V. VATJA. 1961, 178–188), 178.

2 Cf. I. ASHEIM, Glaube und Erziehung bei Luther. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Verhältnisses von Theologie und Pädagogik (Pädagogische Forschungen 17), 1961, 73 f.

the *Confessio Montana* (1559), and the *Confessio Scepusiana* (1569)³—, were based on the *Confessio Augustana*. The importance of the CA is displayed formally in names of most Churches of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy who do call themselves 'The Evangelical Church of the A.C.

My second thesis is: Luther had predecessors and followers, but also co-workers. We should deal with Luther under the aspect of Luther intertwined with his coworkers in Wittenberg, with Melanchthon especially.

2. Current time and space

Currently, the Lutheran Church in Slovakia—the largest Lutheran Church among the Slavic nations—exists in a diaspora situation in a conservative Roman-Catholic milieu. The counterreformation was successful. Especially severe was its violent form after the so-called Ferenc Wesselényi conspiracy in 1670 that lasted almost twenty years. Counterreformation arose anew during the reign of Charles III (1711–1740). In this time, there was no real space for reflection on Luther's theology and the main concern was the survival of the church.

Despite all attempts of the Habsburg dynasty, and despite all attempts of the defenders of the militant Klerofascist and Marxist philosophy in the 20th century in Slovakia, today there is time and space (spiritual and academic) for Slovaks to deal with Luther in 2017 with unprecedented freedom. If it is true that *historia magistra vitae est*, then I hope we learned this: Besides the Blood of Christ, no other blood should be shed among Christians because of faith.

I am a convinced Lutheran theologian. But I am also a convinced ecumenical theologian. To me, it is a shame that after 500 years of Reformation, globally we have a divided Lutheran Church and Lutherans are not able to celebrate Holy Communion together. On the other hand, I am happy that after 500 years of Reformation we can harvest substantial fruits of ecumenical work done with Roman Catholic theologians.⁴

3 Cf. P. KÓNYA / Z. CSEPREGI, *Tri Lutherksé vyznania viery z Uhorska / Drei lutherische Glaubensbekenntnisse aus Ungarn*, 2013.

4 A recent summary of the theological reception of Luther's theology done in the sphere of Roman Catholic Theology offers D. BLUM, *Luthers Theologie in katholischen Perspek-*

Gratefully, in 2017 there is unique time and space (spiritual and academic) to deal with Luther ecumenically. My third thesis is: The ecumenical approach in dealing with Luther in 2017 seems to me the most appropriate.

I will point to one publication that was possible due to the result of a common mission described in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*:

Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5 f.) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts.⁵

The study text *From Conflict to Communion*, a joint document from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Commission on Unity, looks at the joint responsibility for the division of the Western Church in the 16th century, explores the basic themes of Martin Luther's theology with a view to Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, and focuses on five ecumenical imperatives for the relationship between both Churches as they commemorate 2017 together. Those Five Ecumenical Imperatives stress that Catholics and Lutherans should 1. always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division; 2. let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith; 3. again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal; 4. jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time, and 5. bear witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.⁶

tiven. Spotlights auf die Lutherrezeption im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert. (Luther 88, 2017, 91–104). She describes 1. the beginnings of the reception of Luther continuing in the tradition of controversial theology hundred years ago (Denifle), 2. the reception of Luther's thoughts in the context of Vaticanum II (1961–1965) (Lortz, Iserloh, Manns, Pesch) and 3. after a time of »ecumenical winter« she points to a new wave of interest (Walter Kardinal Kasper, Volker Reinhard, Daniela Blum).

5 LWF. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 2000, art. 18.

6 Cf. LWF, PCPCU. From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017, 2013, 87–89.

My fourth thesis is: To deal with Luther in 2017 fairly involves listening to critics of Luther's theology so that it becomes possible again for Lutheran theologians to propose a doctrine that the Church should and could teach.

3. *A look into the future*

500 years ago, the reception of thoughts originating in Wittenberg grew predominantly among the German population in Slovakia (the Free royal towns of Pentapolitana, Free mining towns of Heptapolitana, or among the German court circle of Mary of Habsburg in Buda). Nevertheless, the Reformation was not perceived as a German event and not as a movement for Germans only. The *natio hungarica* during reformation time included Hungarian, Slovak, and German populations alike. Hungarians and Slovaks had an important role in the process of Confessionalization. This proves the universal power of the gospel underlined by Luther. The global character of Lutheranism of present times should be an inspiration for further dealing with Luther.

However, the contextual challenges are great. Kardinal Walter Kasper writes about the person of Luther and his message so strange (*fremd*) to our time. So, how to deal with Luther who is a stranger to our time and how to deal with Luther in our time that would be strange to Luther?

My fifth thesis is: there is no ›strategy‹ how to read Luther in 2017 apart from better theology. And there is no better theology apart from better exegesis.

The method of Luther's theological work was exegesis. Robert Kolb in his excellent book *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God* says:

Thus Luther did not ›intermix‹ exegetical and systematic thinking but rather saw them as naturally and unavoidably intertwined. They came together as he clarifies the contexts of biblical texts, presented them while presupposing certain characteristics of Scripture, and opened their meaning on the basis of a series of fundamental concepts.⁷

However, as there was no other teaching authority besides the Scripture (*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpret*), a notion developed among protestant theologians about one compulsory univocity—binding the text to one

7 R. KOLB, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 2016, 106f.

meaning only. The very reformational hermeneutical tool, the distinction of Law and Gospel, allows at least two perspectives on one text. This is perhaps better expressed in the negative form: not to strive for only one possible reading but to achieve a collection of possible readings.

The framework for Luther's hermeneutics of Scripture and life, for the human experience and reality, that permeated Luther's proclamation of God's word was »the cross of Christ«. Luther talks about God by using human words but insisting that in logic those human words do not apply to God in the sense of an ›analogy‹: A is to B as C is to D.⁸ It is not that we learn about Christ from what the cross does to us. Rather, the cross of Christ teaches a divine logic and this can only derivatively be applied to human life. We learn about us from what Christ does to the cross. To me, theologically this implies not only searching for the original context of biblical texts but also displacing them from concepts and contexts in which they have been deployed and putting them in our various experience and realities—in front of the Cross of Christ and the divine logic hidden behind it.

In his *Operationes in Psalmos*, Luther used such a kind of method:

Sed Theologo puram germanamque intelligentiam scrutanti necessarium est consultis ipsis sacris literis de omnibus iudicare, sicut Augustinus in multis locis docet, et Paulus praecipit »omnia probate, quod bonum est, tenete«. ⁹

His aim was to get through to »simplicissime scripturae simplicissimus sensus«¹⁰. This does not mean that Luther was always right in his exegesis, but certainly he did not doubt the power of promises of God that lead to consolation and certainty of faith despite all *Anfechtungen*.¹¹

Luther fostered the conviction of the final authority of the Bible that creates a difference in different ways of reading the Bible. Better exegesis brings the joy in finding the colorful beauty of a spectrum of meanings in the treasure box called the Bible. The continuous reading and explaining of Scripture is the basis for every Christian existence. By returning to the

8 Cf. loc. cit., 114. See esp. 114–119.

9 WA 5; 281,10–13.

10 Cf. WA 5; 672,25–26: »Sed hoc anhelio, ut purus, genuinus appositusque suo quisque loco sensus habeatur [...].« (*Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519/21).

11 Cf. WA 5; 22,33–35: »Quocirca ingenue confiteri me oportet, me ignorare, legitimam habeam nec ne intelligentiam psalmorum, etsi veram esse non dubitem, quam trado.«

Scripture we can make a step forward. Because Luther and Melancthon have taught us: *fides ex auditu* (Rom 10:17). That is the way how to achieve strength and the ability to catechesis, *doctrina* and confession. And vice versa: catechesis, *doctrina* and confession help us to interpret the Scripture better. Thus, I conclude my words on how to deal with Luther in 2017 with Melancthon's words in his dedication of the *Loci* 1553 to Anna Camerarius:

Denn rechte Lerer richten nicht neue, oder besondere lere von Gott, sondern bleiben stracks in dem einigen verstand, wie sich Gott durch diese Reden geoffenbart hat, die in der Propheten und Aposteln Schrifften, und in den Symbolis gefasset sind,[...].¹²

Wie gehen wir 2017 mit Luther um?

Von Claus Schwambach

Das Jubiläumsjahr der Reformation 2017 ist eine außergewöhnliche Gelegenheit, sich mit Luthers Erbe auf globaler Ebene ökumenisch, kritisch, kreativ und rezipierend zu befassen und sich von seiner Theologie herausfordern zu lassen. Wie gehen wir mit ihm heute um? Ich möchte auf diese Frage mit fünf Überlegungen antworten.

1. Luther war vor allem Bibelausleger und hat sich als Zeuge des Evangeliums, des Wortes Gottes, der Heiligen Schrift, verstanden. Er meinte grundsätzlich, dass nicht seine Person, sondern allein seine *Lehre*, insofern sie Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes als Gesetz und Evangelium sei, für seine eigene Gegenwart und für die Zukunft von Bedeutung sein sollte. Wer daher Luther liest und interpretiert, sollte in erster Linie nach dem quer durch seine verschiedenen Werke und deren vielfältige Gattungen erscheinenden *theologischen Wahrheitsanspruch* fragen. Luther war ein Wahrheitssucher. In seiner Theologie geht es stets um die Wahrheitsfrage, die nicht einfach historisiert und m.E. auch nicht einfach im Rahmen von Subjektivitätstheorien, wie sie für uns heute tendenziell auch in der Lutherforschung typisch geworden sind, subsumiert werden kann. Unsere Subjektivität wird von außen her konstituiert, vom uns unverdient zuvorkommenden externen Wort (*extra nos*), welches uns in der Schöpfung und Erlösung begeg-

¹² CR 22, 45f.

net. Luthers Theologie, die Schriftauslegung sein will, bringt diese Sache unabweisbar zur Sprache – und zwar so, dass wir eigentlich nicht umhinkönnen, unsere Gegenwart in zutiefst existentieller Weise im Lichte dieser Sache zu prüfen. Es gilt daher, Luther als Weggefährten auf der Suche nach der befreienden Wahrheit, die sich uns in und durch die Heilige Schrift unverdient in Jesus Christus *promissional* schenkt, stets frisch und neu, lebensverändernd und ethisch herausfordernd, zu entdecken. Hermeneutische Grundsatzfragen im Blick auf den Zugang zu Luther und im Blick auf seine Kontextualisierung müssten uns also auch in Zukunft in globaler Perspektive beschäftigen.

2. Man kann mit Luther heute so umgehen, dass man im *Gespräch mit der römisch-katholischen Kirche* zwar auf seine grundlegenden Gedanken und Lehren als theologischen Leitfaden zurückgreift, dies aber stets *im Bewusstsein des heutigen Standes der bilateralen ökumenischen Gespräche mit der katholischen Kirche* tut. Die vergangenen 40 Jahre waren von zahlreichen Gesprächen, Konvergenzen und Konsensen geprägt. Gemeinsame Texte wurden veröffentlicht wie z.B. die *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre*. Billige Polemik und Vorurteile wurden abgebaut; eine produktive und fördernde Gesprächsatmosphäre wurde aufgebaut, so dass die Fronten heute aufgeweicht sind. Das Dokument *Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft* lädt zu einer *gemeinsamen* Reformationsjubiläumsfeier ein, indem zum einen der Stand der bereits erreichten Gemeinschaft festgestellt und zum anderen die ›Sünden‹ der Vergangenheit bekannt werden, sowie um gegenseitige Vergebung gebeten wird.

Diese demütige Haltung ist m.E. eine solide geistlich-theologische Grundlage für die gegenseitigen Beziehungen in der Gegenwart und in der Zukunft. Selbstverständlich muss man sich im Jahr 2017 vielleicht auch fragen: Wo befinden wir uns eigentlich im ökumenischen Dialog? Ich denke, dass der anfängliche (vielleicht übermäßige) Enthusiasmus vorbei ist. Stattdessen sollte man von einer *neuen Nüchternheit* reden – Nüchternheit jenseits von naivem Optimismus und überkritischem Pessimismus. Wir können mittlerweile von zahlreichen guten Früchten in Sachen erreichter Konvergenz und Konsens sprechen, identifizieren aber auch deutlicher und klarer die Stellen, an denen das Gespräch nach wie vor klemmt – und zwar nicht aufgrund von Vorurteilen, sondern aufgrund ernsthafter theo-

logischer Gründe. Wir haben eine solide Gesprächsbasis erreicht, die heute als fester Ausgangspunkt dient und für die wir dankbar sein dürfen.

Es bestehen aber auch bleibende Differenzen. Und genau an diesen müssen wir weiterarbeiten – zuerst innerlutherisch, dann ökumenisch – mit dem festen Ziel, nicht theologische Identitäten umzudeuten, sondern wahre Glaubensgemeinschaft und ehrliche ökumenische Partnerschaft zu fördern. Wir haben die ökumenischen Gesprächsmethoden verbessert und wollen diese auch in Zukunft weiter verbessern. Es besteht kein Grund, von einem »ökumenischen Winter« zu sprechen oder zu denken, bereits am Ziel zu sein. Der ökumenische Wahrheitsanspruch reformatorischer Theologie, manifestiert in den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften, sollte nicht im Namen ökumenischer Gemeinschaft preisgegeben werden, sondern kritisch und umsichtig, ehrlich und mutig ökumenisch zur Sprache gebracht werden.

3. Man kann 2017 mit Luther so umgehen, dass man *die Rezeptionsgeschichte seiner Theologie stets im Blick behält*, um bei der Tradierung des lutherischen Erbes möglichst *selbstkritisch zu agieren* und Fehler der Vergangenheit zu vermeiden. In den vergangenen 500 Jahren kam es zu verschiedenen Umformungen, Verschiebungen und Verzerrungen von Luthers Theologie. Kein Interpret ging und geht bis heute an Luther kulturell, historisch, ideologisch und theologisch als *tabula rasa* heran. Vorurteile, Vorverständnisse, Vorentscheidungen können nicht ausgeblendet werden, sondern sind bewusst oder unbewusst bei der Interpretation beteiligt. Jeder und jede steht daher in der Versuchung, Luther einseitig und verzerrend zu vereinnahmen. Besonders der Zweite Weltkrieg und der Nationalsozialismus erinnern uns daran, wie stark Luthers Theologie ideologisch vereinnahmt wurde. In Brasilien sind es die letzten 40 Jahre, die uns daran erinnern, wie intensiv Luthers Theologie von verschiedenen Formen befreiungstheologischer Lektüren und Interpretationen geprägt und nicht selten pointiert ideologisch gefärbt wurde. Sich Luther zum Reformationsjubiläum 2017 zu nähern heißt, sich *historisch-kritisch, kulturkritisch, ideologiekritisch* – kurz: sich *theologisch selbstkritisch* – zu nähern. Für eine Heroisierung Luthers sollte 2017 kein Raum sein. In Gegenwart und Zukunft sollte man Luther so rezipieren, dass man seine Fehler und Schwächen deutlich benennt und für nicht rezeptionswürdig erklärt. Luthers Theologie, insofern

sie mit dem Wahrheitsgehalt der Schrift zu tun hat, kann durchaus auch als Selbstkritik und Kritik des jeweiligen globalen oder lokalen Zeitgeistes fruchtbar gemacht werden.

Zu den weiteren Aspekten greife ich auf Erfahrungen zurück, die ich in den letzten Jahren im Vorfeld des Reformationsjubiläums in meiner lutherischen Heimatkirche in Brasilien machen durfte.

4. Mit Luther kann man im Jubiläumsjahr 2017 so umgehen, dass man den ungeheuren Reichtum seiner reformatorischen Theologie auf Gemeindeebene wiederentdeckt und damit Impulse zu neuen reformatorischen Aufbrüchen erhält. Was bewegt die Gemeinden in Brasilien? Neben sozialer Ungerechtigkeit, Wirtschaftskrise und Korruptionsskandalen beschäftigt sie die Fragen, warum wir als Lutheraner in Brasilien derart stark schrumpfen und wieso andere Kirchen wachsen. Was kann überhaupt unser Beitrag als Christen in Brasilien sein? Wir brasilianischen Lutheraner leben nicht nur im katholischsten, sondern auch im am stärksten pfingstlerisch geprägten Land der Erde – in einem Land, das in den letzten 30 Jahren enorme Veränderungen auf religiösem Gebiet erlebte. Vor allem bei den sogenannten *new Pentecostals* wird die Bibel wörtlich verstanden. Bei ihnen geht es weniger um Gemeindeaufbau, sondern darum, »Mega-Event-Kirche« mit starker medialer Präsenz zu sein. Im Mittelpunkt stehen Wohlstandstheologie, Heilung und Exorzismus von dämonischen Mächten im Hier und Jetzt. Hintergründig herrscht eine gewaltige und alles durchdringende »Do-ut-des-Mentalität« in Sachen Religion – man kann sich den Segen Gottes geradezu erwirtschaften. Hinzu kommt, dass die brasilianische Postmoderne durchaus anders geprägt ist als die typisch westlich-europäische Postmoderne. Sie ist nicht so sehr atheistisch, sondern stark synkretistisch. Neben einer typischen postmodernen Basismentalität oder Lebenswelt herrscht in vielen Bereichen der Gesellschaft eine nach wie vor prämoderne Lebenswelt – nicht zuletzt im Blick auf die Religion. Religion ist »in« in zahlreichen Bevölkerungsschichten. Der Glaube an Gott gehört zum Leben und ist heute dank der *new Pentecostals* zugleich ein Medienereignis. Magisches Denken ist in vielen Bevölkerungsschichten angesagt. Der viel beschworene »garstige Graben« der westlichen Moderne wird in den meisten brasilianischen Lebenswelten nicht empfunden. Mitten in diesem Umfeld, vor allem im Süden Brasiliens, aber auch verstreut über das ganze Land,

leben die – heute in stets sinkender Zahl – rund 660.000 Lutheraner, die in der Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB) zusammengeschlossen sind. Zählt man die sogenannten Missouri-Lutheraner mit, kommen noch einmal ca. 250.000 dazu. Auf Leitungs- und Gemeindeebene wurde und wird heute die Frage nach dem proprium der eigenen Konfession gestellt. Um diese Frage zu beantworten, wurde vielfach auf Luthers Texte zurückgegriffen. So haben wir mit Gemeindegliedern wie nie zuvor Luther gelesen – alle möglichen Texte und Themen! Das war eine begeisternde Erfahrung. Weil Luthers Werke bei uns in Brasilien seit 1987 systematisch übersetzt werden und nun sukzessiv zugänglich sind, wurde dies möglich. Überaus fruchtbar sind die Inspirationen, die ›aus Luther‹ kommen – vor allem als theologische Orientierung mitten im religiösen Wirrwar unserer brasilianischen Gesellschaft. Es fiel Gemeindegliedern auf, wie deutlich Luther bei allen Themen die Heilige Schrift als theologisches Kriterium und als Entscheidungsgrundlage nutzt. Dieses Vorgehen wurde als vorbildlich für seine und für unsere Zeit erkannt und als Motivation für neue reformatorische Aufbrüche gesehen, die das kirchliche Leben im Wirrwar unserer Zeit zurück zum proprium führen können: sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, sola scriptura. Eine ähnliche Wirkung, nun mehr auf der Ebene der Pfarrerschaft und der Synoden der brasilianischen Lutherischen Kirche, entfalteten die sechs Einheiten des Internationalen Luthersymposiums von 2012 bis 2017, die gemeinsam von der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Jena, Deutschland (Lehrstuhl für Kirchengeschichte, Prof. Dr. Christopher Spehr), und der Faculdade Luterana de Teologia in São Bento do Sul, Brasilien (Lehrstuhl Systematische Theologie, Prof. Dr. Claus Schwambach), an verschiedenen Orten quer durch Brasilien veranstaltet wurden. Reformation und Bildung (2012), Reformation und Kirche (2013), Reformation und Bibel (2014), Reformation und Politik (2015), Reformation und Bekenntnis (2016), und Reformation der Kirche im 21. Jahrhundert (2017) waren die behandelten Themen, deren Beiträge auf Portugiesisch publiziert werden.

5. Das Reformationsjubiläum 2017 findet in einer Zeit statt, in der wir besonders empfindlich und empfänglich sowohl für kontextuell bezogene als auch für global relevante Fragen sind. *Kontextualität und Globalität* sind zwei Pole, die zu unserer Zeit – vielleicht mehr als je zuvor – gehören.

Dies hat m.E. im Blick auf den Umgang mit Luther einige Folgen. Die wichtigste ist, dass *lokalspezifische Rezeptionen gefördert* werden sollten. Die Zahl von Lutheranern im globalen Süden wächst in vielen Ländern und sorgt für sehr bunte Lutherrezeptionen. Aber nur dort, wo das Profil seiner Theologie eindeutig erkannt und benannt wird, kann die Rezeption angemessen und kritisch kontextualisiert werden. Ein zweiter Aspekt liegt darin, dass *eine lokalspezifische Lutherrezeption sich nicht allzu schnell zum Maßstab für andere lokalspezifische Rezeptionen erheben sollte*. Im globalen Süden sind wir heutzutage besonders empfindlich gegenüber ›neukolonialistischen‹ Tendenzen einer europäischen oder nordamerikanischen lutherischen Theologie. Je globaler der Austausch von Lutherrezeptionen wird, desto ideologiekritischer und kulturkritischer müssten sie sein. Wir müssen uns weltweit gegenseitig helfen und überprüfen, ob das, was wir jeweils von Luthers Theologie zu lernen und zu übernehmen meinen, vom Zeugnis der Schrift gedeckt oder doch nur einseitig kulturell vom Zeitgeist bestimmt ist. Zu diesem Vorgehen gehört viel Demut, Ehrlichkeit und Mut. Die kritische Begegnung der Kulturen kann dann eine echte Bereicherung für die weltweite Lutherrezeption bedeuten. Für die Zukunft heißt das zugleich, dass eine der weltweit wichtigsten Aufgaben darin besteht, Luthers Texte zu übersetzen, zum Studieren verfügbar zu machen und zu lesen.

What to Do with Luther in 2017?

By Sarah H. Wilson

I take it that we have gathered because we don't need any encouragement to engage with Luther in this year of 2017, and that we will continue to engage with Luther in the years to come. I assume that we all find Luther to be extremely intellectually stimulating. I also hope that for many, if not all or most of us here, Luther's theology continually renews and deepens our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. To me the primary significance of Luther is that he speaks from faith and for faith; otherwise he is just another player on the stage of history, one among many, no more or less compelling than any other. But regardless of anyone's theological convictions or lack thereof, my remarks seek only to commend ongoing engagement with Luther as a good in its own right, a good that will bear fruits in ways not always foreseen.

The rubric I'd like to put forward today is the holistic interpretation of Luther. By way of explanation of this term ›holistic‹ I offer a mild critique: there is a tendency in Luther interpretation to seek the unique and one-sided aspects of his work. This is in evidence in both academic and confessionalistic approaches. Academically, it's the Achilles's heel of our profession: the drive to ever-narrower topics and hyper-specialization within an area of study that has already been worked over to a great degree, to say nothing of the financial grants and ideological fads that push research in one direction or another. Confessionally, there is a need to distinguish Luther and therefore Lutheran churches from other Christian options in order to justify ongoing division or hostility, which in turn mutes aspects of Luther that might draw his followers in the direction of other ecclesial entities. I don't wish to suggest that either of these flaws are to be found in all studies of Luther, by no means; only to say that we benefit from conscientious caution against such temptations.

More to the point, I'd like now to propose three examples of further study in a holistic key.

First, in the area of Luther's political theology. Much effort has been devoted to his doctrine of the two kingdoms or two realms, his division of spiritual from secular power, his defense of temporal authority, and so forth. With good reason: these are the issues that played out on the public stage over the course of his life and beyond. Further, since political revolution became necessary and idealized over the past several centuries, finding precedent and justification in Luther has served a useful purpose.

What has gone missing in all of this is Luther's call to personal pacifism and nonviolent resistance. I do not deny my own feeling of contemporary urgency in recapturing these lost themes! Still, I have come to the conclusion that to speak of Luther's political theology without any mention of pacifism or passive resistance is a serious distortion. Luther's best hope for the righteous exercise of the office of public authority, even in the use of force, lay with true Christians who privately committed themselves to following the way of the cross: which means not lifting a hand in self-defense, much less in aggression; suffering what the world inflicts, fairly or not; trusting in God's promise to make things right, not temporally but ultimately.

Early on Luther breaks with tradition by insisting that the Sermon on

the Mount is not a counsel of perfection for monastics alone but the ethical baseline of *every* believer. »Christians do not fight for themselves with sword and musket,« he writes in *The Admonition to Peace*, »but with the cross and with suffering, just as Christ, our leader, does not bear a sword, but hangs on the cross. Your victory, therefore, does not consist in conquering and reigning, or in the use of force, but in defeat and in weakness [...].«¹³ For Luther, *radical pacifism and radical providence go hand in hand*.

Yet neither pacifism nor providence commends passivity, and this is where resistance comes in. As Luther writes in *Temporal Authority*, »Outrage is not to be resisted but endured; yet we should not sanction it, or lift a little finger to conform, or obey.«¹⁴ If the theme of pacifism gets muted over the course of his years, this tendency can be tracked with Luther's gradual *loss of faith* in providence to protect the gospel. Precisely therein the ugliest tendencies in Luther get the better of him.

In any event, it strikes me as nearly impossible to enact a successful two-kingdoms doctrine, separating political and spiritual power, without equally strong doctrines of personal pacifism and resistance. Without them, political power will become totalizing and the church will be helpless to protest. And indeed, we have seen that happen.

A second area that invites holistic interpretation is Luther's teaching on women and men. The received tradition for a very long time was that Luther's Reformation liberated women from stifling convents and re-established the married estate as better than clerical celibacy. More recently there has been a closer examination of Luther's views of women, and doubts have been raised as to whether the closure of the convents was really to women's benefit after all. Luther certainly does swerve in his comments on women, from what strikes modern ears as conventional patriarchy rul-

13 WA 18; 315,11-16: »Denn Christen, die streyten nicht fur sich selbs mit dem schwerd noch mit buchsen sondern mit dem Creütz und leyden, Gleich wie yhrer hertzog Christus nicht das schwerd furet, sondern am creutze hanget, Darumb stehet auch yhrer Sieg, nicht ym obligen und hyrschen odder gewallt, sondern ym unterligen und unkrafft [...].« = LW 46,32 (*Admonition to Peace*). The only differences between the manuscript (cited here) and the printed version are minor changes in spelling.

14 WA 11; 267,22-24: »Frevel soll man nicht widerstehen sondern leyden, Man soll yhn aber nicht billichen noch datzu dienen oder folgen odder gehorchen mit eym fußtritt odder mitt eynem finger.« = LW 45,112.

ing submissive women in the private sphere, to upending all conventional gender expectations in the honor he pays to »Lord Kate« and his support for the education of girls, the employment of female schoolteachers, and the theological training of midwives. On the same page he can both blame women and exonerate them. It can be quite disorienting.

Luther will never serve up an unambiguously positive account on women, as we might like him to. What might help in contextualizing his mixed report on women, though, is closer attention to his view of men—not just as fathers or husbands, either, but men *qua* men. Studies of sex and gender ought not to assume women are the only topic under consideration! Some work is beginning in this area,¹⁵ but much more remains to be done. I suggest that we could profitably thematize »Luther against men,« as for example when he evaluates men as full of »rebellion [...] the passion of lust and desire [...] a loathing of one's own [wife] [...] jealousy, excessive ambition, arrogance, hope of gain, avarice, anger, ill humor.«¹⁶ My own brief survey of the field leads me to believe that we would turn up far more material on this theme than on »Luther against women.« For starting with *The Estate of Marriage* in 1522, and on to the end of his life, Luther continually took men to task for their contempt of women and particularly of women's bodies. It may be that his defense of the goodness of the female body, including female sexual desire and fertility, is a much bigger breakthrough than even a defense of women's work or public office would have been.

All the more striking is how many such remarks appear in Luther's commentary on Genesis, first delivered as lectures to an audience of young men who, we may presume, had women very much on their minds. It may be argued that Luther intended to curtail men's sexual options even more radically than women's. While women's sexuality has always been closely surveilled, Luther wished to impose the same evangelical strictures on male sexuality. And once male sexuality has been bound to marriage, not only are other sexual options precluded, but so are many public options. It's

15 See, for example, the several essays on Luther in: *Masculinity in the Reformation Era* (SCES 83), ed. by S.H. HENDRIX / S.C. KARANT-NUNN, 2008.

16 WA 42; 346,14–18: »[...] rebellio [...], furor libidinis et concupiscentia. Si uxorem ducas, sequitur fastidium tuae [...] aemulatio, ambitio, insolentia, spes lucri, avaricia, ira, indignatio etc.« = LW 2,119.

hard to imagine how years-long voyages of trade or conquest (or eighty-hour work weeks) could be legitimated when a man's first duty is the care of his children and sexual intimacy with his wife. All of which is to suggest: if Luther had an ambivalent view of women, he certainly had an ambivalent view of men, and both because of an ambivalent view of fallen humanity.

Third and finally, I'd like to suggest an area of investigation that may help lead us through the impasse all too familiar from discussions of justification and sanctification, *simul justus et peccator*, the third use of the law, and so forth. While talk of sanctification can and often does obscure the radicality of Luther's teaching on the saving work of God, it must be admitted that justification itself often gets reduced to an abstracted and bloodless theory. Perhaps this is exactly why unevangelical theologies of sanctification—in the form of naive programs for social justice, or renewed ritualism, or self-help handbooks on personal holiness—keep creeping back in. What does it actually *mean* to live by faith alone in Christ alone? What does it *look like* in an actual, specific, human life? How can we talk about it without ending up again at self-chosen works performed for meritorious ends?

I propose that the place to turn is Luther's evangelical redefinition of sainthood. He starts reclaiming this territory early on in his career when he declares the martyred Augustinians at Antwerp, Henry van Zütphen, and Leonhard Kaiser as true saints of the church for suffering death on account of the gospel. But this view comes to fullest expression in the *Genesis commentary*. For example, Luther's treatment of Abraham—paradigm of faith—can be considered his longest biography of any single figure in his entire corpus.

Notably, Luther's exemplary saints are the ancient Israelites. This is because Luther sees an opportunity in the Old Testament that isn't available in the New Testament: namely, the Old Testament tells the stories of complete lives that run their normal course, from birth to childhood to young adulthood to marriage to parenthood to age to death, dealing with such apparently mundane matters as herding cattle and conceiving children. The Old Testament saints' lives are full of upheaval, to be sure, but also the ordinary trials of human existence. Above all, they are full of encounters with the Word of God. And this is all the more fascinating when you consider that Luther historicizes the speech of God: it comes in the

medium of preaching, from Adam or Shem or some other human figure. The Old Testament saints have no advantage over us, such as in the form of dramatic theophanies, that would make their experience of God radically different from ours.

The result is that, in the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs, there is no experienced gap between justification and sanctification, and no apparent or real competition between God's agency and human agency. Everything happens because of the divine Word addressed to the human being. There is no risk that good works will usurp faith. Quite the contrary, the Old Testament saints furnish endless examples of what faith actually looks like, what actually happens when people hear the Word of God, in ways that give all the glory to God. Thus, Luther puts these words in Melchizedek's mouth: »Abram, you have done great things; but God did them through you. This victory must be ascribed, not to you but to God, the Possessor of heaven and earth.«¹⁷ Luther assures us that Abram was glad that the glory of his achievement was transferred away from him to its true Author.

Luther's evangelical reappropriation of the notion of sainthood is resilient and realistic enough to include the saints' failures and sins—a recurring theme. Faith is not a human superpower but always a gift undergirded by God's promise. Luther's saints are so weak, threatened, frightened, and tossed around by their own sinfulness that no one could ever mistake their occasional outbursts of holiness as their own independent achievements to be offered up to God in exchange for salvation. God is always breaking through the feeble saints, their limitations and their objections, by the Word and by the cross, toward the fulfillment of the divine purpose, in the most unexpected of ways. For Luther, providence takes such a winding course through history that it's impossible to be a saint without constant, and constantly renewed, trust. All the good the saints do is the Holy Spirit's doing in them, but it is a doing that takes place on a battleground staked out by sin, death, and the devil.

Perhaps what these three examples of holistic interpretation of Luther mean to suggest is that Luther's theology is a theology to live by. It is expansive enough to address the range of human experience. A holistic reading

17 WA 42; 544, 13–15: »Magna fecisti, o Abraam: Sed Deus per te illa fecit: non tibi, sed Deo, possessori coeli et terrae, victoria haec adscribenda est.« = LW 2,392.

of Luther forces upon us the recognition that we are not purely scholars, historians, or theologians but human beings living before God and in one another's company, caught in forces and situations beyond our choosing, yet always called upon to respond in word and deed. Luther is a good guide in 2017, and in the years to come, for finding our way forward in faith.