

Luther's Theology of Creation: Nordic Interpretations

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The seminar addressed the shape of Luther's theology of creation and vocation with a special emphasis on Nordic interpretations. The two first sessions of the seminar were devoted to Luther's interpretations of *The Sermon of the Mount*, especially Matt 5:17–26 (WA 32; 354–376 = LW 21,67–83) on the law, and Matt 6:24–34 (WA 32; 452–472; LW 21,186–209) on worldly concerns.

Antti Raunio, a representative of the Finnish Luther research, introduced the first session on law, and led the opening discussions on the many ramifications of the concept of law in Luther's theology, both in his understanding of public life and in his understanding of Christian life. The second session on worldly concerns pointed to the fact Luther can describe the lilies of the field and the birds in the air as words of law, insofar as they unmask the futility of human worrying. However, Luther can also highlight the song of the nightingale as a preaching of the gospel better than any human voice. Such descriptions remind of the comprehensive view of the di-

vine Word in Luther's Commentary on Genesis: »sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you etc.—we are all words of God, in fact only a single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation« (LW 1;22 f = WA 42; 17).

Oswald Bayer presented main ideas in »Luther Ahead – particularly on creation«, and pointed to the importance of Scandinavian Luther research for the theme of creation, a theme that after World War II was often toned down in German Luther research due to the fear of a continuation of an ahistorical *Ordnungstheologie*. Luther's theology of the *Stände* or estates, and the variety of human vocations point to a far more dynamical view of everyday life in creation.

A session on historical papers informed the following discussion. *Lin Chunjie*, »The vocations in the world and the creation theology of Martin Luther«, gave a helpful overview of Luther's creation theology from the perspective of Luther's social theology, while *N.L.J. Beck*, »Continuity and discontinuity in Lutheran theological tradition«,

showed the differences between Luther's emphasis on the promise of liberation and Johann Gerhard's annihilationist view of the end of the world; Beck pointed particularly to Paul Althaus' attempt to recover Luther's interpretation of Romans 8:19–23 on the promise of the renovation and glorification of creation. *Mickey Mattox*, »Martin Luther's reception of the Ptolemaic Cosmos«, brought to the table Luther's not so often read *Lectures on Ezekiel*, and was able to show that Luther, in these lectures, not only spoke of the estates of church, *oeconomia* and government, but above all human estates Luther allocated a place for a fourth estate, namely that of the angels!

The remainder of the seminar was devoted to discussions related to the so-called »Scandinavian creation theology«, based on the work of Regin Preter, Gustaf Wingren and K.E. Løgstrup. Each in their way, these three founding figures have continued to have a *Wirkungsgeschichte* also beyond Scandinavia. An impetus for these discussions came from the newly published book, *Reformation Theology for a Post-secular Age: Løgstrup, Preter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology* (Göttingen 2017).

Scandinavian Creation Theology has the goal of combining Luther's theology of creation with central theological concerns of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). Grundtvig argued that human beings never lost the positive traces of being created in the image and likeness of God. Accordingly, the Christian triad of faith, hope and love can be both recognized, appreciated and to some extent lived by non-believers. With his principle, »human comes first, Christian next«, Grundtvig argued that a broader understanding and appreciation of naturally lived human experience is the underlying condition for a Christian way of life. Christian faith has to be lived in accordance with a shared sense of humanity. While Scandinavian Creation Theology does not constitute a unified movement with clear boundaries, the commonly shared view is that God's creation has an independent value and meaning, and is more than a mere foil for human redemption. The beauty of creation exemplifies divine benevolence—a benevolence also encompassing non-human nature (a view shared by Luther and Grundtvig). Despite his appreciation of the human capacity for discerning ethical demands (*lex naturalis*) also in a fallen world, and despite his em-

phasis on the positive roles of the estates of family and civil government, Luther argued that faith, hope and love are fully beyond human capacities. In Grundtvig, by contrast, faith, hope and love are basically the same phenomena, within as well as outside Church and Christianity. Central for the discussion was the question to what extent Grundtvig's motto, »Human comes first [...]«, is in conflict with Luther's principle of *simul justus et peccator*.

Ted Peters, »The eye of Faith and the Eye of Science: Regin Preter and Niels Henrik Gregersen on God's Creation«, pointed to the need for a contemporary Lutheran theology to bring in the natural sciences as a vehicle for understanding how God's own creation works. The Lutheran scheme of »passivity first«, for example, is in full congruence with an understanding of nature as ruled by law and self-organizing principles. *Allan G. Jorgensen* »Luther, Løgstrup and the promise of the senses« pointed to the role of the senses and gestures as entailing promises no less than words do. *Derek Nelson*

»Materiality, Renunciation, and Appropriation« sketched out a phenomenological method attuned to bring forward theological horizons of meaning as entailed in everyday life communications, also entailing a promise. *Bengt Kristensson Uggla* and *Trygve Wyller*, »Becoming Human: Extra Nos – Gustaf Wingren and the experience of irregular migrants«, related Luther's and Wingren's emphasis on the human existence *extra nos* with the encounter of other people on the borderline between human comfort zones and the ethical demand of taking care of human persons coming as immigrants. Finally, *Niels Henrik Gregersen*, »Martin Luther in Scandinavian Creation Theology«, gave an interpretation of the formative role of Martin Luther in K.E. Løgstrup's concept of the ethical demand and its primacy in relation to formulated rules of behavior. In this view, Luther's concept of natural law is not so much a claim for abstract universality but rather for the reasonableness implied in taking care for the life thrown into one's hands.