

Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty and Desire

Seminar Leaders: Paul R. Hinlicky and Mark C. Mattes

Reporter: Matthew D. Rosebrock

The role of beauty and desire, two topics not often addressed in the life and work of Luther, were discussed in the seminar organized by *Paul R. Hinlicky* (Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia) and led by *Mark C. Mattes* (Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa).

Mattes introduced the seminar and began with his research into Luther's theological aesthetics. He argued that while Luther's definition of beauty does not concern the transcendentals, the reformer nonetheless has a theology of beauty rooted in the cross and resurrection of Christ. The cross cuts through theologies of glory preoccupied with human attraction (e.g. proportion, form, color, etc.) to locate the true ground for beauty within God's justifying love that creates it. Mattes contended that the other side of the theology of the cross is not a theology of glory but the theology of the resurrection that redeems and renews the senses. The resurrection, with its implications for all of creation, enables the perception by faith of first article beauty as well.

Miikka E. Anttila (Janakkala, Finland) proposed that Luther's thinking has an aesthetic character that appears in all of his theology. He discussed the role of beauty as the image through Luther's Heidelberg Disputation and his 1531/1535 *Lectures on Galatians*. Anttila noted that Luther is concerned with an aesthetic defined through the cross and suffering. Christ's deed in justification is aesthetic for Luther as he likens it to the sun that shines into hearts and enlivens faith. Anttila argued that Luther does not describe God's criteria for beauty in superficial terms but the deeper matter of the heart that receives Christ by faith.

Matthew D. Rosebrock (Oregon, Illinois) discussed how Luther's rules of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* can be used as a framework for understanding how the reformer interacted with images of his day with respect to the biblical text. Thus, Luther's three rules are helpful in describing the shape of Luther's theology of vision. Rosebrock argued that Luther's turn from the image of Christ as judge to the image of the

crucified is one framed by prayer and meditation and conditioned by affliction. So Luther's intimate reading of the text of Scripture is formational both spiritually and visually.

Carl P.E. Springer (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Edwardsville, Illinois) offered his review of Birgit Stolt, *Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens* (Tübingen 2000). Stolt argues that Luther's »Latinity« is often not adequately addressed as a substantial aspect of the reformer's thinking. For example, Luther's rhetorical ability—that he even claimed to lack—is, in reality, expressed in his self-deprecating statements and his ability to hide his art. Following Stolt, Springer emphasized that rhetoric was not merely flourish for Luther, but theologically important for speaking to the intellect and emotion in his biblical translation, music, humor, and concept of God as father.

Ronald K. Rittgers (Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana) con-

sidered the role of desire in Luther's »Brief Exhortation to Confession« in the *Large Catechism*. While Luther did have strong words against penance and clerical compulsion by guilt, he still held the practice of private confession in high regard. In the »Brief Exhortation«, Luther encouraged the role of desire in the confessant, not through compulsion, but through faith in the consolation that the Word gives. Rittgers' paper concluded that Luther saw value in the practice of private confession, even supporting it as a prerequisite for admission to the Lord's Supper, for its ability to train the heart to desire God Himself as the only Good. Rittgers' paper was presented *in absentia* by seminar participant *Mark Granquist* (Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota).

Other participants of the seminar included *Jukka Kääriäinen* (FELM, Hsinchu) and *William Schumacher* (Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri).