

Luther and Ecumenism

Seminar Leader: Risto Saarinen

Reporter: Candace L. Kohli

This seminar considered how Luther's historical message is connected with contemporary ecumenical dialogue. Presentations included both theological reflections and reports on ecumenical discussions in international contexts.

Three papers examined theological questions about Luther's role in ecumenism. *Risto Saarinen* (Helsinki, Finland) asked whether »recognition«, an awareness that who we are and become depends on the way others recognize us, is a fruitful concept in ecumenical dialogue. Drawing from his new book *Recognition and Religion*, Saarinen located recognition conceptually between toleration and agreement, two concepts from political philosophy. Recognition is stronger than toleration in requiring positive interaction but weaker than agreement by preserving distinctions between parties. In ecumenism, agreement seeks full, visible unity, while recognition permits differentiated consensus. The question is whether the theological meaning of recognition (*agnoscere*) dating to Aquinas and Augustine as a recognition of God that effects a

status change in the acknowledging believer can help to conceptually locate full, visible unity without loss of separate identities between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

Mark Ellingsen (Atlanta, USA) assessed how Martin Luther was used in the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on Justification* (1999). The *Joint Declaration* and other ecumenical statements, such as the LWF/PCPCU document *From Conflict to Communion* (2013), do not consider some of Luther's statements that seem consistent with Catholic thought or other ecumenical partners. Attempts to systematize Luther's thought contributed to these oversights. To highlight precedents in Luther for affirming many Catholic or Eastern positions, Ellingsen presented an ecumenical reading of Luther as a pastoral-contextual theologian, which he develops in his new book *Martin Luther's Legacy*. A pastoral-contextual approach to Luther distinguishes between certain themes in Luther's preaching and polemicizing from other (characteristically Roman Catholic or Eastern) images he em-

braced when addressing concerns about sanctification or consolation.

Candace Kohli (Evanston, USA) investigated how Luther's theological anthropology could clarify ecumenical positions on good works. She highlighted ambiguity in Lutheran statements about good works after justification as Christ's love in the soul included in both the *Joint Declaration* and *From Conflict to Communion*. For Christ's love to actually be active in the believer's good works, the anthropological possibility for moral deliberation is theologically required. This possibility exists in the way Luther narrated a new theological anthropology in the 1530s to describe the Spirit's re-creation and elevation of human moral powers after justification. By maximizing the Spirit's divine agency, Luther reinstantiated human moral agency. This topic positions Luther more closely with Catholic statements on good works after justification and clarifies Lutheran ambiguities.

Karin Johannesson (Uppsala, Sweden) reported on ecumenical events commemorating the Reformation in Sweden. Souvenir pins and cupcakes imprinted with »may contain traces of Luther« were available at some events, but it remained unclear what traces of Luther's the-

ology the Swedish church wished to highlight. Adding to these events, the Catholic diocese and the Swedish church began new ecumenical small groups focused on the process of dialogue itself. The »friendly conversation« groups document how participants communicate with one another, whether and how groups pray together, and what kinds of emotions arise in the process. The next topic for official bilateral discussions in Sweden will be the community of believers.

Kjell Ove Nilsson (Lund, Sweden) discussed the consequences of Swedish Reformation history. The Church of Sweden adheres to the high church tradition in Lutheranism, making it more »catholic« than other Scandinavian Lutheran churches. This has particular historical reasons. Unlike countries like Denmark and Norway where Luther replaced the Pope's spiritual authority, Sweden replaced papal with princely rule. The Swedish Reformation resulted from the King Gustav I's decision to make Sweden a Lutheran country. Like the English Reformation, Gustav I was in great need of money and depleted the Church of its fortunes. Nilsson also noted that Reformation 500 events in Sweden involve new publications on Luther, including his

Swedish-language book on justification, *To Get it Right with God*.

Kari Kopperi (Helsinki, Finland) described the impact of ecumenical dialogue on Finnish Lutheranism. Significant exchange occurs between New Finnish Luther-Research and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. When bilateral discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church challenged Finnish Luther-Research to study Luther more carefully in search of common theological roots, new emphases on faith and love and the Golden Rule as core principles of Luther's theology arose in Finnish Lutheranism. In the church, ethical discussions about one's responsibility to love the neighbor have occurred around topics like the Finnish welfare-state and 2015 migrant crisis. Although this ecumenical profusion may be receding Protestant tradition in Finland, bilateral discussions have awakened fundamental theological questions that engage Finnish Lutherans across ecclesial hierarchies.

Christiane Tietz (Zurich, Switzerland) reported on ecumenical celebrations of the Jubilee year in Switzerland and Germany. Swiss celebrations of the jubilee begin in 2017 but continue through 2019 to include celebration of Zwingli's

ordination. While reception of the *Joint Declaration* has had varying results in Germany, jubilee year celebrations have been intentionally ecumenical in tone. In a joint church service, the EKD confessed the sin of valorizing Protestants over Catholics by idolizing Luther's 95 *Theses*. A working group of the VELKD and the Conference of Catholic Bishops has also published a bilateral text *God and the Dignity of Human Beings* about joint public statements on ethical issues. The text unfolds similarities and differences in the foundation of ethics using differentiated consensus. Recognizing diversity within the EKD itself, language in jubilee year materials is inclusive of non-Lutheran members of the EKD such as the Reformed Church.

The unique ecumenical situation in China was the topic of *Xi-aowen Jiang's* (Shandong, China) report. China could be seen as »post-denominational«. Distinctions between Lutheran, Reformed, or Baptist Protestants do not exist, negating ecumenical dialogue. Instead, Christian communities focus on practical needs such as training and ordaining pastors. While ecumenical dialogue within Christianity is not in view, China faces a type of ecumenical need to bring the

Christian and Chinese traditions into dialogue.

Ashley Hall (Omaha, USA) examined how Luther is used in bilateral dialogue in the United States, Canada, and Australia. English-speaking dialogues include Luther amongst many authoritative figures but not as the highest authority. American dialogues, for example, make use of an intentional concept of Lutheranism without direct reliance on Luther himself. One way this is achieved is by examining

particular ecumenical topics across Christian history. Luther is located in the Reformation period to indicate how a concept was understood in the 16th century. When Luther is cited, an identifiable hierarchy of authority is ascribed to his writings. References come from texts included in the *Book of Concord* like his catechisms and systematic works, not sermons or treatises. Similar approaches occur in Canadian and Australian ecumenism.

Ekklesiologie beim frühen Luther

Seminarleiter: Dietrich Korsch und Roland M. Lehmann

Berichterstatter: Roland M. Lehmann

Die Erforschung der Ekklesiologie Luthers ist in den letzten Jahren in den Hintergrund getreten. Bei den Jahresthemen der Lutherdekade fehlte der Kirchenbegriff merkwürdigerweise völlig. Daher war die Bearbeitung dieses Themas ein zentrales Anliegen des von Dietrich Korsch und Roland M. Lehmann geleiteten Seminars, welches der auf dem Kongress krankheitsbedingt verhinderte Christopher Spehr geplant hatte. Im Fokus standen einzelne Aspekte und die Entwicklung

von Luthers Ekklesiologie bis zum Jahr 1520. Aufgrund der Sachkompetenz der Teilnehmenden entstanden intensive Gespräche im Rahmen der Lektüre ausgewählter Texte: *Psalmenvorlesung* 1513–1515 (WA 55,2; 383–416; 852,1–854,81), *Römerbriefvorlesung* 1515/16 (Lat.-dt. Ausgabe von Eduard Ellwein, Weimar 1960, Bd. 1, 8–27), *Sermo de virtute excommunicationis* 1518 (LDStA 3; 1–16), *Sermon vom hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leibes Christi und von*