

Luther on Women: New Paradigms for Luther Research

Seminar Leaders: Kirsi Stjerna and Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

Reporters: Kirsi Stjerna and Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

In this seminar *Rosemarie Barth, Lubomir Batka, Diane Bowers, Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, Elisabeth Gerle, Eriikka Jankko, Kathryn Kleinhans, Kristen Kvam, Eva Holmegaard Larsen, Sini Mikkola, Pernilla Parenmalm, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Jone Salomonson, Kirsi Stjerna, Mary Streufert, Deanna Thompson, and Marit Trelstad* engaged in a methodological re-examination of Luther's works, focusing on perspectives gained from gender and feminist studies and featuring new paradigms for Luther research.

In her opening paper, »Reading Luther Anew«, *Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen* called for feminist readings of Luther's theology that acknowledge the complexity of the reformer's writings in two ways: close readings of primary sources and contextual readings. Challenging feminist and postmodern critique that too often assess Luther from a 20th or 21st century perspective, she urged feminist Luther scholarship to take up the humanist principle of going *ad fontes* and study the primary texts within their true

context. Since much is lost in translation, she called on more readings of Luther texts in their original languages. Careful and contextual reading exhibits a complexity and gender inclusivity that open avenues toward new egalitarian readings as one's pre-understanding and the new insights meet in a *Horizontverschmelzung* (Gadamer). Pedersen demonstrated how this happened in the case of women's ordination in the Danish folk church in 1947 when Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers together with his complex view on the *ministerium verbi* functioned as a full humanization of the ecclesial office that quite naturally included women. She further suggested that Luther's few but varied comments on 1 Cor 14:34 expressed an intended ambiguity on the matter of ministry that eventually opened for women's ordination as the reformer actually did allow for women to preach, in contradistinction to the papal church.

Kirsi Stjerna deliberated on the scope of methods used, and tensions, in current Luther research, and »to whom does Luther belong«.

Stjerna and Wiberg Pedersen shared from their joint »Introduction« to their respective work on Eve in Luther's *Genesis Lectures* (1535–1545), published in *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 6 (2017). Going back to the Garden of Eden (and Gen 1–3), Luther seeks to explain God's design for human life, the rationale for the sexes, the mystery of procreation, and the complex relations of men and women. He ruminates on the creation and status of Eve, the mother of all the living, equal while different in relation to Adam, and with a different vocation. Fascinated with the female physique and the mysteries of childbirth, Luther points to Eve and her »daughters« as the receivers and bearers of the promise of salvation—a holy task that the Jewish Mary would bring to fruition with the birth of Jesus. That Luther discovers the essential role of women and their bodies in the God-designed salvation plan suggests a paradigm shift: Luther's biblical hermeneutics deserve another look by placing women at the centre, both as objects and subjects. Pedersen and Stjerna illuminated the importance of gender inclusive language in translating Luther's theological anthropology, addressing the problems of male-centeredness of previous translations.

In her paper, »To be or not to be—in sin!«, *Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir* revisited Luther's *Small* and *Large Catechisms*, in the company of feminist theologians, with the aim of rehabilitating the concept of sin from its ill reputation as a means to dominate, shame and blame marginalized groups, particularly women and people of color. Recognizing the importance of a theological discourse on sin and salvation for our theological understanding of the human situation and role within creation, Gudmundsdottir set out to perceive the Lutheran concept of sin as not simply personal and moralistic, but also as collective and structural.

Under the heading »Sola Sinners? Lutheran Perspectives on Human Nature from Feminist, Postcolonial & Process Theologies«, *Marit Trelstad* explored what corrections feminist and process theologies offer to Lutheran understanding of human nature and vice versa. With a feminist challenge on assumptions of the »essential« or »unchanging« human nature, she focused on Luther's relational sense of human nature and his emphasis on grace as definitive of our very being. Questioning his theological linkage between human depravity and God's grace, she constructively proposed

that Lutheran theology affirm human reliance on grace while tempering Luther's theological anthropology.

Diane V. Bower's paper, »To Spite the Devil: Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora's Wedding as Reform and Resistance« engaged Luther's letters from 1524 and 1525. She surmised that the timing of Luther's marriage was influenced by his apocalyptic proclivity, as well as the immediate political context of the Peasants' Revolt. With a theologically argued position that all men and women should marry, with very few exceptions, Luther raised the state of marriage to a position of honor and a calling. Katharina von Bora can be considered a significant teacher of Luther in these matters.

Eriikka Jankko, with her »Luther and Children—Conceptual Distinctions« presented a two-fold vision: The concept »child« (*das Kind*) refers to a stage of life before maturity (*die Kindheit*), whereas being a child (*die Kindschaft*) implies a binding relation to someone who does parental actions. The term »die Kindschaft« highlights Luther's theological relation-based idea of being a child as an exemplary spiritual vocation. With the term »Kindschaft«, he stresses the value of being a child, and human

beings' status inclusively as God's »real children« (*rechte Kinder*).

In her presentation, *Sini Mikkola* described her doctoral work on how Luther treated gendered bodiliness in his discussions on femininity and masculinity in texts from 1520–1530, and how he constructed proper feminine and masculine ways of being. In her new research expanding on the topic, Mikkola will widen the scope from Luther and focus on 16th century German women's *Selbstzeugnisse*, examining what negotiations of religious identities can be found here beyond the reformer's writings.

In his »Theological and Ethical Considerations in Case of Transgender People from a Lutheran Perspective«, *Lubomir Batka* discussed Luther's understanding of identity and sin with regard of transgender (and intersex) persons. In an effort to transcend traditional gender and body norms, Batka asked how Luther's conceptions of body and soul relate to his understanding of *imago dei*, vocation, and love. Reflecting upon the applicability of the ethical concepts of autonomy and self-determination, given the vulnerability of TG people, he further revisited Luther's double understanding of faith as *strong and weak* and his *theology of the cross* as a double per-

spective of *experientia crucis* and *amor caritatis*.

Kris Kvam spoke about her work with »Luther's Words as Consolation for Women? Insights from Translation and Real Life«, published in *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 4 (2016). The fact that Luther wrote to women who had lost their infants is significant in itself, as is his recognition of the grief of the parent. Luther, who buried two of his own daughters, knew this suffering first hand. In his words of consolation, Luther acknowledged that human beings do not know God's will, but they can be sure of the power of intercessory prayer and the sacraments.

Jone Salomonsen's »Mothers, Tree(s) and Theological Gender. Feminist readings of Luther's Magnificat and Genesis 1–3« sought to construct the identity of the »mother«. In the *Magnificat* (1521), Mary, not-yet-a-mother, is nothing in herself. As this unproductive person is used by God as a surrogate to give birth to the savior of the world, in the birthing process Mary gains a new identity as a »woman«. In Genesis 1–3, the proto-woman emerges as a powerful mother and mistress of the household. Luther calls Eve a building, built for the purpose of giving birth and fostering. With

feminist critique, Salomonsen questioned such grounding, or the priority, of the category of woman in the materiality of the birthing body.

In her paper, »A New Cover: Passionate Embrace and Lipstick Feminism«, Elisabeth Gerle offered a new reading of Luther's anthropology that honors gender fluidity, human mutuality, and queer praxis. Gerle used the notion *Passionate Embrace* as a flexible metaphor for Luther's understanding of the unification of the divine and the human as well as between human beings. Whilst challenging neo-platonic cosmologies, she sought to demonstrate how Luther's anthropology affirms sensual presence, gender fluidity, openness, and renewed passion in human experience not only in eschatological terms, but as ongoing social praxis in everyday life.

In her presentation, »Commemorating Luther in an Age of Trump: A Feminist Populist Proposal«, Deanna A. Thompson examined some of the shared characteristics of today's cultural obsessions with individual men cast as having single-handedly changed the world. She sought to shift the focus away from a singular man toward communities (especially of women) who are also key players in the stories of

reform. She proposed that telling a broader story that includes 16th century reformers like Argula von Grumbach and Katharina Zell and contemporary movements such as the 2017 Women's March helps us more fully understand the significance of reform then and now.

Mary J. Streufert invited deliberation on the current work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America towards a »Social Statement on Gender Justice«. Participants of the seminar offered insights into responsible and feminist uses of Luther in such ecclesiastical teaching.

Luther. Katholische Wahrnehmungen

Seminarleiter: Wolfgang Thönissen und Augustinus Sander OSB

Berichterstatter: Wolfgang Thönissen und Augustinus Sander OSB

Wolfgang Thönissen (I) und *Augustinus Sander OSB* (II) stellten in jeweils eigenständigen Einheiten unterschiedliche Verstehenszugänge vor, in denen Luther von Katholiken und als Katholik wahrgenommen wird. Die Seminarthematik bereicherten aus lutherischer Sicht *Theodor Dieter* (Strasbourg) mit dem Beitrag »Joseph Ratzingers Lutherverständnis« und *Timothy Wengert* (Philadelphia) mit »Luther's Catholic Authorities in the 95 Theses«. Dabei zeigte sich, wie sehr die jüngere, lutherisch geprägte Lutherforschung auf die katholischen Anliegen eingeht und die ökumenischen Errungenschaften im lutherisch-katholischen Gespräch berücksichtigt. Außer den Genann-

ten nahmen am Seminar *Irene Dingel*, *Laura-Marie Krampe*, *Fabian Kunze*, *Jonathan Mumme* und *Jochim Schmid* teil.

I Seminarbericht von Wolfgang Thönissen

Die katholische Lutherforschung hat im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert bedeutende Beiträge zur reformationsgeschichtlichen Forschung beisteuern können. Hier sei nur erinnert an Joseph Lortz, Erwin Iserloh, Otto Hermann Pesch und Vinzenz Pfnür. Es ist die nicht geringe Leistung dieser katholischen Lutherforschung, die über Jahrhunderte hinweg tradierte Abwehrhaltung gegenüber Luther überwunden und ihn von