

Issue 22.2: Reformation Jubilee 500

Let's Talk - Living Theology in the Metropolitan
Chicago Synod since 1996

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Reformation Jubilee 500

by Frank C. Senn - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/>

[Download our entire 2017 Reformation Jubilee 500 issue: Let's Talk Issue 22 \[pdf, 1.2MB, 80 pp\]](#)

The whole Lutheran world is absorbed this year in the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, and much of the rest of the world is also taking note to a greater or lesser extent. The editorial council of *Let's Talk* is providing an opportunity, especially for the members and friends of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA, to reflect on what's important about the Reformation to them.

We propose to devote several issues of *Let's Talk* to the Reformation Jubilee. In each issue we offer three different categories of articles to help stir the creative juices of church leaders and lay persons. Articles that relate to the Reformation Jubilee but don't fit these categories are also welcome.

1. Appreciating Luther

The Reformation begins with Martin Luther's calls for reform of church and society. Luther is unquestionably the Great Reformer. We invite readers to respond to the question: what do you appreciate (or not appreciate) about Luther?

There's an obstacle, however. Luther, like many great historical figures, had clay feet, and this undoes the ability of some people to appreciate his genuine and enormous contributions to theology, Christian life, church practice, and social renewal. Frank Senn recently taught a graduate student who had difficulty giving a class presentation on Luther's German Mass because she had read his anti-Semitic writings in another class. Is there a way to deal with this and other issues up front and head on?

For this issue we invited a veteran professor of history with a sometime association with this journal, Dr. Gregory Singleton, to write an article precisely dealing with this problem of how to handle heroes with clay feet. Although he is not an expert on Luther or the Reformation (but not ignorant of this history either), he has experienced over forty years of teaching American history, frequently dealing with cultural icons who have fallen from their pedestals. [Singleton's "Martin Luther, the Peasants' War, and Anti-Semitism: A Quincentennial Ruminations." provides an approach to dialogue on the hermeneutic of dealing with the whole Luther](#), who would be the first to claim that he was a sinner as well as a saint.

Another article also deals with what some people regard as an unsavory part of Luther's character. Robert Saler, who teaches in an interdenominational seminary in Indianapolis, points out how offended his colleagues are about the way Luther demonized his theological opponents. [In answering the question "Why Did Luther Demonize His Opponents?" Saler draws us into traditions of how the church has sometimes regarded heresy as a moral failing.](#) Luther's own real belief that the Devil was at work in the contemporary church to undermine faith and doctrine, sometimes even among one's friends, drew utterances from Luther were not unlike exorcisms.

Two additional articles also deal with what could be regarded as unflattering aspects of Luther's speech. These are characteristics many Lutherans chuckle over even though the pressure is strong not to emulate the Great Reformer in these ways. Francisco Herrera takes a look at the earthy remarks found especially, although not exclusively, in Luther's *Table Talk*: the sheer earthiness and body-orientation of his language. [Herrera proposes that this provocative speech was "More than Just Table Talk."](#) It was needed to provoke reform and renewal. Herrera sees parallels between Luther's provocative talk and methods of the burgeoning [#decolonizelutheranism](#) movement.

What began as a class project for Tyler Rasmussen, of ferreting out "Luther's Insults" from his voluminous writings, and posting them on a blog, the [Lutheran Insulter](#) website, became an instance of internet celebrity. Overnight this site was getting tens of thousands of hits. Maybe Luther's insults provide models for people today who are living in a highly contentious culture, but Luther said things about people that we wouldn't dare say today---and he said it print! [The trick, Rasmussen proposes, is to show how Luther used insults to draw people from error into truth.](#)

[Anna Marie Johnson appreciates the more positive aspect of Luther's career in his pastoral writings.](#)

Luther wrote innumerable tracts laying out an agenda for the reform of the Christian life. His proposals were often based on the Ten Commandments. Discouraging the more ostentatious good works, like going on a pilgrimage, Luther gave guidance to ordinary Christians on helping their needy neighbors.

[We invite readers to submit articles for our forthcoming Reformation Jubilee issues on what they appreciate or don't appreciate about Luther.](#)

2. Indulgences

The *Let's Talk* editorial council established a second category of articles: in which writers indulge in their favorite Reformation figures, documents, or ideas.

We need to be reminded that there were precursors to the 16th century Reformation. [Benjamin Dueholm writes about the 14th century Lollards who anticipated many later Protestant ideas.](#) The Lollards were hunted down and suppressed by kings and church hierarchy in England, yet they made a profound contribution to the development of the English language in their Bible translation (from the Latin Vulgate) and other writings.

[Theodor Dunkelgrün writes on the humanist Hebrew scholar Johann Reuchlin.](#) What would Reformation Bible translation and scholarship have been without Reuchlin's critical edition of the Hebrew Bible and Erasmus' critical edition of the Greek New Testament? Neither Reuchlin nor Erasmus left the Catholic Church, but their work was essential to the work of the Protestant reformers.

[Frank Senn writes about another humanist, the Swedish King Johan III, who pursued ecumenical relationships between the Lutheran Reformation and the papacy.](#) His "high church" inclinations are evident in an evangelical catholic Liturgy he prepared for the Church of Sweden. It was promulgated in 1576, although not without anti-liturgy antagonism from the theologians.

[Episcopal rector Pamela Dolan tells of acquiring the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*](#) when she was a

Roman Catholic and what the Prayer Book has meant to her over the years. Yes, *The Book of Common Prayer* is a Reformation liturgical book. It reflects the enduring editorial and translation skills of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer.

[We invite readers to submit brief articles about a favorite Reformation figure, document, or idea.](#) Kathrine von Bora Luther? Philip Melancthon? John Calvin? The Formula of Concord? The Heidelberg Catechism? Justification by faith? Write and we will grant you an indulgence.

3. Commemorative Projects

A number of activities and programs are occurring in synod congregations or in ecumenical clusters. We would like to spread the word about what is happening in and through our synod. We include in this issue of *Let's Talk* two reports.

[Dawn Mass Eck reports on the Castle Church Door project at Messiah Lutheran Church in Wauconda](#) and how unity and reconciliation among local churches led to them jointly dealing with the challenges of chronic homelessness in Lake County.

Pastors Betty Landis (St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Evanston) and Joseph Tito (St. Nicholas Catholic Church, Evanston) report on how [four ELCA congregations and four Catholic parishes in Evanston, plus Lutheran and Catholic campus ministries at Northwestern University, entered into dialogue that resulted in ambitious programs of joint study](#) with guest presenters, joint worship, and joint social action.

Both of these activities were a response to the ELCA's Reformation 500 initiative. [If your congregation is engaged in a special commemorative activity within the parish or with other churches, please send us a report.](#)

Help us celebrate Reformation Jubilee 500

We continue to solicit articles for the three sections of the *Let's Talk* Reformation Jubilee issue. Added to the "Appreciating Luther" category is [Frank C. Senn's article on "Martin Luther's Sacramentality and His Attention to the Human Body."](#) He writes about how he came early in life to an appreciation of Luther's defense of the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Asking for an indulgence, Kurt Hendel informs us about the important work of [Johannes Bugenhagen, the pastor of the Reformation who was responsible for the church orders that reformed church life](#) in the territories of northern Germany and the Kingdom of Denmark. [Benjamin Dueholm offers an indulgence on the Heidelberg Disputation and Luther's theology of the cross](#) as his great contribution to the theological enterprise. Cantor Michael Costello informs us of the [special music and worship opportunities at Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest](#) in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Keep the articles coming. What do you appreciate about Luther? What would you like to share about some other Reformation figure, document, idea, or event? What is your church doing to celebrate the

Reformation anniversary. We hope to have another batch of articles after October 31.

Final Articles for the Reformation Jubilee 500 Issue

We received three final articles for this special issue of *Let's Talk*, one in each of our three categories. Shane Brinegar, a PhD student at LSTC, [appreciates Luther both for his critique of the late medieval sacrifice of the mass and for his positive re-conception of a true eucharistic sacrifice](#). This is a helpful article that sorts out many misconceptions Lutherans have about the Eucharistic sacrifice. Frank Senn asks for [an indulgence to write about the great Reformation artist and friend of Luther, Lucas Cranach the Elder](#). In his article Senn reviews Cranach's career in the service of the Saxon electors and his contribution in promoting Christian faith and devotion in his many paintings and woodcuts. Senn includes a gallery illustrative of Cranach's art. Finally, Frederick Schumacher writes about [the Reformation celebration medallion created by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and gives us an interesting history of the Lutheran-Catholic medal wars](#) down through the centuries, which has hopefully come to an end in the joint Lutheran-Catholic observances of this Reformation Jubilee 500 celebrated by the new ALPB medallion.

We hope readers have enjoyed the many different views of Luther and the Reformation brought together in this expanded issue of *Let's Talk*. We also hope that the Jubilee 500 is a commencement of the continuing work of reconciliation and reformation and not the end of it now that the anniversary is past. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

Martin Luther, The Peasants' War, And Anti-semitism: A Quincentennial Ruminaton

by Gregory Holmes Singleton - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/martin-luther-peasants-war-anti-semitism-quincentennial-rumination/>

(with a bit of ersatz theology thrown in for good measure)

In the past, [centennial](#) celebrations were times for rejoicing and celebration. Quincentennial celebrations were times for over-the-top rejoicing and raucous celebration. For the last few decades, however, these milestones have often been the occasion of less than flattering revisionist historical treatments. Cultural icons and iconic events, previously re-canonized every one-hundred years, now almost always have their clay feet exposed.

In this quincentennial observance of the (perhaps apocryphal) nail pounding heard around the world (or at least throughout Christendom) we have the iconic Martin Luther with at least two clay feet: his strongly (one might say deadly) worded advice to political authority in the matter of the Peasants' War and his indisputably anti-Semitic utterances toward the end of his life. To these we could add a number of lesser, but still bothersome, incidents of Luther's hot-headed rhetoric where an irenic tone (perhaps in the manner of Philipp Melanchthon) may have served the cause of Christian unity better.

The editors of *Let's Talk* kindly extended an invitation to me to write a piece considering the implications of these clay feet, particularly the extent to which they might cause us to refrain from seriously engaging his copious other writings. Does the bile of these unfortunate tirades compromise and/or corrupt Luther's discourses on various theological and liturgical issues as well? The invitation came specifically from one of the editors who is my former pastor, fellow scholar, and good friend. He knows that I am neither a Luther scholar nor a specialist in the history of Central Europe in the sixteenth century. However, he suggested that in my thirty-nine year career of teaching at the university level I have most likely dealt with the generic "cultural icon with feet of clay" issue in a wide variety of specific forms. Indeed I did. It came up multiple times in every class in every term from 1966 to 2005. Specific examples included, but are by no means limited to: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery, Andrew Jackson and Cherokee removal, Abraham Lincoln and equivocation on both equality of races and full unconditional emancipation, Martin Luther King, Jr. and plagiarism.

I responded to the invitation with a quick and resounding "YES!" because I am presently working on a book manuscript about the problem of knowledge generally and in the discipline of History specifically, the roles of projection and perception in our social and individual constructions of reality, and how all of this impacts hermeneutical considerations.

Given the nature of the invitation I proceed with the assumption that I am under no obligation to shed any new light on the specific problem of Martin Luther's dyspeptic remarks—indeed, I am neither qualified nor competent to do so. For those who are interested in well researched treatments of Luther, the Peasants

War, and the Anti-Semitic remarks toward the end of his life *placed within the context of his life as a whole*, I would recommend Heiko A Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (pp. 18, 49, 66, 84, 205, 283 for the Peasant Peasants' War; pp. 289, 290, 292-297 for the anti-Semitic remarks), Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (pp. 414-435 for the Peasants' War; 377-380 for the anti-Semitic remarks), and Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (pp. 171, 248-58, 261-63, 276, 293, 298, 311, 336 for the Peasants' War; 378-85 for the anti-Semitic remarks).

What I can do is discuss how we approach the generic "cultural icon with feet of clay" issue and how that *might* impact our approach to Luther's other writings. In order to do this with integrity I need to lay all my cards on the table (there are lots of cards in my hand, so I'll spread them out over the following pages). Historians come in a variety of packages and perspectives. Some construct straight-forward narratives; some enter into the realm of analysis. Some assume that the truth of the past is located in original documents; some consider each document the result of someone else's subjectivity and thus simply a perspective on an experience in the past and not a capsule of the past pure and simple. Some are on a quest for historical truth that will stand the test of time; some are on a continuing quest for historical understanding with the caveat that at any given time that understanding is at best only partial and may indeed be so diluted with the historian's own cultural bias as to be of little use.

My approach to the discipline of History (and thus to the "cultural icon with feet of clay" issue) is informed by the second characteristic in each of the three variables in the above paragraph. That summary needs a little elaboration. For me History is not "what happened in the past." It is the analysis of thoughts, actions, and behaviors of the species *homo sapiens* in the dimension of time and the settings of diverse cultures in order to discover (insofar as possible) that which is persistent and that which is mutable in the human condition.

In short, the content of what follows may strike some as overly academic (though I will try to keep that perspective to a minimum) and the style will strike those of an academic bent as a bit too colloquial, but I hope to make this as accessible as possible and engage as many people as I can in a brief conversation about the thorny world of historical inquiry, hermeneutics, and interpretation.

First, let's tackle inquiry. In a case like this (and all cases dealing with cultural icons) inquiry begins with a consideration of the relevant primary sources, including prevailing interpretations of that icon by his or her contemporaries. Luther became a cultural icon (positive or negative depending on where a commentator stood) soon after his career as a reformer began. (See Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation*) Luther may have been born in obscurity, but rapidly following October 31, 1517, he was known far beyond Wittenberg and Saxony. He was considered important (and dangerous) enough for Pope Leo X to promulgate his encyclical *Exsurge Domine* in June 1520, for Henry VIII to publish *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* in 1521, and for a group of critics (including heavy hitters such as Thomas More and Johann Eck) to launch a steady stream of refutations of Luther's arguments from 1518 to 1525; even negative reviews can contribute to iconic status. (See David V.N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists 1518-1525*) Add to this the crowd at Worms and the widespread publication of the Ninety-Five Theses and treatises that followed and we can make a case for considering Luther something akin to a sixteenth century rock star, complete with a "bad-boy" reputation among both friends and foes.

The second step in our inquiry has more to do with us than with the cultural icon, but it is a crucial step that requires a high degree of rigorous honest self-evaluation on the part of the investigator. We need to survey the literature about our subject written in our own time and in past decades and centuries. We may do this in part for quick references to the primary materials, but of greater importance we need to each ask ourselves what predilections and prejudices we may have gained through direct or indirect exposures to this body of literature. Have we been more impressed by the literature that comes close to canonizing Luther? Conversely, have we been more impressed by recent literature concentrating on his allegiance to secular power and lack of support of the populist masses during the Peasants' War, and/or his anti-Semitic remarks in the 1540s? If we are of the latter disposition, we need to take a look at some of the positive accomplishments, but not lose sight of the darker side. If we are of the former disposition, we need to take a closer look at the darker side but not lose sight of those contributions upon which we wish to build.

Yes, we are talking about balance—hard to achieve and even harder to maintain, and thus a lifelong task that is never achieved with perfection, but is a goal to be sought anyway.

And that brings us to hermeneutics, a big word for keeping some common sense principles in mind as we work our way from a consideration of the relevant evidence to an interpretation of the phenomenon, movement, or (as in this case) the cultural icon under investigation. What do we bring to the reading of a document? How do we attempt to enter the document from a world outside of that document? Decades ago I developed two primary hermeneutical assumptions that have served me well (let's not be coy and call these assumptions "principles." I am guessing, and scholars do that more often than not.)

The first assumption is that we must always remember that authors who were not basically different from us wrote these texts. Thus we need to be open to universal themes even in the face of significant conceptual and stylistic differences. This assumption is based primarily on Carl Gustav Jung's conceptualization of the "Collective Unconscious." Just as human beings have basically the same physical structure over a vast expanse of space and time, we should not be surprised to encounter some non-physical attributes that we share with persons across both of those expanses. Can we not identify with a tragic hero or heroine in a play by Sophocles written over two millennia ago? Though separated by almost three millennia, most of us can empathize with the grief of David as he cried out over the loss of his son. Some common elements of the human condition do not need contextualizing.

The second assumption is that we must always remember that these are texts written in a variety of cultural contexts that are often quite different from ours. Thus we always stand in need of historical, linguistic, and anthropological continuing education. This is not the inverse of the previous assumption, which has to do with themes of the human condition that transcend time and space. This assumption has to do with differing modes of conceptualization and expression over time and space and our need to be mindful of this as we encounter the documents.

But there is more, and the "more" takes the form of musing or thinking out loud. Bear with me as I bare my scholarly soul. Every historian is aware (though some try hard to forget) that the record of evidence is woefully incomplete; is skewed toward the interests of various factions, parties, and other categories of people; is created by human beings with preconceptions, assumptions, and a variety of other subjective factors impacting the final outcome of each document. We then are engaged in our subjective interpretations of the subjective reflections of those who generated the original documents. If we attempt

to tell stories as the primary mode of history our narratives project at least as much of our predilections on the documents we use as we perceive in those documents. Obviously the same can be said of analytical approaches to history, but concentrating on the question (which is what makes analytical history analytical) forces us to at least confront our own biases. Thus we need to be very cautious about rushing to answers.

One could, of course, throw one's hands in the air and conclude that history is impossible, at least history that is accurate. But some sense of history will most likely be part of both our collective conscious and unconscious for as long as the species persists. In spite of the epistemological and methodological problems I think it quite important that we, both individually and collectively, come to terms with our pasts. Or, more precisely, that we continually come to terms with our pasts by refusing to adopt a firm and final "standard" or "orthodox" interpretation of any given historical question. Indeed, one of the problems I have with narrative history is that the emphasis is usually on the answer rather than the question. The answers become concretized, whereas the questions are usually broader than a specific historical moment and the questions need to be kept in play over generations: revisited, revised, revisioned, and reframed.

To summarize the preceding overly long paragraph (and to court the charge of heresy), questions give rise to discussion—a good thing. Answers give rise to dogma—a questionable outcome, at least in critical scholarship. And yes, that is fair warning that I am not going to get anywhere near giving an answer to the question of what we do with our shared icon with admittedly clay feet. Rather I will offer a perspective about how we might fruitfully enter into a conversation about Luther's faults, and how that might broaden into a more general discussion about all of us—past, present, and future—who live within the constraints of the human condition, bounded by freedom and necessity, and riddled with complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction.

All of this I covered in far greater detail when I regularly taught a graduate course on historiography and historical methods. That took place in a secular university. In this venue I feel compelled to explore these matters further from a specifically Christian perspective. We all have predilections, pet theories, and perspectives we would like to promulgate as absolutes. We are aware of some of them, but most likely not all of them. We do indeed project at least as much as we perceive. Add to this my strange combination of Christian anthropology (equal parts of Luther's *simul justus et peccator* and Calvin's innate depravity) and I come to the conversation aware of my own sinful nature and thus am neither surprised nor shocked (as some Christians evidently are) that sinners often sin. Put another way, I am aware of my subjectivity which cautions me against passing judgment based on my biased evaluation, but that very limitation gives me empathy for other sinners.

I warned (promised?) I would give no answers but I will offer a perspective, which is neither an answer nor knowledge (a word used far too often and far too loosely). It is an informed perspective, but not "authoritative," a word I would like to see removed from the language.

I have serious problems with Luther's siding with the princes in the Peasants' War (and his obeisance to political authority in general), but I am mindful of two important factors (whether they are mitigating I can't yet say). First, his position was not unequivocally supportive of the nobility. Second, and most important when it comes to my continuing wrestling with this problem, I am acutely aware that I was able in the 1960s and early 1970s to speak out vehemently against American policy in Southeast Asia without

having all that much to fear. Luther lived in a different place and time. He was alive thanks to the patronage and protection of the Elector of Saxony. Support of princes had pragmatic survival value for him. On the other hand, others such as Zwingli did side with the peasants. I continue to wrestle with this, but I do not find echoes of this problematic stance in the larger corpus of Luther's work.

Luther's negative remarks about Jews—particularly *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543)—I find highly offensive, and somewhat enigmatic. In the 1520s, he wrote a few pieces that chastised Christian treatment of Jews in Europe. From time to time he sought to convert Jews to Christianity, or more precisely he hoped they would be so impressed with his reframed Christianity that they would come in droves to the fold. Luther's later anti-Semitic remarks were limited to non-theological rants during the last few years of a life that now seemed to him an abysmal failure. His name was known throughout Western Christendom, but he was geographically isolated in Saxony. His circumstances did not allow him to participate in the presentation and defense of the Augsburg Confession. He had rhetorically painted himself into a corner with his over-the-top attacks (sometimes *ad hominem*) on both the office and person of the Bishop of Rome, Erasmus, and a host of others. By the time of his last years he was not the only great reformer on the scene. Actually, he seemed rather mild in comparison to some of the newer voices (or even such contemporaries as Karlstadt) in spite of his "Brand." Jews had not converted in great numbers, as he was sure they would have done. By this time Luther was something of an Ishmael—his hand was against every man and every man's hand was against him in his view. He lashed out with bitter anguish and took aim at a wide variety of targets. It is instructive that the penultimate chapter in Roper's *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* bears the title, "Hatreds." None of this is offered as an excuse for the despicable words he wrote, but I do not consider his other writings invalidated by these regrettable utterances of an obviously very unhappy and disturbed man facing the end of his life. That having been said, I continue to struggle with what to do with such a hotheaded contrarian who had flashes of great insight, grace, and wisdom.

If my brother Martin had shared his 1540s remarks about Jews with me in person, I hope I would have followed the advice in the Gospel according to Matthew 18:15-18. I would have placed his advice to the nobility in the 1520s and his remarks about Jews in the 1540s alongside the criterion of the Gospel and asked Martin to consider the extent to which he had stepped way outside the Gospel. And I would further have pointed to many of his other works (*Bondage of the Will*, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, *Commentary on Romans*, *Commentary on Galatians*, among others) and encouraged him to stay in that groove. Given that we encounter Luther only in absentia we can regret his writings that fall short of his work that we honor for its service to the Gospel. We should not ignore the sinful nature of his remarks and try to cast him as a Christian Super-Hero. On the other hand we should not condemn him. We can accept Luther as a brother, who like each of us, is flawed and broken. And we can and should continue to interpret the meaning of what he wrote and what he did (for better or for worse) in community with others as we try—individually and collectively—to discern what it means to be in Christ as both saint and sinner.

I offer no answers here. This is only a rumination about how one person continues to wrestle and struggle.

So where do we go from here?

I know you have been paying attention, so your response is likely, "Conversation." That exchange of

perspectives between sisters and brothers is far more important than anything I have opined in the previous paragraphs. What follows now is a recommendation for an approach to faithful continuous conversation about matters of importance in how we interpret the Gospel in the context of a given time and place, recognizing that the conversation is ongoing. I nominate a great guide for us as we do so.

Josiah Royce (1855-1916) was an American philosopher on the faculty of Harvard University. In 1913 he wrote a book entitled *The Problem of Christianity*. I would place this tome in the hands of every Christian if I had the financial resources to do so. Royce writes a great deal about the Church as both the body of Christ and the creature of the Spirit. He speaks of the Church, in both its congregational and universal manifestations, as the “Beloved Community.” He defines the Church in terms of neither dogma nor organization. It is “. . . a progressively realized community of interpretation.” In Royce’s conception of the Church we are to enter into serious conversation in which we interpret both the Gospel and the world in which we are called to minister, and this is a prelude to ministerial action. Given that our understanding is progressive, in the sense that it is dynamic and must adapt constantly to new realities, our understanding of the Gospel will be protean and the contexts in which we live out the Gospel are similarly mutable.

In the specific set of concerns which gave rise to this brief article, Royce’s “community of Interpretation” invites us to enter into an ongoing conversation. Our entry point may be with a piece or pieces of Luther’s writing, but it is not a conversation *about* Luther. It is a conversation *with* Luther, as well as each other. It takes into account those with whom Luther was in conversation when he wrote the documents under consideration. It also takes into account others who have joined the conversation since Luther (which puts us into interpretive conversation with Hegel, Dilthey, Kierkegaard, Berger, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Küng, Bratten, Jenson, Marty, Senn, and Hauerwas among others).

A community of interpretation works best when we ask new questions and continue to refine and reconsider old questions. Put another way, a community of interpretation functions only through conversation and ceases to exist if we think we have found the correct answer (or, perhaps, more precisely when we have grown weary of thinking about difficult questions and wish to opt instead for a “definitive” answer).

Royce took the Communion of Saints seriously. From this perspective, the body of Christ is perpetuated in part by the conversation that both maintains and propels community. In this sense, one can imagine ecclesia as an expansion of that perpetual conversation suggested by Rublev’s famous 14th century icon of three angels, often also interpreted as the Trinity.

If we take Communities of Interpretation seriously as a sort of ecclesiology in action, we can more intentionally follow the mandate to love one another as Christ has loved us. This has implications for how we deal with our sisters and brothers in our own time, in the past, and in the future. If we engage the Gospel, one another, and the super-persona of ecclesia in this continuing conversation, we will continue to engage those who have gone before us as well as those who are with us now. By so doing we also keep faith with our sisters and brothers who have yet to be born. If we do this, we will have prepared a forum of faithful dialogue that they will be able to engage.

A Pendantic Addendum

While writing this brief rumination, I encountered a recently published book synthesizing cutting-edge research in Cognitive Science. It is worth reading for its own sake, and also as an empirical buttress for Royce's philosophical argument published 104 years ago: Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach, *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017). We all know far less than we think we know, and one of the most important bits of knowledge we can acquire is a reckoning of the profundity of our ignorance. We borrow the summary of knowledge from each other without comprehending how shallow that summary is. The authors advocate intentional "communities of knowledge" in which we distinguish between what we think we know and what we actually know, share perspectives with each other, and resist the conversation squelching settlement on a singular orthodoxy. While not identical to Royce's "communities of interpretation," the two concepts are compatible. Indeed, I would argue that neither concept has much utility without the other. In both cases, the emphasis is on conversations that continue to wrestle with important questions. One must, of course, take my recommendation of this book with a grain of salt. It very nicely confirms my predilections about preferring the concept of "perspective" over the concept of "knowledge."

Full Citation of Referenced Works

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Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

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Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation*. New York: Penguin Press, 2015.

Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*. New York: Random House, 2017.

Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*. Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 2001. (Originally published in 1933 by Macmillan)

For more on the problem of historical interpretation and Josiah Royce see:

Gregory Holmes Singleton, "Is History Possible? A Prolegomenon to an Agnostic Epistemology"
<http://homepages.neiu.edu/~ghsingle/IHPr4.pdf>

Gregory Holmes Singleton, "Josiah Royce and 21st Century Theology"
<http://homepages.neiu.edu/~ghsingle/ROYCE.pdf>

Both of the above are more useful for the recommendations for further reading than they are for the substance of the arguments.

Why Did Luther Demonize His Theological Opponents?

by Robert Saler - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/luther-demonize-theological-opponents/>

For the last five years, I have been the only Lutheran teaching at my ecumenical seminary. Having taught at a Lutheran seminary prior to coming here, I was surprised by the negative reaction of other Protestants (evangelicals, Disciples of Christ, Reformed, Methodist, Episcopalian, etc.) towards the mention of Luther. This negativity has less to do with Luther's theology and more to do with how he treated his theological opponents. According to these students, the flaws in Luther's theology are intimately tied to his intolerance of other viewpoints, which he stretched to the point of literally ascribing the intentions of his opponents to the devil and the devil's minions.

Luther's horrific statements late in life about Jews in Germany, as well as his regrettable reaction to the peasant uprising, are well known. While Lutheran apologists sometimes treat these as missteps within Luther's theology (which they were to a certain extent), we have to be honest and acknowledge that Luther's harsh rhetorical treatments of his interlocutors in theological matters is of a piece with a number of key trends that underpin not only the reformer's own theology but his theological milieu as a whole. Luther's [demonization](#) of his theological opponents, in other words, is not a bug but a feature of his theology. Those of us who theologize in his trajectory and in his name need to be honest about that. While scholars such as Mark Edwards and Paul Hinlicky¹ have taken great strides in explaining how Luther came by his easily-deployed rhetorical demonology in polemics, the damage of that legacy remains—as my students' skepticism attests.

The stakes for not being honest are too high. The history of Lutheran theology is littered with writings from his successors in which the harsh polemics that characterized the 16th century bear fruit, in later centuries, of doctrinal rigidity, condescension towards rival viewpoints, and an anti-ecumenical spirit in many quarters. Lutheran theology has rarely been known for being irenic. However, 500 years after Luther, we are also witnessing the fruit of Lutheranism's engagement with ecumenism, interfaith work, science, and human rights. Even as Lutheran confessional documents continue to identify the office of the papacy with "the antichrist," in our day global observances of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation are being planned in conjunction with Roman Catholic, Mennonite, and other erstwhile opponents of the Wittenberg theologians. We are in an unsteady but steadily improving territory of theological and ecclesial relationality with formerly bitter enemies. If there is any celebration to be had in this 500th year, surely it is that.

Can Diversity of Theology be of God?

If Lutheran theologians and pastors wish to continue to extend this positive trajectory of drawing on specifically Lutheran resources to foster hospitality towards others, then we must come to terms with the conditions by which Luther felt comfortable ascribing malicious, even demonic, intent to his opponents. What we see when we examine these broader trends is that Luther was, in this respect as in so many others, largely a creature of his age. The key question that separates his time and ours is this: can theological diversity be understood as good-faith disagreement among well-meaning Christians, or must

significant theological diversity represent cleavage born of moral weakness at best and demonic influence at worst?

We can notice the following features about Luther's theological milieu as it relates to the question of how theological diversity was itself theologized:

- 1). As Heiko Obermann and others have pointed out, Luther (and his contemporaries) lived in a spiritually thick world. While Luther himself might have been a virtuoso in recognizing the fingerprints of both God and the devil in various events and institutions, the notion that the devil actively tries to mislead believers into spiritually disastrous delusions is readily found in monastic literature, spiritual assessment of mystic visions, papal pronouncements (including a number related to Luther himself), and medieval art. The world of the reformers, in other words, was not "disenchanted" in the ways that Max Weber would later diagnose the modern age. But with enchantment comes demonology—positive spirits always have their match in malicious ones.
- 2). From the patristic era forward, the Christian tradition largely assumed that heresy was synonymous with moral failing. While it was not strictly heresy to teach a theologically non-orthodox idea initially, heresy came in when the teacher refused to submit himself or herself to correction by the church. Such stubbornness (the same argument that Luther would eventually wield against the Jews) was easily elided into demonic influence. Heretics are not simply incorrect, on this count; they are actively at enmity with God, which could of course ultimately only be traced to the direct or indirect influence of demonic/satanic forces. Wrong belief, to the extent that it persists despite the church's efforts to correct it, is not simply Christians of otherwise good faith agreeing to disagree; it is active capitulation to demonic influence. As stark as that may sound, it is a point that Luther makes consistently.
- 3). Despite the reformers' insistence that salvation is a gift from God granted by grace through faith apart from works, the Reformation was caught in a dilemma well summarized by those scholars who point out that, even as the reformers were busy insisting that the Bible is sufficiently clear as to transmit knowledge adequate for salvation to any reader, they were also frantically writing a variety of prefaces and commentaries—"scripture is clear, but make sure that you read it this way." This and other tensions around the relationship between right faith (orthodoxy) and grace as they both relate to salvation created a difficult instability in nascent Protestant theology: having abandoned the notion that good works have any efficacy in contributing to salvation, the soteriological status of the notional content of "right faith" remained vague. This fuzziness contributed to a difficult emerging situation: how much does "faith" entail right belief? To the extent that true faith in the Lutheran sense and orthodox belief in the classical sense become intermixed in the mechanics of salvation, then any diversity in theological opinion that touches on key matters of orthodoxy becomes so fraught with salvific import that to disturb them—say, by questioning the Trinity—could only detract from salvation, and detracting from salvation is the work of the devil. Thus, Lutheranism, for all its key insights about justification, did not enact as significant a soteriological break from views of salvation centered upon holding to the orthodox faith as even its Roman Catholic interlocutors might have supposed. And this, too, paved the way for Luther's own ongoing contention that the introduction of significant theological diversity was the work not of the faithful, but of the devil.
- 4). We need to take seriously the existential and theological violence wrought by church division in the Reformation. Due to the interpretive ambiguity of right faith noted above, the question of which church

could assure the anxious conscience that its teachings were sufficiently orthodox to comprise saving faith was thrown into confusion by the split among Western churches. One of the cruelest aspects of this split was this: at no point during the Reformation was the notion challenged that salvation depends upon being in communion with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The question was now, where is this church? In the visible, concrete Roman church—or in the seemingly invisible, purer Reformation church? For a given peasant not trained in the subtleties of debates around ecclesiology, sacramentology, hermeneutics, and so on, the Reformation was experienced largely as existential chaos (that soon became material chaos through iconoclasm, uprisings, and eventual war). While Luther was an apocalyptic thinker in that he expected the world to end relatively soon in or after his time, he was also easily able to attribute this turmoil to demonic influence as well.

For all of these reasons, Luther had at hand a ready demonology to which the theological divisions that he saw as impacting salvation could be indexed. While we should not paint Luther as a modern-day fundamentalist brooking no matters of dissent and disagreement in the faith, when it came to the encounters with true theological otherness—Jews, Zwinglians, the papacy, etc.—his tendency to demonize has deep theological roots.

Moving Forward

Can the salutary aspects of Luther's theology and polemics against what he took to be toxic understandings of the faith be redeemed from what we must surely regard as both a relational and theological failing on his part? As global Lutheranism continues to expand in contexts that, like Luther's, are thickly "enspirited," and as Western epistemologies meet genuine (and genuinely Lutheran) otherness in the form of African, Latin American, and Asian theological configurations, this question is particularly vital. If demons are making a comeback in Lutheran theology, then so too could demonization.

To be sure, a return to demonology could in principle have the opposite effect. As Richard Beck has pointed out in his recent book *Reviving Old Scratch*,² while a robust belief in Satan can cause thinkers like Luther to demonize opponents, theoretically it could also remind us that demons are demons and people are not—indeed, we are all in sway to demons however we conceptualize them ontologically. A strong demonology could breed compassion and communication among those of us in the sway to forces both of our own making and beyond our control.

And a key ongoing theological task—one that can only be pursued within the ecumenical contexts with which God has gifted us in recent years—is to continue to live in the tension between "the faith that believes" and "the faith that is believed" as regards the trust that Luther and the other reformers saw as having such salvific import. To go more deeply into the radicality of salvation as God's gift can only, in my estimation, push Lutheran theology in the direction of treasuring theological orthodoxy for its wisdom but also treating it as the contested and diverse field that it has always been, so that fierce trust in God's saving actions opens us up to seeing beauty in places where our own theological categories must be stretched to find it.

Notes

1. [△]Cf. especially Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after*

Christendom (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010) and Edwards, Luther's Last Battles (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

2. [^](#)Beck, Reviving Old Scratch: Demons and the Devil for Doubters (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).
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More Than Just Table Talk

by Francisco Herrera - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/just-table-talk/>

When Frank Senn asked me to write an essay on what I appreciate/don't appreciate about Luther I practically jumped at the chance. Why? Because writing out my answer gave me the chance to share one of my most perplexing observations of Lutherans. For what confuses me about Lutherans is not so much what they appreciate or don't appreciate about Luther, *but rather how little of Luther's bold witness (which they claim to appreciate) actually influences their lives and ministries.*

For Lutherans often talk about their affection for Luther's earthiness, his bluntness – and they're right. In *Table Talk* (the focus of much of this essay) he has doozies, like calling St. Jerome "leprous" because he "believed that breaking wind was a sin."¹ Though I haven't been able to find it this time around, there's one conversation in which Luther refers to the sad state of a self-castrated monk, who now, without his *pudenda* to play with, had no outlet at all for his carnal frustrations. Luther wryly commented, then, that his sad state proved that it was "better to have two of those things than none of them." And as for drinking, he also once said that if God can pardon him after having "crucified him for about twenty years [presiding over communion]" he can also approve of Luther "occasionally taking a drink in his honor... no matter how the world may wish to interpret it."² And of course who could ever forget that time that Luther said that he chases the devil away "with a fart?"³

However, standard Lutheran tittering about these stories gives me the impression that for all of its power and impact, many see Luther's forthrightness mostly as a charming, if sometimes questionable, quirk. But this just is far from the truth.

For instance, take a look at this rather insightful comment he makes about sex and respectability:

*[The papists teach that] the Act of concupiscence [sex] is illicit; that the marital act is an act of concupiscence; therefore [marriage is illicit]. I reply to the minor premise: The marital act is not an act of concupiscence. Rather, the act that attracts sex to sex is a divine ordinance. Even if by itself the act is impure on account of original sin, in itself it's still pure and licit.*⁴

So here not only is Luther speaking pretty boldly against any kind of self-righteousness or prudishness around sex, he even goes so far as to say that sex itself is a "divine ordinance... pure and licit," even if the impulse for sex is corrupted by sin. Still more shocking, and in one of his most respected treatises – *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, no less – Luther states that if a woman is married to a man who does not satisfy her sexually, that "divine law" stipulates that "the man ought to concede her right [to marital exclusivity] and give her up to somebody else" who isn't dedicated to his wife only "in outward appearance."⁵ And who could forget Luther's approval of Phillip Landgrave of Hesse's marriage to two women – as he shared the Hebrew Bible's preference for bigamy over divorce – despite the fact that such offenses were technically illegal, even worthy of death?⁶

So now tell me, what percentage of contemporary Lutheran leaders do you think are willing to make such bold statements and such bold acts around sex, sexuality, and relationships?

Similarly, remember that earlier quote about chasing away the Devil “with a fart?” Well, it actually comes from an extended reflection – one of many in *Table Talk* – where Luther shares his thoughts on dealing with depression. If you feel like this, you “ought to be very careful not to be alone, for God created the fellowship of the church and commanded brotherliness” as a way to help you.⁷ In a similar passage he shares that God personally “hate[s]” depression because “it is destructive to the body,” and that when we feel the darkness winning, to remind ourselves that God’s love and support is constant and secure.⁸ Even on such a controversial topic as suicide, Luther defied common convention, saying that people who took such drastic measures to escape suffering were not damned, but rather “overcome by the power of the devil... like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber,” and should not be shamed in death.⁹ Luther’s entire oeuvre is littered with such painfully frank discussions of life’s most intractable quandaries, and does so with an honesty and intensity that would make many, if not most, Lutherans squirm with discomfort and confusion.

And there-in lies my own observation and critique of many Lutherans on this matter.

Because when you really start to read him you soon see that his brusque assessment and diagnosis of the world’s ills is not some playful and innocuous protest of churchly stuffiness – as it is often presented. ***Rather, his willingness to baldly defy convention through unvarnished observation and decisive action is central to his Christian being and praxis - not only as a theologian, but also as a pastor and a human being.*** And his predilection to disrupt how we do church wasn’t just because he liked to rile feathers, but rather because ***he understood that this disruption was necessary in order to dispel the self-delusion and prudery that so often undermines the work of the Gospel and saps the vitality of the Church.***

Like my title suggests, his ‘table talk’ didn’t stay just table talk – but found its way into church reform and revitalization that is as remarkable now as it was back in the early 16th century.

These thoughts have been weighing especially heavy on me these days as I travel the country in my capacity as the Convener of #decolonizeLutheranism – a group of insurgent Lutherans dedicated to making our churches places of genuine welcome and understanding. And just as Luther hesitated to violently rattle the then-pillars of church and community, I wonder what would happen if today’s church leadership would use similarly reliable boldness when confronting today’s problems; pushing their communities to accept the people of color in their neighborhoods and in their midst; embracing parishioners with disabilities as having a unique voice, not as a cause for charity; screaming bloody murder that women make up less than 19% of all senior pastors and less than 15% of all bishops despite being 35% of those ordained to word and sacrament in our church – and this after more than 40 years of having women ordained in Lutheran congregations across the United States.

See where I’m going with this?

For Luther, flawed-but-filled with the power of God, forever testified to what God’s love had done for and to him, and that love gave him the persistence necessary to incite the church to change – dynamically, impatiently, scandalously, and passionately. ***We do Lutheranism a horrible dis-service if we reduce***

Brother Martin’s fire for social iconoclasm and religious reform to a funny anecdote or a fart joke, as opposed to seeing it as it truly is – a challenge and inspiration for how we live our call to ministry, and how the church is always at its best when these fires of death and rebirth burn ever hot. Only then may genuine reform and renewal happen in our communities. Only then will all of the ubiquitous talk of the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation in the US have more than self-congratulatory meaning – not when we use it as an facile excuse to make Lena and Ole jokes and reminisce about Norwegian sweaters and Luther League, but as a reminder that no matter how glorious the changes have been, there is still so much work to do.

And that the love of God will be there with us every step of the way!

What’s more, it’s fair to say that if Luther put his full faith and power into being a witness for Grace – and subsequently changed the world – surely God will do the same through us when we “go and do likewise” where *we* live (Luke 10:37). Luther lived big, laughed big, and messed-up big too (anti-Semitism and the Peasant War, anyone?), but by doing so released the power of God among hundreds of thousands throughout Europe, and then later millions throughout the world. Surely God will do the same for us, too?

This is most *certainly* true!

Notes

1. [^](#)Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, (Fortress Press and Concordia: Minneapolis, MN. 1957), 16.
 2. [^](#) *Ibid.*, 20.
 3. [^](#) *Ibid.*, 16.
 4. [^](#)Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 1955. 324.
 5. [^](#)Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1970), 234.
 6. [^](#)Eric Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism – Second Edition*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 75.
 7. [^](#) *Ibid.*
 8. [^](#) *Ibid.*, 75.
 9. [^](#)*Table Talk*. 29.
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“Are you ignorant of what it means to be ignorant?”: Luther’s Insults

by Tyler Rasmussen - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/ignorant-means-ignorant-luthers-insults/>

“Are you ignorant of what it means to be ignorant?” (LW 33:254)

That’s my favorite Lutheran insult. I’ve used it often. It’s wonderful when people look at me after I say that to them and go, “Huh?”

It all began in Kurt Hendel’s “Theology of Martin Luther” class. Dr. Hendel’s final project had two requirements: it should be about Luther and it should be creatively you. One day during break between classes, I found myself on a website called “The Shakespearean Insulter”. A classmate looked over my shoulder and said, “Luther’s insults are better. You should make one for Luther”. That’s how it all started.

At first, the project was simple: search for insults to make reading Luther interesting. He’s spectacular at times, and other times he’s theologically dense, as all theologians are from time to time. And you really had to read Luther to find his better insults; they didn’t just pop off the page. So I read Luther and highlighted every insult I found. Of course, that means someday someone’s going to inherit the volumes of Luther’s Works that I own, and they’re going to find every insult throughout the books highlighted. Nothing else; just the insults. Imagine opening to “The Bondage of the Will” and the only thing highlighted is: “You are dumber than Seriphian frogs and fishes” (LW 33:77).

After collecting enough insults, I made the website. That was easy. Then came beta trial time. I emailed 3 friends – just 3 – and said, “Made something new; looking for feedback. Tell me what you think.” No one replied to my email. Instead, they shared it. Within 24 hours, I was so popular that I’d received an email from Concordia Publishing House about not having proper citations (I don’t know how they found me... the only personal information on the site was my name). I wasn’t actually ready to launch, but the site had gone viral already.

I had thousands of hits that first day. Within a few weeks, the site had been cited on numerous websites, some in love with it and some using it to show how backwards Luther and all of Christianity is. Soon pastors had tweeted it, renowned historians had quoted it, reputable newspapers had articles on it, and someone even made mugs out of it. I was just having fun with a final project, and suddenly this little site was popping up everywhere.

I imagine Luther as a man who knew that sometimes God has to kick the mule in order to get it to turn, to

use one of Luther's more famous images of the bound will, where humanity is ridden by God like an ass (LW 33:65-6). It's apparent Luther was kicked many times by God before he started walking the direction God wanted. "How are we going to turn Luther into a monk? Kick him with a lightning storm. Then that stubborn donkey is sure to move!" And Luther used the same method from time to time in the form of insults when he thought someone was going the wrong direction. Whenever he came across anything he found to be theologically erroneous and ruinous of the faith, he wasn't afraid to kick them in order to get them to turn.

To put it more theologically, Luther knew that God, who is good, cannot act in an evil way; and yet uses evil as a tool (LW 33:176-8). This use of evil for good is summed up in Luther's concept of God's alien work of judgment; wrath for the sake of grace (LW 16:233-4). It's not God's proper method, but from time to time God has used wrath as a tool for grace. Luther did the same with insults. Not that you're going to find a writing by Luther that's pure insults; you won't even find one that's 25% insults. It's not his main tool; it's an alien work. Luther is mostly arguing and persuading and proving his points. But he's not afraid to rip into someone to make it clear how atrociously heretical they're being at the moment, and the more heretical you're being, the more he's going to diss them out. You want to SELL grace!? Well, I think "you are the most insane heretics and ingrafters of heretical perversity" I've ever met! (LW 31:88). "What you say is a blasphemy that has made you worthy of a thousand deaths" (LW 31:154).

Maybe our theological hearts can't make sense of such insults in light of Jesus' words, "anyone who calls another an idiot shall be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:22). But Luther always did prefer to "sin boldly, but trust the Lord thy God all the more boldly." Besides, he didn't just reserve this tool for his enemies. You could be his best friend, but if you're straying from the path, be prepared for Luther to conjure up a visceral image of your heresy.

The longest insult I have found to date wasn't aimed at some theologian or the Roman Catholic Church of the 1500s or anything like that. It was in a sermon on keeping kids in school. A sermon! That thing pastors do for the sheep in their care. But Luther felt free to insult his own flock if that's what it took to get them to turn and go the right direction. Sometimes you've got to kick the mule. And what an insult! Here's a sample of the full thing: You know how much of "an accursed, ungrateful wretch" you are for not keeping your kids in school? You who "have everything, all of it free of charge", are causing the kingdom of God to go to ruin. You're causing pestilence and syphilis to spread like wildfire, tyrants to rise up and destroy us, and God to "pelt and shower us with nothing but devils [and] let brimstone and hell-fire rain down from heaven and inundate us one and all in the abyss of hell, like Sodom and Gomorrah" (LW 46:254). Now are you going to get your kids back in school or not?

In terms of rhetoric, it's an effective tool that maybe ought to come back into our arsenal in one form or another. Or as many people say to me today in relation to raising youth: Punishment is never a first resort nor is it the ultimate goal, but if we can't or aren't willing to punish our kids when they do wrong, they'll never learn. Or, as the dear Dr. Hendel once said to a class of future pastors: "You're being given the office of the keys, dear people, to bind and to loose, the keys to heaven and hell, and you better be willing to use both of them." The alien works of God ought to be the alien works of humans as well, but the Law and its results have their place in the realm of calling people to the Gospel.

I'm not sure what Luther would think of my site if he were alive today. Maybe he used such rhetoric in his day-to-day fully-sinner moments, but from what remains in his works, what I see are insults that are hyper-contextual. They were a rhetorical tool, not a quotable-quote. But Luther also knew that once the printers got ahold of his works, they weren't his anymore. I'd imagine, at least during those table talks, he'd pull up the site for a laugh. I can imagine him and his friends having a merry round throwing Luther insult after insult at each other, knowing that when people can laugh with each other we've reach one of the points at which humor is holy.

It's with that image in mind that I created this site. So it greatly bothers me when people use this site to show that Luther was a vindictive ass (donkey) and that all of Christianity is backwards. Because this site isn't that at all. At its best, this site lets me tap into Luther's underappreciated rhetoric and use it to take the Devil and all the works of Evil, throw some good insulting feces in their face, and laugh at the fact that Satan is an "ass to cap all asses" (LW 41:212) whose best words come out of the mouth "from which the farts come" (LW 41:280). That's truly holy Lutheran humor.

After five years, I'm still getting about 200 visitors daily. Occasionally I find it mentioned in articles, most recently this March in the magazine *First Things* in an article called "Pope Francis as Historian" by Bronwen McShea (who again simplifies these insults to creative name-calling and doesn't recognize them for the tool they are). Every few months I get a spike of 1000 to 5000 hits in a day. Once in a while, so much more than that. My favorite moment was when Reddit crashed my site. My web host only allows 75,000 database queries in an hour. Suddenly friends are messaging me that my site's down. I was able to find a work around rather quickly and get it back up, but 75,000 visits in an hour! It ain't as good as the Reformer himself by any means, but if the way you get into Martin Luther is by reading the salty parts of his Twitter feed, well – it's a start to some of the best theology in history.

*Insults quoted from *Luther's Works*, copyright © 1957, Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press.

Rev. Tyler Rasmussen, the [Lutheran Insulter](http://ergofabulous.org/luther) website (ergofabulous.org/luther)

An Appreciation of Luther's Pastoral Writings

by Anna Marie Johnson - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/appreciation-luthers-pastoral-writings/>

Martin Luther became a historical figure for a set of academic theses, but most of his German contemporaries knew him for his pastoral writings. By the time he was excommunicated in 1520 he had already written 25 pastoral writings, most of them in German. According to historian Mark Edwards, his German pastoral writings were printed and sold much more often in the sixteenth century than the texts we often read today.

I find his pastoral works captivating because they show a different side of Luther, tender and forceful all at once. In his pastoral writings, Luther is clear about the reason for his protest: to protect vulnerable souls from the demands of late medieval piety.

He worried that the practices of late medieval Christianity—pilgrimages, processions, set prayers, penance, and, yes, indulgences—taught Christians that God's favor could be earned and that good fortune could be negotiated with God. He worried that prescribing these devotions put Christians on the path to despair since they would always wonder if they had done enough. He also worried that all these practices took time, attention and resources away from loving one's neighbor.

His pastoral writings show that the primary reason for his protest was pastoral; he thought the papacy was leading souls astray, not shepherding them. This was his initial and abiding objection to papal authority. Only when church officials asked him to defend traditional arguments on papal authority did he begin to explore and question those arguments.

Luther is known for his lively, pithy prose and his use of everyday German to make his point. This flair is on full display in his pastoral writings. For example, when encouraging readers to use shorter prayers, he wrote, "The fewer the words, the better the prayer. The more words, the worse the prayer. Few words and richness of meaning is Christian. Many words and lack of meaning is pagan."

He was critical of the use of prayer books and prayer beads because he thought they allowed one to go through the motions of prayer even while the mind wandered and the heart was insincere. For Luther, true prayer is defined by its sincerity; it is "the lifting up of the mind and the heart to God."

Luther saw late medieval modes of prayer as attempts to gain favor with God and to avoid God's punishment. Luther cautioned that self-imposed works are not virtuous because they are a misguided attempt to redeem ourselves from sin. (Rejoice, all ye who dislike the practice of giving things up for Lent!)

In place of obviously pious works, Luther recommended good works that go unseen. In every devotional act, he saw a danger of insincerity, either out of boredom or out of a desire to look good in front of others. No work, however pious it appears, is free of this danger. This is one reason why Luther liked to recommend less visible works: if they are invisible and unpleasant, then they can only be done in sincere

faith.

Instead of going on pilgrimages and the like, Luther insisted that we follow the Ten Commandments and serve others, however unglamorous. His explications of the Ten Commandments lay out a very demanding ideal of how to love neighbors—one that involves protecting their rights, their reputation, and their material needs. Again and again Luther pointed to these acts as truly Christian works. He condemned those who say they want to do good works, yet always chose more showy devotional acts over the very routine (and often unnoticed) acts of love toward the neighbor.

Luther's pastoral works paint the life of faith in vivid, rich colors. In his vision, we can live out of deep conviction and commitment rather than narrow self-interest. We are animated by love and joy, not fear and shame. We serve others in the ways that help them most, not the ways that make us look good. We live without fear because we can trust God's good promises.

As Luther put it in *The Freedom of a Christian*, "Who then can comprehend the riches and the glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing. It is lord over sin, death and hell, and it serves, ministers to and benefits all people."

My Appreciation of Martin Luther's Sacramentality and His Attention to the Human Body

by Frank C. Senn - Tuesday, October 10, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/appreciation-martin-luthers-sacramentality-attention-human-body/>

Let's Talk has invited readers to write what they appreciate about Martin Luther as we observe the 500th anniversary jubilee of the Reformation. I'm a cradle Lutheran who grew up in a church-going family, so I've had a long relationship with the reformer. I don't know when I first became aware of Martin Luther, but I remember seeing the classic black-and-white film *Martin Luther* (1953) when it was shown in a downtown movie theatre when I was about age ten. I saw the film several times after that in church showings (with reels and a projector!) and the Irish actor Niall MacGiniss is indelibly etched in my memory as the face of Martin Luther. Of course, I memorized Luther's *Small Catechism* in confirmation class and had to recite parts of it in front of the congregation before my confirmation on Palm Sunday (a real Lenten scrutiny). I earned the Lutheran Scouting religious award, *Pro Deo et Patria*, at about age fourteen, which included as one of my projects writing a 30-page paper on the life of Martin Luther under the supervision of my pastor. In my high school world history course during my sophomore year I wrote a term paper on some aspect of Luther and the Reformation, although I don't remember now what it was. In a college religion course I wrote a paper on Luther's orders of creation (church, state, household).

I went on to seminary and graduate school and seminary teaching and Luther went with me. At the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, which became the Maywood campus of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, I had the Reformation and Modern Church History and the Lutheran Confessions courses from Professor Robert H. Fischer. My senior year at LSTC several of us had a reading course with Professor Franklin Sherman on the recently published church and society volumes in *Luther's Works* (American Edition), including Luther's anti-Jewish screeds. During my term as Assistant Professor of Liturgics at LSTC (1978-81) I taught one of the tracks in Reformation and Modern Church History while Professor Fischer was on sabbatical. (It was in my contract to teach one of the tracks in Ancient and Medieval Church History; it was thought that with a University of Notre Dame PhD I might know something about that.) And, of course, I have studied, taught, and written about Luther's liturgical projects and sacramental theology. (I also once taught Reformation Liturgy at Notre Dame.)

I recollect this personal history with Martin Luther to indicate that there are probably many things I appreciate about Luther. I won't list them all here. I will single out what has been most existential to me and that is Luther's sacramental theology as it relates to the human body. In particular, I appreciate his dogged defense of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

My Early Eucharistic Faith

In my new book, *Eucharistic Body*, I recount my early adolescent experiences of being bullied and sexually molested when I was thirteen.¹ In my experience of receiving first Communion on Easter Day 1957 I believed that I was not only forgiven whatever real or imagined adolescent sins I had committed,

but also that honor was restored to my dishonored body when I received the sacramental body and blood of Christ into my body. I have come to believe that the body itself is sanctified by the sacrament, not just the soul. We are physically in union with Christ and in this real sense become bodily “a little Christ to our neighbor” when we are dismissed from the Eucharistic assembly.

My first Communion was the most important religious experience of my early life. I didn’t have the intellectual concepts to understand why the sacrament was so important to my faith at age fourteen. I accepted the Catechism’s teaching that the benefits of the sacrament are forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. In college my faith sought understanding. The concept of sacramentality began to fall into place as I read Alexander Schmemmann’s *For the Life of the World* (first written for the National Student Christian Federation in 1963) and Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane*. Schmemmann wrote that “The world was created as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.”² Eliade wrote, “By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu.”³ To see the whole created world as an all-embracing sacrament given to us as food and drink (Schmemmann) and particular natural objects like stones and trees (like bread and wine) as hierophanies of the divine presence (Eliade) while remaining natural greatly expanded my sense of sacramentality. But how do I have access to this cosmic sacrament? How does it become a specific means of grace for me? Here Dr. Luther entered the discussion.

Luther on the Real Presence

The same campus pastor who recommended that I read Eliade (among other authors) also suggested that I read Luther’s 1528 treatise, *That These Words of Christ, “This Is My Body,” Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*. In this work Luther nails down the divine presence by appeal to the Word. The fanatics were challenging Luther’s concept of ubiquity, that the right hand of God (Christ) is not limited to being in heaven but is present everywhere, and therefore can be present in the bread and wine. But having argued this way he imagined the fanatics tripping him up by saying: “If Christ’s body is everywhere, ah, then I shall eat and drink him in all the taverns, from all kinds of bowls, glasses, and tankards! Then there is no difference between my table and the Lord’s table. Oh, how we will chew him up.” Luther responds:

Listen now, you pig, dog, or fanatic, whatever kind of unreasonable ass you are: Even if Christ’s body is everywhere, you do not therefore immediately eat or drink or touch him...

See, the bright rays of the sun are so near you that they pierce into your eyes or your skin so that you feel it, yet you are unable to grasp them or put them in a box, even if you should try forever. Prevent them from shining in through the window---this you can do, but catch and grasp them you cannot. So too with Christ: although he is everywhere, yet he does not permit himself to be so caught and grasped; he can easily shell himself, so that you get the shell but not the kernel. Why? Because it is one thing if God is present, and another if he is present for you. He is there for you when he adds his Word and binds himself, saying, “Here you are to find me.” Now when you have the Word, you can grasp and have him with certainty and say, “Here I have thee, according to thy Word.”⁴

Luther says in his Catechisms, following in the tradition of Ambrose and Augustine and Aquinas, “the Word makes the sacrament.” Only when the word is joined to the sign is there a sacrament. But there is also no sacrament without the external signs of bread and wine because “sacrament” is an external sign.

Luther also emphasized that there is no right use of the sacrament unless communicants are eating and drinking the bread and wine. This means taking these earthly elements into our earthly bodies. Since Luther believed that the bread and wine are received as the body and blood of Christ (the Formula of Concord says “in, with, and under”), according to Christ’s word, we ingest Christ’s body and blood.

Controversy Over the Real Presence

In Luther’s colloquy with Zwingli and the Swiss reformers at Marburg, he insisted on an oral eating of the body of Christ as well as a spiritual eating.⁵ This ill-fated meeting of the reformers pulled together by Landgrave Philip of Hesse in 1529 in the interests of Protestant unity resulted in agreement on fifteen points but total disagreement on the last half point: that there is an oral as well as a spiritual eating of the sacramental body. In the debate on the meaning of “is” in “This is my body,” Zwingli held fast to the interpretation that “is” means “signifies.” On this basis, wrote G. R. Potter in his biography of Zwingli, “it was possible to differentiate between the bread eaten by the communicants and the Christ received by faith. All that followed was a development, elaboration, ripening, and justification of this decision.”⁶

The impasse at Marburg divided the emerging Protestant movements and churches. Lee Palmer Wandel expressed surprise that the Council of Trent gave a disproportionate response to Zwingli out of all the reformers. Zwingli was long dead by 1563 when the Council ended and Calvin and Beza had succeeded to dominant theological leadership in the Reformed churches. But the council fathers saw where the real threat lay. Most Reformed Protestants since the sixteenth century have followed Zwingli’s “memorialist” view rather than Calvin’s more complex “real spiritual presence.” Palmer concluded her history of the Reformation Eucharist, “In confessional polemics faith itself has been changed from a process to a bipolarity: presence or absence.”⁷

I think this is an exaggeration. Zwinglian Protestants have experienced the presence of Christ in the Scriptures and the community of faith. But post-Reformation Roman Catholics, reacting to the threat of divine absence from the world, emphasized the real presence of Christ especially in Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and post-Reformation Lutheran celebrants in Electoral Brandenburg were known to practice “ostension” to counter Calvinist influence, in which they elevated the host at the words of institution and said, “See, dear Christians, this is the true body of Christ.”⁸

The Sacraments and the Human Body

Among the benefits in eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ is eternal life in body and soul. Luther writes in his treatise *That These Words of Christ...Still Stand Firm*:

...it is a glory and praise of his inexpressible grace and mercy that he concerns himself so profoundly with us poor sinners and shows such gracious love and goodness, not content to be everywhere in and around, above and beside us, but even giving his own body as nourishment, in order that with such a pledge he may assure and promise us that our body too shall live forever,

because it partakes here on earth of an everlasting and living food.⁹

This is a standard Catholic teaching derived from the church fathers. In fact, later in this treatise Luther refers to Irenaeus' refutation of the Valentinian heretics who taught that Christ is not God's Son and there is no resurrection of the flesh. They cited St. Paul who says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). Luther notes:

Against this Irenaeus writes that the body also will be saved, and that there is a resurrection of the flesh, as our Creed confesses. Among other things he cites this proof against them: If the body is not to be saved also, why should it be fed with the body and blood of the Lord in the sacrament?¹⁰

Lutherans have stressed Luther's rejection of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist (what we offer to God) in favor of the gift character (what God offers to us). In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) Luther speaks of the Eucharist as Christ's last will and testament.¹¹ And the inheritance bequeathed to his followers is the promise of forgiveness of sins. But this is only one of the three benefits of the sacrament listed in the *Small Catechism*. The other two are life and salvation. "Life" here is not limited to "eternal" and may, in fact, refer to living the Christian life here and now in our earthly bodily existence as well as expecting eternal life and salvation in the resurrection of the body---although, to be sure, forgiveness of sins is held up as the primary gift "because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."¹² Forgiveness of sins is a precondition for life and salvation.

When it comes to matters of the body, Luther is thoroughly medieval---but medieval with a difference. Luther got more deeply into the earthly body than his medieval forerunners did with their emphasis on the soul. I have come to appreciate Luther's focus on the human body as I have returned to the body, especially to my own body after treatment for colon cancer ten years ago. I have explored the body in its various aspects and brought some of this together in my book, *Embodied Liturgy*.¹³ In Luther's attention to the body I have been greatly helped by the PhD dissertation of Dr. Charles Cortwright of Wisconsin Lutheran College.¹⁴

We do not have a treatise on the body from Luther or even a systematic approach such as the late Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.¹⁵ But neither are references to the human body only scattered in miscellaneous fashion throughout Luther's writings. The most obvious places to turn are to his great Lectures on Genesis begun in 1535 and completed just before his death in 1546, in which Luther speaks directly about God's creation of the human body.¹⁶ In his explanation of the first article of the Creed in the Catechisms he speaks of God's provision for the needs of bodily life. After his marriage to Katerina von Bora Luther is quoted in his *Table Talk* speaking positively (even enthusiastically) about human sexuality. Luther was also subjected to many bouts of illness as he aged and he wrote in his letters about his medical conditions in great detail and also about his own impending death. (He came close to death from an illness in 1527.) In 1531 Luther preached a whole series of sermons on 1 Corinthians 15 concerning the resurrection of the flesh.¹⁷

Perhaps Luther's most familiar comment on the body---his own body---occurs in his 1521/22 *Sincere Admonition to All Christians*, written at the time of the iconoclastic mob actions in Wittenberg in 1521. Luther implored his followers:

I plead that [every]one should nevermind my name and not call himself Lutheran, but Christian. What is Luther? The teaching is certainly not mine. In the same way I was not crucified for anyone. St. Paul, 1 Cor. 3, would not allow it that the Christians [in Corinth] be named Pauliners or Peterans, but Christian. How comes it then that I, a poor stinking maggotsack at that, should have someone call the children of Christ by my awful name? Not so, dear friend. Let us erase partisan names and be called Christians, whose teaching we have.¹⁸

"Maggotsack" is a good example of Luther's use of earthy language. It was apparently one of his favorite terms to describe the embodied human condition after the fall. Cortwright says that he used the term 125 times, mostly in sermons. As a late medieval man, Luther was conscious of the presence of death in the midst of life. In fact, one of his hymns, "In the midst of earthly life, snares of death o'ertake us," is based on the medieval antiphon *In media vita*.¹⁹ Richard Marius' assessment that Luther was terrified by death²⁰ has been rejected by many reviewers, including Heiko Oberman.²¹ Neil Leroux's extensive study of Luther's primary writings dealing with death and concludes—contra Marius—that "they take [death] out of the realm of the dreary and depressing and onto something of infinite promise, because, for the dying believer, death provides the best opportunity to redeem the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection."²²

Luther looked to the promise of God in the sacraments to counter the threat of death. In his 1519 sermon on *The Holy Sacrament of Baptism*, Luther says that "The significance of baptism is a blessed dying unto sin and a resurrection in the grace of God, so that the old man, conceived and born in sin, is there drowned, and a new man, born in grace comes forth and rises."²³ This is verbally similar to the explanation of baptism in the *Small Catechism* of 1529 that "It signifies that the old creature [Adam] in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."²⁴ Luther goes on in the 1519 sermon to say that

This significance of baptism---the dying or drowning of sin---is not fulfilled completely in this life. Indeed, this does not happen until man passes through bodily death and completely decays to dust. As we can plainly see, the sacrament or sign of baptism is quickly over. But the spiritual baptism, the drowning of sin, which it signifies, lasts as long as we live and is completed only in death.

...

Therefore the life of a Christian, from baptism to the grave, is nothing else than the beginning of a blessed death. For at the Last Day God will make him altogether new.²⁵

A new life is born of water and the Spirit in the sacrament of Baptism. But it is a life of struggle between the new Adam and the old. To aid us in persevering in this struggle there is prayer, Scripture, confession and absolution, but most of all there is the Eucharist and the communion of saints. In his sermon *On the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods* (1519), Luther shows how we are joined to the communion of saints in the Eucharist which support us in our struggles.

To receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints....

This fellowship consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament. Again all sufferings and sins become common property; and thus love engenders love in return and [mutual love] unites.²⁶

Luther goes on with an extended analogy of all the things citizens of a city possess in common for their mutual defense against adversaries. He then paints a realistic picture of the adversities that afflict the baptized Christian.

Now adversity assails us in more than one form. There is, in the first place, the sin that remains in our flesh after baptism: the inclination to anger, hatred, pride, unchastity, and so forth. This sin assails us as long as we live. Here we need not only the help of the community [of saints] and Christ, in order that they might with us fight this sin, but it is also necessary that Christ and his saints intercede for us before God, so that this sin may not be charged to our account by God's strict judgment. Therefore in order to strengthen and encourage us against this same sin, God gives us this sacrament [of Holy Communion].²⁷

According to Luther, this is the relationship of Baptism to the Eucharist. The lifelong struggle between the old Adam and the new begun in baptism continues throughout the whole of our earthly life. This necessitates the nourishment and help provided by this second sacrament. Our struggles of body and soul are brought to the table where they are taken on by Christ and the communion of saints. They are taken on by Christ because Christ becomes a part of us just as we become a part of him when we receive the sacrament of his body and blood into our bodies. The sacrament signifies union with Christ. Our struggles are also taken on by the saints who have been joined to Christ by a common sharing (*koinonia*) of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.

I have found it helpful to refer to the social body of Christ (the church) as an "interpersonal body."²⁸ This is not a term used by Luther; in fact, I learned it from a Buddhist teacher of meditation, Reginald Ray. But it well describes the corporate character of the communion of saints taught by Luther in this remarkable sermon on the relationship between the Eucharist and the communion of saints. Ray writes that "...the more we descend into our body, the more we uncover a very vast and expanding interpersonal

world of connections with other people.” In fact, “We discover, then, that to have a body is already to be in intimate and extensive connection to others.”²⁹ Other people have experienced what we struggle with and we connect with them in a common bond of mutual struggles. But our connections are carried to a new level by our common sharing of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.

Return to the Actual Body

Luther’s strong sense of the real presence of Christ in, with, and under the sacramental elements is what I appreciated most in my early life and what I appreciate now at my present stage in life. As I emphasized in *Eucharistic Body*, the sacramental body of Christ is received into the body of the communicant who consumes the bread and wine and these elements are shared among the members of the interpersonal body in the communion of saints. This is a return to the intuitions of my youth, but now I am equipped with concepts---not only from theology but also from biochemistry, neuroscience, embodied mind theory, and philosophy³⁰---that can help me express what I experienced so profoundly when I brought to the table of the Lord all my adolescent bodily anxieties and ate a tasteless wafer that stuck to the roof of my mouth and drank a little glass of wine that burned my esophagus as I swallowed it.

I think there has been a tendency in sacramental theology, Protestant as well as Catholic since Vatican II, to focus on the actions of the sacraments more than their applications to actual bodies. Even in Roman Catholic sacramental theology there has been a move away from the actual body. One of the most important and influential Catholic sacramental theologians since Vatican II has been Louis-Marie Chauvet. In a work which popularized his sometimes rather dense thought, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, he makes “body” a rich root image for theological thinking (like St. Paul’s *soma*).³¹ But Chauvet’s “body” is not the animate biological body by which humans sense the outside world, think about it with the perceptions of the mind, and respond to it with postural movement. This is the actual body I address in *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Liturgy*. Chauvet certainly acknowledges that the sacraments are applied to bodies, but the “body” that the “visible words” of the sacraments are at “the mercy of” is the “corpus” of scripture, tradition, culture, language, material objects (including water, bread and wine), etc. He is right to bring the sacraments into conversation with this “corpus” of human expression, but one can lose the sense that these anthropological realities are peopled with real bodies---bodies that phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty defined as “living bodies” as opposed to abstract bodies.³²

God connects with human beings through the church community, its rituals and traditions. I have long taught that theology needs to pay more attention to the social structures and natural symbols studied by anthropologists because God has worked through these structures and symbols. But I think Luther would never let us forget that the sacramental body addresses human bodies that are formed by these structures and use these symbols. In exhorting Christians to come to Communion in *The Large Catechism*, his argument of last resort is to say to those who don’t feel a need for the sacrament that “they should put their hands to their bosom to determine whether they are made of flesh and blood. If you find that you are, then for your own good turn to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians and hear what the fruits of your flesh are.” He cites the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-20. “Again,” wrote Luther, “look around you and see whether you are also in the world. If you do not know, ask your neighbor about it. If you are in the world, do not think that there will be any lack of sins and needs.” After describing some of these, Luther concludes: “Moreover, you will surely have the devil around you, too. You will not entirely

trample him underfoot because our Lord Jesus Christ could not entirely avoid him.”³³ Faced with the flesh, the world, and the devil, we need the sacrament for the strengthening of body, soul, and mind as we live in this world.

The sacraments are all about God connecting with us bodily. The Eucharist especially is about the connection of bodies: Christ’s body, the communicant’s body, the church’s interpersonal body all joined together as food and drink given, received, and shared.

Notes

1. [^](#)Frank C. Senn, *Eucharistic Body* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), chapter 4.
2. [^](#)Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 15.
3. [^](#)Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1957), 12.
4. [^](#)Martin Luther, “That These Words of Christ, ‘This Is My Body,’ Etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics,” *Luther’s Works* [LW] 37, ed. and trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 67-68.
5. [^](#)LW 38: 25-27, 38-41 (two different reports of the colloquy)
6. [^](#)G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 293.
7. [^](#)Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 207.
8. [^](#)Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64-65.
9. [^](#)LW 37:71.
10. [^](#)Ibid., 115.
11. [^](#)LW 36:37ff.
12. [^](#)*The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 362.
13. [^](#)Frank C. Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).
14. [^](#)Charles Lloyd Cortright, “Poor Maggot-Sack that I Am”: *The Human Body in the Theology of Martin Luther* (2011). Dissertations (2009 -). Paper 102.
[epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1101&context...mu](http://publications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1101&context...mu)
15. [^](#)John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. with Introduction by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).
16. [^](#)LW 1:68-73, 83-94.
17. [^](#)See LW 28.
18. [^](#)LW 45:70.
19. [^](#)“Even As We Live Each Day,” *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Hymn 350.
20. [^](#)Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, MS: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999).
21. [^](#)Heiko Oberman, “Varieties of Protest,” *The New Republic* 16 August 1999: 40-45.
22. [^](#)Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 278.
23. [^](#)LW 35:30.
24. [^](#)*Book of Concord*, 360.

25. [^](#)Ibid.
 26. [^](#)LW 35:51.
 27. [^](#)LW 35:53.
 28. [^](#)Senn, *Eucharistic Body*, chapter 5.
 29. [^](#)Reginald A. Ray, *Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body* (Boulder, CO: SoundsTrue, 2008, 2014), 279.
 30. [^](#)See, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); David Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003); Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Besser van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014).
 31. [^](#)Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).
 32. [^](#)See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 2014).
 33. [^](#)*The Book of Concord*, 474-75.
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An Appreciation of Luther's Critique of the Eucharistic Sacrifice

by Shane Brinegar - Monday, December 18, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/appreciation-luthers-critique-eucharistic-sacrifice/>

The Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice offered by the priest on behalf of the living and the dead was at the center of medieval ecclesial life.^[i] The biblical scholar and later evangelical reformer will sharply critique the mass as a sacrifice and *ex opere operato* work in light of the doctrine of justification by faith alone and his corresponding contention that the sacrament is a gift or testament bequeathed by Christ to the church.^[ii] His insistence that the mass is a gift and not a work offered to God will be met with condemnation by the medieval Roman Catholic theologians in the increasingly polemical environment of the Reformation conflict.^[iii] Ultimately in its official response to the Protestant Reformers the Council of Trent will reaffirm the notion that the mass is a sacrifice for the living and the dead at its twenty-second session in 1562 in canons one and three of its decrees.^[iv] In the post Reformation post Trent ecclesial environment the question of the mass as sacrifice has remained a contentious and difficult one in the dialogues between Roman Catholics and Lutherans.^[v] Despite the continued ecumenical impasse a careful nuanced reading of the reformation sources and the widespread ecumenical recovery of the eucharistic prayer among Lutherans might reveal that the question of eucharistic sacrifice is not as deadlocked as was once thought.^[vi]

Before attempting to reconsider the historic Lutheran polemic on the mass sacrifice an examination of Luther's evangelical critique of the late medieval eucharistic cultus is necessary to fully understand his pastoral and theological context. In the medieval church the sacrament of penance had attained a centrality and pre-eminence of place in the sacramental system. On this issue the liturgical historian Frank Senn observes,

Even though masses were being celebrated virtually every hour of every day, the faithful were no longer receiving communion. Various ascetical practices, such as fasting and abstinence, and disciplinary fencing of the table by means of the requirement of confession and absolution, had so discouraged the faithful from receiving communion that the fourth Lateran Council (1215) had to decree that the faithful must receive communion at least once a year at Easter, after first going to confession. In this same period eucharistic devotion spawned the development of a eucharistic cult outside of the mass. Nathan Mitchell delineates its four principal categories as follows: Devotional visits to the reserved sacrament: Processions in which the sacrament, concealed in a container or exposed to public view was carried about: Exposition of the sacrament to the gaze of the faithful: Benediction, in which a solemn blessing with the eucharistic bread was imparted to the people, often at the conclusion of procession or a period of exposition.^[viii]

The strict penitential requirement and its emphasis on proper disposition pushed sacramental reception to the margins of the assembly. This marginalization required a pastoral response that allowed the faithful to receive the fruits of the sacrament and the merits of the priestly sacrifice of the mass.^[ix] Furthermore, since Lateran IV had also decreed that through the ministry of the priest the bread and wine is transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ and only the accidents of bread and wine remain it

was widely held in popular piety and official church practice that simply by viewing body and blood of Christ one could attain merit and achieve a kind of spiritual communion with God.^[ix] The importance of viewing the sacramental elements (ocular communion), especially at the elevation of the host during the mass cannot be overstated. Regarding its ritual centrality, the medieval historian Miri Rubin notes,

Proper humility was recommended at this moment, when people were to kneel and gaze at the body and blood. This is the attitude most commonly shown in visual representations of the elevation, a group of men and women with clasped hands, and sometimes holding their hands to their mouths in a gesture of awe, kneeling behind the servers and priest. They are most frequently shown to be clasping their hands in a gesture which becomes increasingly common in thirteenth century representations, one which we nowadays think of as natural for private prayer. At this moment of arrival, people were encouraged to express themselves in salutations and addresses and a whole genre of eucharistic salutations in the Latin and the vernacular developed producing hundreds of suitable prayers.^[x]

The mass in the Middle Ages then was understood as a transaction between God and humanity, the chief actor in this transaction was the priest (assisted by the servers) who transformed the bread and wine of the sacrament into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, thereby making it possible for the gathered faithful to encounter God and obtain graces. This transaction was at the heart of religious and spiritual life.^[xi]

The mass sacrifice (in which the priest was the primary actor) and its related benefits were not simply limited to the faithful who were living and could observe the elevation. In late medieval Christendom the fruits of the mass were extended to the faithful who had died and were in need of prayer and supplication in purgatory.^[xii] The practice of a priest offering the mass for a special intention (votive mass) at the request of the faithful upon a donation goes back to the fourth century.^[xiii] However, in the late Medieval Christendom the number of votive masses being offered for special intentions and the souls of the departed had drastically increased in comparison to prior centuries and this increase led to the emergence of the private mass. Regarding the impact of the private mass on liturgical life and spirituality Maxwell Johnson observes,

The emergence of the private Mass led to other substantial changes in the ceremonial that had been used hitherto. Since there were no other ministers present to read the readings or choir to sing the chants, the priests read all the texts himself. Because there was no congregation, it was pointless for the priest to move away from the altar to proclaim the readings, although a token change in position was retained, with epistle being read on the right side of the altar and the gospel on the left. Similarly, because there was no solemn procession bringing the eucharistic elements to the altar, they were simply taken from a small table beside the altar when needed. In the course of time the need to have various books containing the parts of the mass originally assigned to different ministers became inconvenient in such a celebration, and so embryonic forms of the missal-a book containing all the texts in one volume-began to emerge from the ninth century onward and came into common use everywhere from the thirteenth century. These were not the only changes that resulted from the development. Because of the need for multiple celebrations of the Eucharist on the same day in order that each priest could fulfill what was seen as his primary function, it was often necessary to allow for a number of secondary altars in a church building in addition to the principal one. Because these altars were commonly situated

quite close to one another, the Masses were said rather than sung, usually in a low voice so as not to disturb others celebrating nearby. And because eventually an altar might be used several times a day, it became customary for the priest himself to carry in at the beginning the vessels he was to use and to carry them out afterward rather than their being at the altar in advance. Later, the wealthy would endow special “chantry chapels” in churches, just large enough for a priest and a small altar, together with a regular stipend for the priest to say mass each day after the donor’s death and thus seek forgiveness for sins committed in her or his lifetime. Because by the later Middle Ages some priests ended up with the obligation to say a number of Masses each day for different people, a strange custom that used the *missa sicca* or “dry mass” emerged. This was a rite in which all mass texts were said, except for what one might think were the vital parts: the offertory, consecration, and communion. Although a priest was ordinarily forbidden to say more than one mass a day, this restriction did not apply to the *missa sicca*, and so the priest might repeat that part of the rite numerous times for different intentions (receiving a stipend each time), while completing it with the rest of the Mass only once—which gives a whole new meaning to the expression “Mass production!”^[xiv]

The increasing prominence of the sacrament of penance, the separation of the cross and the altar in theological discourse, the pre-eminence of the priest as consecratory actor, and the emergence of the private mass led to a robust consumer religious marketplace whereby the faithful could attain God’s merit and favor through the work of the priestly class and be certain not only of their own salvation but also the salvation of their loved ones. The so-called “dry mass” is an indication of the quantification that was taking place in the liturgical theology and pastoral praxis of this period. The lay faithful had become so marginalized from the sacramental celebration and counted themselves so unworthy to receive the body and blood of Christ, that they no longer even needed to be present to hear the mass or view the elevation to receive its constituent benefits, the priest could simply accomplish the work for them.^[xv]

While the emergence of the private mass and chantry chapels are clear indications that the priestly offering of the eucharistic sacrifice was at the center of medieval ecclesial practice, we must also analyze sections of the Roman Canon because it is here where the themes of sacrifice and offering textually come to the fore.^[xvi] Before the canon proper came a series of lengthy offertory prayers recited by the priest.^[xvii] In the first prayer, the Eucharist is explicitly referred to as an unblemished offering which the priest alone offers to God the Father for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, the faithful are immediately relegated to a passive position in the liturgy. Furthermore, the priest is placed high above the faithful because only he by virtue of the indelible character bestowed in ordination can offer the holy sacrifice for the sins of the whole world both living and dead. The second prayer uses less direct sacrificial language but leads the faithful to believe that by the offering of the sacramental elements they can share in the divinity of Christ. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth offertory prayers denote that in the Mass there is a kind of transaction taking place between the priest and God the Father, who is a holy and righteous judge who needs to be appeased by the unbloody offering of his Son on the altar. In the prayers there is a sense that God is not seen as primarily present among the faithful but is in heaven where the offering must be brought up to him. The seventh offertory underscores the medieval notion that because God is an angry judge the saints and the Virgin Mary in their humanity and the leading of a holy life are humanity’s only recourse. In this prayer, the priest asks that the sacrifice might be offered in honor of the saints and he begs that they might

intercede for him and all the faithful. The final offering prayer (before the canon proper) is unique because, while it is clearly of a sacrificial character, it includes the active response of the gathered assembly as they pray that the work of the priest might be acceptable to God the Father. The dialogue, preface, and the Sanctus follow, but it is noteworthy that none of these elements contain sacrificial undertones. ^[xviii]

The emphasis on the sacrificial character of the Eucharistic celebration returns in full force immediately after the Sanctus. In the *Te igitur* the celebrant beseeches the Father through the Son to accept the bread and wine of the sacrament as an offering on behalf of and for the sake of the whole church. The language of the *Memento Domine* that follows not only indicates that the sacramental act is an offertory gift to God but clearly places the medieval mass in the context of a ritual, redemptive transaction between, priest, people, and God who demands a just payment for sin. This is especially evident in the concluding passage of *Memento Domine* which reads, “for whom we offer to you, or who offer to you this sacrifice of praise for themselves and for all their own, for the redemption of their souls, for the hope of their salvation and safety, and pay their vows to you, the living, true, and eternal God”. ^[xix] There are other sections in the Roman canon that deserve mention. In the *Communicantes* after the *Memento Domine* there is explicit supplications to the Virgin Mary and other popular saints. Their prayers and merits on behalf of Christians on Earth were essential for medieval Christian piety, and the cult of the saints was intimately connected to the Mass itself. This is because the saints especially the Virgin Mary had been faithful and obedient to the will of God and the teachings of the church. By their holy obedience they merited the beatific vision and had attained so much merit that it could be applied to the living and the dead. Since the observance of the work of the mass was the highest Christian devotion and the saints were the holiest of Christians, of course the faithful would ask for their intercession and pray that the Father would be pleased with their unending merits. In the *Hanc Igitur* note that the celebrant demands that the faithful be spared from damnation and numbered among the elect because of his holy offering. Finally, it is important to mention the *Supra quae* and the *Supplices Te*. The *Supra quae* intimately connects the priestly sacrifice of the Eucharist to the priestly sacrifices of the Old Testament. The *Supplices te* literally asks that the angels will take the gifts of the sacrifice at that altar to the altar of God in heaven. This prayer, too, indicates that God is not primarily understood to be amid the assembly but is primarily far off in a heavenly place and is only reachable because of the priestly class who continually offer the sacrifice of Christ and the merits of the saints up to him in heaven.

There is no need here to go through the remaining sections of the canon in detail. It is only necessary to briefly summarize the key points of the preceding. Overtime the lay faithful did not regularly receive the sacramental elements at mass because of an increasing emphasis on right preparation for communion and the sacrament of penance. This emphasis pastorally necessitated the development of increased ritual practice around the “moment of consecration” and the elevation of the by the priest celebrant which allowed the faithful to receive “ocular communion”. The communion of the faithful by a mere gaze was an indication of the theology of transaction and exchange that characterized late medieval popular piety around the mass. ^[xx] It is against this ecclesial culture of sacramental commodification that the Wittenberg theologian will offer his striking evangelical critique.

In his groundbreaking theological treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) the Wittenberg Professor will take on the notion of the mass as a sacrifice and work. ^[xxi] Luther writes,

The third captivity of this sacrament is by far the most wicked abuse of all.... The holy sacrament

has been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business It is certain, therefore, that the mass is not a work which may be communicated to others, but the object of faith (as has been said), for the strengthening and nourishing of each one's own faith. Now there is yet a second stumbling block that must be removed, and this is much greater and the most dangerous of all. It is the common belief that the mass is a sacrifice, which is offered to God. Even the words of the canon seem to imply this, when they speak of "these gifts, these presents, these holy sacrifices," and further on "this offering." Prayer is also made, in so many words, "that the sacrifice may be accepted even as the sacrifice of Abel," etc. Hence Christ is termed "the sacrifice of the altar." Added to these are the sayings of the holy fathers, the great number of examples, and the widespread practice uniformly observed throughout the world. Over against all these things, firmly entrenched as they are, we must resolutely set the words and example of Christ. For unless we firmly hold that the mass is the promise and testament of Christ, as the words clearly say: we shall lose the whole gospel and all its comfort. Let us permit nothing to prevail against these words-even though an angel from heaven should teach otherwise [Gal. 1:8]-for they contain nothing about a work or a sacrifice. Moreover, we also have the example of Christ on our side. When he instituted this sacrament, and established this testament at the Last Supper, Christ did not offer himself to God the Father, nor did he perform a good work on behalf of others, but, sitting at table, he set this same testament before each one and proffered to him the sign. Now, the more closely our mass resembles that first mass of all, which Christ performed at the Last Supper, the more Christian it will be. But Christ's mass was most simple, without any display of vestments, gestures, chants, or other ceremonies, so that if it had been necessary to offer the mass as a sacrifice, then Christ's institution of it was not complete. ^[xxii]

In these words, the evangelical reformer will overthrow the heart of the medieval sacramental system and shift the focus of the mass from our work and offering to the work and offering of Christ he gives himself as gift to the believer in the material signs of bread and wine. In his evolving understanding of sacrament as gift the notion of testament will play a central role. For Luther Christ's body and blood are his "last will" and testament to the apostles and by extension to the whole church. ^[xxiii] Christ's testament to the church (for the Wittenberg Professor) is most clearly expressed in the Words of Institution (Verba Christi) attached to the sacramental sign.

Despite his profound critique of the commodification of the mass in late medieval popular piety ^[xxiv] especially in the proliferation of private masses, the Wittenberg Professor will reject the notion that the mass is a eucharistia or a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. This is especially evident in the *Deutsche Messe* (1526) where the post-communion collect suggested by Luther is full of eucharistic language. The text reads, "We give thanks to thee, Almighty God, that thou hast refreshed us with this thy salutary gift; and we beseech thy mercy to strengthen us through the same in faith toward thee and in fervent love among us all; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." ^[xxv] It is noteworthy that the language of thanksgiving and praise follows the Verba, which Luther suggested should be chanted to the Gospel tone. This liturgical choice by the evangelical reformer indicates his desire to emphasize the fact that our eucharistia is understood as a response to the testament-gift we have freely received from the crucified and risen Christ. Our thanksgiving-praise response to Christ's gift does not end with the post-communion collect but instead the collect signals the beginning of our eucharistic life in the world -- a life

characterized by thanksgiving and praise to God in Jesus Christ and sacrificial love toward one another and the needy ones in our midst. This is precisely why in the collect the church prays for strengthening in faith toward God and “fervent love among us.” Love toward the neighbor is an act, a service that requires a self-offering to one another, an offering that we are freed and called to give because of Christ’s testament to us.

The theme of eucharistic thanksgiving and praise is not only evident in Luther’s *Deutsche Messe* (1526) but is more clearly articulated in his important sacramental treatise, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods*. (1519) Here the reformer will emphasize the notion that in receiving the sacramental signs, the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, we are made members of the body of Christ, the church. In being made members of this body we are called to live a eucharistic life with one another. Luther writes,

When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship.... Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray and...have heartfelt sympathy.... Here the saying of Paul is fulfilled, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” [Gal. 6:2].[\[xxvi\]](#)

The theme of our eucharistic response to Christ’s abundant love for us expressed in the gift of the sacrament is made explicitly clear. Since the crucified and risen one has offered himself to us we in turn offer ourselves as kind of self-offering to Christ’s needy ones. The one who receives the sacrament is called to a lifetime of sacrificial offering a giving of self to the burdens of the other as Christ first gave of himself to us. Luther’s vehement rejection of the Roman canon then is not an outright rejection of the eucharist as sacrifice but instead a fundamental shifting of its meaning. In contrast to the medieval notion that the rite of the mass is a propitiatory sacrifice offered by the priest so that the faithful can attain spiritual goods, the evangelical reformer suggests that Christ freely gives the believer spiritual goods (that is his body and blood) so that the community believers is set free to live a life of sacrificial service and be Christ to the needy ones. Commenting on Luther’s eucharistic ethic Samuel Torvend asserts,

Luther suggested that receiving bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, signifies the creation or confirmation of a community that receives “gifts” and consequently bears responsibility to respond in mutual assistance to each other. One not only receives but shares that which has been given freely. Such mutual sharing is not an option; it is a sure sign of a lively and living faith.[\[xxvii\]](#)

While Martin Luther re-interprets eucharistia as our faithful response to receiving Christ’s testament and

it has important ethical and ecclesiological implications he does not provide a full eucharistic prayer in the *Formulae Missae* (1523) or the *Deutsche Messe* (1526). However, his colleague Philip Melanchthon can speak approvingly of sacrifice and offering in relation to the eucharist. The lay theologian of the Lutheran Reformation can do this because he holds a broader definition of the term sacrament. On this point the liturgical historian Frank Senn observes,

Melanchthon defined the “sacrament” not in terms of the elements but as a *ceremonia* or *opus* by which God gives us what the sacrament *promissio* offers. “Sacrifice,” on the other hand, is a *ceremonia* or *opus* by which we render glory to God. The Praeceptor expressed his famous distinction in Article XXIV of the Apology...Melanchthon further distinguished two types of sacrifice: the propitiatory sacrifice that satisfies guilt and punishment, placates God’s wrath and merits the forgiveness of sins, which is the atoning sacrifice; and the *sacrificium eucharistikon* by means of which thanks and praise is rendered to God for the reconciliation and forgiveness effected by the atoning sacrifice. The mass cannot be a propitiatory sacrifice, because there has been only one true propitiatory sacrifice in the history of the world: the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The only sacrifice Christians can offer are the eucharistic sacrifices, which are called *sacrificia laudis* (sacrifices of praise), examples of which include: “the proclamation of the Gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the affliction of the saints, yes, all the good works of the saints.” Among these sacrifices of praise is the ceremony of the mass, which is a eucharistic sacrifice if it is used *ad laudem Dei* (to the praise of God).[\[xxviii\]](#)

By making sharp distinction between what God renders to us in the sacrament and what we render in response to God’s offering Melanchthon can move somewhat beyond Luther and refer to the mass as a type of sacrifice, not propitiatory, but still a eucharistic sacrifice. This means that in the liturgy, the Gloria, the Kyrie, the collects, and the lessons could all be interpreted as our eucharistic sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God. In distinguishing between propitiatory sacrifice and *sacrificium eucharistikon* Melanchthon can hold together two distinctive aspects of Christian worship. Our sacrificial act of prayer and praise and Christ’s act of giving his testament for which we also give thanks and praise. These distinctions also mean that the recovery of a eucharistic prayer is possible despite Luther’s rejection of the Roman canon considering corruptions in late medieval piety. Indeed, the Praeceptor himself affirms the possibility of using a prayer of thanksgiving at the table.[\[xxix\]](#) Some of the early Lutheran church orders, in particular the *Pfalz-Neuburg Church Order* (1543), will heed Melanchthon’s affirmation of the use of a eucharistic prayer. The text reads,

O Lord Jesus Christ, thou only true Son of the living God, who hast given thy body unto bitter death for us all, and hast shed thy blood for the forgiveness of our sins, and hast bidden all thy disciples to eat that same thy body and to drink thy blood whereby to remember thy death ; we bring before thy divine Majesty these thy gifts of bread and wine and beseech thee to hallow and bless the same by thy divine grace, goodness and power and ordain [*schaffen*] that this bread and wine may be [*sei*] thy body and blood, even unto eternal life to all who eat and drink thereof.[\[xxx\]](#)

In the preceding I have attempted to situate Martin Luther's assault on the mass sacrifice in its pastoral and theological context. In the late medieval church certain abuses arose especially in the votive masses and their corresponding system of stipends. To counteract the notion of the mass as work and propitiatory sacrifice, the evangelical reformer will repudiate the Roman Canon and emphasize the notion that the mass is a testament or gift that Christ gave to the church for the remission of sins, life, and salvation. Despite his overwhelming emphasis on sacrament as gift, the Wittenberg reformer will still affirm the notion that the mass is a *eucharistia*, a thanksgiving. The *eucharistia* is also our ethical and moral response to the gifts we have received in the sacrament. Melanchthon will expand Luther's notion of *eucharistia* by using an expansive definition of the term sacrament and distinguishing between propitiatory sacrifice and our eucharistic sacrifices offered in praise and thanks to God. Considering this the author of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology can affirm that the liturgy of the mass is a type of sacrifice and affirm the use of a eucharistic prayer. Melanchthon's affirmation of praying at the table will be taken up in at least one Lutheran church order and by some Lutheran's outside of the German Reformation context.[\[xxxi\]](#)

If Lutherans re-read with ecumenical eyes the Wittenberg Reformers critique of the mass sacrifice and its context and properly situate into the broader corpus of our confessional theology, then perhaps we can arrive at a more positive view of eucharistic sacrifice within our own tradition. Coming to a more positive view from the sources of our own theology will enable us to more faithfully have a deeper dialogue with Roman Catholics and work to overcome this "stumbling block to unity". The continued recovery of a full eucharistic prayer in our assemblies beyond simply the Verba will aid this work. On this point Frank Senn concludes,

Lutherans need to understand that sacrifice is a polysemous concept in the eucharistic tradition that refers variously to the offering of bread and wine, the self-offering of the faithful, and the saving work of Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics need to remember that sacrifice is one metaphor for the saving act of Christ along with others, such as ransom and purchase, victory over sin, death, and the devil, and the restoration of immortality through the incarnation of the Word. All of this is present in the eucharistic tradition. Study of this tradition would go a long way in helping us to overcome the ecumenical impasse on eucharistic sacrifice and on the eucharist in general.[\[xxxii\]](#)

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Notes

[i] For a detailed analysis of the medieval eucharistic cultus and its theological and social implications see, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[ii] For a detailed analysis of Luther's understanding of sacrament as gift and testament see the classic study by Carl Wisloff, *The Gift of Communion: Luther's Controversy with Rome on Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964).

[iii] In the *Confutation to the Augsburg Confession* (1559) the Roman theologians declare, "Also, their insinuation that Christ is not offered in the mass must be rejected by all, just as the faithful have always condemned this view. Augustine condemned this error in the Arians, who denied that the mass was a sacrifice for the living and the dead. This teaching is contrary to the Holy Scripture and the entire church." Robert Kolb, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 128.

[iv] For an English translation of these canons see, James White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 206.

[v] In fact as late as the recent joint ecumenical by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist* (2015) the question of eucharistic sacrifice as a "potential stumbling block to unity". See especially pg. 106.

[vi] The Swedish Lutheran bishop Gustaf Aulén has argued that Luther's evangelical critique of the late medieval mass need not be interpreted as an outright rejection of eucharistic sacrifice. See his classic study, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958).

[vii] Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 223.

[viii] The late medieval theologians Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel argued that the sacrifice of the mass cannot be of equal value or efficacy as the sacrifice of the cross. This assertion led to a "pulling apart of the cross and the Altar" and the notion of the quantitative value of masses. For example, Biel will argue that the value and fruit of a mass offered for one person greater than the value and fruit of a mass offered for multiple intentions. See *Ibid.*, 253-263.

[ix] For a discussion of the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation and its formal articulation see *Ibid.*, 251-53. It should be noted that Lateran IV did not use the categories of substance and accidents to describe this Eucharistic dogma that work was left to Thomas Aquinas.

[x] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 155-156.

[xi] It should be noted that church architecture in this period reflects the shift away from Holy Communion as the sacramental celebration of a gathered community to primarily the work of the priest on behalf of the laity who were often engaged in their own paraliturgical devotions. For more on this issue see, Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 218-221

[xii] In late medieval Catholic theology purgatory was understood as an intermediate state whereby believers who had not lived a saintly life were prepared for heaven. For more on purgatory and its integral role in the medieval sacramental system see Samuel Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragment*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 14-15 and 21.

[xiii] For more on the origins of this practice see Edward Kilmartin and Robert J. Daly, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 109-15.

[xiv] Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 220-221.

[xv] It should be noted that in the eleventh century the theology of the priesthood is increasingly understood in hierarchical terms and this has profound implications for the role of laity at mass. While the laity is understood to participate in the sacrifice by their prayers, it is "only the priest (who) is the active subject of the ritual offering." See Kilmartin and Daly, *The Eucharist in the West*, 134-43

[xvi] According to Jasper and Cuming the oldest manuscripts which contain the Roman Canon come from the eighth century. See R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 159.

[xvii] For an English translation of the complete text of the Roman canon see *Ibid.*, 162-166.

[xviii] In fact, as we shall see later, in his *Formula Missae* (1523) Luther will retain the dialogue, preface,

and Sanctus. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Liturgy and Hymns. Volume 53*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 27.

[xix] Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 164.

[xx] Gazing upon the sacramental elements, especially the host was so central to medieval piety, that detailed elevation scenes were often included in the missal alongside the Mass texts. They became visible catechetical representations of the idea that, "the elevation was a token of sacramental meaning and of the exclusive priestly power in its mediation." See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 131-34

[xxi] For more on the historical background of this text see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament II. Volume 36*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 5-9.

[xxii] Maxwell Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: The Sources of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2012), 229-30.

[xxiii] For more on Luther's concept of the Holy Supper as testament see Martin Luther, "A Treatise on the New Testament, That is the Holy Mass" in *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament I. Volume 35*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 84-88.

[xxiv] The prolific contemporary Roman Catholic theologian Robert Daly has even acknowledged that there were some profound abuses in late medieval liturgical practice, especially, the stipends associated with the votive mass. See Robert Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*, T and T Clark, especially pgs. 141-147.

[xxv] Luther, *Luther's Works Volume 53*, 84.

[xxvi] Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor*, 94-95.

[xxvii] Ibid., 94-95.

[xxviii] Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 451-452.

[xxix] For a brief discussion of this see Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*, 250-251.

[xxx] Ibid.

[xxxi] The Swedish Lutheran Church will use a fuller eucharistic rite than those suggested by Luther's liturgical essays and the Swedish reformers will not object to calling the mass a sacrifice. For more on this see Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 467-476.

[xxxii] Ibid., 478-479

Indulge Me: About the Lollards

by Benjamin Dueholm - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-me-about-the-ollards/>

Please indulge me as I share my own odd Reformation-era enthusiasm: the Lollards. Originating in the work of priest and Oxford scholar John Wycliffe (d. 1384), Lollardy flourished as a movement for church and civil reform from the 1370s and the Peasants' Revolt. After rebellions led or inspired by Lollards in 1414 and 1431 were suppressed, the movement scattered, but it never disappeared. Its influence was evident in the reforms of Jan Hus in Bohemia, Luther in Germany, all the way to the English Puritans.

In theology, Wycliffe and his followers blazed the trail for ideas that would go further in the 16th century, as well as some that would end up in eccentric dead ends. They taught that the sacrament was "very Goddis body" and yet bread at the same time; they criticized the temporal power and wealth of prelates; they criticized the use of pilgrimages, images, and prayers to saints. Rightly or wrongly, Lollard views of church and state were considered dangerous to public order, as well as heterodox in theology. Specific Lollard views were condemned by the church in the 1370s and 1380s. Suppression by the civil authorities followed as Lollard preaching continued and was intermingled with civil unrest.

This suppression was effective enough to limit the number of original Lollard texts available today. But it was far from total. Apart from their specific theological claims, the Lollards changed the shape of Christianity in England by translating the Bible partially into English and stressing vernacular preaching. Archbishop Arundel forbade the possession of any Bibles by Wycliffe or later translators in 1407, as well as English tracts.

And it is in this surviving vernacular literature that we can sense the real import of the Lollard movement. Wycliffe's translations, unlike later efforts, did not return to Greek or Hebrew, but rendered the Vulgate in homely, vivid English. Of the Prodigal Son: "And aftir that that he hadde endid alle thingis, a strong hungur was maad in that cuntre, and he bigan to haue nede." The tradition of editing and translating that would swell majestically through Tyndale to the Authorized Version owes little to Wycliffe except his belief that English was a suitable language for Scripture and theology (or politics!) at all. As one scholar of the Lollards says, it is not their literary merit, but this attempt to create a vernacular public discourse that was "their greatest achievement." For decades, simply to write in English--then a language of commoners, not the clerical elite or the Norman rulers--was nearly to be suspected of heresy or sedition.

I appreciate both the insight and the eccentricity of the Lollards. Even more, I admire their brave commitment to preach and teach directly to a new public in a language whose rapid evolution they would help to advance and shape. An early critic lamented that the language of angels (i.e., Latin) was being supplanted by the language of Englishmen. Leaving aside the status of Latin, he was not wrong. From those few radical seeds, a whole vernacular theology and literature has grown.

Indulge Me: Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), Christian Humanist and Hebrew Scholar

by Theodor Dunkelgrün - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-johann-reuchlin-1455-1522-christian-humanist-hebrew-scholar/>

From the fourteenth century onwards, the Italian proponents of the movement we have come to call Renaissance Humanism boldly sought to uncover the textual, artistic, and material remains of antiquity: to renew the use of the Latin language by imitating the elegance of ancient Roman rhetoric; to explore the ancient sources of wisdom; and thereby to renew Christian life and learning. The invention of the printing press in the 1450's was critical to the spread of Humanist learning. So, too, was the arrival of Byzantine Greek and Iberian Jewish refugees, following the catastrophes of the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, at the very time when Humanists were turning to the Greek and Hebrew source texts of Christianity.

Like his contemporary, Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466-1536), the German jurist Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) was a pioneering figure of Renaissance Humanism, and both men served as vital links in the transmission across the Alps of Humanist ideals and practices. From the early sixteenth century onwards, colleges and universities from Alcalá de Henares in Spain to Krakow in Poland and from Leuven in the Low Countries to Luther's Erfurt and Wittenberg formally incorporated Greek and Hebrew alongside Latin into their curricula. (It was Reuchlin who hellenized, in typical Humanist fashion, his great-nephew and student Philipp Schwarzerd's name to *Melanchthon*, just as the young Augustinian Martin Luder changed his name to *Luther* after the Greek word for freedom, *eleutheria*). Where Erasmus was engrossed in studying the Scriptures in Greek, Reuchlin also devoted himself to Hebrew. If both men looked to St Jerome as the ideal Christian scholar, Erasmus was happy to admit that it was Reuchlin who truly possessed the 'trilingual erudition' that had enabled the Church Father, a thousand years earlier, to produce his epochal Latin translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek.

While on diplomatic missions to Italy, Reuchlin visited the court of Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence. There he met such leading figures of the Italian Renaissance as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a devotee of esoteric Jewish traditions known as Kabbalah, which he believed contained hidden evidence for the truth of Christianity. Reuchlin would go on to dedicate much of his scholarly life to Christian readings of Kabbalistic literature. He sought out Jewish teachers to study Hebrew in earnest—among them Jacob Jechiel Loans, a physician to the Holy Roman Emperor—and built a collection of Hebrew manuscripts. By the early sixteenth century, Reuchlin was probably the most accomplished Christian Hebrew scholar outside Italy. His groundbreaking *Rudiments of Hebrew* (1506), a Latin Hebrew grammar and dictionary, was one of the most important tools by which Christian scholars of the time acquired the linguistic skills necessary to read the Old Testament in its original language.

Humanistic scholarship, however, had unforeseen consequences. Knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew sources of the texts of Sacred Scripture could be a very dangerous thing, as Erasmus discovered when his own new Latin translation of the New Testament from the Greek (1516) departed from the Latin Vulgate in ways that directly challenged Church doctrine. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, the Church's attitude

towards Jews and Judaism was implicated too. Trusting the Hebrew Biblical text meant trusting the Jewish tradition through which it had been transmitted throughout the Christian era and engaging with the library of Rabbinic exegesis that explained it.

Soon after he published his *Rudiments of Hebrew*, Reuchlin became caught up in what would become known as the “Battle of the Books,” or the Reuchlin Affair. The Inquisitor Jacob van Hoogstraaten, the Flemish prior of the Cologne Dominicans, together with a Jewish convert to Christianity, Johannes Pfefferkorn, sought to outlaw, confiscate, and destroy all post-Biblical Jewish books throughout Christendom. Reuchlin drew upon his legal, theological, and Hebrew expertise to argue against the persecution both of Jews and their books and he became their chief defendant. Drawing upon Augustine and Aquinas, Reuchlin argued “the Jews are our book-bearers, our copyists and librarians, who safeguard those books from which we take the witness of our faith.” Hebrew learning, the Hebrew Bible, and its custodians and transmitters, the Jews themselves, were indispensable to Christianity. In turn, Reuchlin’s champions mocked his detractors in a collection titled *The Letters of Obscure Men*, which Anthony Grafton has called the first work of academic satire. In 1520, against the backdrop of nascent attempts to resist Luther’s work, the Pope condemned Reuchlin, but by that time Humanist ideals and Hebrew studies had taken root across Europe.

While he never joined Luther’s movement, historians have long seen Reuchlin as a harbinger of the Protestant Reformation, the beginnings of which coincide with the Reuchlin Affair. Luther himself learned Hebrew from Reuchlin’s *Rudiments*. Further, long before the noxious anti-Judaism of his later years, Luther shared Reuchlin’s arguments in favor of the toleration of Jews. Like Luther, many of Reuchlin’s students and adherents became early Reformers. And the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew learning that Christian Humanists championed became prerequisites for the kind of direct, unmediated access to sacred Scripture that would be a pillar of Protestantism.

Further Reading:

David H. Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books* (2011)

Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther’s Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (2017)

Indulge Me: King Johan III

by Frank C. Senn - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-king-johan-iii/>

Indulge me. One of my Reformation heroes is a Swedish King, Johan III (1537-92; reigned 1568-92). Why? Because of his liturgical interests. He authored, with the help of his secretary Petrus Fecht (a student of Melancthon's), a Liturgy that included offertory prayers and a full Eucharistic prayer, elements long considered not acceptable in a Lutheran liturgy. Lutherans were debating these things in the mid-1970s as the Inter-Lutheran Commission of Worship was doing the work that would lead to *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978). I was a doctoral student in liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame and after discovering this king's liturgy in the Notre Dame library I knew I needed to find out more about it. Who was this king? Where was Sweden theologically at the time of his reign in its journey into Lutheranism? Could this liturgy have a place among Lutheran liturgical orders?

Johan was the second son of King Gustaf I Vasa (reigned 1523-60), who had won a war of independence from Denmark and broken ties with the papacy. Johan wasn't expected to succeed his father to the throne. That honor went to his older brother Erik XIV (reigned 1560-68). Erik was a fair-haired boy who dispatched his second brother Johan to England to try to win for Erik the hand of the Protestant Elizabeth I (who had just succeeded her sister, the Catholic Mary Tudor). Johan was a learned humanist who seemed to have an interest in patristics and liturgy. He was present in England when the *Book of Common Prayer* was restored by a Parliamentary Act of Uniformity. Of course, Elizabeth rejected every hand offered to her with a marriage proposal, including Erik's.

Perhaps to keep Johan out of his older brother's way, Gustav Vasa had made him Duke of Finland. Once Erik came to the throne Johan began carving out a sphere of influence on the eastern side of the Baltic, including marrying Katarina Jagellonica, the sister of King Sigismund II Augustus of Poland. On a visit to Stockholm, Erik apprehended Johan and Katarina and had them incarcerated in the Gripsholm Castle. Erik was showing signs of dangerous paranoia and insanity, so the Swedish nobility deposed him and swapped the royal brothers. Erik was made a "guest" in the Gripsholm (it's believed that he was later poisoned, although by who remains a detective story) and Johan was placed on the throne.

In terms of geopolitics, Johan had nearly turned the Baltic into a Swedish lake long before his grandnephew Gustaf II Adolf came to the throne. He had bastions in Livonia (modern Estonia and Latvia), and kept the Russians in check. His son Sigismund was the heir apparent to the Polish throne. But the deal was that he had to be raised as a Roman Catholic. Queen Katarina was also a Catholic and had Catholic chaplains at the court. Her father was the fabulously rich Bona Sforza, but her inheritance was frozen in Naples. Johan dispatched emissaries to Rome to enlist the pope's intervention in releasing the funds. Did he think that pursuing a more "high church" direction in the autonomous Church of Sweden (which was not yet officially Lutheran)—and allowing secret Jesuits like Laurentius Norvegus to teach in the Royal Theological College Johan set up in Stockholm to counter the gnesio-Lutheran influence of the theological faculty at Uppsala—would serve his cause? Sometimes it's difficult to sort out our own commitments from what seems politically useful.

The fact is that Johan III was a disciple of the mediating theologian Joris Cassander and believed that the reconciliation between Rome and Wittenberg might be achieved by returning to the “consensus of the first five centuries” (*consensus quinquasaecularis*), a concept later popularized by Lutheran theologian Georg Callixtus. He authorized the promulgation of the Church Order of Archbishop Laurentius Petri in 1571, which Erik would not authorize because of his Calvinist leanings. The old archbishop died in 1573. A year later, Johan laid before the synod of the Church ten articles concerned with showing greater reverence in the conduct of church services. One might say that Johan was embarked on a course of “reforming the reform.” In 1575, Johan got the synod to ratify a new church order (*Nova ordinantia ecclesiastica*) that claimed to build on the Church Order of Archbishop Petri but was in fact a weighty piece of theological argumentation drawing on the writings of the church fathers. This was followed in 1576 by the Latin-Swedish *Liturgia svecanae ecclesiae catholicae et orthodoxae conformis* (Liturgy of the Swedish Church Conforming to the Catholic and Orthodox Tradition). It was accepted by the Estates (Riksdag) in 1577, but only barely by the clergy estate. The theological faculty at Uppsala University damned the Liturgy, and Johan told them to either accept the liturgy or go to Germany.¹

The pope began to see some possibility of reclaiming Sweden to the Roman Church and dispatched the former Jesuit Secretary-General Cardinal Antonio Possevino to negotiate with King Johan. Johan laid down some conditions which Possevino took back to Rome. In the meantime, the king was told he could listen to Lutheran sermons if he had to but he was not to receive communion at Lutheran altars. Possevino returned in 1579 with bad news. The Roman Curia would not accept Johan’s three minimal conditions: communion in both kinds for the laity, the mass in Swedish, and the marriage of priests. They would only consider Johan’s request that the tomb of his father, Gustaf Vasa, in Uppsala Cathedral not be violated. They also insisted that Johan should not attend Lutheran worship—which was, of course, the liturgy he had designed from ancient, medieval, and Reformation sources.

For Johan, this was the last blow. He told Possevino that the deal was off. Possevino then overplayed his hand by blowing the whistle on the secret Jesuit teachers in Stockholm. A riot broke out and Johan sent Possevino and the Jesuits packing. He also returned to receiving communion at Lutheran altars. Pope Gregory XIII responded by saying he would reconsider Johan’s three minimal conditions if France and Spain would go along with them. But it was too little too late.

The so-called Red Book Liturgy (*Den röde Boken*), so-called because of the color of its binding, continued to be used in the Church of Sweden. Johan even sent a copy of it, translated into Greek, to Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople, although nothing came of this initiative. 1583 was the high point of Johan’s church policy when newly-elected bishops agreed to wear cope and mitre, carry the crozier, and submit to anointing at their consecration. Unfortunately, it was also the year when his beloved Queen Katarina died. Their son Sigismund III Vasa was secure on the throne of Poland and destined to become King of Sweden as well upon Johan’s death.

Johan III married a Swedish Lutheran girl and spent the rest of his reign in relative peace and good will among the people, except for the anti-liturgists who continued to disavow this liturgy which they considered part of a Jesuit plot. But although a few anti-liturgists lost their livings, no one in Sweden lost their lives over liturgical or theological issues.

The Liturgy did not survive Johan III’s reign. In anticipation of the Catholic King Sigismund coming to claim his throne and bringing the forces of the counter-Reformation with him, a synod of the national

Church of Sweden was convened in Uppsala in 1593 that adopted the Augsburg Confession and restored the Church Order of Archbishop Lars. What happened next when Sigismund arrived with Polish troops is another exciting story.

All this and much more is what I got into when I discovered a strange Liturgy in the stacks of the Notre Dame library. And do you know what? Lutherans in Sweden wouldn't think the Liturgy of King Johan III is so strange today. And the pope himself went to Sweden and signed an agreement to work toward communion between Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches. I think Johan III would have approved. Liturgically and ecumenically he was four centuries ahead of his time.

Notes

1. [△][For a full analysis of this liturgy, see my book Christian Liturgy—Catholic and Evangelical \(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997\), pp. 427-47.](#)
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Indulge Me: The Book of Common Prayer

by Pamela Dolan - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-book-common-prayer/>

The first time I bought a copy for myself, I tucked it away at once, as if it were illegal, or a bit naughty. It didn't look like much on the outside—a black cover, with a simple gold cross embossed on the front. I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to do with it, but just holding it made my heart race and my palms sweat. I headed home from the bookstore, queasy with the knowledge that a line had been crossed.

I was a Roman Catholic lay person, and I had just purchased my first Book of Common Prayer.

Little did I know how much my personal journey mirrored the trajectory of the English Reformation. The publication of the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549 was arguably of more significance for the English church than even the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. In those first decades of tumultuous change after the initial break with Rome, the content of the Prayer Book was a matter of the utmost import for the nation; it contained the only authorized forms of worship, so to deviate from its dictates was to rebel against both church and state.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of the Book of Common Prayer in the history of Christianity in England. Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, who was the primary author and editor of the book and its greatest champion, literally gave his life to the cause. In 1556 he was pulled from the pulpit and burned at the stake because he refused to return to the Catholicism required of him by Queen Mary, which would have meant rejecting the doctrinal changes embodied in the Prayer Book.

Episcopalians in the United States use a Book of Common Prayer that has its own history and yet retains much of the content and structure of Cranmer's masterpiece. We still call the 1549 book "the first Prayer Book," which might explain why we can keep a straight face while calling our current BCP "new"—it was adopted officially in 1979! Episcopal priests can face disciplinary action for violating Prayer Book rubrics. Touchingly, every Sunday Eucharist includes the Collect for Purity, modernized only slightly from Cranmer's own words. Most Episcopalians can rattle it off by heart: "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid..."

Many Episcopal churches today use service bulletins that replicate the words of the liturgy in a handy, compact, easy-to-follow format. It is supposed to be friendly to newcomers, and I suppose it is. But those books lingering in the pew racks contain so much more than just an order of worship to be followed on any given Sunday. There are daily offices that can be led by laity or even said at home, services from baptism to burial (including a truly beautiful litany to be prayed at the time of death), and even a rite of reconciliation. There are prayers for all occasions and a calendar of saints, not to mention the entire Psalter.

That first day with my own first Prayer Book, I took it home to my bedroom and opened it in solitude. Rummaging hungrily through its contents, I found a line that has stayed with me. It referred to the Catechism—perhaps the most underutilized section of the BCP—as a "brief summary of the Church's

teaching for an inquiring stranger who picks up a Prayer Book.”

It felt like someone from ages past was reaching out to me, a frustrated, struggling, church-hurt woman looking for a place to call home. I was that inquiring stranger. Reading through the Book of Common Prayer was a like a self-guided tutorial in understanding Episcopal theology. I could read all four Eucharistic Prayers to learn what they believed about that sacrament. I could infer a great deal about the hierarchical structure of the church and the limits of clerical authority. It wasn’t a substitute for attending an Episcopal church, but it made the transition from one tradition to the other that much less daunting.

Since that day, my life has changed immeasurably; I became an Episcopalian, and then went through the discernment process and ultimately was ordained to the priesthood. I have held in my hands more copies of the BCP than I can count. The one I use every Sunday as I celebrate the Eucharist is slowly losing its luster; the edges of the leather cover are wearing smooth and the gold letters that spell out my name are beginning to fade. Inside, there is a smudge of wax from a recent Easter Vigil. The pages that contain the service of Holy Baptism are water-stained and puckered, marked as my own forever.

Today I cherish the Book of Common Prayer less for what I can learn from it privately and more for what it accomplishes corporately—it is a book of common prayer, after all. In large part its purpose is to shape a people, not just to form individuals. It amuses my children that I always include it when we play the “what five things would you want with you on a desert island” game. But it’s true. It has become as much a part of me as any book ever has, and now when I do read or pray from it alone, I feel that I am part of something larger, a great cloud of witnesses perhaps, stretching back to Cranmer himself (with whom I happen to share a birthday).

Indulgence: Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus, Reformer of the Church

by Kurt Hendel - Tuesday, October 10, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulgence-johannes-bugenhagen-pomeranus-reformer-church/>

Johannes Bugenhagen was one of the most influential colleagues of Martin Luther. He was born in Pomerania, attended the University of Greifswald for two years, and served as rector of the Latin school in Treptow and as lecturer at the Premonstratensian cloister of Belbug. He was also ordained in 1509. Impacted by humanism, he was interested in contemporary biblical and theological scholarship and became acquainted with Luther's early writings, particularly the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). He immediately recognized the revolutionary nature of this work but initially considered Luther's critique of the church's sacerdotal and sacramental systems to be heretical. After carefully studying the Reformer's proposals, however, he changed his mind completely.

Bugenhagen, therefore, decided to leave Pomerania in 1521 and study with Luther. His timing was unfortunate, however, since Luther was absent from Wittenberg for eleven months after Bugenhagen's arrival because of his appearance before the Diet of Worms and his exile at the Wartburg. However, Bugenhagen came to the attention of Melanchthon who quickly recognized the Pomeranian's Latin expertise, intimate acquaintance with Scripture, and pedagogical skills. Melanchthon, therefore, encouraged Bugenhagen to offer private lectures, particularly on the Psalms, and welcomed his participation in the nascent reform movement. Luther shared Melanchthon's positive impression when he returned to Wittenberg in March 1522. Therefore, in 1523 he recommended to St. Mary's congregation that they call Bugenhagen as their pastor, which they did. Luther also had a practical motive for making the recommendation. He wanted his new colleague to be able to support a family since Bugenhagen had married Walpurga in 1522. His pastoral call marks the beginning of Bugenhagen's leadership role in the Wittenberg reformation. He contributed much to this crucial movement.

Modeling effective pastoral and episcopal ministry was one important contribution. As the pastor of the city church, Bugenhagen served the Wittenberg community by preaching, celebrating the sacraments, and offering spiritual counsel. After his appointment as general superintendent of Electoral Saxony in 1533, his ministry reached beyond Wittenberg as he cared pastorally for the clergy of the region, provided organizational leadership to the churches, and served as a liaison between the Electors and the ecclesiastical communities.

Significantly, Bugenhagen was also Luther's pastor for more than two decades. Luther was a man of deep faith, a brilliant theologian, a persistent witness of Christ, and a fearless critic of the church. He also experienced profound spiritual struggles. Bugenhagen replaced Johannes von Staupitz as Luther's chief spiritual counselor, and he inspired Luther's deep trust and appreciation as he shared words of guidance, critique, support, and assurance of God's radical love and grace in Jesus Christ. Bugenhagen's pastoral care clearly strengthened Luther for his challenging spiritual journey and reforming work.

Bugenhagen also emerged as a leading theologian of the Lutheran Reformation. While he was not

awarded the doctorate until 1533, he lectured at the Leucorea throughout his reforming ministry and was both a teaching and publishing scholar. The interpretation of Scripture was his scholarly interest, and he published a substantial number of biblical commentaries, the most popular of which was his Psalms commentary. Commentaries on the minor letters of Paul, Romans, Matthew, Jeremiah, and Jonah were also among his diverse publications. His harmony of the Gospel passion narratives became a highly influential and popular spiritual resource. He was also a member of the team of scholars who assisted Luther in the translation of the Old Testament, and he facilitated the publication of the New Testament (1524) and the whole Bible (1533) in Low German

Bugenhagen also produced many treatises that addressed central Reformation themes. His theological interests focused especially on the doctrine of justification, the proper relationship between faith and works, the affirmation of infant baptism, and the defense of Christ's real presence in the sacrament. In his treatises, he addressed the theological positions and practices of the Roman Church but also of other reformers, including Huldreich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and representatives of the Radical Reformation. Although he was not an innovative theologian, he was an effective articulator and apologist of sixteenth-century evangelical theology.

Bugenhagen's organizational contributions to the Reformation movement in northern Germany and parts of Scandinavia have been widely recognized. He manifested keen organizational skills, was able to speak and write Low German, and supervised the establishment of the newly emerging evangelical communities. His organizational travels brought him to Braunschweig, Hamburg, Lübeck, Pomerania, Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, and Hildesheim. Wherever he went, he preached in the churches, met with local reforming pastors and encouraged their work, responded to opponents, consulted with and served as mediator between ecclesiastical and political leaders, and wrote or supervised the production of church orders that became the legal foundations of the evangelical churches.

While he clarified evangelical theology with care, Bugenhagen was flexible regarding adiaphora and addressed local contexts with creativity and pastoral sensitivity. His orders, therefore, also became models for other evangelical orders throughout Germany. Bugenhagen's church orders were divided into three major sections. The first section provided precise directions and theological justification for the reform of the liturgical and sacramental life of the church. The second section, which was often called a school order, gave careful instructions regarding the organization and curricula of elementary vernacular schools for girls and boys and of secondary Latin schools and small universities, called *lectoria*, where academically gifted boys and young men could prepare for service in church and society. The third section was an order of the common chest or of the poor chest that provided guidelines for the collection and distribution of funds that would enable evangelical communities to maintain ecclesiastical, educational, and social welfare institutions; pay the salaries of ecclesiastical and educational personnel; and support the poor. With his advocacy of universal education and the care of the poor, Bugenhagen also made practical and crucial contributions as a social reformer. His theology of faith active in love informed his social consciousness.

Johannes Bugenhagen was an integral member of the collegium of Wittenberg reformers who contributed much to the reform movement led by Martin Luther. He could very well be an admirable model for current pastoral leaders who seek to serve a community of faith that strives to be a public church.

Indulge Me: The Heidelberg Theses and the Theology of the Cross

by Benjamin Dueholm - Tuesday, October 10, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-heidelberg-theses-theology-cross/>

“The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.” I can still remember reading these lines, the twenty-eighth thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation. I don’t recall what prompted me to open Timothy Lull’s Luther anthology to that document, but the startling antinomies and paradoxes caught my imagination immediately and have never since let go. “The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him.” “Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.”

The occasion of their composition, I would later learn, was a formal academic disputation of the Augustinian order, over which Luther presided in April of 1518. The theses and their explanations repeatedly cite Paul’s letters in light of the Augustinian theology that was flourishing at the time, in reaction to the major scholastic movements of the preceding centuries. Among those present at the disputation were friars who would bring the Reformation to new cities in the years to come.

In a way that was novel then and is still shocking now, Luther’s theses for the Heidelberg Disputation proposed a radical reordering of the relationship between human righteousness and God’s righteousness. Instead of half-meritorious human works being accepted or elevated by God’s grace, as in scholastic theology, Luther insists that without grace, human works can only be evil. “The law says ‘do this,’ and it is never done,” Luther says, in a preview of the Law/Gospel theology he will fully develop later. “Grace says, ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done.”

It is tempting to wonder what might have happened to these ideas if they had not been entangled with Luther’s concurrent attack on the practice of indulgences, which apart from its theological consequence was also an attack on the cornerstone of Pope Leo X’s capital campaign. The extreme Augustinianism of the theses is at once less immediately threatening and more radical than the critique of indulgences. Perhaps these debates would have played out very differently if they had been confined to academic theology, instead of splashing across a continent-wide crisis of the church’s polity and economy.

As one whose engagement with that academic theology is strictly amateur, however, I found in the Heidelberg theses something like a Rosetta Stone of my own preoccupations. I had started years before with Augustine, from whom I learned angst and guilt. And I had already leaped ahead to Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, from whom I had learned about paradox and contradiction. Luther, in these theses, connected it all. What had fascinated me in theology, from the start, was something too severe, too extreme for the common metaphors of healing, enlightenment, amelioration, gradual improvement: it was the image of being created anew, put to death and buried and resurrected. Here, in Luther’s theses and their “theology of the cross,” was something that could make sense of very little, except for the stunning reversals in Scripture, where the first is last, the cruel brothers are forgiven, the hungry are filled and the rich sent away empty, the rich man’s gate becomes a fiery prison, the scrupulous search for worthy hungry to feed becomes the surprise condemnation, and the cross becomes the tree of life.

It is common, even expected, for Christian theologians to praise the cross. It adorns our churches and our jewelry, after all. But this, for me, was the cross in a new light. It wasn't an accounting gimmick--Christ paying off my balance--or a principle of self-abnegation. It was really and truly a cross, an ugly and horrid thing. Since sinful humans cannot perceive God in God's goodness and power, God chose to be "found only in suffering and the cross." The people Luther calls theologians of the cross understand this, and perceive the visible things of God through suffering and the cross. The theologian of glory, on the other hand, "prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil."

This is an even more penetrating claim that Luther himself indicates. The cross, as was not much acknowledged in the theology of Christendom, was a punishment reserved by Roman law for non-citizens. It was not the civil sword that punishes wrongdoers as part of the political community; it was an act of public terror that degraded and dehumanized people outside of that community. It was significant that Jesus did not die by the civil sword, or by a lingering fever, or a criminal ambush--all of which would have served to balance the divine ledger or embody an ideal of abstract suffering. Jesus died under a very human kind of curse. Reason still rebels at finding our righteousness and redemption in such a thing.

So the theologian of glory is a persistent presence in the church today, and the theologian of the cross is always needed. There is always a temptation to insist that the contradiction between the world and a God revealed in a viciously executed Jewish messiah is not *quite* total, not *entirely* incapable of compromise and accommodation, not yet *wholly* resistant to our modes and methods of wisdom and understanding. Our noble theologies, our beautiful art, our civilized institutions, our just politics, and pious modes of living have to count for *something*. The cross can be brought into those systems somehow, given a place of prominence, acknowledged as the completion of an otherwise admirable worldview. Our need can't be so great as to sweep all of that away.

And perhaps it isn't. Perhaps the genius of the Heidelberg theses is strictly literary. Augustine, after all, argued that the difficult passages in Scripture ought to be interpreted in light of the clearer ones, and not the other way around. We tend to read law and philosophy as Augustine recommends reading Scripture. Searching for the unaccounted exception or the scandalous reversal is what we do when we read, say, *Hamlet*.

But for me as a pastor, a writer, and a Christian, and I suspect for the history of theology more generally, Luther's theology of the cross held Christian thought open in a critical way. Christians, Luther would later write, must be regarded as the worst of all people, and be persecuted and punished solely for wishing to have Christ and none other as their head. The eschatological and political marginality of the early church--its Messianic severity--is left as a possibility in this theology, even if only by analogy. It is a possibility taken up in Christian existentialism, in liberation theology, and in the best of Christian political and cultural engagement in the world. The cross that cannot be fully captured or concluded within any moral or intellectual system, or any institutional form, is Luther's great contribution to Christian thought.

Indulge Me: Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553)

by Frank C. Senn - Sunday, December 17, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/indulge-lucas-cranach-elder-1472-1553/>

We have used Lucas Cranach's portrait of Martin Luther in a silk screen version as the logo for this Reformation 500 Jubilee issue of *Let's Talk*. So much of the portraiture of the reformers and scenes of early Lutheran worship comes from Cranach that I thought he deserved some recognition in his own right.

When it comes to the arts associated with the Reformation music has pride of place. Martin Luther was himself musical and was a friend and admirer of leading composers of his day. But if it is true that "he who sings prays twice," it is also true that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Luther's German Bible was studded with woodcut drawings from the Cranach Workshop in Wittenberg. Cranach left us portraits of Luther from different periods in his life and the only portrait we have of Katherine von Bora Luther. He was a friend of the Luthers and they served as godparents for one another's children.



Martin and Katarina Luther, portrait by Lucas Cranach the Elder

Cranach named himself after his hometown of Kronach, near Bamberg. He probably received his early training as an artist in his father's workshop, although nothing is known about his father. Around 1500 he began traveling in the Danube valley, painting and making drawings for woodcuts. It is not known whether he met Albrecht Dürer, whose workshop in Nürnberg was well known. But the evidence in Cranach's paintings shows Dürer's influence.

In 1504 Cranach was hired as a court painter to the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony and in 1505 he settled permanently in the Ducal Castle in Wittenberg. We assume that his work had become known well enough for Cranach to land this prestigious position. His life was closely connected with the Saxon electors for half a century (1505-1553). He accompanied Frederick and his successors on hunts, travels, diplomatic missions, as well as to public festivities, weddings, and funerals, etc. Court painters were

something like official photographers today, capturing events and painting portraits of the electors, their councilors, wives, and ladies. He was also “loaned” by Duke Frederick to paint portraits of other notables, including the youthful future emperor Charles V. This occurred in 1508 when Cranach accompanied an embassy to the court of Emperor Maximilian I. Of artistic importance is that a visit to The Netherlands in 1509 brought him into contact with Dutch art and indirectly with the style of the Italian Renaissance.

As the demand on Cranach grew, he hired assistants in order to turn out the increasing number of paintings and woodcuts that were requested. He moved out of the castle into one of the largest houses in Wittenberg, which also served as his workshop. He provided room and board to some apprentices and also opened an apothecary since he needed to mix chemicals in producing paints. Cranach gained great esteem among the townspeople of Wittenberg who in 1537 and again in 1540 elected him as their burgomeister (mayor). He became closely associated with Luther and the German Reformers and provided portraits of several of them. Sometimes their faces were included in altar pieces. He showed them preaching and administering the sacraments. The altar piece in St. Mary’s City Church in Wittenberg shows Luther in his doctoral gown preaching to a congregation with the crucified Christ between them in the center of the painting and in the large panel above that the reformers as disciples of Jesus at the table of the last supper.



St-Mary's Wittenberg altar piece by Lucas Cranach the

Elder

Of course, Cranach’s bread and butter work of portrait painting continued. In the second quarter of the 16th century, Cranach increasingly favored a style of over-refined mannerism suitable to the members of the elector’s court. This is especially noticeable in his depiction of the female nude, such as in his several paintings featuring Venus and Cupid, for whom the ladies of Wittenberg undoubtedly served as models. Court life had a predilection for erotic representation favoring classical scenes, but Cranach’s painting of nudes spilled over into his religious and philosophical art such as “Charity with Four Children” (1534) and “Christ Blessing the Children” (1535f). Children especially were often nude figures, including the Christ child nursing on the breast of his mother Mary. There was no prudishness among these early Lutherans.



Madonna and Child by Lucas Cranach the Elder

In the Smalcald War that erupted after Luther's death, the Emperor Charles V was victorious over the Lutheran princes. In 1550, the elector John Frederick was accused of treason by the emperor and sent into exile. Faithful to the House of Witten, Cranach followed the elector in his exile at Augsburg, Innsbruck, and Weimar. Charles V remembered Cranach painting him as a youth and the artist pleaded with the emperor to treat the exiled elector as befit his dignity, Cranach died in Weimar in 1553 attending the exiled elector. Of three sons who followed him in the Cranach workshop, the second, Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515-1586), painted so like his father that their works are difficult to distinguish.

One of Cranach's most unusual paintings was "The Allegory of Law and Gospel" (sometimes called "The Allegory of Law and Grace") painted in consultation with Luther in 1529. It is a pictorial demonstration of Luther's basic theology, with six supporting biblical citations on the bottom. It was rendered both as a woodcut and as a painting.



Allegory of Law and Grace by Lucas Cranach the Elder

The picture is divided by a tree which is dead on one side (the law side) and blooming on the other side (the gospel side). In the upper left Christ sits in judgment on Adam and Eve as they eat the forbidden

fruit. In the foreground a naked frightened man is forced into hell by a skeleton and a demon while Moses and the prophets hold up the Law. The Law cannot save the sinner from death and the devil. On the gospel side John the Baptist points the naked man to the crucified Christ ("Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."). The risen Christ stands above the empty tomb in triumph over sin, death, and the devil. Our salvation comes not from the Law but from the death and resurrection of Christ.

Man is always naked before God who sees us as we are stripped down to our soul---a sinner in need of salvation, which only comes through the saving work of Christ. If a picture is worth a thousand words, this painting by Cranach makes Luther's theology plain to anyone who looks on it.

The theological motifs in his paintings are sometimes more subtle than this. For example, his crucifixion scenes are sometimes more interesting in terms of the attitudes and reactions of the people below the cross than the figure of the crucified itself.



Crucifixion scene by Lucas Cranach the Elder

By his art Lucas Cranach the Elder was one of the great figures of the Reformation. The Cranach workshop (father and son) bequeathed to Lutheranism a heritage of devotional and instructional art that we have not maintained as well as we have preserved the tradition of church music. We are not edified by kitsch or sloganeering banners. We need art that draws us into the biblical story and prompts us to consider our own situation *coram Deo*.

Unity and Reconciliation Challenges Chronic Homelessness in Lake County

by Dawn Mass Eck - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/unity-reconciliation-challenges-chronic-homelessness-lake-county/>



Messiah Lutheran Church's "A Path Home" model house

On January 1, 2016 Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wauconda starting counting down to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We calculated this date as 95 weeks prior to this commemoration (October 31, 2017), constructed a replica of the Castle Church Door in Wittenberg, Germany, and began nailing, one each week, not Luther's 95 thesis, but 95 acts of unity and reconciliation in the church. This idea was inspired by the [July 8, 2015 Christian Century article, "Repent and Celebrate,"](#) which called God's people to prepare for this worldwide moment by focusing on Christian unity.

A few examples of our postings include, "The Augsburg Confession was an attempt to restore religious and political unity in the Holy Roman Empire at the time of the Reformation;" "German Theologian George Calixtus attempted to unite all of Christianity, but especially Lutherans and the Reformed communities; during the first half of the seventeenth century on the basis of what he perceived to be an agreement regarding essentials during the first five hundred years of the church's history. Thus it was called 'consensus quinquesaecularis;'" and "On the 23rd of August 1948, in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches was officially founded. 147 churches from different confessions and many countries came together to commit themselves to the ecumenical movement."

Our postings include mergers, ecumenical agreements, harmony among church leaders, interdenominational worship, and local partnerships and activity. For example, "On Tuesday, June 14, 2016, the Wauconda Island Lake Ministerial Association (WILMA) met at the Transfiguration parsonage. Father Ron Gollatz prepared a meal for us and Pastor Ben Dueholm said a blessing upon Father Ron's

retirement.”

Yet of all our postings, posting 61, from the 2016 Metropolitan Chicago Synod Assembly, has had the greatest impact on our congregation, the ministerial association, and the county. “Augsburg Fortress CEO Beth Lewis encouraged congregations to work ecumenically on new projects and efforts in the year leading up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.” When I attended the 2016 synod assembly, I was so excited about Messiah’s “Castle Church” door and I have always felt blessed by our local partners in faith, the Wauconda and Island Lake churches, with our monthly support and fellowship, ecumenical worship services, and annual community picnic and bake-off. But in her workshop on observing Reformation 500, Augsburg Fortress CEO Lewis challenged attendees to work together in local ministerial associations on new and visible community efforts. “Try something new together” was her challenge.

Not long before, I had attended a North Conference meeting for our synod at Joy! Lutheran Church in Gurnee and heard about an initiative their congregation was supporting called “Housing First.” This effort of PADS Lake County provides housing first for a homeless individual and then that person is better positioned to benefit from other needed services. I learned that it would take 90 people giving \$10 a month to house one homeless person for a year. I knew immediately that Messiah could do this ourselves, but then remembered the words, “Try something new together.” We had already built a door at Messiah, why not construct a small house? So we built a makeshift house with 90 small hooks. Then we hung 90 keys rings that read “A Path Home” on one side and “Churches Together for Housing First” on the other, and affixed to these key rings was a business card with a giving link. With our strong partnership already in place, it was not difficult to build support among the WILMA congregations.

We kicked off the project at the Service of Prayer for Christian Unity just before Lent of this year. We started transporting the house from church to church in my colleague’s mini-van, and by the fourth week in Lent, we had provided housing for not just one, but two, homeless individuals. We are currently close to housing a third.

This is only the beginning. There are approximately one hundred and thirty people in Lake County meeting the federal definition of chronic homelessness. Currently one hundred are housed using federal dollars, two are housed by Joy! Lutheran in Gurnee and two by our ecumenical ministerial association. Two others nearly have the funds to receive housing. This leaves twenty-four chronically homeless people needing an address and a key. A steering committee has been formed, made up of participants from PADS, Joy! and WILMA. We have determined that it will take 2250 people in Lake County giving \$10 each month to eliminate chronic homelessness in our county. With marketing support, our plan is to pick a month sometime between October 2017 (the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation) and the spring of 2018 to raise the funds for the remainder of this housing. Unity and reconciliation, a door and a house, are blessing the vulnerable of Lake County.

“My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isaiah 32:18).

For more information about PADS Lake County and Housing First, visit <https://padslakecounty.giv.sh/>

Evanston Reformation 500 and Beyond: The Proof is the Beyond....A Joint Reflection

by Betty Landis and Joseph Tito - Monday, June 26, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/evanston-reformation-500-beyond-proof-beyond-joint-reflection/>

It all started in late January 2016 when a dedicated Week of Prayer for Christian Unity volunteer from an ELCA Lutheran church whispered into the ear of a dedicated WPCU volunteer from a Roman Catholic church, “Did you hear about the Pope and the woman Bishop?” The Vatican and the LWF had recently released news of the joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund, Sweden on October 31, 2016.

From that first conversation, we have seen grow an amazing effort between faithful, curious, and energetic Evanston neighbors. Initially led by laity from St. Nicholas (Roman Catholic) and pastors and lay leaders from St. Paul’s, Grace, and Immanuel (ELCA), we now have had the leadership and involvement from all four Evanston Roman Catholic parish members and priests, all four ELCA Lutheran congregation leaders and pastors, and the campus ministries and leaders at Northwestern University. Just recently, we received offers of assistance from Roman Catholic and ELCA Lutheran professors at Garrett Evangelical Seminary. As we look back on our work together, the forming and strengthening of friendships in the present, and the excitement and hope for the future, it is hard not to acknowledge the gifts of the Spirit being made manifest in this journey together into the “Beyond”.

Here are just some examples: we already had formed trusting relationships via the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; one lay leader formerly worked for the Chicago Archdiocese’s Office for Interreligious and Ecumenical Affairs and was very experienced in the Roman Catholic call for ecumenical dialogues; Evanston has a long history of active interreligious/ ecumenical families; a Roman Catholic religious studies professor and her ELCA pastor spouse were willing to dedicate significant time to the leadership team; and, long ago, many of the Evanston ordained clergy began answering the call to ecumenism in ecclesial and personal ways.

Fr. Joseph Tito, who arrived at St. Nicholas in the Fall of 2016, said, “It helped to have the work already started while I was learning about St. Nicholas’ context - I have never seen such a variety of ecumenical and inter-religious families in one parish!” However, nothing can match the impact of the number of congregation/parish members who repeatedly have expressed deep and profound longing for unity. Each time we meet in dialogue (service, learning, or sharing), it brings great joy to remind one another of the many aspects of our Christian faith we share as well as to respectfully give voice to the lament that we have not fully reconciled in Christ – especially at the Eucharistic Table.

We used the Spring and Summer of 2016 to form a leadership team, become better educated together as a leadership team, and plan a year-long effort in “dialogues” (a Roman Catholic term for exploring ecumenical relationships). We separated our plans into categories: Dialogue of Life (live in open and neighborly spirit, sharing joys and sorrows, interests and problems); Dialogue of Theological Exchange (deepen our understanding of and respect for each respective traditions/teachings); Dialogue of Religious

Experience (seek to grow in Christian unity, sharing spiritual practices); and Dialogue of Action (collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people and care for Creation).

Lutherans can see that these categories align with our baptismal promises: living among God's faithful people; teaching the faith; proclaiming Christ and participating in the Word and sacraments; and caring for others and God's world as well as working for justice and peace. We asked each participating congregation to donate a few hundred dollars to help us execute our plans (duplication costs, stipends, refreshments, etc.). The majority of our costs have been covered by individual donations. We originally thought we could aim for a covenant celebration by Pentecost 2017, but quickly realized that that was too ambitious. Instead, after the synod and archdiocese plans were announced, we hoped an Evanston-based covenant celebration might be possible on or before Reformation Sunday 2017.

Our shared emphasis on serving others and caring for Creation provided an easy entry into our year. We invited all to participate in the September 2016 God's Work Our Hands Sunday and chose projects that benefited the communities near both Catholic and Lutheran congregations. After eating lunch and being commissioned together, we split up into groups of both Lutherans and Catholics to complete the projects together. We received a Thrivent Action Team grant to help defray the costs. The stories shared, the memories made, and the friendships begun were priceless. It was so well received that we are planning a "2nd Annual" Joint God's Work Our Hands Sunday on September 10, 2017.

We spent three Sundays in October studying *From Conflict to Communion* with facilitation by Dr. Cristie Traina, Professor of Religion, Northwestern University Department of Religious Studies and Rev. Dr. Eric Bodenstab, ELCA Pastor and Lutheran Theologian. We experienced the benefit of ensuring both Catholics and Lutherans were present at the discussion tables. We were honored to welcome renowned religious historian and Lutheran pastor the Rev. Dr. Martin Marty on Reformation Sunday afternoon. While his lecture was very well received, the Q & A at the end provided strong affirmation for the planned dialogues and resulted in more involvement from our community. The next day, Reformation Day 2016, we together watched the telecast from Lund Sweden. There were more than a few tears shed and the variety of comments shared made this a most memorable and inspiring morning for all who were able to attend and stay to process its impact.

Although the timing had nothing to do with the national election (the date was set based upon Luther's birthday), folks found multiple reasons to appreciate our fun Hymns and Hops event at a local pub in mid-November. There is nothing like harmonizing together to help emphasize both the diversity of gifts we bring and the unity we share as we give glory and honor to God through the grace of Christ Jesus. We used another Thrivent Action Team grant to help pay some of the costs, but, rest assured, everyone paid for their own liquid hops! Based upon the positive comments, we anticipate this may be repeated in years to come.

A unique La Posadas Walk occurred during an Advent mid-week shared worship experience. Due to current events and bitter cold weather, Grace Lutheran hosted an interior walk and focused upon the Syrian refugee crisis as well as the ministries we share with other Evanston faith communities via RefugeeOne.

The deepening political divides provided a poignant backdrop for Evanston's annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity worship theme: Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us (2 Cor. 5:14-20).

Hosted by Immanuel Lutheran, we had a truly ecumenical representation of clergy and church members in attendance and a lovely time of fellowship following. In late February, we presented a Myth Busters forum with Lutheran pastor Keith Fry and Catholic theologian Dr. Susan Ross, Loyola University Chicago, serving together on a panel moderated by Lutheran pastor Bill Hutchison. It was well attended and helped set the stage for a 4-week Lenten Study of the *Declaration On The Way*. We were blessed to have Dr. Kathryn Johnson, the ELCA Director of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations and former LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs and acting director of theology and studies, share her insights at our first study session in Lent. She helped us set a firm foundation of always beginning from the agreements and enthusiastically showed us the fifty-year effort we were joining.

During Holy Week, there was another poignantly tangible “on the way” event when the members of Grace Lutheran joined the Easter Vigil at St. Nicholas Catholic (a joint experience that had begun years before), Fr. Tito blessed the whole Lutheran group together at the Eucharistic table. According to Fr. Tito, it was a “beautiful moment of both respect and communion in the larger sense.”

A small group of Lutherans and Catholics traveled together to St. Louis to participate in the Taize Pilgrimage of Trust (post-Ferguson) and enjoyed the opportunity to engage in all four types of dialogue in an intense four-day period – worship, living, learning, acting for justice, and sharing together. A forum is being planned to share the insights from such an impactful experience and to give voice to our young adults’ hopes.

The late Spring and Summer of 2017 is being used to draft an Evanston Covenant between as many Evanston Roman Catholic parishes and ELCA congregations as possible. At this writing, we are on the second draft and eager to hear the input from our many ministry leaders.

An organic gathering of Lutherans and Catholics will march behind a banner at the Evanston 4th of July parade and plans are underway for a facilitated gathering in mid-October to discuss the challenges and opportunities for greater Christian spirituality within Catholic/Lutheran inter-church families.

A gifted team of worship leaders is planning our shared liturgy on the afternoon of October 29 at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary’s Chapel. We plan to sign and celebrate our finalized Evanston Covenant as well as plant an Evanston tree in honor of our shared vision, affirmations, and commitments. Two days later, we hope to climb onto buses and share the journey from Evanston to Holy Name Cathedral – together witnessing Cardinal Supich and Bishop Miller renew the existing Archdiocese and Synod Covenant. Based upon the importance of breaking delicious bread together at each of our gatherings, we have no doubt that a few well-stocked picnic baskets will be present, too.

All along, we have been focused upon the “Beyond”. The commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation has been merely a jumping off point. In order to help us live into the “Beyond”, we have planned, prepared, and shared these dialogues in order to form the relationships and the commitments needed to be truly the Body of Christ on earth as in heaven. We have come to realize that the newer generations are not only asking for this, but they expect this depth of commitment to authentically and tangibly show how much we need each other, how clearly we hear and are willing to follow Christ’s call, and how desperately the world needs our unity – now and forever.

The Rev. Betty E. Landis, Pastor, St. Paul’s ELCA Evanston and the Rev. Joseph Tito, Pastor, St.

Nicholas Roman Catholic Parish, Evanston

Music Events at Grace for Reformation 500

by Michael D. Costello - Tuesday, October 10, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/music-events-grace-reformation-500/>

Grace Lutheran Church and School in River Forest, Illinois, is celebrating 500 years of the Reformation in several ways, not the least of which is through music. The Fall of 2017 is full of music that celebrates the best of the Lutheran musical heritage, particularly the work of Luther himself.

On September 10 at 4:00 p.m. Grace's Cantor, the Rev. Michael D. Costello, performed works based on chorales. The program began with Costello chanting Luther's German translation of the Magnificat to the ninth tone (or *tonus peregrinus*), followed by Johann Sebastian Bach's Fugue on the same, BWV 733. This was followed by Mendelssohn's Sonata in D minor, Op. 65, No. 2, which is based on Martin Luther's chorale on the Lord's prayer, *Vater unser im Himmelreich*, and two large-scale settings of *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*: first, a partita by Costello and, second, Max Reger's Fantasy on the chorale, Op. 27. A quiet change in the program was a setting of *Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, O Herr* (Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart) by Johann Nepomuk David before the recital concluded with Lionel Rogg's impressive partita on Luther's chorale *Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein* (Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice).

On September 24 at 4:00 p.m. Grace's 47th year of Bach Cantata Vespers got underway with Bach's cantata based on Luther's hymn for children, *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* ("Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word"). The prelude to the service at 3:45 p.m. was Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major for three violins, three violas, three cellos, and continuo, BWV 1048. The service also included Benedictus Ducis' motet on "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" and congregational hymn singing. The Rev. Lauren Dow Wegner, Associate Pastor at Grace, was the homilist.

On October 8 at 4:00 p.m. a group of sixteen singers from Chicago Choral Artists will sing Heinrich Schütz's *Der Schwanengesang* (Swan Song) under the direction of Michael D. Costello. *Der Schwanengesang* is a double-choir setting of Psalm 119, Psalm 100, and the Magnificat, all using Martin Luther's German translations. Tickets are available for this event at chicagochoralartists.com or at the door.

On October 15 at 4:00 p.m. a festival of hymns called *Around This Reformation Year* will take place with leadership from the Grace Senior Choir, Grace School 5–8 Grade Choir, Joyful Voices Choir, Brass, Percussion, and Organ. Settings of Lutheran chorales for each season of the church year will be preceded by commentary from Grace's pastors. The hymn festival will open with comments by Dr. Carl F. Schalk, member of Grace and Professor Emeritus at Concordia University Chicago. The festival will conclude with a new setting of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by Grace's Cantor, Michael D. Costello. A free-will offering will be gathered.

On Reformation Sunday, October 29, Grace will hold festival services of Holy Communion at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. Grace's Senior Pastor, the Rev. David R. Lyle, is the homilist. Music will include Grace's 5–8 Grade Choir at the 8:30 a.m. service and Grace's Senior Choir at the 11:00 a.m. service. Both

services will include music for brass, organ, and percussion.

The Bach Cantata Vespers on October 29 centers around Bach's cantata on Luther's chorale *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"), BWV 80. The prelude to the service will be Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 5, Op. 107 ("Reformation"), will begin at 3:30 p.m. The symphony concludes with Mendelssohn's extensive use of Luther's *Ein feste Burg*. The service will also include Martin Luther's short motet *Non moriar sed vivam* ("I Shall Not Die, but Live") and two hymn concertatos composed for this jubilee year, one by Carl Schalk and the other by Paul D. Weber. Schalk's concertato is based a new tune, which accompanies well Jill Peláez Baumgaertner's text "Praise the One Who Knit Us." Weber's concertato is based on his own text and tune, "God's Only Son, the Word Alone." The homilist for the service will be the Rev. Dr. Mark A. Granquist, Associate Professor of the History of Christianity at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. A free-will offering will be gathered to support the Bach Cantata Vespers ministry.

The November 19 Bach Cantata Vespers is based around Philipp Nicolai's beloved "King of Chorales," *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* ("Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying"). The prelude to the service at 3:45 p.m. is played by Grace's Cantor, Michael D. Costello, and includes Bach's chorale prelude on *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* ("Savior of the Nations, Come"), BWV 661, and Hugo Distler's Partita on *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 8, No. 2. The service will also include Brahms' motet on the chorale *O Heiland reiß die Himmel auf* ("O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide"), Op. 74, No. 2, and congregational chorales "Savior of the Nations, Come," and "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You." The homilist for the service is The Rev. Amy Gillespie of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Lombard, Ill. A free-will offering will be gathered to support the Bach Cantata Vespers ministry.

While other chorale-based cantatas will be presented throughout the remainder of the year at Grace, the final point of our Reformation 500 celebration this fall is a concert of the St. Thomas Boys Choir (Thomanerchor) from Leipzig, Germany, under the direction of Thomaskantor Gotthold Schwarz, on Monday, November 20, at 7:30 p.m. (Doors open at 6:30 p.m.) The program consists of music by Bach, Mendelssohn, Schütz, and Schein. Tickets are available at ticketor.com/grace or by calling 708-366-6900.

The wider community is welcome to share in these Reformation worship and music events.

Michael D. Costello, Cantor of Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest, IL

Historic Medallion Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

by Frederick J. Schumacher - Monday, December 18, 2017

<http://mcsletstalk.org/reformation-jubilee-500/historic-medallion-commemorating-500th-anniversary-reformation/>

From Conflict to Communion - The First Joint Commemoration of the Reformation - Lutherans and Roman Catholics Together



From Conflict to Communion Joint Commemorative Medallion - photo

[PDF of figures referenced in text](#)

[PDF of this entire article: Historic Medallion Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation - Schumacher](#)

It is widely known that had it not been for the invention of the printing press around 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg, the posting of Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, might have ended in nothing more than a theological debate among the scholars and students at the University. The printing press enabled Luther's *Theses* to become known as "the hammer blows heard around the world."

What is far less known is that the sixteenth century also witnessed the flowering of new means for striking medals and coins. Artists, sculptors, woodcutters, and other craftsmen could now make these

durable miniature pieces of art to propagate the reform of the church creatively through the words of Scripture, symbols, and stories from the life of Luther and events of the Reformation. For a rather low price, the new middle class arising in Europe could collect these objects that were easy to store, display and transport. The expectation was that they would be treasured by future generations, bringing to remembrance events of which their ancestors were a part. It has been said that not only the printing press spread the Reformation but also the medal and coin press.^[1] There was not only to be a printed witness but a striking one also.

Luther has remained through the years a popular subject of numismatic art, so much so that it is estimated that there are now close to four thousand different medals associated with Luther and the Reformation, more than anyone else in history. The earliest medal goes back to 1520, but not all of these medals are favorable to Luther and the Reformation. At the first centennial celebration of the Reformation in 1617 a medal was issued by the Roman Catholics with an image of the sun on one side and the inscription, “The constant age of the church. It shines still after one thousand six hundred and seventeen years without changing.” The reverse shows the moon, a symbol of continual changes, and has the words, “The inconsistent novelties of the heresies as they change their form sixteen hundred times in one hundred years.” The Jesuit professor Adam Contzen, apparently impressed with this medal, used it on the title page of his book *Jubilum Jubilorum* published in Mainz in 1618. Under a sketch of the medal he quotes Ecclesiastes 27: 12, “The conversation of the pious is constantly wise, but a fool is as changeable as the moon.” He then refers to the constancy of Roman teachings in contrast to the numerous shapes of the faith under the Protestant heretics who cannot even agree with one another. Christian Juncker includes this in his 1706 book on Luther medals ([fig.1](#)).^[2]

One medal in my collection struck in the United States in 1917 directly attacks Luther. The obverse has a beautiful portrait of Luther, similar to many Luther medals produced during that year by Lutherans. But this one undoubtedly was sold to unsuspecting Protestants following Reformation rallies during the four-hundredth anniversary year. The purchasers were in for a great surprise when they arrived home, opened the lovely felt-lined box, and turned the medal to the reverse to read a six-line inscription: “LUTHER THE SWINE --- A Filthy Mind, A Corrupt Soul, Enemy Of Christ’s Church” ([fig.2](#)).

The propaganda was, however, not from one side of the Roman Catholic - Protestant divide. The Jesuit priest, Gretser, writing in 1796 seems to indicate that the Protestants are even more successful in their anti-Roman Catholic medals and coins. He wrote, “There are many ways to bring things to the people and they (referring to the Protestants) have done this by medals and coins, so welcomed by everyone. In this manner these heretics of our time have used not only books, paintings, and statues to make fun of our bishops, cardinals, priests, monks and nuns but our spiritual life as well through the miserable use of coins.”^[3]

In another place Gretser illustrates this by describing a medal that depicts the pope—but when it is rotated 180 degrees, the pope turns into the devil! ([fig.3](#)) The reverse shows a cardinal who when rotated becomes a fool or court jester ([fig. 4](#)). I have four of these medals^[4] in my collection dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a very poor copy recently made that I purchased in 2014 at a tourist store at the Wartburg Castle. This type of medal is often referred to as reversible or puzzle medals and are easy to come by at very reasonable prices, testifying to the great numbers created and their wide distribution as a means of propaganda.

Another anti-papal medal shows Jesus on the obverse with a dove descending on him indicating he is the Christ and referring to John 1:29. The reverse has an image of devils sitting on the back of the Pope's head trying to take his tiara off and referring to the anti-Christ of II Thessalonians 2: 3-4 ([fig.5](#)).

A very interesting medal commemorating the death of Luther in 1546 has on the obverse his portrait facing right and wearing an academic gown and on the reverse a twelve line inscription in Latin supposedly quoting Luther: "I was your affliction while I was alive. In dying I will be your death, O Pope", and referring to Luther, "He died in Eisleben in the year 1546 at the age of 63"[\[5\]](#) ([fig. 6](#)).

In an article I wrote for *Lutheran Forum* in 2014 I referred to a medal issued in 1983 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau that pointed to a growing appreciation of Luther among Roman Catholics and his being recognized as a theological giant of ecumenical significance who never intended to divide the church. That medal depicted on the obverse side Luther facing slightly left in academic gown and doctor's hat and on the reverse Luther's rose and a swan swimming reminiscent of the legend regarding Luther referring to himself as the swan John Huss (in Bohemian, goose) prophesied would someday arise from his ashes as a swan. Lutherans said he was not only that swan but a singing one. In bold letters the words of Luther appear: "I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ON EARTH THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD NO MORE THAN ONE HOLY COMMON CHRISTIAN CHURCH..." ([fig.7](#)). In that article I then wrote, "I hope that in 2017 some church body or organization will design and mint a medal expressive of a joint commemoration by Lutherans and Catholics."[\[6\]](#)

I cannot begin to express how pleased I am that the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, to the best of my knowledge, has fulfilled this hope in creating what I believe is the first positive medal in the history of medals produced by Lutherans and Roman Catholics. The wonder of it all! From wars being fought against one another to the last fifty years of ecumenical dialogue and the growing appreciation of one another's ministries to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation —the event that split the Western Church — being commemorating together. Beginning on October 31, 2016, Pope Francis and leaders of the Lutheran World Federation commemorated the beginning of the 500th Commemoration worshipping together in the Swedish Lutheran Cathedral in Lund. Pope Francis even wearing a red stole worn by Lutheran pastors over many years on the Sunday the Reformation has been remembered. A few months later I was deeply moved by seeing a video of Pope Francis hosting a large audience of German young people, both Lutheran and Roman Catholic, asking the Pope questions. When the questioning by the young people ended the Pope then said to the young people, "I now have a question for you!" His question was "Who is better, Lutherans or Roman Catholics?" There was a long pause with the young people not knowing how to answer. The Pope then said, "They are better when they are together."

The President of the Lutheran World Federation said recently, "We have begun our irreversible journey from conflict to communion and we do not wish to let it cease ever again." Pope Francis has affirmed this statement, making it even stronger: "We are also called to be on the watch against the temptation of halting along the way. In the spiritual life, as in ecclesial life, whenever we halt, we are turning back."

On October 31, 2017 the Vatican announced that a stamp would be released on November 23 ([fig. 8](#)). One hundred and twenty thousand stamps were issued on that date. They depict Luther and Melancthon kneeling in prayer at the foot of the cross on which Christ is crucified with the city of Wittenberg in the background.

Design Concept of the Obverse ALPB Medal: From Conflict to Communion - Lutherans and Roman Catholics Together



Medallion

Drawing of obverse of Joint Commemorative



Silver cross with Christ holding lamb and dove descending

The 2017 medal depicts Luther in his doctor's robe and hat based on an oil painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1529) and holding a book with German inscription on it, HEILIGE SCHRIFT (Holy Scripture) in his right hand and facing very slightly toward Pope Francis. Francis is wearing a cassock with a short shoulder cape (pellegrina) and pectoral cross with an image of Christ standing from the center of the cross to the bottom holding a lamb over his shoulders and filling the cross bar behind him with numerous sheep to his left and right. At the top of the cross there is a descending dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit.



Martin Luther's coat-of-arms

Above Luther's shoulder on the left is his crest (coat-of-arms or rose) that he designed and said was a compendium of his theology: The cross set on the heart reminded him that faith in the crucified Christ saves us. The heart placed on the rose shows that faith brings joy, comfort and peace into bloom, and the ring around the seal attests that in Christ we will live eternally.



Pope Francis' coat-of-arms

Above Pope Francis' shoulder on the right is his coat-of-arms. In descending order at the top is a three leveled headpiece called a mitre which Francis and his predecessor, Benedict XVI, preferred over the

traditional papal tiara. Below the mitre are two keys, symbols of St. Peter, and then the emblem of the Jesuits (Francis' order) of a shining sun within which IHS (first three letters in Greek for Christ) is over a cross and toward the bottom a star and branch of spikenard, symbols respectively of St. Mary and St. Joseph. Spikenard is a plant from which ointment for making perfume is taken (Matthew 26: 7-9, Mark 14: 3-8, John 12: 3).

Above the heads of Luther and Pope Francis in a circle is a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, descending upon them, reminiscent of part of Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in his *Small Catechism*, that it is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity that "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church... ."

To the right of the dove is the date **OCT. 31/ 2016**, and between the two of them the words **Lund / Sweden**, the location of the Lutheran Cathedral where Pope Francis with representatives of worldwide Lutheranism and the Roman Catholic Church marked the beginning of the yearlong Lutheran - Roman Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation expressed in the encircling inscription: **FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION / The First Joint Commemoration of the Reformation // 2016 // 2017 // Lutherans and Roman Catholics Together.**

Below the images of Luther and Pope Francis are two olive branches joined at the center with a bow. Olive branches on medals have always symbolized peace and reconciliation.

Design Concept of the Reverse: The Issue That Divided the Church Resolved in 1999 Agreement



Drawing of reverse of Joint Commemorative Medallion

In the center of the medal is a 1530 drawing of the **Bishop's Palace** in the German City of Augsburg that divides two important documents presented in this city involving Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Above the palace the date **June 25, 1530** and name of the Lutheran document, the **Augsburg Confession**. On

that date and place the Augsburg Confession, written by Philipp Melanchthon, was presented to the Emperor Charles V by seven Lutheran princes and two imperial free cities. The Confession contained thirty-five articles with the first twenty-one articles setting forth that the followers of Luther did not dissent to any articles of faith from Catholic teaching. The remaining seven articles outline abuses that had come to the Western church in the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation. On August 3 the Roman Catholic Church replied with a rebuttal rejecting thirteen of the articles and on September 22 a written reply of rejection by Rome was given to the Lutherans called the *Confutation*. On that same day the Emperor refused to accept the Lutheran response and the Lutheran Church came into existence followed by wars and bitterness over the centuries.

Below the 1530 image of the Bishop's Palace in Augsburg, in that very same city there are the words, **St. Anna Church** (built in 1521 as a Roman Catholic Church and later became Lutheran in 1545) and the significant Reformation date of **October 31**, but this time in **1999**. It was in this church where some 50 years of theological dialogue bore significant fruit in a new document signed by representatives of the **Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church** called the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The primary theological issue that resulted in the Reformation and separation of the two churches was resolved in the agreement: **Together We Confess: By Grace Alone, In Faith In Christ's Saving Work And Not Because Of Any Merit On Our Part, We Are Accepted By God And Receive The Holy Spirit, Who Renews Our Hearts While Equipping And Calling Us To Good Works.**(JDDJ, paragraph 15).

Above the palace there are two hands reaching out to clasp each other, symbolizing friendship, and perhaps one day full unity. (A medal from 1855 commemorating the 300th Anniversary of the Peace of Augsburg has a similar image.) Encircling the medal is the inscription: **Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification / John 17:21 - 23 / John 15: 4 // American Lutheran / Publicity Bureau.**

At the far left side of the palace immediately under the open door in the gate, ETS / JTS (signatures of the artists).

While the concept and design for this medallion came from Frederick J. Schumacher, the drawings of the obverse and reverse were by his grandchildren, Emma Tomiko Schumacher, 15 years old, and John Taylor Schumacher, 17 years old. It is their hope that someday they will be able to receive Holy Communion with their friends in the Roman Catholic Church. The designer of this medal prays that such will come in their Lifetimes.

Medal Produced by New Orleans Mint, Inc. New Orleans, LA. Mintage: 170 total medallions = 85 antique bronze (5 with loops); 50 antique silver (5 with loops); 10 silver matte (4 with loops); 25 gold matte (4 with loops). For more information go to ALPB.org.

Notes

[1] Hugo Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillen* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1983, 46.

[2] Christian Juncker; *Die Geschichte der Reformation in Münzen und Medaillen bis zum Jahre*

1706 (Nachdruck Karlsruhe, 1982 [1706], 416.

[3] Schnell, 17.

[4] Ibid, 44.

[5] I am indebted to Ralph W. Klein for the translation of this medal and to Kurt Hendel for sharing that these words are not known to Luther but as having been credited to him by Philipp Melanchthon.

[6] Frederick J. Schumacher, *Lutheran Forum* (Fall 2014), 61.

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