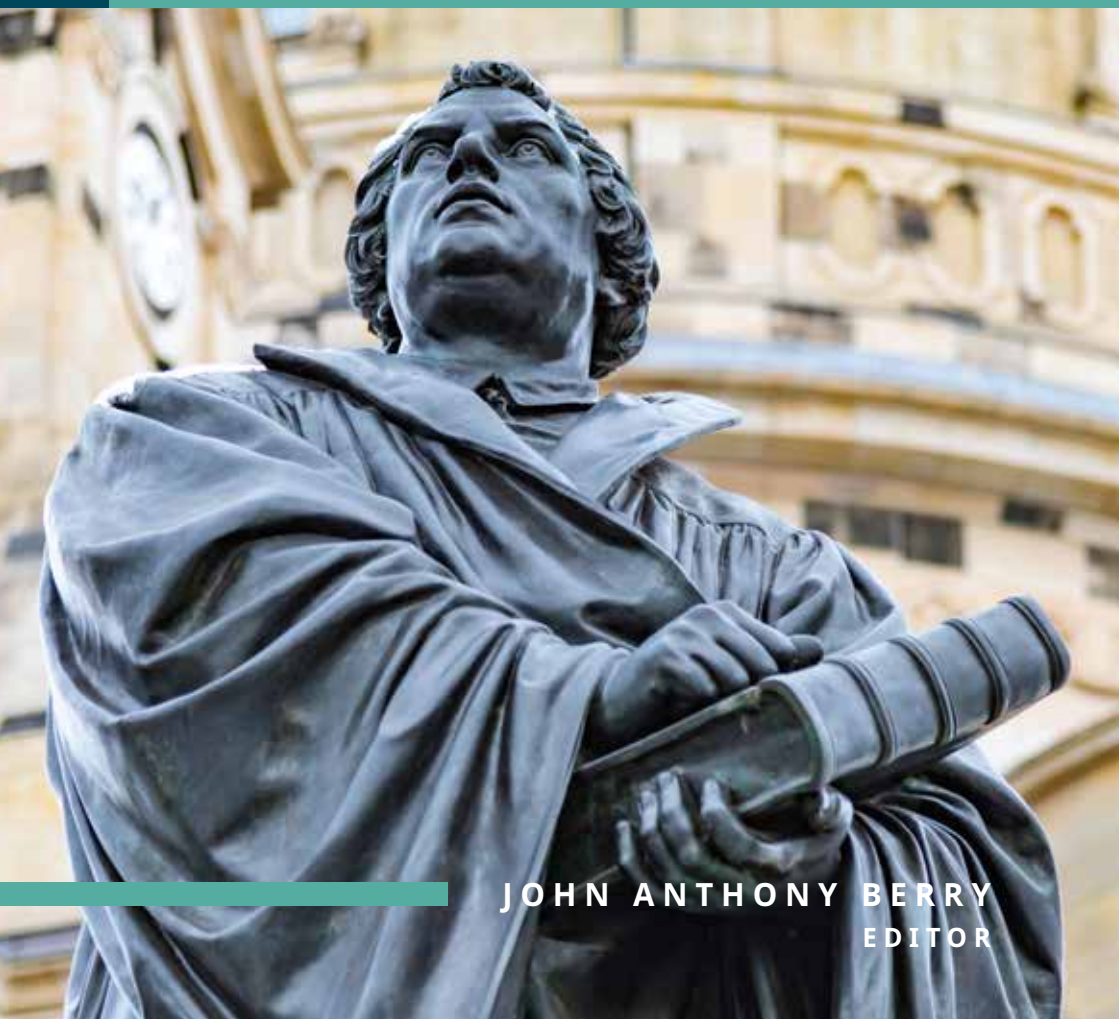


The Spirit of the Reformation

500 YEARS ON

Proceedings of the Malta International Theological Conference II



JOHN ANTHONY BERRY
EDITOR

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Proceedings of the
Malta International Theological Conference
II

John Anthony Berry

Editor



L-Università ta' Malta
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From Reform to Reformation: Luther's Concept of Renewal

UTE GAUSE

The debates on confessionalisation during the last decades, mainly initiated by Heinz Schilling, have largely contributed to the fact that the view on the Reformation as an epoch has changed.¹ Schilling stated that the Reformation as a universal historical change had been lost as early as 1998.² Provocatively, he raised an issue that had been discussed for some time, namely, whether the Reformation had been “lost, crushed between the pre-Reformation reform movements of the late Middle Ages on the one hand, and the “actual” post-Reformation impetus of formation and modernisation during the Age of Confessionalisation on the other hand.”³

In his article, Schilling advocated confessionalisation – instead of the Protestant Reformation alone — to be regarded as a period of modernisation and actual reform. In support of his argument, he quoted

1 Heinz Schilling, “Reformation – Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Temps des Réformes?” in *Die frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 13. All direct quotations in absence of English versions of the literature referred to have been translated from German by the author.

2 See *ibid.*

3 See *ibid.*

Berlin sociologist Hans Joas, who seeks to expose a linear impetus, as derived from Renaissance and Reformation, as the “unbearably vain, self-satisfied and Protestant-biased view of history.”⁴ These debates have a long tradition, but are a pressing issue in regard to the Reformation anniversary, since even church history as an internal discipline of Protestant Theology is on the brink of abandoning the term ‘epoch.’

One grave consequence of the confessionalisation paradigm seems to be that even Reformation research is giving up the focus on Luther’s protestant theology in favour of a plea for a *longue durée* of reforms since the late Middle Ages. If, however, Luther’s theology no longer appears unique and distinctive for its time, i.e., not different from previous theology, the paradigm of confessionalisation gains so much importance that abandoning the term “Reformation” for the epoch seems indeed plausible.

Apart from this concept of a broad confessionalisation, which examines the coexistence of confessions and their contribution to the development of the modern state, two further church historical concepts have recently come to the foreground, either voting – each with different emphases – to forgo the term ‘Reformation’ as a term for an epoch completely, or to widen the confessionalisation paradigm on a European level and remove its focus on the emerging major confessions. Mostly, this is a matter of sovereignty of interpretation as well as the shift of paradigms to the point of relinquishing them completely.

This article presents these concepts and depicts their implications for both Church historiography and the Reformation anniversary.

4 Ibid., 21.

Constructions and Deconstructions

About twenty years ago, Martin Brecht asked whether one might speak of “theology or theologies of the Reformation” and adhered to the reconstitution of one theology:

“For the Protestant concept of justification, the unconditional acceptance of the human being through grace, radical sin, mercy as the requirement of utter justice, *simul iustus et peccator*, the eschatological finality of justification, the certainty of salvation, the distinction between freedom and bondage, *sola fide*, and the bond between faith and the biblical word are constitutive. That, however, there are certain modifications and accentuations among the great representatives of the Reformation, has to be granted.”⁵

Compared to later theological research, Martin Brecht – in contrast to contemporary views – also holds on the constitutive importance of humanism for the reformation.⁶ “Monocentring” was one key term Berndt Hamm used in 1998 in an attempt to describe the contrast between the previous and the innovation of the Reformation, thus pursuing a similar concept to Brecht’s:

“The place of the hierarchy, which, on its respective levels, offers many forms of coexistence and many niches for radicality and oddity, is instead taken by the monocentric circle

5 Martin Brecht, “Theologie oder Theologien der Reformation,” in *Die reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und debatten: Beiträge zur gemeinsamen konferenz der Society for Reformation Research und des vereins für reformationgeschichte*, 25-30 September 1990 im Deutschen Historischen Institut, Washington, D.C. ed. Hans R. Guggisberg, Gottfried G. Krodel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), 101.

6 See *ibid.*

of Christian life in the works of Luther and other reformers. Linguistically, this becomes apparent in the well-known “sola”-expressions, which articulate a novel, normative focus by overriding the pluralistic concept of norms of the traditional church: the consolidation of the Christian normative in the unconditionally self-endowing, redeeming grace of God alone (*sola gratia*), i.e., in the trust of faith alone (*sola fide*), the community of faith with Christ and his self-endowing justice alone (*solus Christus*), the word of God alone establishing and sustaining faith (*solo verbo*), the Holy Scripture containing the God’s word alone (*sola scriptura*), the power of the Holy Spirit alone awakening faith and thus empowering the word (*solo spiritus*), and the aim which all these references strive to serve: God’s glory alone.”⁷

The parallels to Brecht’s focus are obvious. Both descriptions adhere to the Reformation as a theological event with fundamental constituents and as a break. Volker Leppin’s Luther biography, published in 2006, implicitly abandons the concept of the Reformation as an epoch. Leppin’s book caused a sensation, because he portrayed Luther mainly as a late medieval man. In the biography, Luther is not presented as an “impulsive revolutionary,” but rather as a person “only slowly separating himself from his medieval heritage.”⁸

Leppin deals intensively with Luther’s monastic years and, in contrast to Luther’s self-accounts, shown in his autobiographical surveys, that Luther, as a monk, remained within conventional piety and embarked on a monastic career, hereby adopting his father’s

7 Berndt Hamm, “Einheit und Vielfalt der Reformation – oder: was die Reformation zur Reformation machte,” in *Reformationstheorien*, ed. Berndt Hamm, Bernd Moeller, and Dorothea Wendebourg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 77.

8 Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2006).

mentality of a social climber. Furthermore, Leppin stresses the support and encouragement Luther received from his confessor Staupitz and regards the mystic impulses which influenced Luther as a young monk, as being predominantly inspired by Staupitz. These were in turn adopted by a Wittenberg group around Karlstadt, Luther and others to the point where Leppin speaks of a “Staupitzianism” in Wittenberg instead of a Wittenberg “Augustinism.”⁹

Generally, Leppin puts more emphasis on the group of Wittenberg reformers “that gathered around the Augustinian-antischolastic Luder,”¹⁰ rather than highlighting Luther’s unique position. The influence of humanism, however, is clearly and blatantly de-emphasised.¹¹ Surrendering the portrayal of the reformer, who hammered the theses on the door with massive blows – an image Leppin and Erwin Iserloh seem to find almost amusing – Leppin regards Luther’s Protestant discovery as a process that was only later stylised by Luther himself as a breakthrough.

More than others, Leppin observes Luther to be influenced by late medieval monasticism, its theology of piety and its mysticism, and is therefore close to a Catholic interpretation, similar to the Lortz and Jedin schools. Regarding the dispute with Erasmus about the unfree will, Leppin points out that Luther owes the concept to Staupitz and thus again to the late medieval theology of piety.¹² According to Leppin, Luther undertakes important dissociations in 1525, after which he gives up the role of the charismatic leader. He is seen to retreat into the background, as far as his popularity is concerned, namely because of the rulers, who, starting at the Diet of Speyer, take the matter of the Reformation into their own hands.

9 Ibid., 98.

10 Ibid., 97.

11 See *ibid.*, 91.

12 See *ibid.*, 255.

“The agitator of the Protestant movement, whom some consider to have started a whole new epoch, was, at the most, one among others who participated in the process, which now only gradually evolved into a process of reformation in the sense of a transformation of church, law and society.”¹³ Apart from evening out the distinctive theological features, the emphasis lies on the continuities with the late Middle Ages as well as diminishing the focus on Luther. In this regard, Leppin is thus in line with the research on confessionalisation.

In 2012, Berndt Hamm discharged the idea of the Reformation as an epoch. Although he wants the Reformation to be understood as a system break, the historiographic memory of its contemporaries did not grant it relevance as either a break or the reconstitution of an epoch:

“What kind of historiographical status can be attributed to the Reformation between the reforms of the 15th century and the religious-political confessional systems of the late 16th century, once it loses the myth of a dawn of a new age of mankind and of an outstanding, though short yet all the more phenomenal and powerful, historical period in the cultural memory of the present?”¹⁴

Hamm defines ‘system break’ as follows:

“In contrast to the general religious structure of the so-called Middle Ages with its astonishing pluralities and new beginnings, a new sense of theology, piety, and church

13 Ibid., 258 (Emphasis added).

14 Berndt Hamm, “Abschied vom Epochendenken in der Reformationsforschung,” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 39, no. 3 (2012): 375; 388.

with a new structure of signs, legitimations and norms was created by reformatory processes of selection, reduction and transformation, but mainly by a revolutionary focus on Bible, Gospel, faith and community.”¹⁵

His argument thus draws its conclusion from the modernisation and secularisation paradigm developed following the input contributed by Max Weber.¹⁶ Hamm now concludes that taking the changes of paradigm seriously, as occurred throughout the centuries, implies an end of historical thinking in epochs in general.

In doing so, he declares even those constructions as outdated that regard an extension of the epoch in the sense of the confessionalisation paradigm as reasonable, and thereby implicitly avoids the idea of a conflict of confessions in the sense of Protestant superiority. Although the Reformation presents a “system-demolishing radicalisation” in its Lutheran, Zwinglian, Calvinist reformed, Upper German, Anabaptist, Spiritualistic and Anti-Trinitarian movements, epochal terms merely grasp partial phenomena, and point out partial, reductionistic conherences.¹⁷

His conclusion reads as follows: “The cause of the general dubiousness of former concepts of periodisation and epochs has already become apparent: They block the clear view on a course of history which has been wrapped up into epochal portions neither by God nor according to world-immanent essence-ontologist laws.”¹⁸ It was simply a matter of “illusionary universal labelling.”¹⁹

15 Ibid.

16 See Lucian Hölscher's essay in the same issue of *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 39, no. 3 (2012).

17 See Hamm, “Abschied,” 389ff.

18 Ibid., 392.

19 Ibid.

In this fashion, Hamm wants to pursue a “secularisation and demythologisation of historiography”²⁰ and abandon all “large-scale periodisations.”²¹

Thomas Kaufmann’s Luther biography, published in 2006, expresses the opposite view. He focuses on the man at the turn of an era, who embraces the new medium of bookprinting and whom he describes as “a person in two natures”: namely, Luther as the withdrawn, introverted “contemplative Bible reader, [...] and man at prayer” on the one hand, and the “agitator, fighter and propagandist, the linguistic virtuoso pushing into the public world” on the other hand.²² In this evaluation, the positive characteristics are predominant: Kaufmann rejects Luther’s interpretations as “anti-Western-German” or “anti-Semitic Luther,” “God’s bull-necked barbarian” (Thomas Mann) as “extreme projections,” to finally describe Luther’s distinctive identity to be – even compared to his contemporaries – as “entirely determined and borne by the ongoing acts of its God.”²³

Kaufmann considers this as constituent for Luther’s personality. Additionally, the importance of Luther and the Reformation in world history remain irrevocable for Kaufmann: His [Luther’s] life “changed the occidental Church and thus changed the world, as rarely a human being did before or after him.”²⁴ These features are repeated in Kaufmann’s *History of Reformation*, published in 2009, which adheres to the concept of the Reformation as a radical change and an epoch. For him, the Reformation is a “revolt of the Church against the Church.”²⁵

20 Ibid., 399.

21 Ibid.

22 Thomas Kaufmann, *Martin Luther* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), 8.

23 Ibid., 13.

24 Ibid., 14.

25 Ibid.

He ascribes an epochal significance to the new rise of the Protestant church in the 16th century.²⁶ With the Reformation, Luther intended to initiate a “radical reorientation of the entire Christian society.”²⁷

Due to the consequence of the confessionalisation paradigm and the analysis of its formation, as well as in the context of Reformation research starting to open itself to the “left wing” in the 1960s, i.e., to the Anabaptists and to Reformed Protestantism as the dominant confessionalising power (defined as second confessionalisation), more and more voices seek to turn this very opening, which has led Anglo-American research to speak of “German Histories in the age of Reformations (1400–1650), into the new general paradigm.”²⁸

In the 21st century, a Reformation historiography that focuses entirely on Luther and the German-speaking areas during the short period from 1517 to 1555, is dismissed to be a “Rankean triumphalist approach,” only pursued further by old-fashioned, conservative church historians.²⁹ The Reformation as a period of “long reformation” spanning from 1450 to 1650, although other time frames exist.³⁰ It is a European event in which various religious groups participate. Thus, this re-adjustment aims at deconstructing an older narrative, coined already by Ranke, and fundamentally rejects a Reformation historiography focused on Luther and Lutheran-oriented theology, as it is contaminated by national Protestantism and adheres to a fatal linearity of development and to the German *Sonderweg*.

26 See Thomas Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Reformation* (Frankfurt a.M. — Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag, 2009), 17.

27 *Ibid.*, 18.

28 See the monograph of the same title by Thomas A. Brady, *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650* (Cambridge — New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

29 Emidio Campi, “Was the Reformation a German Event?,” in *The Myth of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Opitz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 21.

30 See *Ibid.*, 18ff.

This position from 2013 was published in a collection edited by Peter Opitz, correspondingly titled “The Myth of the Reformation,”³¹ which consequently explores the European horizon of the Reformation in various articles. Emidio Campi’s essay accuses Kaufmann’s History of the Reformation of having a hidden agenda, since it clings to the central position of Luther: “Here we are, back in the world of manifest destiny and the “Eternal German.”³²

Deciding on the question of whether the Reformation is to be abandoned as an epoch in a democratic vote would, based on the previous considerations, show an almost unanimous consensus to either dissociate oneself from the term ‘epoch’ entirely or to turn the dawn of Protestantism into one of several radical changes during the 16th century. Emidio Campi thus concludes: “The result is the “Long Reformation”: a series of fragmented events in small and often competing groups, plus some greater ones, but without a centre and lacking a bold vision. In short, this is the way in which Reformation history is being written today.”³³ While Hamm at least held on to the idea of a systematic break and the concept of an identifiable, qualitatively new theology, Campi even disapproves of this minimal consensus.

Along with historian Luise Schorn-Schütte, I would like to advocate against pursuing “political education,” that aims to enlighten “one’s own contemporaries about the paths and wrong tracks of national history,” but rather in favour of outlining “the modalities of movements, the time horizons and the creation of a sense of values of contemporaries of the

31 Peter Opitz, *The Myth of the Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

32 Campi, 20.

33 Ibid.

Reformation era itself.”³⁴ In my opinion, the debate’s “hidden agenda” roots in unreflected equation of national Protestant interpretations of Luther of the 19th and 20th centuries with Luther’s 16th century concerns and – what is more — the appropriation of Luther by National Socialism. Also, Marcus Sandl’s findings seem highly relevant. Whereby he states that the “historiographical abandonment of the Reformation,” was “a result of an epistemological reorientation, which led to a separation of claims of validity from a transcendent concept of truth.”³⁵ Berndt Hamm has done exactly that. In my opinion, however, to give up of the Reformation as an epoch means to abandon Protestant theology itself.

Luther’s Religious Problem: The Concept of Renewal

1. AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

After this survey of the current trends within Reformation history, I will not continue with the deconstruction of Reformation history in my second part, but instead I will illustrate what is to be associated with Luther’s agenda or rather, what he defines as the rediscovery of the Gospel.

To support my argument, I will refer to the habilitation thesis of historian Marcus Sandl from Zurich, which was published in 2011 and adheres to the key role Luther and his theology played in the 16th century. His monograph, entitled: *Mediality and Event. A Contemporary History of the Reformation*, emphasises the function of book printing

34 Luise Schorn-Schütte. “Reformationsgeschichtsschreibung – wozu? Eine Standortbestimmung,” in *Historie und leben. Der historiker als wissenschaftler und zeitgenosse. Festschrift für Lothar Gall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter Hein et al. (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2006), 149ff.

35 Marcus Sandl, *Medialität und ereignis. Eine zeitgeschichte der reformation* (Zürich: Chronos, 2011), 34.

as an essential medium of the Reformation on the one hand, but also asks about the relevance given by the contemporaries to Luther's and Melancthon's public appearances in Wittenberg.

In Sandl's opinion, Luther gave credibility and relevance to the mediality of God's word itself, i.e., the Bible. Along with this well-received literality came performative actions and certain staged personal acts (e.g., the Diet of Worms in 1521, the Dispute on the Eucharist in 1529, and the Diet of Augsburg in 1530). Sandl allows room for the Reformation as a theological event, regarding it as a "turning point."³⁶ As a theologian and church historian, I am fascinated by the way Sandl provides an external description from a historical, or system-theoretical point of view, which, by means of close observations of the events and the published literature of the time, analyses the reformatory events and the theological literature in a way that is compatible with a theological point of view.

Eventually, Sandl successfully describes the denominational differences between Roman Catholic and Lutheran self-conceptions within the 16th century. Since inner-Christian confessional studies are confronted with the problem that God, despite revealing Himself, ultimately remains hidden from human insight and knowledge; and that the confessions have developed their own respective ways of how Christ, as the bearer of revelation, can be adequately communicated to the believers in a complex process of assurance and how the believers can establish a relationship with God. Sandl succeeds in describing Luther's process of assurance precisely, yet without the use of inner-theological terminology. In his introductory proposition, Sandl states: "At the beginning of the Reformation stood an act of remembrance. Its object were the true contents of Christianity, which – according

36 See *Ibid.*, 10.

to Martin Luther and his fellow campaigners – had been obscured and given over to oblivion through human traditions, introduced by medieval scholasticism.”³⁷

Reformation was a break of tradition, a reconstitution of history through the “occurrence of a new relationship between worldly immanence and transcendence.”³⁸ This becomes particularly apparent in the courage to avow, stemming from the interaction with the Gospel, clearly shown in Luther's demeanour at the Diet of Worms in 1521. I will now illustrate in two steps how Luther's interpretation of the Bible results in a new interaction with transcendence and how, in turn, a specific attitude of faith is actually to be communicated. I will discuss the interpretation of the Bible, as well as the Protestant discovery as an attitude of faith and its transmission into sacrament and pastoral care. Both of these aspects I consider to be essential characteristics of Reformation theology.

2. INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE AS CONCENTRATION AND REDUCTION

Luther's argumentation at the Diet of Worms in 1521 becomes programmatic for the many groups and individuals joining the Reformation:

“If I am not refuted by (testimony of the) Scripture and rational arguments – for I neither have faith in the Pope nor in the councils alone, since it is a fact that they have often erred and contradicted themselves – , I am bound by the words I have quoted. And as long as my conscience is captured in God's

37 Ibid., 13.

38 Ibid., 20.

words, I cannot and do not want to recant anything because it is uncertain and threatens salvation to do something against the conscience. God help me. Amen.”³⁹

At the Diet of Speyer in 1529, the Protestant imperial estates take this commitment to Scripture and the conscience as justification for their adherence to the Reformation. Karl Holl, the great Luther scholar of the early 20th century, could therefore define Luther’s attitude as a “religion of conscience,” as it was based on the conviction that “the divine reveals itself most definitely in the awareness of the “ought” , [and] in the irresistibility, with which the demand, aimed at the will, takes possession of man.”⁴⁰ Through a personal relationship with God, more precisely, through a relationship with Christ, arises the legitimation, almost the necessity to act as one thinks is right. This relationship with God is rooted in the bible, which is interpreted with regard to Christ. The principle of exegesis, developed by Luther with active support from Melanchthon, was, by all means, considered something novel, not only in his eyes, but also in the eyes of his contemporaries.

Apart from Luther, Melanchthon also addressed the unbridgeable cleft between the teachings of scholastic theology, which were based on dogmatic eternity values, and the dynamic biblical theology, fructified by the Holy Spirit and based on the sources, in his first speech as a professor of Greek in Wittenberg in 1519 (“On the Necessity of Reforming Youth Studies”).

39 See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, Vol 1. (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981), 438ff.

40 Karl Holl, “Was verstand Luther unter Religion,” in *Gesammelte aufsätze zur kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 1: Luther. Ed. Karl Holl (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1948), 7th edition, 35.

Initially, Melanchthon refers to this in a humanist sense, which means that one has to turn to the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. He points out that the study of theology requires a high degree of thinking skills, hard work and diligence (*potissimum ingenio, usu et cura*). According to him,

“Only with the help of the sources will the words with their clarity and actual meaning reveal themselves to us, and just as in the bright light of the midday sun, the true and actual meaning of the letter (*genuinus literae sensus*) we have been looking for will manifest. As soon as we have grasped the meaning of the letter, we will be able to obtain reliable evidence for the matters that are indeed conveyed.”⁴¹

Human sciences, philological accuracy – those are all essential, but need the support of the Holy Spirit: “Guided by the Holy Spirit, accompanied by education in our arts and sciences, we are able to find access to the sacred.”⁴² Through engaging intensively with the sources, Christ is eventually truly recognised (*Atque cum animos ad fontes contulerimus, Christum sapere incipiemus [...]*)⁴³. It is the handling of the sources by the individuals in their respective time, which eventually allows the Gospel to speak.

Statements like these are key phrases that represent the core of Reformation theology. Historian Marcus Sandl has characterised this novelty of Protestant theology of the 16th century from an external perspective as follows:

41 Philipp Melanchthon, “Wittenberger Antrittsrede (De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis),” in *Melanchthon deutsch*, ed Michael Beyer, Stefan Rhein and Günther Wartenberg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011), 2nd edition, 62.

42 Ibid., 61.

43 Ibid., 62.

“In a nutshell, one could say that it [Protestant theology], by breaking with tradition, made time a constituent dimension of historical events, and thus put itself into opposition to everything that was before.”⁴⁴ Luther “linked Protestant theology to the conditions of reversal and change.”⁴⁵ The focus does not lie on communicating eternal truths anymore, but rather on a truth that is always solely revealed in the process of the word being actually appropriated, biblical truth is not “static, but dynamic.”⁴⁶ In Reformation theology, it was no longer a matter of giving a lecture, but rather of what actually happened in the act of cognitive formation, in reading, writing and preaching the word of God, to show what was revealed and what no human being was able to show from his own capacities.”⁴⁷ “Reformation recognition was successful only if it was possible to bring the Bible and its exegetes into an immediate relationship with each other.”⁴⁸

The text also has a self-evidence and coherence from which the interpreter must allow himself to be inspired. For that to occur, he needs to believe.⁴⁹

44 Sandl, 40.

45 Ibid., 41.

46 Ibid., 42.

47 Ibid., 43.

48 Ibid.

49 See *ibid.*, 56.

3. THE PROTESTANT DISCOVERY AS AN ATTITUDE OF FAITH AND ITS THEOLOGICAL MEDIATION

The *Sermo de duplici iustitia*, first published in 1519 and preached by Luther on Palm Sunday, March 28th, in 1518,⁵⁰ is a record of Luther's Protestant discovery, he abandons the concept of humility, and instead, articulates the liberating breakthrough of the understanding of God's merciful justice through the belief in Christ.

Luther's Sermon is based on the Christ Psalm of Phil. 2,5 ff. The first justice is given to the human being (*ab extra infusa*), it is infused from the outside: *Haec est qua Christus iustus est et iustificans per fidem.*⁵¹ "It is the justice by which Christ is just and justifies by faith." It is granted to man in baptism and renewed by repentance. By believing in Christ, Christ's justice becomes that of man. It is bestowed upon the unworthy human by grace, *gratis [...] ex pura misericordia*⁵² ("freely and out of pure mercy") and thwarts original sin. In this, the relationship to Christ appears to be almost mystical: *at qui credit in Christo, haeret in Christo, estque unum cum Christo, habens eandem iustitiam eum ipso*⁵³ (The soul believes in Christ, it clings to him and is one with him and thus participates in his justice").

In my opinion, this represents the second and indispensable component of Protestant theology: piety in the sense of an experienceable faith, created by a kind of Christ mysticism. Here, the influence of medieval mysticism adopted by Luther during his monastery years, becomes apparent. Berndt Hamm has stated that a "theology of piety," i.e., a theology, "which aims at piety as a practical

50 See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981), 222.

51 WA 2, 145, Z. 9ff.

52 WA 2, 145, Z. 32-146, Z. 1.

53 WA 2, 146, Z. 14ff.

way of life⁵⁴ – is conveyed through communication, namely, popular religious literature. While Luther's Latin sermon surely represents a form of elitist theology, the young Luther in his early German sermons, sought to communicate these beliefs in his theological treatises for all believers.

While one could call exegesis the craft of Protestant theology, as it provides the set of tools and the base necessary to successfully make the *viva vox evangelii* heard, Luther's theology of piety, based on justification with an often mystical undertone, provides images and narratives, which offer consolation to the soul of the believer and provides encouragement to seek, out of the reign of sinfulness, from the awareness of one's own fallibility and finiteness, the sole consolation in Christ.

In the Sermon on the Preparation to Die, published in 1519, both baptism and eucharist – even in the form of hospital communion – are presented to the dying human as an immovable and steadfast consolation, because they offer physical comfort. The sacraments are warranted promises of God and help in times of impugment. The earthly human being needs physical assurance. People shall trust in these warrants in their hour of death – even if the devil tries to convince them otherwise. The sacrament of Communion also assures the believer that they do not die alone. God, Christ, the angels and all the dead saints are with them in the hour of their death. In addition to the acts of confession, communion and unction, making the sign of the cross assures the dying of God's blessing. Moreover, Luther adopts the well-known and popular *ars-moriendi* imagery, takes up previous ideas and modifies them, e.g., by emphasizing not the impugments that the

54 Berndt Hamm, "Frömmigkeit als gegenstand theologieggeschichtlicher forschung. Methodisch-theologische überlegungen am beispiel von spätmittelalter und reformation," *Zeitschrift für theologie und kirche* 74 (1977): 489.

dying is exposed to, but rather the consolation in dying. The faithful have to adopt this attitude with utmost concentration in order to be able to resist the horrors of death.

“Dan Christ(us) ist nichts dan eytell leben / seyn heyligen auch / yhe tieffer und vehster / du dir dß bild eynbildest / und ansiehest / yhe mehr des tods bild abfelt und von yhm mit Christo / und ynn Christo geruglich sterben.”⁵⁵ [For Christ is nothing less than sheer life as are his saints. The deeper and firmer you imagine and visualise this, the more the image of death will crumble, so that you can die in peace with Christ and in Christ.]

Similar to the medieval *ars* of pictures, which first confronts the dying with the horrors that make it more arduous for them to die, and then visualises the overcoming of impugnement through Christ, as well as supporting angels, Luther creates these images metaphorically. This motif of the dead saints and believers attending the process of dying is also essential for the Sermon on the Lord's Supper, which was written at the same time;⁵⁶ it is a constitutive element of Luther's consolation. Here, he adopts a late-medieval concept and holds on to it. This communion also illustrates the concept of a universal priesthood, which Luther develops in opposition to the hierarchically structured Roman Catholic Church.

In his writings of 1519, Luther thus still remains strongly connected to the momentum of late medieval piety of an *ars moriendi*. Sacraments and sacramentals, as well as a vivid visualisation of Christ are recommended as consolation against the impugnements of impending

55 Martin Luther, “Ein sermon von der bereyту(n)g zum sterben,” in *Martin Luther studienausgabe*, Vol. 1., ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 235ff.

56 Martin Luther, “Eyn sermon vo(n) dem hochwirdigen sakrament / des Heyligen waren leychnams Christi. Vnd von den bruderschaften,” in *Martin Luther Studienausgabe*, Vol. 1., ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 272-287.

death.⁵⁷ The continuity to late medieval piety is clearly visible, whereby he [Luther] thus remains within “the tradition of an internalising image-religiosity, focused on meditative internalisation.”⁵⁸

In the Prayer Booklet of 1522, Luther articulates “Tröstung was bey eynem sterbenden Menschen zuhandeln sey.”⁵⁹ In contrast to the sermon, it is worth noting that confession and Communion are not mentioned as assuring signs of God’s promise anymore, but, rather, baptism instead. Baptism is a warrant that the believers, like Christ, are lifted up out of death and may be certain of the Resurrection. Here, the idea of eternal life together with Christ shall console the dying person. The sight of Christ on the Cross shall make the dying person aware that Christ has overcome sin, death and hell for them. Here, the dying person can be shown a crucifix to strengthen their faith; thus, Luther adopts existing customs and traditions. Subsequent Church Orders, however, insist on abandoning candles and crucifixes, because Christ can be internally envisioned.

In 1534, Luther once again comments on the question of how to deal with the impugnments of dying. Again, he regards dying and death as situations in which every believer is threatened by the devil and impugnments. The composition of the sermon was based on the specific question of a sick person during a pastoral visit, of whether he could still be assured of Christ’s promise, if Christ did not answer his prayers during his illness. Luther’s advice does not relativise the impugnment, but rather underlines that Christ’s promise clearly and irrevocably applies to each and every Christian:

57 The Christo-centric orientation of consolation is also present in the Middle Ages. See Claudia Resch, *Trost im angesicht des todes. Frühe reformatorische anleitungen zur seelsorge an kranken und sterbenden* (Tübingen – Basel: A. Francke, 2006), 40.

58 Berndt Hamm, “Luthers anleitung zum seligen sterben vor dem hintergrund der spätmittelalterlichen ars moriendi,” *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 19 (2005): 338ff.

59 Martin Luther, “How to Console a Dying Person,” WA 10/2, 454-457.

“It is God’s thought and will that I shall believe in His son Jesus Christ, for this, God has gifted me with His Holy Spirit. For without the Holy Spirit I could not have such ideas about Christ, that he, as I believe, has been given to me by God and that he died for me; but as a testimony of such faith, I have been baptised and by such baptism I have become a member of his spiritual body.”⁶⁰

The signs and acts assuring the human being of God’s grace and promise are the sacraments of baptism and the Communion, as well as the Holy Spirit dwelling within the heart of every Christian who enables the believer to say: I believe in Jesus Christ.

Based on these assurances, there is a clear conclusion that, according to Luther, the believers have to draw: “You would not utter such words, unless God had written them into your heart with His finger and through the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ Required piety lies within mental repetition of these promises. They are truths, engrained into the hearts by God, which one has to become aware of. To thwart the devil, they should be spoken out loud on a regular basis, i.e., practised piety consists of spoken prayer, expressing these assurances of faith again and again. Rather than on cognitive examination, the focus lies on emotional address and a meditative use of biblical words. The Prayer is further strengthened by the support of the entire Christian church, already articulated in the sermon:

60 Martin Luther, “Tröstlicher unterricht, wie man in leibesschwachheit de kleinmüthigkeit und anderen anfechtungen des teufels begegnen möge, 1534,” in *Martin Luthers sämtliche schriften*, Bd. 10., ed. Johann Georg Walch (Halle: Sp. 1780-1789), esp. Sp. 1781.

61 *Ibid.*, Sp. 1783ff.

“Thus, you are not alone in impugment, but have throughout the world so many brothers and sisters who all pray with you [...], give support and lament and say: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” It is not one Christian who prays: my father; but they all pray, Our Father.”⁶² Those, to whom this spiritual communion is not enough, shall call someone to their sickbed to speak about Christ or to read a comforting text. The focus on the word does not imply intellectualisation, instead, the word supports the acquirement of faith, which outer forms would distract from.

Christ is the absolute counterbalance to the impugment of sin and death. Therefore, I would like to point out that the focus on the word does not necessarily imply desensualisation and intellectualisation, but rather, that Luther and many other Protestant preachers succeed, by envisioning biblical texts, in leading the listeners through actualisations and images onto a path of faith, which leads to Christ.

Conclusion

From the last part of my paper, I think it is obvious that, as a Reformation historian, I am convinced that it is this focus on Christ, the consolation of Him being with the Christians in a world of challenges up to their own death, and the vivid visualisation of grace – even in participating in the sacrament of Communion – that is the core of Reformation theology and piety. Interpreting and then actualising scriptures is a way to reach people in a world of suffering and sinfulness. This is, in a way, quite a simple message, a reduction perhaps – but I think that the success of Luther among all parts of the population lies in this message.

62 Ibid., Sp. 1785.

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