

Preface and Acknowledgments

A LUTHER SCHOLAR I claim not to be, but Martin Luther, the man and his theology, has been an integral part of my vocational career, a risk of my choosing. From the first published academic article under my name, four decades ago, to my present recurring involvement with research, teaching, programs, and boards associated with Lutheran theology, the sixteenth-century Reformer intermittently revisits my daily work as a theologian with inter- and transdisciplinary proclivities. Luther's texts, each distinct, with its own hue and shape, are all in movement not synchronically but each at its own pace toward what for Luther was the core—the knowledge of Christ or justice of Christ. To this end I have nudged some of Luther's texts in their movement, taking care not to change their hue or shape but translating them for our times, all the while acknowledging that I might have been a traitor in the process, which I cannot but be.

I will continue to be a chronicler and a translator of Luther, not to iconize him or to replant the sixteenth-century Luther in the twenty-first century but to see him come alive in our contexts. Thus, this book does not enclose Luther between its covers; rather, it presents an interim report on a project that I, along with a score of colleagues laboring in these labyrinthine ambits, received incomplete, and as such will leave it still unfinished for others to put on the mantle when our term is up and the labor done. Nevertheless, the need to publish this intermezzo is of importance even as my research on Luther persists, revealing ever new glimpses into the theology of this enigmatic and yet serendipitous and insightful thinker. These pages are thus both a revisitiation of the past and an invitation to a new orientation. It is a revisitiation since a glimpse into the past at this juncture is opportune for Lutheran theology and its heritage, where remembrance is done not just for the sake of recollection but to enable a radical encounter with the past so as to take a stance in current history. This intermezzo is thus also an invitation to direct the gaze to a beam of light projected onto trails

untrodden and paths often deviating from the highway Lutheranism and Lutheran theology have historically journeyed.

My hope is that the present text will lead to fresh research into new directions; yet this novelty does not necessarily surpass what has been brought to light in other circumstances and for other occasions. To indicate their resilience is the task of chroniclers who raise signals, positioning themselves neither as curators of a monumental memory nor as champions carrying forward the torch of the historical march of a weighty tradition. Chroniclers tell stories as if the chambermaids of those history acclaims as heroes. Their gaze is of a third, neither that of detached “objectivity,” of “what really happened,” nor that of the cheerleaders of celebrities. They register and store occasions in which transfigurations occurred; historically inscribed circumstances etch their imprint in other settings, coming there to life. Chroniclers acknowledge and commit these transfiguring events to memory.

For disdainful detractors, discontent with Lutheranism and its theology, this text may be awkwardly confessional; yet it is an announcement of the advent of an unsuspected companion for the journey, or rather the detection of its presence. As for the Luther aficionados, these chapters will be seen as affected by improper methodological flâneur, or even heterodoxy, yet they announce that it is time for taking on other templates, as the old are passing away.

Many of the arguments in the text found their way to select publics in previous installments and, importantly, were written for those contexts. Reformulating the essays and lacing them together into a new and cogent whole that is different than the sum of its parts has been rewarding. A good number of these texts have resulted from my engagement with the Lutheran World Federation, especially with the Department of Theology and Public Witness (formerly the Department of Theology and Studies), and I sincerely thank the communion for the privilege to be part of its work in drafting the contours of a living Lutheran theology in the planetary communion. I am also deeply indebted to the following publications/institutions for granting permission to collect the ideas here, presented in a new light:

Cambridge Scholar’s Publishing: “Luther and the Apocalyptic,” in *On the Apocalyptic and Human Agency: Conversations with Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther* (2015);

Pickwick Publications: “Planet Luther: Challenges and Promises for a Lutheran Global Identity,” in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* (2014);

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Fortress Press: “Power and Politics: Incursions into Luther’s Theology,” in *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times* (2009); “The Word and the Mask: Revisiting the Two-Kingdoms Doctrine,” in *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (2005);

Word and World: “The Weeping Mask: Ecological Crisis and the View of Nature” (1991).

Mentors and guides, friends and partners in conversation who helped bring my thoughts to fruition are, needless to say, too numerous to mention, and not a few even elude consciousness. Naming always runs the risk of oversight, unintended though it might be. However, past and present companions I bring along—some I have named in the text and footnotes; others have left their imprints anonymously but are nonetheless present. From the named and unnamed I seek leniency if my use of their guidance led me to places they had not intended.

Professor David Tracy honored me with a foreword to this book—to him the thanks of an admirer.

This work would not have found its way to the public were it not for the work of Professor Mary Philip, who is *de facto* editor of this volume and whose dedication to bring it to completion will remain not properly accredited.

I also acknowledge the three institutions where I held concurrent appointments from 2011 to 2015: The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; Faculdades EST, in Brazil; and Århus University, in Denmark. To these institutions, their faculty, staff, and administration, my sincere thanks for their invaluable support and friendship.

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As I continue my journey I leave these scripts as signs by the side of the path I am trodding; they are not tombstones, for these signposts point to the horizon ahead.