

1

Introduction: Remembering the Past— Living the Future

CARL-HENRIC GRENHOLM & GÖRAN GUNNER

Lutheran tradition has been of immense importance not just within the churches in quite a lot of countries worldwide but also for society and culture in general. Ideas within Reformation theology have in various ways influenced education, health care, attitudes to work, economy, and politics. This impact of Lutheran tradition has been based on particular theological positions that have been developed in different ways. Some of these positions are the doctrine of justification by grace alone, the idea that the Bible has a particular role as a source for theological reflection, the doctrine of original sin, the idea of a sharp difference between law and gospel, and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

The Reformation Jubilee in 2017 will give an opportunity to celebrate the importance of Lutheran tradition within the churches and in the society. It is an opportunity to remember what happened 500 years ago and to analyze the meaning of Reformation, its main theological ideas, and its societal consequences. However, it is also an opportunity to make a critical evaluation of Lutheran tradition. How are different theological positions within this tradition to be evaluated today? What role can the Reformation predict for the future? What would be a reasonable Lutheran position in a multicultural and post-Christian society?

Lutheran tradition emerged in a sharp opposition towards the Catholic Church. The theological and ethical reflection of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon is characterized by their critique of certain positions within

2 Justification in a Post-Christian Society

Catholic theology. An alternative interpretation of Christian faith was developed in a society where the Church had a considerable political power and where the impact of Christianity on culture was immense. Theological disagreements were important, and they were taken seriously by those in political power.

After the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Lutheran tradition has had a great impact on culture and politics in many societies. This is particularly true in Germany and the Nordic countries, where the political power has been allied to the Lutheran Churches. These churches have often been state churches, which mean that they seldom have developed a critique of those in political power. At the same time Lutheran churches had a great impact on personal faith as well as on basic moral conviction. Within some societies almost all of the citizens were members of the Lutheran church, and its interpretation of Christian faith was mostly taken for granted.

Today, society is quite different. In many Protestant countries in the Western hemisphere the secularization is apparent and it is often adequate to argue that it is a post-Christian society. There has been a separation between church and state in many countries, and the position of Christianity in culture and society is rather weak. Only a minority of citizens today would say that they share a Christian belief. At the same time the society is multicultural, which means that different cultures exist in a close relationship in the same community, often as a result of migration. In this multicultural society there is an obvious religious and moral pluralism, which means that there is no longer a shared system of beliefs and values.

How should we evaluate Lutheran tradition in today's multicultural and post-Christian society? Is it possible to develop a Lutheran theological position that can be regarded as reasonable in a society which involves the considerable weakening of the role of Christianity? What are the challenges raised by cultural diversity for a Lutheran theology and a Lutheran ethical position that makes claims to adequacy? Is it possible to develop a Lutheran identity in a multicultural society, and is there any fruitful Lutheran contribution to the coexistence of different religious and non-religious traditions in the future?

These questions were discussed at an international conference in Uppsala during October 8–10, 2013, on the theme “Remembering the Past—Living the Future. Lutheran Tradition in Transition.” The conference was hosted by the Church of Sweden Research Unit and the Department of Theology at Uppsala University. During the conference almost two hundred participants from all parts of the world discussed issues concerning the interpretation and relevance of Lutheran theology and ethics today and in the future. Lectures were given and papers presented on eight different themes:

(1) Lutheran theology and ethics in a post-Christian society, (2) the Bible in Lutheran tradition, (3) Lutheran identity in a global world, (4) Reformation as a model for interpretation of the present, (5) Lutheran theology and politics, (6) atonement, reconciliation, and forgiveness, (7) Lutheran tradition and tolerance, and (8) Lutheran tradition and gender.

It is important to note that this was not a conference on Luther and his theology. Rather, it was a conference on Lutheran tradition and its possible relevance today. Some of the papers presented at the conference did analyze the theological positions of Luther himself. However, most of the papers dealt with later developments within Lutheran theology. When Luther's theology was discussed, the purpose was not to recapitulate his ideas for a credible theological position today. On the contrary, the purpose was to give a fair interpretation of his ideas and then to make a critical evaluation of his theology. It is obvious that there are ideas in Luther's theology that we can learn from today, but it is also obvious that we have to criticize many of the theological positions developed in his writings.

During the Luther renaissance in Germany and the Nordic countries, one hundred years ago, the idea was to get a thorough understanding of the theological positions of Luther himself, behind the later development in Lutheran tradition that often was criticized. At the same time the idea was often that it is possible to give a constructive contribution to a reasonable theological position through an interpretation of Luther's theology. Today it is necessary to make a strict distinction between the task to give a fair description of ideas within Reformation theology and the constructive task to elaborate a Lutheran theology that can be regarded as reasonable in a multicultural society.

This means that in celebrating the Reformation Jubilee there is a need not only to remember what happened in the sixteenth century. It is also necessary to make a critical evaluation of the past and discuss what would be a reasonable Lutheran position in the future. This implies a critique both of Luther himself and some positions in later Lutheran tradition. Today, Lutheran theology is interpreted in different ways in various cultural and social contexts, and sometimes it is hard to determine what a Lutheran identity stands for in a global world. Therefore, it is urgent to evaluate this tradition and try to find out what a tenable Lutheran theology would look like in a post-Christian society.

The conference in Uppsala on "Remembering the Past—Living the Future" has resulted in two volumes based upon some of the lectures and papers presented. The volume on *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* deals with the issues of Lutheran identity in a global world, Lutheran tradition and gender, and the possibilities to develop a Lutheran political

4 Justification in a Post-Christian Society

theology. In this volume on *Justification in a Post-Christian Society* three main problems are discussed. How should we today interpret the doctrine of atonement and justification by grace alone? What would be a fruitful formation of Lutheran theology and ethics in today's post-Christian society? How has the history of Reformation been interpreted and how can narratives about Reformation be used to justify modern beliefs and attitudes?

JUSTIFICATION, ATONEMENT, AND RECONCILIATION

The first theme of this book concerns the doctrine of justification by grace alone. This is often understood to be the central doctrine in Lutheran theology and the heart of Lutheran identity. At the same time the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) has created a vivid discussion on different interpretations of this doctrine today. Is a "forensic" interpretation of this doctrine tenable or does the justification imply a union with Christ that renews the believer by making her righteous? How should we today understand the Reformation formula that the believer is simultaneously righteous and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*)?

Various interpretations of the doctrine of justification are often related to different understandings of atonement, reconciliation, and the role of the death of Jesus on the cross. Some interpretations of atonement seem to be rather controversial in theology today. Is it reasonable to argue that the love of God presupposes the suffering and the brutal death of his beloved Son? Should atonement be understood in terms of a theory of satisfaction? Does the atoning activity of God in Christ presuppose total passivity on the human side? These problems concerning our interpretation of atonement are in Lutheran theology related to different understandings of the doctrine of justification.

Chapter Two, written by Christoph Schwöbel, takes as its starting point the challenges that Lutheran churches are confronted with in a multicultural society. How should we understand Lutheran identity in a society where different cultures exist in a relationship of coexistence? Schwöbel argues that important for understanding Lutheran identity is the emphasis on God's word, God's work, and God's being as promise. God's justice as the justice by which God makes sinners just means a communication of grace. God's promise connects creation, redemption, and sanctification, and it can be understood as gift, address, and enablement to cooperate with the promises of God.

In Lutheran theology promise and trust are inextricably linked, according to Schwöbel. He argues that humans are trusting animals and that faith can be understood as radical trust in God. Justification is possible

through faith alone, and faith is contrasted to everything human beings can achieve on the basis of their own powers. This understanding of God's promise and trust is central in Lutheran theology, and it also constitutes the Lutheran contribution to life in a multicultural society. Its implication is that the identity of human persons is not established by their differences from other people. Human identity is rooted in the relationship of God to particular persons, which has the form of the promise of enduring identity in all the changing situations of life.

The next chapter, which is written by Christine Helmer, gives a critical analysis of some important interpretations of the doctrine of justification in Lutheran theology. The basic question in this chapter is if experience and justification is a category mistake. Helmer discusses why Lutheran theology has lost the notion of experience in relation to justification. This is done by a careful analysis of the understanding of justification on the writings of three influential theologians in the beginning and the end of the twentieth century, namely Karl Holl, Oswald Bayer, and George Lindbeck. Helmer's conclusion is that there is a shift in the Lutheran theological concept of experience. Holl introduced Luther scholarship to the possibility of constructing a concept of religious experience. However, at the end of the century religious experience is generic and unarticulated, and antithetical to linguistically articulated doctrinal truth.

Against this background Christine Helmer discusses possibilities for thinking anew how justification can be experienced. Her thesis is that we need new insights into what counts as religious experience, and more accurate appreciation of the religious dimension of experience. According to Helmer, a Lutheran theology of justification much work out a more complex dialectic between faith and experience that makes room for the religious development of the self. It must also move beyond a restricted semantics of justification to experiential dimensions of the self, such as emotions, physical postures, relationship with the divine. Human experiences cannot be immune to the divine work of justification.

Different interpretations of the doctrine of atonement are in focus in Chapter Four, written by Antje Jackelén. She mentions some of the obstacles that have been identified for a consistent presentation of the atonement in a contemporary global context. One is the idea that the love of God is expressed in the brutal death of his beloved Son. Another is the complete denial of the human potential to do good that seems to be presupposed by the theory of atonement. A third obstacle is the idea of Christ substituting for depraved humankind, which seems to imply a strange kind of human passivity and collectivism.

6 Justification in a Post-Christian Society

Antje Jackelén argues that post-Einsteinian notions of time may contribute to the theological attempts to cope with some of these obstacles. Einstein's theories of relativity gave a new perspective on the relational character of time, which was quite different from Newton's conception of absolute time. An adoption of post-Einsteinian notions of time would according to Jackelén be productive in several areas of theology. It can inspire theology to focus on the comparative and relationally instead of looking for the absolute and correct superlatives. This post-Einsteinian theological approach would also make it easier to deal with some of the problems concerning atonement theory.

Cheryl M. Peterson argues in Chapter Five that healing can be a fruitful image for the atonement. In Lutheran tradition a forensic interpretation of the doctrine of justification has been dominant, and the atonement has been interpreted in a similar way. However, these interpretations have ignored the personal nature of forgiveness and a relational view of salvation. Considering healing as an image for the atonement would, according to Peterson, better address the human predicament in more relational and transformational ways. The language of healing as an atonement image would also be adequate in our context today, both in the west and in the global south.

Cheryl M. Peterson gives a critical analysis of different atonement theories in the past and the present. She clarifies the problems related to the Latin view, the subjective view, and the classic patristic view. Her thesis is that atonement theories have always been contextual. In a new cultural context we need images and metaphors that are more appropriate. The language of healing could be such a possibility, and it can help bringing together the objective and the subjective aspects of atonement. In Lutheran theology, Peterson argues, it would be possible to affirm healing as a metaphor for the doctrines of justification and atonement, if healing is understood relationally.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

The second theme of this book concerns the understanding of Lutheran theology and ethics in a post-Christian society. This theme is related to a research project at Uppsala University that has studied important ideas in Lutheran theology. One aim has been to analyze some main theological and ethical positions that can be found in Martin Luther's own thought. Another purpose has been to analyze how these ideas have been further developed in later Lutheran tradition. A third objective has been to critically

assess different positions in Lutheran tradition and to constructively tackle the question as to what a fruitful formation of Lutheran theology and ethics could look like in today's post-Christian and multicultural society.

It is quite obvious that theological and ethical positions in Martin Luther's thought have been developed in various ways in later Lutheran tradition. This tradition contains a variety of interpretations and is by no means uniform. Today we have to critically evaluate these different positions anew from the perspectives of a post-Christian and multi-cultural society. Is it possible to formulate Lutheran theological and ethical positions that can be considered reasonable in a society that involves the considerable weakening of the role of Christianity? What would be a reasonable Lutheran approach in a multicultural society where it is necessary to establish a dialogue with a large number of different religious and non-religious traditions?

In Chapter Six Carl-Henric Grenholm argues that the sharp distinction between law and gospel should be challenged within a Lutheran ethical reflection in a post-Christian society. He gives a critical analysis of the ethical theories that are elaborated by three influential Lutheran theologians, namely Paul Althaus, Helmut Thielicke, and Gustaf Wingren. All of them argue in favor of an ethical theory that is primarily based on reason and the doctrine of creation. The gospel and the conception of God's love in Christ are not regarded to give any new substantial contribution to the contents of ethics. This position is combined with a political ethic which is uncritical towards the existing political power.

Grenholm argues that a more tenable ethical theory in Lutheran tradition should be based not only on creation but also on Christology and Eschatology. This means that the opposition between law and gospel should be challenged, as far as it means that the gospel does not have any implications for the content of ethics. The doctrine of the two kingdoms should be abandoned in such a way that the conception of God's love and the idea of human equality, which are important in the gospel about Christ, become relevant also within political ethics. Thereby, Lutheran ethics could be an inspiration for social critique.

In the next chapter Eva-Lotta Grantén discusses what a reasonable Lutheran understanding of original sin would be today. Is it possible to defend a doctrine of original sin in a society where a scientific world view is widely accepted? Her thesis is that a post-Christian and pluralist society challenges Lutheran theology to renegotiate its understanding of original sin. One challenge is raised by the historical critical method in biblical exegesis. Old Testament scholars unite in describing the Eden narrative as a myth that does not give a historical account of something that really happened. Another challenge is raised by evolutionary theory. From this perspective

8 Justification in a Post-Christian Society

the fall is not a historical event, and there is no clear point in history where sin entered.

According to Grantén, Lutheran theology can learn from Reinhold Niebuhr and Ted Peters how to renegotiate the content of original sin. Niebuhr gives a clarifying analysis of the ambivalence in the human situation as finite freedom, connected to a condition of anxiety and lack of meaning. From this perspective it is possible to develop an interpretation of original sin that is compatible with modern biblical exegesis and insights from evolutionary theory. At the same time a reasonable Lutheran doctrine of sin today should be able to connect to people's experience, and it should be true to its heritage.

Karin Johannesson discusses in Chapter Eight the possibilities to develop a Lutheran spiritual theology in a post-Christian society. Spiritual training seems to be controversial in Lutheran tradition, since Luther fought forcefully against the belief that human undertakings such as spiritual exercises can strengthen a person's relationship to God. However, there are interpretations of Luther's understanding of sanctification that make it possible to encourage some kind of spiritual training. Johannesson gives an analysis of three such interpretations, namely those put forward by Tuomo Mannermaa, Arvid Runestam, and Rudolf Hermann.

According to Mannermaa, the leading idea in Luther's theology is his insistence on Christ's real presence in faith, and his conception of sanctification is corresponding to the notion of *theosis*, that is divinization. Runestam argues that Luther understands sanctification as a certain extension of the freedom of a Christian, and from this perspective he emphasized the value of asceticism. According to Hermann, Luther understands sanctification as a time-concept, which means that it is a process of increased dialogue with Christ in prayer. Johannesson argues that the position of Hermann is the most fruitful, since there are vital flaws in the other two alternatives. From this perspective it is possible to maintain that spiritual training in the form of praying to Christ can contribute to the believer's growth in faith.

Two chapters deal with the question how to elaborate a reasonable model of Lutheran ethics in a post-Christian and multicultural society. James M. Childs, Jr. starts with an analysis of what it means that society is post-Christian. He refers to Charles Taylor, who has provided an important account of the impact of secularity upon the status of religion in Western society. For some this points to a post-Christian society where people are leaving the faith. For others, like Jürgen Habermas, it is a post-secular society in which religion still flourishes but in an atmosphere of societal indifference. All agree that it is a post-Christian and pluralistic society.

Childs argues that a vital theologically grounded Lutheran ethic in this context is one of active solidarity with human needs and those of the planet itself. This is Bonhoeffer's "church for others" following the Christ who was the "human for others." The posture of servanthood in the spirituality of Luther's theology of the cross can speak dialogically across the gap between the traditional language of the faith and the multiple voices of pluralism. Lutheran theologians like Helmut Thielicke and Gustaf Wingren have, according to Childs, corrected the quietism of earlier generations. He also argues that eschatological theologies such as Pannenberg's have further paved the way for engagement with the world as central to the church's vocation.

Finally, Richard J. Perry, Jr. argues that physicality can be a new model for Lutheran ethics in a multicultural global world. This is a model for articulating Lutheran ethics that has been developed by some African and European American elders, who carried their bodies from the sanctuary of their churches to the street where God was also active with demonstrators for justice. Physicality means the act of intentionally placing one's body into public spaces as a means of expressing concerns for justice in the world. It emerges out of the lived experiences of poor and marginalized people, and it renews our contemporary and future witness for racial justice and equality.

Perry reflects on the fifteenth anniversary commemoration of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement. The movement developed a method for seeking racial justice in society, from which Lutheran ethics today can learn a great deal. Perry describes the practice of physicality by some Lutheran elders at this time, namely Andrew Schultze, Joseph Ellwager, and Will Herzfeld. Participating in public actions against racial segregation they developed a model for articulating Lutheran ethics, which can be of great importance in a global multicultural world.

REFORMATION AS A MODEL FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PRESENT

The third theme of this volume concerns Reformation as a model for interpretation of the present. What we now call the Reformation comprises a large number of disparate narratives, constantly reinterpreted for different purposes. In keeping with present-day demands and challenges, these stories can be used to justify beliefs, attitudes, behavior patterns, power, and communities. This means that Reformation can be interpreted differently, depending upon the perspectives and intentions of the interpreter. Ideas within the Reformation can also be used to support opposite positions.

How has the history of Reformation been used and how is it constantly transformed? In what ways have the Middle Ages been constructed as an

antithesis to the modern era that began with the Reformation? How should we understand the relationship between Luther's theology and the modern project of secularization? In what ways have his ideas been utilized both to legitimize power and to criticize a system with an autocratic ruler? Can Lutheran tradition give a constructive contribution to the controversies about the values of modernity that are so typical of pluralist societies today? These are some of the questions discussed in this theme.

In Chapter Eleven Niels Henrik Gregersen discusses the contemporary status of religion in everyday life by referring to Charles Taylor's analysis of different meanings of secularity. A typical phenomenon today is the "disincarnation of belief," especially in Protestant countries. The disembodiment of spiritual life, "excarnation," is a point of departure for everyday secularity. In this society an important question is if Protestantism should define itself as the archetype of disembodied faith. There is without doubt a Protestantism without blood and flesh, in which faith is understood primarily as an individualized attitude of faith and inner freedom vis-à-vis church and society.

However, Gregersen argues, there is also a Protestantism of blood and flesh which knows that faith, hope, and love can only thrive in and through social forms of embodiment. This is a Protestantism that knows that faith can never be a purely private affair. Gregersen argues that this Protestantism of flesh and blood is expressed in Martin Luther's theology of creation as well as in his Eucharistic theology. Luther interprets the Christian faith as thoroughly embodied in the three life-circles of the human person, the social realm, and the wider drama of creation. From this perspective faith is always lived as emerging from tradition, as environmentally sensitive, as socially embedded, and as psychosomatically embodied.

Knut Alfsvåg argues in the next chapter that a substantial critique of late medieval *via moderna* was an important part of the intellectual development of the young Luther. There are contemporary scholars, like John Milbank and Alasdair MacIntyre, who have criticized Luther for having expressed his theology by grace alone in a way that either implies a kind of philosophical vacuum or anticipates the modern project of secularization. Alfsvåg argues that this interpretation of Luther is wrong, and that there are clear parallels between the critique of modernity in Luther, Milbank, and MacIntyre.

According to Alfsvåg, Luther is well aware of the philosophical implications of a theology of grace and explores them in detail. One may argue that the young Luther is much better at deconstructing the contradictions of *via moderna* than in presenting a consistent alternative. This changes, however, with Luther's evangelical breakthrough, which gives his thought an incarnational depth that informs even his theology of creation. The work

of the mature Luther should therefore not be read as an anticipation of the modern idea of the secular. Alfsvåg argues that there are two important theologians who in the context of modernity repeat Luther's Christologically informed double emphasis of the limit and reliability of human reason, namely Johann Georg Hamann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

In Chapter Thirteen, Urban Claesson argues that there are possible links between the Lutheran theology and later ideas of the Enlightenment, and that one of these links is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Claesson explores the conflict between the Swedish state and the priest Jacob Boëthius that came to surface in 1697, when Luther's teaching of the priesthood of all believers gained providence for formulating critique against a system with an autocratic ruler. According to Boëthius' perception of this Lutheran doctrine, all Christians had to criticize and admonish each other in order to help each other living holy lives. For Boëthius this also included the right to criticize the king.

As a way to institutionalize the priesthood of all believers within the political system Boëthius suggested a new form of national meeting. The king ought to be responsible in front of this national congregation and its opinions. Claesson argues that this model anticipates later and secularized versions of forming public opinion and establishing national parliaments. This means that this interpretation of the priesthood of all believers can be seen as a link between Lutheran theology and ideas of Enlightenment. Luther's theology was not only used by states to legitimize power—it also provided tools for critique of those in political power.

Luther's commentary on the *Magnificat* is analyzed in a chapter by Elina Vuola. She compares this commentary with contemporary interpretations of the Virgin Mary in the writings of some Catholic Latin American liberation theologians. There are two reasons to make this comparison. First, the silence about Mary and her absence in the Lutheran tradition need to be rethought in relation to Luther's own texts. A critical reflection on Luther's Mariology can make his theology more relevant for contemporary discussions about gender and social justice. Secondly, theological reflection on Mariology can be a contribution—and not an obstacle—to ecumenical relationships.

According to Vuola, Luther both agrees with pre-Reformation ecumenical Mariology and has Mariological interpretations of his own. The latter is especially clear in his commentary of the *Magnificat*. The double emphasis on Mary as the ordinary, even "lowly," woman and as the paragon of faith can be found in both Luther and liberation theology. Even if there are some differences between Luther and liberation theology, there are important similarities that may point to the possibility of an ecumenical

Mariology, which starts with the experiences of ordinary Christians, especially the marginalized and oppressed.

The final chapter in this volume is written by Henning Theißen. He offers a relecture of the ecclesiological key article of the *Augsburg Confession*, preceded by some reflections on why present day theologians consider the confessional writings from the Reformation period meaningful for their work in the early twenty-first century. Theißen gives a perspective on recent debates on Reformation theory, and then he gives a careful analysis of CA 7 and its concept of the true unity of the church. The purpose of the chapter is to transfer some fresh ideas from historiographical Reformation theory to dogmatic ecclesiology.

According to Theißen, particularly Thomas Kaufmann's concept of a Lutheran "confessional culture" seems apt to embed the doctrinal approach to church theory into a broader framework of religious, social, and political values. The main thesis of the chapter is that this confessional heritage enables present day Lutheranism to make a constructive contribution to the controversies about the values of modernity that are so typical of the pluralist societies most Lutherans find themselves in today. These controversies over values require exactly that kind of communication Lutherans are perfectly acquainted with due to what Theißen has identified as the freedom of conscience in Protestant ministry. This means that Lutherans have a particular expertise in "unity in reconciled diversity."