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Introduction

Lutheran Tradition in Transition

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With the Reformation Jubilee in 2017 in mind, there is a need for critical evaluation of the Lutheran tradition, which has been of great importance not just within the churches but also for society and culture in general. Lutheran tradition has in various ways influenced attitudes to work, the economy, the state, education, and health care. How should this tradition be evaluated in the contemporary multicultural and post-Christian society? What can be learned from this tradition today and what should be criticized? What are the characteristics of Lutheran identity five hundred years after the Reformation?

Lutheran tradition has never been uniform. Of course, there are some basic theological positions that are summarized in *Confessio Augustana* and developed in the writings of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon. Some of these are the doctrine of justification by grace alone, the conviction that the Bible is a primary source of the content of theology, and the sharp distinction between law and gospel. However, these positions have been interpreted in different ways in later Lutheran tradition. Some of the positions of the Luther orthodoxy in the seventeenth century were questioned by pietism, in search of an interpretation of faith that made experiences and piety more important than rational considerations. The Luther renaissance in the beginning of the twentieth century was to a high degree influenced by neo-Kantianism, which later on was criticized by neo-orthodoxy.

One reason that Lutheran theology has been interpreted in various ways is that it is always influenced by the surrounding social and cultural context. Questions that need to be dealt with in theological reflection are of different kinds depending on the particular social context in which they are raised. Experiences, perspectives, and concepts are often related to particular cultures, and the result is that theological positions are interpreted in many various ways. From feminist theology and postcolonial theory we can learn that differences in social positions and inequalities related to power structures have a great impact also on the understanding of theological conceptions.

The Lutheran tradition was originally formed in Northern Europe. In Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland Lutheran churches have had a strong position in society, often with a close relationship between state and church. Later on, Lutheran churches became rather strong also in the USA, even if they are not majority churches. Mainstream Lutheran theologies have developed in Northern Europe and the USA, as a response to issues raised in this particular cultural and social context. Therefore Lutheran theology has often been formed by perspectives and experiences within Western culture.

However, migration and missionary activities have led to the formation of many Lutheran churches also in the Global South. These churches are often minority churches, living in societies quite different from Northern Europe and the USA. Many of these Lutheran churches are growing rapidly, and soon their members will be the majority of Lutherans in the world. They are struggling with issues that are different from those that are regarded to be important in Western societies. Since they are minority churches one urgent issue is how they should relate to other religions. Since they are living in societies with great social problems and economic inequalities they need to reflect upon their political role and their possibilities to contribute to the liberation from oppression and poverty.

How should we understand Lutheran identity in this global world? Do minority churches in the global South understand their identity in a different way than majority churches in Northern Europe and the USA? What are the new theological perspectives that are developed within Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Is it possible to develop a Lutheran political theology that gives adequate contributions to issues concerning social and economic justice? What is the role of women in church and society around the world? Is it possible to interpret Lutheran theology in such a way that it includes liberating perspectives?

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 Lutheran identity and different interpretations of Lutheran theology. 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.

The question of Lutheran identity is raised in two different contexts. It is raised in Western societies that can be characterized as being post-Christian and multicultural. In a society where the church has lost a great deal of its cultural impact and authority, and where there is a plurality of religious convictions, it is urgent to find out what is the Lutheran identity. However, this question is also raised in the Global South where Lutheran churches need to find their identity in a relationship with several other religions. Here this relationship is developed from a minority perspective.

In the Global South the question concerning Lutheran identity is closely related to the question regarding the role of the church in society and politics. Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are not always living in liberal societies, where the state is said to be secular. Instead they are living in societies where religion usually has a great impact on political issues. How should Lutherans in these societies understand their role in society and the public arena? Is it possible to develop a distinct Lutheran social doctrine that can give interesting contributions to urgent political issues? And how should Lutheran churches in Europe and USA understand their political role in a post-secular society that is often said to be characterized by the return of religion?

Finally the question concerning Lutheran political theology is closely related to the question of Lutheran tradition and gender. The patriarchal principle in Lutheran ethics has meant not only that Lutheran churches often have supported those in political power. It has also meant a defense of male superiority over women. Mainstream theology in Lutheran theology has most often been developed by men, who did not criticize these patriarchal power structures. Therefore it is urgent to develop a Lutheran feminist theology that articulate those liberating perspectives that can be found also in the theology of Martin Luther.

The conference in Uppsala on “Lutheran Tradition in Transition” has resulted in two volumes based upon some of the lectures and papers

presented. The volume on *Justification in a Post-Christian Society* deals with the issues of justification and atonement, Lutheran theology and ethics in a post-Christian society, and Reformation as a model for interpretation of the present. In this volume on *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* three main problems are discussed. How should we understand Lutheran identity in the contemporary global world? Are there perspectives in Lutheran theology that can contribute to the liberation of women and a critique of traditional patriarchal power structures? Is it possible to develop a Lutheran political theology that does not support existing authorities?

LUTHERAN IDENTITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

The first theme of this book is Lutheran identity in a global world. The changes in the religious arena in the world today mean serious challenges for Lutheran churches. Traditionally, Lutheran identity has been formed in Northern Europe, where the churches have been in majority and where they often have had a close relation with the state. However, today the Lutheran churches are growing in the Global South. Most of the Lutheran churches are today minority churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Some of them have been established by immigration or as a result of missionary activity, and today they are independent churches working in contexts that are quite different from the societies in Northern Europe and the USA.

What are the new challenges facing Lutheran churches around the world today? What does it mean to be Lutheran in the contemporary global world, and how should we understand Lutheran identity from a minority perspective in the South? Are there in different social and cultural contexts different understandings of what it means to be a Lutheran? In what way do different social contexts imply various conceptions of the main tasks of Lutheran churches? How may multiple identities be both a challenge and a resource for Lutherans globally?

In Chapter Two Vitor Westhelle argues that when the majority of Lutherans in the world will be situated in the South, new theological questions are being formulated that conventional answers can no longer address. Luther's theology can be a resource to deal with some of these new challenges originating from new contexts, but a prerequisite is a theological approach that is aware of those issues that are important in the Global South. Westhelle introduces some areas in which Luther's theology might have some relevance in the contexts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

One such area is freedom and liberation. According to Westhelle, what Luther said about freedom is rather close to the liberation motif that has characterized theologies shaped in the third world to a large extent. Another

area is Luther's theology of the cross and his understanding of Christ's real presence, which can be made relevant for a theology in a planetary perspective. Luther's conception of the three institutional spheres, namely the church, the economy, and politics, can also be interpreted in such a way that they are relevant, not only in modern and secularized Western societies, but also in other societies where Lutheranism is growing today. Here the church can be regarded to be a third sphere that keeps the economy and politics in relation, but still distinctly apart.

The next chapter, which is written by Göran Gunner, describes what are perceived to be substantial problems or important issues at stake within a sample of Lutheran churches around the world. What are regarded to be burning issues by Lutheran churches in different cultural contexts and different kinds of societies? It is quite obvious that there are a variety of opinions concerning what are the most important issues, depending on membership number and social context. Minority churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America seem to face other challenges than majority churches in traditional European contexts.

One burning issue in many Lutheran churches is the situation of women in society and in the church. Some churches in Africa are growing rapidly and regard it important to increase growth, while some churches in the European context try to find ways to reverse the decrease in membership. Churches in the Global South are struggling to develop a Lutheran identity that is not dependent of Western culture. Several minority churches are dealing with issues concerning their relationship to Muslim majorities, and issues regarding the relationship between church and state are important in various contexts. The most common burning issue raised is related to the role of the church in the surrounding society, but minority churches have different perspectives on this issue than Lutheran churches in Northern Europe.

A different perspective on the role of Lutheran churches in the Global South is given by Ville Päivänsalo in Chapter Four. He explores some ways in which Christian identity has been expressed in the health work documents of the Lutheran churches and faith-based organizations in Tanzania and India. Even if some Lutheran accounts of health and development differ from each other significantly, Päivänsalo argues that a good part of the variation that shapes this work across cultures can be taken as theological richness rather than a problem. A wide array of Lutheran health work documents tell about a complementary unity, which means that even if perspectives vary and many agencies are minimalistic in terms of explicit faith, the statements do not tend to contradict each other.

Päivänsalo shows that both the Tanzanian and the Indian churches tell about the basis of faith of their health work rather extensively, even if the explored documents depict the pragmatic work in a largely non-confessional manner. He identifies both some important theological perspectives on the right to health, and some practical perspectives on Lutheran health work. One of his conclusions is that health work will be an important task for Lutheran churches in the Global South also in the future. Even if, for example, leprosy has almost been beaten and the global struggle against the HIV/AIDS pandemic has shown some signs of success, the health rights of the globally poor are still usually poorly fulfilled. Exploring the core aspects of the Lutheran health work so far can serve further ventures towards comprehensive visions of Lutheran responses to health-related human needs tomorrow.

Michael R. Trice discusses in Chapter Five what a productive Lutheran theology would look like in the contemporary post-Christian world. This is a world where more people believe in God than have a religion that expresses their belief, and where they are disassociated from organized religious life. Trice argues that there are three general characteristics of this post-Christian world. One is that the authority of the Church is a problem, since the Church is regarded to be a choice among an aggregation of choices in a world of pluralism. A second marker is a disconnection between “the story of God and us” and a world that may not find this story relevant. A third marker of a post-Christian world is a struggle for the coherence of an enclosed identity.

From this perspective Michael R. Trice discusses what a portal for Lutheran identity would need to be in a post-Christian world. His proposal is that Lutheran communities should address five questions aligned to the markers of authority, story, and identity. They need to consider how they understand the identity of the individual and the identity of the community of the believers. They need to reflect on the story of being human on this planet today, and they should also try to find out what is the radical question for the world tomorrow. A fourth question concerns our resources for responding to God’s hope for the world, and the fifth question is what we should be doing as the highest aspiration of our vocational response to a loving God.

LUTHERAN TRADITION AND GENDER

The second theme of this book concerns Lutheran tradition and gender. The issues of gender and Reformation have been a subject of interest both to historical scholars and systematic theologians. Did the Reformation in any

way contribute to the emancipation and liberation of women in church and society? Or did Lutheran theology mainly affirm traditional and patriarchal gender roles? These questions are not only of interest within historical research. Various versions of feminism have also an interest in analyzing the Reformation and its theologies in relation to gender.

Within feminist theology a crucial issue is if there are any liberating aspects of Lutheran theology in relation to gender and politics today. Are there any perspectives in Lutheran theology that can contribute to the liberation of women and a critique of patriarchal power structures? Or does feminist theology today presuppose a thorough critique of main positions within Lutheran theology? Within feminist studies there are different conceptions on these issues, and some of them are reflected in the contributions to this volume. However, the contributors seem to agree that even if there are ambivalences in the theology of Martin Luther, there are at least some liberating aspects in Lutheran theology.

In Chapter Six, Kirsi Stjerna argues that the emancipatory power of Lutheran theology rests on the core idea of justification by faith through grace. The diversity in the interpretation of this idea can be seen as a cause of celebration rather than a concern. From this perspective Stjerna argues that inclusivity, spirituality, and equality are core values within Lutheran theology. Inclusivity means the participation of women in Lutheran theological reflection. Spiritual theology involves the component of experience and entails a mystical dimension, which can nurture expectations of equality and inclusivity. The principle of equality can be regarded to be an implication of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith.

After reflecting on these three core values, Stjerna discusses what we can learn from the Reformation women and their theological concerns. Her thesis is that these women can exemplify the bearings of inclusivity, spirituality, and equality in the Reformation theological tradition. Of particular interest are two female theologians of the Reformation century, namely Argula von Grumbach and Katharina Schütz Zell. These women operated as situational biblically authorized lay theologians, and they applied protestant theology most notably in their defense of the vulnerable and the suffering. Thereby they speak to the transforming and emancipating power of faith and religious experience.

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen argues in Chapter Seven that there are liberating aspects in Lutheran theology for a post-gender politics. By such a post-gender politics her aim is to go beyond any specific gender theories and rather employ an approach to which *homo*, the human being, is the main category. Her thesis is that it is possible to highlight features in Luther's theology that led to political and social improvements for the common people

irrespective of sex, ethnicity, and social background. Luther's ambivalence towards women is possible to combine with his clear cut good theology of justice and grace in which *homo* is the central constitutive category.

According to Wiberg Pedersen, one liberating aspect for human beings in Lutheran theology is his theology of the cross. His idea of the priesthood of all believes emphasizes the equality of all human beings, women and men of faith. The principle of every human being at once just and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*) is also a liberating aspect pertaining to human life. Luther emphasized the importance of giving all children education in common schools, which had liberating and emancipating implications. In his commentary on *Magnificat* he interpreted Mary in such a way that she illustrates liberating aspects that point toward a humanization of the worldly regime.

In the next chapter Mary Elise Lowe gives a critical evaluation of queer Christologies that seem to lay aside the physical, time-bound, suffering, and resurrected body of Jesus Christ. Contemporary queer theologians argue that traditional claims that Jesus was male, had a masculine essence, was heterosexual and celibate have been theologically destructive for LGBTQI Christians. These theologians offer compelling queer portraits of Jesus, and many employ Judith Butler's textualist, materialized theory of the body. Inspired by Butler they develop a queer Christology that resists hetero-masculinist interpretations of Jesus.

Mary Elise Lowe challenges the dis-embodiment found in some of these queer proposals and argues for a fully-embodied queer Christology that weaves in commitments from Martin Luther's theology, especially his radical view of the incarnation, his assertion that the finite can bear the infinite, his view of the human person as *totus homo*, and his theology of the cross. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling's investigations of human sexual variation and philosopher Mark Johnson's theory of embodied cognition are also woven into this Christological proposal in order to ground claims about Jesus' body in emerging scientific research about human sexuality and cognition. Lowe's ambition is that such a fully-embodied Christology might offer queer theologians a way to re-embrace the body of Jesus Christ so that the incarnation can serve as the warp, weft, and direction to queer theological reflection.

Finally, Mary J. Streufert gives a critical analysis of theological anthropologies that claim a hierarchically binaristic gendered order of creation and create foreclosed human lives. Several Christian traditions advocate theological anthropologies that are rooted in gender essentialism and gender-based hierarchy. What it means to be human, these Christians argue, is to be hierarchically binaristic because God created humanity this way. Streufert gives an analysis of three such anthropologies operative within the

United States: the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Promise Keepers.

In her critique of these three positions, Mary J. Streufert argues that justification by grace through faith offers at least four benefits to theological anthropology. First, because the doctrine of justification is thoroughly theocentric and Christocentric, it unsets idolatry. Second, the doctrine of justification declares freedom from bondage. Third, justification alters our sinful status and relations with each other through God's alien righteousness. Fourth, it clarifies human vocation. Moreover, a feminist reading of justification strengthens current arguments on Law and Gospel that challenge its juridical distinctions into God's acts of wrath as the first move and love as the second.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND POLITICS

The third theme of this volume is Lutheran theology and politics. Lutheran churches have often been uncritical of those in power and often closely allied with the state. Within family, economy, and the political order Lutheran ethic has developed a patriarchal principle, according to which the subordinate have to obey those in power. The state has been regarded as an order of creation and the political authorities have been looked upon as fathers of their countries who care for their children and expect obedience from them. Today, it seems to be necessary to revise this traditional social doctrine in Lutheran tradition. In what way can this be done?

A post-secular society poses new, challenging questions about the relationships between church, theology, and politics. In the Global South Lutheran minority churches need to participate in efforts to promote economic justice and political democracy. How can Lutheran theology respond to these challenges? Can churches rooted in the Reformation be a part of the return of religion in the public sphere? Is it possible to develop a Lutheran political theology that does not support existing political power? Can Lutheran churches contribute to social critique and liberation from different kinds of domination and oppression?

In Chapter Ten Tage Kurtén discusses the radical change which modern societies undergo when the secularism, which is taken for granted in modernity, is questioned. These changes open up for a post-secular way of understanding society and politics. The return of religion means that it is important to develop a political theology also within Lutheran tradition. However, according to Kurtén the traditional ways of understanding Lutheran social ethics must be abandoned. The traditional interpretation of the two kingdoms presupposes the idea of a common political and ethical

language that unites all members of a society. When this presupposition is questioned, Lutheran theology must understand the task of Christian social ethics in a new way.

Tage Kurtén argues that Lutheran theology can learn a lot from Jeffrey W. Robbins, Raimond Gaita, and Stanley Hauerwas in its efforts to develop a political theology in a post-secular situation. Philosophers and theologians inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein can give important insights in the meaning of a contextual understanding of language. The most important thing to be learnt from them is that a Christian cannot take for granted that her fellow humans would actually share her personal moral views. This should challenge everyone to be humble and to give room for “the other” to represent a way of life different from one’s one.

Leif Svensson gives in the next chapter an analysis of Ernst Troeltsch’s critical interpretation of Luther’s ethics and the direction it has taken in contemporary “communitarian” critique of Luther. Many contemporary theologians follow Troeltsch in understanding an emphasis on the individual, obedience to secular authority, and an ethical dualism as characteristic features of Luther’s ethics. This is also the case with the “communitarian” critique of Luther’s ethics, which is developed by among others Jean Bethke Ehlstein, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Howard Yoder.

Svensson shows that these “communitarians” concentrate their objections against Luther’s ethics on what they identify as his strong individualism and neglect of community and tradition. The problematic individualism becomes very apparent when Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms is interpreted in terms of a double morality. Even if this critique is influential, Svensson argues that a possible response to the critique might be to interpret Luther’s ethics in a way that is proposed by David Yeago. His research provides a correction to the widespread picture of Luther’s ethics as almost exclusively oriented to the individual and the inner dimensions of faith. Yeago calls attention to what Luther writes about the practices of the church, public discipline of Christians, and the role of God’s law in Christian life. According to Svensson, an important research task is to further explore the insights of Yeago into the outer and bodily aspects of Luther’s ethics.

In Chapter Twelve Victor Thasiah gives a vision of what a Lutheran political theology can look like by describing the theology and the work of John Rutsindintwarane, a Rwandan Lutheran community organizer. Rutsindintwarane embodies a political theology both responsive to a problematic history of relations between church and state and expressive of alternative possibilities in the context of civil society. His theology and his model for community organizing are described against the background of an analysis of the dominant, historical patterns of interactions between

church and state in Rwanda and lessons germane to this relationship suggested for Christians post-genocide.

Thasiah argues that Christians can learn to maintain a critical distance to the state from the theological intelligibility of Rudsindintwarane's practices. Crucial to maintaining this critical distance is the development of political capacities for holding public officials accountable. However, this distance is not without certain positions of proximity. The vocation of the church includes critically cooperation with the same officials to address areas—social, economic, and ecological—of mutual concerns, especially those affecting one's community.

Why are churches not more forthrightly speaking out and acting to transform today's realities of domination? How might churches become places where subversions of reality can be nurtured and alternative public visions held forth? These are two questions discussed in a chapter by Karen L. Bloomquist. She proposes that *ecclesia* be considered an "event" of seeing, remembering, and connecting, of putting together what is fragmentary, pointing to what is true, enabling us to see and act, including in organizing actions with others. This implies the long-term challenge of nurturing and organizing communities of resistance against the dominant scripts and the systematic injustices they entail today.

Bloomquist argues that the challenge is to begin to see more deeply with a new vision rather than capture illusions that block our vision of what really is happening in our lives and world. This becomes possible as we remember a God who became radically incarnate and vulnerable in this world. This God frees and empowers us to engage with these realities today, remembering what has been forgotten in the past and remembering those who are forgotten around us and throughout the world today. We connect in ways that heighten the contradictions between the ideologies and the actual realities, we connect with those who are other from us, and we connect in collaborative actions with others for the sake of the world.

The final chapter in this volume is written by Elisabeth Gerle. She argues that Martin Luther drew on the Eros tradition and the Mystical tradition, but in new ways. He made an interpretation of Eros and passion that was more reflexive and mutual. The union was highlighted rather than desire for the bittersweet, non-attainable. His emphasis was further less individualistic than the modern readings of Luther claim and more directed towards the community. The desire and the love language of the *Song of Songs* became reflexive and mutual, expected to be played out in ordinary life, within the family, in economy, and in politics.

According to Gerle, the erotic imagery for Luther is a resource for ethics and politics. Luther used the *Song of Songs* to argue in favor of political

authority and the love between the princes and the people. Such an idealization of political authority and of the princes is dangerous and easily led to complacency in relation to dominant structures of power. Today we need to question an overemphasis on technological rationality and of politics as pure technique for rational deliberation. This means that we may need more passion in politics. However, we need a passion that is realizing issues of power and tries to prevent productive differences to be an excuse for injustice.

SAMPLE