Introduction

The fast-approaching 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation—to be celebrated, or perhaps lamented, in 2017—has issued in a host of fresh portrayals and retrievals of the man who started it all: Martin Luther. This recent wave of interest in the person and thought of the Wittenberg reformer is, of course, nothing new. The twentieth century saw the emergence of several important schools of Luther interpretation, beginning with the German Luther Renaissance in its early decades. The quincentenary of Luther's birth in 1983 marked the first truly ecumenical celebration of Luther's achievement, following on the heels of post-Vatican II fascination with Luther among Roman Catholic scholars (discussed in the present volume by Jared Wicks) as well as ecumenical dialogue with Eastern Orthodox churches. Those ecumenically minded engagements culminated, in 1999, in the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation. Since then, we have seen still newer biographical attempts to understand Luther as, for example, "a rebel in a time of upheaval," cast in relief against the backdrop of the early modern struggle over the role of religion;[1] and we have seen new assessments,

1. Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebell in Einer Zeit des Umbruchs* (München: C. H. Beck, 2012).

theological and more broadly intellectual, of Luther's thought and the unwitting role he may have played in the emergence of modernity.[2] For some today, "the real Luther" can only be understood when seen as a worthy heir to a formidable theological and exegetical tradition;[3] for others, to grasp Luther means to look forward and to mine the "global" potential of his theology.[4]

Luther's historical significance and the long shadow the Reformation has cast over the shape of modernity go without saying. On this all the contributors to the present volume are agreed. But this book would never have come into existence, if the contributors' conviction did not go significantly beyond merely asserting that Luther's voice is one to be reckoned with. All the essays included here *show* that Luther's remains above all a voice genuinely worth hearing. Five hundred years after the Wittenberg professor called for a public debate on indulgences, Luther still has something to teach us. He still calls today's church to reflection, and does so across denominational boundaries, the presence of which has not infrequently been blamed on him. If only for this reason, Luther's voice remains at the same time in need of being addressed, even from the vantage point of the early 21st century, when the very diverse—and divided—Christian landscape appears to be a simple matter of fact.

What distinguishes the present volume from some earlier ecumenical attempts at rapprochement is that the question of the "real Luther" is decidedly less important. Stripping off centuries' worth

2. Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013); and Olli-Pekka Vainio, ed., *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).
3. Franz Posset, *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt & Wittenberg* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011). For a different account, situating Luther not only in relation to his intellectual antecedents but also in the broader context of the developing Wittenberg theology, see the work of Robert Kolb: *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), and *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
4. Christine Helmer, ed., *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

of layers of uncharitable caricature and hagiographic adulation no longer confronts us as a particularly urgent task, as much of it has already been accomplished. This is by no means to suggest that the contributors do not seek, in their own way, to do justice to Luther. They certainly do. But once the caricature, whether positive or negative, falls away, the Luther that emerges, the "real Luther," appears more complex, polyphonic, perhaps even dissonant, more full-bodied than any apologetic or dismissive portrayals might have suggested.

This volume is interested, therefore, in the reception of Luther as a figure that instructs and inspires but also provokes and challenges precisely through the very richness of what he has to offer. To "get Luther right" is to allow *him* to speak, and to hear him in a manner simultaneously critical and constructive. The idea that this can be done in any other way, that one can uncover and recover the true—straightforward and unambiguous—Luther, showed itself to be a fantasy already in the years following Luther's death. As Robert Kolb observes, already in the mid-sixteenth century Luther's authority posed a problem to those who claimed to be his heirs.[5] For one thing, the *corpus* of Luther's writings was too immense for monitoring public teaching in the Church and adjudicating questions of biblical interpretation. More importantly, Luther could be cited against himself. Further, Luther's theology did not develop in a vacuum but was a product of fruitful collaboration with colleagues and intellectually demanding battles with opponents. Consequently, as Paul Hinlicky reminds us in his essay, Lutheranism historically, as a tradition that appeals to Luther and claims his mantle, is at the very least "Luther mediated by Melanchthon."

5. Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520-1620* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 66.

Even twentieth-century Luther research, undertaken by Lutheran scholars, produced, for all its historical consciousness, diverse portrayals of the reformer, often rather indicative of the scholars' own *Sitz im Leben* and its perceived exigencies. For the Luther Renaissance of the early twentieth century, the framework was largely epistemological and ethical, reflective of the then-dominant Neo-Kantianism. Oswald Bayer has since repeatedly drawn attention to the strongly ontological character of Luther's Christology, rejecting the denuded anti-metaphysical accounts of what the previous generation hailed as Luther's "theology of the cross."[6] For Bayer, the kernel of Luther's thought is found in the realism of the communication of properties between Christ's divinity and humanity and the objective, ecclesially mediated reality of divine promise. The interpretations of the Finnish School, oriented toward *theosis* (deification), constitute another set of ontological claims to what lies at the center of Luther's theological vision.[7]

The contributors to the present volume come from a number of Christian denominations whose reception of the reformer's thought, even as they seek to do justice to it, is even more refracted—and for this reason even more interesting. As the essayists proceed to give Luther a fair hearing, they demonstrate that Luther cannot be heard as a single voice, or addressed from a single perspective. In their at times vigorous engagement, Luther's legacy comes to light not

6. Oswald Bayer, "Das Wort ward Fleisch," Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede, eds., *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 5–34.
7. Inaugurated by Tuomo Mannermaa's *In Ipsa fide Christus adest: Luterilaisen ja Ortodoksisen Kristinuskonkäsityksen leikkauspiste* (Helsinki: Missiologian ja ekumeniikan seuran, 1979). This essay was subsequently translated into German and included in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im glauben gegenwärtige Christus. Rechtfertigung und Vergottung. Zum Okumenischen Dialog* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshous, 1989). It is available in English as *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). Mannermaa's essay has since been followed by numerous monographs and articles by his own students and now also their students.

only as variously received but also contradicted, and/or transformed, only to reemerge as a fruitful leaven that may effect an even further transformation. The putative "real Luther" is thus replaced by Luther the *doctor ecclesiae*, a teacher of the Church.

All the essays were first presented at an Ecumenical Luther conference, convened at Wabash College in the summer of 2014. At the most fundamental level, the goal of the conference was to encourage mutual understanding and appreciation between other Christian traditions and those that claim Luther's legacy. However, the specific focus on the Wittenberg reformer himself, his life and his thought, yielded (as we had indeed hoped) a far richer harvest. It rendered the reciprocity of ecumenical encounters more complex, transcending a mere hammering out of points of convergence and divergence. At the very least, we thought, even if Luther should have nothing surprising to teach all of us, then perhaps he at least still challenges us to constructive engagement with our own Christian identities and the broader Christian tradition. The point turned out to be moot. All the essays presented here are witnesses to the fact that Luther continues to surprise. In this encounter, the Lutherans—represented here by the five Lutheran respondents—come to understand themselves better, and perhaps even more self-critically, through other traditions' engagement with Luther. And in the process they come to appreciate those traditions, not least through the way those traditions lay claim to Luther or respectfully push back. A similarly complex understanding of self and the other is gained by non-Lutherans. To see Luther both as a voice in the church catholic, a voice to be reckoned with, and as a forerunner, for better and for worse, of another tradition that claims his legacy may prove to be a source of deeper insight into one's own identity; more than that, it may offer ways of enriching one's identity and of deploying

it more successfully in dialogue with Christian brothers and sisters across denominational lines.

The essays are certainly not intended to call into question official bilateral dialogues between Lutheran Churches and other denominations, or between Christian denominations more generally. Several of the essayists have participated in such official dialogues as delegates of their respective church bodies. Implicit in all the essays is an appreciation for the institutional initiative behind much ecumenical dialogue, and its very specific aim of establishing convergence in matters deemed essential to one's own and one's partner's identity. However, the essays do seek to make a vital contribution to ecumenical dialogue, so understood, by broadening out its scope. This they do, first, in a diachronic fashion by making the implicit argument that one can learn most fruitfully by recovering and engaging the voice of the teachers and by presuming fundamental wisdom on their part. As a *doctor ecclesiae*, Luther remains a teacher not only of the tradition that claims him, whether with considerable admiration or a modicum of unease, but of the *una sancta*, the Christian Church at large. Second, the essays make the implicit argument that true understanding of the other not only zeroes in on the common denominator, while assuming a blessed irrelevance, or even ignorance, of the non-divisive rest. It also consists in the capacity to learn from each other in a more dynamic way: by drawing on each other's heritage, by calling the partner back to the partner's own heritage, and by allowing this heritage to speak to all those concerned in a critical and constructive fashion. Last but not least, insofar as the authors are all scholars and Christians who reflect on beliefs and practices that are very much their own, the essays are an invitation to ecumenical reflection—an invitation extended to all and intentionally informed by one's own and the other's tradition, open to a challenge, and ready for a surprise.[8]

The first essay offered here is by **Jared Wicks.** Wicks has spent an academic lifetime—indeed, over half a century as a Jesuit theologian—attending to close readings of significant texts in Luther's corpus. His essay in the present volume chronicles shifts in his focus during those decades. Wicks begins with his early fascination with the theology behind Luther's denunciation of indulgence preaching, not just the familiar *Ninety-Five Theses* but the theologically richer *Treatise on Indulgences*. He relates how these early works caused him to realize how deftly, though ever so slightly, the young Luther began to reshape the theology of grace inherited from the late medieval church and give it a new, pastoral twist. What the medieval church called *gratia sanans* (healing grace), Luther now understood firmly, in the context of faith, as a *donum*, a gift that accompanies the fullness of grace. This grace has a re-creating, re-vivifying effect in the Christian's life as she yearns for God's grace, and thus orients all of life's activities.

Far from being separated from the corporate life of the church, however, this life-orientation is nurtured and deepened in participation in the sacraments. Wicks describes and elucidates his discovery of the important *fides sacramenti* (faith in the sacrament) distinction in the early Luther. It is not the sacrament by itself that heals, but also the believer's faith therein, that the sacrament is promised *pro me* (for me). Yet this is not a subjectivizing tendency in Luther; it is, as Wicks shows, due to the objective declaration of promise, such as in the words of institution, that the sacrament elicits

8. The editors note, with gratitude, that the idea for the conference was inspired by the rules with which the late Cardinal Avery Dulles sought to articulate the nature and goals of ecumenical dialogue; in his particular case it was dialogue between Catholics and Evangelicals. Cardinal Dulles' essay, "The Unity for Which We Hope," was originally published in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics: Toward a Common Mission* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 115-146; its summary can be found in a blog post by Timothy George at http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/07/averys-ten-rules.)

faith. Wicks concludes with further reflections on the difficulties (because of Luther's polemics) and resources (because of Luther's catechesis) for Roman Catholic engagement with Luther's understanding of the Church and sanctification in the Holy Spirit.

Brian Brewer, a Baptist theologian and historian, engages an understanding of Luther's famous "priesthood of all believers" doctrine. Noting its origins as an egalitarian, laity-ennobling move, Brewer tracks the evolution of Luther's thought on the common priesthood, especially as the torrents of the 1525 Peasants War raged. Brewer thinks that Luther never abandoned his key insight—that a priest is made by virtue of baptism and faith, not by ordination or human ordinance—though his emphases and certainly his rhetoric changed over time. However, in order to speak to the Baptist tradition today, Brewer insists that the key feature of the common priesthood for Luther was the way it facilitated mutual accountability and consolation among laypersons. There was no need for an ordained priest to be present for Bible study to happen, nor even confession and absolution of sin among laity. Each, by virtue of his common priesthood, could do that for and with one another.

Such mutuality and shared accountability stand in marked contrast to many recent Baptist understandings of the priesthood of all believers, which have tended to stress individuality and each person's "soul competence," in the words of influential Southern Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins (1860-1928). Brewer shows that engagement with Luther's understanding of the common priesthood might well safeguard Baptist identity from privatized and subjectivist personal theologies, and help it develop a nascent mutuality in ministry.

Matthew Boulton, a pastor in the Disciples of Christ church, argues that Luther is helpful to other churches primarily in the subtle ways the Reformer helps to identify the *enemy* of faith. Very often,

Boulton points out, Luther notices how the deepest threat to Christianity comes not from without, but from within, from where the heart of the faith is beating. Because of humankind's penchant for idolatry, the fall from worship to mere observance, from living tradition to dead traditionalism, from righteousness to self-righteousness is an ever-present threat. Boulton thus casts Luther's understanding of sin in a *liturgical* context: distorted, idolatrous human action is an incurvature upon oneself, but genuinely human action, shaped by worship of God, is *excurvatus ad alios*—curved outward in service of others. Luther helps us to see redeemed human nature as a kind of *homo laudans* (praising person) rightly oriented to God in prayer and to one's fellows in humble service.

David Tracy finds in Luther a necessary supplement to Christian theology's insistence that God is fundamentally incomprehensible: God is also hidden, and hidden because God hides Godself. Tracy's essay explores several dimensions of hiddenness. God is revealed as hidden in the crucified Christ, which discloses in a provocative way God's promise of forgiveness. A second dimension is one many Lutherans are quick to elide, but which Tracy affirms: for Luther, theology's God (the *deus theologicus*) also hides beyond this paradoxical revelation. God is also revealed *sub contradictario*, under the form of its contradiction. To speak of this God is to take with utter seriousness the believer's experiences of dread and struggle, or as Luther called them, *Anfechtungen*. Witnesses to a cosmic battle in history between good and evil, the elect and the damned, are sensible to feel uneasy, even terrified of the outcome. God is experienced as hidden in a fearful, not just reason-thwarting, way, as well. Finally there is the dimension of hiddenness closest to the notion of incomprehensibility: his mysterious revelation as Trinity. Drawing on recent scholarship that takes into account the mature Luther's

careful disputations on precise meanings of "person" and "relation," Tracy shows that such precision is subjugated to mystery. The second person of the Trinity unifies himself to the believer in faith in a way beyond our comprehension. This union with Christ, which cannot be comprehended, "comprehends" the believer into something like *theosis*.

Matt Jenson, writing in the tradition of American evangelicalism, develops ways in which that tradition can helpfully critique, but more importantly be enriched by engagement with Luther's multifaceted approach to faith. Focusing on Luther's influential Galatians lectures of 1535, Jenson identifies three potential features of Luther's notion of faith that supplement and safeguard American evangelical Christianity from potential languor. "Easy-believism" names the temptation to limit one's faith to a kind of fire-insurance, resting assured that assent to a few Spartan concepts is enough. Another temptation is to turn the gospel into a toilsome, even if therapeutic, law. A third temptation is to focus inwardly on the *pro me* feature of Christ's promise that one forgets it is the objective *Christ* who promises. Engagement with Luther thereby helps Evangelicals to be even more fully who they wish be in the Christian household of faith.

Susan Wood draws on her experiences of ecumenical dialogue to offer an appreciation and critique of Luther on baptism. Noting the Council of Trent's condemnation of certain positions it supposed Luther and his followers had taken, Wood draws on the emerging ecumenical consensus that these anathemas largely missed the mark. On the contrary, receptive Roman Catholics might well appreciate Luther's pastoral theology of baptism that drives one to remember baptism daily, construes baptism as God's promise for new life, and recovers an eschatological orientation of the sacrament. Catholic theology can also clarify Luther's own claims about baptism as it relates to the Word of God, namely, whether grace is a substance or

a presence, as well as the continuing claim of God's law on the life of the baptized.

Randall Zachman takes a slightly different approach in his essay from our other contributors. Answering the question, "What did reading Luther do for you (or *to you*!) as a non-Lutheran?", Zachman recounts his coming to grips with Luther's insistence that, while no man is an island, facing death certainly puts him on one. As Luther insisted, each of us must fight our own battle with death by ourselves, alone. This is better than not thinking about death—our own death—at all, for it lends some existential weight to our days, rescuing them from a bland (even if occasionally riotous) flaccidity. And then the force of the Gospel penetrates especially deeply, because a dying person confronted with the need to clear his conscience in the presence of God is so keenly aware of the futility of works and the law at that point.

Further, Zachman's essay seeks to highlight how Luther's views on the conscience and death demand personal responsibility for belief. It is not enough to say, "Well, this is what my church believes." Each of us, then, is asked to stand at Worms and consider what the Christian faith entails to our minds and lives. This places an intense burden on each believer. However, in the paradox of faith the more earnestly we confess our lives and shortcomings to God, the more intensely Christ desires to take them as his own.

Johannes Zachhuber examines Luther's principle of *sola scriptura* and comes to the rather surprising conclusion that an ecumenically acceptable version of it was implicitly affirmed by the Second Vatican Council. Tracing one trajectory of a critique of the "two-source" theory of oral apostolic tradition and written biblical tradition, Zachhuber highlights features of Josef Geiselmann's views on the Council of Trent, and Joseph Ratzinger's appropriation of that sharp criticism. Though the scripture principle is often thought to be the

least compelling of the Reformation *solas*, Zachhuber shows that its disparagement is actually a symptom of its success and general acceptance. Despite Karl Barth's protests that, by accepting a historicized continuity between scripture and ecclesial authority, the churches who are inheritors of the Reformation betray the scripture principle, Zachhuber concludes that the Reformation's re-balancing of tradition in a way normatively shaped by scripture actually vindicates the catholic church's long consensus.

Anna Case-Winters discerns many touch-points common to Luther's thought and her own Presbyterian tradition, and finds some of the divergences to be mutually illuminating. There is unfinished business remaining from the Protestant Reformation, and the task, as Case-Winters sees it, is not to celebrate divisive achievements of the sixteenth century, but rather to roll up our sleeves and get to work. On a number of matters, Calvin and Luther are close. Luther thought the Bible pointed to the Gospel; Calvin thought it pointed to the Word. Luther thought the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion was physical; Calvin's real presence was spiritual. What some of Luther's followers have termed the "second use of the Gospel" Calvin's followers term "the third use of the law." Such differences should not be discarded, but neither should they excuse the churches from the patient and methodical work of growth together in unity.

The editors would like to thank all the authors for the seriousness with which they have approached the task of reflecting on the figure and thought of the reformer in the context of their own traditions. Their enthusiastic participation in the Ecumenical Luther conference at Wabash College, from which this volume emerged, made it an intellectually stimulating and personally memorable event. Thanks are also due others at Wabash without whose hard work and dedication the conference would never have taken shape, let alone

place. Bev Cunningham was the organizational and logistical brain, while the student interns, Stephen Batchelder and Joe Mount, lent a hand with a host of practical matters. We would also like to extend words of appreciation to Dean Scott Feller at Wabash, and Dean Timothy George and Associate Dean David Hogg at Beeson Divinity School for their abiding support of our research. Thanks go, further, to Libby Manning, David Kubiak, Bronwen Wickkiser, and Michael Wren, as well as Lilly Endowment staff, Chris Coble and Jessicah Krey Duckworth. We can hardly express our immense gratitude to Kelly Nelson for her good cheer and hospitality, as a horde of theologians descended on her home. Finally, warmest thanks are also due to the staff at Fortress Press, especially Will Bergkamp and Lisa Gruenisen, who eagerly embraced this project and affirmed us in our conviction that its fruits deserve to be shared.

We trust that the ecumenical and multi-voice engagement with Martin Luther presented here will enrich the readers' own reflection on their own traditions, just as the contributors have all learned both from and about each other. Such mutual learning, we believe, models Christian witness, not as uniformity at all costs but as reflective, appreciative, critical and constructive dialogue—with those adjectives applying equally to the other and to one's own tradition.

Piotr J. Małysz
Derek R. Nelson