



Luther: Theologian of the Word in the World

What is appropriate for observing the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther? The year 1483 does not mark any of the dramatic events of the Reformation; it is not, after all, 1517, 1530, or whatever. It is simply the year of Luther's birth.

Since it is a birthday we have in mind, and not a Reformation event itself (properly speaking), it could be suggested that we celebrate the man and his impact on history. Forget about theology. And, of course, many celebrations and events are going in that direction. Luther is thus portrayed as a great cultural, national, linguistic, and even political figure—all of which he was—and so he is commemorated by medals, Luther-land trips, concerts, stamps, displays, books, and periodicals.

But to commemorate Luther in any meaningful sense, it is essential to come to terms with his theology. That's a tall order, however, for his theology is so far ranging. The way chosen for this journal is suggested by its very title so that we take into account both the Word and the world in Luther's thinking. Luther was certainly a theologian of the *Word*. But, contrary to the radical reformers, he did not react negatively toward the *world*. He affirmed the world as God's creation, and he valued highly (as divinely given gifts) the arts, government and civil service, education, family, vocation, food and drink, and on occasion (as E. Gritsch tells us) even fine clothes. And so there can be a celebration of Luther and his impact on history as a cultural force precisely in connection with his theological outlook, for he was a theologian of the Word who was at home in the world; for him, the finite is capable of bearing the infinite.

This issue contains more articles than usual. At the outset *George Forell* delineates the main reasons for recalling Luther today, showing how certain theological affirmations of Luther still have significance. *David Lotz* takes up the topic of the Word of God in Luther's thought, illustrating how much Luther emphasized the Word as "preached Word" (especially as gospel) and how the Scriptures are God's Word in a "secondary or derivative sense." He also explores what kind of preaching, in Luther's thinking and practice, serves the

Word. *Eric Gritsch* shows how Luther was "worldly" without being a hedonist. He provides biographical snapshots and treats Luther's views on nature, music, and history. *James Nestingen* explores the *simul* concept in Luther's thought as having a life-long significance for Christian faith and life (sanctification does not supplant it), for the Christian always needs forgiveness and lives in eschatological hope for that day which finally puts sin to flight. *Gracia Grindal* reviews Luther's ardent love for the arts (particularly music and poetry), shows how adept he was at the arts himself, and indicates ways he used his abilities in his own work. *Marc Kolden* takes a fresh look at vocation in Luther. The term does not refer primarily to one's occupation but has to do

with putting the “old self” to death in service through family, work, citizenship, and one’s sociohistorical context. The article by *Scott Hendrix* rounds out this section of the journal by shedding light on particularly controversial areas in Luther’s thought and action regarding the papacy, the peasants, and the Jews.

The Resources section contains articles which review Luther and his impact in different ways. *Helmut Lehmann* provides a fascinating article on Luther’s review of his own works near the close of his life. *Richard Trost* lifts up aspects of Luther’s thought and work which he has found particularly important for ministry today. *Walter Bouman* takes up the thorny issue of the “law” in the Lutheran tradition in light of current biblical studies and shows how the tradition can be critiqued without losing its essential concerns. *John Stumme* provides a case study concerning Argentina in which he draws on Luther as a resource for the churches in developing a social and political stance in that country. And *Egil Grislis* provides an extensive review of Luther research in various areas: contemporary Roman Catholic assessments, Luther and his heritage, Luther as theologian, and Luther on various doctrines and issues. The “Texts in Context” feature this time turns appropriately to the Old Testament, to which Luther gave most of his exegetical energies. The article is written by *Lee Snook*. David Tiede has again supervised this particular project, which is designed to provide insights for preaching in the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle. His term as Associate Editor has come to a close, and he has committed himself to other projects for the time being. We thank him heartily for his fine contributions to the work of this journal, and we are delighted that he will continue serving it in other ways. Meanwhile, we are happy to announce that Dennis Ormseth has accepted the invitation to become Associate Editor, and we welcome him as he joins the editorial staff.

A.J.H.