

Preface

The figure of Martin Luther has not lost its fascination. This can be seen from the countless events that are being prepared for October 31, 2017, the five hundredth anniversary of Luther's posting of his 95 theses, which forever changed the landscape of Western Christendom. Our Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg has a biennial seminar on Martin Luther and the Luther Sites, which will be held again over Reformation Day in 2017. We had to book our hotel rooms in Wittenberg four years in advance to be assured of accommodations.

The life of the great Reformer Martin Luther remains as fascinating as ever. There exists therefore no shortage of accounts and assessments of his life. However, it is somewhat different with his teaching. Though the index volumes on subjects are now completed on the more than one hundred volumes of Luther's writings in the authoritative German Weimar edition, it remains even today a difficult undertaking to give an account of Luther's teaching. One can always find the Luther one wants: the nationalistic anti-Semitic Luther, the anti-Roman Catholic Luther, Luther the liberator, or simply the pastoral Luther. Even the detailed bibliography of the *Luther-Jahrbuch* is of little help. It lists the hundreds of new articles on Luther that appear every year. But who can read all of this?

Even experts in the field of Luther research scarcely dare to write a comprehensive presentation of his thought. Yet there is the admirable book by the Bernhard Lohse (*Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* [1995; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999]), and the meticulous three-volume biography by Martin Brecht (*Martin Luther* [1981–87; Fortress Press, 1985–93]). I hope I have learned from them to avoid biases and to tell the Luther story how it unfolded itself.

The following study is an attempt neither to replace nor correct the life work of Lohse, Brecht, or of any other Luther scholars. Its purpose is rather to initiate interested novices into the life and thought of Martin Luther. That such a primer on the life and thought of Martin Luther is in demand I could see by having it already in a Russian, Slovak, and German edition. The study begins with a brief biography to familiarize the reader with the most important phases in the life of Luther. Then it leads directly to the center of his teaching. This is facilitated with ample quotations from Luther's own writings in order to provide insight into his own way of thinking. When one has understood the concerns that lay on Luther's heart, connecting lines can easily be drawn to other areas of Luther's thought that are not taken into consideration in the present study. In order to have covered completely the theology and ethics of Luther, I would have had to deal with many more such areas. Yet the concern here is with the center of Luther's theology. This core of his thought will allow us to perceive something of the fascination that Luther holds, as well as of that with which Luther himself was ultimately concerned: the recovery of a living and productive faith in God.

At this point I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Will Bergkamp, who immediately welcomed my idea to update and modestly expand the first English edition of this book, which had come out in 1996. Dr. Mark Worthing, my former research assistant,

translated the first English edition from German. Thanks to his superb job, I could rely on his translation for the second edition. Therefore my thanks go to him as well. I also must thank from the bottom of my heart my wife Hildegard for enduring with a husband who quickly escapes to his study to finish still another book.

Hans Schwarz

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