

CHAPTER 39

LUTHER'S AUTHORITY IN THE LATE REFORMATION AND PROTESTANT ORTHODOXY

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I. THE STRUGGLE OVER THE THEOLOGICAL LEGACY OF MARTIN LUTHER IN THE LATE REFORMATION

THE outstanding protagonists of the several streams of reform that arose in sixteenth-century Europe, e.g. in Wittenberg, Zurich, and Geneva, placed their stamp on their movements in various ways. These figures gained even more respect as authorities as a result of their impact on circles of disciples and students, who worked with them for the cause of reformation and aided in its spread. In Wittenberg such a group of reformers formed around Martin Luther, above all, Philip Melanchthon, but also Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, Nikolaus von Amsdorf, Georg Rörer, Georg Major, and Paul Eber. However, after Luther's death in 1546, a struggle over his theological legacy began, dividing the Wittenberg Reformation over the years. While Luther lived, he succeeded in holding together the various divergent accents in teaching among his followers, including those which distinguished him from Melanchthon, and in integrating them in the promotion of their common cause. However, after his death endeavours to establish clear positions, formulations of doctrinal content that could not be misunderstood, began, seeking the clear demarcation of Luther's thought from all views that were regarded as irreconcilable with his original theological positions.

The Augsburg Interim of 1548 initiated this process of clarification. With this law on religious policy Emperor Charles V attempted to restore religious unity in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation that had been lost through the divisions which the Reformation provoked. The Interim permitted clerical marriage and communion in both kinds but apart from that made medieval doctrine and ceremonies binding. The fact that, contrary to original intentions, it finally applied only to the Evangelical estates of the Empire aggravated the situation since that meant abandonment of efforts to reach consensus between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Instead, from the Evangelical perspective, the only question was, to what extent one would yield to the coercive introduction of the principles of the Interim or whether one would go into exile.

Many territories and cities considered alternative models or other ways to obviate the Interim's regulations. Elector Moritz of Saxony, whose territorial and dynastic interests had moved him to ally himself with the emperor, tried to mitigate the situation for his lands by formulating an alternative policy to the Augsburg Interim. It was to be presented for consideration to the territorial diet in Leipzig. The draft of this policy tried to offer a compromise by retaining reformational teaching and merely altering some rites and ceremonies. It was not accepted by the diet. But Matthias Flacius Illyricus and Nikolaus Gallus, two students of Luther and Melanchthon, had it printed with their polemical commentary, and thus made its text public. They dubbed it the 'Leipzig Interim' and disparaged all who had worked on it in order to warn the public of a development which they regarded as an agreement between 'Christ and Belial', i.e. an irresponsible compromise between good and evil, right and wrong. They thought it called into question the entire tradition of the Wittenberg Reformation.

Among the authors of Moritz's proposal was, alongside Georg von Anhalt, Wittenberg professors Johannes Bugenhagen the elder, Paul Eber, Georg Major, and the Leipzig superintendent Johannes Pfeffinger, Melanchthon himself. With this criticism of the Augsburg Interim and especially the Leipzig Proposal a process of differentiation within Protestantism began which took form in the organization of different groups and in theological variation and doctrinal demarcation. For the evangelical doctrine contained in the Leipzig Proposal bore the hand of Melanchthon and contained statements which, more than previously, appeared to diverge from Luther. They concerned particularly the role of the free will in the justification of sinners, the proper place of good works, and the role of the law in the Christian life. Later, questions regarding the Lord's Supper and Christology came under discussion as well. Disputes also arose over questions of the reintroduction of medieval rites and ceremonies as *adiaphora*, practices regarded as neutral and thus permitted, and of resistance against unchristian governmental authority.

The controversies begun in 1548 extended over several decades. They occurred in a vacuum of authority that arose not only because of Luther's death but also because Melanchthon and the entire Wittenberg faculty were discredited as 'Adiaphorists'. The debates kindled by specific theological positions revolved implicitly around the question of who could correctly represent Luther's theological legacy and which theology preserved his views most faithfully. Their disciples began to differentiate Luther's and

Melanchthon's theologies from each other, distinguishing their own positions in order to guarantee that the churches would follow Luther's teaching as the most authentic reformational doctrine. Martin Luther was simply the guarantor of that doctrine. Theological authority was ascribed to him alone, not to Melanchthon or the other members of the Wittenberg circle of reformers, as influential as they individually might have been.

Above all, the creation of an edition of Luther's writings served to establish Luther's authority. The edition gave the reformer a lasting voice, even after his death, at the same time paving the way for different approaches to appropriating his theology and authority. His writings were cited in order to decide disputed questions, to solve theological problems, and especially to legitimate one's own position in critical situations, theological, legal, and political. Already in 1539 the Wittenberg edition of Luther's works began, under the leadership of Georg Major, Georg Rörer, and Johannes Aurifaber. It was completed in 1559 (Wolgast 1968, 1980; Schilling 1991). Since this edition placed Luther's writings in a thematic, not chronological, order, it made it easier to find Luther's utterances on specific topics. Thus, one could quickly assemble his opinions on various theological questions and critical problems. Especially the Wittenberg theologians gathered around Melanchthon after Luther's death, who shared the former's theological sentiments, preferred citing the Wittenberg edition, to prove their agreement with Luther's Reformation. The layout of the edition permitted placing positions of the 'young Luther' over against his opinions when older, ascribing mostly to the former a greater historical significance. Increasingly, the positions of the theologically mature, later Luther could be regarded as opinions of an ever more impatient older man.

Soon the Wittenberg edition found a rival in the Jena edition. Ernestine Saxony compensated for the loss of the electoral title and lands around Wittenberg to the Albertine branch of the ruling Wettin family by founding a new institution of higher learning at Jena. It attained university status and was intended to continue Luther's reformational legacy, so as not to abandon it to those remaining in Wittenberg. The Wittenberg edition was now regarded as the possession of Melanchthon and his Wittenberg colleagues. In 1555 Georg Rörer left Wittenberg to join the project of creating the Jena edition.

Jena aspired to be seen as the centre of Lutheran theology; the theological faculty there, Matthias Flacius (1557–61 in Jena), Simon Musaeus (1559–61), Johannes Wigand (1560–1, 1568–73), Matthäus Judex (1560–1), Johann Friedrich Coelestin (1560–1, 1568–72), Tilemann Heshusius (1569–73), and Timotheus Kirchner (1571–3), all claimed to continue Luther's theology in pure form, free from all alien influences. Scholars have designated this group as 'Gnesio-Lutherans,' although they did not always represent the same theological argumentation. In contrast to the Wittenberg edition of Luther's works, the Jena edition was arranged chronologically, a conception advanced by Weimar court preacher Johannes Stoltz (Scheible 2004: 1747) to prevent historically unjustifiable interpretations of Luther. This was to enable consideration of how Luther's early reformational concerns became more precise and developed further, also in exchanges with opposing positions. That meant that Luther's later theological developments, even when they permitted no compromise, assumed the higher authority.

Opponents of the Lutheran Reformation rejected the Lutheran claims of prophetic authority and pure teaching for Luther. Johannes Cochlaeus launched the genre of polemical biography with the publication of his *Commentary on Martin Luther's Deeds and Writings* (1546; cf. Vandiver, Keen, and Frazel 2003; cf. Herte 1935), a tradition continued to other Roman Catholics and rebutted by Lutheran authors (Kolb 1999: 75–101) beginning with Ludwig Rabus, Johannes Mathesius (Volz 1929), and Cyriakus Spangenberg (Herrmann 1934/35).

The attempts to claim Luther's authority as their own which typified the process of forming different theological directions within the Wittenberg circle after Luther's death contributed to the strengthening of his reformational authority. Citations from his letters and his 'prophecies' were published to reinforce specific theological positions with similar utterances from the departed reformer. In this way the estimate of Luther's person and his authority also became the subject of controversy.

II. THE DESIGNATION OF LUTHER AS A PROPHET OF THE END TIMES

Luther himself had given a decisive impulse for his designation as an authority beyond the bounds of his own age to provide direction for the church. Even before his death, his understanding of himself, recorded in his own writings, contributed decisively to the estimate of his person and his significance among his contemporaries and the spread of these estimates in popular publications. During his lifetime and particularly after his death this led to ascribing to him the role of a prophet and winning him corresponding respect.

Luther's prophetic self-consciousness was closely connected to his understanding of history and others' perception and interpretation of it. His rediscovery of the gospel and the message of a God who loves human beings and frees them from the necessity of justifying themselves gained great importance for the society of the time and with it a lasting impact. This sprang largely from his own and his contemporaries' conviction that this perception of his actions was anchored in the flow of history that was moving toward an apocalyptic end. Luther himself saw this reformational awakening as a sign of the end of time, and he viewed it as a part of God's all-embracing plan, in which he himself was functioning as God's instrument. He took the stage not only as a conveyor of a new orientation for religion but also, like the Old Testament prophets, called for repentance and change. His reformational rediscovery of the gospel of the justification of sinners *sola gratia* and *sola fide* and his proclamation of the message with exceptional power in both its use of language and its content, made him in fact a dynamic personality, whose counsel was sought and whose words provided orientation for many, also societal leaders. His roles, on the one hand as a prophet of doom, and on the other as a proclaimer of salvation and deliverance, like the apostles, constituted the two sides of

Luther's understanding of himself. In this perception traditions from the Old and the New Testaments merged and were incorporated into the historical circumstances of the early sixteenth century.

The self-designation as a 'prophet' or 'the German prophet' occurs already in Luther's early writings. Even if it appears superficial, it was intended to be less a claim for a particular honour and respect, more a reflection of Luther's conviction that he must carry out an assignment from God. This self-designation expresses not an unrealistic arrogance but a consciousness of a special call to execute a demanding, dangerous task in the End Times. From Luther's viewpoint God had commissioned him as part of his plan for human salvation as the rediscoverer of the gospel, making Luther his servant and instrument in order to bring to light once again the saving truth of faith that had been submerged in the Middle Ages. On the basis of his belief in his divine commission Luther categorically rejected similar claims by others, e.g. the dissenters of the Reformation, and rebuffed the reproach that the Wittenberg Reformation had remained stalled half the way to true reform.

Luther's proclamation of the gospel also bears elements of this understanding of his role in the flow of history in the End Times. Frequently his sermons referred to the threat of catastrophe and the advent of doom if people continued to ignore God's gospel. Luther's apostolic proclamation therefore always contained admonition, announcing divine judgement, following Old Testament models with their threat of divine punishment should the people disregard and show contempt for God's grace, now so publicly proclaimed. This stance was strengthened by the reformer's daily experiences. He viewed himself surrounded by indifference to God's commands, particularly the first table of the Decalogue, which commanded proper worship of God. But also the behaviour of the people in regard to its second table, which was to regulate human coexistence in a peaceful, just life in society and the home, left much to be desired. Therefore, Luther neglected no opportunity to call to remembrance God's punishments, which condemned such indifference. His behaviour and action fit the picture of Elijah, the prophet expected at the end of time, whose divine commission before the Last Day the prophet Malachi (3:23) had foretold. Indeed, Luther rejected an interpretation of this passage that applied to the concrete present and the return of Elijah bodily, but he could view his action as analogous to the conduct of the Old Testament prophet. Luther's prophetic self-consciousness was uncontested, accepted and assumed by his contemporaries. To be a 'prophet' or 'Germany's prophet' did not remain only his own comment about himself. Others used this description as well. His contemporaries recognized in the reformer a second Elijah, who, following the first, Old Testament, Elijah, preached against false teaching and superstitious ritual, and announced God's wrath over all the unrepentant.

An identification of Luther with the prophet Elijah appeared in the early Reformation, placing him in a succession with John the Baptist, seen as the second Elijah. In line with late medieval conceptions of the Antichrist, the reformer then fell into place as the third Elijah. Surprisingly, it was probably Hudrych Zwingli who, under the impression made by the Leipzig debate of 1519, first expressed the conviction that the Wittenberg

reformer was Elijah returning at the end of time. Whether he can be regarded as the originator of this thought is not completely clear; he may have borrowed it from Erasmus. Luther's friend and colleague Philip Melanchthon made similar statements, which continued to be used in the second generation of reformers. In the context of Late Reformation controversies Nikolaus Selnecker, a co-author of the Formula of Concord (1577), who worked on the composition of the *Apology of the Book of Concord*, stated that Melanchthon referred to Luther as Father, Preceptor, and the Elijah of the last times (Hasse 1995). This served to counter the claim by the opponents of the Formula of Concord that Melanchthon was on their side. The exaltation of Luther as second or third Elijah or the prophet of the Last Times also found its place in popular writings, pamphlets, and songs, which not only spread this idea among the public but also offered ground for cultivating the idea further (Dingel 1996).

This also had an impact on how one used Luther's oral and written statements after his death. By the end of the 1540s, beginning of the 1550s, countless collections, e.g. of his 'prophecies' appeared, often intentionally assembled in order to strengthen and legitimate positions in the theological controversies and efforts toward doctrinal concord or to cultivate theological orientation and contemporary applications of this thought on the popular level (Kolb 1999). Frequent reprints demonstrate the success of such efforts, not only in learned circles. In 1557, for example, the Dresden preacher Peter Glaser edited a collection of *One Hundred Twenty Prophecies* of Luther, which he republished in an expanded edition (*Two Hundred Prophecies*) in 1574, available in a reasonably priced octavo format. The first edition, according to the later preface, had been completely sold out. At least two other editions (1592, 1628) became available. In 1578, immediately after the adoption of the Formula of Concord, Johannes Lapaeus produced another volume of Luther's prophecies, designating him as the Third Elijah. Lapaeus, pastor in Nordhausen, gathered so-called 'prophecies' from Luther's writings under the title *True Prophecies of the Precious Prophet and Holy Man of God, Dr. Martin Luther* and arranged them topically in six chapters. The popular impact of this compendium of '*dicta Lutheri*' should not be underestimated. It aimed to convey an apocalyptic interpretation of the times and strengthened the conviction 'that indeed the true divine prophetic spirit, which spoke through the holy prophets, also has spoken in these last times through the blessed Dr. Martin Luther' (cited from Koch 1986: 105–6).

Luther's contemporaries and the next generation gave prophetic authority not only to his call for repentance and his announcement of divine punishment; they also accorded it to his statements in questions of doctrine and public confession. As the reformational changes were interpreted, he had indeed led the church out of its 'Babylonian captivity' under the papacy as God's elect instrument. In 1575, in the midst of negotiations leading to the Formula of Concord, a collection of Luther's writings on the question of interpreting the Lord's Supper appeared under the title, *The Most Important and Best Writings of the Highly-Enlightened and Spiritually-Endowed Man of God, Dr. Martin Luther*. In the context of the ongoing disputes over the Lord's Supper and Christology, which had led to the fall of the so-called Crypto-Calvinists—better labelled Crypto-Philippists—this publication was designed to legitimize and provide authority for the doctrine of Luther

that would be adopted in the Formula of Concord. This collection's goal was to make these writings of Luther, 'the true Elijah of the last times', accessible again. It is therefore not surprising that even the authors of the Formula of Concord appear to have used this volume when they cited Luther and his writings as the guarantor of this doctrine (Koch 1992: 128–59).

III. VARIOUS APPROPRIATIONS OF THE AUTHORITY AND TEACHING OF LUTHER IN THE SECOND GENERATION OF REFORMERS

That Luther was regarded as the prophet who was to appear at the end of time and that prophetic authority was ascribed to his theology did not only serve to cultivate his memory and appreciation of his contribution to the reform of Christendom. By appropriating his theological statements to legitimate their own positions in public confession and teaching, the second generation of reformers claimed him as an authority for their teaching. This combined both aspects of the office bestowed on Luther as 'German prophet' or 'Elijah of the last days': his role as prophet of doom and his role as rediscoverer of the gospel and evangelical truth. All groups with the stamp of Wittenberg on them which took shape, especially after 1548, appropriated Luther's authority in one way or another, even if with differing emphases.

That became clear already as the group of Luther's disciples assembled around Flacius and Gallus after 1548 formulated judgements on the so-called adiaphora, that is, against the labelling of rites and ceremonies as permissible neutral practices which neither promote nor distract from human salvation. The group called Gnesio-Lutherans opposed the possibility of the reintroduction of medieval ceremonies as a religious and political compromise of electoral Saxony with the imperial policies which were intended to use the Augsburg Interim to force a consistent re-catholicization of the evangelical territories in doctrine and ritual (with the exception of clerical marriage and communion in both kinds). The alternative proposal, the so-called 'Leipzig Interim' (1548), aimed at guaranteeing the retention of evangelical teaching and saw room for negotiation in the realm of rites and ceremonies. Flacius saw in the Leipzig proposal a 'compromise between Christ and Belial': that is, the attempt to reconcile God and the devil. His comrade Joachim Westphal, pastor in Hamburg, supported this position with the help of a collection of citations from Luther (*The Position on Adiaphora of the Honourable and Precious Man, the Blessed Dr. Martin Luther* (Latin 1549, German 1550). He thereby constructed, in his own words, an 'armory' which was to be used as a powerful arsenal against opponents, and that in a time in which clearly many thought they could simply move beyond the reformer's authority (Dingel 2005). In Westphal's eyes the confusion that had set in was nothing else than a divine punishment for the weariness people were exhibiting toward the evangelical truth which Luther had rediscovered. Westphal

intentionally sought passages from Luther's writings to counter this way of thinking. Luther's *'dicta'* could and should serve to prove the propriety of Westphal's own contrary position. These citations strengthened the Gnesio-Lutherans in their confession of the faith without any compromise. Luther's authority took hold through his teaching and his clear positions in regard to disputed questions.

But those disciples of Matthias Flacius who separated from the other Gnesio-Lutherans on the doctrine of original sin, the so-called Flacians, also appealed to Luther and did so gladly and frequently (Dingel 2000). They preferred especially the prophet of doom and disaster. They cited his theological interpretation of history and his observations which they counted as prophecies for explaining their own situations and fate. That included Luther's conviction that the word of the gospel would continue to be obscured from time to time and that a time of darkness and disaster would break in and divide the church through controversy. The Flacians related these 'prophecies of doom' to the efforts of Jacob Andreae toward achieving an all-embracing agreement and to the conclusion of that long process in the much-disputed Formula of Concord (1577); its first article decisively rejected and condemned Flacius' position that original sin is the substance of the fallen human creature. The Flacians for their part regarded the teaching of the Formula on original sin as an intolerable diminution of the effective presence of original sin, which thoroughly corrupts human beings and affirms their absolute dependence on God's grace. The Flacians regarded the teaching of the Formula, which indeed disallowed the opposing position of Viktorin Strigel (original sin is merely an [Aristotelian] accident and adheres to a person only loosely), as an insupportable compromise which opened the door for error and false teachers. Confession of true teaching without compromise could, according to the Flacians, take place only by withdrawing from the majority group and its communion, to form a persecuted 'tiny flock' for the sake of the truth. It emphasized therefore that Luther's prophetic description of the situation at the end of time applied to their own situation. Both their like-minded Gnesio-Lutheran comrades, with whom they were one in other theological questions, and the political authorities, had distanced themselves from the Flacians, and that drove them even deeper into isolation. Luther's prophecies concerning history and his theology of history served them as a consolation in their frequent exiles, a legitimization for their refusal to compromise and a proof for the truth of their teaching. As 'exiles of Christ' they knew at the end of the day that they were one with Martin Luther in their resolute stance in behalf of evangelical truth (Dingel 1996: 467–541).

But the theologians of the Formula of Concord, who strove for formulations that would integrate elements decidedly Luther's own and also the concerns of Melancthon in an all-embracing unity of the Protestants of the Augsburg Confession, cited Luther as the guarantor of proper teaching and the proper understanding of Holy Scripture. This served the goal of firmly establishing Luther's authority and that of the Augsburg Confession, for its authors understood the Formula of Concord to be a direct explication of that Confession. For those authors it was indisputable that Luther had always acted as God's chosen instrument and his writings reflected the message of the gospel without any falsification. God himself had 'brought the truth of his Word into the light out of

the abominable darkness of the papacy through the faithful service the precious man of God, Dr. Luther' (BSLK 834,44–385,2; BC 527). This teaching had found its appropriate and purest expression in the Augsburg Confession presented to the emperor at the imperial diet in Augsburg in 1530.

The Augsburg Confession was not only appropriated for Luther's theology but also vice versa, the authority of the reformer was transferred to the authority of the Confession. Alongside Luther's own writings the Augsburg Confession in its unaltered version took its place as the inheritance bestowed by the Reformation and a timeless expression of the authority of the reformer. Its frequent reprinting in the framework of various editions of Luther's collected writings, both the Wittenberg and the Jena, provides clear evidence for this. Volumes 6 and 9 of the Wittenberg edition (1557) integrate the *Confessio Augustana invariata* in German of 1531 and the first revision of 1533, in which the article on the Lord's Supper was unchanged. Volume 6 of the Jena edition also published the *Confessio Augustana invariata* of 1531 (Neuser 1987: 72 (\$40, 41), 75 (\$46), 92 (\$67), 113 (\$93), 115 (\$95), 130 (\$\$114, 115); cf. 76 (\$47) and 119 (\$101) for the Latin editions). In his *Historia der Augsbürgischen Confession* (1576) David Chytraeus presented Luther not only as the decisive initiator of the Reformation but also as the major player in constructing the confessional documents of the Reformation. He designated Luther as the heroic confessor and real originator of the Augsburg Confession while emphasizing his peaceable intentions and his great pastoral service (Dingel forthcoming). Against this background Luther's doctrinal and controversial writings along with the Augsburg Confession, interpreted according to Luther's theology, served as a correct interpretation of Holy Scripture, the authority of which for faith and teaching obviously stood over that of Luther.

That the Wittenberg reformer functioned as guarantor of the true understanding of Holy Scripture and that Luther's writings held the status of additional witness for a proper and clear understanding of the truth which was to be confessed became clear in the Formula of Concord as well as the *Apology of the Book of Concord* (Dingel 1996: 603–85). The authors of the Formula regarded Luther as 'the most outstanding teacher of the Augsburg Confession' (BSLK 984,36; BC 600). Against reproach from the Calvinists, especially Zacharias Ursinus, that the Lutheran theologians exaggerated the authority of the Wittenberg reformer and attributed to him characteristics unfitting for any human creature, making his authority absolute, the authors of the *Apology of the Book of Concord*, Timothy Kirchner, Nikolaus Selnecker, and Martin Chemnitz replied that no appeal was being made to Luther or the Augsburg Confession for their own sake. Decisive was their clear foundation on the content of the Holy Scripture, the truth and relevance of which were emphasized for the first time in Luther's writings and sermons and in the articles of the Augsburg Confession and thus were adequately conveyed to the people (Dingel 1994, 1996: 141–55).

The context for this change in Luther's stature as a secondary authority had begun to develop with the composition of the *Corpus doctrinae Philippicum* (1560). Gradually this and similar collections of confessional documents assumed the function of setting public standards for theology. This led to a kind of hierarchical ranking in the question

of ecclesiastical authority (Dingel 2012). Among these *Corpora doctrinae* was the Book of Concord (1580), which declared as its goal the restoration of the clarity of teaching and confession in the midst of the existing differences. Luther served from this point as an authority only in so far as his teaching clarified the statements of the Augsburg Confession, which in turn was regarded as a timeless confessional summary of the highest authority of Holy Scripture. In its unaltered version the Confession stood at the centre of all *Corpora doctrinae* within the Lutheran sphere. Those who accepted the Augsburg Confession as their prime secondary authority defined Luther's authority on the basis of his proper understanding of biblical statements. His writings were accorded authority because, faithful to Scripture, they voiced the position of the Augsburg Confession. As the Wittenberg Reformation's foundational confession, it had also assumed the highest political and legal significance for its 'adherents' as the basis of their legal toleration since the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555). The authority of Luther's person found a rival in the growing authority of the Confession and began to be placed under the confessional documents.

Recourse to Luther's authority, as seen in the Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord, had not concentrated so much on reverence for Luther's person. It served rather, above all, to reinforce the doctrine of the Lord's Supper held by the Lutherans in view of the success of Calvinism and Calvinistic tendencies within the Empire. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper, together with his Christology of Christ's two natures, stood as the divisive issues between the Calvinist and Lutheran confessions. Calling on Luther's authority supported the literal interpretation of the words of institution, Christ's statement that his body and his blood are really present in and under the sacramental elements of bread and wine. This interpretation was seen as that of the tenth article of the Augsburg Confession. By citing Luther's writings in the sacramental controversy with Zwingli, his students demonstrated the usefulness of the unfolding of his Christological foundations, especially in his *Confession on the Supper of Christ* (1528) as a further, although only secondary, argument for Christ's real presence in the sacrament. There Luther had set forth the concept of the communication of divine characteristics to Christ's human nature, grounded in the personal union of Godhood and humanity in Christ's person and exhibited in his exaltation to the right hand of God, that is, to divine omnipotence. Originally only a supplementary support used to reinforce the exegetical argument, under the theological influence of Johannes Brenz, who taught a complete omnipresence of Christ's humanity, and of Martin Chemnitz, who developed a doctrine of the 'multivolipresence' of Christ, this Christological issue developed into another indicator of confessional differences. Calvinist opponents immediately attacked the argument as an intolerable 'doctrine of ubiquity'.

This bitter, persistent discussion of the Lord's Supper and Christology did not spare the question of the authority ascribed to Luther. It became still another controversial issue. It is striking that for the Lutheran side in this context the prophetic authority of the reformer hardly played any role at all. It retreated behind the doctrinal authority of the confessional documents to which pastors subscribed. In rejecting Calvinist attacks, the authors of the *Apology of the Book of Concord* conceded to their opponents, 'It is true

that Luther initially wrote much on indulgences, the pope, purgatory, and similar topics that he later retracted, and it is true that he did not have prophetic authority, but it does not follow from that that he erred in his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as our opponents want to argue, and that his doctrine on the Lord's Supper should be retracted... We do not bind ourselves or others to Luther's writings as a rule of faith or say that he could not err. [We bind ourselves] to that which he taught and demonstrated on the basis of clear, lucid passages from the prophetic and apostolic writings and we do not doubt but are certain that he did so in the doctrine of the Holy Supper' (Kirchner, Selnecker, and Chemnitz 1583: 276b–7a).

This position presents the criterion that was decisive for the Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord regarding the Wittenberg reformer and what marked him in their eyes as superior to all the other leading figures of the Reformation: his authority was based not only on his rediscovery of the gospel but especially on his interpretation that uncovered abuses and freed the church from them and expressed convincingly the potential of God's Word to lead people to the centre, Christ. From this perspective Nikolaus Selnecker could postulate that the Lutherans were not merely some confessional sect but that they simply represent Christian teaching as 'the Christians': 'We are Christians... and nothing else but... we have Christ's name. Because we know that through Luther's ministry we were brought back to the truth of the gospel, we confess that we believe with Luther concerning teaching and are not papists, not Calvinist, not Anabaptists, or other sectarians, but we who are called Lutherans, that is Christian, retain Christ's word to which Luther led us back' (Selnecker 1581: 264).

IV. DEALING WITH LUTHER'S AUTHORITY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The developments described here continued in the seventeenth century. Contributing to this was the continuing perception of being in a flow of history that was moving toward an apocalyptic end. In this context authority was therefore ascribed to Luther less as an individual person or an outstanding personality but rather to the extent that he played a special role in the context of the history of salvation. That he accomplished as a proclaimer of the gospel and an instrument of God (Zeeden 1950–2: 1.78). The *Apology of the Book of Concord* had established that Luther was not simply to be equated with the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New and could not claim prophetic authority to the same extent (even if he still qualified for the designations 'prophet', 'apostle', or 'Evangelist' and continued to be named the 'third Elijah'). His authority was not understood as grounded in and arising from his unusual personality but as an authority derived from its faithfulness to Scripture. His conformity to Scripture as he proclaimed God's Word as God's instrument is that which established his authority. That Lutherans after the Formula of Concord shared the Formula's view

that Luther's proclamation presented an understanding of Scripture which conveyed its truth reinforced this appreciation of the reformer. His authority arose, therefore, from his office and his commission. They were subordinate to the authority of Holy Scripture, on the one hand, but on the other functioned as a guarantee that the theology taken from Scripture and the confession which summarized the content of Scripture could claim to be true and valid. With this Luther's catechisms and the Smalcald Articles became ever more prominent as standards for teaching. These documents made Luther's voice and his positions on decisive theological questions present even after his death. They served, particularly in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, to ensure the proper understanding of the formulations of the *Confessio Augustana invariata* and lent the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 a Lutheran reading.

In the seventeenth century Luther's person and reputation remained a topic for dispute among the confessional groups, above all with the Jesuits (Herte 1943: 91–332). The opposing interpretations both relativized and reinforced Luther's peculiar authority equally. Designating Luther as the fifth evangelist, as happened in the sixteenth century, waned. The epithets 'prophet' and 'apostle' were used more carefully. At the same time Luther's authority became a standard in Lutheran dogmatics. Johann Gerhard emphasized, for example, the coincidence of 'a properly ordered ecclesiastical call and the extraordinary gifts' which marked Luther (Zeeden 1950–2: 1.90–1). This had distinguished him in the eyes especially of other contemporaries. Gerhard viewed in Luther's extraordinary gifts, abilities, and character traits the foundation for his unique status and that which enabled him to perform his great work of reformation. In line with this Gerhard drew up a catalogue of these extraordinary gifts.

Even if the gifts were perverted into their opposite in the Catholic controversial literature of the time—Luther had not been called in orderly fashion; he had not been called and sent by God at all (Herte 1943; Zeeden 1950–2: 1.90–1)—Lutheran 'Orthodoxy' stood steadfast in its reverence for Luther. Foundational for seventeenth-century Lutheran theology was the conviction that the content of Luther's teaching agreed with the message of God's Word and the propositions of Holy Scripture were faithfully reproduced in Luther's utterances. What Luther had taught was regarded as key to understanding the Reformation; the seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians believed that they were in continuity with that teaching. The all-embracing renewal of the church and the revelation of the Antichrist and his corrupting effects were the great accomplishments that constituted Luther's impact. In that impact the Lutheran theologians, like their predecessors, saw God at work. 'Because public teaching is God's Word, the Reformation is a divine activity. Analogously: because the unveiling and overthrow of the Antichrist could only be a divine activity, the Reformation, through which both were set in motion, is *also* a divine activity' (Zeeden 1950–2: 2.103, emphasis Zeeden's).

The concern for the preservation of the 'orthodoxy' of teaching, which arose through its agreement with the teaching of the reformer, offered the perspective from which

Luther was viewed. The concern was always his teaching, that is, his impact. Therefore, his individual personal characteristics were subordinated to what he proclaimed, also in presentations of the reformer at this time. Even the Luther 'biographies', which increased in number compared to the sixteenth century (though the tradition begun by Rabus, Mathesius, and Spangenberg, in concert with Roman Catholic counter-biographies, did produce some already then: Kolb 1999: 86–101), concentrated less on his person and much more on his impact and the teaching connected to it. Johannes Müller's *Luther Defended* (1645) stated: 'Now we know from God's Word that we should not focus on the person of the teacher but consider the teaching in itself, whether it conforms to God's Word or not;... a great and good person cannot make a teaching good which is false; a lowly or bad person cannot make a teaching that is correct bad and false. Thus, we would not be obligated to be concerned about Dr. Luther's person and to reply to criticisms against his person because his teaching is correct and corresponds to that of Holy Scripture... we take seriously what he taught from God's Word and do not pay attention to his person' (cited in Zeeden 1950–2: 2.110).

Thus, Luther's authority was not that of an individual; it was theological authority arising from his teaching. The attacks lodged by Catholic controversial theologians on the personal, individual weaknesses of Luther did not need to be refuted for this reason. In the eyes of the Orthodox theologians they missed the essential and actually important point. For what lent Luther in their eyes his uniqueness and authority was his interpretation of the gospel and the delivery of the true understanding of the gospel which had taken place through him. For this reason the chief court preacher in Dresden Matthias Hoe von Hoeneegg could designate Luther—as had his sixteenth-century comrades in the faith—as an elect instrument of God, whose teaching had been exposed to the devil's persecution, which 'papists and other heretics and Schwärmer' had stirred up against him. But God placed him in his protection and so directed the unfolding events 'that the angel (Luther) with the gospel flew through the heavens (Revelation 14) and rescued one hundred thousand souls from papal darkness with the clarity of pure divine teaching and brought them the light... No less than a real Samson he tore down the two supporting columns of the Antichrist's empire (Preface to Erasmus Willich, *Sontantia Luther*, cited by Zeeden 1950–2: 2.99). As a figure in the history of salvation, with his place at the apocalyptic end of the flow of history, Luther appeared as the one who proclaimed divine teaching as the apocalyptic angel of Revelation 14. The teaching for which Luther served as God's instrument and with which he judged the Antichrist, is identical with God's Word itself.

With this stance toward Luther, Orthodox Lutheranism in the seventeenth century revealed that it was the heir of its Late Reformation predecessors. As the authentic interpreter of God's Word, Luther enjoyed the highest authority, which was naturally subordinated to the Holy Scripture as a direct witness of God's Word. It was the eighteenth century that discovered the person 'Luther', that is, his religious personality and the character traits of the individual so important for practical piety.

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