Introduction

In 2017, many churches will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. By design, this is not envisioned as solely a German event, but rather as a global and ecumenical one. After nearly 500 years of existence, the Lutheran communion has a world-wide presence which should become visible in the context of the anniversary. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches repeatedly expressed their great desire to deepen their understanding of Lutheran identity in relation to other denominations in their respective ecumenical contexts. Knowing one's own tradition is a prerequisite for a fruitful, beneficial dialogue with other faiths and world views.

To that end, the LWF deemed it necessary and appropriate to establish a center in Wittenberg. In 2008 the relevant resolution was passed at the Council meeting in Arusha (Tanzania), and in 2009, the LWF Center in Wittenberg was founded. Since then, a firm connection between the site of the Reformation and the global Lutheran communion has been guaranteed, which strengthens the Lutheran identity and the capacity of the member churches for inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue. The now firmly established and highly respected International Seminars (two per year, each one lasting 14 days) at the Wittenberg - Center make a substantial contribution in this regard. Theologians from member churches are invited for two weeks to Wittenberg to work with professors from universities in Germany and abroad on topics of Lutheran theology. The objectives of these seminars are:

(a) to understand the key messages of texts by Martin Luther,
(b) to recognize the circumstances and contexts in which Luther lived
(c) to relate Luther’s insights constructively to the lives of the participants
(d) to experience communion with pastors from all over the world, and
(e) to strengthen everyday life in the home churches

Topic of the 10th Seminar, November 2014

The 10th seminar took place in Wittenberg from November 8th to November 22nd, 2014 and was led by Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter and Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson from the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. The topic of the seminar was “The Christian and the Government: Luther’s View of Temporal Authority.”
The righteousness of God

1. In the Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings, the reformer reports that he had struggled for many years how to understand the phrase “righteousness of God” in Rom 1:17 (“For in it [scil. in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous through faith will live.’ [Habakkuk 2:4]”). Luther understood “righteousness of God” in a philosophical way or according to the common sense as giving everybody his or her due (suum cuique). If a temporal judge on earth is righteous, he will punish the evildoer and acquit the innocent. A teacher will reward a good performance in examination and give bad marks if the results of the examination are bad. As long as Luther understood “righteousness of God” in this way, he was terrified by this phrase, because he argued in the following way:

God as eternal judge will punish the evildoer or the sinner and reward the person who acts well. (1)
I am a sinner of unquiet conscience. (2)
Conclusion: God will punish me eternally if he is righteous. (3)

If righteousness of God is understood according to the every-day-understanding of justice, Luther cannot realize why this should be “good news”, i.e. the gospel. On the contrary, Luther found that this “gospel” added terrible burdens on the sinner, and he felt to be such a sinner.

2. Luther found the right understanding of the phrase “righteousness of God” by carefully reflecting on the wording of the text and making the following linguistic observations concerning Rom 1:17:

In the gospel: The righteousness of God is revealed. (1)
As it is written: The one who is righteous by faith will live. (2)

The words “as it is written” make clear that sentence (2) explains sentence (1) and that both sentences have the same content. Thus “righteousness of God” does not refer here to an attribute of God but rather to something that characterizes the believer. Since it is the righteousness of God, it comes from God and thus is God’s gift. Luther quotes Habakkuk 2:4, according to which “the righteous by faith” will live (or the “righteous will live by faith”). Thus it is faith that receives the gift of righteousness. The genitive of “righteousness of God” is so to speak a genitive of communication: God is righteous by making human beings who believe righteous. Luther found the same structure of the genitive also in other biblical phrases like “power of God” (not only the power by which God himself is powerful but also the power by which we are powerful through God), the “wisdom of God” (not only the wisdom by which God is wise or is wisdom but by which we are wise through God), etc.

3. Luther gained his insight by “meditating day and night” (compare Psalm 1:2), but it was “by the mercy of God” that he eventually found the right understanding. Thus the way in which he gained insight of the proper understanding of “righteousness of God” corresponds to its content or meaning: by the mercy of God, as a gift. As much as he had hated the righteousness of God previously, he now
love this righteousness, properly understood, as “the gate to paradise.” Luther tells the story of his reformation insight as a typical conversion story with a turning point in the middle and attitudes contrary to each other before and after that turning point.

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<td><strong>Righteousness of God</strong></td>
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<td>God punishes sinners</td>
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<td>that by which the righteous lives by a gift</td>
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<td><strong>Luther’s self-perception</strong></td>
<td>I felt I was a sinner before God</td>
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<td>born again, entered paradise</td>
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<td><strong>Relation to God’s righteousness</strong></td>
<td>I hated the righteous God</td>
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<td>Love as great as hatred was</td>
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4. There has been a long debate among Luther researchers whether there was one turning point at all in Luther’s biography or whether there was a long process of discoveries with many steps that Luther at the end of his life summarized in one turning point. There is also a debate whether or not Luther refers in the Preface to the year 1518 as the year when he gained that understanding of the righteousness of God. Since Luther states at the end of the text quoted that before starting the second lecture on the Psalms he felt much better prepared by his new insight it seems to be plausible that he thinks of the year 1518 as the year of that basic insight. But the debate on these questions is still going on.

5. Many people nowadays cannot understand why Luther characterizes the relation between God and human beings by using the term “justification” which is taken from the juridical realm. It is simply biblical language that Paul often uses in his letters to the Galatians and Romans. But we can also see that it reflects a general anthropological insight. Luther is well aware that human beings live in relations: in relations to other people, to themselves, to the impersonal world (nature, culture, state, etc.), and to God. In all these relations we are observed, evaluated, and “judged” by others, and vice versa we observe, evaluate, “judge” others, ourselves, the world, God (compare 1 Cor 4,3-4). If we take “judge” in a broad sense, this word describes a universal structure of relations.

6. Luther summarized the theses “On the Remission of Sins” by saying: “The righteous will live not from works of the law, and also not from the law, but from faith. Romans 1[:17, Rom. 3:28].” Thus his new understanding of the sacrament of penance must have something to do with the proper understanding of Rom 1:17. This sacrament is one place where justification takes place. Thus, how this sacrament is understood reveals how justification has to be perceived. In order to fully grasp the change in Luther’s understanding, one should be aware of Luther’s understanding of this sacrament in 1517 (95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences).
7. The 6th and 7th theses of the 95 Theses read as follows: “The pope [the same is the case for any priest] cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; […] God remits guilt to no one except at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to his vicar, the priest.” Luther still presupposed in the time of the 95 Theses that the priest in fact does not forgive sins, rather he declares that sins (or the guilt of sin) have already been forgiven by God. What is essential for the forgiveness of sins, is the inner repentance of the sinner. God reacts to this repentance by forgiving the sins. This understanding creates the problem which role the sacrament of penance and especially the priest should play in forgiving sins. The church was used to emphasize the role of the priest but if the decisive processes take place between the penitent sinner and God, it is difficult to define the role of the priest in this process. Luther’s answer to this problem in thesis 7 was that God only forgives sins with the requirement that the penitent sinner will confess to a priest. This is humiliating for a person and thus belongs to his or her repentance.

8. In the background there is a certain branch of (late) medieval theology. The tradition following the theologian Duns Scotus (1265-1308) emphasized the absolute freedom of God. Nothing that is created (for example: a good act) can force God to react in a certain way (for example: to convey his grace on the person who does this good act). Thus a relationship between God and humans can only be established by God, namely by God’s self-determination. God determines himself to establish a certain pact with human beings. Its content is: If a human being does what is in his or her power, God will not deny to giving him or her his grace. But what is in his or her power? According to that tradition a human being by the freedom of the will is able to create an act of love of God above all. Such an act is an act of will towards God. This act plays a decisive role when it comes to repentance of a sinner. Does a person who has sinned confess because he or she is afraid of going to hell if his or her sins will not be forgiven? In this case, the repentant person would act in his or her own interest and love of himself or herself. Or does he or she repent because she violated God, and therefore she repents out of love of God? Thus the argument reads as follows:

God’s pact: If a human being does what is in his or her power, God will not deny to giving him or her his grace. (1)
An act of love of God (i.e. true repentance) is in the power of the human being due to his or her free will. (2)
Thus a human being can merit grace. (3)

The question often attributed to Luther, ‘How do I find a gracious God?’ has its roots in this line of thinking. This question is not the question of Luther, the reformer. Receiving grace (see sentences [1] and [3]) means forgiveness of sins. That means: If one truly repents then God will forgive his or her sins. This is the understanding that lies behind thesis 6 of the 95 theses. The task of the priest is to investigate the signs of repentance, and if he finds such signs, to declare that God has already forgiven.

9. Luther denies that we human beings are able to love God as God wants to be loved. Deuteronomy 6:5 states: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Jesus repeats this in Matthew 22:37!) This means that God wants that the whole person
is dedicated to him, not only the human will. But we do not have power over all our desires, longings, emotions etc. They may go in different, even opposite directions. Thus we cannot love God as he expects us to do. Thus sentence (2) of the argument above is denied by Luther. Since true fulfillment of the law can only originate from love of God, we are not able to fulfill the law – in a theological sense. It is important that we distinguish between a legal and moral sense, in which we fulfill the law, and a theological sense. In the legal sense, it is only required to act outwardly in accordance with a precept of the law. In the moral sense, it is required that we do the right act because it is good. But in a theological sense it is required that our whole person is dedicated to God and that we act out of this wholehearted dedication.

10. The law – understood theologically – reveals and confronts us with the fact that we do not love God as he wants us to love him, namely with the dedication of our whole person. We may have power over our will, but not over all powers of our soul. According to the old rule “Nobody is obliged to do something that transcends his possibilities”, medieval theologians limited the requirement of the command to love God to the will. Performing an act of will, namely loving God above all, is the fulfillment of the law. For Luther, this is correct in the moral sphere, but it is not correct if the law is understood theologically. In this respect, all of our powers should be directed to God in love, which is not the case until the end of our lives. Since we do not love God in this way as our final goal, we instead love ourselves as the last goal of our lives and seek our own benefit in all what we do. This is Luther’s definition of sin. We are curved into ourselves. This is different from egoism. Egoism can be overcome – at least to a certain degree – by our natural powers, by being fair to others, by being just (giving everybody his or her due). But even if we act in this way in surmounting egoism, we are proud of achieving this, we boast ourselves (at least before ourselves), we think that we are superior to others, or we criticize others who are weaker than we, etc. We ground our self-esteem on these deeds and benefit in this way from them. Thus Luther’s insight of the theological understanding of the law can function as a critical theory of our moral and religious achievements: It is true that we should strive to improve and make progress in fulfilling God’s law, but we should never forget that we have not reached full dedication of our whole persons to God and that therefore we ourselves and others may suffer from the consequences of this lack of wholehearted love to God.

11. The law of God, theologically understood, requires from us something that we cannot fulfill. Nevertheless, the law does not lead us into desperation, since its theological meaning is to say: “You must have Christ and his Spirit!” And Luther adds: The gospel says: “Here is Christ and his Spirit.” Thus, the law cannot theologically been fulfilled by certain acts (love of God), but by Christ and by our participation in Christ. Luther's early question, “How do I find a gracious God?” changes into the question, “Where do I find a gracious God?” The answer is: in the gospel!

12. Luther gained one basic reformation insight in reflecting on the sacrament of penance, especially on the understanding of Matthew 16:18. Luther realized that Matthew 16 said just the opposite from what he thought for a long time (namely that God would forgive a person who was contrite about his or her sin by an act of love of God above all, and that the priest could only declare that God had already forgiven), but rather that the priest declared the penitent righteous and by this act on behalf of God the sinner actually became righteous. Luther understood the words of God as words that create what they say, and that they have the character of promises (promissio). Such a word of promise is said in a particular place and time, by a particular person and directed to a particular person, aiming at
this person’s faith that grasps what is promised as promised to himself or herself personally. Luther insisted that such faith is the only appropriate reaction to a word of divine promise, that the human being is challenged to look away from himself or herself and to look only at the word of God’s promise and to trust fully in it. Not to trust in this word would make God a liar or one on whose word one could not eventually rely. Thus unbelief is the greatest sin against God. This understanding of penance allows for overcoming uncertainty of the forgiveness of sins. In the old understanding, forgiveness depended on the rue repentance, but nobody could be totally certain whether his or her repentance was actually true. People were well aware of Paul’s words in 1 Cor 4:3-4, where he states that he is not justified because he is not aware of anything bad that he had done, but Paul insists that God has the final judgment. That indicates that we are not able to gain full insight into our self and into our soul. Thus the Apostle already had an insight that Psychoanalysis again emphasized in the 20th century. This insight is very important for a proper understanding of religious life. Luther states: 

*Our theology is certain because it puts us outside of us* (i.e. it makes us relying on Christ’s promises and not on our contrition or any other subjective states of affair).

13. Therefore sin has a twofold dimension, and both dimension are connected with each other as two sides of one coin: Sin is seeking one’s own benefit in everything (1), and sin is not trusting in the promises of God and so making God a liar (2). The law reveals the first aspect, while the gospel is offering to us the promise of God’s grace in Christ that overcomes sin. To reject this promise is the greatest sin. Luther sometimes speaks of the believer as “at the same time righteous and sinner.” Many people have problems to understand this. From what has been said, we can say: With reference to the law of God, a believer is still a sinner (he or she is not wholeheartedly dedicated to God), but with reference to the gospel and its promises a believer is righteous. The latter perspective is always the final and predominant perspective.

14. This indicates a basic structure of the relation between God and human beings: God wishes to deal with human beings by giving them words of promise which show his will towards them, and human beings, on the other side, should deal with God only by trusting in his promises. Faith is totally dependent on God’s promises; it cannot create the object in which human beings put their trust. But divine promises aim at the human being’s believing. There is the basic relation of divine promise and human belief. This relation is understood correctly only if both sides are emphasized, but with a predominance on the word of promise since it creates faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. Both need to be stressed: the “objectivity” of the promise, and the “subjectivity” of faith.

15. Luther is aware that the New Testament does not use the word “sacrament” in order to denote those practices that we call “sacraments” (for example: baptism, Holy Supper, etc.). Thus it is clear that the meaning of “sacrament” cannot simply be taken from the New Testament, but requires theological reflection. Luther accepted the definition of a sacrament by Augustine: The word comes to the element and makes a sacrament. The word is twofold: A word of promise of Jesus Christ is required that states what is communicated through the sacrament, and a command is required that tells that this practice is to be performed. In this way, a “sacrament” is instituted by Christ. Therefore the priest has to serve Christ’s promise in order that it creates faith in a human being. Since the priest acts only on behalf of Christ (according to his command) and communicates nothing else than what Christ has told his disciples (promise), the act of the priest is at the same time the act of God. Because the priest’s acting through the sacrament is nothing else than an instrument of God in the service of Christ, his
work is at the same time highly elevated as the work of the Holy Spirit. If a pastor baptizes a child, we should regard this baptizing as if the Holy God himself puts the child into the water and baptizes it. This should be explained to the congregations so that they respect the ministry of the pastors in an adequate way.

16. Luther explains that by trusting in God’s promise – more precisely, in Christ’s promise – a human being is in a relation to Christ that can be described by using the image of a (spiritual) marriage: the soul is the bride; Christ is the bridegroom; faith is the wedding ring. According to the laws of marriage, the properties of the bridegroom (righteousness) become the properties of the bride, and the properties of the bride (her sins) become the properties of the bridegroom. This “happy exchange” is forgiveness of sins and salvation. The image shows that something external (Christ’s righteousness) becomes something internal: it becomes the property of the soul but only in the union with Christ not in separation from him. Luther insists that our righteousness is totally external: it is Christ’s righteousness, but it has to become totally internal – by faith in Christ. Only if both sides are equally emphasized is the reality of salvation properly understood. He can also state, “It is precisely in faith that Christ is present.” “Presence” is a relation: Christ is “in” and “for” the soul: something external (Christus) is inside the soul.

17. The word of Christ’s promise is always said in a particular situation by someone to someone else. This means that Christ’s words are always heard in the Church, and that justification takes place within the Church. Since the external word of the Gospel is foundational for faith and creates it by the power of the Holy Spirit, Lutheran ecclesiology can never begin with the concept of the invisibility of the Church; rather it will insist that the church is basically visible, especially in the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. Faith is, of course, invisible, and thus the church is at the same time visible and hidden, but it is hidden precisely under the visible elements that the Holy Spirit uses. Therefore the church is understood as “the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly” (CA VII.1). This also means that the core reality of the church is the congregation that is assembled around pulpit and altar. Again, this does not exclude the dimension of the universal church since each individual congregation is understood as connected with the others by the practice of the right preaching and right celebration of the sacraments for which the ministry in the church is needed.

Summary of Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky-Wilson: Week one

1518 THESES ON THE REMISSION OF SIN

1-7: Remission of guilt vs. remission of punishment

8-12: The source of remission is Christ, not the priest or the penitent

13-22: The source of certainty in absolution is Christ’s word alone

23-34: The task of the priest vs. the action of God

35-41: Hypothetical and restricted cases
42-45: Old covenant vs. new testament

46-50: Concluding spiritual remarks

Summary: In this document Luther establishes for the first time that the source of certainty in faith lies not within ourselves nor in the power of the church but in the fact that Christ is trustworthy, means what he says, and keeps his promises.

SERMON ON TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Two kinds of righteousness corresponding to two kinds of sin:

Alien righteousness: Christ’s righteousness, which is instilled in us from without through the word and our reception in faith. Given in baptism and whenever we repent and believe. It is not our work or choice but a gift given to us. It overcomes original sin, which is also instilled in us from the outside without our work or choice as a curse laid upon us.

Proper righteousness: built upon the foundation of Christ’s righteousness, this is our own righteousness, which works with Christ’s righteousness. It consists of slaying the flesh, loving the neighbor, and honoring God. It counteracts actual sin, which is the sin we ourselves commit. Proper righteousness is the consequence and fruit of alien righteousness. It is treating other as Christ has treated us.

THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

The Word of God is the gospel concerning Jesus Christ and his salvation offered freely to sinners. It can only be received in faith. The commandments show us what we should do but do not give us the power to obey them. The gospel is the promise of God which gives exactly what it promises. A promise can only be received in faith, that is, it only does the good it intends when it is believed. Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand.

The powers of faith:

1. The Word of God lives and rules in the soul
2. Faith fulfills the First Commandment and therefore all the Commandments
3. Union with Christ
4. Kingship
5. Priesthood
Joyful exchanges:

1. Because we reckon God as righteous when we believe His promise, He in turn reckons our faith as righteousness
2. We receive Christ’s benefits and he takes away our sin, death, and damnation
3. The incarnation: the divine nature takes on the human properties and the human nature takes on the divine properties
4. Christian ethics: we take our neighbor’s sins and burdens as our own and we offer our good works to our neighbor as their own

Promise $\rightarrow$ Faith

Law $\rightarrow$ Repentance

The task of the ministry is to constantly relate promise and faith, and law and repentance.

The issue at stake is not what we do, but who we are. Thus not works, but faith.
The de-centered self lives in God and the neighbor.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH: BAPTISM

The most important thing about baptism is that it is a divine promise. This allows a distinction between valid baptism: correctly performed with water and the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and efficacious baptism: the promise of God is received in faith. The task of the ministry is to declare what baptism gives (I Peter 3:21, Mark 16:16) in order to awake faith. Repentance and faith do not require a new baptism but send us back to the promise made once for all to us in baptism. God does the baptizing; the pastor only lends voice and hands. Promise and faith belong together; we are not to choose one over the other, or else we end up either at double predestination on the one side or free will with justifying works on the other side. Christian life is a continual return to the power of baptism.

CONCERNING REBAPTISM

Luther replies to the concerns of two evangelical pastors who have heard about re-baptizing; this is not based on his direct conversation with Anabaptists. Note that rebaptism had been a capital crime in the Holy Roman Empire for more than 1000 years and all persons (except Jews) were required by law to bring their children for baptism soon after birth.
Replies to objections:

1. If it is a human work, shouldn’t I choose it and participate in it knowingly? Luther replies: it is not a human work, but a divine work to be received in faith.

2. How can I be sure I was really baptized as an infant? Luther replies: if you can’t believe this, you can’t believe almost everything you claim as knowledge.

3. Shouldn’t a person believe before being baptized, as in Mark 16:16? Luther replies: No pastor can be sure of the faith of a baptismal candidate (belief ≠ verbal confession of faith), and in fact no person can be sure of her own faith. Baptism based on certainty of true faith will only lead to multiple rebaptisms.

Can children rightly be baptized, since they do not have faith?

1. Luther does not prove that all children have faith; he only proves that it is incorrect to say that no children have faith, by referring to several biblical passages, chiefly John the Baptist in Elizabeth’s womb in Luke 1. Thus, it is possible for children to have faith.

2. Although the baptism of children is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, neither is the baptism of adults, or of men and women, only of “all the nations,” which certainly includes children. Furthermore, household baptisms almost certainly include children, and household baptisms include the baptisms of adults regardless of their consent or faith.

3. Even if children don’t have faith prior to baptism, baptism creates and awakens faith, because baptism is the divine promise, not the human response to it. Thus pastors should preach about the promise in baptism in order to make valid baptisms develop into efficacious baptisms.

Luther’s reasons for retaining infant baptism:

1. It has been practiced since apostolic times.

2. It would be terrible to take it away if it were in fact effective.

3. God would have stopped it earlier if it were so bad.

4. Many infant-baptized people have grown into faithful Christians.

5. If it weren’t a legitimate way of making Christians, then there would have been no Christians and no church for more than 1000 years.

6. It is practiced in every part of Christendom.

7. It is part of the covenant with “heathen,” which includes children.
BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH: LORD’S SUPPER

First captivity: reservation of the cup to the priests

Second captivity: requirement of belief in the theory of transubstantiation

(Please note: Lutherans do not believe in “consubstantiation”! They confess the real physical presence of Christ in the bread and wine. No particular theory of it is required for faith.)

Third captivity: the mass has been made into a sacrifice offered by human priests to God and thus a good work, rather than a divine promise made by God and offered to the faithful.

The Lord’s Supper is a testament, namely a promise put into effect by Christ the testator’s death. The inheritance is forgiveness of sins; the heirs are those who receive the inheritance in faith. Thus the words of institution are gospel to be spoken clearly for the faithful to hear and believe.

Same structure here as elsewhere: God’s Word of promise → faith → love → good works. God does not deal, nor has ever dealt, with human beings otherwise than through a word of promise. We in turn cannot deal with God otherwise than through faith in the word of His promise.

The prayers are our offering up to God. “Eucharist” means thanksgiving: it is our work, not God’s. The words of institution and the distribution are God’s work to us, thus gospel. It is extremely important to distinguish these two directions in our liturgy; otherwise we turn God’s work into our work. “Therefore these two things—mass and prayer, sacrament and work, testament and sacrifice—must not be confused; for the one comes from God to us through the ministration of the priest and demands our faith, the other proceeds from our faith to God through the priest and demands His hearing. The former descends, the latter ascends.”

Note: later in the controversy with Zwingli, and especially in the 1528 “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” Luther will put more emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Supper. As this was not a matter of dispute with the Roman party, it is not much mentioned in the Babylonian Captivity.

A BRIEF INSTRUCTION ON WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND EXPECT IN THE GOSPELS

Law and Gospel: Common Errors

2. What makes me feel bad/guilty vs. what makes me feel good/guiltless
3. Natural vs. supernatural
4. Pre-Christian life vs. Christian life
5. God’s wrath vs. God’s love
Twofold Grasping of Christ

1. As gift (or sacrament): all that Christ is and has done is given freely and completely to you out of the great fire of God’s love for us. This is what makes us Christians.

2. As example: only once we have received Christ as a gift does he become an effective example for us, modeling how we are to give ourselves as gifts to others just as he gave himself as a gift to us. Without Christ as gift, Christ as example is only a law and a hindrance, and makes us hypocrites.

Christ as a gift nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example exercises your works. These do not make you a Christian. Actually they come forth from you because you have already been made a Christian.

The law is God’s word and benefit just as much as the gospel.

The Old Testament is as much God’s word as the New.

Uses of the Law: Classic Lutheran Distinctions

1. First Use or Political Use: restraint of violence and ordering of public life together, in which reason and love play primary roles. It is not necessary to be a Christian to participate in this use of the law. It is possible to keep the political use to a great extent.

2. Second Use or Theological Use: the law is a mirror revealing to us our sin and thus our need for Christ. It evokes repentance. This is a valid use of the law even for Christians who have begun to be new people through the gospel.

3. Third Use or Pedagogical Use: the reborn Christian learns from the law the right way to conduct herself and show love toward the neighbor. Although Luther certainly writes much about the law as the director of our sanctification (e.g. the Ten Commandments in the Catechisms), he never explicitly identifies this as the “third use of the law.” Thus it has been disputed in Lutheranism afterward and is addressed in the Formula of Concord.

“Senses” of the Law (Sarah’s distinctions):

1. Instructive Sense of the Law. This is the Torah in Jewish understanding, exemplified in Psalm 1. The law teaches us how God would have us care for the creation, our bodies, and other people. It is always valid, including for the Christian.

2. Relational Sense of the Law. This is what happens when sin distorts our relationship with God. Instead of relating to God directly through promise and faith, the law becomes the mediator of our relationship and makes our reconciliation to Him conditional. The believing Christian is set free from this relational sense of the law through Christ.
Legalism maintains the relational sense of the law even for the Christian.

Antinomianism rejects the instructive sense of the law for Christian.

Both errors should be rejected.

**Summary of Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter: Week two**

*The Christian and Temporal Authority*

Summary of the second week

1. Luther has the task of reconciling Mt 5:39 and Rom 13 and in connection with this to answer the question of whether a Christian can serve in a position of temporal authority. In order to do so, Luther develops several distinctions.

1.1 The first distinction: Temporal authority that in certain cases uses force (called “the sword”) is necessary since not all children of Adam are true believers, rather they are wolves that threaten to devour the weaker people (“sheep”). Luther distinguishes here between two classes of people (true believers – non-believers).

1.2 True Christians do not need the “sword” because they (a) do no wrong and (b) if wrong is done to them they do not seek revenge.

1.3 Luther’s second distinction: One has to distinguish whether a Christian acts (a) on behalf of himself/herself or whether (b) he/she acts in a position of temporal authority on behalf of others. In case (a) he/she is not allowed to resist evil, but in case (b) he/she will do it out of love for neighbor. In both cases love is the driving force, even though it has a different, even contradictory approach.

1.4 Since every office has been instituted for the sake of the common good (the good of the neighbors), every office-holder who seeks his/her own benefit in his/her office acts in contradiction to the purpose and task of the office.

2. Luther has the task of answering the question of how far temporal authority extends (for example, whether a prince can force Lutheran Christians to hand over Luther’s writings and his translation of the New Testament).

2.1 Luther answers by introducing a new distinction: two types of government: (a) temporal government through the law and (b) spiritual government of the Holy Spirit through gospel and faith. (a) relates to the body of a person, property, external affairs, (b) relates to the “soul” (= the human person in relation to God).

2.2 Only the one who can show the soul the way to heaven can govern it: i.e. God through the Word of God. Thus temporal government can have no authority over the soul; it has to limit itself to the body and external affairs.
Since faith is the work of God, it must be free from any pressure from the side of temporal authority. This is the basis for the claim of religious liberty.

If princes force Lutheran Christians to hand over to them Luther’s translation of the New Testament, the latter should practice nonviolent resistance: no cooperation with the officials but willing suffering if they do take away the books.

Luther offers four guidelines as to how a Christian and prince should conduct his office of temporal authority:

1. With firm faith in Jesus Christ.
2. A Christian can trust fully only in Christ; thus – as a consequence – the prince should only have limited trust in his counselors; he must be able to have own insight and must not be fully dependent on his counselors.
3. Concerning warfare: A prince should not wage war on his superior (Rom 13!); on equals only if he has been violated and it is clear that the war will not do greater damage and injustice than what he has suffered. His subjects are only allowed to follow him into war if they are certain that the case of the prince is just. If they realize that this is not the case, they should refuse the required military service.
4. The prince should apply law (general rules) not automatically to concrete cases, rather he should do this with equity, i.e. by taking into consideration the special circumstances of a given situation.

Concerning the peasants’ rebellion Luther directs his comments to the princes and the peasants:

1. Luther accuses the princes of acting unjustly against the peasants and thus being the reason for their rebellion. They have to expect to be deposed from their thrones as a consequence of their bad behavior and by the wrath of God. Princes should repent and amend their behavior.
2. But even though the peasants are seen as the instrument of God’s wrath, this does not justify the peasants’ rebellion, as Luther states in turning to the peasants. If the peasants ask whether their rebellion is theologically right, Luther clearly says ‘No’. His reasons are:
   1. This rebellion is against natural law since it says that nobody can be part of a conflict and judge over it at the same time. But through their upheaval the peasants make themselves judges of the conflict and immediately execute their judgment.
   2. This rebellion contradicts the Christian faith since Christians should be prepared to suffer injustice according to Matthew 5:39.
   3. Nobody knows whether the result of the rebellion, even if it were successful, would actually represent an improvement in the situation of the peasants. But if one wishes to change a given situation seriously (even violently), one must be certain that the change would lead to an
improvement. Since this cannot clearly be foreseen, there are no good reasons for going into a violent rebellion. In 1525, the peasants’ rebellion failed terribly and the living condition of the poor peasants deteriorated as a consequence of the rebellion. Thus suffering evil conditions in a Christian manner, as Luther described it, would have caused much less pain for the peasants than going to war. (There are similarities to the history of South Africa where the fact that the non-violent resistance against the Apartheid regime turned into a violent struggle has contributed to the contemporary violence in South African society.)

4.2.4 The peasants appeal to Christian freedom but this freedom is a freedom of the “soul” – the human being in relation to God – while the freedom that the peasants have in mind is the freedom of one human being to another. Thus the peasants are mixing the relation to God (faith) and the relation to other human beings (love). Thus they make the gospel an instrument for their temporal interest and compromise the gospel. Luther was afraid that appealing to the gospel for rebellion would lead to contempt for the gospel among many people.

4.3 Luther proposes to establish a commission consisting of a few princes and members of the magistrates of the cities to take up the peasants’ concerns and to function as a judge. He admonishes both parties earnestly to keep peace and not to go to war.

5. Concerning the topic, whether soldiers, too, can be saved, Luther distinguishes between an occupation and the person who holds it. He first discusses the problem whether or not the occupation of a soldier is contradicting Christian faith and secondly how the persons should behave who hold this occupation. An office, even though it is right, can become evil and unjust if the person engaged in it is evil and unjust.

5.1 In order to answer the first question, Luther refers to Rom 13 (institution of the “sword” by God) and to John the Baptist who did not require from soldiers to leave their occupation; Luther emphasizes that the “sword” is meant for the protection of the people against evildoers from within and without.

5.2 Luther distinguishes two kinds of government by identifying their different means and different aims: spiritual government operates through the Word of God and aims at faith, righteousness, making people good, and leads to eternal life, while temporal government uses the sword in order to force people to keep the peace and become righteous in the eyes of the world.

5.3 Answering the second question of how a Christian should use this office, Luther distinguishes between three cases: (a) a war of subjects against their overlord, (b) a war of equals, (c) a war of an overlord against his subjects.

5.3.1 (a) Luther denies the question that a situation could evolve in which it is just for subjects to be disobedient to rulers and fight against them, depose them, or put them in bonds. Even though an insane ruler must be deposed, Luther emphasizes the difference between a mad ruler and a tyrant since a tyrant has not yet lost the light of reason and his conscience, even though they seem to be weak. (In the 20th century, Bonhoeffer had a different opinion: There may be cases where it is necessary “to jump into the spokes of the wheel” when the car of the
tyrant is threatening to crush the crowd. But even when a person performs such a right and required action, nevertheless, killing a tyrant makes him guilty.)

5.3.2 The rebellious subjects cannot answer the question of in whose authority they act, except in their own, nor of who is the judge over the case. They cannot demonstrate that God has commanded their rebellion.

5.3.3 (b) War against equals is only just if it is done in self-defense since every lord has the task of protecting his people. One has carefully to distinguish between wars of desire (in order to revenge an insult or any violation of one’s rights) and wars of necessity (undertaken after serious evaluation of the situation and its possible consequences).

5.3.4 Luther states: “A Christian is a person in himself; he believes for himself and for no one else. But a lord and prince is not a person in himself, but on behalf of others. It is his duty to serve them, to protect them, to defend them.” Nevertheless, if the prince is a Christian, he should be prepared also to suffer insult and violation by others, if the damage of the war were likely to be bigger than the injustice that he suffered.

5.3.5 (c) Overlords can fight against their subjects if they rebel violently, as the peasants did. Nevertheless, every overlord has to keep in mind that the task and purpose of his office is to be of service to his subjects.

5.4 Concerning the mercenaries Luther states that it is possible to earn one’s salary (“dienstgelt” = money for service) by military service. Thus Luther distinguishes two categories of work: agriculture and military service. The first feeds the people, the second defends them.

5.4.1 If a mercenary knows that the case of the lord whom he serves is unjust, he must refuse to follow him in war. Nobody can be forced by an overlord to do wrong things and sin (Acts 5:29).

5.4.2 Aims like gaining wealth (from booty), honor etc. must not prevail since this motivation violates the purpose of the service: to do it for one’s neighbors.

On the War against the Turk

Luther writes this booklet in 1528, in a situation when the Ottomans rapidly and with great force have spread to the west of Europe. In 1520, they conquered Belgrade (now the capital of Serbia), and in 1526, they defeated the Hungarian King and killed him. In a few months, they would be besieging Vienna. Luther describes the success of the “Turk” as follows: “Just count up the number of lands he controls […] He has Greece, Asia [present-day Turkey], Syria, Egypt, Arabia, etc. He has so many lands that if Spain, France, England, Germany, Italy, Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and Denmark were all counted together, they would not equal the territory he has. Besides, he is master of all of them and commands effective and ready obedience.” There was a tremendous fear of the atrocities of the “Turk,” and different kinds of reactions to this threat were discussed. One was a crusade against the “Turk,” the other was resignation to his dominance with the hopes that this would allow for a certain mode of surviving, perhaps even
enjoying some freedom for the Christian faith. Luther was directly touched by the debate since he was regarded as an advocate of not fighting against the Ottomans, and the advance of Ottomans was seen by his opponents as a “fruit” of his theology. Thus he was challenged to correct this perception and also felt the obligation to educate “innocent consciences.” This means that the conscience was not seen as “the voice of God in a human being” but as the consciousness of ethical reflection in a human being which has to be developed, cultivated, and educated.

In defense of his 95 Theses, Luther had actually stated (in 1518): “To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with the rod.” He now explains that this sentence was said in a situation different from that of 1528. Interestingly, the difference consists basically in the fact that in the meantime Luther had found the distinction between what a Christian should do as a Christian (not resist evil for one’s own sake according to Matt. 5:39) and what temporal authority should do (it has from God precisely the task of resisting evil according to Romans 13:1-7). In 1518, Luther rejected the understanding that Matt. 5:39 was not a commandment of Christ but only a counsel for those who wished to be perfect. Luther insisted that it is a binding commandment for all Christians. Thus he did write the sentence mentioned above, but at the time he had not yet understood how to distinguish the task of temporal authority from the task of a Christian on a personal level. From the distinction developed in “On Temporal Authority” Luther consequently and consistently develops his statement concerning the war against the Turk with two basic lines: (1) Since Christians must not resist evil, a war against the Ottomans cannot be led in the name of Christians or under the banner of the Cross. (2) Since the Emperor and other institutions of temporal authority must resist evil, they must fight against the Ottomans if the latter attack the subjects of the Emperor or of Princes. Under no circumstances can the Emperor or Princes start a war. War is only allowed in order to defend subjects and one’s own territory if they are under attack from outside.

Nevertheless, there are two wars to be led with two different players. One is “war” of the Christian, but his/her war is not a physical but rather a spiritual one. The second is the war of the Emperor and his princes in defense of their subjects. Luther wishes that the fight against the Ottomans might be led with a “good conscience.” That means a prince or a soldier should be certain that he is in a state of salvation when he fights with weapons against the Ottomans (that serving as a soldier does not endanger his salvation, for it does not in principal contradict his being a Christian). Luther first touches shortly on the question of whether there is a just cause for war against the Ottomans. His answer: It is obvious that the Ottomans are attacking the German Empire, and they do not have any reason (namely, self-defense) for this attack. This does not require a long argument. Then Luther develops the two “types” of warriors, as previously mentioned:

The first is the Christian. Luther understands the advance of the Ottomans as the rod of the wrath of God over the sins of the Germans. Thus the first task of Christians is to take this rod out of God’s hands. This requires serious repentance and amendment of life. Luther exhorts the readers of his booklet to repent, and by doing so he explains how pastors could do this. By referring to examples of the Old Testament he shows both that God punishes sins of the people seriously but also that God honors repentance by bringing his punishment to an end. Following repentance and betterment of life Luther admonishes the people to pray to God so that they will not have to live under the domination of the religious abominations of the Turk. Again referring to biblical examples he shows that prayer is powerful, and he advises his readers to pray with the firm belief that their prayers will be heard. This is important and
makes a difference from processions and other religious practices that were used at that time. He makes pastors responsible for the repentance and prayers of Christians.

In order to make clear that such prayers are very much needed and thus also in order to inform Christians about what they should pray for, Luther elaborates on the terrible danger that the Turk represents. Even though he complains that the Christians in his time did not have much knowledge about the “Turk,” he explains what he learned from the Koran that he read (admittedly in a poor translation). Luther did not talk much about the rumors about the atrocities of the Turk since he was aware that these were often not based on reliable information. But from his own reading of the Koran, Luther made the following statements:

Even though the Turk highly appreciates Jesus and Mary, he denies that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for our sins or that he reigns at the right hand of the Father. Thus he allows no article of Christian faith to remain, except the article concerning the general resurrection of the dead. Luther calls such rejection of Christian doctrine lies that kill souls.

The second feature that Luther observes is connected with these lies: The spirit of lying is followed by the spirit of murder. Mohammed commands ruling by the sword. In the Koran the sword is the noblest work. Thus the government of the Turk is not meant to maintain peace, protect the good, and punish the wicked; rather it intends robbery and murder so that the Turk has become the rod of God’s wrath. This emphasis on violence (“sword”) amounts to the destruction of temporal government. “The Turkish faith, then, has not made progress by preaching and the working of miracles, but by sword and by murder, and its success has been due to God’s wrath.”

The third area of Luther’s criticism is that – according to his perception – the Koran has no regard for marriage: “it permits everyone to take wives as he will. It is customary among the Turks for one man to have ten or twenty wives and to desert or sell any woman he will, so that in Turkey women are held immeasurably cheap and are despised […] That kind of living is not and cannot be marriage, because none of them takes or has a wife with the intention of staying with her forever […] Thus the marriage of the Turks closely resembles the chaste life soldiers lead with their harlots.”

Luther sums his criticism up as follows: “lies destroy the spiritual state [= the church]; murder the temporal state; disregard of marriage the estate of matrimony. Now if you take out of the world veram religionem, veram politiam, veram oeconomiam, that is, true spiritual life, true temporal government, and true home life, what is left in the world but flesh, world, and devil?”

The other war that should be led against the Turk is a physical one with the Emperor as the main player. It is the task of the Emperor to lead this war and the obligation of the subjects to follow the Emperor since the territory and the subjects are under attack. The war is to be waged under the banner of the Emperor; his subjects should be sure in conscience to obey God’s ordinance when they follow the Emperor. Whoever obeys the Emperor, in this case, obeys God. Temporal authority commits sin if it is not mindful of its office. Luther thinks that princes understand their office as princes improperly if they think it is up to them to decide whether or not they should follow the Emperor. It is simply their duty of obedience. The Emperor and princes should go to war simply with the intention of doing their duty in protecting their subjects but not with the intention of gaining honor, glory, or wealth. But most important is that the Emperor does not act as the head of Christendom, since he is not the head. It is not a war on behalf of
defending the Christian faith but to protect his subjects. Crusades are not allowed, and the crusades that happened have shown their wrongness by creating much harm for Europe. It is as terrible if so-called Christian armies have “Ecclesia, ecclesia!” as their battle cry just as the Ottomans call out “Allah, Allah!” But even if the princes have gathered strong troops, they should go to war not trusting in the power of their military forces but fearing God (see Psalm 44:6-7). “It is true that one should have horses and men and weapons and everything that is needed for battle, if they are to be had, so that one does not tempt God. But when one has them, one must not be bold because of it lest God be forgotten or despised, since it is written, ‘All victory comes from heaven’ [1 Macc 3:19]. If these two things are present, God’s commandment and our humility, then there is no danger or need so far as this second man, the emperor, is concerned. Then we are strong enough for the whole world and must have good fortune and success.”

War against the Turk can only hope for success if repentance, betterment of life and prayers accompany or precede it. Both aspects have always to be taken into consideration: military efforts and spiritually taking the rod of wrath out of God’s hands. But they must never be combined into a crusade or a war under the banner of the cross. The Christian and the Emperor have different callings and offices. “I do not advise men to wage war against the Turk or the pope because of false belief or evil life, but because of the murder and destruction which he does.”