
Introduction:

Reformations that Await Us

Now that we have officially moved beyond the long anticipated 500th anniversary observance of the posting of the 95 Theses, we are prone to ask how we might turn our attention away from the historical event toward the future. To my mind, the legacy of the Reformation (a term that I must confess I find insufficient—I prefer Revolution) was to challenge structures of authority and power, both spiritual and temporal. In, with, and under the words posted in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, was an idea that would change the ways people in the Western world, if not the entire globe, came to understand the source of power and authority, and their limits.

The world is a more interesting place because Luther challenged structures of power. And the world is a more complex place because it is now easier to change those structures of power for the better and for the worse. Luther has provided evidence that structures of power and authority are not eternal. That, to my mind, is the great historical legacy of the Reformation.

For all the consequences of that discovery—good and bad—an additional gift was the renewed focus of the Christian church on the centrality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the posture of grace and mercy that God has toward all creation. To my mind, this is great theological legacy of the Reformation.

With this monumental anniversary behind us, it is now up to us to determine how this legacy will take shape as our future destiny. What is the relationship between the modern expression of Luther's church and the structures of power and authority in our world? How will we understand our contribution to theology and history as a continuation of Luther's desire to rebuild the structures of the church as the body of Christ in conversation with temporal power? And how will the message of the church attend to the need for humanity to encounter God as the suffering Christ, who takes away the sin of the world and who is revealed in Scripture as fundamentally pro-human? Those are the questions that interest me as I look to the future of evangelical theology.

Every scholar who approaches the task of interpreting the Reformation brings her/his own questions to the endeavor. Even more exciting is the use of a variety of methods to consider the events of the Reformation. That is certainly the case in this month's edition of *Currents in Theology and Mission*. We draw upon contributors from the fields of history, biblical studies, systematic theology, ethics, ecology, and parish ministry.

All the articles in this commemorative issue share one common theme: how the impulses of the Reformation still move the church in new and compelling directions. **Craig Nesson** challenges the modern expression of the church to consider the impact of the anti-Semitic tendencies in Luther's writings, and encourages

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us to engage in truth telling about the reality that Luther's anti-Jewish screed, *Against the Jews and their Lies*, was not an isolated expression of his attitudes toward the Jews, as scholars are often quick to conclude. This helps us to place Luther's theology in a more comprehensive context.

Ann Fritschel concentrates on Luther's "christological hermeneutical lens" as a way to better address the twenty-first century cultural context in the United States. **Timothy Wengert** contributes a commencement address to seminary graduates, in which he presents them with the gift of freedom that comes from knowing that Lutherans, and their leaders, are not immune from sin and brokenness. Thus, even in weakness the gospel is proclaimed and received.

Winston Persaud reflects on his time as a representative of the Lutheran Church in the dialogues with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. In this reflection he helps us to see the ways in which ecumenical dialogue extends beyond the boundaries of theology and polity, due to their ecumenical, inner-faith, multi-ethnic, and cross-cultural settings. Out of his experiences, Persaud draws conclusions about how we all can, and should, allow our own personal stories to shape the human story.

Christine Helmer argues that study of the Reformation helps modern people understand their potent role in modern protest movements, and how religious perspectives shape and convey political perspectives. **Scott James Meyer** provides historical commentary that helps to bridge modern conversations about sacramental theology in our times with ideas expressed by leaders of the Reformation. Thereby Meyer provides another instance of how Reformation theology from the sixteenth century informs twenty-first century church practices.

Finally, **David Carlson** considers the ecological movement as a home for a new Reformation that concentrates on earth stewardship. This article presents 9.5 theses that seek to ground ecological concepts in theological language that are linked directly to the struggles of the sixteenth century Reformation in Germany.

Each of these authors reminds us, using the language of their various disciplines and ministry settings, that when considering the legacy of the Reformation, it is right to honor what happened in the past by insisting on its significance for what continues to happen today and into tomorrow.

The issue begins with the “Listening to Immigrant Voices” feature by **Man Hei Yip**. She proposes that the assertion, “I am an immigrant,” needs to become a new discourse that breaks boundaries and dismantles exclusionary ideologies. The encounter with immigrants allows us to be changed and our assumptions of the world to be challenged.

We include two articles in the **Currents Focus** section. In the first, **Charles J. Lopez Jr.** underscores how the hospice chaplain serves as “the symbolic presence of God” by providing listening and presence. The emphasis on spiritual care at the end of life generates significant impetus for going deeper into one’s relationship with God as the Holy One. Hospice underscores the integration of the body, mind, and spirit. Second, in a piece dedicated to his parents, **Doug Keil** recounts the significance of a winter road trip as part of his life journey.

We include, as always, many **Book Reviews** of recent theological works. *Currents in Theology and Mission* is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to: currents@lstc.edu.

We are grateful to all contributors to the fine set of **Preaching Helps** that lead us ever deeper into the new lectionary year. Special thanks from the editors also to **Nathan Montover** for his stewardship of the series of issues dedicated to Reformation themes in recent years, culminating with this issue. May the Word of God that generated the Reformation of the sixteenth century enliven the reformation imperatives facing the church now in this historical moment!

Nathan Montover, Guest Editor

Craig L. Nesson, Issue Co-Editor