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Martin Luther and Spirituality

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Foreword

Spirituality is necessarily describing a multicolored and truly rich range of religious experience and state. While the term itself has become popular in Protestant usage rather recently, it is readily understood as referring to devotional life, to faith, and to a life in love with God.

Professor Robert A. Kelly has succeeded in showing that Luther's spirituality is not ivory-towered and *weltfremd*, but challenging and modern. Authentic Gospel is always powerful and impacts on real life. A remarkable fusion of deep devotional and theological insights, this account projects an unforgettable portrait of Luther's faith, indeed, a faith for all times.

My own brief survey suggests that culture invariably both facilitates and restricts our religious understanding. Hence in different historical circumstances—and periods—good Lutherans have celebrated divergent aspects of Luther's faith. I have singled out three such overarching, and at times overlapping, perspectives: piety, faith, and spirituality. While piety has often been recognized as expressing Luther's heroically devout personality, and faith as a very foundation of Luther's theology, spirituality may be both the deepest and the broadest of all categories. Spirituality includes not only Luther's positive insights, but also the dark side of Luther's life, notably his deep sense of hatred.

Luther's followers have sought to be partakers of the best in Luther. Consequently, Luther's spirituality has also reverberated through the Canadian Lutheran church scene. Professor Bryan V. Hillis with loving care and wisdom has offered as precise a portrait of Canadian Lutheran spirituality as can be drawn at this time. I believe, however, that the thoughtful connection between Luther's spirituality and that of his followers is at the same time an implicit challenge for us to do even better than we have done.

Professor Joseph Wawrykow has provided a remarkably lucid, accurate, and nourishing exposition of St. Thomas' understanding of the Lord's Supper. It is a statement absolutely valid in its own right, and yet so helpfully prepared for a Lutheran readership. In the spirit of learned ecumenism, a very solid bridge of authentic understanding has been built. In conclusion, his briefer comments on Luther are of similar quality and force.

Of all the possible concerns within Luther's wider range of spirituality, Professor John W. Kleiner has dealt with the most difficult topic (which, however, in this day and age does need to be faced). Namely, Luther was not only able to err, but at times he did so with great bravado. The topic, of course, is Luther and the Jews. Professor Kleiner has made a very good case that Luther's dreadfully negative views had been influenced also by socio-economic considerations, and not only by mistaken theological convictions. Here we must see that there are limits even to Luther's depth; but in the end *sola Scriptura* and not Luther's word must remain decisive for a positive spirituality.

Egil Grislis