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Spirituality and Practice: Luther and Canadian Lutheran Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

A mere fifteen minutes examining *Religion Index One* will indicate to any student of Christian thought the burgeoning interest in this area called "spirituality". "Christian Spirituality" seminars have sprouted and grown in the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the Catholic Theological Society of America and the College Theology Society. Ewert Cousins, professor of Theology at Fordham University, is responsible for editing the twenty-five volume work entitled *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*.¹ The World Council of Churches has convened consultations on spirituality in 1984, 1986 and 1987 in response to requests from its members.² Interest in the spirituality of Martin Luther certainly has not subsided since the publication of Bengt R. Hoffman's incisive work on the nature and origin of Luther's spiritual experience.³ Chapters continue to be written on Lutheran spirituality, both past and present.⁴ In this time of increased interest in spirituality, including Lutheran spirituality, where do Canadian Lutherans stand? Assuming that Canadian Lutherans identify with the founder of the sixteenth century reformer by which they are named, this paper will attempt to compare the spirituality of Luther and Canadian Lutherans, insofar as that is possible.

While the term "spirituality" has enjoyed increased popularity of late, it is still regarded by many Protestants with some mistrust. As Martin E. Marty recently wrote, "spirituality" is "the code word covering everything from profound

quests to warm tingles between the toes.”⁵ Louis Bouyer notes that Barthian, Bultmannian and Neo-Lutheran theologians are likely to equate spirituality with mysticism where mysticism is viewed as an essentially Catholic fact rooted in pagan elements, therefore foreign to the Bible and irreconcilable with the Gospel message.⁶ Gordon Rupp corroborates Bouyer on this point when he says that “[s]pirituality is a catholic word, beginning to dissolve into ecumenese, but it is much better than ‘piety’ with its nineteenth-century overtones or the rather better eighteenth-century phrase ‘inward religion.’ ”⁷ Rupp’s quote indicates two points concerning the term: a) “spirituality” has been especially popular among those associated with the ecumenical movement⁸ which may account for its increased popularity of late and b) while writers use the term with reckless abandon, there is no widespread agreement on what the term means. One of the clearest indications of the last point is that Bradley Hanson, past chair of the AAR’s seminar on “Modern Christian Spirituality” from 1984–1988, includes a whole section in his book *Modern Christian Spirituality* entitled “What is Spirituality?” Four definitions are given there which count the following as central aspects of spirituality: a) inner experience b) integration of that experience and c) expression of that experience in terms of action. Though the exact mix of those aspects remains a matter of some debate among the scholars presenting, all their definitions include these three aspects.⁹ Since these aspects are integral to the definition of spirituality, Luther’s concept of spirituality will now be examined.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF LUTHER

a) Luther’s “inner” experience:

Lutherans are not used to regarding their beloved namesake as a man of the spirit. They are quite happy to defend him as a staunch defender of the faith, as a rebel against the tyrant mother church, as a medieval man with all the flaws that entailed, even as a somewhat base and vulgar man whose table talk was not always something we would want our children to hear. But a spiritual man? When that energetic movement of only a few years ago called the “charismatic renewal” rolled

through Lutheran churches, we may have heard Luther frequently quoted against but seldom in support of such activity. For Lutherans, perhaps especially Canadian Lutherans, Luther was a theologian, quotable, rational, tough-minded, perhaps even stubborn, but a theologian nevertheless.

Bengt Hoffman wrote his book *Luther and the Mystics* as a corrective to what he calls this excessive "objective ratiocination" regarding the study of Luther or the tendency to make Luther into an intellectual theologian not primarily informed by his experience of God.¹⁰ Along the same lines, Jared Wicks quotes Otto Pesch's comparative work on Aquinas and Luther which argues that Luther was an "existential" theologian for whom every theological issue centred on what God was saying to the individual person.¹¹ What these authors and others are trying to do is highlight a sadly neglected aspect of Luther and his work, namely, that Luther's theological work was directly informed by his spiritual experience.

Frank Senn, in the introduction to his book, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, draws the connection between spirituality and theology. He defines spirituality as "the subject of communion with God and the way of life which emanates from that" while theology is the "way in which one conceives of God".¹² Theology and spirituality are related in that the way in which one conceives of God (theology) will affect how one perceives one's relationship to God (spirituality). The converse is also true, namely, that spiritual experience affects theology. Senn argues further that the various types of Protestantism extant in the world today are products, at least in part, of their different spiritualities; for instance, mainline Reformation spirituality, including Lutheranism, differs from Puritanism and Revivalism insofar as the latter place greater emphasis on the immanence rather than the transcendence of God.¹³ Hence, Lutheranism, if it is to be true to its founder's theology, must understand Luther's spiritual experience. As Louis Bouyer states: "There is no doubt that the problem that presented itself to Luther, first as a personal one, then as one whose solution would inspire all his public activity, was directly spiritual."¹⁴

The history of Luther's spiritual journey is familiar to most Lutherans; the young law student caught in a thunderstorm appealed to a saint for help; the struggling monk suffered great anxiety over whether he could possibly please God with

his many ascetic practices; finally the preacher/teacher after studying the Pauline texts came to a new understanding of God's righteousness and what that meant for him. Of interest to us here is the content of the inner experience that brought Luther to his theological understanding.

In his study of the spiritual experience of Luther, Frank Senn notes that Luther was born in remote Thuringia where religious faith was very conservative. The young Luther was sent to a school in Magdeburg operated by the Brethren of the Common Life whose "*devotio moderna*... advocated an eminently interior piety based on self-analysis achieved through meditation and the use of the confessional."¹⁵ After the thunderstorm vows of 1505, Luther entered the monastery of the Hermits of St. Augustine, one of the strictest religious houses of the time where he lived according to and probably even beyond the requirements of the governing Rule. Ascetic practice was unquestionably a significant aspect of his striving to answer the question "What must I do to be saved?" as Luther struggled with the insufficiency of his own efforts before the justice of the Almighty. When Staupitz counselled the young monk to study the Scriptures, even this was regarded as part of the ascetic discipline that would eventually bring Luther assurance of salvation. What finally came to Luther—what is often called his "Tower experience"—was the realization that such ascetic practice would not earn him salvation. Rather in the court of the Almighty Judge only the Almighty could possibly pronounce innocence. As Bouyer points out, this was not a new idea and Luther had probably read it in the Augustinian spiritual writers he favoured.¹⁶ What was new was that Luther realized, whether suddenly or not, that his ascetic habits were not the way to obtain God's grace; only trust in God's mercy could accomplish his salvation. As Luther stated in 1545:

I have begun to understand that the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by the gift of God, that is to say by faith. This means that the gospel reveals to us the justice of God, that is to say that passive justice by which God, in his mercy, justifies us by faith, as it is written: the just one lives by faith. *I felt then reborn and I entered into the wide-open gates of paradise itself.*¹⁷ [Emphasis mine]

This spiritual experience informed the rest of Luther's life and theology. As Hoffman says, "the experience of justification

by faith, perhaps beginning with the so-called tower experience, became the yardstick with which Luther meditated.”¹⁸ Despite Luther’s awareness of his guilt before God, Luther also knew that he was saved. What was to become the cornerstone of his faith were these two themes of his spiritual experience: humanity is accused of its sin and would be lost forever but God justifies and saves the sinner without regard to merit.¹⁹ Obviously Luther’s training, his struggle with the church, his inability to find fulfilment in the monastery, his pastoral concern for his congregation tempted by the lax discipline of indulgences,²⁰ and perhaps even his relationship with his father²¹ were all factors that had an effect on Luther’s spiritual progress. Whatever the causes or influences for the experience, whether the experience was sudden or progressive, the fact is that Luther had a spiritual experience that informed his life work, namely, that we are justified by grace through faith, not of our own doing but because of God’s good grace.

Bengt Hoffman clearly demonstrates the mystical character of this justification experience. Luther used phrases like “the mystical Christ”, “mystical incarnation”, “mystical theology” and “mystical eyes” to depict the experience of being justified before God. He also frequently used the word “invisible” to refer to a perfect relationship of faith which reflects Luther’s mystical concept of justification.²² His repetition of the terms “spirit”, “spiritual” and “spirituality” especially in reference to the operation of the “invisible” Holy Spirit also demonstrates the connection of this concept of justification with mystical thought.²³ For Luther, “one who is spiritual” is one “who has the Spirit of Christ” and who therefore has been brought to God’s salvation in a new birth.²⁴ The dogma of justification would be hard pressed to have more mystical, spiritual or experiential roots than these!

b) Luther’s integration of his spiritual experience:

As indicated above, it is no exaggeration at all to say that Luther’s life was comprised of his efforts to integrate his experience of justification with his work as a reformer. Only three instances will be noted here. Luther’s most famous public act of challenging the Roman Catholic monolith with his ninety-five theses was a first tentative attempt to integrate his spiritual experience of justification with his understanding of the

church; how could the papal indulgences be God's will given his experience of justification? When Luther debated John Eck at Leipzig in 1519, he was forced to the realization that he identified with the Hussite cause because of his conviction that the (invisible) church consists of those justified by God, not those the Roman Catholic Church declares saved.²⁵ Finally, as demonstrated in the following letter to a minister who was considering leaving his post upon hearing of the excommunication bull, Luther assumes that others who were fighting with him against the Roman Catholic Church had received that "spirit" of justification also:

*If you have the spirit, do not leave your post, lest another receive your crown. It is but a little thing that we should die with the Lord, who in our flesh laid down his life for us. We shall rise with him and abide with him in eternity.... He will come, he will not tarry, who will deliver us from every ill. Fare well in the Lord Jesus, who comforts and sustains mind and spirit. Amen.*²⁶ [Emphasis mine]

Lest we make Luther into some kind of starry-eyed spirit-filled fanatic, it is important to note here that Luther always grounded his spiritual experience in study of the Scriptures. Even Hoffman who decries the over-intellectualization of Luther's theology is happy to state that Luther's spirituality and mysticism were grounded in the Word: "mystical knowledge was part of Luther's spirituality, but it was not free-floating; it was rooted in the justifying kerygma of Scripture."²⁷ God's Word in Scripture is the most decisive means of communicating God to us but even that communication must be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. As Hoffman has so aptly written:

The Holy Spirit uses in a special way the words about and by Christ. These words are preeminently the receivers and channels of his communication with us. The word calls forth the divine Presence to the one who seeks. No wonder Luther encouraged Christians to be diligent in their reading and contemplation of Scripture! The Word spoken by and about Christ is a bridge between the Lord and his friends, Luther thought.²⁸

The most obvious results of Luther's integration of his spiritual experience of justification were his theological constructs. In all his dealings with the Catholic hierarchy, Erasmus, other reformers like the Anabaptists, and even his beloved Melancthon, Luther emphasized *sola fides*. Without this article of faith, Luther said one could not know God:

Whoever departs from the article of justification does not know God and is an idolater.... For when this article has been taken away, nothing remains but error, hypocrisy, godlessness, and idolatry, although it may seem to be the height of truth, worship of God, holiness, etc. The reason for this is that God neither wants to be known nor can be known in any other way except through Christ....²⁹

Another theological construct that Luther utilized and which seemed to act as an instrument of integration for Luther's spiritual experience of justification is the "theology of the cross". In chapter 4 of his book *Luther and his Spiritual Legacy*, Jared Wicks outlines how Luther's theology of the cross was directly related to his spiritual experience.³⁰ As Wicks says, "Luther's theological optic was sharply focused on the appropriation of redemption in the life of faith."³¹ Fundamental to that appropriation was the realization of the magnitude of our sins before the Almighty who accuses and judges us accordingly. No matter how self-inflated we may become with our words (and here Luther rates theologians as among the worst offenders), the only real way we are saved is through the cross of Christ. Though a stumblingblock to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek, on the cross Christ overcame death with life and thereby has accomplished the work of salvation. Luther's theology of the cross did not find God in the glorious creation but found the Almighty hidden in the suffering of Christ. Like the mystic who can only passively wait for and accept the experience God grants, so too we as Christians can only accept God's saving work on the cross, as baffling and unexpected as it may be. There is no human activity which can justify us but only God's pure gift of the cross.³² Why does God work that way? Because God is that sovereign, that mighty, and that much beyond our understanding. Only the cross reveals our Lord in a very obscure and unexpected way.

c) How Luther expressed his spirituality:

Luther's whole life work can be regarded as an expression of his spiritual experience of justification but in this section we will look at those activities which Luther specifically taught were related to the experience of justification. Those activities fall into four categories: 1) education; 2) prayer; 3) good works; and 4) worship.³³

In this context, education refers not to institutional education systems which Luther also encouraged for his followers,³⁴ but to the educational tools which a Christian must use in order to nurture the ongoing process and realization of justification. First and foremost for Luther was the diligent study of the Word of God as contained in the written Scriptures and preached from the pulpit. So Luther encouraged his readers to "Hear God's Word often; do not go to bed, do not get up, without having spoken a beautiful passage—two, three, or four of them—to your heart."³⁵ Simply hearing or reading was not enough, Luther said; one must ruminate upon Scripture so that with real earnestness one can take it to heart, love it and hold fast to it.³⁶ In the *Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings of 1539*, Luther proposed a "correct way of studying theology" which he said he had learned from his study of Psalm 119; one must first pray, then meditate upon the reading, and finally expect spiritual trials that will test one's knowledge and understanding of the Scripture.³⁷

Catechetical instruction also played a major role in Luther's expression and nurturing of the spiritual experience. Senn points to the fact that the basis of every explanation of the Ten Commandments in the *Small Catechism* is the phrase "We should fear and love God" which reflects Luther's spiritual experience of justification by faith.³⁸ Calling his *Small Catechism* a "brief transcript of the entire Holy Scripture",³⁹ Luther urged upon his followers the spiritual discipline of reciting portions of the catechism daily just as he read and recited every morning with his children the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Psalms, etc.⁴⁰ As one needed to be reminded of one's baptism, the first justifying event in a Christian's life, so one needed to continue to remind oneself of one's sin and the righteousness God freely offers in the Son of God.

Martin E. Lehmann's *Luther and Prayer* traces the development of Luther's concept of prayer.⁴¹ By the time Luther had finished lecturing on Psalms in 1515, he was aware of two types of prayer: a) that which "monks and others" engage in, consisting of words only but which "is not prayer in the proper sense of the word"; and b) the prayer of the heart or true prayer which was defined in medieval times by John of Damascus as "the ascent of the mind, or rather of the spirit to God".⁴² Once God's Word has come to us and established a

right relationship with God, we can truly pray, expressing our trust in and dependence upon God.⁴³ Luther expressed this most eloquently in his *Personal Prayer Book* of 1522: "What is important for a good prayer is not many words...but rather a turning to God frequently and with heartfelt longing, and doing so without ceasing."⁴⁴

Lehmann also demonstrates from Luther's writings how real prayer becomes possible only by making justification the basis for prayer. Justification is not a one-time event but a recurring phenomenon by which, because of our faith in Christ, we are forgiven and granted Christ's righteousness on a continuous basis. Prayer is the inevitable result of this ever new and right relationship with God.⁴⁵ This means our prayer will always have a doxological content as we praise and thank God for God's great gift and request "continually... the gift of the Spirit and the increase of faith".⁴⁶ Though God may not grant all our prayers concerned with this-worldly needs,⁴⁷ Luther assured us that, in issues concerning the spiritual life, when God's Word and prayer are used in combination we can be sure of God's affirmative answer: "However, where this foundation, which is the Word of God, has been laid, there prayer is the ultimate help. No, it is not help; it is our power and victory in every trial."⁴⁸

Luther's most eloquent and clear description of the reasons for living a moral life is contained in his famous tract of 1520 *The Freedom of a Christian*. While critics charged that Luther emphasized faith to the point that there was no need for good works, Brooks demonstrates that the essence of Luther's reply was that only the perfectly spiritual person could make that claim and "such we shall be only at the resurrection of the dead".⁴⁹ In the meantime, all people need to work towards the active Christian life as a means of "crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires".⁵⁰ Because we have an inner union with the crucified Christ who justifies us, living a moral life is an integral part of being a Christian not because it earns us this justification but because it is a natural result of our justification. Good works are not a striving and devising to make oneself acceptable to God but are done out of devotion to God and in the service of the community where God can be served.⁵¹ Whether it is one's vocation in the family, job or social life, Christians are free to serve without regard for the

imperfect nature of their works.⁵² Christians are confident that their salvation and their words are in God's hands. The spiritual basis for this was just as obvious to Luther; in commenting on John 15:2 Luther said that moral goodness is not our own doing but reflects Christ at work in us. Not only is Christ the Christian's model of a moral life, but Christ works within us as cosmic Lord, our moral works being mere extensions of the "spiritual generation" that Christ initiated.⁵³

Communal worship was another area where Luther's spiritual experience was expressed and nurtured. The theological groundwork for the reform of worship from a works-righteousness orientation to an expression of justifying grace was laid in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. The emphasis on preaching and frequent, full reception of the Eucharist reflected Luther's emphasis on God meeting humanity in worship with the most fitting response of humanity being praise and thanksgiving in the form of prayer and song. Luther's theology of the Eucharist wherein Christ comes to us in, with and under the earthly form of the bread and wine indicates the mystery and veiled nature of God's presence, necessary because while we may be justified, we are still not able to receive the full presence of God.⁵⁴ The rite of baptism was perhaps the most obvious expression for Luther of the grace of God which according to the *Small Catechism* "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all those who believe this as the words and promise of God declare."⁵⁵ Baptism is not a single event in the life of a Christian but Christians should remind themselves daily of their baptism so that "a new man daily [can] come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."⁵⁶ In this way, Luther said the very essence of a Christian's spiritual life can be expressed and nourished continually.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF CANADIAN LUTHERANS

In a book dedicated to the search for the identity of Canadian Lutheranism, William Hordern notes that Canadians have traditionally defined their identity negatively, that is, in opposition to another group whether it be the British or the Americans. While Lutherans have had their Confessions as

a source of identity, they are not very helpful in discovering identity (or spirituality!) because the Confessions were meant to “explicate and illuminate the ecumenical creeds”, not to express something new or distinct.⁵⁷ In the same volume, Günther Gassman argues that to evaluate Lutheran identity one needs to study basic theological and historical elements; however Gassman says nothing of the spiritual experience that may inform those elements.⁵⁸ In other words, “spirituality” does not seem to be a major element in defining the identity of Canadian Lutheranism.

How does one determine the spirituality of a group of people, especially a disparate group of people like those Canadians who call themselves Lutheran? Thomas Ryan quotes a 1980 profile of Lutherans in Canada which indicated that 58% of those 700,000 claiming to be Lutheran at that time were of a German background, 19% of Scandinavian ancestry, and 20% of other European (Estonian, Latvian, Slovakian) heritage.⁵⁹ While Roger Nostbakken had some success in characterizing the worship of some of these groups,⁶⁰ it would be impossible to characterize in the same way the spirituality of those groups.

Further problems present themselves in the study of the spirituality of a group like Canadian Lutherans. What generation of Lutherans do we study? How does one separate Lutheran spirituality of the Canadian variety from that of the American? Is it even accurate to do so? Should one try to evaluate the spirituality of the major denominations that comprise or have comprised Canadian Lutheranism? Is it even possible to define accurately the spirituality of a whole denomination? If not, which congregations or individuals does one use as the gauge for Canadian Lutheran spirituality?

Whatever slippery path one takes here it seems one will have to make some arbitrary assumptions. Here are mine. Based on the work of Joachim Wach who says that all religious experience is translated into theoretical, practical and sociological expression,⁶¹ it is assumed here that Canadian Lutherans were and are informed by a spirituality or spiritual experience that has produced certain beliefs, practices and communities. Given the central aspects of spirituality articulated above and given the difficulty in determining the spirituality of a group as diverse as Canadian Lutherans, this section will assume that the

spirituality of Canadian Lutherans has expressed itself historically and continues to be expressed in the actions and beliefs of Canadian Lutherans today. For the sake of comparison then, we will survey the same four categories of Luther's spiritual expression in the Canadian context; namely 1) education; 2) prayer; 3) good works; and 4) worship.

At a recent convention of the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), Walter Freitag noted that there are at least two types of Lutherans who settled Canada: a) "pietists" who reacted against the doctrinal nitpicking of the intellectual elite of Europe and who were more interested in the use of prayer, personal testimony, hymns, Bible reading and devotions as tools to shape Christian life; and b) "orthodox" Lutherans who stressed doctrinal preaching, education, good order in worship and intellectual assent to official church doctrine.⁶² Like any typology, this one has its limitations; however it is very instructive in terms of identifying the spiritual orientation of the various ethnic groups that came to this country. In his introduction to the history of the former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, George O. Evenson summarizes how various Lutheran synods tended to emphasize either the orthodox or pietistic typology at the beginning of this century.⁶³ German groups which dominated the Missouri Synod tended to be more orthodox with a resulting emphasis on education and order in worship. Groups of Scandinavian extraction which eventually became the Lutheran Church in America were more pietistic; prayer and the doing of good works, not to mention the avoiding of bad ones, were emphasized by these groups. Somewhere in the middle with a healthy dose of Norwegian orthodoxy and Danish pietism were those groups which eventually formed the American Lutheran Church.⁶⁴ Such typologies are helpful as background information to the historical examples of Canadian Lutheran spirituality cited below.

King Christian IV of Denmark, in his quest to find a short route to India, dispatched Jens Munk in May of 1619 on a voyage to the new world. Among Munk's crew was a Lutheran clergyman by the name of Rasmus Jenson Aarhus who, despite his own failing health and the diminishing size of his sailor congregation, held services including a Christmas communion service that year. Before he succumbed to scurvy and dysentery,

Aarhus ministered as he could to those dying around him. It was some time however before the first Lutheran community was established.⁶⁵ Yet even in the very beginnings of Canadian Lutheranism, we see an emphasis on public worship as important in nurturing the spiritual lives of Lutherans.

Shortly after the first Lutheran church was built in 1759 in Halifax, catechism classes began, and in 1761 seventeen people were confirmed in the Lutheran faith. The candidates for confirmation were asked to renounce all the "sects and heresies" existing in the new land indicating not only an emphasis on pure doctrine but also the isolationism of Lutherans in Canada. Keeping this particular congregation as German as possible even after the death of their first German pastor, was just one way of maintaining Lutheran identity and purity of doctrine.⁶⁶ While it is easy to be critical of such isolationism in a twentieth century perspective, it must be remembered that these Lutherans were battling a trend in Nova Scotia; many Lutheran congregations who did not get German clergy were led by men who claimed Lutheran affiliation but who were soon tempted by the better salaries of the Church of England, eventually becoming members of the Anglican communion.⁶⁷ Often this resulted in real struggle between those who wanted to remain true to Lutheran worship practice and those who were happy enough to use the Book of Common Prayer.⁶⁸

This struggle for Lutheran worship and doctrine against the influence of the established church continued when Lutherans tried to establish a presence in Ontario in the early 1800s.⁶⁹ Struggles for orthodox Lutheran doctrine also occurred on other fronts as liberal preachers like F.W. Bindemann in the Kitchener area were rejected by congregations who wanted "more of a Lutheran status" in their preaching.⁷⁰ Such struggles were not limited to what is often regarded as the more orthodox German synods; at Gimli, Manitoba in 1879, two days of religious discussion were held among the Icelandic community as one Rev. Bjarnason, a liberal minister from the State Church of Iceland, debated the conservatively trained Rev. Thorlaksson from the United States. Everything from the use of vowel signs in the Hebrew Bible to the religious significance of the teachings of Copernicus received attention there.⁷¹ Such doctrinal discussions reflect a real concern with

the Word of God, its interpretation and use; if the interpretation was at all misdirected, the message of justification was perceived to be endangered.

Obviously many of the real problems of Canadian Lutheranism resulted from a lack of indigenously trained clergy.⁷² Hence educational institutions at places like Melville, Camrose and Outlook were organized to give at least the preparatory training to seminary on Canadian soil. When a seminary was first proposed for the southern Ontario region in 1909, the University of Toronto seemed the most likely site but this idea was soon scuttled because it was thought it would be too easy for Canadian Lutherans to be persuaded by broader ecumenical endeavors that would "weaken their Lutheran principles".⁷³ Lutherans thereby continued their founder's emphasis on education as a way of nurturing and expressing the experience of justification, even if done in isolation so as to protect the purity of the experience.

Lutheran piety and service to the community have been noted from the first arrival of Lutherans in Upper Canada. In a new world where signs of civilization were considered supportive of the community, Mrs. Simcoe, wife of Canada's first lieutenant-governor, noted that the Lutheran "houses and grounds have a neater appearance than those of any other people".⁷⁴ The establishment of hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged and colleges were real contributions to the community befitting the experience of justified Christians free to pursue risky enterprises.⁷⁵ However, Lutherans have also been accused of being rather self-serving in many of these community efforts;⁷⁶ in 1946, the establishment of Canadian Lutheran World Relief, whose principal task was the resettlement of Lutheran refugees, is a good case in point.⁷⁷ Only recently have Lutherans been more involved in less self-serving ventures like native issues, the peace movement and environmental campaigns.⁷⁸ One senses there is a trend developing here as influential, prophetic Canadian Lutherans like William Hordern stress using the gospel message of justification by grace as a springboard to action and not as an excuse of pietistic quietism.⁷⁹

In the area of worship, Lutherans have, like their founder, emphasized the transcendent sovereignty of the Almighty who

not only created and saved humanity but who is also responsible for humanity's continuing well-being. Canadian Lutherans are especially well-situated as witnesses of God's transcendent sovereignty; as Douglas Hall says in his book *The Canada Crisis: A Christian Perspective*, "It is hard to stand out on the prairie, or by the sea, or in the midst of northern Ontario's myriad Christmas trees and think to oneself: 'Man [sic] is the measure of all things!'"⁸⁰ These thoughts could not have been far from the minds of Rev. Aarhus and those Danish crewmen who thought it so important to conduct the first Lutheran worship on Canadian soil even as they struggled for survival.

While Canadian Lutherans have constant reminders of a hidden, even distant God in a country of extreme temperature and vast expanses of physical space, they have also enjoyed the comfort of the sacraments as vehicles of grace in their worship. Though the transcendent sovereignty of God is seldom overlooked in Lutheran circles, God is made more present through baptism and the Lord's Supper so that some emphasis can be placed also on God's immanence. In this vein, Donald Johnson argues that a reaffirmation of the sacramental tradition is currently providing new meaning and unity in Canadian Lutheran worship. Whereas in the past Lutherans received the Eucharist four times yearly, the minimum recommended by Luther, most Canadian Lutheran congregations now celebrate at least bi-weekly if not more often. Vestment adornments now emphasize the celebratory nature of the Eucharist. Where possible, altars have been brought forward to be closer to the people, to emphasize God's presence among the people, as are baptismal fonts to remind people of their baptismal grace. Private baptisms are discouraged to emphasize the community aspect of the sacrament. More liturgical settings and inclusive language are available to emphasize the participation of everyone in the liturgy.⁸¹ By re-emphasizing the sacraments and encouraging increased lay participation in the liturgy, Lutherans are re-discovering Luther's spirituality of praise and mystery in the presence of the transcendent Almighty who is also considered immanently present "where two or three are gathered" (Matthew 18:20).

Concern for worship was the impetus in the late 1960s for most North American Lutheran bodies to cooperate in a manner to which Lutherans are unaccustomed; at the invitation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, almost all North

American Lutherans, including Canadian Lutherans, began discussing the possibility of a common hymnbook. This American experience, together with the Canadian experience of pan-Lutheran cooperation during World War II and following when waves of Lutheran immigrants required aid in resettling, set the stage for the merger which resulted in the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada in 1986.⁸² The Canadian version of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church-Canada, did not participate in this merger because of its previously mentioned "orthodox" (as opposed to pietistic) spirituality which places such great emphasis on a prior doctrinal agreement. As Welf H. Heick once said in an address to the Lutheran Historical Conference, Lutherans have always lagged behind other Canadian denominations (e.g., the Methodists and Presbyterians) in their efforts to unite,⁸³ and this necessity for prior doctrinal agreement has usually been the cause. Canadian historians Phyllis Airhart, Michael Gauvreau and Marguerite Van Die have demonstrated among other things that Canadian Methodism and Presbyterianism, linked as they were with Canadian Evangelicalism, were more open to modern intellectual influences and ecumenical advances by other denominations through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.⁸⁴ In contrast, only since World War II have the ethnically and theologically isolated Lutherans been able to talk to one another in the same language (English) let alone discuss with other denominations ecumenical possibilities.

Two recent studies are helpful in measuring current Canadian Lutheran attitudes and spirituality. Based on a series of national surveys, Reginald Bibby discovered in his extensive study of religion that Canadian religion is "fragmented": "Religion, Canadian-style, is mirroring culture. A specialized society is met with specialized religion. Consumer-minded individuals are provided with a smorgasbord of fragment choices. Culture leads; religion follows."⁸⁵ How fragmented is Canadian Lutheranism? That is, how true have Canadian Lutherans remained to their founder's spiritual experience and expressions of justification? Though the Lutheran sample is small,⁸⁶ Bibby's study indicates that, like most other mainline denominations, Lutheran numbers are not increasing in the same proportion as Canada's population. Having said that, it is noteworthy that Lutherans have not slipped nearly as much as the

other mainline traditions.⁸⁷ In other words, Lutherans at least claim to continue to identify with their Lutheran heritage while others may not.

In terms of belief, Bibby says that "A good rule of thumb on beliefs and practices is that Anglican, United Church and Lutheran affiliates tend to be the least traditional."⁸⁸ "Traditional" belief here refers to affirming belief in God, Jesus' divinity, and life after death. However, it is worth noting that regarding belief in God, committed Lutherans scored a fairly high 85% with only committed Roman Catholics and Conservative Protestants scoring higher. Lutheran belief in Jesus' divinity and life after death appears to be markedly lower but Bibby admits that in these two areas, his statistics are incomplete.⁸⁹

Bibby's "rule of thumb" breaks down completely when "practice" is considered. Sixty per cent of committed Lutherans surveyed said they engaged in private prayer and 39% in Bible reading, which is actually higher than the national average of committed believers (53% and 25%).⁹⁰ Though 58% of Lutherans claim to be a member of a church, only about 14% actually attend weekly, which does not compare favourably with the national average of 35%.⁹¹ In terms of having "experienced God", committed Lutherans are below the national average of committed religious folk (38% compared to 42%).⁹² Hence if we take these figures as indicators of our spirituality categories, Lutherans do not seem to value highly attendance at worship nor have they had an experience of God in the same way conservative Protestants claim. Yet Lutherans do continue to pray and read their Bibles more than the average Canadian believer, which in combination with a re-evaluation of the "belief" categories above may indicate a continuing interest if not commitment to education and prayer.

The results of David Ramsey's study of Lutherans in Regina seem to support this. Conducting surveys in a cross-section of Regina congregations including those of the American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod heritage,⁹³ Ramsey found that, contrary to his own expectations, there was very little fragmentation of belief in answers to questions regarding belief in God, the New Age movement, and the divinity and work of Jesus. The vast majority of Lutherans gave orthodox Lutheran answers to questions concerning all these categories.⁹⁴ There was

also relatively little dissension from the orthodox Lutheran doctrine regarding the question of who would receive salvation; over 75% agree that “[w]e are saved by the grace of God because of our faith in Christ Jesus... [having done]... nothing to earn or deserve it.”⁹⁵ Even those who disagreed with what Ramsey judged to be the orthodox answer did “so in ways which do not entirely reject Lutheran theology”.⁹⁶ Simply put, the “unorthodox answers” to the question “How are we saved?” were governed by the orthodox idea that God’s mysterious grace demonstrated on the cross is full and plentiful and should not be bound by any dogmatic statement.⁹⁷ Similar explanations were given regarding any fragmentation of belief regarding the necessity of the sacraments, especially baptism.⁹⁸

On only one question of doctrine did Ramsey’s Lutherans appear to be taking more instruction from the surrounding culture than from the Lutheran Confessions; regarding the state of human nature, a little less than half gave the orthodox Lutheran answer that “sin is now our condition, our nature” but another 26% gave the liberal answer that “human nature is neither good nor evil” and the remainder gave responses more humanist or determinist in nature.⁹⁹ Clearly these liberal, humanist and determinist answers are not congruent with Luther’s experience of absolute human corruption in need of God’s saving grace.

As already mentioned, Ramsey was surprised by the relatively fragment-free results and perhaps even more surprised by the fact that the better educated respondents gave unexpectedly orthodox answers. At least Regina’s Lutherans seem to know how their answers should reflect the doctrine and spiritual experience of Luther.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Though this study makes no pretensions to having described the totality of Canadian Lutheran spirituality, a comparison with Luther’s spirituality does reveal some trends congruent with and also diverging from Luther’s spirituality.

In his emphasis on education, which originates in the Scriptures and includes other means such as the Catechism, Luther strove both to nurture his spiritual experience of justification

and maintain the necessary correct doctrine to support it. Through the decades, Canadian Lutherans of all descriptions have been embroiled in doctrinal debates which, even if many of them are carry-overs of American disputes,¹⁰⁰ reflect a concern for correct doctrine. That concern seems to have resulted in a remarkably homogenous (non-fragmented) set of beliefs especially concerning who God is, the work of Christ and justification, even if the need for that justification seems to have been blurred somewhat by the optimism of contemporary culture regarding human possibilities. By and large, Lutherans still share with Luther the belief in, and therefore also the experience of, the need for justification and God's gracious work of such justification in the work of Christ.

Though the committed Lutherans of Bibby's study can only boast a 39% Bible reading rate, a 60% private prayer rate and a 15% weekly attendance rate, both Bibby's and Ramsey's studies support the idea that Canadian Lutherans still know what their spiritual experience should be, even if they do not take the time or make the effort to nurture that experience through prayer and worship. In a culture which values high ethical and moral standards, the works that Canadian Lutherans accomplish are not regarded as currency in obtaining justification, an understanding one would think our money-based culture would encourage; rather Lutherans, like their namesake founder, regard those works as a result of the salvation experience with service to our fellow human being a natural by-product.¹⁰¹ One can only pray that though the knowledge Canadian Lutherans seem to have internalized is not supported by the type of sustained spiritual practice (i.e., worship and prayer) that Luther encouraged, Canadian Lutherans are experiencing and will continue to experience the spirituality that prompted Luther's faith and life-work.

Notes

- ¹ Ewert Cousins (ed.), *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985).
- ² Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "Spirituality in the Academy," in Bradley C. Hanson (ed.), *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 16.
- ³ Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-examination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

- 4 For instance, see Frank C. Senn (ed.), *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) and others below.
- 5 Martin E. Marty, "Among the Tribes: Realistic Hope in 1992," *The Christian Century* (January 8, 1992) 4.
- 6 Louis Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality*, vol. 3: *A History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1965). Sandra M. Schneiders also notes the Roman Catholic nature of the term in her essay "Spirituality in the Academy," 18.
- 7 Gordon Rupp, "Protestant Spirituality in the First Age of the Reformation," in G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker (eds.), *Popular Belief and Practice Papers Read at the Ninth Summer Meeting and the Tenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 155.
- 8 See for example Thomas F. O'Meara, O.P., "Lutheranism: A School of Spirituality," *Dialog* 23 (Spring, 1984) 126-134 which argues that if Roman Catholics regard Lutheranism as a school of spirituality, dialogue between the two denominations will be enhanced.
- 9 Hanson, *Modern Christian Spirituality*, 15-61.
- 10 Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 18, 218.
- 11 Jared Wicks, *Luther and his Spiritual Legacy* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983) 24-25.
- 12 Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 2.
- 13 Ibid. 4-7.
- 14 Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality*, 63. Or as Bengt Hoffman succinctly states, Luther's "faith-consciousness was significantly molded by mystical experience" (*Luther and the Mystics*, 18).
- 15 Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 13.
- 16 Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality*, 63.
- 17 Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe 54 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883) 186. As quoted in Marc Lienhard, "Luther and Beginnings of the Reformation," in Jill Raitt with Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17: *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 269. Hereafter *Luthers Werke* abbreviated as WA followed by volume number and page.
- 18 Bengt Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," in Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P. (eds.), *Spiritual Traditionals for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) 151.
- 19 Ibid. 273.
- 20 Peter Brooks makes a particularly strong case for the notion that Luther's theology and courage were primarily a result of his pastoral

- concern for his congregation. P.N. Brooks, "Martin Luther and the Pastoral Dilemma," in Peter Brooks (ed.), *Christian Spirituality Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1975) 95-118.
- 21 Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton Library, 1962).
- 22 Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 150-151.
- 23 A. Skevington Wood, "Spirit and Spirituality in Luther," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61/4 (1989) 317.
- 24 Ibid. 317.
- 25 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950) 89.
- 26 Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Briefwechsel. 333 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1930-1970) 189. As quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 116.
- 27 Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 152. Hoffman opened his incisive work with the following: "Luther placed a limit on Christian mysticism by his emphasis on 'the external word'" (Ibid. 13).
- 28 Ibid. 153.
- 29 WA 44:773.
- 30 Wicks, *Luther and his Spiritual Legacy*, 61-83.
- 31 Ibid. 63.
- 32 Ibid. 76-78.
- 33 The overlap of these activities with Luther's concept of sanctification are obvious. Most helpful in a study of Luther's concept of sanctification is Egil Grisli's "Luther and Sanctification: Humility and Courage," *Consensus* 10 (January, 1984) 3-16.
- 34 WA 30-2:586.
- 35 WA 52:777.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 WA 50:658ff.
- 38 Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 33.
- 39 WA 30-1:128.
- 40 WA 30-1:126. As quoted in Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 35.
- 41 Martin E. Lehmann, *Luther and Prayer* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985).
- 42 Ibid. 6.
- 43 Ibid. 12.
- 44 Ibid. 16.
- 45 Ibid. 64, 67.
- 46 Ibid. 90.
- 47 Lehmann also shows how the theology of the cross is related to the activity of negatively answered intercessory prayer. As God is hidden in the dark side of the cross, so also our trust in God is strengthened in the dark moments of our lives (Ibid. 110-113).
- 48 WA 44:574. As quoted in Lehmann, *Luther and Prayer*, 152.

- 49 Brooks, "Martin Luther and the Pastoral Dilemma," 111.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 WA 7:36; Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 30.
- 52 WA 7:37; Lienhard, "Luther and Beginnings of the Reformation," 295.
- 53 WA 5:548-553; Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 156-157.
- 54 Senn, *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 21-22.
- 55 Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 348-349.
- 56 Ibid. 349.
- 57 William Hordern, "Interrelation and Interaction Between Reformation Principles and the Canadian Context," in Norman J. Threinen (ed.), *In Search of Identity: A Look at Lutheran Identity in Canada* (Winnipeg: Lutheran Council in Canada, 1977) 21-23.
- 58 Gunther Gassman, "Lutheran Identity—Introduction to a Study Project," in Norman J. Threinen (ed.), *In Search of Identity*, 55-60.
- 59 Thomas Ryan, "The Lutherans in Canada," *Ecumenism* (March, 1986) 3.
- 60 Roger Nostbakken, "Celebrating the Mosaic: A Perspective on Lutheran Worship in Canada," *Consensus* (October, 1982) 13-22.
- 61 Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951) 34ff.
- 62 Walter Freitag, lecture given to Saskatchewan Synod Convention of the ELCIC at Luther College, University of Regina, June 9, 1992.
- 63 George O. Evenson, *Adventuring for Christ: The Story of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada* (Calgary: Foothills Lutheran Press, 1974) 12-15. See also Valdimar J. Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada* (Winnipeg: Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod in North America, 1945) 20-21.
- 64 Evenson, *Adventuring for Christ*, 14.
- 65 Carl Raymond Cronmiller, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada* (n.p.: Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada, 1961) Chapter 2; Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada*, 18.
- 66 Cronmiller, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada*, 40-44.
- 67 Ibid. 54-55; Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada*, 31-36.
- 68 Ibid. 47; Cronmiller, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada*, 54-55.
- 69 Ibid. 87-93, 101-107.
- 70 Ibid. 117; Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada*, 66-67.
- 71 Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada*, 162-165; for more Icelandic synod debates see also pages 170-178. Other non-German debates are noted on pages 310-311.
- 72 Cronmiller says that many of those posing as clergy were simply "clerical tramps... imposters who pretended to be ordained clergymen" (*A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada*, 130).

- 73 Waterloo was chosen instead. Ibid. 213-214.
- 74 Eylands, *Lutherans in Canada*, 19.
- 75 Ibid. 21.
- 76 William Hordern, "Interrelation and Interaction," 27; B.G. Smillie, N.J. Threinen, "Protestants—Prairie visionaries of the New Jerusalem: The United and Lutheran Churches in Western Canada," in Benjamin G. Smillie (ed.), *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983) 70, 86.
- 77 David Pfrimmer, "Who are the Lutherans?" *Ecumenism* (March, 1986) 5; Smillie, Threinen, "Protestants—Prairie visionaries of the New Jerusalem," 88.
- 78 Ibid. 90.
- 79 Hordern, "Interrelation and Interaction," 25.
- 80 Douglas Hall, *The Canada Crisis: A Christian Perspective* (Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1980) 78.
- 81 Donald Johnson, "Lutherans at Worship in Canada," *Ecumenism* (March, 1986) 13-15.
- 82 Pfrimmer, "Who are the Lutherans?" 5.
- 83 Welf H. Heick, "Canadian Lutheranism—Unique?" *Lutheran Historical Conference: Essays and Reports*, 2 (1968) 79.
- 84 Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Marguerite Van Die, *The Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).
- 85 Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987) 233.
- 86 Ibid. 277.
- 87 Ibid. 15.
- 88 Ibid. 102.
- 89 Ibid. 103, 277.
- 90 Ibid. 103.
- 91 Ibid. 107.
- 92 Ibid. 103.
- 93 This study could be used to compare the more "pietistic" American Lutheran Church with the more "orthodox" Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregations: Ramsey discovered no difference between the congregations in their belief patterns based on these categories. David Ramsey, "The Doctrine of Salvation: The Lutherans. A Comparison of Official and Actual Belief" (Unpublished M.A. thesis: University of Regina, 1990).
- 94 Ibid. 55-68. For example in response to a question regarding their belief in God, over 84% answered that God is real or personal; over 95%

described Jesus as true God and true man and over 80% rejected the New Age Movement which, it could be argued, represents an alternate spirituality.

95 Ibid. 70, 113.

96 Ibid. 72.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid. 75-77.

99 Ibid. 51.

100 Evenson, *Adventuring for Christ*, 12-15.

101 Ramsey, "The Doctrine of Salvation," 70.