

St David's, Red Hill ACT
October 2017.

Sunday 29th

†Sisters and brothers in Christ, for an Australian born and bred and raised Church of England to the core, my five years post-graduate time in the then West Germany was a unique learning experience. And central to that experience was my relationship to the Lutheran Church which took me in to their student hostel in Munich precisely because they welcomed Anglicans from abroad. That and my later marriage to a Lutheran enabled me to form a more balanced image of the Reformer and his legacy.

I remember that when living in Nuremburg back in November 1964 who should come to town on a State visit but the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, and he was given a warm civic welcome as well as a reception in the cathedral-sized St Laurence Church which was packed with local Lutherans wanting to hear what the Primate of all England had to tell them. But first, the Dean of St Laurence's welcomed the Archbishop by saying that it was fortuitous that St Francis of Assisi could come and renew the Church back in the 13th century but in the 16th century Martin Luther the Augustinian monk HAD to come and renew the Church because in the hands of the then Papacy it had fallen into the Babylonian captivity, so-called.

So Michael Ramsey was put on notice not to say anything negative about Luther. Neither did he. Instead in flawless German he preached on John Chapter 4 verse 27 quoting Jesus' reported words:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...” It was just what the Germans wanted/needed to hear from their former bitter enemy. We need to remember that the Archbishop of Canterbury is next in precedence to the Royal Family in the English aristocratic hierarchy. And Nuremburg has a special place in earlier Anglo-German relations. Back in 1532, the then king, Henry VIII had sent one Thomas Cranmer to Germany to learn more about Luther’s Reformation. While residing at the clergy house of St Laurence’s Church with the then Lutheran Dean, Cranmer took a shine to the niece of the Dean’s wife and so became a convert to the institution of clerical marriage. He had also imbibed other Lutheran principles and brought these back to England together with his German wife but kept her a secret from King Henry.

So the Lutheran connections go back a long way and Cranmer made use of these in composing the First Book of Common Prayer as an English language Mass book. That is what it was called. It subsequently underwent several revisions until 1662 when Elizabeth was on the throne but by then it had absorbed certain Calvinist influences which have proved troublesome ever since. Consequently our Church has had difficulty, even today, in making up its mind whether it is essentially Catholic without the Pope, Lutheran or Calvinist. Maybe it is all these things, a veritable theological debating society. But, of course, Luther did not set out to split the Church, just reform it from within. So it is essentially Rome’s fault that it came to a split finally at the Council of Trent in 1551-52 when the Papacy dismissed all of Luther’s reforms to church practice as heretical. Basically all the Lutheran delegates wanted was to replace Papal authority with that of a Church Council, but Rome would not

entertain it. The signals are that today the present Pope Francis would be quite happy to go down that track. We live in interesting times. But back to Luther the theologian:

In his spiritual life Luther worried intensely about sanctification and how to overcome the consequences of his fallen human nature. Sanctification was a great problem, not only to him. But when a Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel (1465-1519) appeared selling so-called indulgences, meaning, if you bought a certificate from him, half the proceeds of which were to go to building St Peter's cathedral in Rome, you could reduce the time you had to spend in Purgatory expiating one's sins before being allowed into heaven. It was this theological sleight-of-hand by the Papacy against which Luther believed he had to protest most vigorously. Hence the nailing of his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg, allegedly on 31st October 1517. The Reformation had begun.

One would not describe Luther as a systematic theologian but nevertheless his teaching shows a consistent internal unity. Its key point is the experience of justification of the sinner before an angry God comes *solely through faith*, not works. Indeed, the relationship of the human creature to the Creator is not based upon the individual's moral rectitude established by good works but solely in the faithful's acceptance of the judgement of a just God over him/her. Everyday the human being falls victim to sin but the sinner may receive anew the daily forgiveness of God. The Christian life consists of daily penitence, indeed, in a dying and rising again from the scourge of sin. So, paradoxically, one is both sinful and justified simultaneously. That is the life long reality for every Christian. In maintaining this

Luther is credited with having re-established the original New Testament's concept of God, namely that in Jesus' words according to Luke 5: 32: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.", but also in Mark 2:17, "Those who are well need no physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." And the guarantee for the certainty of grace, according to Luther, can only be found in the Word of God, that is, in the revelation of God's acts of salvation towards humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In this way faith derives from the Word that is understood as both law and gospel (good news) simultaneously. The *sacraments* give assurance through outward and visible signs of the promises of God. They are efficacious not through the mere liturgical act *but through the faith that springs from the Word.*

Of the seven sacraments of the medieval Church Luther retained the key ones, namely Baptism and the Eucharist for the simple reason that it was only for these two that he could find adequate grounds in the Scriptures. In the Eucharist he rejected the prevailing Roman interpretation of Transubstantiation but in his dispute with the Swiss reformer, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) he retained the concept of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ. And through the certainty of forgiveness the Christian experienced the joy of abandonment of his own will to the will of God. Faith demonstrated itself in love, and the location of certainty was in the individual's calling (*Beruf*). In Luther's world view, everybody had a role to fulfil in the so-called "economy of God" under whose sovereignty the world existed.

Finally, and very importantly, today Rome has completely re-assessed Luther. Back in 1980 for example, the Pope had sent a delegation led by two bishops to Augsburg to square off with the Lutherans which they did in a joint statement called “All under one Christ”. Essentially it meant that there is nothing in Luther’s teaching that is at variance with Catholic teaching, so we are in an era of re-newed ecumenical collaboration. We will learn more about this here at the ANU in a few weeks when a great international conference of church officials from all over the world will meet to discuss “Receptive Ecumenism”.

What we Anglicans have to grasp is that officially Rome has undergone a change of heart from the time when we were growing up. Then, we were all heretics and schismatics, clamouring to be let into hell. Now we are partners in peaceful ecumenical dialogue. And it is largely due to the recollection of the original Lutheran witness which warned the Church about its true priorities all those centuries ago.

Like all churches, Lutherans in every country have undergone intense re-assessments of themselves. We have come to the view that to insist on the absolute permanence of Reformation or the Counter-Reformation statements of the Romans has been contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and we all have to re-affirm the spirit of *justice, peace and reconciliation*. So everybody feels obliged to embrace the other across denominational boundaries and become genuinely ecumenical. And I know the Lutherans in Germany are foremost among the Churches in advancing this line today. – You may

remember that old saying: “I am not bigoted; some of my best friends are Jews”. Now we can say, “I am not bigoted; some of my best friends are Lutherans, Papists, Presbyterians Methodists, or Baptists. And now we look forward to making friends with both Jews and Moslems. We, as really committed Christians, are never short of challenges that we are obliged to confront. †