

*(Draft—not for publication or citation)*

## **Worshipping-Experience as the heart of Lutheran Theology**

*Jens Wolff*

### **Abstract**

In a work with the title: “German Mass and Order of Service,” published in 1526 Luther emphasizes the universal and the contingent dimension of the Word of God. The paper asserts that this has important implications concerning Luther’s view of cultures. The paper analyses his concept of worship and its actual meaning in terms of an intercultural approach. Although Luther does not use the term “intercultural,” he develops a highly intercultural vision of worship which often has been overlooked by Reformation scholarship. The paper shows the tight connection between Luther’s theological thinking and his concept of culture. In this respect the paper offers a transformative perspective on Luther’s theology and its concrete practices today.

### **1. What does “intercultural” mean?**

Many disciplines at universities around the world nowadays are concerned with cultural or intercultural studies<sup>1</sup>. Almost since the beginning of European thinking the question of nature, and in particular human nature, was connected with the problem of culture<sup>2</sup>. In this respect, current historical research sheds new light upon intercultural aspects of Lutheran theology. One of the latest publications on the subject situates the reformer, Martin Luther, “between cultures.”<sup>3</sup> Not only Luther, but also the Wittenberg Reformation with its institutional developments and its international effects certainly became an event of global significance with a strong sense of decentralization. Both Luther and his theology and its ecclesiastical implications are still strongly present among other denominations throughout the world. As you all know there are currently some 140 Lutheran churches around the world in thousands of congregations in 79 countries with 68 million Christians – understanding themselves in continuity and sometimes also in discontinuity to the Wittenberg Reformation.

---

<sup>1</sup> ALEIDA ASSMANN: Interkulturelle Übersetzung – Grenze, Chancen, Aporien, in: ALOIS HAHN / NORBERT H. PLATZ (hg.), *Interkulturalität als neues Paradigma*, Trier 1999, 65-71. – Thanks to Martha Stortz for correcting the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Interculturality again became an important subject during the Age of Enlightenment, cf. for example KOCH, MANFRED: *Der Maßstab der Kulturen. Überlegungen zu Geschichte und Gegenwart interkultureller Literaturwissenschaft (Komparatistik und interkulturelle Germanistik)*, in: *Sprache und Literatur*, Heft 70, 23. Jg (1992), 13-29. – Also before the 18th century there was a strong interest in other cultures, cf. OLFERT DAPPER (1636-1689): *Die Unbekante Neue Welt/ oder Beschreibung des Welt-teils Amerika, und des Sud-Landes: Darinnen vom Ursprunge der Ameriker und Sudländer/ und von den gedenckwürdigen Reysen der Europæer darnach zu. Wie auch Von derselben Festen Ländern/ Inseln/ Städten/ Festungen/ Dörfern ... und so wohl alten als neuen Kriegen/ ausführlich gehandelt wird; Durch und durch mit vielen nach dem Leben in Ameriken selbst entworfenen Abbildungen gezieret*, Amsterdam 1673. - Der Text wurde übersetzt von JOHANN CHRISTOPH BEER (1638-1712).

<sup>3</sup> HANS MEDICK / PEER SCHMIDT (hg.): *Luther zwischen den Kulturen. Zeitgenossenschaft – Weltwirkung*, Göttingen 2004.

But one has to keep in mind that this ubiquitous presence of Lutheran churches around the world in modern times aroused from the minuteness of the beginnings of the Reformation: the new discovery of the Word of God when an unknown monk and young professor read and interpreted the bible together with a few students. It is simply not true, that these beginnings already were “a moment of world history”<sup>4</sup> as Reformation scholarship<sup>5</sup> in the historicist tradition of Leopold von Ranke and Gerhard Ritter pointed out. This static and nationalist perspective which identifies regional German history with world history underestimates that the effects of the Wittenberg Reformation were only later either realized or transformed throughout the world. The discovery of the Word of God also was the discovery that this Word has an absolutely contingent mode of realizations. As Luther puts it: “The Word of God and mercy are like a travelling cloudburst which does not return where it has been once.”<sup>6</sup>. This high contingency of the Word of God is connected with a universal address not only to Christians but to all humankind. This Word itself occurs in a multifunctional or multicultural way which helps to understand its presence in various world-cultures.

It is my own thesis in this paper that the adaptability of Lutheran theology and its transformative and translational<sup>7</sup> character is one of the factors that facilitate the spreading of Lutheran congregations in many different cultures throughout the world. Therefore the Euro-centric perspective on Luther – which still is very common among church historians!<sup>8</sup> – may be appropriate for the sixteenth century. But there are watertight theological reasons to transform this limited perspective to a broader view of the post-Lutheran history and the transformations that Lutheran theology underwent in various regions of the

---

<sup>4</sup>BERND MOELLER: Das Berühmtwerden Luthers (1988), in: DERS., Luther-Rezeption. Kirchenhistorische Aufsätze zur Reformationsgeschichte, hg. v. JOHANNES SCHILLING, Göttingen 2001, 15.

<sup>5</sup>CARL HINRICHS: Rankes Lutherfragment von 1817 und der Ursprung seiner universalhistorischen Anschauung, in: Festschrift für Gerhard Ritter zu seinem 60. Geburtstag, hg. v. RICHARD NÜRNBERGER, Tübingen 1950, 299-321.

<sup>6</sup>Vgl. WA 15; 32,7f (An die Ratsherren aller Städte deutschen Landes; 1524). – Luther was not the first one to use this metaphor. He probably read it in the writings of the Reformation theologian Ulrich Hugwald (1496-1571). – Cf. THOMAS HOHENBERGER: Lutherische Rechtfertigungslehre in den reformatorischen Flugschriften der Jahre 1521-1522, Tübingen 1996, 279f.

<sup>7</sup>The translational character of the Reformation deeply is rooted in Luthers theology which develops a lot of translational techniques in the sense of the interpretation of the Holy Scripture (like *figura* and *imago*), see JOHANN ANSELM STEIGER: Fünf Zentralthemen der Theologie Luthers und seiner Erben. *Communicatio – Imago – Figura – Maria – Exempla*, Leiden 2002.

<sup>8</sup>It does not make sense to complain about national protestant views of history and at the same time to limit the own historical or theological understanding through a Euro-centric perspective, see VOLKER LEPPIN: Die Wittenberger Reformation und der Prozess der Transformation kultureller zu institutionellen Polaritäten, SSAW.PH 140/4, Leipzig 2008, 26. When the author uses the term „international“, he always prefers an Euro-centric perspective, see op. cit., 45.

world<sup>9</sup>.

If the Word of God and mercy are like a travelling cloudburst, and if, as Paul says, God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11), it is a good counsel for Christians to participate in the ongoing project of “Provincializing Europe”<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Lutheran service

Since I am a pastor and church historian and wrote my dissertation on Luther’s theology of the cross<sup>11</sup>, I would like to discuss the subject of worship by means of an historical text, at the same time sketching some systematic thoughts on the present situation of Lutheran churches within in the world. Since Martha Ellen Stortz asked me to choose an intercultural approach, together with you I would like to analyze a text in this respect that Luther has published in 1526. The title reads: “German Mass and Order of Service.”<sup>12</sup> There Luther deliberately emphasizes that *everybody* is in the state of being addressed by God: Christians and non-Christians (*status ecclesiasticus*). Luther radically points out that an “order of service” really is not necessary for the ones who already are Christians but for the ones who shall become Christians or become even more powerful Christians (WA 19; 73,14f). And somebody who already is a Christian, as Luther with his exaggerating rhetoric underlines, does not need Word and Sacrament as a Christian but as a sinner (WA 19; 73, 15-17).

The aim of an “order of service” is to address and to reach lay Christians and youth throughout the world<sup>13</sup>. It all is for their sake: reading, singing, preaching, writing and making verses. Ringing all bells and whistling with all organs and clinking with everything that can clink also is helpful and productive (WA 19; 73,22-25<sup>14</sup>).

To resume this part: Luther stresses two universal aspects in the „order of service“. The first one is the universal aspect of language that may reach any Christian and non-Christian, the second one is the universal aspect of music that is immediately accessible for anybody. Music is able to call people to God with or without words. The intercultural dynamic of Lutheran faith in my opinion depends highly upon the afore-mentioned theological decisions which put music and the Word of God in the center of the service for the sake of young people and

---

<sup>9</sup> E. g. Mexiko (=New Spain), Africa (Tansania, South Africa etc), Asia (India or Indonesia), Russia, China, Latinamerica (Brasil), United States etc.

<sup>10</sup> See DIPESH CHAKRABARTY: Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton 2000.

<sup>11</sup> JENS WOLFF: Metapher und Kreuz. Studien zu Luthers Christusbild, Tübingen 2005.

<sup>12</sup> The German title reads: “Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottesdienst“.

<sup>13</sup> Luther apparently not was the first one to emphasize the significance of the lay man, cf. YVES CONGAR: Der Laie. Entwurf einer Theologie des Laientums, <sup>3</sup>1964. – KLAUS SCHREINER (hg.): Laienfrömmigkeit im Spätmittelalter, München 1992. – THOMAS KOCK / RITA SCHLUSEMANN (hg.): Laienlektüre und Buchmarkt im späten Mittelalter, Frankfurt 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Here Luther uses *verba actionis* in the present tense.

everyday Christians.

### **3. Interculturality and Freedom**

It is simply astonishing how tightly Luther connects his liturgical and homiletical suggestions with his earlier text “The Freedom of a Christian” (“Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen” 1520), using a new theological and rhetorical style, beginning with a request: “I want to ask you friendly, also for the sake of God, that you not make a law out of my order lest you ensnare somebody’s conscience” (WA 19; 72,3-8). Every preacher or pastor shall use the Christian freedom how, where and whenever he likes. Luther points out that he does not want to control, to master or to govern anybody with laws. The order of service is free. But at the same time he emphasizes that most of the people use Christian liberty only for their own advantage but not for the improvement of the neighbor or for the glory of God. Luther therefore in his “German Mass and Order of Service” develops a dialectical concept of liberty which has to meet two criteria. The freedom Luther is in favor of has to be the servant of love and of the neighbor. The effect of a Christian service should not be to make the participants annoyed about some liturgical or homiletical practice. Worshipping is a religious but also a social practice. Therefore it requires certain social, ethical, and theological standards.

Luther is in favor of Christian freedom. This is the topic he stresses the most right at the beginning. He comes to the radical conclusion that any external order of worshipping has nothing to do with the conscience of the believer before God. But it may be helpful to have a certain order for the participants in worship. When for the first time in his text he explicitly refers to the Bible, Luther uses a communal “we”. Like Paul he emphasizes the community of Christians, that we all shall seek to “speak the same thing” (1 Cor 1,10). Luther combines his reference to Paul with a second quotation from the Bible, Eph 4,5, that we all have one baptism, and—as he adds *against* the biblical text Eph 4:5 – also one Holy Supper (WA 19; 72,29-32).

For Luther worshipping which is grounded in the freedom of a Christian consists of a mixture between uniformity and diversity or particularism. He deeply respects various orders of worship in other congregations. Especially where there already are established good orders of worshipping it is not necessary that everybody accepts and shares the particular order of the Wittenberg Reformation. Luther’s distinction between uniformity and diversity shows a good appreciation for the diversity of Christian practices. Although he does not use the term „intercultural“, he apparently is capable of perceiving other ‘cultures` of worship or cultural practices. He shows a clear sensibility for the other. The supplementary, “German Mass and Order of Service” also demonstrates a critical self-perception of culture: Germans, Luther writes, are “wild, raw and ranging people who only change their manners in case of highest emergency” (WA 19; 75, 18-20). Germans are the true barbarians.

### **4. Worshipping and multilingualism**

Let us now have a closer look to the „order of service“ from the perspective of a close reading which circles around the intercultural question of

language<sup>15</sup>. Here Luther apparently uses methods of comparative literature<sup>16</sup> and comparative hermeneutics<sup>17</sup>. According to Luther it is possible to differentiate between three types of service: the Latin mass which was common in the Middle Ages; second, the vernacular service for all Christians who speak the vernacular; and third, the private service which a family or the ones who want to be seriously Christians celebrate in their houses. It is interesting that the biggest part of the introduction deals with the question of the Latin mass in relation to masses in other languages but not with the vernacular service and the private service. Luther surprisingly—almost like nowadays Pope Benedict XVI—is of the opinion that nobody should abolish the Latin language from service<sup>18</sup>. He demands this not for nostalgic reasons but again for the sake of the youth and especially for the improvement of their education. Deeply rooted in the humanist tradition, Luther regrets that in his time Greek and Hebrew are not as common as Latin. He also regrets that, in his opinion, these two languages do not offer as many chants and music as Latin.

This again means a self-critical perception of the own humanist tradition and humanist schooling. The priority of Latin within the European universities has led to an almost homogeneous culture. Luther opposes a one-dimensional view of a world centered around one language only because this view tends to despise other languages<sup>20</sup>. The priority of Latin signifies a strong uniformity which not always is helpful. Luther's creative idea, which carries refreshing consequences

---

<sup>15</sup> In this section I am trying to apply some categories of Intercultural German Literature towards Luther's theology. For methodological reflections see WERNER NELL: *Interkulturelle Lektüren – interkulturelle Komparatistik. Verstehen und Anerkennen, Grenzerkundungen im Medium der Literatur*, in: BERND KIEFER / WERNER NELL (hg.), *Das Gedächtnis der Schrift. Perspektiven der Komparatistik*, Wiesbaden 2005, 141-176. – NORBERT MECKLENBURG: *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft*, in: ALOIS WIERLACHER / ANDREA BOGNER (hg.), *Handbuch interkulturelle Germanistik*, Stuttgart 2003, 433-439. – NORBERT MECKLENBURG (hg.): *Über kulturelle und poetische Alterität. Kultur- und literaturtheoretische Grundprobleme einer interkulturellen Germanistik*, in: ALOIS WIERLACHER (hg.), *Perspektiven und Verfahren einer interkulturellen Germanistik. Akten des I. Kongresses der Gesellschaft für interkulturelle Germanistik*, München 1987, 563-584.

<sup>16</sup> MANFRED SCHMELING: *Interpretation und Kulturvergleich. Überlegungen zu einer komparatistischen Hermeneutik*, in: HENK DE BERG / MATTHIAS PRANGEL (hg.), *Interpretation 2000. Positionen und Kontroversen. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Horst Steinmetz*, Heidelberg 1999, 201-214. – See also GEORGE STEINER: *Was ist Komparatistik?*, in: DERS., *Der Garten des Archimedes. Essays*, München 1997.

<sup>17</sup> See for the theoretical background THOMAS GÖLLER: *Kulturverstehen. Grundprobleme einer epistemologischen Theorie der Kulturalität und des kulturellen Erkennens*, Würzburg 2000. – PETER ZIMA: *Komparatistik als Metatheorie. Zur interkulturellen und interdisziplinären Perspektive der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*, in: LUTZ DANNEBERG / FRIEDRICH VOLLHARDT (hg.), *Wie international ist die Literaturwissenschaft? Methoden- und Theoriediskussion in den Literaturwissenschaften: kulturelle Besonderheiten und interkultureller Austausch am Beispiel des Interpretationsproblems (1950-1990)*, Stuttgart 1996, 532-549.

<sup>18</sup> The problem of the Latin mass Luther already discussed in „Formula missae“ (cf. WA 12; 197ff). Although he is highly in favor of the vernacular, he repeats his opinion in 1528, see *Enders* 6, 266 (de Wette 3,294).

<sup>20</sup> WA 19; 74, 10f: „Ich halte es gar nicht mit denen, die nur auff eyne sprache sich so gar geben und alle anderen verachten“.

for worshipping, runs as follows: Sunday we should celebrate the service in four languages: in German, Latin, Greek, Hebrew (WA 19;74,8f). Again, this multilingual plan is both educational and practical, as well as theological. Luther confesses: “I want to educate young people who can be of use to Christ in foreign countries and talk to the people” (WA 19; 74,11-13). It always is a problem if a community is isolated because of their language. According to Luther this also means a captivity of their faith.<sup>21</sup> The limits of my language always are the limits of my world.

But again, it is a genuine theological argument that the Holy Spirit in the beginning did not wait until everybody came to Jerusalem to learn Hebrew, but the Holy Spirit gave a plurality of languages for preaching that the apostles could preach wherever they were sent. Nowadays it is recommended that young people learn many languages because nobody knows how God will need them in their lifetime. Although Luther often was criticized for his nationalistic views (often rightly!), here his argument is not ethnocentric<sup>22</sup> but multilingual. He knew four languages and almost daily worked with all of them. And he was of the opinion that multilingual knowledge improves the communication of the Word of God.

In my opinion, already the title “German Mass and Order of Service” suggests a certain bipolarity: worship implies a relationship to a particular community. Therefore Luther stresses the relation to a particular language: the vernacular, in this case the German language. On the other hand, he thinks about the mass in a more general sense, which is implied in the second part of the title: “Order of Service” has at first glance no specification of a certain community or a certain language.

## **5. Places of worship and children of God**

### a) Places of worship

“Order of Service” not only offers a detailed plan for the liturgy (inclusive of the Lord’s Supper), music and preaching on Sunday for the everyday Christian but also considers other places of worship. Faith not only is practiced publicly in the Sunday service. The ones who seriously want to be Christians have to gather in their houses for praying, reading, baptizing or celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

At first glance, Luther’s suggestions here are very cautious. Again, nobody can command the people to gather in their houses for worship. If there were more people who wanted to be serious Christians it would be easy to make an order for private gatherings. But since there is at present a lack of such people, it is not

---

<sup>21</sup> Luther here uses the example of the Waldensians in Bohemia, although this judgement itself seems a stereotype of Luther because the situation in Bohemia was characterized through a multilingual situation, cf. H. KAMINSKY: A History of the Hussite Revolution, 1967. - Cf. about stereotype and prejudice RUTH FLORACK: Stereotypenforschung als Baustein zu einer interkulturellen Literaturwissenschaft, in: Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien 2000 „Zeitenwende - Die Germanistik auf dem Weg vom 20. ins 21. Jahrhundert“, hg. v. Peter Wiesinger, Bern 2003, 37-42.

<sup>22</sup> MANFRED BROCKER / HEINO HEINRICH NAU (hg.): Ethnozentrismus. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des interkulturellen Dialogs, Darmstadt 1997.

necessary to establish an order.

Luther stresses the tight connection between public service and private houses. He suggests that the catechism should be the joint between the public and the private sphere. The church like the home is a learning place. Years before publishing the catechism,<sup>23</sup> Luther is here already developing the idea of an elementary teaching in the church and in the home which would include the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Although nowadays it might seem that Luther expects too much of families and especially of fathers who were to be in charge of the religious education of their children, he cleverly reflects upon the fundamentals of the faith which would be useful for children and parents.

#### b) The Children of God

They should learn and understand the gospel "by heart." The memorization that was common in Latin elementary schooling is the best way of internalization. Luther is of the opinion that there are too many things written in books but not in the heart. The biblical message consists only of the two elements: faith and love (again this is like the end of „The Freedom of a Christian“). You can keep it with you like two sacks: the sack of faith and the sack of love. The sack of faith has to little bags in it: in the first little bag we put our conviction that we are all sinners. In the second little bag we put our conviction that we are all redeemed through Jesus Christ.

The sack of love also has two little bags in it: in the first one we put the part that we should be the servant to our neighbor as Jesus was our servant. In the second little bag we put the other part that as Christians we suffer and experience evil<sup>24</sup>. One can play the game with the two sacks of love and faith with coins. Then it is even easier to understand. Coins can symbolize faith and love. Luther admonishes that nobody should despise this game for little children. When he wanted to bring up human beings, Christ had to become a human being himself. The idea of condescendence is fundamental for the concept of education. If we want to raise our children we have to become like children too.

## 6. Summary

a) As I tried to show, understanding worship as the *heart* of Lutheran theology is not only limited to the Sunday service or Sunday school but is a daily event. In this understanding of worship theology has to start with the weakest, with children.

The order of service is made not only for adults. Learning, experiencing and living one's own faith ideally begins during as a child. This is the time where basic confidence (*Urvertrauen*) develops which cannot be overwhelmed by the

---

<sup>23</sup> It is an underestimation if one thinks that Luther began to develop his idea of the catechism only after and during the visitation of 1528/29, cf. ALBRECHT BEUTEL: „Gott fürchten und lieben“. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der lutherischen Katechismusformel, in: DERS., Protestantische Konkretionen. Studien zur Kirchengeschichte, Tübingen 1998, 57.

<sup>24</sup> WA 19; 77,15-22.

forces of evil. Understanding oneself as a child of God or better, experiencing oneself as a child of God in daily life or on Sundays, adults learn together with children. Childhood functions as a model of being close to God at a time of life when there are no intellectual or cognitive barriers which prevent the normal “grown-up” person from believing. To me this is an exciting insight into the structure of faith as it is already developed in the Old Testament. Apart from few theologians, e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others<sup>25</sup>, this central element of Lutheran theology has not entered in the current discussion of systematic theology.

The high value placed on memorization helps the children of God know and believe in the gospel “by heart.” This English expression which does not exist in German depicts the affective relation and identification of believers with the Gospel. In its affective and emotional dimension, the heart of the believer clinging to the Word of God, whether communicated through baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or music, is the centre of worship.

**b)** Becoming a Christian is like learning a new language. The believer must practice learning the new language daily. Therefore it is important not to limit the service of God to Sunday liturgy. The whole life shall be service. Therefore Luther not only offers detailed plans for Sunday liturgy, but he also has distinct ideas about how to spend the rest of the week and how to make one’s own life into the life of a Christian.

As the beginning of the week, Sunday is just the prelude to the rest of the week. On Monday and Tuesday there should be read a kind of catechism; Wednesday, a chapter of St. Matthew, e.g., the Sermon on the Mount. The gospel of St. John has its own day on Saturday. On Thursday and Friday one should read the pastoral epistles of the New Testament.

**c)** The service on Sunday itself is a particularly intercultural event. Luther encourages us to notice and to experience this with open ears and hearts. The Sunday service already consists of a large number of components which come from different cultures. The ‘Kyrie Eleison’ which we sing in the liturgy originates from Greek culture, every ‘Hallelula’ is a revitalization of the Hebrew, the Prophets in the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, already preach the universal meaning of the Word of God. And if we remember Pontius Pilate in the New Testament we get a deep insight into Roman Culture.

Prerequisite to recognizing and experiencing the intercultural meaning and effect within our communities is the intercultural and truly universal meaning of the gospel. Not only the communication of the Gospel itself along with sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper but also the various chapters of the Bible feature a huge amount of intercultural experience when paganism and Christianity, Jewish theology and Pauline thought had one of the most thrilling encounters of world history.

You can call Luther’s dealing with these traditions “intercultural,” since he

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. MARCIA BUNGE (ed.): *The Child in Christian thought*, Grand Rapids 2000.

not only lived and worked between different languages and religious cultures but also was inspired by them when working on his theology. Although for most of his life he stayed in a small city somewhere in Germany, his Wittenberg sojourn must be characterized as at least a bilingual situation with German and Latin – in addition to the biblical worlds of Greek and Hebrew cultures. These were all important in orienting Luther's theological thinking.

I frankly admit that Luther often was very patriotic, not interculturally but regionally orientated. But living and speaking in a at least a bilingual and multicentric situation meant that he was not simply "ethnocentric." Certainly he was 'ethnocentric' in the sense that his mother tongue, his own language, would serve best for his own people to understand the communication of law and gospel. This Protestant idea was directed toward the good of the people, and it was not meant to colonize them through a homogeneous language. At this point, Luther could not foresee that there would be one day 140 Lutheran churches in 79 countries with 68 million Christians.

In my opinion, the rhetorical and theological integration of the voice of the other into Luther's theological concept of worship was one of the factors that made the broad spread of the Reformation movement possible. These basic elements of Luther's worship experience should not be gambled away. The integration of that intercultural approach into theological education is highly necessary. At least in a lot of German universities this has not yet fully been realized.

Are „intercultural approaches“ not a necessity in a world faced with fundamentalist movements throughout the world<sup>26</sup>, many of them, as Martin Marty stresses, inspired by Christianity<sup>27</sup>? I am convinced that you cannot do without these basics of an intercultural approach in a pluralistic and multireligious world<sup>28</sup>. God wants, as the prophet Ezekiel points out, that all people should come to the recognition of truth: „Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?“ (Ez. 18,23). This prophecy makes the Word of God into a truly global event which undermines borders that still divide Christianity<sup>29</sup> religiously, economically,

---

<sup>26</sup> MARTIN E. MARTY / R. SCOTT APPLEBY (hg.): Herausforderung Fundamentalismus. Radikale Christen, Moslem und Juden im Kampf gegen die Moderne, Frankfurt / New York 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Here I cannot discuss detailed Luther's relation towards other religions, see JOHANNES EHMANN: Luther, Türken und Islam. Eine Untersuchung zum Türken- und Islambild Martin Luthers (1515-1546), Gütersloh 2008.

<sup>28</sup> In this paper I can not deal with the question of interreligious understanding, see NOTGER SLENCZKA: Die Theologie Luthers angesichts des religiösen Pluralismus und des interreligiösen Dialogs, in: FRIEDRICH-OTTO SCHARBAU (hg.), Christus bekennen, Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg e. V., Bd. 1, Erlangen 2004, 33-54.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. JÜRGEN STREEK: Kulturelle Codes und ethnische Grenzen. Drei Theorien über Fehlschläge in der interethnischen Kommunikation, in: JOCHEN REHBEIN (hg.), Interkulturelle Kommunikation, Tübingen 1985, 103-120. – ROBERT WEIMANN: Repräsentation und Alterität diesseits/jenseits der Moderne, in: DERS. / SABINE ZIMMERMANN (hg.), Ränder der Moderne. Repräsentation und Alterität im (post)kolonialen Diskurs, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 7-43. – The

anthropologically, and socially<sup>30</sup>. But truly understood, the prophetic Word of God truly has a certain dynamic quality.<sup>31</sup> In sum: The Word of God itself has a transcultural meaning<sup>32</sup>. It always is able to cross borders.

### **Two questions for group discussion**

1) Are there any intercultural experiences within our communities which we could share together? 2) Do you think it is community-orientated and realistic to connect religion and education?

---

struggling for identity also concerns Lutheran communities, see KAREN L. BLOOMQUIST ON BEHALF OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION (ed.): *Identity, Survival, Witness. Reconfiguring theological agendas*, Geneva 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore in theology similar problems arise which can be compared with the problems of other disciplines, see JÁNOS RIESZ: *Weltliteratur zwischen „Erster“ und „Dritter“ Welt. Die Verantwortung der vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft (Komparatistik) heute*, *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 33 (1983), 140-148.

<sup>31</sup> The word of God does not allow the abuse of religion in political situations. Modern African history often has a religious basis for political practice, cf. STEPHEN ELLIS / GERRIE TER HAAR: *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> See WOLFGANG WELSCH: *Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen*, *Information Philosophie* 2 (1992), 5-20. – Also DERS.: *Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1996.