

The Global Luther

— A Theologian for Modern Times —

Edited by Christine Helmer

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THE GLOBAL LUTHER
A Theologian for Modern Times

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Abbreviations

- BoC *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Trans. Charles Arand et al. Ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- LW Luther's Works—American Edition. 55 Vols. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. St. Louis, Mo. and Minneapolis: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 2002.
- NEB *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*. Ed. C. H. Dodd et al. Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- NRSV *New Revised Standard Version: The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*. Ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- RGG *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 4th Edn. 9 Vols. Ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007.
- WA D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 67 Vols. Ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1997.
- WABr D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel. 18 Vols. Ed. G. Bebermeyer et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985.
- WADB D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Deutsche Bibel. 12 Vols. Ed. P. Pietsch et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–1961.
- WATr D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden. 6 Vols. Ed. K. Drescher et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–1921.

Foreword

The adjective *global* associated with the proper noun *Luther*, in the geographical sense, is oxymoronic. Globes existed in Martin Luther's Europe, as did maps of the known world. But the world in which Luther traveled was a tiny diamond-shaped chunk of what was to become Germany—474 kilometers long from Wittenberg to Augsburg, and 334 kilometers from Marburg to Leipzig. He was certainly aware of the alien "Turk," his name for the threatening Muslim presence, but his writings provide no road-map for what centuries later came to be called "foreign missions." A provincial of the provincials, he wanted to help reform the church so that the pure gospel would be preached until the imminent end of the world in the territories not far from his front yard. The concept of the "global" would have been as foreign to him as putative news from the star Arcturus would be to us.

Yet Christine Helmer and her colleagues audaciously and creatively project a "Global Luther." At first glance, the biographies of the authors still suggest provincialism. Most of the historians are from Northern Europe and North America. (One hopes that a second volume in a sequence convened and edited by Professor Helmer will also feature scholars from "everywhere else.") The chapter by Bishop Munib A. Younan provides a sample of what is to come in the decades ahead, when interreligious activity will test Luther-an witness and scholarship. The presence of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans would help break the mold of Luther scholarship shaped and often frozen in the old "Luther homeland(s)." Yet most of the chapters in this book already do that, in an exciting fashion.

Speaking of a mold being broken might suggest that the authors here are iconoclasts, seekers of novelty, trash-talkers about the work of their intellectual antecedents. Not at all. They show respect for such work and then engage in revisionism that will advance a new global receptivity to Luther scholarship. If readers will not here find a demolition of the Luther image, they will also

not find the treatment of Luther as icon and idol. Most of the historians represent and interpret conventional findings of Luther scholarship and move on from there to challenge readers to probe further. For example, chapters reflecting contemporary Finnish Luther scholarship revisit the key texts familiar to all who have read Luther or who are informed Lutherans. Then they provide turnings and openings for understandings in cultures that were alien to the sixteenth-century Reformers, just as they have become alienated from the world that the Reformers, led by Luther, took for granted. "Psychoanalysis," "Liberation," and such words in chapter headings do not demand rejection of sixteenth-century affirmations, but they will elicit revisionist thinking for the academy, church, and larger culture alike.

Editor Helmer teases readers in her line one: "The study of Luther is an intellectual enterprise fraught with risk." She invites readers to take up the risk with the authors herein. We associate "risk" with "rewards." They will be manifest to any who take this intellectual tour of a sometimes figurative, sometimes literal Luther "globe." It is time and this is the place from which to take off with guides who demonstrate their trustworthiness as they deal with the familiar and then their risk-taking as they venture to the horizon of the unfamiliar in appropriating the figure and significance of Martin Luther.

Martin E. Marty