

Luther's Impact on the United States and Australia at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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I.

Some preliminary remarks are in order as I introduce the topic on which I have undertaken to write and as I explain the aspects I wish to emphasize. First, it must be underscored that Martin Luther is very evidently one of those Germans who made an impact even beyond the borders of Germany. That is to say—to adopt the phrasing I chose for my topic in the heading—he made an impact on world history. While the works of thinkers like Kant, Hegel, or even Heidegger were available only to the highly educated segment of the population, for example, and influenced only the discussion of and within a particular discipline, Luther's accomplishments as translator and poet were respected and received in many countries and in many circles, even and especially by the less well-educated classes. While innovators like Gutenberg, Kepler, or Sigmund Freud gave impulses only in very specific fields of technology or learning, and while composers like Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven achieved universal acclaim only in their very own quintessential *métier*, the field of music, Luther's significance was and is by no means limited only to his own narrow field of theology, or only to Germany at that. Already in the sixteenth century, the impulses emanating from Luther transformed all of Europe. In short, regardless of the criteria employed, it seems to me that Luther's impact beyond Germany was multifaceted, far-reaching and ongoing.

True, it must be added that Luther's place in world history cannot be objectively defined, cannot, in a sense, be objectified; rather, Luther's eminence was and continues to be a matter of discussion and interpretation. We know that even in his time he was a controversial figure, commanding glowing admiration on the one

hand and evoking passionate hatred on the other. Even in the centuries that followed, exactly what constituted his actual eminence remained an ongoing point of contention. What precise effects this one man had over the short and long term was and continues to be a matter of interpretation. In addition, it must be stated that the judgments and prejudices of one epoch overflowed into the next, with the result that even in retrospect, we can hardly say when which interpretation of Luther arose. Besides, people made frequent attempts to enter into direct dialogue with Luther, some of which succeeded, while others did not. Combatants, for instance, sought such direct recourse in the daily battles of church politics. At times, the intent was to manifest and modernize Luther's legacy with a political accent and thus to legitimize one's own position, as was the case with the Confessing Church. At other times, it amounted to nothing more than immaterial trivialities or even mindless hero worship of Luther. It is the nineteenth century above all that is most replete with such examples. Many of the attempts at direct recourse, however, also led to critical reflection on the conditions of one's own time, to creative theologizing and to new achievements that were artistic in their own right. By way of example one might cite Roger Williams, who developed his ideas of the separation between church and state and of freedom of religion and conscience on the basis of direct recourse to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms;¹ Grundtvig, the great Danish theologian, poet and educator of the people, who viewed his work as the contemporary continuation of Luther's work;² or Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, who claimed to have been inspired by Luther to create his great spiritual music.³

In addition to the various forms of debate with Luther, it must also be observed that the impulses that went out from Luther were felt in various ways, in various phases and in various countries from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. In the sixteenth century, it was not just the unity of the German imperial estates that shattered because of Luther, and along with that unity the hope for the completion of the Imperial Reform. Rather, Luther's criticism of the pope and his new evangelical theology, as mediated by Zwingli, Bucer, and preeminently by Calvin, contributed substantially to the emergence of reformation movements in Switzerland, France,

England, Poland, Hungary, and also in Scandinavia. This led in the various countries to entirely dissimilar conflicts that affected the national histories of these countries in divergent ways. It must be recognized that the Roman Catholic Church would never have been compelled toward internal reform had it not been for Luther's radical challenges. Further, the biblical and thorough theological contemplation and accomplishments that were so common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would never have been conceivable without Luther's example. This is the case for Cornelius Jansen, who spearheaded the most influential inner-Catholic restoration movement, for August Hermann Francke's efforts in the area of pedagogical reform, as well as for the conversion experience of John Wesley that proved to have such far-reaching consequences in the Anglo-Saxon world.

When millions of Germans and Scandinavians emigrated overseas in the nineteenth century, they furnished Luther's work with yet another aspect. The emigrants founded Lutheran congregations in the American Midwest, in southern Russia, in southern Australia, in southern Brazil and in southern and southwestern Africa. These congregations felt an obligation to Luther's legacy, and they held Luther's name in high esteem. Ultimately, Lutheran missionaries founded Lutheran groups on every continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, groups that originated in non-European cultures and are connected to European tradition only through Luther's doctrine.

It should not be forgotten that Luther's theological and political assertions continued to have an effect on the theology, the philosophy, and even the political propaganda of the twentieth century.

If we wish to define and describe Luther's impact on world history, it is therefore necessary to immerse ourselves in an extremely complex subject matter that is defined by quite disparate conceptions and traditions. We must become familiar with the different phases and forms of the way people perceived Luther, shaped his teaching, and developed his ideas. These disparate developments cannot be reduced to a single simple common denominator. To attempt to describe Luther's impact on all of world history in one presentation would result in superficiality and oversimplification. Most of the

essence of what makes Luther's impact beyond the borders of Germany a worthwhile object of study would be lost. In what follows, I will discuss two cases of the after-effects of Luther's life and work outside the political and cultural tradition of Germany, two instances that I deem to be particularly instructive. First, the assessment of Luther in the United States in the decades before the First World War; second, the role that Luther's legacy played during the same time period for the German Lutherans who had emigrated to southern Australia during the nineteenth century. While the first case has to do with the assessment of Luther on the part of leading American historians and church historians, that is, on the part of non-Lutherans, and while this case is paralleled by the role that Luther played in the Dutch or English perception of history in the decades before 1914, the second case focuses on the most important non-English minority in Australia prior to 1914, namely the group of German Lutherans. We find parallels to the second case in the German Lutheran congregations in southern Brazil, southern and southwestern Africa, and in part also in the American Midwest.

II.

Let us proceed to the first case. As far as the assessment of Luther in the United States in the decades before the First World War is concerned, we may take the year 1883 as a starting point, in which Luther's 400th birthday was celebrated with great extravagance in the USA.⁴ It was the Luther of the 95 theses, the Luther who uncovered the corrupt financial practices of the Renaissance papacy, the Luther who burned the papal bull threatening him with excommunication and who courageously withstood papal attempts at intimidation, Luther the hero of Worms, who bravely defended the cause of the new evangelical freedom even against the emperor representing the highest political authority, the Luther who translated the Bible in the Wartburg castle, the Luther who fought against the medieval Catholic superstitions and for new spiritual and religious freedom—that was the Luther whom Americans praised in the year 1883 as the progenitor of the modern world and thus also of the United States. Clergymen of every denomination except for the

American Roman Catholics joined in the praise of Luther; only the Baptists expressed a certain reticence. And American Lutherans were by no means the only ones to make contributions for the construction of a Luther monument in Washington, DC; it was predominantly members of other denominations who did so. The monument in question was a casting of the statue that had been erected in Worms in 1868 of Luther holding the Bible. The casting was fabricated in Germany. The North German Lloyd Company then shipped it free of charge to New York. American trains transported it from there to Washington DC, again at no cost. There it was placed on a large granite pedestal (without the accompanying figures from the original in Worms), and in May of 1884 it was ceremoniously unveiled in the presence of 10,000 spectators by the most eminent member of the Supreme Court at the time, Morrison Remick White, to a performance by the United States Marine Band.

This whole course of events was also significant on a deeper level: A great number of speeches and publications from the anniversary year 1883 also testify to the high esteem in which many Americans held Luther at the time, so much so that—to use the same metaphor—in the new world, his monument seemed to stand on a granite foundation. It will suffice to cite one of the many examples. On September 22, 1883, the popular weekly publication *The American* reported on the impending Luther anniversary in the following words:

No other German celebration could excite so much interest throughout the rest of the world; for no other German occupies such a position in the world's history as does MARTIN LUTHER. There are those who regard KANT or HEGEL, LESSING or GOETHE, as greater than LUTHER; but none of these has come home so closely to people of other countries as has the Reformer. His name is a household word throughout Protestant Christendom; *i.e.*, among the most progressive, enlightened and prosperous peoples of the world. To his initiative as a reformer those peoples in great part owe the qualities which give them their preeminence in the present and their prospects in the future; to his memory is due the tribute of respect which mankind must pay to the great leaders and benefactors of mankind.

The American went on to state that Luther united within himself the “best qualities of the Teutonic character—staunch truthfulness,

loyalty to wife and home, childlike simplicity, cheerfulness, happy humor, fervent devotion to the Fatherland, fearless faith in God, and joy in the truths of the gospel.”⁵ No higher praise could have been afforded in America in the 1880s, since leading American politicians and historians at the time derived the special role that their country played in the world from its Teutonic legacy. They believed the insatiable spirit of freedom and that certain incorruptible sense of justice and truth that marked the United States even in their time to have arisen among the ancient Anglo-Saxons. For Luther to be described as “the ideal Teuton,” something which occurs explicitly and frequently in the article cited above, is to go beyond the use of a mere synonym for the word “German.” The intention was to declare that both Luther and they themselves were offshoots of the same root, that Luther’s work breathed the same air as the very best of America, that Luther, in fact, was one of their own.

One generation later, during the next great Luther anniversary of the year 1917, this kind of language is conspicuously absent in the USA. Various spiritual, scientific and ecclesial movements and developments had led many Americans to distance themselves gradually from Luther in the decades between 1883 and 1917, and the political events of the anniversary year 1917 itself brought this to the surface.

Professional American historians founded their own departments in the great universities in the 1880s and joined together to form the American Historical Association in 1884. It was in reaction to Teutonism (the overemphasis of the impact the Anglo-Saxons had on world history) that they emphasized no longer the history of the Reformation, but rather the medieval, and especially the early medieval legal, economic and constitutional history of England instead. Luther now featured in their discussions very rarely.

To the extent that American historians put their own scientific skills to the test, their criticism of European models grew, and not least of German models. To cite one example: “I think far less of Germans, German education and German educational institutions than I did six months ago!” a young American historian wrote to his famous teacher Herbert Baxter Adams in Baltimore after visiting Eisenach, Göttingen, and Berlin in 1901. “I cannot help but feel that

they (and the Prussians in particular) are narrow-minded, outwardly polite but uneducated at heart." He questioned why American students should come to Germany, except to study in those fields in which the material lay in Germany. It seemed to him that in many subjects, including the subject of history (with the exception of German history), Germany had nothing to offer American students that they could not have even better at home.⁶ It must be observed that although this epistolary passage stands in marked contrast to earlier American sentiments regarding Germany, it nevertheless expresses a sentiment commonly found around 1900. The general alienation from German culture and science then also contributed specifically to alienation from Luther.

In the decade before 1914, religious factors again played a stronger role for the domestic American critics of Teutonism, the advocates of the so-called "New History," and in particular for James Harvey Robinson. Accordingly, Robinson again made greater allowance for the Reformation in his works. On the other hand, the group surrounding Robinson aimed to use the methods and research results of the social sciences in the discipline of history, and thus to write not as much about the *great men* who shaped history as about the *social forces* that determined the course of history. For this reason, although Robinson's writings, which were widely read in the United States before 1914, mention the significance of the Reformation for world history, they do not discuss Martin Luther in any great depth. In addition, Robinson subscribed to the newer Catholic studies on Germany in the late middle ages, including those of Johannes Janssen. Consequently, he relativized the view held by Protestant authors that the Reformation constituted a major turning point, and he rehabilitated late medieval piety instead.⁷

Because some proponents of the New History were preoccupied with social history, they were led to believe that the Reformation was part of a revolution by the bourgeoisie that lasted from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Thus Carlton J. H. Hayes, for instance, in his *Political and Social History of Modern Europe*, published in 1916, considered what he called the "Commercial Revolution" of the sixteenth century to be at least as important as the "Protestant Revolt," wherein it is significant that he expressly pointed out the

“economic causes” of the Protestant Revolt. For Hayes at least, Luther retained the role of the leader of the German bourgeoisie against Rome.

A comprehensive look at the textbooks published for use in American high schools and colleges before 1914 strikingly shows that there was a tendency to see the Reformation no longer as a significant event of world history, as was the case in 1883, but rather as an episode of *German* history. The textbooks portrayed Luther as the originator of a tradition that extended from him via Frederick the Great to Bismarck. It is clearly evident that they had adopted a German-Protestant interpretation of history on a smaller scale. Even though this tradition was still viewed very favorably in the United States, it ultimately served to diminish Luther's significance for world history, as well as for the formative history of the United States.

The greatest accomplishment of the American church historians of that era, who had joined to form the “American Society of Church History” in 1888, was the publication of a thirteen-volume church history of America, in which between 1893 and 1897 prominent spokespersons from every denomination presented the history of their respective church bodies: Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Reformed, Lutherans, Unitarians and Universalists. Soon afterward, between 1898 and 1906, the Secretary of the association of church historians, Samuel Macaulay Jackson, published a series in nine volumes entitled “Heroes of the Reformation,” containing accounts of the lives of Luther, Melancthon, Erasmus, Beza, Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox, Balthasar Hubmaier and Calvin. Both projects testify to the creative genius of the American church historians of the time and their willingness to cooperate in a pragmatic, yet also scientifically founded and ecumenical manner. Both projects simultaneously also demonstrate the self-consciousness of the individual denominations and the self-consciousness of denominational historiography. In light of these two series, which were widely disseminated in numerous editions and widely used even beyond the ecclesiastical seminaries, Luther appears as only one among many other Reformers, and Lutheranism as only one among many different forms of Protestantism. That means that

Luther had been reduced to the domain of a particular church body, and that his singular significance, which American church historians in particular had still emphasized in 1883, had now been significantly relativized.

These tendencies were strengthened in the decade before the First World War by individual critical studies of Luther. The Congregationalist William Walker Rockwell, for instance, published a paper in 1904 on Landgrave Philip of Hesse's double marriage, which only partly justified Luther's attitude toward this awkward affair. The Presbyterian Henry Elias Dosker in 1909 designated the Dutch Anabaptists as the true protagonists of political and religious freedom,⁸ and not Martin Luther, as had been the custom in America in the nineteenth century. The Baptist Henry Clay Vedder, in a handbook on church history published in the same year, accused Luther and his followers of augmenting the power of the princes, acting selfishly, and enriching themselves, all the while being intolerant on their own part.⁹ During the same period, American church history bodies issued relatively mild reviews of the works critical of Luther by (Roman Catholic authors) Heinrich Denifle and Hartmann Grisar. It was only one more step toward the demythologizing of Luther the hero, when the historian Preserved Smith in 1913 dissected the young Luther with the methods of psychoanalysis.¹⁰

Finally, theologians like Walter Rauschenbusch contributed to the diminishment of Luther's influence on American spirituality after 1900. Rauschenbusch formulated the so-called "Social Gospel" in answer to the social needs of that time, and he saw Luther as unable to provide any impulse or help. In his famous book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907, Rauschenbusch described the Reformation in its early years as "truly religious and creative," since it "encompassed all of human life" at first and attracted to itself "the enthusiasm of all idealistic people and movements." Even so, he claimed, Lutheranism became petty, dogmatic, and contentious, and Calvinism took the lead instead.¹¹

Let us pause for a moment and take stock. While Luther had been deconfessionalized by American theologians and historians and turned into a figure of universal significance in the course of the

nineteenth century, he was reconessionalized and renationalized in the decades prior to 1914. While the Americans had praised him as the father of all religious and political freedom and as the progenitor of their own way of life in 1883, they now downgraded his eminence and began to distance themselves from him. The causes for this development are difficult to discern. For one thing, it seems to me that before 1914, citizens of other nations were less and less able to understand why the German national hero whom the German Protestants lauded so greatly should also be a part of their own history. For another, the spiritual, theological and scientific movements current in America before 1914 also made an impact on the interpretation of Luther. The more self-conscious the American theologians and historians became, the more clearly they distinguished between their own and foreign tradition. The more they set their own agenda with initiatives like the New History or the Social Gospel, the less they were able to make use of a Luther who had become stylized as the patriarch of the entire Western world.

Admittedly, what the German reformer was allowed to keep until 1917 and what was clearly brought out by the American anniversary speeches and anniversary articles, even half a year after the American declaration of war against Germany, was his eminence as a passionate and devout biblical theologian. We will return to this aspect at the end.

III.

Let us now investigate the second case, the significance of Luther for the Lutherans who emigrated to southern Australia from 1838 onwards. These groups did not subject their church father Luther to critical scrutiny. What they understood Luther's legacy to be, however, came to a great extent to determine their life, as will be demonstrated below. Some background information: Pastor August Ludwig Christian Kavel led a number of the groups of Old Lutherans who emigrated from Prussia in the 1830s to southern Australia. Favorable conditions for passage and the purchase of land, offered to Kavel in London by the wealthy Baptist George Fife Angas, proved to be the decisive factors. Angas was involved in the opening up of

southern Australia and was searching for capable, devout colonists. Kavel and his flock took Angas' offer as a form of divine providence. They believed God was leading them into a desert at the end of the world, in order for them to maintain the true Lutheran faith in a time of rampant unbelief.¹²

A few years later, in 1841, Kavel called for Pastor Daniel Gotthard Fritzsche to follow. However, Kavel and Fritzsche had divergent conceptions of how to establish a Lutheran church in southern Australia. In addition, and more significantly, Kavel had in the meantime become a proponent of Chiliasm, that is, of the impending return of Christ and the beginning of the millennial kingdom, while Fritzsche rejected this doctrine as completely and utterly un-Lutheran and declared that Christ would only return to consummate the last judgment. Correspondingly, conflict soon arose. Already in 1846, before there were even one thousand German Lutherans in southern Australia, the first schism of the German Lutheran congregations took place. Reunification attempts following the death of the contentious Kavel in the year 1860 came to naught. On the contrary, the following decades resulted in even more separations, although they were less serious in nature.

Another factor to consider was that the first immigrants in the decades after 1840 encouraged other groups of German Lutherans to follow suit. Some of these settled in Adelaide, while most established themselves in towns to the east and north of Adelaide. In these towns German pastors held worship services in German, and it was here that after 1850 the first German public schools and a printing press for the German church were established. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as immigration from Germany dramatically slowed, of the 200,000 inhabitants of the state of South Australia, 20,000 belonged to the German Lutheran congregations. Slightly more than half of them were members of the so-called "Immanuel Synod," designated from 1921 onwards as the "United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia." It consisted of the groups affiliated with the Kavel tradition. The so-called "Australian Synod," deriving from Fritzsche, had somewhat fewer members and was also known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Australia.

Finally, we should note that the German Lutherans, who worked for the most part in the field of agriculture (some as independent farmers, some as agricultural laborers), had little contact with the English colonists. Few German-English marriages took place. When the Lutheran families grew large and land became scarce, they purchased new land and founded new German towns. They did not attend the institutions of higher learning which the English had founded. They imported their pastors from Germany, mainly from Hermannsburg and Neuendettelsau, and in part also from the American Midwest, as will be demonstrated. Only just before the First World War did they begin to construct their own theological seminaries. The German Lutherans continued to maintain a deep mistrust toward English-speaking faith communities, particularly toward the Methodists and Baptists who were very active in South Australia.

At first they kept just as great a distance from Germany, which they had left, and in particular from German Lutheranism, which had in their view departed from the true Lutheran path. The *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* of the Lutheran Church of Australia (hereafter referred to as the "Church and Mission Paper"), the voice of Kavel's supporters, had this to say regarding the dedication of the Luther memorial in Worms:

In and of itself, the memorial may be well and good. However, although in the reports it is presented almost exclusively from a political aspect, the affair has almost nothing to offer even to politicians, and as far as the Christian or ecclesiastical aspect is concerned, it has even less to offer, let alone the Lutheran aspect. At best, we may glimpse in it a tragic sign of the times, a pitiful caricature, a distorted picture, a building of the "tombs of the prophets" (Matt. 23:27-33) by people who are nothing but children of those who murdered the prophets, i.e. who destroyed their work and their faith and have long since laid them to rest in the tombs. It is already more than enough to read that someone like Dr. Schenkel, who flatly denies the divinity of Christ, the inspiration (divine afflatus) of Holy Scripture and the doctrine of the atonement, could be the star of the festival!

It was entirely consistent then for the Church and Mission Paper to provide no further information for its readers on the Worms celebration of 1868 other than to print belatedly a report on the

350th anniversary celebration of the Reformation by the Missouri Synod in St. Louis and to add the following commentary: "This report contrasts with the one above in every way, as much as the bright noonday does from pitch-black midnight."¹³

In the year 1870, many of the Lutheran pastors in South Australia refused to celebrate the German victories over France as a special gift of God's grace. Education, science, enlightenment and liberalism were in their view symptoms of a Christianity that had fallen mortally ill. They considered it their purpose to construct a Lutheran Zion instead. "It has now been forty years since the little Lutheran church of God in the desert of South Australia began its pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan," the Church and Mission Paper wrote in 1879 to mark the thanksgiving for the emigration, celebrated in the summer of every year.

Our emigration is of tremendous importance for the children and the children's children not only of those who emigrated for the sake of the Lutheran faith forty-one years ago, but of all those who belong to us and who fear God. The God of grace elected our fathers during the time of revival and unionism in Germany and raised them up out of all oppression, yes, led them with a mighty arm out of the land of persecution into this land of freedom, where we could edify ourselves and our children with our most holy faith to our heart's content. And we still can—if only we want to!¹⁴

Even in the 1880s, the reports of the Church and Mission Paper on the conditions in the evangelical church in Germany sound like horror stories from the realm of the antichrist. Afterwards, however, for reasons that are still mostly unknown to us, the tone and the attitude began to change. In the two decades before 1914, the Immanuel Synod became affiliated with conservative Lutheran circles in Germany, especially those of the Inner Mission. The emphasis shifted from commemorating the causes of their own emigration to preserving their Germanness, from describing the signs of the end times to the correlation between genuine Germanness and pure Lutheranism. "This is not just about the German language, but about that which stands and falls with the German language: Lutheranism," the Church and Mission Paper wrote as early as 1892. "The German language is after all the language

of the Reformation, while the English language is the language of Methodism. It was in the German language that Father Luther proclaimed the truth." Furthermore: "Therefore, you parents, hold on to the German school, the German language and everything we have shown to be associated with it, lest your children's children one day join in the clamor demanding the downfall not just of Lutheranism, but of Christianity as a whole." There was still time to do so, the paper claimed.¹⁵ In addition, a parochial school teacher from a town on the far side of Adelaide postulated in 1893 that "just as it is impossible to commute the German national character into the English one, so it is also impossible to reproduce Luther's truly German-Lutheran doctrine in its full value in the English language."¹⁶

Genuine Germanness and pure Lutheranism—this dual ideal pervaded the preaching and publications of the Immanuel Synod right up to 1914. In 1899 and 1900, its supporters declared their solidarity with their distant relatives, the Boers, over against the English.¹⁷ In order to promote their own development as an ethnic group, they championed the drive to separate Australia from England and to give a voice to all immigrant groups, even the non-English speaking ones, in the proposed realignment of the state.¹⁸ In 1910, the Immanuel Synod solicited donations for the construction of an institution of higher learning "in order to preserve our most treasured assets, the faith of our fathers and our national customs and traditions."¹⁹ For the Immanuel Synod in 1911, Germany was now the country to which its congregations owed their entire "intellectual and spiritual inheritance": their language, Bible, hymns and church.²⁰

When the war broke out in 1914, Australian nationalism demonstrated its solidarity with England and directed itself against the German colonists, amongst others. It found them unprepared, helpless and disoriented. On the occasion of the anniversary of the Reformation in 1917, the Church and Mission Paper presented its creed one last time. The "sanctity of the earthly vocation, the household and the home is an inalienable heirloom of the Reformation," it said, as were "the Christian school," "Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism," "our hymns," "the Word of God in the mother tongue" and "the justification of the sinner before God by grace through faith alone."²¹ A few weeks later, the Australian

military authorities informed the editorial team that as of the end of the year (1917), all German language publications were prohibited. At that same time, the authorities closed down the German parochial schools and replaced the names of German towns and areas, partly with designations that derived from the Australian Aborigines, partly with names that served as reminders of outstanding events of the First World War such as Marne, Somme, Cambrai and Verdun.

From the 1880s onwards, the pastors of the congregations that were aligned with Pastor Fritzsche and belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Australia led them along a different path from that of the Immanuel Synod, even though the respective points of departure had been very similar in the 1870s. These congregations also had a low opinion of German Lutheranism after 1870, and they too called for the establishment of German schools in order to preserve Lutheranism. For example, *Der Lutherische Kirchenbote für Australien* (the "Australian Lutheran Church Herald," hereafter referred to as the "Church Herald"), the mouthpiece of the Australian Synod, ran the following statement in 1887:

Even though we are residents of Australia, we Germans should under no circumstances neglect our glorious German mother tongue. No German Lutheran should lose his mother tongue—not only because German is such a beautiful and excellent language in itself, but also and especially because such a great wealth of sound, truly Christian literature is written in this language. Which other nation possesses a Bible translation that can match Luther's? Which other language boasts such a treasure of splendid devotional literature? Which language enjoys such a supply of spirited hymns for the church? If our children were to forget their mother tongue, they would also lose the key to a treasure chamber of incalculable wealth, for which the English language offers nothing but the most inadequate of substitutes.

However it was also conceded that since English was the language of business and the courtroom, it was "indispensable" for "getting ahead in the civic realm."²²

In the late 1880s and the 1890s, during which the Immanuel Synod again drew closer to German Lutheranism, the Australian Synod intensified its contacts with the Synod of the Old Lutherans who had emigrated to the American Midwest, the Missouri Synod

in St. Louis. While the Church Herald described Germany the way one would portray a prospective mission field, the Australians discovered Lutherans in St. Louis whom they believed to be in no way inferior to themselves when it came to confessional faithfulness and strength of faith. When the founder of the Missouri Synod Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther died in 1887, in the eyes of the Australian Lutherans, "yet another mighty one [had] fallen in Israel," "a faithful witness and confessor of the truth."²³ Simultaneously they believed that in Germany, on the other hand, unbelief was "manifesting itself more and more, both brazenly as well as cloaked in piety," as they stated in 1892.²⁴ At the same time that conditions in the German state churches seemed to them "dreadfully tragic"²⁵ and that Germany was "no longer ashamed of unbelief,"²⁶ as the Church Herald formulated it in 1898, they sent graduates of their parochial schools to St. Louis for advanced education and appointed Missouri Synod pastors in their congregations.²⁷ They categorically rejected the hyper-Germanness that was prevalent especially in German associations in Melbourne and Sydney before 1914. When a report on a sermon by Wilhelm II circulated in Australia in the year 1900, the Church Herald unequivocally stated that "the German emperor's grasp of Christian knowledge is a very limited one. Had he had the opportunity to study the Word of God and true evangelical doctrine as the princes had at the time of the Reformation, had he had chaplains at his court like the ones they had, he might be a different man today."²⁸

It is just as remarkable that after 1900, the Australian Synod systematically promoted the use of English. The Church Herald wrote in 1904 that if it ever got to the point that the children were truly "unable to understand German, it would by no means herald the end of the parochial school. Lutheran Christians need and want to raise the children for the kingdom of heaven, and if they have lost the German language, perhaps due to prior ignorance regarding its preservation, then they must establish English Lutheran schools."²⁹ In the theological seminary of Concordia College, founded in 1895, half of the curriculum was offered in the English language by the year 1907. After an English language article featured in the Church Herald in 1912 pointed out that there were faithful Lutherans in

South Australia who did not understand a single word of German,³⁰ the Australian Synod began in the summer of 1913 to publish "The Australian Lutheran," a church periodical in the English language. The first edition claimed that it was necessary to be prudent and to anticipate that many German settlers would adopt the English language. In order to keep them in the church of the fathers, it would be necessary to meet their spiritual needs in their adopted language.³¹ In November of 1914, after the outbreak of the war, the Australian Lutheran expressed the same thought again, this time in a more scathing tone: "We should not be deceived by foolish chatter," it said, "as if Lutheran doctrine were reserved for the German language and could not be taught in English. Only an ignoramus"—the reference seems to be to the pastors of the Immanuel Synod—"would claim that."³²

But such sentiments were meaningless in the face of the generalizing anti-German propaganda of the Australian nationalists. It was also useless for the Australian Synod, which had begun to designate Australia more and more frequently as "our land" even before 1914, to send an official loyalty address to the English Governor-General in Melbourne immediately following the outbreak of the war. The Australian Synod too had to close its parochial schools down at the end of 1917; it too was subjected to forced assimilation. All the petitions which had been presented to the Australian authorities, particularly by the pastors from St. Louis, went unheeded. In the face of the charged emotions of the war, no Australian authority was willing to recognize that the Australian Synod had initiated a gradual form of assimilation long before 1914 and had categorically rejected the course of German nationalism pursued by the Immanuel Synod.

To sum up, Luther's legacy had led to an ambivalent result among the German Lutherans living in the antipodes. On the one hand it strengthened the German national and confessional character of many German Lutheran congregations, while also leading them into the cul-de-sac existence of a minority that was isolating itself and was slowly declining on a cultural and social level (the latter aspect could not be demonstrated in the framework of this paper). On the other hand, due in part to the experiences of the American Lutherans, it also

opened up communication between other German Lutheran groups and their English-speaking environment, while still preserving their confessional distinctiveness. It cannot be denied that both groups harmonized Luther's doctrine, and that both groups venerated Luther as a conservative church father. It must be admitted, however, that it was Luther's long-lasting legacy that made possible the cohesion of the Lutherans who emigrated to South Australia, their family life, and the establishment of their congregations and schools.

IV.

In conclusion and in summary, it must first be noted that the First World War constituted a significant watershed both for the perception of Luther in the United States and also for the Lutheran tradition in Australia. In the United States, the gradual dissociation from Luther, which we can observe in the years before 1914, turned into a criticism of Luther that became strident in some cases. In Australia, the German Lutheran congregations experienced forced assimilation. The defeat of the world power of Germany in the First World War influenced very negatively Luther's standing in these two countries. Thus it would seem at first glance, at any rate.

Upon closer inspection, however, we can recognize that the American dressing-down of Luther and the assimilation of the Lutherans in Australia led not only to negative results. Thus in Australia after the end of the First World War, many Lutherans experienced dramatic social and cultural advancement, the Lutheran churches and the English churches entered into dialogue for the first time, and after the Second World War, the reunification of all Australian Lutherans took place.

Even more noteworthy were the developments in the United States. As was emphasized above, the mainstream in America stripped Luther of all cultural Protestant and political attributes in 1917 and only acclaimed him as a passionate and devout biblical theologian. Looking back, we can recognize that this was in many respects the same conception of Luther as *homo religiosus* which the Germans discovered during the First World War in the midst of deafening nationalistic propaganda. To be sure, the Germans did not forget the 1917 American

criticism of Luther in the following decades. And when the “German Christians” and National Socialists again made Luther out to be the hero of the Germans, even as their own predecessor, the result was that in America, the line was drawn from Luther and Frederick the Great via Bismarck and finally to Hitler. Historians saw this as the politically fatal line of tradition of German history. And this declaration led in turn to counter-reactions from Germany after 1945.³³ However, the effect of these things should not be overestimated, because the conception of Luther as *homo religiosus* took on a greater importance overall on both sides of the Atlantic. In Germany, as is well-known, it significantly contributed to a reorientation on the part of Catholic Luther studies. In America, the concept of Luther as *homo religiosus* offered to many American theologians and church historians the foundation for renewed, intensive personal research and the framework for the adoption of the newer German Luther research, which came about in the course of the Luther renaissance. The depoliticization of Luther that came about in 1917 also led, I believe, to a new rapprochement and to renewed contemplation.

Meanwhile it needs to be examined whether the time for an almost exclusive focus on Luther as the devout biblical theologian is past—as necessary and as useful as it may have been. Luther’s impact inside and outside Germany was not limited to theological issues, precisely because Luther’s impact on world history went far beyond the field of theology. In the same way, the time has come once again for us to think of Luther as an awkward political figure both for his contemporaries and for posterity.

Translated by Karl Böhmer, with permission, from “Luthers welthistorische Wirkung gezeigt am Beispiel der USA und Australiens im ausgehenden 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” Luthergedächtnis 1817 bis 2017 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012) 110-125.

NOTES

1. Roger Williams, “Das Abenteuer der Freiheit,” in *Geschichte, Politik und Pädagogik. Aufsätze und Reden*, ed. Karl Dietrich Erdmann (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1970), 355-371.

2. See Leif Grane, “Luther in Dänemark,” in *Luther in der Neuzeit*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1983), 135-150.

3. See Friedhelm Krummacher, "Luther in der romantischen Kirchenmusik," in *Luther in der Neuzeit*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1983), 248-264.
4. For the background, see Hartmut Lehmann, "Die Entdeckung Luthers im Amerika des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Luther in der Neuzeit*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1983), 151-159. Also in *Luthergedächtnis 1817 bis 2017*, Refo500 Academic Studies 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 35-43. See also Hartmut Lehmann, *Martin Luther in the American Imagination* (Munich: W. Fink, 1988).
5. "The Luther Celebration," *American* (Philadelphia), September 22, 1883, 374.
6. David Kinley to Herbert Baxter Adams, Berlin, February 16, 1901, in *Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876-1901: As revealed in the correspondence of Herbert Baxter Adams*, ed. W. Stull Holt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 298-299.
7. See James Harvey Robinson, "The Study of the Lutheran Revolt," *American Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (1903): 205-216.
8. Henry Elias Dosker, "The Early Dutch Anabaptists," *Papers of the American Society of Church History* 2, 2nd ser., (1910): 198.
9. Henry Clay Vedder, *The Period of the Reformation*, Church History Handbooks 2 (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1909), 61-63.
10. Preserved Smith, "Luther's Early Development in the Light of Psychoanalysis," *American Journal of Psychology* 24 (1913): 360-377.
11. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1907), 334.
12. For what follows, see Hartmut Lehmann, "South Australian German Lutherans in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: A Case of Rejected Assimilation?," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (1981): 24-42, as well as the references cited there.
13. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 4, no. 17 (September 21, 1868).
14. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 15, no. 11 (June 17, 1879).
15. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 28, no. 9 (May 10, 1892).
16. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 29, no. 16 (August 31, 1893).
17. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 35, no. 21 (November 22, 1899).
18. I am indebted for this suggestion to Ian Harmstorf, "The Germans: The State's First Nationalists," *The Sunday Mail* (Adelaide), October 2, 1977.
19. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 46, no. 10 (March 8, 1910).
20. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 47, no. 22 (May 30, 1911).
21. *Kirchen- und Missionsblatt* 53, no. 44 (October 30, 1917).
22. *Der Lutherische Kirchenbote für Australien* 14, no. 9 (September 1887).
23. *Kirchenbote* 14, no. 7 (July 1887).
24. *Kirchenbote* 19, no. 8 (August 1892).
25. *Kirchenbote* 23, no. 20 (November 2, 1896).
26. *Kirchenbote* 25, nos. 12-13 (June 23, 1898).
27. See John B Koch, *When the Murray Meets the Mississippi. A Survey of Australian and American Lutheran Contacts 1838-1974* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975).
28. *Kirchenbote* 27, no. 30 (October 17, 1900).
29. *Kirchenbote* 31, no. 4 (February 17, 1904).
30. Supplement, *Kirchenbote* 39, no. 26 (December 26, 1912).
31. *The Australian Lutheran* 1, no. 1 (July 1913).
32. *The Australian Lutheran* 2, no. 5 (November 1914).

33. See Hartmut Lehmann, "Katastrophe und Kontinuität. Die Diskussion über Martin Luthers historische Bedeutung in den ersten Jahren nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 25 (1974), 129-149. Also in *Luthergedächtnis 1817 bis 2017*, *Refo500 Academic Studies* 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 189-212. [Editor's note: watch for a translation of this essay ("Katastrophe und Kontinuität") in a future issue of *Lutheran Quarterly*.]



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