

MARTIN LUTHER AND HIS THEOLOGY IN GERMAN CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION BEFORE AND AFTER VATICAN II

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Recent Roman Catholic research has produced a series of outstanding works on Luther's life and theology. During the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the present century, the serious scientific work was for the most part done by Lutherans and other Protestants, with names such as Theodosius Harnack, Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl, Paul Althaus, Heinrich Bornkamm, W. von Loewenich, R. Hermann, and H. J. Iwand being well known.¹ Why, then, has the more fair and serious Catholic interpretation of Luther arisen only so recently?

1. *The Basis and Course of Earlier Catholic Interpretation*

Cochlaeus' Influence

An answer to this question of why the more scientific and accurate Catholic depiction of Luther is so recent was well stated at the time of World War II by Catholic scholar Adolf Herte in a three-volume work, *Das katholische Lutherbild im Bann der Lutherkommentare des Cochlaeus*. His clear and, for many Catholics, embarrassing answer was this: Catholic Luther interpretation for the previous 400 years had more or less repeated what Johannes Cochlaeus, a contemporary of Luther, set forth in his extremely negative *Commentaria de actis et scriptis M. Lutheri*.² Cochlaeus' writings were basically nothing but fiction, calumny, and lies. In the rude style of that time, Cochlaeus depicted Luther as a monster, a demagogue, a revolutionary, a drunkard, and a violator of nuns.³

¹See Ernst-Heinz Amberg, "Luther in der Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts," *TLZ* 108 (1983): 802-815.

²An edition has been published in Münster by W. Aschendorff in 1943.

³Theodor Kolde, "Cochlaeus," *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. D. Albert Hauck, 3d ed., rev. and enl., 22 vols. (Leipzig, 1898), 4: 194-200.

This same style continued during the following centuries. The Jesuits in their jubilee book of 1640, *Imago primi saeculi societatis Jesu*, called Luther the "blemish of Germany," the "filthy wretch of Epicurus," and the "corruptor of Europe."⁴ Although the expressions became softer during the following centuries, the biographical and theological standpoint remained mainly polemical.

Johann Möhler

Johann Adam Möhler, the prominent theologian and historian of the Catholic Tübingen school in the early nineteenth century, admitted that Luther's feelings were sound and healthy, i.e. Luther was not a decadent man; but he contended that Luther's doctrine of justification caused a misunderstanding of ethics of which the Reformer himself was unfortunately unaware. Indeed, Luther's entire doctrine was nothing else than the renewal of Gnosticism.⁵

Ignaz Döllinger

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Ignaz Döllinger, one of Catholicism's most famous church historians, who later broke with his church after the dogma of papal infallibility had been proclaimed, wrote a three-volume work entitled *Die Reformation*. In it Döllinger attempted to apply Leopold von Ranke's principles of modern historiography to church history, but his outcome was just the reverse, for again the treatment took the form of polemics. Döllinger admitted that Luther was the most popular character that Germany had ever possessed, but declared that the Protestant Reformation, judged according to its fruits, was a "soul-murdering heresy"⁶ which stifled every arousal of conscience by the illusion of a false assurance of salvation.⁷

Johannes Janssen

At about the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century this same kind of problematical procedure reached its culmination in

⁴See Walter Beyna, *Das moderne katholische Lutherbild* (Essen, 1969), p. 13.

⁵J. A. Möhler, *Symbolik*, 6th ed. (Munich, 1895), pp. 242-245.

⁶I. Döllinger, *Kirche und Kirchen, Papsttum und Kirchenstaat*, 2d ed. (Munich, 1861), p. 341.

⁷I. Döllinger, *Die Reformation*, 3 vols. (Reprint ed.; Frankfurt a. M., 1962) 3: 43.

three authors: Johannes Janssen, Heinrich Denifle, and Hartmann Grisar. Janssen, a historian who later became a Catholic priest, wrote a work entitled *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters*, in which he glorified the Middle Ages and devalued the era of the Reformation. For him, Luther was a sick soul with inferior character.⁸

Heinrich Denifle and Hartmann Grisar

The rudest attack, however, came from Denifle, a Dominican monk and renowned specialist in the study of the Middle Ages. In 1904, his book entitled *Luther und Luthertum* appeared. In it he depicted Luther as a moral miscreant who had invented the doctrine of justification to excuse his own immoral life.⁹ He accused the Reformer of being guilty of a "damned half-knowledge"¹⁰ and of a "philosophy of the flesh,"¹¹ and he called Luther's doctrine a "seminar of sins and vices."¹² In several passages he chose the form of personal address to Luther, exclaiming, for example, "Luther, in you there is nothing divine!"¹³

A more subtle, but in its effect no less offensive, approach was used by Jesuit priest Grisar, Professor of Church History in Innsbruck, whose book entitled *Luther* appeared in 1911. Ostensibly, Grisar gave the impression of being fair and objective, but into his supposedly neutral statements he skillfully mingled subtle insinuations about Luther's immorality, abnormality, and haughtiness.¹⁴

The Catholic philosopher Johannes Hessen has evaluated the methods of Denifle and Grisar as follows: "One may doubt which of the two methods of killing Luther was the most pleasant: The rude, but open, way of the Dominican . . . or the cunning method of the Jesuit. . . . There is no doubt that both methods are failures."¹⁵

⁸See Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (Heidelberg, 1955), pp. 261-264.

⁹H. Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum*, 2d ed. (Mainz, 1904), 1: 605.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 666, 681.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 787.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 799.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 797.

¹⁴See Bornkamm, pp. 335-340.

¹⁵See *ibid.*, p. 107.

2. *Beginnings of a New Approach*

Just before and during World War II a turning point was reached in Catholic Luther study in that a change for a fairer and more objective evaluation of Luther began to develop. This was the beginning of the new Catholic Luther interpretation that has caused a sensation in the religious world of today.

Joseph Lortz

The new stance can be traced back especially to the work of Joseph Lortz, who in 1939 wrote a two-volume work entitled *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (Eng., *The Reformation in Germany*). The publication has become a best-seller, with tremendous echo in the Catholic as well as in the Protestant theological and historical milieu. In fact, Lortz's volumes have been compared with von Ranke's classic work in the nineteenth century, *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation*.

Lortz tried seriously to understand Luther and the Reformation. In one stroke he abandoned, once and for all, the polemical approach, denying, for example, the legend of Luther's immorality. Lortz declares that "Luther was not motivated by low inclinations and desires when he broke with the church . . . this ought to be understood by everyone."¹⁶ The Reformation was inevitable, Lortz suggests, with the Catholic Church having been guilty of corrupting the life and thought of medieval Christianity.¹⁷

But, says Lortz, Luther did not fight real Catholicism. Catholicism as Luther understood it was the prevailing Scholasticism of the late Middle Ages, the so-called "Occamism" in which Luther had been brought up—a position the Reformer finally rejected as a new kind of Pelagianism because theologians such as William of Occam and Gabriel Biel had made man's will and work precede God's grace according to the famous sentence, "Si homo facit, quod in se est, deus dat ei gratiam."¹⁸ Thus Luther, who probably was not very well acquainted with High Scholasticism and especially not with Thomas Aquinas, fought only a decadent form of

¹⁶J. Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, 4th ed. (Freiburg i. Br., 1962), 1: 192.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 176.

Catholic theology, while the real Catholicism (which was mainly Thomism) remained untouched.¹⁹

Lortz clearly points out in his *Reformation in Deutschland* that Luther was no modern subjectivist (subjectivism was rather anticipated by Erasmus), but rather a Christ-centered thinker with enormous and deep strength of faith, influencing generations of Christians; if it were not so, Protestant Christianity would have disappeared a long time ago.²⁰ In a letter to some German soldiers during World War II, Lortz was even more positive, stating that Luther was a man of secular significance, an inexhaustible ocean of religious strength. He was a real "homo religiosus," not a shallow kind of Christian, but a confessor of "theologia crucis." He was an evangelist of Jesus Christ and of Christ's gospel of redemption and grace. Luther's earnestness as a monk, his love for the Scriptures, his belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, his life of prayer and piety—all of these point to the "homo catholicus" in this "heretic."²¹

It is interesting to notice that Lortz still considered Luther a "heretic." He explained Luther psychologically: In spite of Luther's many wonderful sides, Luther was an "Erregungstyp" ("emotional character").²² Luther formed his theology out of his own experience and therefore was unable to integrate other theological aspects which were contrary to his inner life and thoughts.

Johannes Hessen

Because of Lortz's attempt at a psychological explanation of Luther, the Catholic philosopher Johannes Hessen, in a booklet entitled *Luther in katholischer Sicht* (1st ed., 1947; 2d ed., 1949), criticized Lortz. Hessen has pointed out that Lortz's psychological explanation is unsatisfying—that the difference between Catholicism and Luther is not a psychological one, but a theological one. Luther had a real and justified theological burden. Thus, Hessen

¹⁹Ibid., p. 170. If this is so, a twentieth-century Protestant-Catholic encounter on the reformational issues should probably be easier than it has seemed to be in former times.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 400-402.

²¹Cited by Johannes Hessen, *Luther in katholischer Sicht*, 2d ed. (Bonn, 1949), p. 16.

²²Lortz, *Reformation*, 1:162.

has given one of the most enthusiastic Catholic appreciations of Luther that appeared before Vatican II. Luther, to Hessen, was a real "reformer, a restorer," whose only mistake was that he was more earnest and deep than his contemporaries.²³ If Luther sometimes exaggerated, this was because of his prophetic mission, for the prophet must fight any kind of deformation with all the means at his disposal. Luther only fulfilled a historical law. (Towards the end of his life, Lortz too had begun to appreciate Luther more and more as a "prophet," a "theologian of high rank," and a "mighty spiritual power," whose "riches must be gathered into the Catholic Church."²⁴ On Luther's main point—i.e., the doctrine of justification—Catholics can agree with the Reformer.²⁵)

Erwin Iserloh

Lortz's work is presently being continued by his one-time student Erwin Iserloh, who achieved prominence in 1961 through an article on Luther's "95 Theses."²⁶ Iserloh has also written the articles on Luther and the German Reformation in the fourth volume of the *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (2d ed., 1979), edited by Hubert Jedin.

According to Iserloh, Luther was a "Behaupter" ("maintainer"); in the Reformer's theology there was no room for compromises, but only for confession. This confession proceeded from the truly religious experience of the Majesty of God, on the one hand, and man's sinfulness, on the other hand.²⁷ But like his master Lortz, Iserloh affirms that Luther mixed up Late Scholasticism with Catholicism, thus fighting a deviation instead of the real phenomenon.²⁸

²³J. Hessen, *Luther in katholischer Sicht*, 1st ed. (Bonn, 1947), p. 18.

²⁴J. Lortz, "M. Luther. Grundzüge seiner geistigen Struktur," in *Reformata Reformanda*, ed. E. Iserloh and K. Repgen, 2 vols. (Münster/W., 1965), 1: 220, 221, 218.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁶E. Iserloh, "Luthers Thesenanschlag—Tatsache oder Legende?" *TThZ* 70 (1961): 303-312. Iserloh tried to prove that Luther had not actually posted those theses on the door of Wittenberg's "Schlosskirche."

²⁷E. Iserloh, "Martin Luther und der Aufbruch der Reformation (1517-25)," in *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Hubert Jedin, 7 vols. (Freiburg i. Br., 1962-79), 4: 15, 17.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 41.

Summary

The foregoing studies on Luther's life and person were surely profitable because they brought a change in Catholic thinking about Luther. But those historical studies had their limitations inasmuch as they did not include Luther's theology.

Certain Protestants in the recent past have produced some fine works on Luther's theology. These include Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (1961); Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther. Einführung in sein Denken* (1964); Rudolf Hermann, *Luthers Theologie* (1967); and Friedrich Gogarten, *Luthers Theologie* (1967). Thus far there is, however, no general presentation of Luther's theology in Catholic research, with perhaps the exception of Otto Hermann Pesch's *Hinführung zu Luther* (1982) that will be mentioned later. This is a kind of introduction to Luther's theology. Nevertheless, the 1960s have produced some interesting works on special features in this field. For example, a rather complete picture of Catholic interpretation of both the person and the theology of Luther has been given by Werner Beyna, *Das moderne katholische Lutherbild* (1969). This has brought us, of course, to the time of Vatican II and thereafter.

3. *The Most Recent Catholic Appraisals*

The present situation is characterized by an inner-Catholic tension between the older "historical" school (J. Lortz, H. Jedin, E. Iserloh, P. Manns) and the more recent "systematical" school (A. Brandenburg, H. Küng, St. Pfürtner, H. Fries, O. H. Pesch). The "systematicians" criticize the historical school on three points: (1) The historians proceed from the standpoint that Catholic dogma is not to be disputed; (2) they see a Catholic irreconcilability with Luther's doctrine of God's sovereign action in salvation, an action that excludes cooperation on the part of the recipient; and (3) they are not ready (with the exception of Hessen) to learn anything from Luther. This threefold criticism has been set forth by the most outstanding representative of the new approach, the former Dominican monk Pesch, already mentioned earlier for his incorporation of a broad theological perspective in his treatment of Luther.²⁹ To a certain extent, this new doctrinal dialogue began in 1957 with

²⁹See Peter Manns, *Lutherforschung Heute* (Wiesbaden, 1967), p. 10.

Hans Küng's famous book *Rechtfertigung*, a dialogue between Karl Barth and Catholicism. But because Luther's doctrine was not addressed directly by Küng, the new school considers its beginning to be with Albert Brandenburg's *Gericht und Evangelium* in 1960.

Albert Brandenburg

According to Brandenburg, who seems to have been very deeply influenced by Gerhard Ebeling's existentialist Luther interpretation, Luther's theology is mainly a new hermeneutic. The initial notion in Luther is the "Deus absconditus"; the second notion is the judgment concept; and the culmination appears in the concept of faith, faith being the basic form of existence (with the historical event thus being secondary and personal engagement primary in importance).³⁰ It is because of this existentialist character of Luther's theology, Brandenburg declares, that the Reformer is a "Lutherus praesens" for all Christians³¹—an interpretation that has not found unanimous agreement. But Brandenburg insists on the Catholic integration of Luther's theology. In *Die Zukunft des Martin Luther* (1977) he calls the Reformer the "first evangelical theologian in the Church," a person who must get "his deserved place in the Church" and from whom alone Catholicism and Protestantism can expect a "renewal of Christianity."³²

Stephan Pfürtner

In 1961 Stephan Pfürtner published a booklet entitled *Luther und Thomas im Gespräch* (Eng., *Luther and Aquinas: A Conversation*) in which he deals with the special aspect of the assurance of salvation in Thomas Aquinas and in Luther. For him, Luther's "fides actualis" corresponds to the Catholic "fides caritate formata."³³ He doubts the Council of Trent's theological understanding of Luther's assurance of salvation; therefore it is possible to maintain that Luther was not condemned by that Council.³⁴ Though Aquinas rejects an assurance of grace,³⁵ he teaches an assurance of

³⁰See Beyna, p. 193.

³¹A. Brandenburg, *Die Zukunft des Martin Luther* (Münster/W., 1977), p. 42.

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 41, 65, 81.

³³S. Pfürtner, *Luther and Aquinas: A Conversation*, trans. E. Quinn (London, 1964), p. 40.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 37.

hope;³⁶ and both Aquinas and Luther refute the un-Christian “securitas” assurance—Luther by faith, and Aquinas by hope. This consideration could serve as foundational in the search for “a synthesis of an understanding of faith”—a synthesis that one day could even be realized.³⁷

Otto Hermann Pesch

The most complete and thorough work on the subject of Aquinas and Luther, however, is a book of nearly 1000 pages by Pesch, Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Hamburg: *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei M. Luther und Thomas von Aquin*, published first in 1967 and reprinted in 1985. Pesch believes that there are only formal differences, no substantial ones, between the two theologians. Luther’s theology is existential, Thomas’s is sapiential;³⁸ but they do not differ in their main points of justification, and therefore there is no reason for condemning one or the other.³⁹ Pesch further points out that the polemics between Protestants and Catholics for 500 years has perhaps been only a big misunderstanding.⁴⁰

In 1967 a smaller work by Pesch also appeared: *Die Rechtfertigungslehre Luthers in katholischer Sicht*. In it Pesch has elaborated six points of importance in Luther’s doctrine of justification: (1) The Law and the Gospel; (2) *simul justus et peccator*; (3) *justitia aliena* (“external justice”); (4) *sola fide numquam sola* (“faith justifies alone, but does not remain alone”); (5) the assurance of salvation; and (6) God’s sole agency and man’s non-free will.

Pesch’s treatment of the six points is as follows: He admits that Catholic theology has failed to accept the antithesis between the Law and the Gospel, but is not troubled in this regard, because modern man does not experience sin through the Law, but rather through existential need. In this respect, both Catholics and Protestants are in the same boat.⁴¹ The formula “*simul justus et peccator*,”

³⁶Ibid., p. 41.

³⁷Ibid., p. 113.

³⁸O. H. Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Darmstadt, 1985), pp. 937-938.

³⁹Ibid., p. 950.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 951.

⁴¹O. H. Pesch, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre Luthers in katholischer Sicht* (Berlin, 1967), p. 53.

already treated by Grosche, Koster, and Rahner, can also be integrated into Catholic theology. Sin as sensuality in the human mind is more than the "fomes peccati," the latent possibility of sin in case of temptation. Sin is a dynamic power in man; therefore Catholics can also speak of a total depravity of human faculties. However, Pesch admits that the concept of the Council of Trent, the concept of inherent grace, is incompatible with man's being permanently in sin.⁴²

In order to overcome Luther's opposition to the Catholic concept of grace as an ontological quality, Pesch calls attention to the fact that only the nonbinding *Catechismus Romanus* speaks of "divina qualitas in anima," while the Council of Trent only mentioned grace as being inherent in man.⁴³ Pesch is very open to Luther's accentuation of good works and agrees with Rudolf Hermann that the Reformer fought simply against the possibility of a presentation of man's works before God—a view that is also a perfectly genuine Catholic attitude.⁴⁴ Perhaps Catholics can even agree with Luther's assurance of salvation. The fact that Luther distinguished between "certitudo" and "securitas," maintaining assurance on the condition of faith for the present moment of faith and refuting assurance of eschatological accomplishment, could be, according to Pesch, the basis for a dialogue. Assurance of hope in Aquinas is, at any rate, very near to Luther's view. Against Luther's assertion of non-free will, Pesch points out that Catholic theology is more capable of explaining man's responsibility *vis-à-vis* sin.⁴⁵

In four points Pesch in 1967 still saw differences that had not yet been resolved. These may be listed as follows:⁴⁶

Luther	Catholicism
Forensic justification	Effective justification
<i>Sola fide</i>	<i>Fides caritata formata</i>
Grace as a relationship	Grace as a quality
The Word of God as the main vehicle of grace	The sacraments as the main vehicle of grace

However, in more recent publications—*Mysterium salutis* (1973), and *Gerechtfertigt aus Glauben. Luthers Fragen an die*

⁴²Ibid., p. 61.

⁴³Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 78.

Kirche (1982)—Pesch expresses his firm conviction that the doctrine of justification according to the present understanding of many Lutheran and Catholic theologians “does not separate the churches any more.”⁴⁷ Indeed, it is possible to say, “United in the doctrine of justification? We confidently affirm: ‘Yes!’”⁴⁸

August Hasler

Another most interesting work, *Luther in der katholischen Dogmatik*, was published by the Swiss theologian August Hasler in 1968. In it, Hasler reports his investigation of the most prominent Catholic dogmatic textbooks of earlier times and of the present day (more than thirty titles) in order to ascertain how correctly their authors have interpreted Luther’s theology. The outcome was disappointing. With the exception of Michael Schmaus, the well-known dogmatist in Munich, all of the other Catholic spokesmen showed only a limited acquaintance with Luther’s theology. They often misunderstood him, and they usually quoted him according to secondary sources, seldom according to the Weimar Edition. Hasler then analyzes the main features of Luther’s thought, proposing to find a common terminology in order to arrive at common beliefs. However, he admits that even with this being done, there will still be differences of understanding between Catholicism and Lutheranism.⁴⁹

Peter Manns

Especially has the Luther commemoration of 1983 produced some new Catholic works on Luther’s life and theology. Peter Manns, one of the most famous spokesmen of the Lortz school, produced, for instance, an illustrated biography in which he rigorously refutes the idea of any pathological trait in Luther’s character and maintains the normality of Luther’s monastic crisis and the profound theological character of the Reformation.⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, Manns considers Luther’s teachings on “pure love,” or love as the fulfillment of the Law, as the Reformer’s

⁴⁷O. H. Pesch, *Gerechtfertigt aus Glauben. Luthers Fragen an die Kirche* (Freiburg i. Br., 1982), p. 42.

⁴⁸O. H. Pesch, “Gottes Gnadenhandeln als Rechtfertigung des Menschen,” in *Mysterium salutis*, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer (Einsiedeln, 1973), 4/2: 913.

⁴⁹A. Hasler, *Luther in der katholischen Dogmatik* (Munich, 1968), p. 347.

⁵⁰Peter Manns, *Martin Luther* (Freiburg i. Br., 1982), pp. 52, 82.

central point.⁵¹ This love points in two directions—love as the gift and triumph of God's grace, on the one hand, and love as a categorical refutation of antinomianism, on the other hand.⁵² Manns closes his discussion with the following statement:

Whoever follows Luther, lives a good life and dies even better, for at the end of the dark tunnel there is somebody who loves us and about whom we can freely rejoice. This is Luther's ecumenical testament, for which we should with modesty be thankful.⁵³

Alfred Läßle

Alfred Läßle, Professor of Practical Theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Salzburg, has contributed to the Luther commemoration of 1983 with a biography entitled *Martin Luther. Leben, Bilder, Dokumente*. He views the Reformer as a Catholic phenomenon, "coming out of the Catholic world" and at the same time "remaining in it until the end."⁵⁴ Perhaps one has to be a Catholic, he feels, in order really to understand Luther; indeed, "Luther was much more Catholic than a Lutheran of today may realize."⁵⁵

Läßle compares and contrasts Luther with Savonarola. Both have much in common, but there is one significant difference: Savonarola would have repudiated most of Luther's Reformation program.⁵⁶ Savonarola never abandoned the Roman Church, its traditions, and its sacraments. Läßle stresses Savonarola's "unreduced Catholicism in its evangelical fullness,"⁵⁷ thereby insinuating that the Italian Dominican monk, not the German Augustinian, was the real reformer.

Pesch's *Hinführung zu Luther* gives a far better insight into Luther's concerns than does Läßle, by indicating that Luther's reformation was a "theological revolution,"⁵⁸ a change in the

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 220.

⁵⁴A. Läßle, *Martin Luther. Leben, Bilder, Dokumente* (Munich, 1982), p. 14.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁸O. H. Pesch, *Hinführung zu Luther* (Mainz, 1982), p. 39.

course of the Church by a categorical return to the Scriptures—something that in the sixteenth century meant an inevitable break with the Church, while today it means the possibility of enlarging Catholic theology.⁵⁹ For Pesch, Luther was the “common teacher” of both Protestants and Catholics.⁶⁰

4. Conclusion

We close this survey of German Catholic Luther research by mention of a twofold conclusion set forth by Walter Kasper and Hans Küng, followed by a final question concerning Luther and Catholicism. Kasper and Küng have suggested that, on the one hand, (1) the Catholic understanding of Luther's person and theology has made enormous progress in the last few decades, while on the other hand, (2) the Catholic hierarchy has failed to keep in step with this progress.⁶¹

The question then arises, Is the French theologian and Lortz disciple Daniel Olivier correct when he says, “Catholicism did not and does not want to have anything to do with Luther, because Luther's Christianity is incompatible with the doctrine of Rome”?⁶² Or is Pesch right when he says, “In spite of some necessary criticism, Luther and his thought can today be perceived as another possibility of theological thinking and Christian existence which has its correct place in the Catholic Church”?⁶³

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 272-279.

⁶¹Walter Kasper and Hans Küng, “Verständigung über Luther?,” *Concilium. Internationale Zeitschrift für Theologie* 12 (1976): 473 (hereinafter cited as *Conc (D)*).

⁶²Daniel Olivier, “Warum hat man Luther nicht verstanden? Katholische Antwort,” *Conc (D)* 12 (1976): 477.

⁶³O. H. Pesch, *Ketzerfürst und Kirchenlehrer* (Stuttgart, 1971), p. 42.