

A SCHOLARDARITY MANUSCRIPT

What Happened to the Reformation?
Including a Book Review of
Harm Klueting's Luther and New (Modern) Times
With Notes and a Response

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Preface

Reading Thomas A. Brady, Jr. 1997 speech, "The Protestant Reformation in German History" as well as Heinz Schilling's response,¹ I can see that the intensification of the study of the late medieval period, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; along with the backward expansion of the Confessional Age, has put the squeeze on the Protestant Reformation, a development that I was not aware of while reading Harm Klueting's book. What a surprise to hear Heinz Schilling refer to the Reformation as a harmless, foundational myth for the belated German nation! He writes that it is not a sixteenth century historical reality, but one of the great European myths, which will always be studied by European historians, especially German ones as the traditional "Reformation-as-universalist-revolutionary-turning-point."²

One consideration for this problematic take on the Reformation is that Tom Brady is a staunch and genuine Catholic, who has discounted the predominantly religious sign of the Reformation for a political and sociological take on it. His criticism for the other position is that you are doing theology, not history! Even for Gerhard Ritter, as one of the editors of the periodical, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, to write that

¹ Occasional Paper #22 for the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. <http://www.ghi-dc.org/publications/ghipubs/op/op22.pdf>

² Ibid., page 47.

it is concerned with universal history and "not with the history of the Protestant Churches as such,"³ fails to realize that the Reformation is all about the Church - the Roman Catholic one and the Protestant one, a religious renewal that was excluded from the Roman Catholic Church, because of institutional inertia, while caught in faulty traditions that got out of hand, (to use a Harm Kluebing term) - that took centuries to correct.

The Reformation was centered in the Church but transformed society from that human depth. Like the Norwegian theologian, Dr. Inge Lønning said, when I argued that the Reformation in Scandinavia had ulterior political motivation: "No, the Reformation changed the cocoon of our society into a butterfly, with one new wing as the church and a new government as the other."⁴ The on-going influence of the Reformation has also not ceased today, nor has it in recent history. Think of the nineteenth century world-wide Protestant Missionary Movement that took place alongside the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church. Gerhard Ritter is right. The Reformation is also universal history.

Let's face it, Luther resembled no one more than the fiery Hildebrand, who was up against a Medici Pope, because he made a bid for the renewal of the Catholic faith, struggling to

³ Ibid., page 39. There he also says that "the Reformation is a major achievement of the German mind" and that it cannot be reduced to "church history" or "secular history" or "political history."

⁴ In a private conversation at the Luther Jubilee in Washington, D.C., 1983.

identify the true ultimate versus the false one, thereby setting many other revolutions afoot. Luther shifted the call away from the periphery and its centrifugal detachment, monasticism, celibacy, a separate order of priests, toward the center of society with centripetal involvement, making lay vocations sacred by declaring the priesthood of all believers. His new take on the holy vocation of laity-ordained-to-priesthood went a long way farther into Max Weber's inner-worldly asceticism than just proving one's Calvinist election by means of externalizing the marks of faith by economic success, i.e., Weber's thesis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

How did the transnational Catholic monastic orders become transformed into transnational corporations? How did the medieval Roman Catholic Church become the first modern western state, which then became transformed into the absolute nation states? And how can the Church really take hold in our post-modern history again and make the nations answer to Christ's Kingdom of Heaven?

Tom Brady argues that there is a discontinuity in German history, because there is no way to connect the particularism, the patchwork of the 300 principalities of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation to the German nation of today. That is because he is thinking predominantly in political and sociological categories, by which he fails to see the spiritual,

religious, and cultural continuity that shaped the German people. It might even describe the negative development of Nazi Germany, where the nation was transformed into a false ultimate and became such a discredit to the German spirit.

If the detachment-involvement tension could be made to hold once again in an ecumenically united Christianity, then the heresy of nationalism could be converted into fervor, not for Christianity - but the sovereignty of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ and the beautiful heaven of grace that Luther writes about could become the wonderful and beautiful sky over this sorry world once again.⁵

I'm worried that encouraging this development might make Christianity more like Islam, where nationalism seems to be relativized under the shared Muslim faith of its countries. That is why I don't call for a new "fervor for Christianity," but a new fervor for the sovereignty of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ, and his miracle movement of forgiveness, healing, and new life that his earthly ministry brought to this violent and war-torn world. So there can be no triumphalism, but only heart-felt reconciliation through the suffering service filled by the forgiveness, love, and compassion of our Savior.

⁵ See Luther's Commentary on Psalm 117 in Philip and Peter Krey, Luther's Spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), page 138.

Book Review, Notes, and a Response for Harm Klueting's work, Luther und die Neuzeit, (Luther and New Times), (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2011), 224 pages. This book contains a short preface and introduction and ends with an appendix including a two page chronology of the steps involved in Luther's break from the Roman Church, 1512-1522, a two page index of abbreviations, 12 pages of endnotes, 5 page bibliography and a ten page person index. (The following numbers in parentheses indicate page numbers from Klueting's book.)

1. Introduction: The Protestant and Catholic Reformations

Harm Klueting has written a very important Catholic history of Martin Luther and our "new times," the term by which he refers to modern times as opposed to the medieval period. He writes following the Catholic historians Erwin Iserloh and Joseph Lortz, but I will argue, not with the sorrowful and heartfelt repentance of the latter for the corruption of the church hierarchy of that day. As it is said, "When the church needed a Hildebrand on the papal throne, all it had was a Medici."

Writing in a somewhat Tridentine spirit, Klueting enlarges the Catholic Reformation farther, appropriating even the young Luther as one of its representatives and enumerating Luther's steps in his break with Catholicism after 1520, rather than ascribing this break to his excommunication by Pope Leo X. What Protestant historians call Luther's Reformation, Klueting deems

"the reform of a [monastic] order that got out of hand,"⁶ i.e., issuing into heresy, which he surrounds with a mounting Catholic Reformation, for example, in the new Catholic monastic orders, St. Theresa of Ávila, and the flowering of the Baroque era, to name only a few items he mentions.

⁶ Kluebing cites Edeltraud Kluebing to this effect three times, (13, 26, 33, her reference is on page 197). He notes the support given for this description of the Reformation by Konrad Repkin (26). In the words of Kluebing, "If the early Luther can be understood as a Catholic Reformer and the Reformation as the reform of a [monastic] order that got out of hand, (*eine aus dem Ruder gelaufene Ordensreform*), and as the culminating point of two hundred years filled with the striving for reform, then very much of the medieval has to be contained in the Reformation." (33) (All translations from the German are mine.)