

Introduction

Martin Luther affixed his 95 theses to the portal of the *Schlosskirche* in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517. Thus, the year 2017 marked 500 years since that important moment in the history of the church and of theology. The occasion has prompted the academic and ecumenical worlds to question themselves with sincerity and frankness and to examine the current situation of our ecclesial communities in order to verify whether the Reformer's demands are still relevant and whether his expectations have been fulfilled.

In this situation, it has been seen from various sides how essential it is to remember, without at the same time giving in to triumphalism, ending up celebrating an event whose message is still profoundly relevant in the different Christian churches. Perhaps, in recent centuries, there has been a growing realisation on many sides that reform must be continuous and is played out on both a community and personal level.

Thus, among the many congresses and meetings that marked this anniversary, the Relational Ontology Research Group of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, in collaboration with the ecumenical office of the Finnish Lutheran Church, decided to honour Luther by exploring a question as profound as it is essential.

The point was not to merely repeat what the Reformer said, but to ask ourselves what possibilities the experience of all these years offers

us for deepening and responding to his requests. So the goal was “Rethinking Ontology with Luther,” title of a two-day conference, some sessions of which took place on 3 and 4 May 2018 in the magnificent setting of Villa Lante, home of the Finnish Academy of Sciences in Rome.

The challenge posed to scholars from different European countries, such as Poland, Germany, Ireland and Slovakia, as well as Finland and Italy of course, was to verify to what extent the Lutheran critique was directed towards a Greek type of metaphysics, therefore pagan, and could today be overcome by the relational approach to a real Christian ontology, inspired by the reinterpretation of the Fathers of the Church’s thought in recent decades, and by the progress in Luther Studies, particularly within the Finnish theological school.

The organisers of the conference are deeply grateful to the editors of “Theological Research” for the opportunity to publish here some of the contributions revised from the profound and fruitful dialogue that took place during those days.

The Lutheran perspective was presented by Dieter Kampen, vice-president of the Academy of Lutheran Studies in Italy, who offered a valuable analysis of participatory ontology in the Reformer’s thought. Then Tomi Karttunen, from the University of Eastern Finland and Chief Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology, of the Lutheran Church of Finland, showed Luther’s theological realism through Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s reading of the being and acting of the church. Finally, Olli-Pekka Vainio, from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, offered a comparison between the Reformer’s theological ontology and contemporary discussions on relational ontology. The Catholic perspective was presented by Lubomir Žak of the Lateran University, who offered an ontological reading of Luther’s Lectures on Romans, and Paul O’Callaghan, of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, who introduced the ontological dimension of the Lutheran doctrine on justification. Finally, Giulio Maspero, from the same University, and Oskari Juurikkala, from Åbo Akademi University, proposed the (relational) ontology of divinization in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.

It is hoped that the publication of this dialogue will stimulate the same group of scholars to continue their research together and at the same time attract many other colleagues to this line of research, which is particularly promising for theology, church life and ecumenism.

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