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**Lutheran Reformation, Saints
and the People's Religion in Latin America**

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Preface

Traditionally the stance on the veneration of saints within the Lutheran tradition seems to be clear. In the Situation of protestant mission and evangelization the position taken in the past meant that those who would turn in faith to Christ would also turn away from the veneration of the saints of the Catholic tradition. This article tries to show that it might be fruitful to take a fresh look at this traditional attitude.

First I will try to sketch the function of the saints in Latin America from the perspective of cultural theory in order to show its relevance within the spiritual lives of the common people. Secondly I will take on a historical perspective and I will show the heterogeneity of views on our topic by Protestant theologians during the Reformation era.

The purpose of this article is to help prepare the way for a new attitude towards the people's religion in Latin America in the context of evangelization. This includes a new approach towards the spirituality of the people that is primarily at home in the world of saints.

1. Saints and Evangelization in the Latin American Context

1.1. The People's Religion in Latin America

Beginning in 1492, both *conquistadores* and missionaries brought the Christian message to the various peoples of the Latin American continent. With a few exceptions, this mission's history was distinguished by violence, oppression and intolerance combined with a fundamental lack of respect and strategies of de-figuration of the indigenous and African-American cultures. The various oppressed peoples have since been following a path marked by physical, cultural and religious resistance. They sought, in the message they heard from the missionary's mouth, elements that were likely

to lend support to their resistance. They dynamically adapted those elements to their culture and religion. Alongside and in spite of the official Christian religion, which was imposed upon them from above, there emerged a variety of alternative models of faith, rites, beliefs, and practices. Seen as a whole, these alternative elements have usually been given the name "popular religiosity" or "the people's religion".¹

The people's religion can be defined as a way of living the contents of the Christian faith as summarized in the Apostolic Creed and expressed through images, devotional practices, gestures, rituals and feelings that are intimately connected to popular culture. By using words, emotions and symbols, the people convey the meaning that the great themes of Christian faith bear on their life: God the Father, Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior, the Holy Spirit, the Saints, Mary, and so on. In its fundamental aspects the people's religion coincides with official religion, but it differs from it as far as meanings and forms of expression are concerned. The people's religion is structured around two pivotal centers: the cultural and the social-historical.

Insofar as, broadly speaking, one means by culture the original way by which every people organizes its own life, receives and hands on its own traditions, regulates what happens between different people and groups, and establishes an overarching understanding about humans and their world, it is possible to say that a specific manner to relate to the holy is an intrinsic part of culture. This is precisely what we are getting at when we speak about a cultural pivotal center of the people's religion. Indeed, every culture has a religion, and every religion needs to be integrated within a given culture in order to last. In the specific case of Latin America, Christian

¹ On people's religion in Latin America, see José L. González; Carlos R. Brandão; Diego Irrazábal. *Catolicismo popular: história, cultura, teologia*. Trad. por Jaime A. Clasen. São Paulo: Vozes, 1993; Riolando Azzí, *O catolicismo popular no Brasil: aspectos históricos*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978; Günter Paulo Süß. *Catolicismo popular no Brasil: tipologia e estratégia de uma religiosidade vivida*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1979; Carlos Alberto Steil, *O sertão das romarias: um estudo antropológico sobre o Santuário de Bom Jesus da Lapa – Bahia*. Petrópolis, 1996; Alba Zaluar, *Os homens de Deus: um estudo dos santos e das festas no catolicismo popular*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1983.

faith has become embodied in three large cultural universes: those of the indigenous peoples; of Iberian peoples; and of the African peoples.

Regarding the second, social-historical pivotal center of the people's religion, it must be said that both the resistance of oppressed peoples and their struggle for liberation have profoundly shaped those forms of the people's religion which eventually became dominant. The history of invasion, conquest, colonization, slavery, resistance, rebellion and the search for independence has been a central trait of the people's religion in Latin America. In a way, the accounts witnessing apparitions of the Lord, the Virgin and the Saints to indians, blacks, mestizos, slaves, and the poor, are also examples of historical interpretation advanced on the basis of faith. The apparitions have attempted to show that God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary and the Saints are on the side of the dispossessed and oppressed ones. The contents of the people's religion, however, are differently reinterpreted depending on the social condition of those who actually live them out. Thus they can either be directed at efforts towards liberation or be instrumental in reproducing domination.

Devotion to saints was at the core both of official or traditional religion and of the people's religion. The former was primarily non-clerical in nature. In it devotion to the Saints happened at the family level, taking place in home worship services with people gathered around the oratory (small home chapel). Religious life was restricted to worshipping the Patron Saints of specific towns and those Saints who were guardians of the crops, of the professions or of individual people. In society, official religion usually took the shape of religious feasts in which people came together so as to be able to parade their social status and economic power. Its main emphasis was laid on the obligations people had before the Church, the clergy, the saints, and so on. In the people's religion, on the other hand, obligations are still to date preceded by devotion. Indeed, in it one can even see some forms of resistance to the burdens imposed upon people by official religion. Such resistance can be found in Europe during the late Middle Ages. It is also evident in the Latin American context, although there it has been transposed into completely new and distinct cultural worlds. The people's religion is very

open to the assimilation of elements from other religions. In the Latin American situation, this openness is especially true in the case of the indigenous, African and Jewish religions.

1.2. The saints in the people's religion

Let us now look at some examples that illustrate the place of devotion to saints in Latin American people's religion.

1.2.1. The Virgin of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe is considered the patron saint of Mexico (1737), of the Americas (1910), and of the Philippines (1935). Worship of the Lady of Guadalupe was officially recognized by Pope John Paul II (1990). The account of her apparition, which was written in the *nahuatl* language, dates from 1649, 118 years after the supposed meeting of the Virgin with the indian Juan Diego in Mexico.

Juan Diego was walking by the hill of Tepeyac on his way to Tlatelolco when he heard a song. When he approached the place where the sound came from, he saw the Virgin. Speaking in the *nahuatl* language, she gave him a set of instructions to be delivered to the archbishop of Mexico. Upon hearing the instructions, however, the archbishop did not want to believe the indian. The same thing happened a second time. This time the Virgin wanted a temple to be constructed in that place

... so that in it I [i.e. the Virgin] can show and bestow on people all my love, compassion, help, and protection. For I am your merciful mother, indeed the merciful mother of yours, of all who live in this country and of all who love me, call upon me and trust me. In that place I want to listen to their moaning and heal all their miseries, afflictions and sufferings.²

² "Nican Mopohua: história das aparições da Virgem de Guadalupe," In P. Suess, ed., *A Conquista espiritual da América Espanhola*, Petrópolis: 1992, p. 477.

The Virgin performed a miracle so that Juan Diego might be able to persuade the archbishop, who had demanded a sign to confirm the truthfulness of the indian's message. The Virgin commanded Juan Diego to pick roses in a place where only plants of the desert could be found. The indian wrapped the roses with his cloak and took them to the archbishop. When he opened his cloak and let the roses fall on the floor, an image of the virgin was to be seen inside the cloak. According to the account, the archbishop was taken by sorrow, shed tears and prayed fervently all at once. He then asked for forgiveness for not having obeyed the Virgin's requests. Soon after this had happened, the Virgin healed Juan Diego's uncle, who was terminally ill. She told Juan Diego the following in *nahuatl*:

Listen and understand well, my young child, for what frightens and afflicts you is really nothing. Do not let your heart be disturbed. Do not fear this illness or any other illnesses and afflictions. Am I not here, your very own mother? Are you not protected under my shadow? Am I not your own health? Are you not cared for on my lap? What else do you need? Do not let anything afflict or disturb you; do not let your uncle's illness afflict you, for he will not die from it. You can be sure he has been already healed.³

There was a sudden boom of pilgrimages, religious feasts, and conversions to the Virgin's religion. A new meaning grew out of the meaningless and chaotic indigenous existence in the years following the conquest. At first the missionaries rejected the piety created around the virgin of Guadalupe as an illegitimate way to reestablish primitive indigenous religion. But in the end the virgin of Guadalupe was gradually accepted as Virgin Mary. The Franciscan priest Bernardino de Sahagún, a very knowledgeable student of the Mexican peoples' religions, advanced as a ground for his rejection of the worship of Guadalupe the discovery that before the Conquest Mount Tepeyac was a place of worship of Tonantzin, the mother of the gods in indigenous mythology. Indeed, the word Tonantzin translates as "our mother". For Sahagún, the Virgin of Guadalupe had nothing to do with Christian faith, being instead a mere satanic invention devised to cover up idolatry.

³ Ibid., p. 481.

1.2.2. Father Cícero (Padre Cícero)

Padre Cícero is venerated and invoked as a saint in the Brazilian Northeast, an entire region pervasively characterized by the people's religion. Cícero Romão Batista (1844–1934) was a diocesan priest in the town of Juazeiro, in the countryside of Ceará. Padre Cícero had made strenuous efforts on behalf of the social-economic and religious development of Juazeiro. For this reason he was soon to be found in a confrontation with the church's hierarchy, and ended up being suspended from his functions as a priest. This fact, however, did not mean a lot to the people who venerated him. A place of pilgrimage formerly dedicated to Our Lady of Pains became a center drawing also believers in "Padim Ciço", the name given to Padre Cícero by the common people. Until this very day Roman Catholic hierarchy looks suspiciously at the piety which developed around Padre Cícero's sanctuary. The pilgrims, however, are not a bit suspicious, as it can be concluded from the following three witnesses:

– Padim Ciço lived on earth, he went through the same things we live through here. He suffered as we did, he lived and suffered with us, didn't he? But about God the Father we hear no news! He is only in Spirit! I tell you: I do not consider the Mystery of Jesus' Incarnation to be quite as hard to understand as the mystery of God being a Spirit. ...

– Padre Cícero was sent by God, for there were already saints in other countries. Brazil had no saints; God could not come to Brazil because when He came into the world our country had not been yet discovered. God does not speak our language. This is why God sent us my dear Padim Ciço. ...

– He [i.e. Padre Cícero] accepted everyone, without discriminating against any people. He gave with one hand what he received with the other, not looking at the value of gifts. He taught good things, he was a wonderful counselor ... and he always said: whoever has killed, stop killing; whoever has stolen, stop stealing. He was humble, obedient till death, he suffered persecution without a single complaint. There is an intimate bond between God and my dear Padim Ciço: it is as if my dear Padim Ciço were like God's clothing ... and God were in him. Indeed, he is like God's lamp, like some kind of energy or light. There was such union between Padim Ciço and God that sometimes one could see that my dear Padim did precisely the things God does.⁴

⁴ José F. Ávila Soares, *A vivência do Divino na tradição de um povo*. Petrópolis, 1986, p. 132–134.

1.2.3. The Deceased Woman Correa (Defunta Correa)

As in the case of Padre Cícero, the devotion to the deceased woman Correa, or Defunta Correa, is not recognized by Roman Catholic hierarchy. Yet she too can count on thousands of devotees, this time in Argentina. Deolinda Correa lived in the first half of the nineteenth century in the Andean province of San Juan. Her family was persecuted by the province governor, and both her father and husband were brought to prison. When Deolinda was looking for her captive husband and running away from the police, she got lost on the mountains together with her baby, who had just been born. Weakened both by hunger and thirst, Deolinda felt her end to be near and, according to tradition, asked God for her son's life so that he could continue to be nourished even after her death. A long time after this had happened, her corpse was found. The child, however, was still alive by her breast, which had nourished the boy in spite of his mother's death.

The news about this amazing event were quickly spread, and the place where Deolinda had been buried became a pilgrimage center. A chapel was built there. Defunta Correa is regarded as a saint by the poor people. They pray to her for comfort, help, and miracles. Hundreds of thousands of people come visit her grave every year during Holy Week. But the devotion to Defunta Correa can also be seen along the Argentinean roads and highways, where one can always find bottles and recipients filled with water sitting by small chapels. The thought conveyed thereby is that never again should Defunta Correa lack the very element that mitigates thirst and opposes death. What devotion to Defunta Correa has in common with many other similar religious practices in Latin America is the strong identification of the people with the sacrifice of those who suffer and die under circumstances characterized both by injustice and miraculous signs.⁵

⁵ Cf. Schoenborn, op. cit., p. 218f.

1.3. The saints and the protestant missions

In October, 1995, a bishop of the Universal Church of God's Kingdom – that branch of Brazilian Neopentecostalism which grew the most in the last years – made a bizarre “performance” before the TV cameras: he both exposed to ridicule and kicked an image of Our Lady Aparecida, Brazil's patron saint. It was the 12th of the month, precisely the day of the national holidays dedicated to the patron saint. Thousands of the saint's devotees went spontaneously to the streets in order to attack and stone temples of that church and other Protestant denominations. The newspapers even talked about a religious war. A law suit was initiated against the bishop. Roman Catholic bishops condemned the act against the people's faith and sought to differentiate between the Universal Church of God's Kingdom and other Protestant denominations. Leaders of Protestant denominations also condemned the attitude, emphasizing the importance of tolerating different religious manifestations. Some of them, however, took the opportunity to make explicit just how much they disapproved of the devotion to Our Lady of Aparecida.

If one were asked to describe a typical attitude representing the historical stance of Protestants concerning devotion to the saints both in Brazil and Latin America, one could simply say that the overall attitude became embodied in the “performance” of that neopentecostal bishop. A brief analysis shows how Protestant missionaries, in their work of evangelization since the second half of the nineteenth century, dealt with the devotion to the saints and the people's religion mainly at the level of kicking. The despise revealed by this action was intrinsic to the strong anti-Catholic tendencies which characterized, and to a great extent still characterize, Latin American Protestantism.

Ashbel G. Simonton, the first Presbyterian missionary in Rio de Janeiro (1859–1867), wrote a book entitled “Death and the Future State of the Righteous” (*A Morte e o Futuro Estado dos Justos*) in which he described the Roman Catholic Church as a pagan religion that heavily depended on mythology and was not really Christian because of its remoteness from the

Gospel. Simonton's description was based on an analysis of Roman Catholicism which took into account its liturgical practices, rites, ceremonies and intermediary or go-between saints. In his opinion, Roman Catholicism is only nominally a Christian religion: Indeed, it is a church far removed from its own origins, contributing both to mythology and the lack of religion prevalent in society.⁶

Eduardo Carlos Pereira (1855–1923) was a Roman Catholic by birth who converted to Protestantism in 1875. He became a Presbyterian minister in 1881, and did not at all agree with the guidelines of the Missionary Congress of Edinburgh (1910) and the Congress for Christian Action in Latin America ("The Panama Congress", 1916). The former excluded Latin America as a Protestant missionary field, since it considered Latin America to be a Christian, albeit Catholic, continent. The latter confirmed the stance of the Edinburgh Congress, stressing the need for missionary cooperation among all Protestant churches and the hope also to include the Roman Catholic Church in this missionary cooperation. Pereira's response to both congresses took shape in the book "The Religious Problem in Latin America" (*O Problema Religioso na América Latina*), published in 1920.⁷

In his book, Pereira states that the Roman Catholic Church deserves recognition as a branch of Christianity for having preserved both the creeds and great dogmas of Christianity, and for its value as a custodian of the Christian idea. But Pereira also drives the point that Roman Catholicism became a pagan religion. This pagan trait can be seen in its tendency to cling to tradition and renounce the Bible and to establish a new Trinity (Jesus, Mary and Joseph). But it is also revealed by devotion to the saints; indulgences; priestly absolution; meritorious works; purgatory; Masses; worship to the Virgin Mary; clericalism; the magic use of sacraments; and the tenet that the Pope is

⁶ Antônio G. Mendonça, *O celeste porvir: a inserção do protestantismo no Brasil*. São Paulo, 1984, p. 81f.

⁷ São Paulo: Empresa Editora Brasileira, 1920, 442 p. Cf. Mendonça, op. cit., p. 88, que crê que nesse livro está resumida "toda a visão que o protestantismo tem tido, desde seu início no Brasil, da Igreja Católica".

an embodiment of the visible church.⁸ Devotion to the saints and Mary are thus quoted as examples of paganism and hence as practices which should be promptly dismissed and rejected by Protestant missionaries.

Álvaro Reis, a Presbyterian pastor in the city of Rio de Janeiro, made similar statements in his polemics with Father Júlio Maria, a fierce critic of Protestantism. Reis, however, is much more virulent than Pereira in his three conferences published in 1908. According to these, oratories, religious processions, devotion to saints and Mary are pagan manifestations; they increase the religious ignorance of the people and lead to superstition and fanaticism. Reis criticizes Roman Catholic representations: God as a gray-haired old man, the various faces of Christ, the different names given to the Virgin, the color of Our Lady of Aparecida: "She is brown like a coco-nut – almost black – a mulatto girl!"⁹

In short: to Protestant pastors and missionaries, the people's religion and the devotion to saints which was a constituent part of it were seen as signs of backwardness, superstition, religious ignorance and paganism. In their opinion, the Roman Catholic Church reinforced this paganism in various ways instead of opposing it. Accordingly, Protestant evangelization – and this is not restricted to Brazilian Presbyterians, but includes other Protestant denominations (Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Pentecostals, etc.) in Latin America –, should have as its starting point a radical denial of popular religion, repressing it and replacing it by cultural patterns compatible with Protestant Christianity as found in North America and Europe. This missionary view has been challenged and revised in the last thirty years, a period during which a profound debate took place about the relationship between the Gospel and cultures. Unfortunately, however, this revisionist stance still is the work of a small minority within Latin American Protestantism.

⁸ Pereira, op. cit., p. 397–402.

⁹ Álvaro Reis, *As conferências do Pe. Júlio Maria*. Rio de Janeiro, 1908, p. 30, apud Mendonça, op. cit., p. 91 n. 51. "É cor de cuia – quase preta – é fula!"

1.4. The importance of devotion to saints for evangelization

It is worthwhile to mention here two recent papers produced in the Lutheran theological context which highlight the importance of devotion to saints and the people's religion in Latin America. My own contribution shares their basic perspective and intends to expand on it.

In a short paper on the meaning of All Saints Day (November 1), which takes as its starting point Revelation 7.9–12, Lothar C. Hoch claims that Protestantism has sufficient reasons to offer resistance to the usual practice of the invocation of saints. Having said that, however, he points out that there are traits in the biblical witness, the Ancient Church tradition and in the Protestant confessional heritage that allow for the celebration of worship services in the memory of martyrs and exemplary figures of faith. The church should not forget that her communion also links her with the martyrs from the past. Otherwise the church runs the risk of ceasing to be the only, holy, and apostolic Church, as it is confessed in her own creeds. Besides remembering her own martyrs, the Church ought to remember the martyrs among indigenous peoples, blacks, and the poor of Latin America.¹⁰

A second paper by Ulrich Schoenborn describes the world of saints in Latin America from the perspective of the people and its religiosity. As far as veneration of saints is concerned, Schoenborn draws distinctions between three different types: traditional veneration; veneration of "rebel saints"; and non-official veneration. The importance of drawing such distinctions has to do with the fact that several saints were actually victims of violence, having turned themselves against it by means of their word and actions. Both the saints' life and their death ask future generations to denounce violence as blasphemous and unworthy from a human point of view. The saints remind us about the fact that God has been subjected to human violence, having thereby utterly challenged the assumed normality of violence in history. The

¹⁰ Cf. Lothar C. Hoch. *Dia de Todos os Santos*. In: *Proclamar libertação*, vol. 17, São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 1991, p. 230–236.

saints also remind us about the origins of the Christian community. Indeed, they point at its very essence, at what is most fundamental in it. Moreover, they do this at times of great uncertainty. They also display a pedagogic relevance in spite of the fact that they are not masters and do not impose their opinions on others. They are like signs of the liberation worked out by the Gospel. Among other things, the end result for Christians is a learning process which helps them to thoughtfully look for a consistent way of life; for a commitment to truth and self-surrender; to deal with conflicts; and to be creative in spite of opposition and crises. The saints are recognized as companions on the way which Christians themselves would like to walk.¹¹

2. Lutheran Reformation and the Saints

2.1. The prevalent understanding of the relationship to the saints

Within the scope of the Lutheran Reformation, the dominant understanding of the saints in the life of faith and the church was basically determined by the confessional writings and those documents which influenced the shaping of ecclesiastical constitutions and liturgical formulae. The confessional writings in particular were decisive for the kind of approach that emerged concerning the issue of the veneration and invocation of saints. This was due to the fact that they sought to present a correct interpretation of controversial issues from Holy Scripture and church tradition, both pointing at misuses found in current teaching and practices and attempting to correct them.

In order to establish the main lines of this prevalent understanding, we will restrict ourselves to an analysis of writings composed at the time with the participation of both Luther and Melancthon.

¹¹ Ulrich Schoenborn, *Das Volk und seine Heiligen in Lateinamerika*. *Una Sancta* 3 (1994), 211–223, specially p. 220s.

2.1.1. Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony – 1528

The topic of saints is dealt with at some length in the part where suggestions are made concerning the feasts of the liturgical calendar year. Some religious holidays should be kept so that God's word might be heard and learned. But since only Christ is the Mediator, this does not imply an approval of the practice of the invocation of saints, either with the purpose of petition or praise.

On the other hand, it is right to honor the saints whenever we consider that they are presented to us in order to mirror divine grace and mercy. In the same way as Peter, Paul and other saints – humans made of flesh and blood, and as weak as we are – were blessed by faith, so do we now receive a comfort similar to the one they received. Through their example we know that God will transform our weakness into goodness provided we trust, believe and invoke God in our weakness as they once did.

Honor to the saints is also to be found in the continuing exertions of faith and good works, things which, as we can see and hear, they have done. Hence, people must be encouraged by the example of the saints for the exercises of faith and good works, as one can read in Hebrews 13.7 and 1 Peter 3.5–6.¹²

Among other writings which coined the guiding Lutheran interpretations regarding the issue of saints, "Instructions for the Visitors ..." – a text which undergirds several ecclesiastical constitutions – is distinguished by a conspicuously different stance. It differs even from the Augsburg Confession, to which it provided the major building blocks, primarily because it apportions greater space to promoting the memories of the saints than to criticizing their invocation.

¹² Cf. StA 3, 442, 26–20 = WA 26, 224, 26–31 = LW 40, 30.

2.1.2. The Large Catechism

In the Large Catechism, the saints become a theme in the interpretation of the First Commandment, in the passage where Luther contrasts true worship of God, on the one hand, with idolatry, on the other. As examples of idolatry Luther mentions worship to Mammon; boasting about one's great learning, intelligence, power, renown, kinship and honor; witchcraft; and the invocation of guardian saints. Luther points out that everyone would choose his or her specific saint to adore and invoke for a specific purpose – St. Apollonia for toothache; St. Lawrence for protection against fires; St. Sebastian or St. Roch against plagues; etc. Being idolatrous in the relationship with the saints, however, would not be bound to externalities:

Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart, which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it receives comes from God.¹³

In the end, this idea that idolatry is something arising from the inside of human beings would be very important for Luther. Indeed, it illuminates – also in Luther's explanation of the first commandment – his refusal to interpret in literal biblical terms, as Andreas Bodenstein, Karlstadt, Huldreich Zwingli and several other reformers did, the Old Testament prohibition against images. Luther's favorable opinion towards the use of images to illustrate the saints' faith and works is connected to that refusal. The images are even said to perform a useful function as the "Bible of the poor".

2.1.3. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology

In article 21 of the *Augsburg Confession*, Melancthon endorses the possibility of treasuring the memory of the saints with the purpose of imitating their faith and good works according to one's own vocation. In this sense, the emperor can follow King David's example in order to resist the Turk.

¹³ BSLK 562, 10–29; 19–27 = BC 366, 11 (The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Tr. and ed. T. Tappert, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959).

Melanchthon adds that Scripture teaches neither invocation nor the search for help from the saints. Rather, it proposes Christ in an exclusive way as the mediator, propitiator, high priest and intercessor. The Latin text quotes 1 John 2.1–2 and the German text adds to this passage those of 1 Timothy 2.5 and Romans 8.34.¹⁴

In response to this, the *Confutatio* to the Augsburg Confession wonders at the lack of vigilance on the part of the princes. According to the *Confutatio*, however, the princes' basic mistake was to tolerate all memory of the saints treasured with the purpose of fostering the imitation of their faith and good works, rather than tolerating that memory treasured with a view to invoking them and searching for their help. The authorities ought to do something to avoid the first kind of tolerance and opinion to be disseminated in their territories. Thus, article 21 of the *Augsburg Confession* is completely rejected.

Concerning the veneration and intercession of saints, the authorities should believe and confess what is believed and confessed by Christian people in all places, and what is observed in all churches since the time of Augustine. Since Augustine, such a belief implies nothing less than seeing the treasuring of the martyrs' memory as implying the search for imitation, for being associated to their merits, and for attaining help through their intercession. Concerning this point, the *Confutatio* also enlists Scripture in its support. It argues both for the veneration and invocation of saints. It affirms Christ as the only mediator of redemption, and proposes Mary and the saints as "mediators of intercession". The *Confutatio* does not consider invocation to be contrary to Scripture, but declares it cannot rely on a biblical basis. Instead of critiquing existing deviations in the various forms of piety, it leans toward calling upon our trust in the church's self-understanding as a body whose

¹⁴ Cf. BSLK 83b, 1 – 83c, 6.

members – whether dead or alive – are invested with power by Christ (the head) for the sole purpose of mutual assistance.¹⁵

At the beginning of Article 21 of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*,¹⁶ Melanchthon claims that the Confession approves the threefold honor to the saints. Such honor is threefold on account of what it intends for Christian people: (1) thanksgiving; (2) the confirmation of one's faith; and (3) imitation, first of faith and then of the other virtues, in the latter case depending on one's vocation. Soon thereafter Melanchthon proceeds to comment on the misuses, primarily those in the invocation of saints. He only speaks positively again about the function of honor to the saints towards the end of the article, in the context of his remarks about the lack of credibility of many accounts about the lives and deeds of the saints:

The great things that the saints have done serve as examples to men in their public or private life, as a means of confirming their faith and as an incentive to imitate them in public affairs. But these no one has sought out in the true stories about the saints. The saints administered public affairs, underwent troubles and dangers, helped kings in times of great danger, taught the Gospel, battled against heretics. It is truly worthwhile to hear of these things and to see some examples of mercy. Peter was forgiven for denying Christ; Cyprian was forgiven for having been a sorcerer; Augustine experienced the power of faith in sickness and constantly affirmed that God hears the prayers of believers. It would be useful to recall such examples as these which talk about faith or fear or the administration of public affairs.¹⁷

According to Melanchthon, it is not to be denied that the saints in heaven pray for the church as a whole, in the same way as live people do. But except for 2 Maccabees 5.14, Scripture contains no witness about dead people praying. Even if the saints pray fervently for the church, this does not mean that they should be invoked. In the same vein, it is not valid to argue from church tradition, since invocation is only a recent practice. Ancient Christians did not invoke the saints, they only mentioned them.

¹⁵ Cf. Herbert Immenkötter (hrsg.). Die *Confutatio* der Augustana von 3. August 1530. Münster: Aschendorff, 1979, p. 124–129.

¹⁶ Cf. BSLK 316, 45 – 325, 50.

¹⁷ BSLK 324, 39 – 325, 4 = BC 234, 36ff.

The saints are not to be transformed into propitiators, for in this way the honor appropriate to Christ only would be transferred to them. The distinction between “mediators of intercession” and “mediators of redemption” does not exist in practical terms. What happens at the practical level is that people usually picture Christ as being more rigorous and the saints as more appeasable. Thus they would rather trust the saints’ than Christ’s mercy, looking for the saints at the same time they shun Christ. This is how they effectively turn the saints into mediators of redemption. Hence the reason to deny the saints a role as propitiators has to do mainly with pastoral counseling. There is no solace when the certainty concerning salvation is lacking. A propitiator is characterized by the promise which alone guarantees propitiation to exist through a specific someone.¹⁸ Moreover, the propitiator’s merits are given to another person by divine imputation. This is why prayer must be guided by trust in the divine promise and the merits of Christ. As to the saints, there is no certainty on this point, so that people remain doubtful concerning propitiation.

Among the misuses he finds operative in the worship of saints, Melancthon draws a distinction between those ascribed to the common people and those imputed to theological leaders. He leaves the first kind of misuse to the consideration of the theologically untrained. This makes clear that both the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology* are primarily interested in contesting the theological arguments for the invocation of saints. Therefore, both writings postpone the task of drawing the consequences of their critique for establishing an alternative pastoral model. Time and again Melancthon refers briefly to the devotion to the saints within popular religiosity. This happens when he comments on the practice of making procurators out of patron saints – St. Anna, St. Sebastian, St. Valentine and St. George are mentioned –, pointing at its origin in pagan religions. Or else when he compares veneration of images by people who consider themselves to have some inherent virtue with the magicians’ beliefs about the inherent virtues of the images of the zodiac at a given time.

¹⁸ Melancthon quoted Jo 16.23; Mt 11.28; Is 11.10; Sl 45.12; Sl 72, 118; Jo 5.23; 2Ts 2.16s.

When dealing specifically with the issue of intercession to Mary, Melancthon concludes that as a matter of fact she replaced Christ as a mediator in the sight of public opinion. Soon after that, he uses the occasion to summarize the argument advanced in article 21. He synthesizes quite briefly the reformational understanding about Mary taking as his point of departure both Mary’s and the believer’s relation with Christ:

Granted that blessed Mary prays for the church, does she receive souls in death, does she overcome death, does she give life? What does Christ do if blessed Mary does all this? Even though she is worthy of the highest honors, she does not want to be put on the same level as Christ but to have her example considered and followed. The fact of the matter is that in popular estimation the blessed Virgin has completely replaced Christ. Men have invoked her, trusted in her mercy, and sought through her to appease Christ, as though he were not a propitiator but only a terrible judge and avenger. We maintain that we dare no trust in the transfer of the saints’ merits to us, as though God were reconciled to us or accounted us righteous or saved us on this account. We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by Christ’s merits when we believe in him.¹⁹

2.1.4. The Smalcald Articles

In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther writes about the relationship of Christians with the saints after a discussion about the Mass and its various misuses.²⁰ Luther restricts himself basically to the topic of the invocation of saints. He considers invocation as one of the abuses having to do with the antichrist. Invocation of saints conflicts with the first and pivotal article, namely that “Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, ‘died on account of our transgressions and resurrected for the sake of our justification’ [Rm 4.25].”²¹ Invocation thus annihilates knowledge about Christ. Furthermore, it cannot rely on a scriptural basis. Therefore, all piety connected with angels and saints – i.e., adoration, fastening and celebrating feasts and worship services in their honor, sacrifices, founding churches, instituting shrines and new forms of worship, searching for help, attributing special functions – is plain idolatry and takes God’s honor away.

¹⁹ BSLK 322, 15–36 = BC 232, 27 – 233, 29.

²⁰ Cf. STA 5, 373, 14 – 375, 25 = BSLK 424, 10 – 425, 25.

²¹ STA 5, 355, 22s = BSLK 415, 7–9.

For Luther, the appeal of the invocation of saints is anchored in people's self-interest, in the attempt to procure bodily and spiritual benefits and help. Hence Luther identifies in this kind of religiosity an overt or veiled attempt to do business with the holy. Giving up trust in retribution on the part of the saints certainly damages their honor, appreciation, and memory:

If such idolatrous honor is withdrawn from angels and dead saints, the honor that remains will do no harm and will quickly be forgotten. When spiritual and physical benefit and help are no longer expected, the saints will cease to be molested in their graves and in heaven, for no one will long remember, esteem, or honor them out of love when there is no expectation of return.²²

Upon examining the documents above, one can conclude that the prevalent view on faith and spirituality in connection with the saints is rather negative. There are undoubtedly references to how important it is for Christians to honor the memory of dead saints, since such honor reflects on the Christians' faith and the works it brings forth. But those writings ascribe greater prominence to the critique of the abuses and damages resulting from late medieval piety precisely in connection with the saints. To be sure, this could not be at all different, for the fact remains that those writings were produced with the goal of demarcating their own positions *vis-à-vis* both church doctrine and practice on the basis of what was then chided by evangelical proclamation. Although this negative view can be fully justified theologically and historically, it must be pointed out that it had momentous repercussions for the whole evangelizing process that came out of the churches of the Reformation. This is especially true for those contexts where devotion to the saints was an inseparable component of what it meant being a Christian.

²² StA 5, 375, 16–21 = BSLK 425, 17–25 = BC 297, 28.

2.2. Luther's hagiology

2.2.1. The stages of Luther's thought on devotion to the saints²³

Late medieval piety was characterized by its focus on intercession to the dead saints, and particularly by a noticeable increase of the confidence in Mary's power. On the one hand, there was a growing number of saints who were invoked to provide solutions for people's needs and illnesses. On the other, the fact that Mary was increasingly ascribed the function of mediating between believer and Christ eclipsed the traditional theological distinction between adoration (*latria*) and veneration (*doulia*).

Luther was born and grew up within this context characterized by fervent devotion to the saints and Mary. In his own time, he nourished special sympathy for St. Barbara, St. Christopher and St. Anna. He must have prayed the "Hail Mary" any number of times, looking at the rosary in the hands of his mother Margareth. At worship services and in school, he learned to recite and sing the Magnificat. In the places where he spent his childhood and youth – Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach –, there were towers, churches, chapels, altars, and images dedicated to the saints and Mary. When he moved to pursue studies at Erfurt in 1501, Luther actually settled down in a town which at that time was nicknamed "Little Rome" because of the large number of buildings, altars, and relics designed for pious practices. The monastery of St. Peter could even count with threads of the Vir-

²³ About Luther and the devotion to the saints, see Frieder Schulz, *Heilige/Heiligenverehrung VII: Die protestantischen Kirchen*. In: TRE 14 (1985), 665f; H. George Anderson ; J. Francis Stafford; Joseph A. Burgess (ed.). *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*. Augsburg/Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII); Wilhelm Maurer, *Historischer Kommentar zur Confessio Augustana*. Bd. 2: *Theologische Probleme*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, , 1978, 156ff; Max Lackmann, *Verehrung der Heiligen: Versuch einer lutherischen Lehre von den Heiligen*. Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag, 1958; Lennart Pinomaa, *Luthers Weg zur Verwerfung des Heiligendienstes*. *Lutherjahrbuch* 29 (1962), 35–43; Peter Manns, *Luther und die Heiligen*. In: R. Bäumer (hrsg.), *Reformatio Ecclesiae. Beiträge zu kirchlichen Reformbemühungen von der Alten Kirche bis zur Neuzeit*. *Festschrift für Erwin Iserloh*. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh, 1980, p. 535–580; Horst Gorsky, *Die Niedrigkeit seiner Magd: Darstellung und theologische Analyse der Marien-theologie Luthers als Beitrag zum gegenwärtigen lutherisch/römisch-katholischen Gespräch*. Berlin, New York: Lanning, 1987 (Europäischen Hochschulschriften 23).

gin's hair in its collection of relics. In 1503, during a bleeding caused by a wound inflicted in the leg by his own sword, Luther invoked Mary's help. Two years later, during a storm, Luther made a vow to become a monk upon invoking St. Anna, who was the helper in this kind of situation and a trendy saint at the time. Life at the monastery was permeated by devotion to the saints and Mary. As a priest, Luther had nothing less than twenty-one patron saints, who were systematically remembered during the week. Like many a person of his time, Luther was immersed in the world of the saints. These were present everywhere with their images and legends.

During the years of 1517 and 1518, Luther had focused his criticisms on the notions of confession and absolution in the sacramental practices of the time; on indulgences; on the papacy's claim to retain the office of the keys; on the idea of a purgatory; and on prayer for the dead. The constitution *Omnis Utriusque*, approved during the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), demanded that adult Christians confessed their sins to their parish priest once a year so that they could thus obtain divine forgiveness. Even after someone had received absolution, however, there remained the obligation to perform works to satisfy earthly penalties connected to sins which had been forgiven. This was considered an integral part of the sacrament of penance. On this point, the church could be of help either by mitigating or eliminating the remaining earthly penalty. The church did this by means of her recourse to, and application of, the superabundant merits of both Christ and the saints (indulgences). Both the pope – as Christ's vicar – and the bishops were responsible for the use of such a treasure. Those needing and using this kind of help were the dead (purgatory, intercession for the dead) as much as the living.

Luther carefully analyzed this whole system on the basis of biblical exegesis, criticizing the fact that it left out of focus the notion of forgiveness as a gift coming exclusively from Christ. His attitude in relation to the saints and Mary was guided by the conclusion that only Christ, through his death and resurrection, is the mediator of people's salvation. The people, in turn, approach Christ and the merits procured by him in the cross exclusively by faith. Luther came to such a view through an intense search for the biblical

significance of penance, but also through rethinking the soteriological implications of the Trinitarian dogma centered on Christ's incarnation. Although strongly influenced by the worship of saints during his education, Luther developed a radical critique of the invocation element intrinsic to it. He declared that the invocation of saints led the people to place more trust upon the merits of dead saints than upon Christ. Luther began to teach that the dead saints, the angels and Mary can be remembered. Their invocation, however, should be omitted in liturgical celebrations, in private devotion and in all situations.

From Frieder Schulz we learn that Luther's valuation of the saints was different along the various stages of his biography. Between 1518 and 1520 the motif of the *communio sanctorum* would have been dominant. This motif was characterized by positive affirmations about the role of the saints in the context of the exchange of gifts and the exercise of charity in the church. Within such a framework, the *communio sanctorum* would have been understood as the brotherhood/sisterhood of Christ. Still according to Schulz, in the period from 1522 to 1524 Luther underscored that the veneration of saints is not necessary and that, strictly speaking, one should lead the people to Christ although dealing carefully with the weak. Because of his focus on Christ, Luther turned his attention to the "living saints", that is, the members of Christianity on earth. For these members, service to "dead saints" ought always to be secondary to service done for the purpose of furthering love. Finally, beginning in 1525/26 Luther completely condemned the invocation of saints by issuing rigorous judgments such as those found in the *Smalcald Articles*.²⁴ Among other things, this came about because Luther disapproved of the decadent ways of worshipping the saints in his own age, but also because he wanted to strengthen Christ's place as the only mediator of salvation on the basis of scriptural witness.

²⁴ Schulz, op. cit., p. 664, 51 – 665, 42. He quotes for the first stage WA 2, 743. 750. 697; 6, 131; for the second WA Br 2, 548, 14; WA 10 II, 165, 3; WA 15, 192; 10III, 313–317; and for the third: WA 50, 210, 1–8 [Smalcald Articles]; 26, 508; 30II, 644.

Luther also made efforts towards eliminating the excessive number of days dedicated to the saints, or towards transferring those holidays to a Sunday.²⁵ Nevertheless, if we consider Luther's preaching as well as that of his contemporaries, we will see that honor to the memory of saints by no means ceased to exist within evangelical worship practices. Luther continued preaching regularly on holidays dedicated to saints till 1540. In 1544, two years before his death, we can still find two sermons preached on such holidays.²⁶

As long as he lived, Luther considered as "saints" the central biblical personages, such as the legislators, prophets and kings of the Old Testament – even those despised by biblical tradition itself –, the apostles, and others in the New Testament. His rejection of worship to saints did not undermine his understanding of the biblical writings. Besides the biblical saints, Luther obviously continues to appreciate Augustine, but also other saints of the Ancient Church such as Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory, Agnes, and Bernard. As masters of justice, however, the saints of the Ancient Church lose all of their brilliance when their preaching is compared to the apostolic message of grace. On the other hand, God also granted holy attributes to John Hus and his companions and to many other baptized. On June 16, 1524, when the remains of St. Benno were deposited for veneration in the Cathedral of Meissen, Luther comments that in the very place where God receives praise also Satan rejoices about his own triumphs.²⁷

A recurrent trait during the period in which Luther works on the Catechisms and after are his negative thoughts on the worship of saints. Availing himself of anecdotal and theological examples Luther presents the dangers of worshipping the saints. He both experienced himself and saw in other people how the practice of the invocation of saints moves humans away from Christ, the only mediator. In opposition to this, Luther affirmed that

²⁵ See WA 6, 243; 445f; 12, 37.

²⁶ See Robert Lansemann, *Die Heiligkeit besonders die Marien-Apostel-und Engeltage in der Reformationszeit*, 1939, 79ss, apud Pinomaa, op. cit., p. 35 n. 4.

²⁷ See WA 15, 636, 22ff; 416, 21ff; 26, 168, 12ff.

the Holy Spirit is an instrument of Christ which can dispense with the help of the saints.²⁸

Luther looked with skepticism at the worship of saints being practiced in his time. He shared this attitude with several other people of his time. The way he goes about to buttress his claims, however, does not involve only arguments common in the Middle Ages; rather, it heavily relies for its basis on the Gospel's proclamation. Luther manifests a realism that is typical of the peasantry when he describes the saints as ultimately dead: "All the bodies of the saints are in the earth, being sinful and having died in sin."²⁹ Thus Luther answered negatively to the question whether the dead saints intercede for the living. To expect this from them would turn them into Gods. We can know nothing about the state of deceased saints. Be it as it may, the truth is that they do not intercede for anybody.³⁰ Such a sober analysis concerning the understanding of something whose grasp is actually above the abilities of one's mind is connected to a trust which presupposes the justification by grace and faith in Christ. God witnesses to Godself directly through the Word.³¹

2.2.2. Christ, the Word and the Saints

Luther's thought on the saints is connected to the Word. The saints' examples are not sufficient if the Word is not present. On the other hand, those who are truly saintly bear witness to the Word even at the cost of sacrificing their own lives. Therefore, Luther could see saints in the Church of his own time: the evangelical martyrs, who sealed the preached Word with their own blood. Evangelical saints are not made manifest through relics, but through the Word which even after their death continues to be confessed and believed. Shortly before the First Assembly at Speyer in 1526, when the application of the Edict of Worms was imminent, Luther spoke in a sermon

²⁸ Cf. WA 20, 390, 2ff; 30II, 644, 10f.

²⁹ Cf. WA 30II, 369, 39s.

³⁰ Cf. WA 30II, 694, 1ff.

³¹ See WA 30II, 674ff.

about a new kind of saint/martyr. This is the one who is a Christian and preaches Christ, but who, when he or she speaks, speaks as if Christ himself were speaking. When we listen to the Gospel, we listen to Christ himself. That which is spoken is Christ's very own voice and Word.³² The saint/martyr is the one who preaches, the one through whose preaching Christ's very own Word is spoken. In another sermon of the same period, Luther states something similar: "When I preach, Christ preaches in me. When you listen Christ listens in you."³³

All authentic preaching is Christ's own preaching. It is through the Word that the congregations and Christ himself find their saints. Christ is the "Saint of Saints" (*sanctorum sanctus*). All other saints preach Him to the extent that it is given them by God to do so. Thus there are many saints. Christ is the head of all saints, Christ has Spirit, power and dominion out of himself. He is the source of all preaching. From him flows all sanctity. This is the great difference between Christ and other saints. On the other hand, when a comparison is made between saints, one must conclude that none is better or possesses more sanctity than the others.³⁴

According to Luther, nobody should torture him or herself or let him or herself be tortured by those who preach about the saints, leading him or her to draw toilsome comparisons between him or her and the saints so as to conclude if he or she is more or less saintly when compared to them. This ought not to happen because there is only a single Christian faith, and not a faith according to Mary or Peter. Sanctity is always Christian. It is created by the Holy Spirit in all parts of Scripture. All sanctity depends for its being from the person of Christ. Christ's Word *qua* preaching and hearing creates sanctity by means of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to understand sanctity

³² See WA 20, 363–368, specially 365, 1ff.

³³ Cf. WA 20, 350, 7.

³⁴ Cf. WA 20, 390, 6ss; 441, 1f; cf. 539, 21ff.

through reason. Sanctity is one of the Spirit's heavenly gifts finding expression in earthly humankind.³⁵

In Luther's teaching on saints, communion with Christ is the constitutive element. Saints are those who belong to the group of people who through faith have a sharing in the justice imparted by Christ in the cross. Sanctity forms a pair with sinfulness for all who are encompassed by this group, since they are *simul iusti et peccatores*. Everything depends on Christ. All of the saint's merits vanish before him. Even though Mary can still be considered very worthy, she did not die for us as Christ did. Only Christ is the Lamb of God. Everything Scripture says about human sanctity depends on him. Preaching Christ brings as a consequence denying the invocation of saints.³⁶

2.2.3. Mary

Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, very little had been defined in doctrinal terms concerning the devotion of Mary. On the basis of Scripture, Luther felt free to develop his own conceptions. The starting point of his theological reflections was the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council (451), which granted Mary the title "*theotokos*" and affirmed its perpetual virginity. The council considered the idea of the "immaculate conception" to be pious and pleasant. In this regard, it taught that Mary had been conceived in sin but that her soul was purified by infusion after conception. But even though this view had been sanctioned by the Council of Basel (1431–1449), Luther thought that neither should it be forced on the believers, nor should opposite opinions be considered heretical.³⁷ Luther also taught that Mary remained a virgin before (*ante partum*), on the occasion of (*in partu*) and after (*post partum*) Jesus' birth.³⁸ Such a notion, however, should not be fixated as an official doctrine. Enlisting Scripture in his support, Luther

³⁵ Cf. WA 20, 390, 19s; 479, 32s; 611, 4; 390, 2ss.; 425, 13; 750, 12ss.

³⁶ Cf. WA 29, 413, 7ss; 243, 8ss; 30II, 283, 30s.

³⁷ Cf. WA 17II 288, 17–34; 1, 583, 8–12; 40III, 680, 31–32.

³⁸ Cf. WA 11, 320, 1–6.

endorsed most religious holidays involving Mary, but rejected those of her assumption and immaculate conception. In the sixteenth century, many Lutheran territories continued to celebrate the Marian holidays of purification (February 2), annunciation (March 25) and visitation (July 2).³⁹

In Luther's opinion, Mary embodied God's undeserved grace, a trait which becomes evident in the *Magnificat*. As such Mary typifies the church. Luther maintains that, like Mary's virginity, the church will never be destroyed, regardless of the degree of opposition and persecution she may be confronted with.⁴⁰ Luther affirms Mary's assumption. But he does not consider what happened to her any different from what had happened before to people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who were promised everlasting life together with God. Mary's assumption points to Christ. If Mary is invoked, Christ is dishonored.⁴¹ Whenever they refer to Mary, Luther's hymns often use the language of Marian piety to extol Christ and the Trinity.⁴²

Since about the middle 1520s, Luther takes a more or less definite stance regarding Mary's place in the people's life of faith, completely rejecting all forms of invocation. Mary is still allotted a special place on the basis of her experiences known from the Bible. Because she had to fear losing her Son, she is an example in times of temptation. Because she believed she could conceive as a Virgin, she is a witness of faith to all the world. Because she suffered under the cross, she is the greatest of all martyrs. Her mantle offers protection and shelter when there is danger. But Mary should not be turned into a Goddess and as such be placed on Jesus' side. Mary is praised because of God's majesty, who chose her as the mother of God's Son.⁴³

³⁹ Cf. Walter Delius, Luther und die Marienverehrung. Theologische Literaturzeitung 79 (1954), 414; Hans Düfel, Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung. Luther 35 (1964), 122–131.

⁴⁰ Cf. WA 10I1, 405, 13–16; 7, 568, 4.

⁴¹ WA 10III, 269, 12f; 52, 681, 27–31.

⁴² Cf. WA 35, 411–473 = LW 53, 211–309.

⁴³ WA 15, 642, 37ff; 643, 5ff; 27, 22, 33; 23, 9ff; 74, 1ff).

2.2.4. Luther's alternatives for evangelization in a context of piety focused on the saints

2.2.4.1 From fraternity (sorority) to communion

A clear alternative can be derived from the way Luther goes about dealing with the topic of the fraternities (viz. sororities) or still confraternities. The fraternities were religious associations which gathered primarily lay people. Their specific goal was to foster devotion to a given saint. They were constituted by people generally connected to groups of artisans or neighborhood groups which came together and organized in an association. Through spontaneous contributions and feasts dedicated to their specific patron saints they raised the funds required to build oratories, altars, chapels and help their members in situations of need. In the late Middle Ages, a significant number of people centered their life of faith on activities promoted by the fraternities. This experience was passed on and made a deep impression also on Latin American Christianity.

In 1519, Luther wrote "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods"⁴⁴. In this sermon, after defining the place of Holy Communion both in the life of people and the congregation, Luther offers an analysis of the fraternities and proposes concrete suggestions.

Luther critiques fraternity feasts for being turned into occasions for gluttony and drunkenness. For this reason, he states, fraternity members do not sanctify religious holidays with good works as they should, but end up embarrassing their patron saints. The right thing to do would be to dedicate holidays to praying and doing good works, employing all the funds and resources gathered to feed the poor and serve them out of love for God. Luther, however, does not restrict himself to a critique of prevalent mores. For Luther, the major difficulty with the fraternities comes down to the fact that they break away from Christian communion because of their selfish motivations:

⁴⁴ WA 2, 742–758 = LW 35, 49–73.

For in them men learn to seek their own good, to love themselves, to be faithful only to one another, to despise others, to think themselves better than others, and to presume to stand higher before God than others. And so perishes the communion of saints, Christian love, and the true brotherhood which is established in the holy sacrament, while selfish love grows in them.⁴⁵

Given this situation, Luther proposes to the fraternities that they be based on the “first fraternity”, a divine, heavenly fraternity, and thus the most noble of all:

In this we are all brothers and sisters, so closely united that a closer relationship cannot be conceived. For here we have one baptism, one Christ, one sacrament, one food, one gospel, one faith, one Spirit, one spiritual body, and each person is a member of the other. No other brotherhood is so close and strong.⁴⁶

According to Luther, even if fraternities did their best to reach the unity among their members, they would never accomplish that unity fully without becoming identified with the first fraternity, the “fraternity of Christ”. What the reformer actually suggests is an inversion: the meaning of one’s belonging to a fraternity is not in being served, in the search for rewards for what one did either on behalf of the patron saint or the other members. Rather, its meaning is connected to making oneself available to service in church and society. This takes place when Christ, as the one who gives himself away, is put in the center, and when His presence constitutes the very basis of communion:

But suppose you say, “If I do not get something special out of the brotherhood, of what use is it to me?” I answer: True, if you are seeking something special [for yourself], of what use indeed is the brotherhood, or the sisterhood either? But if by it you serve the community and other men, as is customarily the nature of love [to do], you will have your reward for this love without any desire or search on your part. If, however, you consider the service and reward of love too small, this is evidence that yours is a perverted brotherhood. Love serves freely and without charge, which is why God in return also gives to it every blessing, freely and without charge. Since, then, everything must be done in love, if it is to please God at all, the brotherhood too must be a brotherhood in love.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ LW 35, 69 = StA 1, 286, 1–9.

⁴⁶ LW 35, 70 = StA 1, 286, 28–33.

⁴⁷ LW 35, 71f = StA 1, 287, 11–19.

What Luther actually finds in the lived spirituality of many fraternities is the demand to do things and produce so as to receive rewards in exchange. He sees that announcing God’s grace in this environment is an extremely limited undertaking. His proposal is that people should first hear, see, feel, and receive what God gives them for free in Christ, in this context especially through Holy Communion. Only on the basis of this starting point can the fraternity be transformed in a true communion which is imbued with the right motives to do its service in the world.

Luther kept this understanding until later. It appears, for instance, in his 1527 “Lecture on the First Epistle to John”. Here he says that the justified achieve, as saints, the genuine Christian communion in love. Through the Word they live in Christ and Christ lives in them. In this group of people, nobody can live only for himself or herself. Whoever preaches the Word correctly can do nothing but serve his or her neighbor. In this way, he or she shares in the richness of the Word. In the end, participating in the Word amounts to the saints’ participation in Christ. When each and everyone conforms to Christ, every saint will be a saint for his or her neighbor.⁴⁸

2.2.4.2 Dead saints and living saints: a single communion of sinners and saints

Another 1519 writing is “Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and Are Heavy-laden”⁴⁹, which was published only in the following year. Its goal was to offer consolation to a very noble person, the Electoral Prince of Saxony Frederick the Wise, who had a serious illness at the time. Already in the title of his writing Luther makes a reference to the number of male and female saints (14) who were looked for in afflictive situations, particularly in the case of sickness. Throughout the writing Luther intends to show how, according to the Gospel, Christian spirituality is manifested when people are faced with situations of suffering.

⁴⁸ Cf. WA 20, 703, 1–9; 683, 10ff; 693, 8ff.

⁴⁹ WA 6, 104–134 = LW 42 I, 121–166.

In this sense, also devotion to the saints must be redirected. One must look at the example of saints with the sole purpose of being encouraged to bear sufferings analogous to those they bore. Any other kind of veneration of saints, such as e. g. invocation, would mean an escape from the reality of suffering, a subterfuge not to really follow the example of the saints. In Luther's opinion,

the feasts of the saints, their memorials, churches, altars, names, and pictures are observed and multiplied to inspire others by their example to bear the same evils which they also bore. Unless they are observed in this light, the cult of the saints cannot be free of superstition. There are many who observe all these things only to escape the very evil which the saints, by their example and memory, teach us should be borne. They thus become unlike those whose feasts they celebrate to become like them.⁵⁰

Devotion to the saints, therefore, assumes a profound identification with the saint's life of faith, a life which we look at as providing an example. The basis for this identification is in the fact that the devotee shares in the same undivided reality that makes him or her simultaneously sinful (in him or herself) and just (in Christ), a reality also lived out by the saint whose memory is honored through a specific devotion to him or her. All feelings of unworthiness arising from a comparison with the saints and their suffering necessarily leads people to spoil their devotion. This happens as people attribute to the saints more than they actually deserve, thus taking away the merit of Christ's redemptive work. Saints are only saintly inside the communion, which in turn owes its existence exclusively to the forgiveness procured by Christ in the cross:

Since confession of sins is truth, it justifies and sanctifies. Thus in the very moment of your confession, you are no longer suffering for your sins, but for your innocence. The righteous man always suffers innocently. You are made righteous by the confession of your deserved suffering and sins. Thus your suffering may be compared with the sufferings of the saints as truly and worthily as your confession of sins may be compared with the confession of the saints. There is only one truth in the midst of everything, only one confession of all sins, one suffering of all evils, and one true communion of saints in all and through all.⁵¹

⁵⁰ LW 42 I, 137f.

⁵¹ LW 42 I, 140.

2.2.4.3 Images and devotion in the hearts

In 1521/22, during the period in which Luther had taken refuge at the Wartburg fortress, a group of people took the lead of the Wittenberg Reformation. This group introduced radical changes, which impacted also the area of devotion to saints. One of the movement leaders was Andreas Bodenstein of Karlstadt. Among other things, he published a work on "The Elimination of Images" and included, in the new Congregation Statute of which he was the great mentor, a paragraph concerning the removal of images from churches. Wittenberg was hit by a wave of iconoclasm. Churches and chapels were invaded. Images and altars were destroyed.

Luther responded by writing down a series of eight sermons preached from March 9 through 1, 1522, and since known as "The Invocavit Sermons". Luther condemned the hasty and anti-evangelical way by which action was taken in Wittenberg, regarding it as utterly disrespectful of weak consciences. For a moment, he dealt specifically with the issue of images and with how they could promote evangelization among those who venerate them.⁵²

For Luther, no people, or perhaps just a few, lack the understanding that the crucifix on the wall is not God, but only a symbol, and that God is actually in heaven. To be sure, he agrees that veneration to images had developed in ways to cause deep concern, but he claims that it can be countered by a preaching directed against the false trust in images. This process, however, must be careful and guided only by the proclamation of God's Word. In this way the weak consciences, which rely on these things, will not be given reason for scandal. Luther's main concern is to make sure that true worship is promoted and the Word is correctly proclaimed. The evil of veneration to images cannot be suppressed by means of the obliteration of

⁵² Cf. StA 2, 541, 22 – 543, 19. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Ordnung und Abgrenzung der Reformation 1521–1532*, Berlin, EVA, p. 47f; Elfriede Starke, *Luthers Beziehungen zu Kunst und Künstlern*. In: Helmar Junghans (Hrsg.), *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526–1546*, 2. Ausg., Berlin, EVA, 1985, p. 531f. 906.

works of art in churches. This at least as long as the images remain in the hearts and their creation is considered meritorious for salvation.

In Karlstadt's opinion, images should be eliminated so that no believer ever got tempted to venerate them. Karlstadt's emphasis falls on the "ought", on a new legislation established on the basis of his understandings of Scripture. Luther, on the other hand, considered this attitude incompatible with the situation of those who are weak in the faith. Besides, such an attitude would make central something whose significance was not, in Luther's eyes, fundamental in the realm of faith. As soon as they cease to have a grip on people, images cannot really cause any damage. Hence, Luther proposes that images be kept for the inner decoration of churches. Only later should those which cause deviations and lead to veneration be quietly removed.

Therefore it should have been preached that images were nothing and that no service is done to God by erecting them; then they would have fallen of themselves. That is what I did; that is what Paul did in Athens [...]. He preached against their idols, but he overthrew none by force. And you rush, create an uproar, break down altars, and overthrow images! Do you really believe you can abolish the altars in their way? No, you will only set them up more firmly. Even if you overthrew the images in this place, do you think you have overthrown those in Nürnberg and the rest of the world? [...] This is what we must preach and teach, and let the Word alone do the work, as I said before. The Word must first capture the hearts of men and enlighten them; we will not be the ones who will do it.⁵³

2.2.4.4 Honoring the memory of the saints as a part of preaching and liturgy

The concepts of "example" and "model" were both characteristic and central for Luther's attitude towards the dead saints. Christians who are now dead gave an example of faith with their words and actions, an example, moreover, which must not be ignored. In the *Magnificat*, Mary is presented as a model for both thought and action for whoever lives under God's grace and unconditionally yields to it.

⁵³ T. G. Tappert (ed.), *Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1520–1523*, Philadelphia, 1967, 247 = StA 2, 542, 32 – 543, 16.

Luther actively fostered due honor to the memory of saints, and attempted to integrate it into preaching and worship. He defended a very careful analysis of some collections of legends about the saints, but simultaneously favored the use of reliable collections, such as the *Legenda Aurea*, written by James of Voragine.⁵⁴ Luther honored the memory of Heinrich von Zutphen, an evangelical martyr who was executed in Brussels in 1524; he even told Zutphen's history following the style of the old martyrologies.⁵⁵ Luther encouraged Georg Major to publish a revised version of the *Vitae Patrum*. He both wrote a preface to it and recommended it as edifying literature.⁵⁶ He acted similarly in regard to Spalatin's writings.⁵⁷ In this sense, he continued to advance hagiographic tradition, underscoring its exclusively pedagogic character for the purposes of edification and encouraging people in Christ's discipleship.

In a 1534 preface to a writing by Lazaro Spengler, Luther bears unmistakable witness to the importance of honoring the memory of saints, both with respect to people's life of faith and with respect to the Church:

Besides Holy Scripture, there can be for Christianity no book more valuable than the Legends of the beloved saints, especially those who are authentic and sound. This is so because in the Legends we find a very mildly description of how the saints believed in God's Word with all their heart and confessed it with their mouths, praising it through their actions and both honoring and confirming it through their sufferings. All of this serves as consolation and greatly strengthens those who are weak in the faith. It also makes those who were already strong even more tenacious and persistent. Scripture can be taught on its own, without the examples and histories of the saints. But even if this is true, it still is very helpful to additionally hear and see other people's examples. For a weak heart always thinks thus: "See, you are alone, [but] he too believes and confesses such a thing, practices it and suffers, etc." Hence also God, side by side with doctrine, describes in scripture itself the life, faith, confession, and suffering of the beloved patriarchs and prophets. And St. Peter [Second Epistle of Peter 3] also comforts the Christians with the example of all saints when he says: "You must know that the same sufferings befalls all your brothers in the world." And the Psalter is a comforting example for all Christians who are troubled in their spirit.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ WA 43, 108, 24–31 = LW 3, 325.

⁵⁵ Cf. WA 18, 224–240 = LW 32, 265–286.

⁵⁶ Cf. WA 54, 109–111.

⁵⁷ Cf. WA 54, 112–115.

⁵⁸ WA 38, 313, 10 – 314, 6.

3. Summary

When referring to the saints, the confessional writings of the Lutheran Reformation devote a significant amount of space to oppose the practice of their invocation. This is only natural given the fact that their primary goal is to affirm their own position, demarcating it from the abuses happening in the Church at that time. And yet, when they condemn the invocation of saints, they do not do so only in order to contest a practice which lacks scriptural basis. Rather, it is clear that they reject invocation for reasons connected with pastoral counseling. They point out that Christ is the only mediator precisely to affirm the certainty of salvation. On the other hand, the confessional writings never cease to approve and recommend honor to the memory of saints.

In this sense, the confessional writings clearly reflect Luther's stance. In a context of piety strongly influenced by devotion to the saints – a devotion often spoiled by attitudes like invocation and the affirmation of the saints as mediators instead of Christ –, Luther endorses an evangelization that both shows sensitivity and is oriented to pastoral counseling. Luther preserves the positive elements in the devotion to the saints and only then seeks, through the preaching of the Word, to persuade people about misuses and abuses. He proposes a new structuring of the fraternities according to the model of Christ's true communion, a communion the basis of which is Christ's self-surrender, and which both excludes selfishness and self-interest, and assumes love to one's neighbors, especially the poor and suffering. He is affirming of how important it is for Christians to be identified with the saints who suffered injustices because of their witness to the Gospel, showing that whatever goes beyond this kind of devotion to saints actually longs to deny or escape from the cross and suffering. He recognizes the pedagogic function of images and disapproves of violent and authoritarian repression of consciences and popular forms of piety. He does this even when these forms of piety are seen as implying misuse or abuse, and in such cases he establishes the preaching of the Word as the sole pastoral alternative. Finally, he values the place of honor to the memory of saints in the church's preaching and liturgy.

This way of understanding and practicing devotion to the saints was kept in European Protestantism (Germany, Scandinavian countries, England), appearing especially in worship and liturgy. But it did not take concrete shape in Latin American Protestantism, which neglected – and still neglects – honor to the memory of saints. The neopentecostal Brazilian bishop's kicking at the image of Our Lady Aparecida perfectly symbolizes this attitude. Protestant churches always proceeded from the assumption that evangelized people ought to be completely transformed and adjusted to the way of life of Protestants in Europe and North America. They rejected popular culture and ignored the people's religion in a wholesale manner. This is certainly one of the reasons why the preaching of the Protestant churches never really came close to the people as such, being restricted either to the middle class or to ethnic minorities, or still to both at the same time.

To a large extent, the people's religion in Latin America manifests a spirituality that is primarily at home in the world of the saints. Therefore, it is requisite to enter and move in this world if we intend to bring the Gospel to the people. It is likely that a major way to do it will involve reclaiming our Reformation heritage via the recovery of honor to the memory of saints.

From Portuguese translated by Luís H. Dreher