

“Preface” to Theology in the Life of the Church

[in Theology in the Life of the Church, iii-iv. Edited by Robert W. Bertram. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1963.]

The hope of theology lives in this balance: Quod vitam theologiae, id Ecclesiae animat, et Ecclesia, quae ad vitam pertinet, eadem ad theologiam.

What is life for theology
Is life for the Church,
And the Church for life
Is the Church for theology.

Accordingly, the Conference of Lutheran Professors of Theology, hopeful alike for the theological life of the Church and the churchly life of theology, has conceived in lively hope the present symposium.

For hope there is when theology is animated by that Life who Himself is *Christus Vivificator*. He it is who at the very sources of theology, in bible and tradition and history, marks the difference between the Bible as Law and as Gospel, between the dead and the living tradition of the confessors, between the history unto death and the history unto resurrection. And the Church whose theology is alive with him can be alive herself, in her worship around preaching and sacraments, in her cure of souls, in her world mission. Likewise the Church whose own life is Christ can be pertinent, as he is, to all of life, as men must live it in society and family and education. Finally, to complete the circle, it is the pertinent Church which comes alive again in theology, in the doctrine *de Ecclesia*: the ministering Church, ordered to no other end but the Gospel's, a Church of the churches. Luther's word for Jesus Christ is still, in the midst of her mortal conflict, a word for the Church and her theology: *Vivit*.

Moreover, we hope that this symposium, though consciously Lutheran, may contribute to the vitality of the Church far beyond the churches called Lutheran. Less than that we dare not hope and still be Lutheran. Already fifteen years ago this book's predecessor, *What Lutherans are Thinking*, was offered “in the spirit of ecumenical Lutheranism” – all the more wondrous in view of the synodical differences which at that time still awaited resolution. If in the meantime the Lord has prospered our confessional unity, we should be nothing but ungrateful were we to shirk that larger symposium in which all Christians confess with and to one another. Where differences persist, also within Lutheranism, this book does not conceal them. For, as we all have learned, our differences too are better confessed than denied, again for the sake of the whole Church.

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Robert W. Bertram