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***БЫТЬ БЛАГОЧЕСТИВЫМ И ДОВОЛЬНЫМ:  
УДОВОЛЬСТВИЕ И ЕГО ЗНАЧЕНИЕ В ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЯХ  
ОБ ОБЩЕСТВЕ МАРТИНА ЛЮТЕРА***

В статье рассматриваются лютеровское понимание человеческой жизни и его социальная этика. Автор приходит к выводу, что в личном мировоззрении Лютера удовольствие, как выражение веры, дало возможность верующим рисковать тем, что Бог дал им, чтобы служить другим и создавать упорядоченное общество. Удовольствие и удовлетворение — это враги социальных волнений, а также личного недовольства и неудовлетворенности. Взаимное служение и любовь устраняет необходимость восстания. Лютер настаивал на выполнении Божьей воли, что в свою очередь призывало людей отбросить социальный квиетизм и играть активную роль во всех аспектах жизни: дома, на работе, обществе и собрании верующих во Христа.

*Ключевые слова:* призвание, Оккам, проповеди, человеческая жизнь, общество, этика

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***GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT:  
 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTENTMENT FOR  
 MARTIN LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY***

The article explores the Luther's understanding of human life and his social ethics. The author concludes that in Luther's very personal world contentment, as an expression of faith, made it possible for believers to risk what God gives them to serve others and create an orderly society. Contentment is the enemy of social unrest as well as personal dissatisfaction and unsettledness. Mutual service eliminates the need for rebellion and mutual love eliminates the desire for personal security or gain by exploiting others. Luther's insistence on fulfilling the assignments God has called individuals to perform prevented social quietism and encouraged active participation in all aspects of life in the home, the workplace, society, and the congregation of Christ's people.

*Key words:* callings, Ockham, sermons, human life, society, ethics

«God made me together with all creatures»<sup>1</sup>. With these words Martin Luther introduced God as their Creator to the children who were to learn the Christian faith. Like all people of his age, Luther could not conceive of individual human beings, who indeed stand alone in the presence of God, apart from their place and roles in human community. Therefore, in his Small Catechism, from which these words are taken, he also defined the core of what it means to be human as «fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things»<sup>2</sup>. But he concluded his treatment of the fundamental elements of the Christian faith with a «Chart of Christian Callings», a brief introduction to the daily Christian life in community, containing only passages from Scripture, giving a basis for serving and loving other human beings according to God's plan<sup>3</sup>.

#### LUTHER'S DEFINITION OF BEING HUMAN

Luther's understanding of human life arose out of his own experience and personality and out of his reading of Scripture, but it took concrete form also within the context of his university studies. The instructors who trained him in the philosophy and theology of his time relied to a large extent on the ideas of the fourteenth-century thinker William of Ockham. From the Ockhamists at the University of Erfurt Luther learned that God's most important characteristic is his omnipotence. God is almighty, and he created the universe independent of all conditions. No eternal law existed alongside the eternal person of the Creator. God designed the world as he saw it. Alongside this emphasis on God's total responsibility for all that exists and happens in human history, his instructors told Luther that God demands their own exercise of responsibility for the commands and the assignments he has given them. As students of the late-fifteenth century German theologian Gabriel Biel, Luther's teachers explained that God demands that they do their best in order to merit grace, divine aid which enables them to do the works that please God enough to gain admission to heaven<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelische-Lutherischen Kirche / Hrsg. von I. Dingel. Göttingen, 2014. P. 870–871.

<sup>2</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften... S. 862–863.

<sup>3</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften... S. 894–895, 898–899.

<sup>4</sup> Oberman H. A. The harvest of medieval theology: Gabriel Biel and late medieval nominalism. Cambridge MA, 1963.

Luther rejected the idea that human beings can merit God's favor. He took Ockham's accentuation of God's power to its logical conclusion and found in Scripture the basis for teaching that God is unconditionally gracious and that he re-creates sinners into his children just as with his word he brought the universe into existence. Luther found God totally responsible for everything, including the relationship between himself and his human creatures.

However, Luther broke his logical construction to take seriously the Biblical emphasis on human responsibility. In a paradox he found that God expects obedience to his plan for human life, expressed in the law or commands that are written on the human heart and also recorded in Scripture. At the same time, God comes with the gospel of rescue and restoration of human righteousness in God's sight through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ<sup>5</sup>. Thus, Christians live within the tension between God's gift of new life in Christ and God's expectations for the behavior of his reborn children.

Like the modern psychological theorist Erik Erikson, Luther viewed trust as the foundation and core of human personhood and each individual's personality. God promises to be faithful to those who trust in Christ for their new life, and this trust not only turns people to a loving relationship with the Creator but also liberates them from the need for self-protection at the cost of others. This promise of eternal life from God frees them from condemnation and fear; it also binds them to the neighbor because it frees them to be truly human in the way God created them to be: self-giving and even self-sacrificing toward others. This liberation through Christ, as Luther presents it above all in his 1520 treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, sends his people into the lives of others as they live together in human community<sup>6</sup>.

#### LUTHER'S MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

Luther's mind, shaped by medieval thinking, was intensely personal, and so he thought of what modern thinkers describe as social systems on a personal basis, not as an impersonal system. His parents'

<sup>5</sup> Kolb R. Resurrection and Justification. Luther's use of Romans 4,25 // Lutherjahrbuch. 2011. N 78. P. 39–60.

<sup>6</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 7: Schriften, Predigten, Disputationen 1520/21. Weimar, 1887. S. 20–38 (German) and 49–73 (Latin).

experience with loans from bankers as they built their smelting operation in Mansfeld acquainted him with the potential and actual abuses of capitalism, but his call for economic repentance addressed bankers as individual, responsible human beings, not the system itself<sup>7</sup>. His sometimes sharp critiques of governmental leaders, both princes and courtiers, also were aimed at individual transgressors of God's commands to care for the poor and to administer justice fairly. They did not assess the system of governance in the constitution of the Empire, and in moving toward a qualified concept of the right of «lesser magistrates» within the German Empire to resist the emperor in cases of his abuse of office, Luther again saw the structure of the Empire in terms of the persons who had responsibilities established by God rather than an inherent constitutional arrangement<sup>8</sup>.

Luther's view of society and its configuration was not original although he introduced new elements into the medieval view he inherited. Medieval thinkers recognized a divinely-ordained structure to human life, and they divided daily life into three «walks of life» or «situations». [German *Stand*, Latin *status*]: the church, understood as the holy orders of priests and bishops, monks and nuns (the *ecclesia*, in German often *Lehrstand* to emphasize its role in teaching the principles of life), the political or societal leadership (the *politia*, in German *Wehrstand* to emphasize its role in defending the peace and maintaining order), and the household, embracing both family and economic life (the *oeconomia*, in German the *Nährstand* to emphasize its role in providing the basic needs of human life). Medieval thinkers assigned each individual to one of these situations; Luther saw roles for every individual in all three, or four since he distinguished economic activities from family life more clearly than had been the case earlier<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, medieval Europeans exalted the clergy as superior to the other situations of life. Priests, monks, and nuns alone received

<sup>7</sup> Rieth R. Luther's treatment of economic life // The Oxford handbook of Martin Luther's theology / Ed. by R. Kolb, I. Dingel, and L. Batka. Oxford, 2014. P. 383–396.

<sup>8</sup> Wolgast E. Luther's treatment of political and societal life // Oxford Handbook. P. 397–413; Mark U. E. Jr. Luther's Last Battles, Politics and Polemics 1531–1546. Ithaca, 1983. P. 20–67.

<sup>9</sup> Wingren G. Luther on vocation / Trans. Carl C. Rasmussen. Philadelphia, 1957. P. 1–77.

«holy orders» [*ordo, ordines*] and a «calling» [*vocatio*] from God. Luther defined every set of responsibilities, designated as «offices» [*Amt/Ämter, officium, officia*], as being in holy orders, and Christians recognize that each of these sets of responsibilities is a «calling» [*Beruf*, in Latin *vocatio*] from God<sup>10</sup>.

*TRUST PRODUCES CONTENTMENT*

Luther's understanding that trust forms the heart of human existence extended beyond trust in God's promise of forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the relationship between Creator and human creature through Christ's death and resurrection. Luther also trusted deeply in God's providing care. His sermons give evidence that he often spoke to the congregation in Wittenberg of the comfort believers have because they know that, as he said in his Small Catechism, God «daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock and all property — along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life». Furthermore, «God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me in the face of all evil». Luther believed that «all this is done out of pure, fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all», and he urged that God's providing care lead his people «to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him»<sup>11</sup>.

With daily thinking based upon trust that God is providing not only for eternal life but also for life on this earth, Luther concluded that trust leads to contentment. His perception of life is sometimes interpreted as urging resignation and creating social stagnation. But he never argued that God did not call individuals to new responsibilities in their walks of life and to changes in their positions, particularly in their occupations, during the course of a lifetime. His own family life provides a counter-example to any doctrine of social immobility. His father moved from the agricultural peasantry to an occupation in the smelting industry and his own operation. His father did not marry a peasant girl but found his

<sup>10</sup> Wengert T. J. «Per mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum»: Monastische Züge in Luthers ökumenischer Theologie // Luther und das monastische Erbe / Hrsg. von Ch. Bultmann, et al. Tübingen, 2007. S. 243–268.

<sup>11</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften... S. 932–935.

wife among the merchant families in a neighboring town, Eisenach, to his village of Möhra. His parents intended to invest in the family's future by sending him to university to occupy a bureaucratic position in the government or to supply the family business with legal guidance. Instead, Luther sprang to the position of university professor in the «queen of the disciplines», theology.

In addition, Luther promoted the advance of students at the University of Wittenberg out of other social levels into a new social status, that of pastor, with rights to marry and become a citizen (in contrast to medieval priests). By the end of the sixteenth century these pastoral families were solidly entrenched among the bourgeois leadership of towns, but among his students and early supporters were many who came from artisan families; Simon Museaus grew up in the peasantry.

Nonetheless, Luther believed that trust in God's provision for this life recognizes that all Christians serve God in whatever callings in life God has placed them, and that trust breeds contentment; to be discontented indicates a failure to trust God's governance of this world. He particularly targeted discontentment with one's economic situation as a serious sin against God. In 1529 his exposition of what trust in God means as he applied the first commandment to his readers' lives, he called «mammon, that is money and property» «the most common idol on earth». People think that «they have everything they need when they have money and property; they trust in them and boast in them so stubbornly and securely that they care for no one else». Their feeling of security, happiness, and lack of fear gives them the illusion that they are «sitting in the midst of paradise», and when their money disappears they are filled with doubt and despair»<sup>12</sup>.

He made that point clear in 1531 while preaching on Matthew 6:19–21. Jesus' warning that his followers dare not store up treasures on earth where moths and worms can destroy and thieves can steal, but rather find treasure in heaven. Luther compared greed with false teaching as attitudes destructive for faith; greed looks to material gifts of God rather than to God himself for a sense of security and peace:

Two terrible plagues... always arise: false preachers who corrupt the teaching, and then Sir Greed, who obstructs right living. Now that the gospel is being preached again, people have become

<sup>12</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften... S. 932–933.

much greedier than they were before. They scrimp and scrape as if they were practically dying of hunger. They used to go around as if they were blind and transfixed, they used to let the preachers tell them any kind of silly notion, and they contributed their dues in piles. They did not see how much it was, and they did not complain. Now that their eyes are opened and they know how they ought to live and what genuine good works are, they watch their pfennigs so closely and they are so greedy that you would think every one of them wanted to take all the property in the world for himself. The only way I can account for this or explain where it came from is that must be a plague from the devil himself... there are two most dangerous and corrupting forces in Christendom: spiritually, it is the false teaching that corrupts faith; physically, it is the greed that corrupts its fruit<sup>13</sup>.

Luther repeated his condemnation of greed in a sermon on Easter Monday 1534. His text was Colossians 3:1–7. From it he identified as the chief sins besetting his audience «fornication or unchastity and greed», against which the listeners should «diligently guard» themselves. After condemning sexual sins, he continued, Paul «speaks similarly about greed, to which he gives the shameful name of «idolatry» or «worship of a false god», so that Christians would all the more flee from it as from the most abominable vice, the one that God hates most» — because it signifies lack of trust in God's provision for life<sup>14</sup>.

Such denunciations of greed did not mean that Luther embraced the ideal of poverty that he had forsaken and renounced when he left behind the monastic ideal of poverty. Neither poverty nor wealth commended believers to their God. Material blessings need not necessarily tempt them into idolatry; they can serve as tools for aiding and supporting others. In 1531 he had observed to the congregation:

It is no sin to have money and property, wife and children, house and home. But you must not let it be your master. You must make it serve you, and you must be its master. As it is said of a fine,

<sup>13</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 32: Predigten 1530; Reihenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7. Weimar, 1906. S. 437, 11–439, 34.

<sup>14</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 21: Roths Winterpostille 1528; Crucigers Sommerpostille 1544. Weimar, 1928. S. 271,1–18.



upstanding gentlemen: he is master of his money — and not its subject and its prisoner, as a stingy, greedy belly is, who would be willing to surrender the Word of God and everything else, doing nothing and saying nothing, rather than take chances with his money... Such a person despises and forsakes the eternal treasure for the sake of that scabby Mammon, which he can neither use nor enjoy. Meanwhile, he goes his own smug way, supposing that he can get around to the Word of God any time, and grabbing whatever he can. He cannot miss a single heller, for God's sake! Eventually he sinks deeper and deeper into greed, he gets farther and farther away from the Word of God and finally becomes completely hostile to it<sup>15</sup>.

Continuing his comment on the text, he commended contentment:

Listen now to what serving Mammon means. ... The sinful worship of Mammon does not consist in eating and drinking and wearing clothes, nor in looking for a way to make a living and working at it; for the needs of this life and of the body make good and clothing a requirement. But the sin consists in being concerned about it and making it the object of the reliance and confidence of your heart. Concern is not a matter of clothing or to food, but directly to the heart, which cannot let a thing go and has to hang on to it<sup>16</sup>.

The rich man in the parable of Lazarus (Luke 16: 19–31) gave Luther the opportunity to make a similar point. «This rich man is not punished because he indulged in sumptuous fare and fine clothes». The preacher listed several biblical saints who had eaten and dressed well: Solomon, Esther, David, and Daniel. This rich man's «heart was attached to [sumptuous fare and fine clothes], sought them, trusted in and chose them, and because he found in them all his joy, delight, and pleasure and made them in fact his idols... he thereby gratified his own lust and lived to himself and served only himself»<sup>17</sup>. There is no necessary parallel between the riches of this life and the riches of heaven<sup>18</sup>. Instead, the rich man exemplified the lack of faith or trust

<sup>15</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 32. S. 454, 22–455, 6.

<sup>16</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 32. S. 458, 32–459, 5.

<sup>17</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 32. S. 592, 22–293, 19.

<sup>18</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 52: Hauspostille 1544 (Veit Dietrich). Weimar, 1915. S. 369, 5–33.

in God's providing care. «Where faith is, there is no anxiety about fine clothing and sumptuous feasting, indeed, there is no longing for riches, honor, pleasure, influence and all that is not God himself, but there is a seeking and a striving for and cleaving to nothing except to God, the highest good alone...»<sup>19</sup>. «Luther believed that Lazarus exemplifies the nature of faith: to expect all good from God and to rely on him alone. In contrast, unbelief does not expect any good from God. Thus, not caring for or seeking God, the heart becomes hardened; its loss of any concept of mercy dampens and destroys the desire to practice kindness to others<sup>20</sup>. His attempt to find security and peace in his riches led this man to fail to exercise love toward the neighbor. Luther speculated that such a person must have had enough wealth to have servants whom he could have sent to Lazarus' aid. Luther knew well that he was dealing with a parable, not an historical report, but he wished to drive home a concrete point for those of wealth among his hearers. The parable served as a warning to prosperous Wittenberg citizens not to neglect their poorer neighbors.

Luther's sermon on the festival of Saint John the Evangelist in 1528, on John 21: 19–24 criticized Peter for not being content with his own position in life but trying to determine John's. «Every person should attend to the work entrusted to him and guard the honor of his calling», Luther remarked, as he condemned the aspect of medieval piety that drove people to leave family and village behind to go on pilgrimages. «No one is without some commission and calling, so no one is without something to do, if he desires to do what is right. Everyone therefore is to take heed to continue in his calling, pay attention to doing what he is to do, and faithfully follow God's commands, serving God and keeping his commandments. Then a person will have so much to do that all time will be too short, all places too tight, all resources too meager»<sup>21</sup>. Luther counseled, «to avoid unrest, discontent, and disgust with one's situation», believers should recognize in faith that «God governs all alike, places each

<sup>19</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 12: Reihenedigt über 1. Petrus 1522; Predigten 1522/23; Schriften 1523. Weimar, 1891. S. 593, 20–594, 8.

<sup>20</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 12: 594, 20–41; cf.: Die Bekenntnisschriften... S. 930–933.

<sup>21</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 10. I Ab./1: Weihnachtspostille 1522. Weimar, 1910. S. 306, 17–310, 13; cf.: Luther's sermon on Luke 5,100 in his Hauspostil of 1544 (D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 52. S. 394, 33–395, 20).

person in the lot that is the most useful and suitable for him, and that he could not have planned things better for himself in any case. This faith brings rest, contentment, peace, and banishes the tired spirit». Luther warned against the restlessness and disgruntlement that lack of trust in God brings. It silences praise, love, and thanks toward God and deprives the neighbor of the loving support believers are called to give<sup>22</sup>.

Peter and the other disciples provided Luther with another example of faithfulness to God being demonstrated in the exercise of God's calling in the story of the catch of fish in Luke 5: 1–11. The trust they exhibited when they continued to fish at his command reveals that they knew that «Christ cares for those who believe in him, so that they are abundantly supplied in the face of temporal and bodily needs». Christians experience «manifold tribulations, miseries and distress... If Christ is to help, there must be trials, trouble, and toil, and it must come to this, that we despair of all human counsel, comfort, and capability. Then he comes with his help and demonstrates that he still can comfort, advise, protect, and deliver and that he is able to do this when all else has failed». Luther noted that human toil and exertion seems to accomplish little for many: «Daily experience still shows that many people labor, tooth and nail, in anxiety and exertion, and yet can scarcely earn their bread or pay off their debts and get out of poverty». But others do not work so hard and strain themselves, and they receive abundantly. Only the blessing of God, who gives to those whom he loves what they need while they sleep (Psalm 127: 2). Luther paraphrased the psalmist, «It is in vain that you worry and torture yourself with cares and work, day and night, in order to provide what is needed in the household. Much may be needed there, but it does not depend on your hands and labor at all. Nothing will come of your effort unless God himself is the head of the household and makes it possible for you to say, "God bestows his gifts overnight". Grain and all food from the earth, indeed, all that a person has or may acquire, must be given by God»<sup>23</sup>.

Although Luther had lived under the threat of execution by church and by empire since 1520 and 1521, he had enjoyed a com-

<sup>22</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 10. I Ab./1. S. 315, 18–316, 14.

<sup>23</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 22: Cruciger Sommerpostille (Forts.) 1544. Weimar, 1929. S. 75, 1–77, 6.

paratively good life in Wittenberg as a university professor. Nonetheless, he realized that many were in need even if his parents and grandparents — relatively prosperous peasants and small-town merchants — had enjoyed a good life as well. However, he believed that even those with fewer material blessings could find contentment in knowing that God would meet their needs, even if on a level below that of others. «Those people are at rest and in peace who content themselves with the things that God provides. They journey onward cheerfully and courageously, whatever calling may be. They have enough to support life, and all their necessities are so well supplied that they must say to themselves, ‘no evening yet have I gone hungry to sleep’ although it appears as if affliction and want are at their very doors... They have this benefit from their confidence and faith in God, that they need not fret and injure themselves among the thorns, or cares for the body, or be stung and injured by them, but can so to speak sit amid the roses in a lovely garden». For in Proverbs 15.15 one reads, «he that is of a cheerful heart enjoyed a continual feast»<sup>24</sup>.

In Luther’s very personal world this contentment, as an expression of faith, made it possible for believers to risk what God gives them to serve others and create an orderly society. Contentment is the enemy of social unrest as well as personal dissatisfaction and unsettledness. Mutual service eliminates the need for rebellion and mutual love eliminates the desire for personal security or gain by exploiting others. Luther’s insistence on fulfilling the assignments God has called individuals to perform prevented social quietism and encouraged active participation in all aspects of life in the home, the workplace, society, and the congregation of Christ’s people.

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<sup>24</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. Bd 22. S. 77, 23–78, 32.

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