Luther as a monk.
Captain Markku Tulander

A paper presented at The Salvation Army Europe Zone’s Luther 500 Symposium, Luther Hotel, Wittenberg, 15-19 October 2017.

Like many other famous person Luther or stories about him are often mixture facts and fiction. For example Roland Bainton in his book “Here I stand. A life of Martin Luther” say few times: you may have heard that Luther said this or that. But I say to You that what he really said was... So I’ m maybe not telling You the ultimate truth about Luther as a monk. But anyhow my intention is at least try to say something that will help us to understand Luther little bit more.

BACKGROUND

Some scholars says that Luther became a Monk because of his childhood. Luther himself told story about it when he pilfer a one single nut. He’s mother whipped him up badly. But that time that wasn’t unusual and in the whole society, children were poorly treated. Of course this could be one reason why he later see God harsh and unmerciful.

But if we look religious concepts at that time we find something interesting. The beliefs of people were full of fairies, trolls, elves and demons. The beliefs was full paganism. World was a quite distressing place. School didn’t offer relief. Vice versa. At the school pupils learned church songs. They saw churches, many kind of monks, relics, people healed by touching reliquary and so on. Luther remember that he saw in his own eyes that demons left possessed man.

Nothing chanced when he arrived Erfurt University. At home, at school and at university they have one main goal. Raise fear of God and respect for church. Luther’s emotions varied quick and strongly. He could be in one moment rapt and in the next moment depressed. His mood vary rapidly. This was something he suffer for whole his lifetime. He told that before going in to the monastery his was very depressed some six months period.

MONK’S ROBE

Medieval religion had two faces. On the other hand fear on the other hand hope. It caused unrest among people. Church told stories about hell to scary people and hope that this
should lead people look for help from the church, for example indulgences. It was also common idea that sometimes God was good and mercy and sometimes He was master of thunder. God and every heavenly powers were also unpredictable. There was very famous booklets called art or knowledge of death. In the picture of last judgment Christ was judge sitting on rainbow. Luther saw this kind of books and he told that he was terrified at the picture where Jesus was a judge sitting on rainbow. But luckily there was one good way to avoid doom. There was belief that end of the world was already cancelled once. Christ was about blows into a horn and announces Judgment Day. However God’s mother Mary plead more time. She wanted give monk’s more time to prepare themselves. It was common belief that everyone wearing monk’s robe got better treatment when entering heaven. Wearing monk’s robe is like second baptism. In matter of fact monasticism was shortcut to heaven. Luther like thousands of others monks wanted to save his soul.

**LUTHER AS A MONK**

Luther was twenty one years old and studied at the university of Erfurt. He was on his way back after visiting his parents. Suddenly lightning knock him down. At the moment he saw the end of his life. He saw a horrible God, merciless Christ and countless devils. Devils try to push him to the hell. He shouted: St. Anna, help me! I promise You I’ll enter into monastery! He asked for help from his father’s patron saint, St Anna. After all he went to monastery with reluctance. But he believed that God had called him.

During the years in the monastery he tried to get peace with God. Days and nights went in religious exercises. First mass as a priest was epochal. Communion convert bread and wine to flesh and blood of Jesus. He began mass but saying the words: we sacrifice for you... eternal, living and true God he be shocked and terrified. Luther was full of fear of holiness. He was horrified before the Infinite. Fear was increased by feeling of worthlessness. This kind of feelings were the foremost throughout Luther’s time as a monk. On the other hand Luther has a feeling that God was called him into contact and on the other hand God pushed him away. There is lots of stories about how Luther pestered his confessor vicar Johann von Staupiz. Staupitz was in the end so tired or annoyed that he said to Luther: God is not angry with you! You are angry with God! God has commanded your hope. Confession turns out to be ineffective. Luther didn’t reached the peace of mind or soul. He realized that it’s not about individual sins. Luther understood that the whole person needed forgiveness. As a result of this he resorted mysticism. Because human is weak he or she must give up battle. You must let yourself entirely to the love of God. Vicar Staupiz tried to get Luther across that he made the faith too complicated. Only one was needed. Love to God.

But there was but. If God is not righteous? Scholastics said: God only binds the rules he has created. He is not obligated to reward people’ achievements. Usually, he does so. But there is no certainty. Luther understood this so that God is capricious. Other scholastics said: God is almighty. Therefore, nothing can be a coincidence. The fate of man has already been prescribed. This was something that Luther liked a little bit. It was great joy to the saved man but terrible torment to others. Luther cried: This is contrary to the common sense. As if God were delighted the sins of the poor people to be able to condemn them to the destruction. For a moment he had peace in his soul but in the next moment the peace was gone.
LECTURER IN BIBLIA AT UNIVERSITY OF WITTENBERG

Vicar Staupiz saw Luther’s spiritual sufferings. He found a way to ease these sufferings. He suggested that Luther would continue his studies until the doctor. He also suggested that Luther should start preaching and teaching at university LECTURA IN BIBLIA which means biblical studies.

Luther hesitated but accepted the proposal. He began to lecture from the psalms year 1513. Year 1515 he began to lecture from Paul’s letter to Romans and later he lectured from Paul’s letter to Galatians. These studies proved to be crucial. Luther found a solution in the midst of his daily work. First verse in the psalm 22: My God, my God, why You have forsaken me? The same words Jesus said when he died. Christ felt himself rejected by God. Jesus also had anxiety. But why this despair? Luther knew why he himself felt despair. He was weak before almighty. He was unclean before Holy. But Christ was not weak. Christ was not unclean before Holy. Why did he have to be rejected by God? The only answer was that he took our wickedness on him. He, true man felt together with humankind, that he was alienated from the most sacred. Christ was no more merciless judge. He, however, judge but suffers from the same with the ones that he must judge. The cross-examination assured Luther that God was not vicious or capricious. Luther concluded that no one would not get close to God with any act. All we need is to believe in other words it is confidence that God wants to save us. Luther had made a long journey from the uncertainty of trust. This was beginning of other long journey with ends to reformation.