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## **Orthodox Reading of Martin Luther: Protestantism as a Pan-heresy according to St Justin Popović<sup>1</sup>**

*Pravoslavno branje Martina Lutra: protestantizem kot vse – herezija po sv. Justinu Popoviću*

*Abstract:* This study suggests a comparison between Orthodox scholar Justin Popović and reformer Martin Luther and focuses on the methodology of how to evaluate Protestantism from the Orthodox perspective. First is explained a historical and a theological context in which Father Justin mentions Protestantism, then the hermeneutical presuppositions of his critique are introduced, third, his methodology is brought under scrutiny; finally, a closer assessment with German reformer Martin Luther is proposed, of their aims, methods, key concepts. It is claimed here that Popović and Luther should be considered brothers in arms and that they are much closer than Justin Popović has been aware of.

*Keywords:* Serbian Orthodox Theology, Justin Popović, Reformation, Humanism, Priesthood of all Believers, Original Sin

*Povzetek:* Študija ponuja primerjavo med pravoslavnim učenjakom Justinom Popovićem in reformatorjem Martinom Lutrom, osredotoča se na metodologijo vrednotenja protestantizma s pravoslavnega zornega kota. Na začetku je pojasnjen zgodovinski in teološki kontekst, v katerem oče Justin omenja protestantizem, nato so prikazane hermenevitične predpostavke njegove kritike, temu pa sledi preučitev njegove metodologije. Na koncu pa je predloženo podrobnejše ovrednotenje Popovića v razmerju do reformatorja Martina Lutra, njihovih ciljev, metod in do ključnih pojmov. Tu je zastopano stališče, da je Popovića in Lutra treba obravnavati kot brata v skupnem boju in da sta si medsebojno veliko bližje, kakor se je tega zavedal Justin Popović.

*Ključne besede:* srbska pravoslavna teologija, Justin Popović, reformacija, humanizem, duhovništvo vseh vernikov, izvirni greh

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## 1. Introduction

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This study further develops a thesis published in an article in *Ostkirchliche Studien* about the theology of tradition in the work and writings of Serbian Orthodox theologian Justin Popović (1894–1979). The following was claimed there (Širka 2018, 340): »It exceeds the possibilities of this short study, but let me strongly confirm that there are not so many differences between Luther and Justin as it seems: quite the opposite, they are very similar in their attitude, in their terminology, and in their theological accents.« This is actually not so apparent as Popović criticized Protestantism in his writings quite sharply and heavily, calling it a pan-heresy. However, if we place a question: Would Justin Popović and Martin Luther understand each other? One must answer positively: yes, they would almost certainly understand each other and might agree on many issues.

Therefore, the starting point is the statement that St. Justin Popović and German reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) are much closer than may be evident at first sight, as both thinkers share disapproval of sin and desire to improve the world. This contribution aims to provide further details: to analyse Justin's texts as he discusses Protestantism and Luther, as well as to evaluate them from the perspective of Protestant theology. As is assumed from this perspective, they should be considered allies.

When one says ‚an ally‘, we have in mind a similar situation between current Greek Orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras and German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Yannaras finds inspiration in Heidegger's work, from whom he takes his thorough critique of the development of Western philosophy from the time of Plato. In his book *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, Yannaras uses Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. He argues that God in the West had been reduced to the best solution, first cause and highest value, all in order to justify Western social structures: papacy, hierarchy, monarchy (Yannaras 2005, 39–58). In other words, Yannaras found an ally *in* the West *against* the West.

## 2. Martin Luther and His Reformation Theology

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Who was Martin Luther? He was a former Augustinian monk, a church reformer against his own will and a professor of theology in Wittenberg. He claimed that the church of his time went astray from the original apostolic and biblical teachings and should return to its roots, *ad fontes*. According to Luther, salvation cannot be earned by our good deeds but is received only as a gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In his theology, Luther challenged the office of the Pope by claiming that the Bible is the only source of knowledge. This is why he translated the Bible into German and made it more accessible to his people, which impacted both the church and German culture.

The most important concept that Luther brought forward was the doctrine of justification, which meant that God declared a sinner righteous by faith alone

through God's grace. Luther summarised his concept in the *Smalcald Articles* (1537) like this (Luther 2021):

»The first and chief article: That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification (Rom 4:25). And He alone is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29), and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (Is 53:6). /.../ Now, since it is necessary to believe this, and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us.«

In other words, Luther opposes the teaching of the Catholic Church of his day that the righteous deeds of believers are performed in cooperation with God. Instead, he claims that Christians receive such righteousness from outside of themselves, that righteousness is imputed to Christians (rather than infused into them) through faith.

Mentioning Martin Luther and Orthodoxy in one sentence is not unusual, especially in the Finnish Luther research that dates back to the mid-70s. A group of Finnish scholars, led by the Tuomo Mannermaa (1937–2015) from the University of Helsinki, proposed a new way of understanding Luther's teaching on justification with the Orthodox concept of salvation as *theosis* (deification), which builds a theological intersection of two traditions (Jenson 1998; Trueman 2003, 231–244; Briskina 2008, 16–39). In order to explain this new theological reading of Luther and to bring a more ecumenical potential to Lutheran-Orthodox relations than had been assumed, they released a series of publications that challenged the dominant German interpretation of Luther. The external impulse for this new wave of Luther studies came from the ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church. In his work, Mannermaa proves that the current Luther research had been held captive by neo-Kantian ontological assumptions and that Luther had already employed the language of deification, words such as: *vergotten, durchgotten* (Mannermaa 1990, 11–26).

The results of the Helsinki circle reveal the broader contours of this article, which show the ecumenical potential of Luther studies in relation to the Orthodox. However, far more, they show that when we bracket the confessional terminology, such as deification, sanctification, justification and third use of the law, to focus on the content behind those terms, suddenly common ground opens for dialogue. Let us call it ecumenical in the broad sense, to wit, universal.

### 3. Justin Popović on Luther and Protestantism

Let us now return to Justin Popović and begin with where and how he writes about Luther and Protestantism. The results of our reading can be summarized within several general claims.

(a) Father Justin did not write much about Luther and Protestantism. None of his essays dealt extensively with this topic. Several paragraphs and occasional sentences exist throughout his books; the longest elaboration is an almost three-page discussion concerning original sin in the first volume of his *Dogmatics*.

(b) In certain places, Justin talks about ‚Luther‘, while in others, he chooses the word ‚Protestantism‘ and seems to use them as synonyms. Justin is aware that Luther and Protestantism are not the same and denotes Luther as the father of Protestantism, yet still, they contain the same content. In other words, he believes that Protestantism is what Luther taught. By saying ‚Protestantism‘, he actually means ‚Lutheranism‘, but not as a historical ecclesiological term, but only as the movement that follows Luther. In academic circles, this is called Luther-studies, and by any means, it is not meant Lutheranism or Protestantism, as these have developed over time and in many ways abandoned many of Luther’s ideas.

(c) Justin does not use the word ‚Protestantism‘ as an ecclesiological category, as is commonly done today – an umbrella term for all churches that emerged after the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. These would include not only the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Augsburg Confession) and Reformed Calvinistic (Helvetic Confession), but also such evangelical denominations and non-conformist churches as Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites and Pentecostals.

(d) Whenever Justin spoke about Protestantism, he spoke about it in connection with Catholicism: more precisely, he started with the critique of Roman Catholicism and papacy and then brought Protestantism into a discussion. The context in which he talks about these two traditions contrasts European humanism and St Savaist (*svetosavski, bogočovečanski*) humanism. Still, but not always, when he writes about Roman Catholicism, he mentions Luther and Protestantism, at least not explicitly. For example, his *Dogmatics* contain the discussion about the *filio-que* and Immaculate Conception of Mother Mary, which do not include the Protestant perspective (Popović 2003, 217; 2004, 288).

A short preliminary evaluation is now in order: (a) Justin’s knowledge of Luther’s teaching was correct but not complete, and (b) the diachronic aspect is missing, as in what happened afterwards, how Luther’s teaching was questioned, discussed and altered. An excellent example of where this is visible is Justin’s text on original sin that included both the Roman Catholic and Protestant perspective (2003, 333–338).

#### 4. Protestantism and the Original Sin

As far as Justin Popović is concerned, he sees the Orthodox position on original sin as lying between the Roman Catholic and Protestant stance. Roman Catholic teaching is too optimistic for Justin since it says that the fall of the first men consisted only in their refusal of outer grace (*iustitia originalis*), which was not the organic part of the spiritual and moral nature of the human being. By doing so,

after the fall, the nature of man remained the same as it was before the fall (334). Justin criticizes this; for him, human nature has been so impaired after the Fall that even those who desire to do good perform evil. He quotes the Apostle Paul from Rom 7:18–20 to support his view (335).

Protestant teaching, as Justin understands it is another extreme, a pessimistic one, as here the consequence of the fall is a totally destroyed image of God, the nature of man became sin (336). Therefore, man is not able to do any good, and all he/she wants and does is sin. The fall entered the nature of human beings up to a level that no power in this world can liberate them from sin, not even baptism.

Father Justin sees this Protestant concept as incorrect, for Protestant teaching identified Adam's nature and the original grace (*prvobitna pravednost*). Justin opposes this by the Holy Scripture, which says that even a fallen human being owns the remains of good, keeps a tendency toward good, a desire to do good, and these remains could not have remained if Adam had received the image of Satan instead of the image of God (see Exod 1:17; Matt 5:46; 7:9; Acts 28:2; Rom 2:14–15).

However, the crucial question that remains reads as follows: Is this really a Protestant, Luther's perspective?

From his early *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516), where Luther claimed the central aim of the epistle was to expose the pervasiveness of sin, comes his definition of original sin (Luther 2003, 95):

»But what, then, is original sin? According to the Apostle it is not only the lack of a good quality in the will, nor merely the loss of man's righteousness and ability. It is rather the loss of all his powers of body and soul, of his whole outward and inward perfections. In addition to this, it is his inclination to all that is evil, his aversion against that which is good.«

As we see, Luther's commentary includes a critique of self-interest, as deeply rooted in human nature due to original sin. Although nature was created good, it has been so deeply corrupted that such a curving in of human nature upon itself became natural. In his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517), where he criticized nominalist theologians who argued that human free will confirms the image of God, Luther stated (Lull 2009, 34–39) that, on account of original sin, we »can only will and do evil« and that our will »is captive.« While in his commentary on Romans, he talks about *inclination*, here he talks about the captive will. Luther recapitulated his ongoing critique of works of righteousness and underscored the fundamental bondage of the will to sin. He abandoned the concept of grace as *gratia infusa* (infused into the human being by God) that works together with free will on its way to the perfection of human nature.

Where do Luther's ideas come from? As an Augustinian monk, the writings of Augustine of Hippo formed his theological training. As Jairzinho Lopes Pereira claims in her latest book, it is precisely Augustine's understanding of human sal-

vation from whom Luther took the notion of a general condemnation in Adam and brought it to radical consequences. In his works *Ad Simplicianum and Confessiones*, St Augustine maintained that the first step a human being makes towards God is itself a divine gift and that the sheer will to believe in God's grace. Still, this assessment constituted a »break with the patristic tradition« (Pereira 2013, 7) on the issue of salvation. In line with Augustine, Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone was also an effort to show that salvation's beginning and accomplishment belongs only to God. The teaching of other Church Fathers, who claimed that human beings begin, and God together accomplish the salvation process, may have seemed to Luther as too similar to the teaching of the nominalist theologians he so vehemently opposed.

Up to this point, it seems that Justin's interpretation of Luther's position is correct. However, two things are missing. First, it is important to point that this is only one side of the coin and that Justin's claim that Luther is too pessimistic does not really stand its ground. Namely, in order to grasp the problem of sinfulness and righteousness within human beings, Luther introduces several concepts, formulated as perfect pairs, such as law and gospel, or alien righteousness (*iustitia aliena*) and the proper righteousness (*iustitia propria*). However, the most important for us at this moment is: *simul iustus et peccator*, absolute sinners and absolutely righteous. What does this mean?

According to Luther, individuals are simultaneously absolute sinners *coram hominibus* (righteousness before men) and absolutely righteous *coram Deo* (righteousness before God). With this understanding, Luther opposed the claim of scholastic theologians that justification depends on the human ability to overwhelm sin with good deeds, as well as the claim that humans are sinners (or righteous) only to a certain extent. While claiming that all people have sinned and lack the glory of God, Luther wanted to show the need to acknowledge the totality of sin in order to reveal the glory of God's grace. In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516), where he stated that humans are simultaneously actual sinners and righteous through God's imputation and promise of complete recovery, he expressed this with a famous sentence (Luther 1972, 258): »They are sinners in fact but righteous in hope.« Elsewhere in his essential writing *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520), Luther unfolded binary anthropology that discerns between the ,inner' human being, who is righteous through Christ, and the ,outer' human being, who inhabits a world of sin.

A second issue that will complement Justin's interpretation is that the controversy in this particular issue continued after Luther's death, between so-called Gnesio-Lutherans (a party that considered themselves to be authentic Lutherans) and Philippists (followers of Philip Melanchthon) over the issue of free-will. Melanchthon and his followers held that free will cooperates in appropriating the salvation offered by God through the gospel (Kilcrease 2017, 600–602). Against this, the Gnesio-Lutherans maintained Luther's belief in the radical nature of original sin and denied that free will had any ability to cooperate with the grace of God (Lump 2017, 308–310). It should be mentioned that Melanchthon at first

agreed with Luther about the radical nature of original sin, and both agreed that, apart from the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit in word and sacrament, people are unable to respond to God. Nevertheless, in 1535 (edition of the *Loci Communes Theologici*) Melancthon modified his position (Kilcrease 2017, 600) and added the human will among the list of the causes of conversion, along with the Word and the Spirit.

To summarise in one sentence, what Justin Popović sees as the Protestant position is actually an *incomplete* Luther position, only partly correct, and the awareness of a further discussion and development of this position is missing.

## 5. Context: Humanism, Papal Infallibility

The context in which the discussion concerning Protestantism appears in Justin's writings is the discussion about humanism or, more precisely, the contrast between two types of humanism: European and St Savaist. Justin already talked about it in 1925, in an article published in the journal *Christian life*, later published in *Philosophical Divides* as „European man on an Incandescent Crossroad“ (Evropski čovek na žeravičnoj raskrsnici). (Popović 1999, 284–90; 2019, 26–35)

Justin's opening position is his observation that Orthodox Serbs live in a geographical and spiritual watershed between two worlds, two cultures, East and West. These two worlds cannot function together. Arguing from a theological perspective, he made a sharp contrast or distinction between the ‚spiritual‘ East, where a sense of community prevails and which offers salvation, and the ‚rationalised‘ and ‚mechanised‘ Europe, where a fragmented society had lost its humanity.

‚European humanism‘ is a term that Justin uses to denote an uncritical trust in human capabilities and possibilities, where humanism is a new salvific Gospel founded on man (Popović 2019, 26). We believe that when Justin says human being or man, he primarily means self-referential *cogito*, and that his words should be understood as a very explicit critique of rationalism and enlightenment. It is the *cogito* that replaced God, that »declared man to become God« (34) and became the measure of »all things visible and invisible« (32).

The results of this event are catastrophic, as he says. Many monsters »roared out from each and every pore /.../ wheezing and shaking the Earth« (26): such are futurists, decadents, anarchists, nihilists, Satanists, and are causing the apocalypse. Let us emphasise that these movements are not what he means by humanism. They are only the result of humanism – humanism is the »father« (26) of these movements. Please note that the word ‚European‘ is often omitted, as he rarely uses this adjective in the previously mentioned article.

According to Popović, the problem is that when negating the existence of God, humanism negates its own value. A model that does not include any highest value inevitably contradicts itself and if all values are relative, this leads to a fight for the highest one. Justin predicts that the only way this can happen is through total

destruction, and nihilism is therefore, the final consequence of European humanism.

Without the God-man, humans are always enslaved to death, slaves to evil and the devil, so human beings voluntarily reduce themselves to a devil-like state of sin. The idea of man as the measure of everything still reigns in the idolatrous and polytheistic unchristian world, even today and even in the Christian Church. From the fetishistic to a papist, all European humanisms are based on the belief that man is alone amid his spiritual situation. This idea synthesises the very spirit of Europe and all its goals, ideals and values (1981, 276).

Protestantism is mentioned very early in Justin's famous article *The Supreme Value and Infallible Criterion*. This highly valued lecture introduces Justin's main theological position, the key to all Christian life and existence, placing God-Man as the »fundamental truth upon which no compromises can be made« (2009, 36). Here he connects humanism with the first fall of man, his first rebellion against God »when man has driven God out« (20) from the immanent to the transcendent sphere and is entirely left with himself and within himself. At the same time, this is where he connects humanism with Christianity, with the spirit of ancient Rome detected in Roman Catholicism, no less even in Protestantism, its faithful collaborator. As Popović writes (33–37):

»In Western Europe Christianity has gradually transformed into humanism. With time and with effort the God-man has been shrunk, and finally reduced to man: to an infallible man in Rome, and to a lesser infallible man in Berlin. Thus there developed a Western Christian-humanistic maximalism—papism—which takes everything away from Christ, and a Western Christian-humanistic minimalism—Protestantism—which seeks very little from Christ, and often nothing at all. In both papism and Protestantism man has replaced the God-man as both the supreme value and the supreme criterion.«

It should be noted that Father Justin does not say that humanism and Western Christianity are the same thing. Then, as we read, they »gradually transformed« which means that he accepts that there was a period before the transformation, but he fails to give us any further information on this. We do not know when the transformation happened and what were the attributes of the period before the transformation. Further, it is not clear whom he means by a »man in Berlin«, but we know that the infallible man in Rome is meant to be the Pope, and by that he means »papal infallibility«, the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church formally defined in 1870 at the First Vatican Council.

This teaching on papal infallibility states that the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error when speaking *ex cathedra* (from his office and by his supreme apostolic authority), as well as when he defines a doctrine that concerns faith or morals to be held by the entire Church (document Pastor aeternus 1870). However, this is not so unproblematic in the West as Justin thinks. Let us just mention



that a disagreement arose among Catholics over the meaning of papal infallibility, and the dissenters, while still believing that the Councils of the Church are infallible, were opposed to the dogma of papal infallibility. Hence a schism arose between them and the Roman Catholic Church, which resulted in forming communities that became known as the Old Catholic Churches. Another example is the well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, author of *Infallible?*, who refused to accept papal infallibility as a matter of faith and was sanctioned by the Church by being excluded from teaching Catholic theology (Küng 1970).

For Popović, the dogma of papal infallibility (appointing the Pope as vicar of Christ on Earth) means that man has declared himself to be higher than God, and this is the first protest against God, the »first Protestantism« (Popović 2009, 34; 2000, 120), as he cites here the words of the Slavophile thinker Aleksey Khomiakov (2000, 149). Justin uses a play of words here, using the word ‚protest‘ in two meanings. Protestantism as a historical movement is just a second inevitable step, »papism applied in general« »whose basic principle is carried out in life by each person individually« (2009, 34).

Let us note that, for Justin, both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism share this common transfer of the foundation of Christianity from God-man to transitory man. For Justin, every Protestant is »a duplicated infallible man, for he claims personal infallibility in matters of faith. One could say that Protestantism is the vulgarization of papism, but bereft of mysticism, authority, and control.« (34) The result of this transformation of Western Christianity is that it was transformed into humanism and transformed the divine-human religion into a humanistic one. »What a tragic logic, to appoint a vicar and representative for the omnipresent God and Lord« writes Father Justin (34). Western Christianity proclaimed an all-present God as absent, and instead of him, set his deputy in Rome. The Pope usurped for himself the entire jurisdiction appropriated only to God-man and proclaimed himself as ruler of everything.

In his book about ecumenism, Justin writes more about papist humanism and infallibility, which he sees as a »renaissance of atheism and paganism« (2000, 139–51). He calls the Pope a Zeus of the European Pantheon, and more importantly, this is the event that caused the apocalypse of Europe, which has already begun (143). In this regard, he discusses the three falls of Adam, Judas and the Pope because all three share the wish to become good by one’s own efforts, but only the Pope’s fall supplemented the God-man by man (145). As he writes (149–50):

»No other heresy has so radically and so comprehensively risen against Christ the Theanthropos and His Church as papism has through the dogma of infallibility of the Pope, a man. This is undoubtedly the heresy above all heresies. It is the horror above all horrors. It is an unseen rebellion against Christ the God-Man. It is, alas, the most dreadful banishment of the Lord Christ from the earth. It is the repeated betrayal of Christ, the repeated

crucifixion of the Lord Christ, not on a wooden cross this time but on the golden cross of papist humanism.«

The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962–1965), though considered as a rebirth of all European humanisms, persisted in maintaining the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope or, as Justin writes (Popović 2000, 148): »re-birth of all European humanism, a renaissance of corpses.«

What about Protestants? Protestants are no different from Roman Catholics, as they accepted this papist dogma and applied it to the teaching of values for each man, where every human is infallible in understanding the Bible. There is no substantial difference between the Vatican and Protestantism, as Protestantism initiated the teaching about »an infinite number of popes throughout Europe« (149). Protestantism is just a consequence of the papacy. A little further in the same book, in the chapter about humanistic ecumenism, one finds a summarizing paragraph describing Protestantism, as (153): »the dearest and most loyal child of papism, blunders from heresy to heresy through its rationalist scholasticism, constantly drowning in diverse poisons of its heretical fallacies /.../ In principle, every Protestant is an independent pope, an infallible pope, in all matters of faith.«

In a sense, Justin considers the Pope the father of Protestantism and Protestantism as the final stage of papism, its child. Was he right?

## 6. Luther on the Papacy, Universal Priesthood and Interpretation of the Bible

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First of all, Father Justin does not seem to sufficiently consider that Protestantism began (also) as a critique of the papacy. In fact, before burning the 1520 Papal bull *Exsurge Domine* that contained his excommunication, Martin Luther was a pious Roman Catholic monk who had a high opinion of the Pope. He actually believed that the problem lay with the curia and those around the Pope rather than with the Pope himself. Even after publishing the 95 theses in 1517 (nailed to the door) and pleading for a public, academic dispute, he hoped to get a hearing with the Pope concerning the need to correct some moral issues and doctrinal errors.

Let us mention at least a few theses that prove this. In thesis no. 5, we see that Luther is mainly concerned with regulating the powers of the Pope, which should be under Gospel standards: »The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.« (Noll 1991, 29) The popes cannot give absolution if God has not granted it and can only act within the boundaries set by the Word of God (29): »The pope cannot remit no guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.« (6)

A bit later on (visible in his writing *Resolutio Lutherana ... de potestate papae* against Johannes Eck in 1519), Luther begins to oppose the claims of the primacy of the Pope with the primacy of Scripture. The authority of the Holy Scripture should be above the authority of popes and Councils, which means that he considers the institution of the Pope to be a historical and human institution. As there is no direct connection between Peter and Pope, Christians are not obligated to obey and follow the popes.

Still, only after his excommunication in 1520, Luther expounded his radical critique of the Papacy. His works are full of references to the Pope as the supreme adversary of the Christian faith and the institution of Papacy as a power structure that no longer serves the cause of the Gospel but exists only for the carnal interests of curia and Pope. The Pope is considered a counterfeit of Christ and, therefore, the Antichrist, preparing his final attack on the Church of Christ.

Luther's *Smalcald Articles* were already mentioned, here he speaks of the Pope's power as »false, mischievous, blasphemous, and arrogant«, mainly interested in »diabolic affairs« (4). Further, he writes (Luther 2021):

»And yet it is manifest that the holy Church has been without the Pope for at least more than five hundred years, and that even to the present day the churches of the Greeks and of many other languages neither have been nor are yet under the Pope. And the Papacy is also of no use in the Church, because it exercises no Christian office; and therefore it is necessary for the Church to continue and to exist without the Pope.«

It is important to emphasise that his critique draws on theological and historical arguments rather than on his personal experience with the Papacy.

The second point, beyond Luther's critique of the Pope, is that when Justin Popović writes about the »infinite numbers of popes«, he has in mind Luther's concept of the universal priesthood, also called the priesthood of all believers. This means that all believers are spiritually equal because of faith and baptism, and it was the reaction opposing the Roman teaching holding that clergy was of a higher estate than lay people. Luther did not have in mind only the hierarchical structure and practical issues but was especially interested in matters of faith. It is those matters of faith that should not be dominated solely by the clergy. As Carin Riswold asserts, Luther wanted to vest the power and authority to all Christian believers (Riswold 2017, 634–35).

There are several consequences of this teaching foundation for Protestantism. The most important is that while ordinary Christians share a common priesthood, they have direct access to God through the mediation of Jesus Christ (Bayer 2004, 15–26). However, this does not mean that each human being can interpret Scripture as one wants and relativise one true meaning (Christological and Messianic in this case), but he points to a personal relation to Christ without mediators. At the very centre of this teaching is the baptism (Thompson 2004, 39), and Luther returns to the creation of human beings according to the image of God (*imago*

*Dei*) and the idea expressed in 1 Pet 2:9, that »you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.«

In his essay *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, which is pivotal for his understanding of the priesthood of all believers, Luther talks about the three walls: (a) when the spiritual power is above the temporal, (b) that only the Pope may interpret the Scriptures, and (c) that no one may summon a council but the Pope? (Luther 1966, 11) Luther attempts to challenge and weaken these walls. He calls as »pure invention« (12) the assertion that Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate, while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. To that end (14): »Because we are all priests of equal standing, no one must push himself forward and take it upon himself, without our consent and election, to do that for which we all have equal authority.«

One of the major consequences of the teaching of the universal priesthood that best represents the implications of the theological assertion of the priesthood of all believers, and perhaps the one Justin has in mind, is the project of translating the Bible into vernacular languages. The reformer intended to correct what he considered to be the Catholic Church's errors and achieve this by a call to the uniqueness of the authority of the Bible. However, focusing on *Sola scriptura* does not ignore history, tradition, or the Church when reading and interpreting it. Instead, it sees the Church as the *regula fidei* (embodied in the ecumenical creeds) and as the interpretive context.

Therefore, Luther was not so extreme to deny ordained ministry, and the teaching of the priesthood to all believers does not exclude order and authority within congregations and denominational organizations. For example, Lutheranism maintains the biblical doctrine of 'the preaching office' or the 'office of the holy ministry', as stated in the Augsburg Confession in article 14 (Noll 1991, 91): »It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.«

## 7. Concluding Remarks

First of all, to state our claim, irreconcilability between East and West in Justin's writings should not be understood in the sense of geopolitics or in strictly geographical terms, but as a contrast between the European man (a style developed in Christian Europe) and the *svetosavski* man, as two philosophies and two possibilities concerning how to live the life of Christ. What Justin has in mind is not an opposition between European countries and Serbia in a political or nationalistic manner, nor opposition between Orthodoxy in Serbia and Roman Catholic or Protestant Churches. He talks in strictly theological terms, has in mind opposition between good and evil, God-man and Antichrist.

East and West are theological categories. Due to historical reasons, he sees most of the 'theological' West in the 'geographical' West, but he sees a lot of 'the-

ological' West in the ,geographical' East as well. ,European man' is not really a man who lives on the continent of Europe (West of East of Europe), but ,European man' is a metaphor for a sinful man (Lubardić 2020, 45–47). Hence, the method that Father Justin uses lies in the intertwining of the ontological-theological and historical layers of meaning, using words with primary geographical and historical meanings, but giving them theological meaning.

Therefore, it is evident that the common thing for both is sincere care for others. This is where everything begins and ends both for Luther and Justin – the soul of a Christian. Both were great scholars, but both were publicly active as pastors and preachers, as shepherds of a flock, for each the central place remains Church, liturgy and sacraments. Indeed, many differences exist: whereas Justin moved to the Church Fathers as the authority, Luther focused on an individual's relation with Christ. Luther's equivalent to *sobornost* is *ad fontes*, return to the beginnings, to build the catholicity with the apostolic tradition. Both stressed the importance of Christology: *Sola Christus* and God-Manhood; these two concepts are of the highest importance for each of them, the core of their theology.

It has been shown that Justin's interpretation of Protestantism and Luther's teaching were not errorless; that is the one thing that should not be forgotten. Still, the final evaluation must not put Justin Popović in a negative light, as one must be aware of the methodology he uses (intertwining of historical and theological categories, very typical for Early Church Fathers). Awareness of his methodology will prevent reading his words literally and fundamentalistically. This kind of reading will not only be incorrect, but it will not even be fair to Father Justin. It will prevent fundamentalist Orthodox believers from saying »Pope, Luther, all is from devil,« while at the same time preventing Western believers from saying »Justin had no knowledge about the things he was writing about.« This would not be fair either.

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