

Luther on Public Worship: Serving God and Being Served by Him

By Clif Daniell

When thinking about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, one does not often consider topics like worship. Understandably, other polemical matters, such as indulgences, papal authority, and justification, normally get the most headlines. However, Luther had much to say about the public gathering of God's people. In a sermon preached at the dedication of the castle church in Torgau, the reformer declared, "This new house should be so ordered that nothing occurs in it but that our dear Lord himself speaks with us through his holy word, and we in turn speak with him through prayer and praise."¹ Bound up within this quote is a subtle critique of late medieval Roman Catholicism. The church of the 16th century largely saw public worship as an opportunity to serve God, in order to gain his favor. It was, in essence, an exchange between the human and divine where man's service was offered and God's grace was then given.² However, Luther's comments at Torgau hint at an altogether different theology and practice. In public worship, God first serves man and, responsively, man serves him. Among the gathered assembly, there is divine activity, which creates and compels corporate expressions of faith. This main point can be unpacked by considering Luther on worship, preaching, and liturgy.

LUTHER ON WORSHIP

Nearly six months after the posting of *The 95 Thesis*, Luther was asked to further explain his ideas before a gathering of his Augustinian order. It was an opportunity for him to not only defend his claims but to further flesh them out. For this meeting, he penned what has been called *The Heidelberg Disputation*. Little is known about the specific debates that took place, except to say Luther's ideas were presented and some, in particular the Heidelberg theology professors, took issue with them. This was largely because there was less of a focus on indulgences and more of a critique of late medieval

scholastic theology.³ And at the heart of the reformer's evaluation, there was a distinction between theologians of glory and theologians of the cross.⁴

A theologian of glory attempts to approach God with his achievements in hand, but a theologian of the cross recognizes that he dare not come before the Holy One in this manner. In fact, because of his sinful condition, he cannot come at all. Instead, God must come to him, and he has in the cross of Christ. For Luther, these ideas strongly shaped his views on worship, leading to the conclusion that man is not principally a giver but a receiver in the public assembly. It is God who is the primary active agent in worship.⁵

The Active God

Mankind is natively a worshipper. According to Luther, a person either adores the creator or created things.⁶ For him, there was no third state where, out of indifference or uncertainty, one worships nothing. Neither could there be a bowing to both. Man either exercises

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1. Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe, hereafter WA), 120 vols. (Weimar, 1883–2009). WA 49, p. 588, quoted in Hans-Christoph Schmidt Lauber, "The Lutheran Tradition in the German Lands," in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westefield Tucker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 396.

2. Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," in *Luther's Works* (hereafter LW), ed. Helmut Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, et al. 53 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–65), 53.11.

3. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 215, 231.

4. See LW, 31.52, theses 20 & 21.

5. Dennis Ngien, "Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," *Reformation* 12 (2007): 1–2.

6. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans J. Theodore Mueller (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1954), 71.

faith in God or trusts in idols.⁷ In Luther's mind, much of Roman Catholic/late medieval worship was idolatrous. The churchgoer of the 16th century was to follow the prescribed ecclesiastical incantations or engage in the appropriate penitential deeds and aid would come from God. The worshipper could even be delivered from sin in this life and in purgatory by participating in the various elements of the mass.⁸ They were to simply do their best (*facere quod in se est*), and God would do the rest. In fact, he was obligated to do so. In establishing a *facere quod in se est* pact with mankind, God made himself duty bound to grant grace when 'appropriate worship' was given.⁹ Public worship, then, was an exchange, where a level of sincere service was rendered to God and, as a result, he served the worshipper.

Yet, in many respects, Luther saw this inversely—God acting, man responding. For him, the late medieval understanding of public worship was inherently a theology of glory.¹⁰ It was mankind ascending the ladder to heaven in order to speak with God and gain his favor. However, to Luther, such an idea was untenable, especially given man's bondage to sin and weakness. The reformer declared,

"How, then, are endeavors after good made by those who one and all are ignorant of God, and neither regard nor seek God? How have they a power that is profitable for good, when they all go out of their way from good, and are utterly unprofitable?"¹¹

Since mankind is so undone before a holy God, he

7. Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 5–6.

8. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 344–345.

9. Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 132.

10. Even though Luther does not specifically say medieval worship was a theology of glory, he certainly implies it given his overall critique of scholastic theology and practice, which was centered on worship. See Luther's *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* (LW 31, 9–16) and the *Heidelberg Disputation* (LW 31, 39–58). See also Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015) 60–61.

11. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1995), 280.

12. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, pp. 296, 317.

13. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, pp. 292, 295.

14. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 129–130.

15. Robert Kolb and Charles Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 28.

16. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 71.

17. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Alistair McGrath and J. I. Packer (Crossway: Grand Rapids, 1998), 157.

cannot freely choose to do the 'best' necessary to enter into God's presence for worship. He is unrighteous and so are his works. There is nothing in man that will rightly turn him to God. Even those led by the Spirit are caused a great deal of trouble by their original condition. How much more those outside of Christ?¹² Therefore, both the non-Christian and the Christian cannot do the works necessary to warrant God's favor in worship. Neither congruous (*facere quod in se est*) nor condign merit (*gratia gratum faciens*) provide a sufficient basis for approaching the divine.¹³ Medieval corporate piety, then, crumbles and collapses on the basis of man's native enslavement to sin, as does the notion that he is the primary giver in public worship. Instead, God is the active agent amongst the gathered people.

God's Service to Man

From the beginning, God has always been the one who graciously initiated service to man. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God made..." Creation itself was a free act on the part of the divine.¹⁴ In specifically making man, God gave life and original righteousness to Adam and Eve, and this was without their contribution or participation.¹⁵ They were passive receivers, and none of this changed post-fall. In fact, God's initiative only became clearer. After the Garden, man's attitude towards God can be summed up as, he does not "care for God's righteousness, nor obeys him, but all fight the divine truth."¹⁶ He is habitually addicted to the worship of false gods. Whatever pious acts in worship he may do, they do not constitute acceptable service to God. They are either done out of fear of judgment or for self-glorification. Man, then, is in rebellion and, worse, is spiritually dead in his trespasses.

He is incapable of giving service to God. But in Jesus Christ God has not left man to destruction. He has actively revealed himself as the only redeemer for mankind. The impetus was upon him to work, and out of love he did. "Almighty God did not spare his own Son, but delivered him to a most shameful death, that he might be made a curse and sin for me, a cursed sinner, that I might be blessed, the child and heir of God."¹⁷ At the Cross, Christ came to the rebel and paid his punishment. On Golgotha's hill, Jesus' death secured everlasting life for spiritually dead sinners. Therefore, God has actively served man, in both creation and in Christ, without his contribution or participation and in spite of his weakness and sin.

Surely then, he who has taken this kind of loving initiative has not suddenly switched and made it so that man first serves God in worship? For Luther such an

idea was a manifestation of a theology of glory. It was a way for men to revel in their wisdom and achievement.¹⁸ In the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther was declaring that the late medieval scholaſtic approach to worship was inconsistent with the natural identity of transgressors.¹⁹ Man is simply unable to serve God in worship without him first being served the Goſpel of Chriſt by God.

This means that a *facere quod in se est* approach to worship is contrary to the logic of the Cross. Chriſt became weak and ‘foolish’ via imputation in order to save a wayward people. Sinners are brought into the presence of God for worship through his sacrificial death. However, they can only do so conscious of their own weakness and foolishness, trusting in the work of Chriſt alone to declare them righteous. The problem, then, with a late medieval scholaſtic understanding of public worship was that it elevated man’s effort and minimized Chriſt’s work.²⁰ It promoted hubris and vain glory, while neglecting the sinfulness of man and humble faith in the Savior. It made the worshipper a theologian of glory rather than of the Cross. Moreover, it turned God into one who must be placated by man’s service, instead of the one who seeks to save the loſt. God is the

“one who gives, not takes, who offers, not asks for it ... in short, who does and gives all things and needs no one, and who does everything freely, out of pure grace and without merit, for the unworthy and underserving, yes, the loſt and damned.”²¹

He is the principle giver and not receiver. Man is the primary one being served in worship. His service is one of faith and repentance, truſt and praise. It was for worship that God made and redeemed a loſt people. It is among the gathered for worship that he continues to remind them that in creation and in Chriſt’s Cross he has served and ſtill serves them in their weakness. Yet for Luther, how does God actively give within the context of the public assembly? What does he use to serve sinners?

LUTHER ON PREACHING

On May 4, 1521, Luther found himself at the Wartburg Caſtle. For nearly a year it would be his home. In order to keep Luther alive, Fredrick the Wise had whisked him away from Worms to a location not even revealed to the prince. It would be “Luther’s Patmos.”²² While he was gone, problems surfaced in Wittenberg. After debates arose concerning whether to reform the mass, Andreas Karlſtadt, on Chriſtmas of 1521, departed from the traditional worship service. He wore no priestly garments,

altered the liturgy, and gave out both the bread and wine to communicants. These changes didn’t necessarily go againſt Luther’s personal views, but they did create commotion throughout the city. Mob riots ensued, proclaiming freedom from religious oppreſſion. Others saw it as desecration of holy things. Tension was high in the city, and it only got worse. Two days later, the ſparks that had set the town of Zwickau aflame with extremist teaching came to Wittenberg in the form of the arrival of the Zwickau prophets.²³

Over the next few months, Karlſtadt and others sought to bring even more reforms to the city. Images in worship were not to be tolerated. The Lord’s Supper was to be given in both kinds—bread and wine. Pastors in local parishes were allowed to conduct worship in a variety of ways. Doing so only caused the city to further descend into a state of chaos. By early 1522, Wittenberg was in religious and social disarray.²⁴ There was a growing sentiment that only Luther could bring ſtability. At first, Fredrick the Wise was reluctant to allow him to come out of hiding. But eventually, on March 6, 1522, Luther returned to Wittenberg with the task of reſtoring order.²⁵

Yet, what would he do to bring reform? Luther believed that some of the things being eſpoused by Karlſtadt and others were true, but they and many in the city had abused their evangelical freedom. They had sought reform by force, and thus were causing people to overlook Chriſt.²⁶ What was the reformer’s methodology for handling the chaotic situation in Wittenberg? Luther preached. One week after his arrival, he daily preached a series of eight sermons, in public worship, which recaptured the hearts and minds of the people and put down the attitudes and actions of the Wittenberg radicals.²⁷ And it is here at this moment that Luther put into practice his belief that God was

18. McCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 125.

19. See LW 31.52, theses 3, 13, & 14.

20. Luther, “Heidelberg Diſputation,” *Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 22–23.

21. Luther, *Admonition on the Sacrament of Chriſt’s Body and Blood*, 1530; WA 30, p. 603, quoted in Wainwright and Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, p. 396.

22. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 191–193.

23. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521–1539*. ed. Karin Bornkamm, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 51–52.

24. Bornkamm, 58–60.

25. Bornkamm, 67–68.

26. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 52.

27. Bornkamm, 73–74.

especially active through the proclaiming of the Word. If peace was going to be found in Wittenberg, it would only happen because the Scriptures were rightly being heralded.²⁸ For Luther, it was the declaration of the Word of God in public worship that would bring reformation. Man only has the power to speak the word, and not the ability to accomplish the appropriate results.²⁹ Only the active God can do that, and he does it through Gospel proclamation.

Anfechtungen and the Need for Preaching

With Wittenberg in turmoil, there was a need for biblical preaching. However, lying underneath the religious and social issues in the city, was a more basic problem. As discussed earlier, man's fallen condition is such that he cannot serve God in worship. *Facere quod in se est* is impossible because his status is labeled 'spiritually incapacitated.' Yet, for Luther a person's sinfulness was not simply a 'state of being,' but also an experiential reality best described as *Anfechtungen*. In one sense, this word refers to the attacks of the Devil to tempt and torture the souls of sinners.³⁰ It is his creation of noise to drown out the preached Word. Satan hates the Scriptures and seeks to either distort or distract men from its right proclamation. According to Luther, this was one reason why Wittenberg was boiling in 1522. Satan was at work misleading people and muddling the Word.³¹

Yet, *Anfechtungen* also refers to a personal struggle which includes "all the doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man."³² It is the suffering and trouble sinners endure given the general effects of the fall and one's own personal sins. Furthermore, it is the sense of angst that men feel as they come to the realization of

how undone and unpleasant they are to a holy God.³³ It is like what Jonah felt as the great fish came upon him, swallowing and taking him down to the place where there was no light and life. Overwhelmed with despair, Jonah cried out to God for salvation. So also, the sinner is overcome with misery, especially as he stands before a holy God's wrath and condemnation.³⁴

However, experiences of *Anfechtungen* do not go away post conversion. In fact, they may become more prevalent throughout the Christian's life.³⁵ This is certainly because the attacks of the Devil increase, and one's native attachment to the world does not vanish. Additionally, there is also a sense in which the believer ought to still feel despair due to his recurrent struggle with sin. He continues to sense its pull, and guilt persistently weighs him down. Doubt may even flood his mind, causing him to ask, "Is Christ really for me?"

For Luther, the goal in this life is not to rid the Believer of these experiences, necessarily. Instead, Luther's response to *Anfechtungen* is to accept it as the Christian's struggle—"a kind of seesaw between despair and hope."³⁶ It is a part of the Believer's life, one that is even fostered and fueled by preaching in public worship. As the Law is proclaimed, God is serving the Christian, by reminding him of specific sins. Convinced by the Spirit of his weakness and foolishness, his soul becomes burdened with sorrow. Through the preaching of the Law, God makes him see his need, which is a necessary preparation for the Gospel. Luther declared, "If I were to live long enough I would write a book about *Anfechtungen* without which nobody can understand the Scriptures or know the fear and love of God."³⁷ It is into this sense of spiritual angst that the proclamation of the Gospel then comes, lifting the head of the weary transgressor. The preaching of the Law brings the sinner low, so that the work of Christ can lift him up. In public worship, he is forced to honestly look inside himself and then is led to gaze outside to the crucified and risen Savior for salvation. *Anfechtungen*, hence, is stirred up and soothed by biblical preaching. Perhaps Luther believed that what was lying behind many of the problems in Wittenberg in 1522 was a more basic issue best described as *Anfechtungen*. Moreover, it seems he understood what they really needed was the Gospel heralded.

An Audible Word Preached

If the Word was the foundation of Luther's reformation, the framing of the church in Germany would take place only through its preaching. Luther believed the preached Word was the "real medium" that would bring salvation to sinners and biblical change to the church.³⁸

28. Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 68. Carl Trueman makes the same point and connections between Luther's Eight Sermons in Wittenberg (1522) and the 'reformation' that ensued. Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, pp. 94–95.

29. Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 293.

30. Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holdman, 1988), 105.

31. Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 291.

32. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 42.

33. Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, p. 50.

34. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 357.

35. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 123.

36. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 123.

37. George, *Theology of the Reformers*, p. 324.

38. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, p. 64.

Ideologically, this was in many ways similar to what the Fourth Lateran Council declared in 1215.³⁹

Since just as the body is fed with material food so the soul is fed with spiritual food, according to the words, ‘man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.... We therefore decree by this general constitution that bishops are to appoint suitable men to carry out with profit this duty of sacred preaching, men who are powerful in word and deed.’⁴⁰

However, much of medieval practice sidelined the preaching of the Scriptures. While the Word was frequently read in worship, over time its proclamation was squeezed out of the liturgy, in favor of more ceremonial elements.⁴¹ But for Luther, the audible Word declared to the gathered assembly was central. God was actively serving people through it. In his mind, words were powerful. They shaped reality.⁴² When a man and a woman stood before the local parish priest and said their wedding vows, it created a new reality—a union between them.

In a similar fashion, Luther argued that God’s Word did the same except on a grander scale. “God speaks a mere word, and immediately the birds are brought forth from the water. If the word is spoken, all things are possible, so that out of the water are made fish or birds.”⁴³ Divine speech is powerful enough to create what it has called for. And the same can be said for the Word that is Christ. His coming is powerful and efficacious for the salvation of the lost. Christ is God’s preaching to sinners that there is hope of forgiveness and new life. And his death and resurrection create what has been called for—redemption for those enslaved to Satan, sin, and death.⁴⁴ As the Gospel of Christ is heralded in worship, God is taking the initiative to humble the proud through the proclamation of the Law and then to build them back up through the announcement of the Gospel.

Therefore, in preaching, Luther says, “To be sure, I do hear the sermon; however, I am wont to ask: ‘Who is speaking? The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by God.’”⁴⁵ Through the feeble instrumentation of words, God is at work serving sinners. Since they cannot reach up to him, he takes the initiative and lowers himself in a way they can understand.⁴⁶ Through the preaching of the Word, God humbles himself, using human language to describe divine truth and to create new realities. As the Law is heralded, God brings the commands to bear upon the

sinner’s soul, and by the Spirit, makes him low. As the Gospel is declared, he lifts up the drooping heads of the guilt-laden and condemned transgressor, and he declares the one whose faith is in Christ to be righteous. For one filled with *Anfechtungen*, the greatest need was to look outside the self, to the Christ announced in the Word.⁴⁷

Given that God is actively at work through the proclamation of the Word to apply both the Law and the Gospel, Luther believed preaching was to be central in the public assembly of the church. In fact, if there was no preaching there was no real worship of God taking place, because at the heart of biblical worship was God serving sinners through the heralding of the Scriptures.⁴⁸ That is why Luther said, “Therefore, when God’s Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together.”⁴⁹ Without the audible Word being given to the people, they remained in their idolatrous state, functioning like theologians of glory. To come together without the Word being central would only further encourage the exaltation of man. But with biblical preaching being the ‘chief thing’ in the worship service, reformation could take place, because through it, God was at work.

In 1522, when Luther returned to Wittenberg, finding that a revolution of sorts had erupted, he “literally preached the Reformation back onto a steady course, winning over popular opinion and putting down radical elements.”⁵⁰ God used the Word proclaimed and worked his will. In Luther’s own words, “I simply taught,

39. John Witvliet, *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Maag and John Witvliet (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 3.

40. Canon 10, *De predicatoribus instituendis*, Fourth Lateran Council (1215), trans. Norman P. Tanner, S.J., *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington: George Washington University Press, 1990), 239.

41. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), xvi.

42. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, pp. 83–84.

43. Luther, *LW* 1.49, quoted in Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 86.

44. Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, pp. 180–181.

45. Luther, *LW* 22.528, quoted in H.S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” *The Pastoral Luther*, ed. by Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 102.

46. H.S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” *The Pastoral Luther*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 104.

47. Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 134.

48. Ngien, “Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*,” p. 10.

49. Luther, *LW* 53.11.

50. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 94.

preached, and wrote God's Word ... I did nothing; the Word did everything."⁵¹ In 1522, the active God used his proclaimed Word in public worship, saving the Reformation in Wittenberg, and likely Luther as well.

A Sacramental Word Preached

In Luther's second sermon after returning from Wartburg, he reminded them that "the chief characteristics of Christians [is] that their whole life and being is faith and love."⁵² Hence, this faith must never be endangered, and love must never compel unless it is of biblical necessity. As a negative example, Luther then discussed the medieval mass. In his own words, "The mass is an evil thing, and God is displeased with it, because it is performed as if it were a sacrifice and work of merit."⁵³ The Eucharistic theology of the late Middle Ages viewed the Lord's Supper as an offering to God from the priest. He presented the bread and wine on behalf of the people. In return, God infused grace and brought blessing upon the participants. The Supper, then, was an action initiated by man and responded to by God.⁵⁴ It was a human attempt to satisfy divine justice.⁵⁵ Once the work was done, God was placated and there was an automatic conveyance of favor. The change in status was brought about not mainly because of the finished work of Christ, but due to the sacrifice offered in the mass.

However, Luther saw this sacrament not predominantly as a *sacrificium*, but instead, as a *beneficium*.⁵⁶ He said, "The mass is not a benefit God accepts but rather one that he gives; it is not a good deed that we do, but rather it does good to us."⁵⁷ The Lord's Supper is God speaking a word of grace and love. It is his promise that Christ's death was for sinners. As a testator, Jesus was

crucified on the Cross, suffering wrath. As a resurrected and ascended "promiser," he now gives, in the receiving of the bread and wine, confirmation that sins are forgiven.⁵⁸ Christ's very presence at the holy meal assures one of an eternal inheritance that was purchased at Calvary. For Luther, Christ's real presence, then, was key. Without it, the Savior was not proclaiming the Gospel, comfort was not really being given by God, and therefore, the Supper was nothing more than a human activated ceremony.⁵⁹

But given his theology of worship, Luther understood that the Lord was the active giver in this sacrament. He was the Host, hospitably serving his people.⁶⁰ In fact, he saw it as God's preaching in a different way. Christ presence and attachment to the words of institution made it so that the partaking of this holy meal was more than the eating of bread and drinking of wine. Jesus' words "broken for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins," made the Supper effectual to accomplish its intended outcome. As these phrases were declared and the elements given, God was preaching a visible word and imparting the forgiveness of sins.⁶¹

To the soul wrestling with *Anfechtungen*, the mass, as Luther understood it, was a source of strength in the fight against the flesh, the world, and the Devil. Additionally, it was to be viewed as nourishment for the weary saint. As the burdens of living in a fallen world press in, as guilt and sadness weigh down, as adversaries attack, the Believer was to fly to Christ in the Supper.⁶² There the message of the Gospel is proclaimed through words and visible signs giving help, hope, and joy. Therefore, just as with the audible Word, the sacramental Word is the remedy for *Anfechtungen*. It comes to the sinner from outside, as God's gracious service.⁶³ It is what brings the Christian back from despair to hope. To Luther, in 1522, the people of Wittenberg needed this visible proclamation. Amid the uncertainty and ungodliness found in the city, he proclaimed, the "bread is a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy."⁶⁴ It is Christ personally and actively announcing through the ordinary means of words, bread, and wine that salvation was come to sinners because of his death and resurrection.

A Response to the Preached Word

In his seventh *Invocavit* sermon, Luther ended by saying, "let this be a warning to you, for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain.... You are not heeding it at all and you are playing around with all kinds of tomfoolery which does not amount to

51. Luther, *LW* 51:77.

52. Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 292.

53. "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," p. 292.

54. Helmar Junghans, "Luther on the Reform of Worship," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 1999): 319.

55. Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, p. 55.

56. Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, p. 27.

57. Luther, *A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass*, 1520; *WA* 6, p. 364, quoted in Wainwright and Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, p. 396.

58. Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pp. 212–213.

59. "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 220.

60. Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, p. 198.

61. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: Reformation of the Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, v. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 179–180.

62. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 146.

63. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 156.

64. Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," pp. 303–304.

anything.”⁶⁵ Why were they being chided? They were not rightly responding to the audible and sacramental Word that had been previously declared to them. God serves sinners through the preaching in the pulpit and at the Table. However, those who hear and partake are to respond with faith. It is to be their reply to God’s service in the Law and the Gospel. In public worship, the sinner is humbled as sins of omission and commission are detailed. And then, they are encouraged and comforted as Christ’s saving work is preached. Such Good News appeals for faith to be exercised.

Luther believed, as the Word in both forms went forth in the worship service, that God was actively creating new life and calling for corporate expressions of faith. There was to be a receiving and responding to the promise of God in the Cross, which manifests itself in humble praise and thanks.⁶⁶ Most definitely, the divine service of Law and Gospel is primary, but man’s response of faith is called for; in fact, it is required.⁶⁷ As man’s condition and God’s catholicism are proclaimed, confession is expected and trust in Christ is needed, lest *Anfechtungen* overwhelm the soul, ungodliness characterize the Believer, and the Devil ruin the church. When Luther returned home from the Wartburg Castle, this is exactly what he found happening in Wittenberg. Believers were afflicted. Saints were acting more like sinners, and Satan was at work.

Some of the issues Karlstadt and others were attempting to address, Luther agreed needed to be reformed. On these matters, it wasn’t necessarily what these “zealots” were saying, but how they and the people as a whole were responding to the Word of God already preached to them. There was little humility, patience, or compassion accompanying their efforts to change the church.⁶⁸ For Luther, that meant the people were not listening. And yet, what did he do? He preached, trusting that God would actively work through his audible and sacramental Word, comforting those afflicted with *Anfechtungen*, and calling for faith and the fruit of obedience. He believed that in worship God would serve his people, and they were to respond by gratefully and rightly serving him in return. With this theology of worship in hand, Luther then constructed a new liturgy.

LUTHER ON LITURGY

After Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1523, he was cautious about making changes to the public worship service. This was not the case with other more “zealous” reformers, like Thomas Muntzer and Johannes Lang.⁶⁹ They quickly established new liturgies for worship that were in the vernacular of the people. However, Luther

got rid of similar changes Karlstadt made in 1522. The following year, he did introduce a purified Latin mass for the city. Even though the preaching was to be in German, everything else in the liturgy was basically unchanged.⁷⁰ Luther intentionally waited to make further liturgical revisions. One reason was because he wanted an ascetically pleasing liturgy.⁷¹ Some of the early reforms made to orders of worship were pragmatic in nature and, therefore, lacked beauty and overall appeal. Others, were simply too conservative, dressing the old mass in new language.⁷² Composing the kind of liturgy Luther wanted would take time.

Another reason for the delay was due to pastoral sensitivity. The reformer understood that change would not come easy, especially when dealing with a medieval liturgy that people were accustomed to for such a long period of time. Luther wanted to be sensitive not to unnecessarily injure consciences. Neither did he want to “stir up the fickle and fastidious, who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off.”⁷³ He knew that following in the footsteps of “Anabaptist extremists” would only lead to disaster. History would prove him right.⁷⁴ And yet, disaster of a different kind would not escape him.

Luther’s caution to bring liturgical reform was also the result of the tumultuous times he lived in. Wittenberg had just come out of a chaotic situation in 1523. Zealots were continuing to take reform too far, too fast. The Catholic Church was still railing against him, and the persecution of Protestants was on the rise. Yet, the most disturbing was the Peasants’ War in 1525. Luther wrote, “The affair of the peasants has quieted down everywhere after almost one hundred thousand have been killed, so many children orphaned, and the rest so robbed of their livelihood that the appearance of Germany was never more miserable than now.”⁷⁵ This war solidified in his mind the importance of pastoral sensitivity and patience in instituting liturgical reform. Yet,

65. “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg,” p. 304.

66. Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 226, 234.

67. Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, p. 47.

68. Luther, “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg,” p. 304.

69. Lewis Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation 1517–1559* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 116.

70. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 34–35.

71. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 101.

72. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521–1530*, p. 467.

73. Luther, *LW* 53.19.

74. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation 1517–1559*, pp. 109–110.

75. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521–1530*, p. 399.

it also reminded him of the need for divinely directed change in the area of worship. If it is in this context that the human heart is primarily quickened and shaped by God's service of sinners, then the writing of a new liturgy ought to be of the utmost importance.

A New Liturgy

After years of work, Luther officially introduced a new order of worship on Christmas of 1525. He did not want this to become a "new law" for all churches to follow. He believed some liberty was allowable, but that love for fellow believers and sensitivity to the non-Christian should guide areas of evangelical freedom in worship. For Luther, uniformity was important for the purposes of encouraging the brethren and evangelizing the lost.⁷⁶ Hence, the German Mass should be adopted in Wittenberg, but not necessarily elsewhere. This was simply his contribution to the many orders of worship that were already in existence. However, Luther's liturgy was new and, in some ways, even unique. Elements of the Roman Mass that supported a *facere quod in se est* attitude were removed. Luther did not want the service to even hint at being a *sacrificium*. It was to be viewed as a *beneficium*, where God was active through the audible and visible Word. And yet, Luther called for and provided aides to help people respond with faith and praise. God's service and man's response were both important in the new liturgy, and this point is most obviously seen through the fact that it was in German. If the average person could not understand what was being said, then he could not receive the Law and Gospel from God, and neither could he respond rightly with faith. Composing the

liturgy in the vernacular was a significant initial step in matching up Luther's theology of worship with his liturgical practice.

The liturgy began with a hymn or psalm, oftentimes Psalm 34.⁷⁷ It was followed by a collect and then a reading from Paul's epistle, both done in a monotone chant. Afterwards, a German hymn was sung, another reading was given, this time from the Gospels, with the congregation, next, singing the Apostle's Creed.⁷⁸ Then a passage from the Gospels was preached.⁷⁹ Towards the end of the service the Lord's Prayer was to be paraphrased, followed by instruction for those taking the Supper, a collect, and then the benediction. This new liturgy put feet to Luther's understanding of God's activity and man's responsiveness in worship, and the foundation of it was the Word and sacrament. It was only as God served his people the 'means of grace' in worship that corporate expressions of faith could be created. Thus for Luther, Scripture was paramount. So much so, everything could be spared in the public assembly except the Bible.⁸⁰ As the Reformed would later say in explaining the regulative principle of worship, it was to be read, preached, seen, sung, and prayed.⁸¹ And, the most important part of the service was the audible Word. Without Bible preaching, worship was an idolatrous attempt to earn God's favor and, in the end, of no spiritual benefit. With it the worshipper is given the mirror of the Law, where the true self is seen—a sinner deserving condemnation. And then the message of the Gospel is offered, where a different declaration is heard—a saint receiving forgiveness through Jesus Christ. For Luther, as both of these truths were heralded, the people of God were reminded of their need for a Savior, that Christ was this deliverer, and, subsequently, moved to trust in him. Clearly, the preaching of the Word was meant to affect the hearer experientially, leading one from repentance to faith to devotion.

Yet, the experiential side to Luther's liturgy was not disconnected from a catechetical one. Instruction in the truths of God were important because they shaped the heart, mind, and will of the people. Specifically, the various services held throughout the week sought to move worshippers through the Decalogue, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments, stressing various heads of doctrine.⁸² Doing so would help those who wanted to be Christians to know what they were to believe, do, and leave undone, and it would further admonish and encourage those who already loved God and his Word.⁸³ This catechetical emphasis in worship was one of the things that drove Luther to create

76. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, p. 254.

77. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521-1530*, p. 475.

78. Martin Luther, *LW* 53.69-78.

79. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, p. 255-256. Luther encouraged other passages of Scriptures to be preached on throughout the rest of the week, but on Sunday the Gospels were to be the focus of proclamation since they most clearly and simply expounded Christ and his work.

80. Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 309.

81. This does not mean that Luther should be grouped in the Reformed camp regarding the "Regulative Principle for Public Worship." His was a "normative principle"—whatever is not specifically forbidden by Scripture is allowable. See Terry Johnson, "The Regulative Principle of Worship" in *The Worship of God* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor Press, 2005), 13, and Nick Needham, "Worship Through the Ages" in *Give Praise to God*, ed. Phillip Ryken, Derek Thomas, and Ligon Duncan (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), 397-398.

82. Luther, *LW* 53, p. 68-69.

83. Luther, *LW* 53.64.

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Scripture with a Southern Accent. Understanding and Applying a Southern Presbyterian's View of the Bible. Continued from Page 68.

Therefore, a high view of plenary inspiration not only explains Thornwell's inconsistency in this matter, but also *refutes* it. If we believe the Bible is God's word in its entirety, then we can repudiate Thornwell's mistakes quite easily. The Word of God teaches that all men are created in the image of God (Acts 17:26). True, slavery was regulated by God's word, but the same inspired Word also teaches that the eschatological freedom brought about by the Messiah's first coming should result in freedom for earthly citizens as well, as Paul makes clear in Philemon (Phil. 15–21). If Thornwell and other Southern Presbyterians had been consistent in their application of their view of the Bible, the United States might have abolished slavery without losing over a million lives in the process.

Finally, Thornwell's blunder in this crucial area reminds us that all of us have interpretive blind spots. Like Thornwell, we are far more influenced by the culture around us than we care to admit. If the Bible is what Thornwell argued it was, then it must serve as our authoritative lodestone for all matters of doctrine and life. We must submit constantly to its directives, some of which will be deeply countercultural. Accordingly, perhaps one of the greatest lessons we learn from Thornwell's understanding of Scripture can be stated in a question: "What are the doctrines and practices clearly taught in the Bible that we may have missed?" This is a penetrating and sobering query. I am convinced that the only way to begin to answer it is through a careful study of great men like Thornwell, both in their triumph and in their tragedy.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to make the case that a prominent Southern historian misunderstood a central feature of Thornwell's theological matrix, which is representative of the entire Southern Presbyterian tradition. Relative to this doctrine, the Southern church stood united in its view of plenary inspiration with Christians across time and space. Believers today do well to imitate their faith here. The frenzied revisionary spirit that grips the modern writing of history is a spirit foreign to this view of inspiration. For, the Bible itself offers a history that is full of brilliant, deeply flawed people like Thornwell. Like us. And the only way to avoid the errors we have observed in Thornwell's thinking is to hold the same view of inspiration he did. It is God's word alone, guiding and shaping everything we do, that can help us do better than those who came before us.

Luther on Public Worship. Continued from Page 96. a formal catechism in 1529.⁸⁴ It helped to systematize doctrine and explain God's work in Christ, while also providing clear direction on how one ought to respond to the Word. For Luther's theology of worship, this catechetical side provided the necessary biblical stimuli for experiential responses. Through the teaching and preaching of the Word, God not only created but also compelled corporate expressions of faith. In his mind, as God served man the means of grace, man was to be driven to rightly respond.

Various minor details of the service also stress this same point. In the pre-Supper admonition of the *Deutsche Messe*, Luther wanted it to be somewhat scripted. "We can't have [the admonition] one way today, and another way tomorrow, and let everybody parade his talents and confuse the people."⁸⁵ In doing this, Luther was being careful to not draw undue attention to the priest and to guard against misperception. He wanted to keep front and center the activity of God in the sacramental Word and man's humble and grateful response.⁸⁶ The readings from Scripture and collects provide another example of this point. The readings were done with the priest looking at the people, as a sign of God's declaration to them, and the collects were said facing the altar, emphasizing man's response.

Luther's use of music is also informative here. In his mind, music in worship was to be filled with Scripture, which made it and preaching generally related.⁸⁷ God was speaking to the people through words set to a tune. And yet, quite often, it was the congregation that was singing them. Not only did the music speak the Word, but it served to enable them to recall truth when struggling with *Anfechtungen*, as well.⁸⁸ When facing temptation, an illiterate believer in the 16th century would more readily remember a psalm set to a tune, than a verse of Scripture or the answer to a catechism question. Additionally, it made the congregation more a part of the service itself and added a dialogical element to worship. Medieval liturgies were largely non-participatory. The priest performed the mass and the choirs sang in order to merit God's grace for the people. Yet, in Luther's liturgy, the gathered assembly actively participated. Not only in the music, but in every part of the service. As they heard God speaking through Word and sacrament, reading and music,

84. Luther, "The Small Catechism," *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 322.

85. LW 53.80.

86. LW 53.74.

87. Paul Jones, *Singing and Making Music* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006), 3–4.

88. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 103.

89. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, p. 256.

they were led to prayer and praise and to “acknowledge sin, profess faith, and renounce evil.”⁸⁹

What made everything from the opening hymn to the closing benediction new was not so much the ‘elements’ themselves, but the theology that informed them. With the Roman Catholic liturgy on one side and the Extremists on the other, in 1525, Luther composed an order of service that reflected both God’s action and man’s response. To him, both were central and provided a unified way of understanding public worship. It was God’s action that elicited man’s response.⁹⁰ For the troubled people of Wittenberg, a liturgy like this one would lead them to consider their true condition, hear of an afflicted Christ, find comfort for their weary souls in the Gospel, and be encouraged to respond with faith. The same still rings true today.

CONCLUSION

Luther’s words at the dedication of the castle church in Torgau hinted at the core of his theology of worship. “The Lord himself speaks . . . and we in turn speak . . .”⁹¹ In the gathered assembly, God serves man and in response man serves the Lord. Public worship is first a divine activity, which creates and compels corporate expressions of faith. Contra late medieval practices, it is not a ‘doing of what is in one’s self’ nor an opportunity for ‘grace to make one gracious.’ Instead, it is “an example of divine grace in action.”⁹² Luther’s view of preaching further reinforced this point. God is at work to meet the sinner in his struggles with *Anfechtungen* through his audible and sacramental Word. But as the Law and Gospel are heralded, a response of faith is called for. There is to be an intentional reaction of humility, repentance, gratefulness, and devotion. Luther’s 1525 liturgy took his doctrine of worship and converted it into a structure for doxology; in fact, it was the foundation and the fuel of his order of worship.

In a church context where the gathered assembly is increasingly being referred to as a ‘worship experience,’ Luther would no doubt disapprove, because Modern Evangelical worship is one sided. Liturgies are dominated by human action, leaving little room for divine activity in Word and Sacrament. They are focused on man’s response without first considering God’s past, present, and future work. The preached Word is minimized, in order to provide longer music sets or more extensive choral performances. Scripture is made to give way to singing, which, given song choices, centers worship on man blessing God, as opposed to God blessing man, through

90. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, “The Lutheran Tradition in the German Lands,” pp. 396, 398.

91. Martin Luther, quoted from “The Lutheran Tradition in the German Lands,” p. 396.

92. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, p. 196.

Gospel proclamation. Additionally, the sacraments are seen as a public profession solely, to the exclusion of God declaring the visible Good News that he saves sinners in Christ and by the Spirit. These worship practices are built upon a theological foundation that leans too far in the direction of human response. Luther, however, provides a helpful perspective on and balance to the public gathering. Public worship is a service: God’s to man, first and foremost, and in response, man’s to God. The Evangelical Church in America would do well to benefit from Luther’s theology of worship in this area.

The Noachic Covenants and Redemptive Judgment. Continued from Page 162.

cultural mandate, he prohibited consuming animal blood (Gen. 9:4). It is God’s pedagogical lesson that animal blood offered in altar worship after the inauguration of the covenant of grace in Genesis 3:14–15 is the type of the final sacrifice, offered on the Golgotha by Jesus Christ as the mediator of the New Covenant. The New Covenant community, as *the diaspora or pilgrims*, is no longer obligated to abstain from animal blood after A.D. 70 because God permanently terminated altar worship and the Old Covenant order with the fall of Jerusalem.

God prohibited the killing of innocent humans in the context of his command of the new cultural mandate (Gen. 9:5–6). God’s institution of capital punishment in the historical context of the resumption of the covenant of common grace suggests that God made a proper distinction between church and state. In that sense, the prosecution and execution of criminals for the crime of killing of innocent people do not belong to the ministry of church, but are the legal responsibility of state under the New Covenant Age until the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. ■

Reviews & Responses. Continued from Page 180.

Jews and gentiles can get out of the covenant of works altogether” (139).

Part two is entitled “The Achievement of Justification,” and therefore treats of Christ’s accomplishment of perfection. Horton, agreeing with Lee Irons, rejects N.T. Wright’s definition of the Greek word “*dikaiois*” as being equivalent to “God’s covenant faithfulness,” and instead ties the term to the standard of the law. The second half of chapter four is a defense of the penal substitutionary atonement. Horton also defends the combination of penal substitutionary atonement with the *Christus Victor* theme, rightly in my opinion. There is no need for a false dichotomy between the two ideas. Christ’s death and resurrection is just as undoubtedly a substitution for our persons as it is Christ’s victory over Satan and his evil forces. However, this does not mean that there is something good about the ransom theory of the atonement (243). Here, I believe Sproul is on the better track: God saves us from God’s