

♪ Worship Notes ♪

THEME: Reformation Sunday



Luther Posting His Ninety-Five Theses

THE REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

October 31 is celebrated in Lutheran parts of Europe, and in Lutheran churches elsewhere, as Reformation Day (or the Sunday before it as Reformation Sunday; this year the 31st happens to fall on a Sunday); this looks back to October 31, 1517, the day on which Martin Luther posted his “95 Theses” onto the church door at Wittenberg, touching off what we now refer to as the Protestant Reformation.

But Reformation Day is a truly a Christian holiday for *all* Protestants, one which deserves to be remembered and celebrated; for it indeed is in many ways our spiritual “Independence Day,” as it commemorates the movement of God which freed the Church from the medieval distortions of the gospel and restored the apostolic teaching concerning the nature of salvation.

While the crucial reformation and restoration of New Testament doctrine was at the center of the Reformation, there were at the same time important changes in worship that likewise corrected some of the excesses and errors of medieval practice. (As major as the changes were,

later movements would go much further in restructuring the forms of worship, such as the Anabaptists.) Geoffrey Wainwright writes:

“The Protestant Reformers sought a root-and-branch cleansing of medieval western doctrine and its liturgical expression. They returned to the scriptures and, to a lesser extent, the patristic Church, in order to recover the original gospel for both teaching and worship. In the liturgy, they operated both at the level of ceremony, where the pruning was severe, and at the level of the ritual structures and texts, where they set about a drastic re-shaping and re-formulation.” (Wainwright, *Doxology*, 263)

Some of the most important new, or renewed, worship emphases were:

1. The Sole Priesthood of Christ

This crucial doctrinal recovery has of course enormous implications for our understanding and practice of worship. (See [Worship Notes 1.8](#)). T. F. Torrance explains:

“At the Reformation this doctrine [justification by Christ] had immediate effect in the overthrow of Roman sacerdotalism—Jesus Christ is our sole Priest. He is the one and only Man who can mediate between us and God, so that we approach God solely through the mediation of the Humanity of Jesus, through his incarnate Priesthood. When the Humanity of Christ is depreciated or whenever it is obscured by the sheer majesty of his Deity then the need for some other human mediation creeps in—hence in the Dark and Middle Ages arose the need for a human priesthood to mediate between sinful humanity and the exalted Christ, the majestic Judge and King. There was of course no denial of the Deity of Christ by the Reformers—on the contrary they restored the purity of faith in Christ as God through overthrowing the accretions that compromised it; but they also restored the place occupied in the New Testament and the Early Church by the Humanity of Christ, as he who took our human nature in order to be our Priest, as he who takes our side and is our Advocate before the judgment of God, and who once and for all has wrought out atonement for us in his sacrifice on the Cross, and therefore as he who eternally stands in for us as our heavenly Mediator and High-Priest.” (*Theology in Reconstruction*, 166-67)

2. The Primacy of the Word and the Importance of Preaching

In the Middle Ages “the sermon had fallen into a grave decline, most parish priests being too illiterate to preach; and the place of the Scripture lections had been usurped on a great many days by passages from the lives and legends of the saints. The Scriptures were not fully accessible in the vernacular. . . . Reformation was an urgent necessity.” (William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, 72)

In the Reformation, “helped by the vernacular language, the printed book and the long sermon, worship became . . . the vehicle for direct doctrinal instruction of the people.” (Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Periods of Liturgical History,” 37)

3. Scripture and Worship in the Language of the People

“At the close of the Middle Ages worship in the West was virtually the preserve of clergy and monks. The Daily Offices had been collected together into a single book called the Breviary; another book, the Missal, contained the Mass. Both were in Latin—an academic tongue since the fall of the Roman Empire. This, together with the decline of preaching, resulted in the virtual disappearance of edification from the worship of ordinary people.” (Raymond Abba, *Principles of Christian Worship*, 22-23)

The Reformers championed (aided by the recent invention of the printing press) the translation and publication of the Bible in the language of the people; and they insisted on conducting of services in the vernacular, so that the people could fully understand and enter into worship, and be instructed from the Word.

4. Participatory worship

By the end of the Middle Ages “the great central rite of Christendom had become a drama performed by the clergy in an unknown tongue, a spectacle to be witnessed, but no longer a corporate act of worship.” (Raymond Abba, *Principles of Christian Worship*, 22-23)

“[The Reformers] accomplished the formidable task of wrenching worship from the hands of the priests and returning it to the people. This, undoubtedly, was one of the crowning achievements of the Reformation.” (Chuck Fromm, “New Song: The Sound of Spiritual Awakening”)

5. Congregational singing

What had become the domain of choirs and monks was restored to the corporate expression of the people. Corporate singing became a centerpiece of Protestant worship. Luther himself composed new hymns (in the vernacular) for the people’s song, and Calvin instituted the singing of paraphrased Psalms.

6. Regular and Meaningful Communion

“At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Western Church had become a dramatic spectacle, culminating not in communion but in the miracle of transubstantiation, and marked by adoration, not unmixed with superstition, at the elevation. Said inaudibly in an unknown tongue, and surrounded with ornate ceremonial and, if a sung mass, with elaborate musical accompaniment, the rite presented only meager opportunity for popular participation. The people were not encouraged to communicate more often than once a year.” (William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, 72)

For all their debates about the exact nature of what happened during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Reformers were united in their desire to restore Communion to the people as a rich spiritual feast. In Geneva Calvin did not succeed in instituting weekly Communion as he wished, but most traditions coming out of the Reformation provide for at least quarterly, and usually monthly, celebration of the Lord's Supper (and some indeed weekly).

CELEBRATE THE "SOLAS"

A powerful corporate way to commemorate and integrate the significance of the Reformation for both doctrine and worship is to together proclaim and respond to the distinctive teachings of that movement—often referred to as the “Solus” of the Reformation, based on their Latin designations.

The following litany of readings and song responses has been adapted from a brochure originally published by Beeson Divinity School (and used by permission).

(Congregation) The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was a tremendous movement of spiritual and ecclesiastical renewal which called the church back to its biblical and evangelical roots. As heirs of this great tradition, we own afresh the principles for which our forebears in the faith struggled, and by which they lived and died.

SOLA SCRIPTURA (the Scriptures Alone)

(Leader) The Holy Scriptures have once and for all revealed to us the nature and purposes of God, the work of Christ, the call of the gospel, and the way of salvation.

(Cong.) “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” [1 Peter 1:23-25]

Song of Response:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He has said,
To you who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Sola Scriptura

SOLUS CHRISTUS (through Christ Alone)

(Leader) Salvation has been accomplished and is applied solely on the basis of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins.

(Cong.) “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” [John 14:6; Acts 4:12]

Solus Christus

Song of Response:

My hope is built on nothing less
 Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
 I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
 But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.
 On Christ the Solid Rock I stand,
 All other ground is sinking sand;
 All other ground is sinking sand.

SOLA GRATIA (by Grace Alone)

(Leader) As those who were dead in our trespasses and sins, we could do nothing to earn or deserve God's mercy. Salvation is a free gift of God's grace—His unmerited favor freely bestowed through Jesus Christ and His atoning death.

(Cong.) *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."* [Romans 3:23-24]

Song of Response:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord;
 Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt.
 Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
 There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt
 Grace, grace, God's grace,
 Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
 Grace, grace, God's grace,
 Grace that is greater than all our sin.

Sola Gratia

SOLA FIDE (by Faith alone)

(Leader) We respond to God's gracious initiative in salvation through personal trust in the Redeemer. Not by our works, but rather by faith in Christ's provision on our behalf, do we enter into the blessings of eternal life.

(Cong.) *"Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."* [Galatians 2:16]

Song of Response:

My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed;
 I trust the Everliving One, His wounds for me shall plead.
 I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
 It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

Sola Fide

Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt;
 A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out.
 I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
 It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

SOLI DEO GLORIA (Glory to God Alone)

(Leader) God has created and redeemed us in order to display the glory of His majesty and His mercy, the wonders of His greatness and His grace.

(Cong.) *“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” [Ephesians 3:20-21]*

Song of Response:

To God be the glory, great things He has done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the lifegate that all may go in.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He has done!

Soli Deo
Gloria!

See an entire Reformation Day/Sunday service of worship [HERE](#) on the WRI website and in [Worship Notes 2.10](#).

MAN MISSIONS TEN-YEAR UPDATE

A report for friends and supporters of the
ministry of Worship Resources International

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BIBLICAL WORSHIP CONSULTATION OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

PURPOSE: The three-year old *Biblical Worship Consultation* is a forum for evangelical scholarship that analyzes the practice of Christian worship from historical, biblical-theological, and pastoral/practical perspectives. Papers and discussions focus especially (although not exclusively) on corporate worship and the biblical-theological foundations for liturgical theology and practice. The consultation aims primarily to encourage academic study that promotes renewal and reform in the worship of evangelical churches and liturgical education in evangelical institutions.

NEXT MEETING: The 2010 meeting of the *Biblical Worship Consultation* will take place on Thursday, November 18 from 2:50–6:00 pm, during the Annual Meeting of ETS (for registration info, please go to www.etsjets.org). This year's topic is "***The Use of the Bible in Constructing an Evangelical Theology of Worship.***" While evangelicals agree that the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles provide a normative set of basic elements or activities in corporate worship (e.g., reading and preaching of Scripture, prayer, the Lord's Supper, etc.), how should Christians move beyond these basic NT texts to develop a whole Bible theology of corporate worship? How should the rest of the Bible inform and guide our understanding of the theological meaning of those elements of worship and the specific forms and order of corporate worship? For example, do the visions of the worship of heaven in Revelation and Old Testament texts about the worship of the people of God before Christ provide any norms for the practice of corporate worship, and, if so, what are the hermeneutical grounds for deriving normative principles from these texts?

Each of the papers will address these general questions by focusing on different hermeneutical issues:

Paper 1: Daniel I. Block (Wheaton College)

"In Spirit and in Truth: The Mosaic Vision of Old Testament Worship"

Paper 2: Peter J. Leithart (New St. Andrews College)

"Sacrifice and Worship after the Stoicheia?"

Paper 3: Reggie M. Kidd (Reformed Theological Seminary)

"Scripture's Governance of Worship in Ancient-Future Perspective"

The session will conclude with a moderated panel discussion and Q & A time

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