



On Christian Liberty

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Perhaps no work of Martin Luther's so captures the revolutionary zeal and theological boldness of his vision as 'The Freedom of a Christian'. This translation of Luther's treatise brings alive the social, historical, and ecclesial context of Luther's treatise.

On Christian Liberty Details

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Joseph Sverker says

I find Luther doing an excellent job in short and clear terms explain with biblical justification his view of justification by faith. He was accused ignoring the importance of good deeds for a Christian. But I think it becomes clear in this book that he is not ignoring them at all, he is, to his mind, putting them in their rightful place, namely as the consequence for living after one has been accepted by God through faith in Christ. I think this, if anything, is a more noble view of good deeds, doing them for the love of God and your neighbour rather than for merit. The Catholic church would probably say as well that one should not do the deeds because of merit, but that the still issue merit. However, that will be a fine line to tread for the Christian. And I also find it strange that the Catholic church would teach that good works are meritorious since already Anselm argued in *Cur Deus Homo* that there is nothing that we humans do that can so to speak "give anything to God". If that is the case, then why would God reward good deeds. They don't do anything towards him. Rather, I would agree with Luther here, that good deeds is simply the signs for a Christian lifestyle, it is the way God wants us to live and thus we should try to live that way.

An irony here, that I think I must look in to deeper is that I get the feeling that Luther is proposing virtue ethics. He states that a good person does good deeds and a bad person does bad deeds, from the Jesus' saying about the good tree and the fruit. However, that also sounds a bit like Aristotelian ethics, does it not? So while Luther is very critical against Aristotle in theology on the one hand, in questions of logic for example, and "prime mover", he seems to agree with him on the other - Aristotelian ethics.

Caleb says

Truly an amazing book. It's a short, easy read written to German lay people of that time, and it's written with the primary purpose of explaining and defending the fact that we are saved by faith alone because our faith connects us to Jesus. In one part Luther uses the biblical example that faith is how Jesus becomes our bridegroom, and when this happens all that is his becomes ours and all that is ours becomes his—just like in human marriages. So we obtain the righteousness, glory and sonship of Christ while Christ took on our humanity and sin and suffered God's wrath as if he had sinned himself. God doesn't see Christians as sinners still in need of saving, but as the bride of Christ made perfect through faith in Christ.

There is so much more I learned from this book, but I'd rather you read him than me so I'll stop there. Read this book, highlight in it, take notes in the margins and recommend it to your friends! I would recommend this to a believer of 20 years, one of a few days, or even someone who isn't a Christian but wanted to know what it means to become a one.

Ty Lukasiewicz says

Written September 6, 1520 by Martin Luther. This book entails Martin Luther's view on the Bible and salvation through faith.

In this little book, Martin Luther explained that salvation is through faith alone and not through works.

“ Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the word of God”.

He ExplainsExplains that as Christians, through faith we are able to draw near to Christ.

“Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry Abba, father. Pray for one another, and do all things which we see done and foreshadowed in the outer invisible works of priests”.

Lutheran explains that “although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought to empty himself and take upon himself the form of a servant”.

The second part of this book was Luther’s letter to Pope Leo the 10th. In it, he states that “he has never thought ill of Lio personally”. Instead Luther states: “ I have truly despise your see, the Roman curia, which, however, neither you nor anyone else can deny is more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom ever was”.

Good book to read especially for the history of religion.

E. says

I gave this 4 stars because Luther was breaking new ground--the explanation of some of his ideas is a little rough. Luther actually did not use this approach as much after 1522 or so because he had to deal with the problem of people taking his ideas on Christian liberty too far.

Maybe the most fascinating thing about the book, given current theological controversies, is the way Luther lays out his idea of justification based on marital rather than legal imagery. Just as a husband shares all his belongings with his wife when they marry, Christ shares all of his (communicable) attributes with his bride, the church. Thus, his righteousness becomes ours.

Brent McCulley says

Martin Luther, in writing to Pope Leo X, expounds upon some theological doctrines that were so thoroughgoing in comparison to what was theretofore exegetically discussed, is it any marvel that Luther was tried at the Diet of Worms and planned to be subsequently found guilty and captured (praise God he escaped!)?

In his short treatise, *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Luther defines the Christian life; viz., the Christian is a free-man, subject to no one, and also, a slave, subject and a servant of all. Luther fantastically ties in old testament exegesis from Genesis to New Testament expository from Romans in typical ostentatious Luther fashion. Moreover, he also touches on every believers right as a priest before God, with Christ as our advocate and Great High Priest. Luther is a true prophetic voice, that should still be heralded in a Christian day in age which is all sensation and no substance. A must read for all believers.

Brent McCulley (10/26/13)

Adam says

An excellent short introduction to Luther. His thesis here concerns a sacred mystery: “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.” In pursuing this paradox, Luther distinguishes true Christianity from lax liberalism on the one hand, and the oppressive dogmatism of Catholicism on the other. Carrying out this argument, of course, he promotes with characteristic boldness his vision of justification by faith alone.

Of secondary interest, there are a few very brief passages near the center of the book that will jump out at anyone curious about Luther, including: his vestigial Mariology, his criticism of the 16th-century equivalent of Christ-as-life-coach preaching, and his express disapproval of anyone using the Gospel to stir up anger against Jews.

Also, the book begins with an introductory letter of several pages which was presented with the book to Pope Leo X. The letter contains more than a few surprises for any reader resisting the temptation to skip ahead to Luther’s treatise.

Juli says

I give it a 3.5 but rounded up on the stars. Luther contends that by putting assurance of salvation on works the Christian is contradicting the work of Christ and the promises of God. Nonetheless, Luther’s conviction is that this freedom does not exclude Christians from works but rather should be the compelling reason to serve God and one another. How would my life look different if I were to live more truly out of a place of freedom? I was especially struck by the weight of Luther’s thoughts when he said, “What greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful? – that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one’s self but lying and vanity to God?”

I think our own Christian culture, similar to the one Luther experienced, often perpetuates the idea of good works needed for God’s approval, only the works today might look like quiet times, prayer, going to church, and not using profanity. Sin often becomes relegated to discreet acts based on the idea that your bank of holiness is based on things you do or do not do. I believe our culture has failed to understand the severity of sin as well as the severe mercy in God’s grace. We live in a world that is mixed with both human sin as well as God’s grace and I think this begs dialogue with Luther’s idea of Christian Liberty.

Josiphine/Tessa says

Amazing. Martin Luther's arguments have both beauty and clarity.

James says

In 1520, three years after posting his famous theses, Luther was still a monk in the Catholic Church. It was then that he wrote this short manifesto regarding the nature of the freedom of a Christian. In it he elucidates some of the principles that would become the foundation of the Protestant Reformation. He opens with a discussion of "man's twofold nature" of the inner spiritual nature or the soul and the outer bodily nature of the flesh. These two natures are in conflict for it is the inner nature or soul that is fed by the preaching of Christ that makes it righteous. He also discusses the seeming contradiction that the Christian is both free and subject to no one while at the same time in bondage and servant to all.

This short but rich text also brings out the importance of each individual being his own priest; thus laying the foundation for the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers". I was impressed with Luther's style of argument, for he argued from the text of the Bible rather than from his unsupported views. In doing so he was able to rationally support statements that seemed contradictory on the surface. Admittedly the arguments depended on your acceptance of the divinity of the Bible as God's word. However, for Luther and his audience this was not an issue.

Luther had been concerned with edicts by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church that had no biblical support. It is likely that with this in mind that on September 6, 1520 he sent this manifesto with a letter to Pope Leo X. However the Catholic hierarchy was not be responsive to Luther's arguments. In the following year he was called to appear before the Diet of Worms and was declared a heretic.

David says

Straight to the source. It seems that most reformed theologians bend over backwards to avoid admitting that works have anything do to at all with the Christian walk, while the more ancient and liturgical faiths do the same in regards to anything that has the slightest smack of antinomianism. Luther's treatise here on Faith Alone is the most concise summary and explanation of the doctrine, and it does well to rightfully comment on the necessity of works without relegating them to the dustbin of Romanism or legalism.

Short, sweet, and clear.

Skylar Burris says

I worshipped at a Lutheran church for almost four years and yet never read this. I'm glad I finally did, even though I am no longer a Lutheran. It really helped me to better understand the doctrine of "justification by faith and not by works," and I appreciated the distinction Luther was careful to make between works and a *belief in* works and his insistence that ceremonies and rituals, though not salvific, are of immense value: "Hence in the Christian life ceremonies are to be no otherwise looked upon than as builders and workmen look upon those preparations for building or working which are not made with any view of being permanent or anything in themselves, but only because without them there could be no building and no work. When the structure is completed, they are laid aside. Here you see that we do not condemn these preparations, but set the highest value on them." I also appreciated his emphasis on taking the middle ground between a laxity towards works on the one hand and a tyrannical belief in works on the other. Today, Lutherans and Catholics are not as far apart on this doctrine as they once were, and they have put forth a joint declaration on the

doctrine of justification. Luther never intended to start a new church, but to reform an existing one, and yet he succeeded in doing both.

This little volume also helped me to make better sense of the seeming contradiction between the points of views of the apostles James and Paul, though I still find their perspectives on faith, works, and justification difficult to reconcile with one another.

As far as Luther's writing is concerned, he turns some good phrases here and there, but is a bit repetitive and sometimes dull, and it's almost comical the way he insists to the Pope, basically, "Hey, I'm not criticizing you. I respect you. You and I are tight. It's just...why don't you control your whore of a church? But I totally respect you, pimp. I don't know why people suggest I'm insulting you, pimp."

Mortimus Clay says

Billiant. Someone ought to use this to reform the Church!

James Bunyan says

"A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."

Luther basically writes this short book as an exposition of these two propositions.

Banger- very helpful and a good way to get to grips with Luther and his view of justification by faith.
Loads of it is quotable!

Helpful quotes

On the convicting power of the law: "[The Laws] were ordained, however, for the purpose of showing man to himself, that through them he may learn his own impotence for good and may despair of his own strength."

On the marriage of Christ to the church: "If we compare these possessions, we shall see how estimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. For, if He is a husband, He must needs take to Himself that which is His wife's, and at the same time, impart to His wife that which is His. For, in giving her His own body and Himself, how can He but give her all that is His? And, in taking to Himself the body of His wife, how can He but take to Himself all that is hers?"

On how the good gospel impacts our hearts: "Who can injure such a heart, or make it afraid?"

On identity leading to works: "For nothing makes the person good but faith, nor bad but unbelief."

On legalists and those of tender conscience: "Fight vigorously against the wolves, but on behalf of the sheep, not against the sheep."

Frankie Della Torre says

Luther at his best! This is a classic text on the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from

the works of the Law, over against the Catholic doctrines of justification by faith and works.

Recent scholarship, however, (namely, the New Perspective on Paul) has challenged the very assumptions that shaped the debate between the Reformers and the Catholics, and has sought to redefine such terms as "righteousness," "justification," and "faith" in terms of what we find in Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period. The debates continue on! We shall see the shape of Pauline scholarship in due time. Nonetheless, this text is as important historically as it is helpful theologically.

Zeynep says

this text is so repetitive that it demands a drinking game. take a shot every time luther says faith is more important than works and you'll get wasted in no time.
