

## Lecture 31: Martin Luther and Christian Liberty

April 6, 2020

### Luther's Theme: *Liberty*

Name: Protestant Reformation – in continuity or discontinuity with the church?

Illus. Whig vs. Tory interpretation

*Which one is the correct interpretation of the event?*

### Three Issues in the Protestant Reformation

**Liberty of Conscience** – Unity vs. Uniformity

“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe” (Luther).

**Justification** – Faith Alone vs. Faith and Works

**Authority** – who has the right to decide orthodox *faith* and *practice*?

Scripture and Tradition: Trent (2.0)—Protestant (1.0)—Anabaptist (0.0)

Magisterium vs. People

Illus. Supreme Court vs. Original Intent

Definition of Church – Augustinian Church (sacraments) vs. Augustinian Grace (election)

**Sum:** Authority—Justification—Liberty (cf. Galatians, the 1520 treatises)

### Luther's Claim: *Spiritual Abuse*

Definition – binding the conscience to human authority as if to divine authority

Illus. Matthew 16 – “stumbling block”

Matthew 18 – “millstone”

Papacy – Vicar of Christ or Antichrist?

### *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility* (1520)

Three Walls of the Romanists:

1. Spiritual Power > Temporal Power
2. Interpretation of Scripture belongs to the pope.
3. Only the pope can call a council.

Response:

Priesthood of Believers

Keys → Congregation

“It was not the Church that appointed these things, but the tyrants of the churches, without the consent of the Church, which is the people of God” (Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, p. 131).

Train of Abuses & Proposals for Reform

### *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520)

Three Captivities of the Mass:

1. Both Kinds – not the bread only
2. Transubstantiation – “an opinion” not required of faith
3. Mass as Good Work and Sacrifice – both are errors:  
“They have come to ascribe to the sacrament what belongs to the prayers [the good work of priests], and to offer to God what should be received as a benefit [‘Christ Himself’]” (160-61).

### *The Glory of God*

By necessity, God alone works—God deals with man through promise, and man deals with God through faith.

### *Word and Sacrament*

The word gives the promise, and a sign confirms the word, but a sign is not absolutely necessary (Augustine).

The **Mass** is Christ's *testament* (covenant by death) with a *promise* to be believed and an *inheritance* to be received.

Do you believe—that is, do you “lay hold on the word of Christ” as your own?

Do you receive Christ in the mass “by faith alone,” not as a work but as an heir or a beggar, without boasting?

If so, you will be moved by God's “overflowing goodness...lavished” in Christ to love Him above all things!

### Assessment from the Book of Hebrews

Believers are *priests in Christ*, having a cleansed conscience and immediate access to God in prayer and at death.