

Apologetics Forum, Catalina Lutheran Church
Friday, May 5, 2023

Part 2. Michael A. Lockwood, **The Unholy Trinity: Martin Luther Against the Idol of Me, Myself, and I**, 2016

“... idolatry is not optional. ... if we refuse to fear, love, and trust the true God in any part of our lives we are compelled to construct some idol to take his place.”

Idolatry is Everyone’s Problem

- “God plays too big a part in human life for us to be able to abandon him without attempting to fill the resultant void.”

moralistic therapeutic deism

Beliefs widely held by Americans:

- A God exists who created and orders the world
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to one another
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to solve a problem
- Good people go to heaven when they die

moral relativism

- Moral norms are not fixed, but change according to individual and cultural beliefs and circumstances
- See ***On moral relativism*** excerpt

cognitive dissonance

- “... [a] theory [that] suggests that when people’s behavior challenges what they want to believe about themselves – that they are moral and rational – they will find ways to rationalize this behavior to remove the dissonance.”

Spiritual diagnosis

- Idolatry lies at the heart of all sin, and is thus everyone’s problem
- When people refuse to fear, love, and trust the true God they are compelled to find substitutes for him and all the essential roles he plays in human life

Me, Myself, and I

- The self is “the idol that lurks beneath other forms of idolatry”
- See ***Isaiah 2:7-22***
- See ***2 Timothy 3:1-4***

The Idol of the Self and Providence

- God the Father provides us with all good things
- We should not despise the means through which God has chosen to work
- We should not put our confidence in the earthly means, but in God alone
- See ***Psalms 127:1***

The Idol of the Self and Love

- God calls on us to love him above all things.
- “The nature of human beings is to love themselves more than God and all things, and to use all things including God as a means to serve their own desires.”

The Idol of the Self and Justification

- Jesus Christ must justify us sinners with a righteousness that is not our own.
- Three forms of self-justification:
 - Works
 - Antinomianism (no Law, all Gospel)
 - Justification before the court of human opinion (even for secular people, since God has imprinted a natural knowledge of himself and his Law on the human heart)

The Idol of the Self and the Worship of God Incarnate

- No one can come to the Father except through his incarnate Son, who comes to us now through the means of the Gospel.
- “Those who try to investigate God’s majesty apart from Christ’s humanity are seeking things they cannot know.”
- See **John 14:6**
- See ***Luther on Worship Through the Gospel*** excerpt

The Idol of the Self and God’s Word

- The Holy Spirit reveals God to us through his Word.
- “... the chief idol in this area is human reason, or more particularly, human reason that refuses to be enlightened and regulated” by God’s Word
- Human reason gives us the wrong picture of God:
 - Natural/general revelation reveal God’s power and justice
 - Human reason does not know the Gospel
- See **Isaiah 55:8-9**

The Idol of the Self and Repentance

- The Spirit must free us from our idols and create true faith in us.
- “Luther stresses that God must put to death one idol in particular, the self. This means destroying our self-righteous presumption by teaching us that we are sinners. It also means destroying our confidence in our own wisdom and strength. If we are to have a pure hope in God, we must be stripped of all the other things in which we trust or boast, from our works, honor, and wisdom to our property and health. That is, we need to experience the cross, which God gives us to destroy our empty pride.”
- See ***Luther on Human Reason vs. God’s Word*** excerpt
- See ***Spurgeon on God’s Word*** excerpt

Conclusion

- On the idolatry of the self → “What could be more oppressive than attempting to shoulder a burden we cannot possibly bear, the responsibility of being gods? What a joy to relinquish this burden and to come to the One whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light!”

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Selected excerpts

On moral relativism

“On the one hand, most teens and young adults in American have a strong ethos that forswears judging any ideas or people that may be different. They believe that everyone has the right to choose what is right for themselves, and that criticizing anyone for their choices is intolerant and unloving. This means that most of them react negatively to words such as commitment, duty, faithfulness, obedience, calling, obligation, accountability, and responsibility, since they judge such things to be coercive, and antithetical to the sovereign freedom of the individual. On the other hand, the same people often draw clear moralistic lines and make decisive judgments on certain matters of right and wrong, which they regard as self-evident to any reasonable person. Statements like, ‘Well, obviously you shouldn’t hurt someone else,’ or ‘It’s totally wrong to have sex with someone you don’t really care about,’ are commonplace. Furthermore, their moral relativism does not stop them from being moralistic therapeutic deists, who assume that the purpose of religion is to inculcate an ethic of niceness, which they think is not relative but common to all religions, So the researchers conclude that in practice they ‘continually seesaw, with little self-awareness that they are doing so, between their individualist Jekyll and moralistic Hyde selves, incapable of reconciling their judgments with the anti-judgmentalism, and so merely banging back and forth between them’ In practice, most of them end up adopting an ethic of pragmatic consequentialism, guided by the silver rule of ‘don’t hurt others,’ yet without much ability to analyze or defend what they are doing apart from saying ‘it feels right to me.’”

Luther on Worship Through the Gospel

“When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him. When you see how he works, however, and how he helps everyone to whom he comes or who is brought to him, then rest assured that faith is accomplishing this in you and that he is offering your soul exactly the same sort of help and favor through the gospel. If you pause here and let him do you good, that is, if you believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. Then Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift.” (LW 35:121)

“Gottesdienst [divine service] without God’s Word is Teuffelsdienst [worship of the devil]. In contrast, let everyone see to it that he is certain his Gottesdienst has been instituted by God’s Word, and not invented by his

own pious notions or good intentions. Whoever engages in Gottesdienst to which God has not borne witness ought to know that he is worshiping not the true God but an idol that he has concocted for himself." (LW 35:273)

Luther on Human Reason vs. God's Word

"No reason is so firm that it can not again be overthrown by reason. There is no counsel, no matter how wise, no thing, no edifice, no matter how magnificent or strong, which cannot again be destroyed by human counsel, wisdom, and strength. And this can be seen in all things. Only the Word of God remains to all eternity." [see footnote, p. 232]

"... the attempt to guard or to base God's order upon reason, unless previously it has been grounded in and illumined by faith, is the same as if I wanted to illumine the sun with a dark lantern or use a reed as the foundation for a rock." [LW 39:63]

Spurgeon on God's Word

"Extenuations, explanations and apologies may be produced from the best of motives. But too often they suggest to opposers that it is admitted that God's most Holy Word contains something in it which is doubtful, or weak, or antiquated. It looks as though it needed to be defended by human wisdom. Brethren, the Word of the Lord can stand alone, without the propping which many are giving it. These props come down and then our adversaries think that the Book is down, too. The Word of God can take care of itself and will do so if we preach it and cease defending it. See that lion? They have caged him for his preservation – shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes!

See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure Gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries."