**Eglise francaise du Saint Esprit**

*Spirituality Course April 29, 2020*

**Lutheran Spirituality**

Last week, we saw that the medieval church’s control of economics, politics, the military and civil society was beginning to weigh heavily on the emerging nation states and new social classes of the early modern period. In Holland, the frustration with the institutional church and its seeming unconcern with the spiritual needs of the people whom it was supposed to be serving resulted in the welling up of a new sort of spirituality: the *devotio moderna*. This new expression of spirituality focused on the interior life instead of great formal church ceremonies. It freed the bible from scholastic disputations and liberated it to be used in the devotional life of the laity. Instead of over-emphasizing an abstract theology, it tried to strike a balance between thinking the faith and living the faith in very practical ways. All of this happened within the structures of the medieval Catholic church. The ‘leaders’ of that movement never envisioned setting up a new religious order: let alone leaving the Catholic church altogether.

We’re not going to go into the causes of Martin Luther’s break with the Roman Catholic Church here. But it’s important to remember that the Reformation wasn’t a definitive and final rupture with the Christian past; a completely new and genuine way of being a proper Christian. Far from it. Theologians on all sides have often portrayed it this way. Catholics have seen Luther as a heretical schismatic, and Protestants have portrayed the Roman Church as the Whore of Babylon of the Book of Revelation. This is what happens when theologians reduce everything to abstract arguments, and don’t look at the spiritual roots of the evolution that the church was going through in the early modern period. The gospel isn’t about signing off on an agreed Catechism. It isn’t a formula that can be pinned down and used to judge others.

**Martin Luther** (10 November 1483 – 18 February 1546) was a German friar, priest and professor of [theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theologian#Christian_theology). He was an Augustinian Friar, profoundly influenced by the *Devotio Moderna* movement and the outlook of the northern Humanists; scholars of northern universities who adopted the new curriculums and disciplines of their southern Italian colleagues. Dr. Staupitz was an Augustinian abbot inspired by these humanists. He supervised Luther and heard his (many) confessions. He himself repudiated the Reformation, but is recognized as a Holy Man in the Lutheran calendar. Luther later said about him: "If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I would have sunk in hell."

The Devotio Moderna explored the two domains of what we confess – our theology – and how we live; and their practical manuals like the Imitation of Christ tried to integrate the two. In Christian studies they are known as orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

**Orthodoxy** = the right things to believe. Luther has a reputation for being very strong on this front. The Catechism teaches you what to believe. Many of his works seem like long theses on the theme of justification by faith: Lutheran Orthodoxy.

**Orthopraxy** = the right ways to behave. Traditionally speaking, this is the way in which orthodoxy is thought to be appropriated by the believer - how the believer turns what he or she believes into how he or she behaves. (In reality, the process often happens the other way around). Thanks to his Augustinian background and his connection with the *Devotio Moderna*, Luther was very close to some of the mystics in the Catholic tradition. This connection and the reflections to which it gave rise is often referred to as Lutheran Pietism.

Luther looked at orthodoxy and orthopraxy and applied it to how he saw the work of Christ operating in two spheres:

CHRIST **FOR** US

CHRIST **IN** US

**Lutheran Orthodoxy**: Luther's emphasis on salvation by grace through faith, his strong Theology of the Cross and his talk of sanctification mean that we often understand his belief in Christ as being in a Christ who objectively does something for us. The great slogan of Lutheranism and the Reformed Church is “Salvation through grace by faith, not by works!” still dominates talk about Reformed piety. Christ imputes righteousness to us: it is attributed as a merit transmitted to us by Christ. The individual Christian has done nothing about it him or herself. All the Christian needs to do is to take hold of the promise of forgiveness offered in the Bible. Don’t think for a moment of the 'movements of the soul' which fluctuate unpredictably. This has nothing to do with your emotions! It is sometimes referred to as 'forensic justification'. We know about our salvation - it is a matter of pure cognition.

**Lutheran Piety:** Focuses on the indwelling of Christ, an indwelling that can only be seen 'with mystical eyes'. This is less about Christ doing something for us and more about Christ doing something in us. We know about our salvation not through cognition, but because of the Spirit living in us and helping us to understand. There is a huge difference between knowing something and understanding something. (Eliot) The Holy Spirit takes something that we know, and turns it into something that we understand. That process is inward, personal and subjective. It’s a sort of existential wisdom, not a cognitive, cerebral wisdom. Luther tried to put it this way: "A theologian is molded by living: - no, rather by dying and being judged, not by conceptualizing in itself or by study or speculation. Negative theology - that is true cabala - is very rare. It is too perfect and lies beyond all thought. But not even the affirmative theology can be treated by disputation and numerous words. It rather moves in the highest repose and silence of the mind, as in rapture and ecstasy. That makes for a true theologian."

He made a distinction that he often used to lampoon the people he disagreed with or compliment the people he liked. He called the former Lese meister - masters of reading (the sophists, the scholastics, the humanists) and the latter Lebe meister - masters of living (the true Christians, the mystics)

One of the greatest tragedies of people's idea of Luther is that **the confessional, intellectual aspect of his thought has prevailed over his reflections on the inward or 'spiritual' aspects of his thought**. Most people who write about him downplay his connection with the mystics and emphasize his break with what they call the 'works spirituality' of the late Medieval period. (Pilgrimages, masses, confession, indulgences, rosaries etc ) Why have they done this?

**Certain factors have led to this situation.**

1. Some of it is Luther’s fault. A lot of his preaching and writing was directed against his opponents: and he exaggerated their emphasis on ascetical practices and said that salvation came from outside ourselves, not from inside ourselves. It’s not about the human person, it’s about something objective: what Christ has done FOR us.

2. People want to downplay the idea of Luther as a mystic. "In defense of Protestantism, one endeavors to prove an absolute contradistinction between the Catholic-Mystical and the Lutheran-Evangelical." Many Protestants view mysticism as suspect and even heretical. They ascribe it to Roman Catholics and extremist Pietists in their own tradition.

3. Every time people scent mysticism in Luther's sermons or commentaries, they take away the intuitive and experiential content of his words and just interpret them as a description of an objective reality. Whenever they come across words like ‘mystic union’ in Luther, they say that it really refers to the righteousness that Christ’s saving act on the cross has imputed to us – the grace that our faith claims for itself. They say it refers to a propositional truth; not a so-called subjective mystical or experiential relationship with God.

4. After Luther died, he was read through the lens of the enlightenment thinkers who followed him: not by the mystics or the people who wanted to explore the ‘spirituality’ side of his faith. Descartes (1596 - 1650 I think therefore I am) Newton and the clockwork universe (1642 - 1727) and Kant's (1724 - 1804) idea that metaphysics covers an unknowable field that can't be described or analyzed in any scientific way. The Enlightenment took over Luther's thought and downplayed the late Medieval Mystic that lay behind it.

Luther was trying to translate into meaningful theological language a radical spiritual experience of Christ's justifying presence. He quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, all of whom were mystics. For Luther, mystical theology simply means an experience of God; however or whenever that comes. Mystical theology is of an experimental and experiential kind. It is what prayer leads to. It is heart rather than head, but never one without the other. "Our trouble with Luther's mystical utterances is that we let the theoretical understanding, the urge for all-embracing theological-logical theorems, so overwhelm the religious quest that **intuition, inspiration, intimation and feeling** are not given their due."

**Angels:**

Luther seems convinced that faith always moves into dimensions not approachable by reason and logic, but available to inner experience. He is convinced that there is a supernatural and supernormal realm. He held angels in very high esteem. "We Christians should have the sure knowledge that the princes of heaven are with us, [and] not only one or two, but a large number of them as Luke records (2.13) that a multitude of heavenly host was with the shepherds. And if we were without this custody, and God did not in this way check the fury of Satan, we could not live for one moment." "At death I know not where I am to go; but my guides, the holy angels, know it well"

**The Bible**

Luther speaks of the 'outer word' and the 'inner word'. The Bible and the Logos. The forensic outer word remains dead if the Spirit doesn’t begin to speak inside the world to a person's heart. "I bring to my mouth the goblet in which there is wine, but I don't press the goblet down into my throat. So it is with the word that brings the voice of God... It falls down into my heart and comes alive.” He was determined not to mistake the goblet for the wine; he was no Biblical Literalist in the modern sense. The Word is like a photograph that contains the Spirit of God. The Word in Scripture vibrates with the energy of the spirit of the one who spoke it.

**Christ**

There is a difference between the Historical Christ and the mystical Christ. Christ is historical in the sense that he appeared in history, walked on earthly roads and is the center of the scriptural record. But the same Jesus Christ is also the Mystical Christ. He is more than just an influential memory. He is the Cosmic Lord and Mystical presence. Some followers of Luther speak of Christ-for-you – (the forensic Christ – what Christ did on the cross) as the basis of faith, almost to the exclusion of a Christ-in-you. If this superhuman Christ is exaggerated to the Nth degree as the Great Savior, then humans are correspondingly denigrated - you end up with a very low anthropology. but Luther talks about us being formed in Christ, or even Christ being formed in us. He re-published the *Theologia Germanica* which uses the word divinization to describe this process. (Written by an anonymous German author in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Calvin and the Reformers rejected it, calling it a work of Satan) Christ was a loving and protecting presence, working through the angels.

**Church services**

Order is necessary, but it shouldn't obscure the Gospel. "If the Elector will let the Gospel of Jesus Christ be clearly preached, why, have your procession in the name of God, carry a silver or golden cross, and wear a chasuble or a surplice of velvet, silk or linen. If your lord the Elector is not content with one chasuble or surplice, put three of them; as did Aaron the High Priest. And if your Electoral Grace is not content with one procession, then go around seven times, as did Joshua with the children of Israel. Such matters, as long as they are not abused, do not add to or take anything from the Gospel. But they must not be made a matter of necessity for salvation." Luther criticised the "Ceremoniacs", and claimed that Christ could be found anywhere. Adiaphora.

**Morality**

Prayer more than ideas empowers Christians to act as upholders of life and the moral order. It is because of the prayers of Christians that all good things happen in the world. Four strands - a prayer garland: Instruction / Thanksgiving / Confession / Prayer. He speaks of the Lex Orandi The law of those who pray as opposed to the Lex Credendi, the law of the believers. The Ten Commandments are there only to remind us of what we can't do - not to tell us how to behave.

It wasn’t as if all this was forgotten after Luther died. Some people took up his mystical thought and wove it into books that had a huge influence over the spread of Lutherism in Scandinavia. Johann Arndt (1555-1621) wrote *True Christianity* and Christian Scriver (1629 - 1693) wrote The Soul’s Treasure. These are still read in Lutheran churches and they’re part of the daily worship in lots of Lutheran homes.

Practicum

Luther had a friend who was a master barber named Peter. Peter needed some help praying, and Luther wrote him a little essay. It begins like this:

“When I feel I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts… I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word for word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.” He recommended that Peter begin and end the day with a simple prayer or a little bible reading.

Morning Prayer: A recitation of the Creed or the Ten Commandments. This can be done kneeling or standing with hands folded and eyes directed towards heaven. They say the Lord’s Prayer slowly, petition by petition. Here’s an example. When we say “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” we might think along these lines:

“O dear Lord, God and Father, enter not into judgment against us, because no man living is justified before you. Don’t look upon how good or how wicked we are, but only on your infinite compassion. Give forgiveness to those who have wronged and harmed us. We are not helped by their ruin; we would much rather that they be saved with us. Amen.” He also told Peter that a person who forgets what he has prayed has certainly not prayed well. Just as a barber must concentrate on what he is doing lest he cut his customer, how much more does prayer call for concentration if it is to be a good prayer!

For each petition, think of them in one of four ways:

Instruction

Thanksgiving

Confession

Prayer

He calls these fours strands, that when they’re woven together become a wonderful garland of praise to God.

Take for example the commandment “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods but me.”

Instruction: God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things. My heart mustn’t build on anything else: wealth, prestige, wisdom, might or piety. Only God.

Thanksgiving: This God has come to me unasked, unbidden, and unmerited. He has offered to be my comfort, guardian, help and strength in time of need. How can we thank God enough?

Confession: I acknowledge my ingratitude for having shamefully despised such teachings and such a precious gift. I repent of my idolatry and ask God for his grace.

Prayer: Help me by your grace to learn and understand your commandments more fully every day and to live by them. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again seek after other gods or other consolations on earth or in any other creature.

“The mind, once it is seriously occupied with a matter, be it good or evil, can ponder more in one moment than the tongue can recite in ten hours or the pen write in ten days. There is something quick, subtle and mighty about the mind and soul.” So improve on these four aspects if you can!

Begin by praying the Lord’s Prayer reflectively, petition by petition. If you find your reflections a bit thin, don’t be discouraged. Just pick one that speaks to you more than another, and work with that. Reflect back on when you first learned or heard the prayer. How have your opinions and experiences changed reading it now? What KIND of prayer do you pray when you reflect on the moral imperatives of the Lord’s Prayer (as we forgive those who trespass against us, Lead us not into temptation…. Etc)

A note on the Creeds. Do you see them as something that require your doctrinal and intellectual assent? Or do you read them as a guide for devotion and practical commitment?

Works and grace.

The law is there to tell you what you can’t do. Expectations placed on you by others. Expectations you place on yourself. How much have you accomplished in confinement? Have you invented Calculus? Or discovered a new planet? Sorted out something or cleaned something every day? These expectations are there quite often to remind us of what we can’t do: rather than laws to obey if we want to be perfect. We are already delivered. The Ten Commandments weren’t delivered before the Israelites became free; they were delivered afterwards. They are not a set of rules for moral behavior: they are a description of what a healthy and free relationship between God and the people might look like. Give yourself some dignity. Rely on God, not expectations.