

Martin Luther: sacramental practices research paper

[History](#), [American History](#)



Theology has transcended ages since the beginning of the 16th century. As a matter of fact, Theologians such as Martin Luther came out as strong believers who would preach with inspiration and self conviction. The conviction was based on the ' unjust' doctrine of the Catholic Church at that time and the then limited bible.

As a catholic priest, Martin Luther became a respected minister among the conservatives and the deity who had control of political direction of the state and social views on supernatural. However, this was to change in the dawn of the 16th century with the emergence of a fresh approach adopted by Martin Luther.

Thus, this reflective treatise attempts to explicitly identify the roles of Martin Luther, his ideologies, development, and practices in the Catholic Church Sacraments in his life time. Besides, the paper discusses the results of the 16th century Protestant Reformation facilitated by Martin Luther who is believed to have been the catalyst of the same. Moreover, the paper concentrates on roles of Martin Luther especially in the act of offering Catholic Church Sacraments.

Martin Luther is described as a great pillar of the protestant transformation faith. In order to understand his character, it is important to reflect on his active participation in the Catholic Church as a priest who was empowered by the church leadership to lead a congregation in sacrament practices. Reflectively, it is critical to review his stand on faith, salvation, grace, and good works following the release of his famous 95 theses.

In his view, Martin Luther defines faith as a substance of full reliance on only God and that man is but a subject in the salvation ladder. Man is therefore is a custodian of salvation and not necessary the owner of the same. According to Marius (1999):

In Reformed Theology, the Lord's Supper and Baptism are sacraments, which are external signs by which God seals the promise of goodwill toward people in order to sustain the weakness of faith inherent in humans, and which operate as testimony of the piety of believers toward God. (Marius 89)

Therefore, man must internalize the self conviction faith, that is, only God has the sole power to save him from every form of sin.

Martin Luther believed that sin imprisoned mankind and made him unable to really redeem himself from the yoke of trespasses. This was the basis for his rejection of the sacrament of confession, sale of indulgence, pilgrimage, elaborate Catholic mass ritual, and prayer to saints.

Interestingly, this belief was a direct opposite of his upbringing noting that he was brought up as a staunch Catholic by his Catholic parents. Therefore, Luther was always in a constant conflict with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church doctrines which suggested the opposite, that is, man can redeem himself from sin through confession to a priest who had the capacity to intercede for forgiveness of sins.

In the thought of Luther, this was wrong and misleading to the population practicing Christianity which he described as a personal and internalized

relationship with Christ as the only true savior. As a result, Martin Luther opined that man has not control over his destiny but is rather a subject and a custodian of faith. Actually, the notion of faith kept this liberal priest from despairing against the reality at that time.

Martin Luther remains to be the most inspirational figure in the quest for reformation of the church which commenced in the 16th century. His religious steadfastness inspired many people who found solace in the alternative approach towards serving the supernatural being.

In most of his preaching messages, Luther was steadfast in opposing 'good works' and reminded his congregation of then aspect of faith as an accompaniment of salvation. Without faith, Luther contended that salvation is meaningless and but just a tool for satisfying greediness of mankind in his quest to elevate himself in a state of being an object of worship.

Martin Luther has always been a controversial figure as viewed by the many modern denominational Christians. He is accredited for having castigated a systematic fragmentation of the Christendom which further exacerbated it to splintering into series of denominations that have spread across the globe.

Through expunging the bureaucratic and corrupt church system of his time, Martin Luther succeeded in inspiring the church to turn back to biblical root by his preaching on only two sacraments, that is, Lord's Supper and baptism which are symbolically represented in the Old Testament by Passover and Circumcision. In exercising sacrament practices, Martin Luther introduced then aspect of reformed theology. According to Tracy (1999):

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Reformed theology refers to the exclusive use of scripture to support theological positions. As a result, the New Testament contains passages that support the general position of Reformed Theology that the Lord's Supper and baptism are derived from Passover and circumcision.

In addition, the New Testament indicates that the Lord's Supper and baptism are imbued with additional meanings and implications that are not present or considered in the Old Testament, which are indicative of the covenant relationship that the faithful form with Christ. (Tracy 137)

The most significant materials that aided the process of transformation into the two sacraments as supported by Luther were his famous Ninety-Five Theses collection which disseminated clear and well researched messages to the congregation. However, " his message of salvation through the unmerited grace of God was not readily accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, in part because it undermined the authority they exercised through the priests and the administration of the sacraments" (Marius 98).

Luther distanced himself from the Roman Catholic's practice of confirmation as part of the Christian sacrament. However, he had no problem with the same especially when practiced as a rite. In one of his well presented sermons, Martin Luther was categorical on the periphery of this practice by asserting that "...if every pastor examines the faith of the children ...lays hands on them, and confirms them" (Luther 9).

Therefore, Luther's article on Small Catechism which was basically meant for children was actually in support of confirmation as a right and it prepared parents to embrace the same on their children.

Specifically, Martin Luther was among the first person to approve in full the 1540 Brandenburg Church Order which was written by Bugenhagen Johannes which dwelled on confirmation and church governance by Episcopal (Wright 67). Besides, Luther showed a great recognition for the Melanchthon's 1545 Wittenberg order for the church.

Interestingly, this order supported the doctrine of empowering pastors and priests to lay hand on children and confirm them as a rite of passage in the church (Marius 45). Generally, Luther attempted to present a very specific and neutral treatment of this issue in his paper, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

I wonder what could have possessed them to make a sacrament of confirmation out of the laying on of hands, (Mark 16: 18; Acts 6: 6, Acts 8: 17, Acts 19: 6) which Christ employed when He blessed young children, (Mark 10: 16) and the apostles when they imparted the Holy Spirit, ordained elders and cured the sick, as the Apostle writes to Timothy, " Lay hands suddenly on no man." (1Timothy 5: 22)

Why have they not also turned the sacrament of the bread into confirmation? I do not say this because I condemn the seven sacraments, but because I deny that they can be proved from the Scriptures. (Luther 13)

Thus, Martin Luther concluded that the practice lacked divine aspect and connection but was merely a church doctrine which is void of faith sacrament because the practice could not save a soul from the prison and dungeon of sin that had gripped mankind. According to Luther, a divine sacrament must contain the aspect of promised salvation through faith and believe in the sole power of redemption from God and not mankind who are mere custodians of salvation.

Different from the divine sacrament, Luther opined that the one practiced by the Roman Catholics at that time contained elements or circumstances leading a person to anticipate a feeling of exceeding psychological and physical demands on ability to comfortably cope up with pure salvation. Besides, it offered unrealistic consolation in the face of sin as mankind was convinced by the leadership of the church to believe in salvation from mankind. He concluded that:

Confirmation and Extreme Unction are rites received from the Fathers which not even the Church requires as necessary to salvation, because they do not have God's command. Therefore it is not useless to distinguish these rites from the former, which have God's express command and a clear promise of grace. (Luther 16)

Though faith is meaningless without guidance from fellow human beings, balance between doctrinal rites and divinity is necessary. As a remedy, Martin Luther proposed that his congregation should rather concentrate on

the sacrament of baptism and celebration of the last supper since these two had biblical roots in them.

However, practicing other sacraments such as the confirmation would serve the purpose of bonding mankind especially when the same was given the approach of a church rite. As a result of this clarification and relation to the bible, Martin Luther was able to influence the lives of many European Christians to undergo radical changes in belief patterns on the aspect of faith in salvation and divine control in order to make a sacrament valid.

He opines that “ lying on of hands as there was in apostolic times, whether we called it confirmation or healing! Hence it is sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies, such as the blessing of holy water and the like” (Luther 06).

Following these revelations, European Christians experienced systematic changes in the political, personal, social, and cultural systems which were controlled by theological realms before. Specifically, musical composition for worship became diverse as people integrated diversity in worship.

Besides, financial accountability was more profound as the leadership of the church was held accountable for every penny spent unlike the free style model adopted by the Roman Catholic. Generally, these transformations were accompanied by liturgical language as translations were made available to the congregation in addition to the ‘ singing church’ concept as opposed to conservative worship (Marius 78).

Since the transformation empowered transformation followers to read bible translation in their own languages, the influence and power of the catholic priests at that time dwindled considerably as the lay Christians could get first hand understanding of the scriptures as opposed to non objective or biased interpretation by the Roman Catholic priests.

In addition, the aspect of divine sacrament empowered these Christians to independently study the bible in native languages, pray and repent directly to God without unnecessary intermediary medium, and give alms based on personal conviction (Kolb 56).

In retrospect, Luther's intention was to let the clergy to perform the priestly role of sacrament administering. " While Protestants argued for this priesthood being scriptural and providing for individuals to personally have a relationship with God, the result was not a rise in Biblical literacy among the lay population, despite Luther's support for education of the youth" (Kolb 60).

However, the general control and dominance displayed the priests on the congregation dwindled as more people rejected the priesthood doctrine which was viewed as imposing confraternities, charities, and monastic orders.

Through initiation of active reforms in the church, Luther's intention was specific and long term. By proposing transformations such as presence of a reparation altar, priesthood, and canon embedment of church sacraments,

Luther wanted to maintain the status quo by supporting the aspect of delegating the duty of sacrament practices solely on the priests or pastors.

Among other practices Luther advocated besides the sacrament model was the communion and the presence of the image of Jesus Christ physically attached to the altar where sacraments were offered (Wright 23).

Luther's endeavors on transformations paid off with conception of the autonomous Western Europe absent from the Roman Catholicism cord of the seven reparations. As asserted by Kolb (1999):

the division of Christianity in Western Europe can in part be traced to the loss of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which, with a pope to serve as God's representative on earth, the vicar of Christ, had acted with the College of Cardinals to keep Christianity, at least in Western Europe, doctrinally unified under a particular institution. (Kolb 42)

Reflectively, as more people embraced Martin Luther's ideology, Roman Catholic lost its single authority to diverse traditions that embraced the reformed Christian faith. This was characterized by numerous religion based war in protest of the martial realm imposed by the powerful Roman Catholic establishment.

Though these conflicts were detrimental, that is, they resulted in internal displacement and political instability, the overall effect was eradication of the Catholic dogma as revelations on divine path to salvation surfaced.

Protestants were empowered to question certain practices and draw

inferences from the bible which translated in their native languages. In fact, “ It was the question of salvation, as well as others, such as the necessity of the sacraments, which separated the various Christian sects for centuries” (Tracy 71).

The root of religion based war can be traced to varying ideology on views as proposed by Martin Luther and those that were internalized by the Roman Catholic establishment which had an almost monopolistic control over religious roles on mankind.

Actually, “ Luther considered the Church corrupt and in need of extensive reform and the Church believed Luther was a heretic since his teachings regarding the papacy contradicted their own and threatened their claim to Papal supremacy” (Tracy 75). The differing ideology attracted a good number of converts to protestant front headed by Luther. These converts were disillusioned by the deep rooted culture of corruption and misappropriation in the Roman Catholic churches.

As a result of Luther’s revolutionary messages on freedom and the joy of self conviction, many converts made substantial step towards quest for economic and political rights. Surprisingly, drawing his conviction from the bible, Luther was against use of force to liberate the body from physical harassment because such action would jeopardize the noble course of goodness to mankind since it had no divine aspect but was guided by emotions. According to Wright (1982):

The Peasant Revolt of 1524-1525 was condemned by Luther as unchristian and he lent his support to the princes as they put down the rebellion, killing thousands of peasants. While there were pertinent political necessities involved in Luther's condemnation of the revolting peasants, his theology regarding the Two Kingdoms, the theological status of Christians and non-Christians, influenced his position as well. (Wright 98)

Luther used this opportunity to justify his movement as based on revolution against unjust acts as opposed to disobedience to authority which was the pivotal point of the Peasant Revolt. Just like the sacrament, this revolt has no divine aspects but was a justification of hunger and human opinion same as the confirmation sacrament.

Overtime, Luther's efforts paid off as his ideology of afterlife available for reformed Christians penetrated religious circles. People begin to question the origin of the seven sacraments and their divine significance in the lives of those who follow them. Basing his defense from the bible, Luther identifies only two sacraments as those that have spiritual benefit to Christians, that is, the last supper and baptism.

While dismissing other sacraments, Luther proposed that these sacraments were only permissible when practiced as a rite among mankind.

Interestingly, Luther embraced the role of priest in administering sacraments and proposed to maintain the image of Jesus on the sacrament altar.

Among the seven sacrament practices carried out by the Roman Catholic churches, Martin Luther rejected the sacrament of confession, sale of

indulgence, pilgrimage, elaborate Catholic mass ritual, and prayer to saints as based on principles of human gratification. However, he embraced the sacrament of the last supper and baptism as having roots in the bible. Luther further categorically classifies the five sacrament rituals as those lacking divine inspiration since salvation was only possible by faith and not human practices.

Interestingly, this belief was a direct opposite of his upbringing noting that he was brought up as a staunch catholic. His ideology of transformation embraced diversity and facilitated liberation of the Western Europe from the thread of the Roman Catholic establishment.

As a matter of fact, these systematic proposals facilitated a century old transformation that swept across the continents of the world and climaxed with the establishment of the Lutheran church. As a better alternative, followers were convinced that the sacrament of baptism and last supper are ideal as compared to the other five which merely glorify the sinful mankind and deny faith a chance in the spiritual conviction.

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