

HOMILETICAL DEVELOPMENT FROM A FIRST TO A SECOND GENERATION REFORMER. A COMPARISON BETWEEN MARTIN LUTHER AND JOHN CALVIN

GABRIEL MIREL ALBU*

ABSTRACT. The return to the authority of the Scripture is the key point of the Reformation. The centrality of the Bible has an essential role in the significant shift in the way preaching was done. During the Reformation, the dull preaching of the past became a new, invigorating calling. The comparison that we envisage between two of its great agents, Martin Luther and John Calvin will prove the homiletical development in the Reformation period.

KEY WORDS: preaching, development, Reformation, Luther, Calvin

Introduction

The Protestant movement appears in the so-called dark age of the late medieval period. The Reformation was, debatably, one of the most significant turning points in the world's history. Martin Luther and John Calvin are the Reformation's two key figures, representing the first-generation and second-generation reformers. Starting with the Protestant Reformation, there was a significant emphasis on preaching. This emphasis did not develop itself; instead, the Reformation's socio-religious context shaped the focus on preaching.

Thus, on the one hand this paper is an overview of the social and religious context of the Reformation. The next natural step in analyzing the homiletical development between Luther and Calvin would examine their education, personality, and influences over time. Since the Holy Spirit is working in the proclamation process, the preaching does not change its application. God uses human vessels to reveal the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ. On the other hand, this study is a comprehensive analysis of the preaching of both Reformers. The first step in this chapter will be to analyze the view of God, Scripture, and preaching. The next phase will examine the calling, preaching frequency, sermon preparation, and proclamation style.

* GABRIEL MIREL ALBU is Ph.D. candidate at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, specializing in Practical Theology and Preaching. E-mail: gmalbu01@mabts.edu.

This preaching comparison between a first-generation and a second-generation Reformer will show, in the end, the importance of the Gospel proclamation in the Protestant Movement.

The Context of the Reformers. Luther and Calvin

Many factors shape a person's character, like family, education, or cultural context. When approaching the preaching of Martin Luther and John Calvin, there is no surprise that each one of them had his character shaped by those categories. Many scholars describe Martin Luther as a first-generation Reformer, while John Calvin is a second-generation Reformer (George 2013: 365). Timothy George portrays the Reformation period as being "an era of transition, characterized by the emergence of a new kind of culture that was struggling to be born even as the old one was still passing away" (George 2013: 309). Indeed, the late medieval period was a very dark age, and many events prepared and paved the way for the Reformation.

In what the social context is concerned, the European continent experienced a great crisis generated by multiple wars, long-suffering, famine, and different plagues. The hunger was so deep that the poor people were desperate to survive, so much so that the "corpses of executed criminals were cut down from the gallows and eaten" (Nauert 1981: 8). Not only were families affected by the famine, but other diseases like the bubonic plague, or Black Death, wiped out one-third of the entire European population (McGrath 2001: 15). The invention of the gunpowder cannon contributed substantially to the significant number of deaths in war (George 2013: 460).

Religiously, the European population found themselves in a dark age, but at least they could find refuge in the Church. That was more easily said than done since the ecclesial context was not where people might find encouragement. Alister McGrath characterized the Fifteenth-Century as the period when the anti-clerical movement knew a significant increase in popularity (McGrath 2001: 27). The corruption and the moral depravation within the Catholic Church increased the distrust of the people in the clerics. One of the triggering points of the reformation was the preaching of indulgences by John Tetzel. In his preaching, Tetzel offered an escape from purgatory for their loved ones in exchange for a donation for St. Peter cathedral in Rome. Tetzel taught: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, /The soul from purgatory springs" (Bainton 2014: 61).

Another significant event was the so-called Babylon Captivity of the Church when the papacy relocated to Avignon, France. Further, when two and later three popes claimed simultaneously to be the church's supreme head, the Great Schism disillusioned many Europeans (George 2013: 635). In the end, Emperor Sigismund influenced the Council of Constance (1415) to resolve this controversy by rejecting all three popes and electing a fourth

one, Martin V (Lampport 2017: 152). Before the Reformation period, in this gloomy socio-religious context, there were a couple of “forerunners of the reformation,” including John Huss and John Wycliffe, “the morning star of the reformation” (George 2013: 660). King Sigismund offered a safe-conduct to John Huss to attend the Council of Constance, but he was arrested and sentenced to be burned at the stakes when he arrived in Constance (Britannica 2013: 297). Later Martin Luther would recall Hus’s final words as being a prophecy that would find fulfillment in himself: “They will roast a goose now (for ‘Huss’ means ‘a goose’), but after a hundred years, they will hear a swan sing, and him they will endure” (Luther 1957: 104).

Luther was born to Hans and Margarethe Luther on November 10, 1483. Following his father’s guidance, he studied law but he dropped out soon after he experienced a bolt of lightning that struck the ground near him. In his fear, Luther exclaimed, “Help me, St. Anne! I will become a monk” (Mullett 2014: 44). Despite his father’s objections, he would fulfilled the promise and joined the Augustinian order. His superior in the Augustinians was John Staupitz, who made a significant impact on his life: “If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I should have sunk in hell” (Bainton 2014: 34). Regardless of his diligent confession, he would still feel the burden of guilt in his heart. Staupitz sent Luther to Wittenberg University to heal his disciple: “Physician, cure thyself by curing others” (Bainton 2014: 42). Luther wrestled with Augustine’s commentary on Romans and eventually experienced salvation through faith in Christ alone at the university.

Luther’s frustration with indulgences and ecclesial corruption pushed him to compose the 95 Theses, leading to direct conflict with the Catholic Church. In his clash with theologian Johann Eck, Luther suffered a defeat when he admitted that he agreed with John Hus’s writings. That setback eventually worked for his good in such a way that Luther would clarify his theology. Influenced by Augustine, Staupitz, and Hus, and having an extroverted personality, Luther portrayed his dearest friend, Melancthon, as it follows: “Master Philip, he cuts with the precision of a knife, I simply swing the ax” (Nichols 2017). Luther married, and he expressed deep love for his wife Katherine Von Bora and his children.

When Magdalena was fourteen years old, she lay upon her deathbed. Luther prayed, “O God, I love her so, but thy will be done.” And turning to her, “Magdalenenchen, my little girl, you would like to stay with your father here, and you would be glad to go to your Father in heaven?” And she said, “Yes, dear father, as God wills.” And Luther reproached himself because God had blessed him as no bishop had been blessed in a thousand years, and yet he could not find it in his heart to give God thanks. Katie stood off, overcome by grief, and Luther held the child in his arms as she passed on. When she was laid away, he said, “Du liebes Lenichen,

you will rise and shine like the stars and the sun. How strange it is to know that she is at peace and all is well, and yet to be so sorrowful!" (Bainton 2014: 331)

In a different part of the then Europe, Calvin was born to Gerard and Jeanne Calvin on July 10, 1509 (Selderhuis 2010: 9). Like Luther, Calvin studied to become a lawyer, but he soon realized God had different plans for him. At the age of six, Jeanne's death left Calvin motherless; his father's death would leave him an orphan of both parents at the age of twenty-one (Selderhuis 2010: 11).

Calvin describes himself in the preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* as "timid, softer" and with a "pusillanimous disposition" (Calvin 2012). Although he did not have Luther's sense of humor, Calvin possessed a sharp sarcasm that he often used in preaching (Lawson 2009: 27). Frequently, people portray Calvin as being a systematic theologian. The French reformer managed to systematize Reformed Theology, but he viewed himself primarily as a pastor. With a devoted love for his congregation, he was, as he liked to think, "God's watchdog" (Selderhuis 2010: 22). People that influenced Calvin's thinking started with Augustine, John Chrysostom, John Major, and Martin Luther. Guilhem Farel and Martin Bucer may also be added as an influencer of Calvin's theology. Calvin was not willing to compromise for the sake of false peace, and he was ready to criticize Martin Bucer, his spiritual father, claiming that he could act no differently: "I prefer to make my complaint against you openly rather than to suppress my annoyance and so cause it to grow" (Selderhuis 2010: 31).

Even though Luther and Calvin did not meet, Calvin had a close friendship with Philip Melancthon, and he highly esteemed Luther's works: "Even if he [Luther] were to call me a devil, I should still regard him as an outstanding servant of God" (Parker 2007: 170). In 1540, Calvin married Idelette Calvin, the widow of an Anabaptist who had two children (Charles, Judith). In 1549, after nine years of marriage, he would become a widower (Selderhuis 2010: 170). Calvin lived his life for the glory of God, and despite his long sufferings, he would stand firm in the sovereignty of God.

Centrepiece: the Reformers' View on God, Scripture, and Worship

Luther's continuous struggles as a monk show how he viewed God: "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience" (Luther, Preface, 1545). Later in his life, he indicated that his austerities had done "permanent damage to his digestion" (Bainton 2014: 26). Prior to his conversion, Luther struggled to find a gracious God, but, instead, he found a just and angry God:

Meanwhile, I had already, during that year, returned to interpret the Psalter anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skillful after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for

understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then, it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed,” that had stood in my way. For I hated that word “righteousness of God,” which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. (Luther, Preface, 1545)

It is no surprise that he eventually looked back to that period of his life by presenting his relation with God: “I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him” (Bainton 2014: 48). Luther, in the end, understood the beautiful truth of the Gospel, that “the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith” (Hillerbrand 2009: 30).

On the other hand, Calvin, being a second-generation reformer, avoided Luther’s struggles and clarified God’s doctrine. B.B. Warfield, referring to Calvin, comments that “No man ever had a profound sense of God than he; no man ever more unreservedly surrendered himself to the Divine direction” (Warfield 2014: 24). Calvin followed Luther’s perspective and showed a pessimistic view of the human ability to get right with God apart from the person of Christ (Ramp 2001: 262). Nonetheless, Calvin did not neglect the positive aspect of the faith that brings confidence in God:

Such is pure and genuine religion, namely, confidence in God coupled with serious fear— fear, which both includes in it willing reverence and brings along with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed by the law. And it ought to be more carefully considered that all men promiscuously do homage to God, but very few truly reverence him. (Calvin 2009: 8)

Even though Calvin and Luther held a pessimistic view of sinful men’s nature, they both agreed that God reveals Himself in the Scripture. Men may have the possibility to comprehend God’s revelation. That is not to say that man, in his strength, can understand the Word of God; instead, he needs the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Calvin 2009: 22). Both of the reformers believed that the preaching of the Scripture is the means by which God calls the elect to repentance and faith. Calvin said that God “has ordained His Word as an instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all His benefits, is dispensed to us” (Adam 2010, 1: 204). In the same manner, Luther rejected the use of force in converting people to Christ, showing that the Word needs to do the work in the life of the sinner: “For the Word created the heaven and the earth and all things; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners” (Hillerbrand 2009: 64).

The Scripture was indeed the focal point of the Reformation. The preaching was the vehicle that propagated the redeeming message so that it reached

far and wide. For Luther, preaching the gospel message implies holding on to the article by which the Church stands or falls: justification by faith alone (George 2013: 1292). In the words of the Scripture, Luther went on saying, “You will find the swaddling clothes in which Christ lies. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them” (George 2013: 1688). In Luther’s view, although Christ is the center of the Bible, not all the passages talk equally about the Messiah (George 2013: 1684). Since he views the Bible in such a manner, he forcefully calls James’ writing “an epistle of straw” because it had “nothing of the nature of the gospel about it” (George 2013: 1689).

For Calvin, on the other hand, the authority of the Scripture precedes the authority of the Church, and he maintained that “the church was under the Word, not the Word under the church” (Lawson 2009: 21). In an equal manner, Calvin viewed the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God but distinguished between each passage in his effectiveness in pointing out to Christ as the Redeemer (Calvin, Sermon on the Deity). Preaching is not like any other action; instead, it is the event where “it is as if God Himself came into the midst” of people (Adam 2010, 1: 205). Martin Luther and John Calvin could not be any more different in their personalities; still, they could not be more alike in their zeal for God. Luther’s focus on the justification by faith alone triggered the Reformation, while Calvin’s emphasis on God’s grace laid the firm foundation for the Protestant Movement. One may view Luther’s firm conviction on justification as the defining factor of the Reformation. Others would suggest that Calvin’s systematic writings helped the Protestant Movement in defining its theology. Although both of the affirmations are indeed true, the Reformation’s driving factor was preaching.

Timothy George displays the shift from Catholic to Protestant worship by showing the new emphasis on preaching: “protestant worship centered on the pulpit and open Bible with the preacher facing the congregation, not on an altar with the priest performing a semisecret ritual” (George 2013: 1843). Before the Reformation, the pulpit was “relegated to secondary status with the mass and ritualism assuming the central place” (Lawson 2009: 19). With the Reformation, Luther and Calvin returned to the Great Commission, where Jesus commands the Apostles to go and “make disciples” through preaching the Gospel. Not only did Jesus point out the importance of preaching, but the Apostle Paul also shows how important it is to preach when he says: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 2:42, ESV). In Albert Mohler’s opinion though, faithful preaching starts with this confession: “We preach because God has spoken” (Mohler 2008: 40). If one seeks to understand what is involved in the Gospel’s proclamation, he should start with God, who reveals Himself to humanity. Another defining factor of preaching is the

interaction with God's inspired Word that eventually concludes in proclamation.

The Reformers and Preaching

Preaching as a Calling

Calvin regarded preaching not just like a pure proclamation of the Gospel; instead, it involved a supernatural characteristic: "whenever [God] speaks by His servants, as though He was nigh to us, face to face" (Calvin 2017: 267). If the preacher is under the Holy Spirit's guidance, then the proclamation of the Gospel is not made by a mortal man, but rather it is God who is speaking.

It is certain that if we come to church, we shall not only hear a mortal man speaking, but we shall feel [even by his secret power] that God is speaking to our souls, that He is the teacher. He so touches us that the human voice enters into us and profits us that we are refreshed and nourished by it. (Parker 1992: 42)

For Luther, preaching should proclaim "Christ as the focal point of the Bible" (Ferry 1990: 97). Calvin, however, testifies that the proclamation of the Gospel is in itself "a manifestation of Jesus Christ," and the congregation has "the truth of that which had been promised from all time" (Calvin, Sermon on the Deity). If Calvin emphasizes God's presence in the preaching, Luther finds the power of the preaching in the spiritual battle with the devil:

A man might vex himself to the death against the devil, who, in the Papists, is such an enemy to God's Word. The devil seeth and feeleth that the external Word and preaching in the Church doth him great prejudice; therefore, he rageth and worketh these errors against the same, but I hope God ere long will look into it and will strike down the devil with these seducers. (Luther 2006)

Proclaiming the Gospel is the instrument of warfare. Luther describes it as "nothing but a proclamation of God's grace and the forgiveness of all sins, granted to us through the sufferings of Christ" (Luther 2010). Luther rediscovered the tremendous value of the sermon. Timothy George shows how Luther "invested it with an almost sacramental quality and made it the central focus of the liturgy" (George 2013: 1842).

Once Luther experienced the work of regeneration made by the Holy Spirit, he grasped the Scripture with new meaning: "whereas before the justice of God filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven" (Bainton 2014: 48). Even if Luther made a tremendous impact with his writings, he viewed his responsibility in the church as "the business of preaching, not writing" (Jorgenson 2014: 43). The proclamation of God's Word was his greatest calling, although, at times, he was discouraged and wanted to quit preaching:

“If you don’t improve, I will stop preaching rather than cast pearls before swine” (Bainton 2014: 363). At one point, Luther did leave the preaching office within the St. Mary’s congregation in Wittenberg: “I would rather preach to mad dogs, for my preaching shows no effect among you, and it only makes me weary” (Luther 1972: 129). Later he would return to his calling, but still, he would stress that “if this were not God’s own order and institution, I would not want to preach another sermon to the end of my days” (Luther 1957: 372). Timothy George illustrates Luther as a “veritable volcano of a personality,” but Calvin is different. He was “shy to the point of being unsociable; he would not have done well with small talk at a modern party” (George 2013: 3952). Nothing in his personality would refer him to a public ministry, and still, God, in His providence, guided him in the ministry of preaching and teaching.

The French reformer wanted to commit to a life of “study and writing and planned to stay away from public ministry” (Puckett 2009: 45). Even though people view Calvin as the great theologian of the Reformation, he would not refer to himself in this manner. Instead, Calvin saw himself “as a pastor in the church of Christ and therefore, as one whose chief duty must be to preach the Word” (Lawson 2009: 19). On two separate occasions, Calvin considered the perfect opportunity to focus on his writing, but God had a different plan for his life. When Calvin found refuge in Geneva, Farel informed him that “it is clear that God had brought him to Geneva and that he wanted to keep him there as well” (Selderhuis 2010: 52). When Calvin resisted, Farel added that “Calvin would find no eternal peace if he did not stay” and brought a curse upon the Frenchman:

At this point, Farel (Burning with a wondrous zeal to advance the gospel) suddenly set all his efforts at keeping me. After having heard that, I was determined to pursue my own private studies. When he realized he would get nowhere by pleas, he came to the point of a curse: that it would please God to curse my leisure and the quiet for my studies, that I was seeking if in such a grave emergency I should withdraw and refuse to give aid and help. This word so overwhelmed me that I desisted from the journey I had undertaken. (Battles 2018)

In 1538, Calvin was forced to flee from Geneva and find refuge in Strasbourg, which, at first glance, tempted him since this city offered far more possibilities for a scholar (Selderhuis 2010: 86). At last, he would find a safe place in his writings as he previously intended. Little did he know that his comfort zone would soon be troubled by Martin Bucer, his future spiritual father:

Then free, released by this means from my calling, I had planned to live quietly, without undertaking any public responsibility, until that excellent servant of Christ, Martin Bucer, making use of a curse similar to that of Farel’s, removed me

to another post. Terrified, therefore, by the example of Jonah that he set before me. (Battles 2018)

After a few years in exile, Calvin had the chance in 1541 to return to Geneva, but he did not want to do that (George 2013: 4130). The more he rejected going back to Geneva, the more confident he was that this was the correct decision before God: “The more I balked at returning, the more suspicious I became of myself” (Selderhuis 2010: 116).

Preaching Frequency

There is no other way that can explain Calvin’s ministry of preaching than the calling from God. In his sermon on The Mystery of Godliness, Calvin displays the proclamation of the Word as a daily blessing bestowed by God upon believers: “we show and teach daily in our sermons that God put upon himself our nature” (Calvin, The Mystery of Godliness). Probably, Calvin was not speaking figuratively about the frequency of the proclamation since, in Geneva, pastors preached sermons daily and twice on Sundays (Ward 2005: 328). As Lawson points out, after his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin preached “twice on Sunday and then on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.” He eventually brought “ten new sermons every fourteen days” (Lawson 2009: 20). Not only did he preach a tremendous number of sermons over the years, but he also displayed a variety of sermons from different books of the Bible. By the estimation made, Calvin preached, on average, 170 sermons per year (Edwards 2009: 34). The French reformer was a busy man by his presence in the pulpit, but Luther was less active. Some scholars estimate that the German reformer preached more than 4000 sermons in his life during his 30 years of ministry (Lampert 2017: 105). Luther himself testifies for his busy life in preaching and teaching:

I could almost occupy two scribes or secretaries. All-day long I do nothing but write letters... I preach at the monastery, I am a lector during meal times, I am asked daily to preach in the city church, I have to supervise the program of study, and I am vicar, i.e., prior of eleven cloisters. Plus: I am warden of the fish pond at Leitzkau, and at Torgau I am involved in a dispute with the Herzbergers... I lecture on Paul and I am still collecting material on the Psalms... I have little uninterrupted time for the daily [monastic] hours or for celebrating mass. Besides, I have my own struggles with the flesh, the world, and the devil. See what a lazy man I am!! (Hendrix 2015: 45)

The preaching of Luther was an extensive exposition of the Bible that would last for approximately one hour. Timothy George affirms that Luther became the primary key of the Reformation not because he went against the teaching of indulgences, instead because “the Word had already taken deep root in his heart” (George 2013: 1164). When he discovered in the Bible justification

by faith alone, his heart would beat for the proclamation of the Gospel, using his own and particular characteristic.

Do your best. If you cannot preach an hour, then preach half an hour or a quarter of an hour. Do not try to imitate other people. Center on the shortest and simplest points, which are the very heart of the matter, and leave the rest to God. Look solely to his honor and not to applause. Pray that God will give you a mouth and to your audience's ears. I can tell you, preaching is not a work of man. (Bainton 2014: 361)

In contrast with Luther, Calvin stands before the congregation in preaching, depending on the event, between 40 and 60 minutes (Adam 2010, 2: 335). John Leith writes that Calvin knew much of the Bible from memory: "He knew the Bible in his person, in his quick, in his mind" (George 1990: 223). James Montgomery Boice asserts in the same manner that Calvin "had no weapon, but the Bible. From the very first, his emphasis has been on Bible teaching" (Lawson 2009: 19).

Preaching Preparation

Calvin endeavoured to understand the Bible, so he could then proclaim it to the congregation with clarity. His commentary on the Bible shows his commitment to discovering the author's original intention.

I should climb up into the pulpit without having designed to look at a book and frivolously imagine, 'Ah well! When I get there God will give me enough to talk about,' and I do not condescend to read, or to think about what I ought to declare, and I come here without carefully pondering how I must apply the Holy Scripture to the edification of the people—well, then I should be a cock-sure charlatan, and God would put me to confusion in my audaciousness. (Parker 1992: 81)

The French reformer would read the Bible multiple times and meditate upon the passage having in mind the responsibility of being a trustworthy and faithful servant of God. He used Greek and Latin in his pursuit, giving special attention to the grammatical structure, verb tenses, historical background, and geographical setting (Lawson 2009: 25).

Since it is almost his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author. It is presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of Scripture around as though it were some game that we are playing. (Calvin 1959: 1)

Calvin, in his sermon preparation, mastered the art of studying the Scripture in the original language. Not only did he use that for proper understanding,

but he also appealed to word studies, searching for a particular word meaning in different passages from the Bible (Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*). Even if he used the original language in his research, when he preached, he tried to keep it clear and straightforward for the audience: “The word justification is often used in Scripture for approved” (Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*).

Luther also recommended the use of Greek and Hebrew in the sermon preparation phase. Even though he advocated for the usage of Greek and Hebrew in the preparation phase, he disagreed with the use of them in preaching: “No Latin, Greek, or Hebrew should divert the hearer from the plain truth in the mother tongue” (Kolb 2017: 111). He stated that knowing the Bible’s original language would help the interpreter preach the Gospel in a powerful way, not in a “flat and tame manner” (Kolb 2017: 111). Although he was busy in the ministry, he still advocated a thorough exegetical process, insisting on the grammatical-historical approach to get the passage’s correct meaning (George 2013: 1724). Those who do not take the time to meditate and study the text properly are called: “lazy, licentious, adulterers, and blasphemers” (Hopson 2017: 106). The preparation phase was an essential factor since Luther was often troubled in his sleep that he would have to preach with “no Konzept” along in the pulpit (Ferry 1990: 267). Sometimes, when he stepped down from the pulpit, he felt a sense of discouragement: “I had often wanted to spit on myself when I left the pulpit: ‘Pfui on you! What did you preach?’” (Kolb 2017: 113) This attitude shows how strict he was with the study phase of the preaching, but also with the proclamation.

Preaching Style

Luther spent a tremendous amount of time making the truth of the Scripture applicable to his congregation. Often, he would recall that people would instead stop listening to him: “Thus, people today also say of me, Dr. Martin Luther: ‘If he does not care to preach, let him stop. We have his books. Just begone! Go to the devil!’” (Ferry 1990: 277) Still, Luther continues with preparation because he knew that proclamation is an essential part that only the preacher may fulfill: “Even if they do read it [the Bible], is not as fruitful or powerful as it is through a public preacher whom God has ordained to say and preach this” (Ferry 1990: 271). By knowing his audience, Luther enabled his preaching to be concrete and straightforward by its application. His primary purpose, after his conversion, was to present God’s grace in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; those who would stretch the confusion in the minds of the listeners by their preaching should be preachers “in the abyss of hell” (Ferry 1990: 272).

Cursed be every preacher who aims at lofty topics in the church, looking for his own glory and selfishly desiring to please one individual or another. When I

preach here, I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people. I don't look at the doctors and masters, of whom scarcely forty are present but at the hundred or the thousand young people and children. It's to them that I preach, to them that I devote myself, for they too need to understand. If the others don't want to listen, they can leave... we preach in public for the sake of plain people. Christ could have taught in a profound way, but He wished to deliver His message with the utmost simplicity in order that common people might understand. Good God, there are sixteen-year-old girls, women, and farmers in the church, and they don't understand lofty matters. (Luther 1955: 236)

In the interpretation process, not only did Luther follow a grammatical-historical approach, but he would also stick to the passage: "In my preaching, I take pains to treat a verse of Scripture, to stick to it, and so to instruct the people that they can say, 'That's what the sermon was about'" (Luther 1967: 160). He would also prefer the literal interpretation of the passage, calling the allegorical interpretation "rubbish" (Elwell 2001: 613). In his *Tabletalks*, Luther encouraged simplicity in the delivery of the sermon: "It is best not to make the sermon long and to speak simply and on the level of the children" (Kolb 2017: 113). He would also point out the characteristics of a great preacher: "he stands, he speaks up, and knows when to shut up!" (George 2013: 1842) Luther was a sharp preacher, often threatening the sinners using diverse and harsh language (Hopson 2017: 104). Luther's preaching corresponded with his volcanic personality. On the other hand, even though he did not have a straightforward preaching style like the German reformer, Calvin still says that the pastor "ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves" (Calvin 1974). If Luther directed his preaching to the people, Calvin would use the first person plural, having a pastor's heart and sticking alongside his congregation: "Let us learn, then, although the believers and children of God desire to have rest, nevertheless, they must not desire to be here at their ease" (Calvin, *Second Sermon on the Passion...*).

Calvin's personality may not be as volcanic as Luther's; still, the Geneva pastor was unwilling to compromise any of the Bible's truths in the name of false peace, seeing himself as God's watchdog: "A dog barks when it sees that its master is being attacked. I would be a real coward if I saw God's truth being attacked and remained quiet without making a sound" (Selderhuis 2010: 32). Instead, he would search for the fundamental basis for unity in the Person of Jesus Christ (George 2013: 4100). On one occasion, he accused his friend, Gerrard Russel, of seeking the bishop position for his interest: "You are fooling yourself if you think that you belong to the people of God when you are, in fact, a soldier in the army of the anti-Christ" (Selderhuis 2010: 49). Not only did Calvin have a tremendous gift in explaining complex theological concepts using simple, short, and clear sentences, but he also used

sarcasm as an efficient weapon (Selderhuis 2010: 67). Broadus describes the French reformer as a pastor that gave “the ablest, soundest, clearest exposition of Scripture that has been seen for a thousand years” (Lawson 2009: 20). This clear exposition resulted from the hard work of diligently studying the passage and his commitment to the authority of Scripture. The Geneva pastor was energetic in his preaching and would argue that the pulpit is not the place for being monotone in the delivery: “Doctrine without zeal is either as a sword in the hand of a madman, or else it lieth still as cold and without use, or else it serveth for vain and wicked boasting” (Calvin 1974).

Even though he would preach for more than one hour, Calvin did not waste any time; instead, his preaching always had a powerful teaching element, and he recalls the Church as being the school of God (Selderhuis 2010: 115). For Calvin, the preaching ministry should be “contextual, contemporary, and engaged with the congregation” (Adam 2010, 2: 331). He clarifies different events or gestures so the believers may understand their meaning in their original context and culture.

According to the narrative, “Judas had given a sign of Him Whom he betrayed, that it was Jesus, and that He was seized, and having arrived, he kisses Him and says to Him, ‘Hail, Master!’” Now let us note that this was a manner of greeting. As in some nations, they embrace; in other nations, they shake hands. The Jews were entirely accustomed to this kiss, as one sees by Holy Scripture. (Calvin, *Second Sermon on the Passion...*)

As previously pointed out, Luther would often have harsh words describing his preaching and would blame himself for not following his outline. To his greatest surprise, that particular sermon would have received the most significant appreciation from the congregation (Kolb 2017: 113). Later, Luther reflected on this experience; he would advise preachers, when they step out in the pulpit, to “forget what they had carefully prepared, abandon their outlines and experience God’s grace” (Kolb 2017: 112). Luther advocated for thorough preparation, but eventually, he would recognize that God is in charge of the Gospel’s proclamation from the preacher to the congregation.

Calvin, a writer by nature, resisted the trend of his day of reading the sermon from his previously prepared manuscript. The French reformer viewed the reading of a manuscript blank and in the form of a lecture.

It appears to me that there is very little preaching of a lively kind in the kingdom, but that the greater part of delivery by way of reading from a written discourse... preaching ought not to be lifeless but lively, to teach, to exhort, to reprove. (Calvin 2007: 190)

Even if Calvin was an introvert, his preaching was different; he was enthusiastic and energetic in his proclamation. Unlike Luther, he would not go into

the pulpit without an outline; instead, he would tackle the proclamation process extemporaneously (Puckett 2009: 47). Calvin followed an expository methodology of preaching, going through books of the Bible, expounding on four or five verses per sermon until he would reach the end of the book (Lawson 2009: 23). Thomas Torrance comments on Calvin's preaching by pointing out that the reformer used "a mode of persuasion which throws the reader back upon the truth itself and its inherent validity" (Adam 2010, 2: 332). Often, Calvin would use the rhetoric of raising objections to the Bible's truths; adding "one could say" or "one may ask" helped him connect with the audience:

Jesus says that death is for Him such a bitter drink that He would prefer that it was taken away from Him, that is, "if it were possible." It is true that one could raise here many questions, for it would seem that for an instant Jesus Christ forgot our salvation or, still worse, that fleeing from the struggle He willed to leave us in a lost estate on account of the terror which He felt. (Calvin, *Second Sermon on the Passion...*)

Luther had a different way of grabbing the audience's attention. He was by no means a systematic thinker; instead, he was the key figure that effortlessly steals the light by his rough language. Frequently, Luther would contradict himself by stepping in the opposite seat with the primary purpose of wrestling with that thought (Jorgenson 2014: 47). Luther's way of dealing with different situations is also seen by Alister McGrath, who advocates that Luther was "propelled to fame through a series of controversies" (2001: 88).

Luther, in his writings and his preaching, focuses on the justification by faith alone. On the other hand, in his proclamation, Calvin emphasizes the sovereignty of God. Having a God-centered perspective is reflected in his sermons that tend to be somewhat similar to differ in their approach (Ward 2005: 321). It is noticeable that at the end of each sermon, Calvin would have a benediction prayer that would point people in reverence before God: "Now we shall bow in humble reverence before the majesty of our God" (Calvin, *Second Sermon on the Passion...*). One may describe Calvin's preaching as a beautiful tension between the prophet who has his inner side rooted in the sovereignty and glory of God and the pastor that has his heart full of love and passion for God's people. Calvin's return to Geneva shows this tension at work. After being banished from the city, he returned to Geneva and immediately resumed his expository preaching from where he once left:

When I went to preach again for the first time, there was not a soul that did not sit up straight, full of curiosity. However, I completely passed over everything that had happened and that they surely were curious to hear about and devoted a few words to explain the essence of my ministry. Thereafter I gave a short testimony of my faith and the sincerity of my intentions. Then I chose to expound on the

passage to which I had come before my banishment. In this way, I hoped to show that I had not put down my teaching office but had only interrupted it for a while. (Selderhuis 2010: 118)

Both Luther and Calvin were expository preachers and strived to remain faithful to the Word of God. They were dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in the preaching ministry of the Gospel. Calvin prayed intensely and expected much from God's intervention (Ward 2005: 324). In the end, he was confident that only the Holy Spirit would enable the faithful to call upon God "with a clear conscience" (Ward 2005: 325). Luther likewise was rooted in God's word and God's help in his spiritual battles.

Conclusions

The Protestant Reformation represented a return to the Holy Scripture's authority in the Church and Christian families. Luther's writings were nothing more than his struggles that eventually echoed in the mind of ordinary people. R.C. Sproul points to Karl Barth's comment on Luther: "He was like a blind man who lost his balance in the bell tower. He reached out for something to grab hold of, and he happened to grab the church bell, and it woke up the whole world" (Sproul, *A Blind Man in a Bell Tower*). The Gospel is the center of the Holy Scriptures, and preaching was one of the ways that enabled the propagation. Both Luther and Calvin viewed proclamation as being the most crucial action in the church's worship. They were zealous for preaching because they were confident that God revealed Himself in the Bible. Even if they advocated for a universal priesthood, they recognized the importance of the preaching office. In Luther's view, the minister of the Word should have the confidence to say *Haec Dixit Dominus* (Thus say the Lord) by ensuring that he has the divine calling and that his doctrine was correct (Ferry 1990: 272).

I know that on the Last Day, God will attest that I have preached rightly." If I were not sure of this so that in my heart I could build upon it and depend upon it, it would be much better for me to keep my mouth shut. (Luther 1955: 186)

God's calling for ministry was the defining factor of the proclamation ministry of Calvin and Luther. They had a fire within them for the Gospel message because God's Word found a deep root in their hearts. Calvin and Luther preached because God called them, and He revealed Himself in the Bible. For those who boasted a life led by the Spirit but did not reflect in the fruit of the Spirit, Luther would say: "Go preach to the geese. You are a devil. Don't molest and confuse me with your spirit. Christ does not want me to listen to you" (Luther 1967: 175). In a world of confusion, both reformers strived to present the Bible clearly and understandably. Steven Lawson

reveals that “being unintelligible was the error of Rome, not the Reformers.” For Luther and Calvin, there was “no glory in preaching over the heads of their listeners” (Lawson 2009: 26). After a meticulous study of the passage, the author’s intention would make a piercing application. Preaching regularly, they fulfilled Apostle Paul’s commandment from 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Such was Calvin’s purpose in preaching:

When I expound Holy Scripture, I must always make this my rule: that those who hear me may receive profit from the teaching I put forward and be edified unto salvation. If I have not that affection if I do not procure the edification of those who hear me, I am a sacrilege profaning God’s Word. (Willis-Watkins, Willis, Welker, and Gockel 1999: 341)

Luther’s emphasis on justification by faith alone and, in the same tune, Calvin’s focus on the preeminence of God’s glory had, in the end, served the same central purpose: to proclaim the redemptive message of salvation through faith in Christ alone.

References

- Adam P (2010) Calvin’s Preaching and Homiletic: Nine Engagements—Part 1. *Churchman* 124(3): 201-215.
- Adam P (2010) Calvin’s Preaching and Homiletic: Nine Engagements—Part 2. *Churchman* 124(4): 331-342.
- Bainton RH (2014) *Here I Stand—A Life of Martin Luther*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Battles FL (2018) *The Piety of John Calvin*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.
- Calvin J (1959) *Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- _____ (2017) *John Calvin’s Bible Commentaries On Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai*. Altenmunster: Jazzybee Verlag.
- _____ (2012) *John Calvin’s Commentaries On The Psalms 1-35*. Altenmunster: Jazzybee Verlag.
- _____ (1974) *John Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible*. Ada, MI: Baker Books.
- _____ (2007) *Letters of John Calvin*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- _____ (2009) *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Beveridge H. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Edwards JK (2009) *Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons That Go Beyond the Superficial*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing.

- Elwell WA (2001) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Ferry P (1990). Martin Luther on Preaching: Promises and Problems of the Sermon as a Source of Reformation History and as an Instrument of the Reformation. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54(4): 265-280.
- George T (1990) *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- _____ (2013) *Theology of the Reformers*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing.
- Hendrix SH (2015) *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hillerbrand HJ (2009) *The Protestant Reformation*. Revised edition. New York, NY: Perennial.
- Jorgenson AG (2014) Martin Luther on Preaching Christ Present. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16(1): 42-55.
- Kolb R (2017) Luther's Suggestions for Preaching. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 43(1): 109-114.
- Lampert MA (2017) *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lawson SJ (2009) The Biblical Preaching of John Calvin. *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13(4): 18-34.
- Luther M (1957) *Career of the Reformer: Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg (1530)*. Minneapolis, MN: Muhlenberg Press.
- _____ (1972) *Lectures on Isaiah*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- _____ (1967) *Luther's Works*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- _____ (1955) *Luthers' Works: Reformation Writings and Occasional Pieces*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- _____ (1955) *Selected Psalms*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- _____ (2006) *Selections from the Table Talk of Martin Luther*. Translated by Henry Bell. Kindle Edition.
- _____ (1957) *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- _____ (2010) *Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes*. Volume I. Introduction by Henry Eyster Jacobs. Kindle Edition.
- Hopson M (2017) How Did Luther Preach? A Plea for Gospel-Dominated Preaching. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81(1): 95-117.
- McGrath A (2001) *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mohler AR (2008) *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.
- Mullett MA (2014) *Martin Luther*. London: Routledge.
- Nauert CG (1981) *The Age of Renaissance and Reformation*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

- Parker THL (2007) *John Calvin: A Biography*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing.
- Parker THL (1992) *Calvin's Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Puckett DL (2009) John Calvin as Teacher. *He Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13(4): 44-50.
- Ramp SW (2001) John Calvin on Preaching the Law. *Word & World* 21(3): 262-269.
- Selderhuis HJ (2010) *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Ward P (2005) Coming to Sermon: The Practice of Doctrine in the Preaching of John Calvin. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58(3): 319-332.
- Warfield BB (2014) *Calvin and Calvinism: Classic Reformed Essays on the Man and His Theology*. Monergism Books.
- Willis-Watkins D, Willis D, Welker M, and Gockel M (1999) *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Internet Sources

- Britannica Educational (2013) *Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia*. Britannica Educational Publishing. Accessed on October 5, 2020.
- Calvin J. *Second Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Matthew 26:40-50*. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html. Accessed on December 15, 2020.
- Calvin J. *Sermon on the Deity of Jesus Christ: John 1:1-5*. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html. Accessed on December 15, 2020.
- Calvin J. *The Mystery of Godliness: God Manifest in the Flesh: 1 Timothy 3:16*. <https://www.monergism.com/mystery-godliness-god-manifest-flesh-1-timothy-316>. Accessed on December 15, 2020.
- Luther M (1545) *Preface to the First Volume of His Latin Works*. Translated by Thornton A. From "Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe. 1545." Vol. 4, *Luther's Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clement. 6th Edition. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967, pp. 421-428. <https://www.bluffton.edu/courses/humanities/2/ml-1545.htm>. Accessed on October 5, 2020.
- Nichols S (2017) Philip Melanchthon. <https://www.5minutesinchurchhistory.com/philip-melanchthon/>. Accessed on October 5, 2020.
- Sproul RC. *A Blind Man in a Bell Tower*.