The Decalogue in the Reformation Liturgies

by

David Wallingford

edited by

Gordon Jeanes
David Wallingford

David Wallingford in middle life was awarded an MA with distinction for the dissertation which has been edited for this Joint Liturgical Study. A learned lay Christian, he had taken early retirement from a career in finance and accountancy in the gas and rail industries to fulfil a long-term ambition of returning to academic study. The combination of the graduate skills of a historian with a lively and first-hand interest in Reformed traditions of worship promised much of him as a liturgical scholar, and the choice of the Decalogue as a topic for research opened unexpected and creative paths for him to explore the worship of the Reformation period. The praise accorded him by his examiners led to his being commissioned by the Board to edit his dissertation into this Study. However, within days of his accepting the brief, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and he died in June 2016.

Unable to do the final editorial work himself, before he died he agreed with the Joint Editorial Board that we could appoint a scholar to complete that work. The Board duly asked the Rev Dr Gordon Jeanes, a member of the Board and already a contributor to the series, to take this responsibility. This editing has involved some shortening of the text, but it has been done with great care to present the Study as nearly as possible in the form that David Wallingford himself would have wished to do. Our hope is that the Study will not only throw light upon his chosen area of research, but will stand as a tribute to a relatively unknown but brilliant author.

Alcuin/GROW Joint Editorial Board
August 2016

Text © David Wallingford 2016.
The cover illustration is of the statue of Moses carrying the pulpit (1626) by Sebastian Kirchner from Fürth in Langenzenn (Bavaria) City church. © Wikimedia Commons File:Langenzenn Stadtkirche - Kanzel Moses.jpg accessed 29.04.14.

ISSN: 0951-2667
ISBN: 978-1-848-25833-4
# Contents

Editorial Note: Numbering the Ten Commandments

1 Introduction  5

2 The Decalogue in Reformation Catechesis  9

3 The Decalogue in Protestant Liturgical Reform  25

4 The Decalogue, Religious Imagery and Post-Reformation Worship Space  41

5 Conclusion  59

Appendix 1: The Place of the Decalogue in the Principal Reformation Liturgies  61

Appendix 2: Reformation Catechesis – Ordering of the key texts  63
Editorial Note:

Numbering the Ten Commandments

The Jewish tradition of numbering the Commandments is summarized as follows:¹

‘The Bible nowhere refers to the Decalogue as ten commandments… [more than ten commands covering nine topics: forbidden forms of worship; swearing falsely, etc. ]… Yet the Bible refers to it as “the ten words” (Ex. 34.28; Dt. 10.4), apparently using this round number as an expression of totality, as is found in other places in biblical and Talmudic literature. Various methods arose for dividing the passage into ten commandments. One ancient rabbinic tradition was to count “I am the Lord” and “You shall have no other gods” as one pronouncement … in order to arrive at ten. Traces of this tradition may be found in the Middle Ages, as well as in Christian divisions of the Ten Commandments. Another rabbinic tradition became the normative one: “I am the Lord” was considered a separate pronouncement… and each of the nine topics enumerated above was counted as one commandment.’¹ The Jews divide the Commandments into two tables of five.

There is no one Christian arrangement. The medieval Western custom was to treat ‘You shall have no other gods’ and ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol’ as one commandment and then treat the commandment(s) against coveting as two, with the ninth as the neighbour’s house or his wife (following Ex. 20 or Deut. 5). Luther retained this division, but the Reformed tradition of separating ‘other gods’ from ‘idols’ and uniting the commandment(s) against coveting originated with Leo Jud, an assistant of Zwingli at Zurich, and was taken up by Bucer, Calvin and the Church of England.

Introduction

The Church lay at the very heart of medieval society exercising considerable influence in the daily lives of much of the population of Western Europe. Religion in its external form was expressed through familiar ritual in the cultural practices of the people introducing the sacred into mundane lives. In Lee Palmer Wandel’s words, ‘Christianity was rooted in the rhythms, cadences, and customs of specific locales.’\footnote{Lee Palmer Wandel, Voracious idols and violent hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 20.} It is, therefore, unsurprising that, when the sixteenth-century Protestant reformers challenged the religious status quo, the result was a widespread upheaval that impinged upon many aspects of medieval life, not least in the people’s experience of worship both in the liturgy and in the visible re-ordering of their worship space. Richard Marks, focusing on the impact of these changes on local communities in England, has provided a powerful description of the transformational nature of this experience:

[T]he shock wrought upon the social fabric of each community by the forced destruction of its familiar helpers and the practices tied to them cannot be underestimated. By removing the images, the whole structure of parish life and custom was undermined ... \footnote{Richard Marks, Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England (Sutton Publishing Ltd., Stroud, 2004), pp. 255 and 275.} [Those] who would have known a world of images in their youth, had to adjust to an imageless world, one in which through repetition of the second Commandment in the Communion service and the ringing condemnation of idolators in the Commination prayers they were exhorted to revile what for ... generations before them had been a part of their daily lives.
Marks’ description, as well as highlighting the enormity of the upheaval in worship, also hints that the Decalogue, in this case God’s command against idolatry, played its part in the transformation. Amidst the complex web of religious, political and social factors contributing to the motives and causes of the Protestant Reformation, there is a hint that this familiar biblical text was an influential factor.

The same sense of importance can also be discerned in the visible post-Reformation legacy of church redecoration. Two of the most striking examples of post-Reformation church furnishings took inspiration from the Decalogue. Firstly, in churches of the Reformed tradition across Western Europe, it became common practice to install Decalogue Boards. Usually situated in highly prominent positions at the east end of churches and often accompanied by the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, these furnishings portrayed the Reformed emphasis on the authority of Scripture and a transformation in worship from image to word. From a personal perspective this powerful visual presentation has always held a compelling fascination and with it one, as yet unanswered, question – why is the Decalogue usually in the middle? Was this an accident of design or does the central positioning communicate the Decalogue’s special importance?

Secondly, but perhaps less well known, was the post-Reformation Lutheran custom of designing pulpits resting on carved statues of Moses holding the tablets of the law. This striking visual representation of the juxtaposition of law and gospel also portrayed a sense that the Decalogue was important. When the congregation gathered to hear the gospel message of grace preached from an elevated pulpit located in their midst, they could not fail to note that the minister’s words were delivered upon a foundation of the Ten Commandments (see the front cover illustration).

Such highly visible artistic legacies add to the sense that the Decalogue must have been influential in the minds of the architects of reform in both their development of Reformed theology and in its communication to the people in the parishes.

The significance of the Decalogue can also be learned from the
Reformation theologians themselves. Martin Luther wrote:

This much is certain: anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures. In all affairs and circumstances he can counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters. He is qualified to sit in judgement upon all doctrines, estates, persons, laws and everything else in the world.\(^3\)

Likewise, John Calvin claimed that ‘the Ten Commandments... set forth a godly and righteous rule of living.’\(^4\) The words of these most eminent figures of the Reformation portray the value attributed to the Decalogue as a comprehensive guide for Christian living. Both acknowledged the sufficiency, directness and permanence of the Decalogue recognizing it as a unique text given directly by God and inscribed in his own hand in stone.\(^5\)

With such resounding architectural evidence and contemporary attestation to the importance of the Decalogue in Reformation thinking, it is surprising to discover that many authoritative histories and general liturgical accounts of the Reformation fail to register the Decalogue’s significance in shaping the reformation of worship.\(^6\) The reader is left with the impression that the Decalogue was relatively incidental in determining the course of reform. In Diarmaid MacCulloch’s more recent historical accounts, there is some recognition of the Decalogue’s

---

\(^3\) Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, trans. Fischer, R.H., (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959), Martin Luther’s Preface, para. 17.


role, particularly in relation to the dispute over idolatry, but even in this work references are infrequent. Moreover, MacCulloch’s description of the three key catechetical texts as ‘the minimum kit which those caught up in the Reformation would have at their disposal’ falls somewhat short of a resounding endorsement of the Decalogue’s impact.

It is a similar story with general liturgical accounts of the Reformation. Yngve Brilioth and Gregory Dix barely mention the Decalogue in their chapters on the Reformation. Bard Thompson, William Maxwell, and Frank Senn, in their forensic analyses of the content of Reformed service orders, typically signpost the Decalogue in regard to its liturgical positioning but only rarely delve into the meaning or significance of this positioning. This pattern is also apparent in specific denominational accounts of the reform of worship. For example, Geoffrey Cuming’s *A History of Anglican Liturgy* addresses the contribution of the Decalogue to the reform of worship in England in just a few passing references.

The general flavour of these historical and liturgical accounts is inconsistent with the architectural evidence or with the contemporary quotes drawn from Luther and Calvin. With this in mind, this Study will provide a re-balanced assessment of the impact of the Decalogue in the reform of worship in Western Europe in the sixteenth century. Through an examination of the more detailed scholarship on Reformation catechesis (chapter 2), a deeper analysis of the Decalogue in public worship (chapter 3) and the consideration of specialized works on Reformation attitudes to art and imagery (chapter 4), the Study will also examine the Decalogue’s influence in the formation of Reformed beliefs and its role in the communication of those beliefs to the people.

---