

A Religio-Political Discourse: The Decalogue in the Large Catechism of Martin Luther

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The Jewish Decalogue has not only been depicted in the Qur'an of the Middle Ages, but also was transmitted into the early modern era. The teaching of the Decalogue was one of the major biblical sources the 16th century reformist people adopted to defend their new religious movement against the Medieval Catholic tradition. In particular, when Martin Luther led a new protestant church, he wrote a clear commentary of the new faith in the form of two catechisms in 1529. The Small Catechism was for training of children. The Large Catechism was an institutional manual for pastors or teachers. The German reformer independently applied the Exodus version (20:17) of the Decalogue in the Large Catechism. Then, how did Luther use the Decalogue in the light of his reformation campaign? How has his metaphorical discourse been revealed on the Decalogue? This paper explores the textual genre and historical context of the Reformation teaching in unveiling Luther's religio-political intention over the authority and power of the traditional papacy.

Keywords: Decalogue, reformation, papacy, Large Catechism and Luther

Introduction

The Pentateuch of the Old Testament contains two versions of the Decalogue originating from the same narrative of Moses (Exodus 20: 1-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21). The Jewish Decalogue tradition has a long transmission history. The doctrinal teaching was an important part of the life of medieval and early modern people in the Middle East and Europe. The Qur'anic teachings of Surah Anaam [6: 151-153] and Surah Isra [17: 23-39] included the Jewish disciplines of the Decalogue in the Middle Ages. For the German reformer Martin Luther, the teaching of the Decalogue was the key ingredient of his new religious campaign against the social practices of the medieval indulgence policy of the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrine on indulgences.¹ Even though Luther was a priest, monk, and professor, he eventually denied the doctrine on indulgences and the abuses connected to it and disputed "the scandalous conduct of the pardoners" in Germany.² The religious privilege of exemption was originally offered to those who gave alms to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in

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¹ The initial motivation for indulgence was to allow a confessor or a Christian awaiting martyrdom to intercede for another believer in order to shorten the other's canonical penance in the early church. Robert W. Jenson, "Luther, Lutherans and Antinomianism," *Dialog* 22, 4 (Aug., 1983): 246-300.

² Arthur Geoffrey Dicken, *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (London: Fontana, 1974).

1517.³ This indulgence was authorised by Pope Leo X.⁴ The Dominican friar Johann Tetzel led the “jug-handled marketing practice.”⁵ However, the aggressive marketing practice of the Dominican friar was seen by Martin Luther as the purchase and sale of salvation. In particular, Martin Luther attacked the friar’s presumption that salvation could be sold and purchased. The catholicisation of the religious practice was soon confronted by the reaction of the German professor of theology. The announcement of Theses that were widely circulated even in France, England, and Italy before 1519,⁶ was the initial counter-Rome statement. Luther gainsaid the Pope’s right to grant pardons on God’s behalf: “The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed [...]” (Thesis 5). “Why does the pope [...] build the Basilica of St Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?” (Thesis 86).⁷ Luther’s view was productively developed with new ideas opposed to the authority of the Roman Church.

As the reformation movement was progressing, Luther, through his writings,⁸ began to improve the anti-Catholic doctrines for his followers. The German reformer disagreed with the traditional sacerdotalism that the priesthood constituted a privileged community of the spiritual elite, instead believing that all baptized Christians to be a holy priesthood. The religious leader defiantly translated Greek scripture into the German vernacular to increase the accessibility of the Holy Word.⁹ The local (German) version of scripture (New Testament) challenged the Latin tradition of the Catholic Church. While newly composed hymns proved crucial for the reform of worship and liturgy,¹⁰ Katharina von Bora exemplified Luther’s view that priests should be allowed to marry.¹¹ Luther’s *On the Abrogation of the Private Mass* argued against the belief that the Latin mass re-enacts the sacrifice of Christ: Luther condemned this specific understanding of the Mass as idolatry.¹² Instead, the religious ritual was constructed as a spiritual gift to be received with thanksgiving by the whole congregation. Compulsory confession was rejected, although Luther encouraged private confession and absolution, for it was accepted that every Christian was a confessor.¹³ Further, during the Imperial Diet the

³ The indulgence custom began from the early church, but became increasingly popular in the Middle Ages as a reward for displaying piety and doing good deeds. Gerhard Brendler, *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 54-66.

⁴ He who was the last non-priest to be elected pope.

⁵ Klemens Löffler, “Pope Leo X,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 9 (New York: 2013). E. A. Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 532-536.

⁶ R. E. McNally, “The Ninety-Five Theses of Martin Luther: 1517-1967,” *Theological Studies* 28, 3 (1967): 439-446.

⁷ “The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God’s remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven (*Thesis 6*).”

⁸ There are many writings as Bible Commentaries, Hymns, Prayers, Sermons, Christian Liberty, Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, the German Mass and Order of Divine Service, Prefaces from Luther’s German Bible Version, Ninety-Five Theses, Catechisms, and miscellaneous references.

⁹ The reformation movement was carried in different languages. James Arne Nestingen, “Luther’s Cultural Translation of the Catechism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* XV (2001): 440-442. Winston D. Persaud, “Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms: Defining and Confessing Christian Faith from the Centre in a Religiously Plural World,” *Dialog: a Journal of Theology* 46, 4 (Winter, 2007): 355-356.

¹⁰ Robin A. Leaver, “Luther’s Catechism Hymns, ‘Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word.’” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, 4 (1997): 116-121.

¹¹ His marriage was political as well as social at the beginning of his new movement. Timothy J. Wengert, “The Book of Concord and Human Sexuality, Seen Through the Institution of Marriage,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48, 1 (Spring, 2009): 9-18.

¹² N. J. Thompson, “Going Public: Catholic Calls for the Abolition of the Private Mass in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 13, 1 (2011): 63-92.

¹³ Luther’s essay, “On Confession, Whether the Pope has the Power to Require It.” See H. J. A. Bouman, “The Doctrine of the Justification in the Lutheran Confessions,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 11 (1955): 801.

general assembly of the Imperial Estates of the Holy Roman Empire held at Augsburg in 1518.¹⁴ At the place, Luther disputed that the papacy played no part in the biblical church, deprecating papal authority as an expression of the Antichrist.¹⁵

The Catechism of Martin Luther

Afterward, Luther established a new church organisation between 1526 and 1529 and fostered the new style of worship. The reformer summarised and elucidated the chief tenets of the new faith in two catechisms: the Small Catechism and Large Catechism. They were innovative and ground-breaking, as the first one was written for children and the second was for pastors and parents. The Large Catechism (Große Katechismus) mainly consists of five entries on the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed,¹⁶ the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The contemporary scholars have examined both catechisms, especially the Large Catechism (including the Latin version of the Large Catechism), from a number of perspectives.¹⁷ Nestingen considers the catechisms, in particular, the section on the Decalogue, Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, as cultural productions mainly addressed to German families.¹⁸ The Small Catechism (Kleiner Katechismus) was interpreted as "a combination (of) oral and literary features to an extent which enables the conciliation of principalised literality with the possibilities and scope of memory-based orality."¹⁹ Luther explained the sacrament of Baptism by reference to the theology of grace and justification,²⁰ while his own experience of prayer was one of the major subjects in the Large Catechism.²¹ The question one wants to pose is whether Luther's treatment of the Decalogue in the Large Catechism is polemical, that is written to contest the position of the Roman Church.²² Is there textual or testimonial evidence that allows one to discern the religio-political argument that Luther addressed to his followers? In the year 1529, when the Roman Emperor Charles V, together with Pope Clement VII, tried to put an end to the protestant heresy, Luther launched the Large Catechism to assist in the formation and cultivation of reformed congregations. The reformer not only produced a number of sermons and pamphlets, but also assigned his colleagues Justus Jonas and John Agricola the task of composing a book of religious instruction for children.²³ Philip Melancthon was also required to compose the "Instruction to the Visitors of the Clergy in the Electorate of Saxony."²⁴

However, the Catechism tradition was not a new method of teaching doctrines in the era. It was already

¹⁴ The general assembly of the Imperial Estates of the Holy Roman Empire was held between 962-1806.

¹⁵ See the Antichrist in 2 *Corinthians* 2. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 211-222. Michael A. Mullet, *Martin Luther* (London: Routledge, 2004) 123-131.

¹⁶ Charles P. Arand, "Luther on the Creed," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20, 1 (March, 2006): 1-25.

¹⁷ J. G. Nordling, "Theological Potpourri: Large Catechism III, 66, Latin Version," *ConcordiaJournal* 29, 3 (July, 2003): 235-239.

¹⁸ Nestingen, "Luther's Cultural Translation of the Catechism," 443-448.

¹⁹ K. Ehlich, "Catechism, a Text Type at the Borderline Between Orality and Literacy," *Lili-Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 29, 116 (Dec., 1999): 9-33.

²⁰ Kirsi Stjerna, "Seeking Hospitable Discourse on the Sacrament of Baptism," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, 2 (Summer, 2014): 92-100.

²¹ Timothy J. Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," *Lutheran Quarterly* XVIII (2004): 249-274.

²² R. H. Fischer (trans.), *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959).

²³ Luther's cooperation with his colleagues increased his influence. M. Lohrmann, "Bugenhagen's Pastoral Care of Martin Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24, 2 (June, 2010): 125-136. H. H. Figge, "Zur Erfindung des Patenpfennigs: Justus Jonas an Hans Luther," *Numismatisches Nachrichtenblatt* (2006): 321-323.

²⁴ Melancthon was one of his close partners for the literary activities. Fischer, *the Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 1. Wengert, "Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism," 250-254. Uwe Birnstein, *Der Humanist. Was Philipp Melancthon Europa lehrte* (Berlin: Wichern Verlag, 2010).

exercised at the Catholic organisation for hundreds of years. For instance, the movement of the counter-Reformation that had launched before 1517, pursued “new religious orders, missionary activity, the founding of institutions to care for the sick, poor, and homeless, and a general effort to teach and preach to the laity,” for their own reform.²⁵ The question-and-answer catechism, called *Interrogatorio* was also used at the School of Christian Doctrine in sixteenth century Italy.²⁶ It consisted of works very strongly motivated by the love of God. Yet, the *Interrogatorio*, only sums up the basic elements of orthodox Christianity (Catholicism), basing on ecclesiastical tradition than on the Bible, whereas the Protestant catechisms grounded the tenets of the faith in Scripture. There were subtle, but real differences in content between the catechism of the Roman Church and the new Lutheran catechism. Grendler contends that “(the initial) Protestant catechisms sometimes contained anti-Catholic material.”²⁷ Meanwhile, Catholic theologians had adopted the writings of Augustine in their attacks on Protestantism, because the historical influence of Augustine (354-430 CE) was on both the Catholic catechism as well as the German reformers.²⁸ Peter Canisius, one of the most energetic members of the Society of Jesus also published one of the first explicitly confessionalised Roman Catholic catechisms, the *Summa Doctrinae Christianae*.²⁹ On the other hand, Drickamer maintains that the Large Catechism teaches a “receptive” religion, “in which everything is received from God.”³⁰ Thus, there were ongoing conflicts between the two early modern groups of Christianity.³¹

The Counter-Papacy in Luther’s Commentary of the Decalogue

Then, how can one understand the Large Catechism of Martin Luther? What are its form, function, argument, and scope? Many of the text’s symbolic illustrations or concepts imply his anti-papal campaign. The incorporation of statement attributable to the devil serves to admonish the readers, as terms such as “evil and misfortune” and “danger and disaster” clearly indicate³²: “then comes the devil, who hates and badgers us on all sides, but especially exerts himself where the conscience and spiritual matters are at stake.”³³ “Luther’s practice in the Decalogue also reveals his attention toward the devil one” in each of the Decalogues.³⁴ The hymns that Luther included explicitly allude to the pope as the arch-enemy of the new church:

Preserve us, Lord, by thy dear Word, from Turk and pope defend us, Lord, who now would thrust out from his throne our Savior, Jesus Christ, thy Son.³⁵

²⁵ Paul F. Grendler, “The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” *Church History* 53, 3 (Sep., 1984): 319. Geoffrey Rudolph Elton, *Reformation Europe: 1517-1559* (London: Collins, 1963), 134-142.

²⁶ It shows that there were innovative movements in the Catholic Church as well. Ibid., “The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” 329-330.

²⁷ Ibid., “The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” 330.

²⁸ This figure demonstrates that they used the same tradition of the Decalogue. Hilmar M. Pabel, “Peter Canisius and the Truly Catholic Augustine,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 908.

²⁹ Ibid., “Peter Canisius and the Truly Catholic Augustine,” 903-924.

³⁰ It reflects that the Augustine tradition was generalised in the Reformation era. John M. Drickamer, “The Religion of the Large Catechism,” *Concordia Journal* (July, 1982): 139.

³¹ Ibid., “The Religion of the Large Catechism,” 914-916.

³² Timothy J. Wengert, “Martin Luther and the Ten Commandments in the Large Catechism,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31, 2 (April, 2004): 257.

³³ The figure of devil was generally applied to the power of the traditional church for the new movement of Luther. Theodore Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press, 1959), 338-339.

³⁴ Tom V. Hagel, “The Place of the Devil in Lutheran Catechesis,” *Lutheran Education Journal* 141, 2 (2007): 103-112.

³⁵ Robin A. Leaver, “Luther’s Catechism Hymns ‘Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word,’” *Lutheran Quarterly* XI (1997): 397-409.

The phrase of “Preserve us, Lord, by thy dear Word, from Turk and pope” refers, according to Leaver, to the Ottoman threat against Protestant Europe; additionally, it acknowledges the external ecclesiastical threat posed by the Roman Church and the Emperor Charles V against Lutherans.³⁶ Popes (perhaps Pope Leo X (1513-1521) and Clement VII (1523-1534)) were hostile to Luther and his followers. The Large Catechism therefore exemplified Luther’s ideological theology.³⁷ The Decalogue in the Large Catechism was the non-negotiable teaching, presented as a sine qua non of the reformed Christian doctrine and practices, as is evident for the following statement by Luther: “this much is certain, anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures.”³⁸

The “Introduction” to Luther’s Large Catechism reflects that Luther’s conviction that the new evangelical churches, having achieved some measure of external stability, now needed to be strengthened internally. The “Preface” mentions that reformed pastors and preachers have been negligent in the cultivation of a proper spiritual attitude. Their condition was depicted as, “they used to be under (the religious order of) the papacy.”³⁹ Luther characterises many of them as still beholden to the papacy, and he responds to this unfortunate situation by questioning the authority and sincerity of the papacy in the teaching of the Decalogue. The leaders of the traditional church were also criticised as that “they (the bored, presumptuous saints) evidently consider themselves much wiser than God himself, and wiser than all his holy angels, prophets, apostles, and all Christians.”⁴⁰ Thus, the encouragement of Luther for his new evangelical churches was demonstrated based on the criticism of the conceit of the Latin Church leaders. The papacy is roundly criticised in Luther’s commentary that attaches to each commandment of the Decalogue.

The Commandments to God

Luther taught from the start of his career as a reformer that the first commandment portrays God as both strong and desirous of worship.⁴¹ The commentary emphasises that God will avenge Himself upon His people if they turn away from Him and He will not cease to be angry until the fourth generation, even until they are utterly exterminated. Therefore, God is to be feared, and not despised.⁴² The reformer illustrates his case by invoking the counter-example of the idolatrous Roman papacy. The saints, he avers, have been virtually deified by the pope’s followers. The illustrations were various, such as if someone has a toothache, he is encouraged to fast in honor of St. Apollonia;⁴³ if anyone fears fire, that person should invoke St. Lawrence as his helper in

³⁶ The method of metaphor was one of the main literary techniques in Luther’s writings. Ibid., “Luther’s Catechism Hymns ‘Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word,’” 404-405.

³⁷ Particularly, his personal prayer reflects his socio-religious perspective and intention. Luther argued that faith is the fulfilment of the commandments. Nestingen, “Luther’s Cultural Translation of the Catechism,” 444-446. Wengert, “The Book of Concord and Human Sexuality, Seen Through the Institution of Marriage,” 9-18. Bernhard Mutschler, “Ein Reden des Herzens mit Gott. Martin Luther über das Gebet,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49, 1 (1998): 24-41.

³⁸ Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 5. Christofer Frey, *Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London, New Delhi, and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 118-131. Henning Graf Reventlow, “The Ten Commandments in Luther’s Catechisms,” in *Decalogue Jewish and Christian Tradition*, eds. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (New York: T & T Clark, 2011) 132-147.

³⁹ Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 5.

⁴⁰ Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 5.

⁴¹ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Truth about God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 40, 1 (1998): 17-39.

⁴² Number 34, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 35.

⁴³ It was a customary tradition that saints become the subject of personal prayer. L. F. Haas, “St Apollonia (died about AD 249),” *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* 60, 5 (1996): 558.

need;⁴⁴ if he/she dreads the plague, the person is taught to make a votive offering to St. Sebastian or St. Rochio.⁴⁵ The ritual of selecting patron saints and the idolatrous worship directed toward them are seen as a serious problem within the Catholic Church. Luther deprecates such practices, comparing the churchmen who encourage them to sorcerers and magicians:

Here belong those also, as, e. g., sorcerers and magicians, whose idolatry is most gross, and who make a covenant with the devil, in order that he may give them plenty of money or help them in love-affairs, preserve their cattle, restore to them lost possessions, etc. For all these place their heart and trust elsewhere than in the true God, look for nothing good to Him nor seek it from Him.⁴⁶

With regards to the phrase, “taking the name of the Lord, thy God in vain,” the people of the Reformation were reminded that the greatest religious abuses occur in spiritual matters pertaining to conscience. In this regard, the historical character of St. Nicholas⁴⁷ was introduced as the target the children formerly were accustomed to fast and pray for. The name of the saint that was quoted in prayer among many votaries, instead of the name of the Lord, was seen by the reformer as vain. Further, Luther depreciated the Sabbatical commandment, for he believed that the rite had been enjoyed not for Christians, and certainly not for reformed Christians, but rather, for the Jews of Israel. His co-religionists were taught that Jesus Christ has made it free for all his followers. Yet, Luther urged everyone to keep it, because this exercise in the Word is more pleasing to God than any work of hypocrisy.⁴⁸ Thus, in his comments on the first three commandments he warned against the tendency of focusing on the legends of the saints than on the deity of God: “to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely... to cling to Him with our heart is nothing else than to entrust ourselves to him completely.”⁴⁹ The religio-traditional attitudes of Catholics that disregarded the grace and mercy of God were prohibited for the life of the new faith community.

The Commandments to Men

The other seven commandments are related to one’s fellow men. The reformer taught that God has placed special emphasis on honouring one’s parents, above all estates of fatherhood and motherhood. If God’s Word and will are being closely followed, then secondarily, nothing shall be esteemed than observing the word and will of one’s parents. Yet, this one takes price of place after obedience to God, and as a complement to the first three commandments. Here, Luther demeans the dignity and honour of Carthusians, monks, and nuns and argues against paying them honour: “Oh, what a high price would all Carthusians, monks, and nuns pay, if in all their religious doings they could bring into God’s presence a single work done by virtue of His commandment [...]”⁵⁰ The teaching of the fourth commandment was encouraged to the young, but Luther also

⁴⁴ “St Lawrence of Rome,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_of_Rome, approached on 26/05/2014.

⁴⁵ D. Salter, “Remembering the Catholic Middle Ages: The Franciscans, English National Identity, and William Hogarth’s The Roast Beef of Old England,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 9, 1 (Winter, 2006): 145-163.

⁴⁶ See numbers 11-12, Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand (Trans.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 124.

⁴⁷ It is applied in present days. Anna M. Redcay, “Live to learn and learn to live: The St. Nicholas League and the Vocation of Childhood,” *Children’s Literature* 39 (2011): 58-84.

⁴⁸ Number 102, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 9.

⁴⁹ Paul Lehmann, “Harvey Cox, Martin Luther and A Macro-Sociological Appropriation of the Decalogue,” *Sociological Analysis* 45 (1984): 87.

⁵⁰ *Carthusian* is derived from the Chartreuse Mountains. Saint Bruno built his first hermitage in the valley of these mountains in the French Alps in 1084. Number 118, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 12.

evaluated that “it has not been esteemed and taught hitherto under the papacy.”⁵¹ Furthermore, the fatherhood was introduced in three species: fathers in blood, fathers in office, and fathers in spirit. Fathers in blood designated those to whom falls the care of family; fathers in office were they who care for country. Those in the Papacy were depicted as the spiritual fathers. They have had themselves called thus, but have failed to perform this paternal office.⁵² Luther indirectly satirised the irresponsible behaviour of the Roman Church leaders for their lack of spiritual sensibility. The spiritual fatherhood of the apostle Paul was illustrated for the comprehension of his reformed followers:

When we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. (1 Cor. 4: 13-15)⁵³

The fifth commandment states that no one should perpetrate any evil deed against his neighbour and that “under this commandment not only he is guilty who does evil to his neighbour, but he also who can do him good, prevent, resist evil, defend and save him, so that no bodily harm or hurt happen to him, and yet does not do it.”⁵⁴ The followers of the new reformed movement were required to practise and inculcate this teaching, but Luther here indicated that this message would not be preached for monks of the Catholic Church. The monks were seen to mock and delude the world with a false, hypocritical show of holiness. Luther accused them of throwing the fifth commandment, indeed, all the commandment, to the wind, as if they did not require truly to be taught. The monks of the traditional church were decried that they shamelessly proclaimed their self-serving behavior and hypocritically boasted about their ostensibly perfect lives.⁵⁵ The internal conceit of monks, in contrast to true Christian parenthood, was thus what mainly concerns Luther in this teaching on the commandment: “Honor your father and your mother.”

Luther’s commentary of the sixth commandment, likewise, implicitly condemns the ubiquitous sin of adultery as the most common form of unchastity in the era. Marriage was sanctioned by God, and as such, husbands and wives were obliged to conduct themselves with the utmost seriousness of purpose.⁵⁶ Luther therefore endorses marriages, even defending it from all who dismiss it out of hand, despite it, or hold it in disrepute. The reformer metaphorically stated that the commandment had been misconstrued by the blind world and by the misguided ecclesiastics. The commandment, “You shall do not commit murder” was emphasised to be applied whether they be that of emperor, princes, or bishops. Further, for the singlehood of religious leaders (not getting married), Luther disagreed and pointed out that the popish rabble, (celibate) priests, monks, and nuns, were in contravention of the sixth commandment. On the contrary, he encouraged his protestant people to

⁵¹ Number 140 and 145, *Ibid.*, *the Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 14. Henning Graf Reventlow, “The Ten Commandments in Luther’s Catechisms,” in *Decalogue Jewish and Christian Tradition*, eds. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 132-147.

⁵² Number 158, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 16.

⁵³ Numbers 159-160, Kolb, Wengert, and Arand (Trans.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 152.

⁵⁴ Number 189, Fischer, *the Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 18. Reventlow, “The Ten Commandments in Luther’s Catechisms,” 132-140.

⁵⁵ It reveals that there was a strong formalism among church authorities. Number 197, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 19. Elton, *Reformation Europe: 1517-1559*, 134-142.

⁵⁶ The sexual depravity of the church is also reflected in this commandment through the encouragement of marriage which is seen biblical. Number 208, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 20.

avoid monastic vows, for there will be a continual burning and secret suffering which can only be assuaged in the married life. Paul's injunction where husband and wife should love and honour one another (Ephesians 6: 2) was invoked to support Luther's personal will on this commandment. Therefore, Erik M. Heen asserts that Luther himself followed Paul in the context of the Law.⁵⁷

With regard to the seventh commandment, "You shall not steal," there were metaphorical expressions of "swivel-chair robbers," "land- and highway-robbers," "not pick-locks and sneak-thieves" who snatch away the ready cash in the early modern time. The leader of the Reformation continuously attacked ecclesiastical office-holder who behave as if they were great noblemen, and honourable, pious citizens, and yet seize every opportunity to rob and steal under a good pretext. He excoriated Charles V, whom Luther considered overly beholden to the order of Pope Clement VII (cousin of Leo X). The fellows of the Roman emperor, like lords and princes who daily plundered not just a few towns and cities, but all Germany, were also condemned as the great powerful arch-thieves. The current pope was portrayed as the supreme protector of all thieves: "Yea, where should we place the head and supreme protector of all thieves, the Holy Chair in Rome with all its retinue, which has grabbed by theft the wealth of all the world, and holds it to this day?"⁵⁸ Luther spiritually designated them the greatest thieves in the sight of God, and assured the readers that God, who sees all things, shall justly punish these malefactors.

According to Luther, the eighth commandment, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour" was a principle commonly observed by the Jews.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it was also encouraged that everyone must always come to their neighbour's aid. The notion that one must respect one's neighbours, whether they are husbands, wives, children, or servants, applied not only the secular, juridical sphere, but also spiritually. Regarding secret sins, when they are made public, the person should be prosecuted. Here, the pope was reproved for teaching false doctrine and thereby bearing false witness throughout the world.⁶⁰ The reformed people were informed that the pope publicly bore false witness against his people through official teachings. In particular, Luther skewered the poisonous tongues of false, self-appointed saints:

For when a matter is public in the light of day, there can be no slandering or false judging or testifying; as, when we now reprove the pope with his doctrine, which is publicly set forth in books and proclaimed in all the world. For where the sin is public, the reproof also must be public, that every one may learn to guard against it.⁶¹

While Siegfried Kreuzer argued that the book of Deuteronomy is one of the most influential books in the Bible and in Church History, Martin Luther had understood the Hebrew book as the most comprehensive exposition of the Decalogue.⁶² Luther and the Catholic Church largely followed the Pauline-Augustine order of the first eight commandments.⁶³ For the ninth and tenth commandments, however, Luther diverged from the

⁵⁷ Luther often quoted the principles or teachings of Paul from the New Testament. Erik M. Heen, "A Lutheran Response to the New Perspective on Paul," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23, 3 (Autumn, 2010): 263-291.

⁵⁸ Number 230, Fischer, *the Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 22. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1995). Dicken, *The German Nation and Martin Luther*, 45-47.

⁵⁹ Martin Luther considered the last three commandments in the same concept of anti-coveting. Heen, "A Lutheran Response to the New Perspective on Paul," 274-276.

⁶⁰ See Reventlow, "The Ten Commandments in Luther's Catechisms," 132-147.

⁶¹ Number 284, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 28.

⁶² Siegfried Kreuzer, "Luther's Lecture on Deuteronomy and its Importance for his Understanding of the Decalogue and his Catechism," *Kerygma und Dogma [Kerygma & Dogma]* 46, 4 (2000): 302-317.

⁶³ Andries Raath, "Writing 'New' Decalogue: Martin Luther's Development of the Pauline-Augustine Tradition of National Law," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 70, 3 (2005): 425-454.

Catholic Church, instead using the word order of Exodus 20:17.⁶⁴ The two commandments are understood to be given exclusively to the Jews, even though in part they concern Luther's followers. These last two commandments were understood as directed specifically against Jewish transgressions, since among the Jews coveting a neighbour's wife, man-servant, maid-servant, house, land, livestock, or anything that is his, was considered neither a sin nor a disgrace. By contrast, Luther stated that the last commandment, though flouted by roguish men, is observed by truly pious folk who wish to be known as sincerely honest and upright.⁶⁵ The Markan narrative of King Herod, who took his brother's wife while he was still alive (Mark 6: 14-29), was seen to allude indirectly to the rapacious authority of the Rome Church for the followers of the reformation movement. Luther additionally reminded his readers that the pope and his followers were not only envious of everyone else's good fortune, but also miserably avaricious.

Conclusion

The Lutheran reformative interpretation of the Decalogue in the Large Catechism clearly functions as a religio-political statement against the decadence of the Roman Church, even though the larger catechetical context was an exhaustive account of Christian ethics applicable to the members of the new reformed movement. Martin Luther subscribed to the theory of natural law, which he cites to impugn the traditional Church's legalistic reading of the Ten Commandments.⁶⁶ The reformer insisted that his early modern German co-religionists strive truly to live according to the Decalogue, which he treated as a compendium of divinely sanctioned doctrine. The first commandment was for Luther the chief source and foundation for all the rest. In this regard, the names of St Apollonia, St Lawrence, Sebastian, and Rochio, were criticised because the worshipful reverence devoutly bestowed on them, instead of the name of Yahweh. The dishonourable behaviour of monks and nuns, especially the Carthusians, contravened, in Luther's view, the paternal office of spiritual fatherhood that must be exercised by ministers and their congregations. The monastic vow of celibacy without marriage did nothing but encouraged a hypocritical show of holiness. The prestige of the pope, indeed the entire Holy Office was accused of bearing false witness against the whole people of Christianity. Luther's reading of the last two commandments of coveting neighbours including their wife and possessions, was less explicitly anti-Catholic than his approach to previous eight commandments; nevertheless, he railed with bitter irony against "those desperate saints who dare to invent a higher and better life and estate than the Decalogue teach[es]."⁶⁷ Thus, Luther's treatment of the Decalogue in the Large Catechism, is firmly grounded in religious ideology and his hopes for the newly reformed Christian movement.

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⁶⁴ You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maid-servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour (Ex. 20: 17). It is not clear about the reason Luther disregarded the deuteronomic tradition yet. Kreuzer, "Luther's Lecture on Deuteronomy and its Importance for his Understanding of the Decalogue and his Catechism," 302-317.

⁶⁵ Number 300, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 28.

⁶⁶ Raath, "Writing 'New' Decalogue: Martin Luther's Development of the Pauline-Augustine Tradition of National Law," 425-454.

⁶⁷ Number 315, Fischer, *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 31.

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