

11-25-2018

Luther on Prayer

Munyengetero Mtata

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

 Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mtata, Munyengetero (2018) "Luther on Prayer," *Consensus*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol39/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Luther on Prayer

Munyengerero Mtata¹

Luther's reflections on common, or communal prayer reveal a helpful way of describing Luther's thought process around the subject of prayer primarily from the perspective of his 1520 *Treatise on Good Works*. Along with this treatise, other writings by Luther are helpful in examining whether Luther's thoughts remained the same or they changed over time. If they changed, it is also helpful to explore which areas would have changed. The idea of good works was a hotly contested one, as Wengert indicates that the treatise was a product of Georg Spalatin's "strong encouragement" for Luther to address it.² One would imagine that the war Luther waged against the sale of indulgences may have influenced the writing of this treatise about three years later. Besides, the indulgences would have provided false hope in addition to depriving the poor of the little money they had. This indeed may be viewed as an understanding of salvation through good works. Of course, from the *Treatise on Good Works* itself, there is little that explicitly suggests this view.

Prayer in the Explanation of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works*

The concept of prayer that Luther raises in his explanation of the Third Commandment is given in the context of the *Treatise on Good Works*. In this treatise, Luther attempts to provide a new understanding of good works in a context where "... designated acts of religious devotion and charity ... made up for sins committed by believers" were "... considered meritorious for salvation."³ Luther problematizes this thinking as he builds his argument on Augustine of Hippo who had maintained that any supposedly "good works" would be considered rather sinful if not founded on faith.⁴ Luther and his colleagues often shocked contemporaries by their approach to good works, especially the belief that they do not contribute anything to one's salvation. Further, they recognized that the Ten Commandments (the actual subject of this treatise) were only for worldly Christians while the "*perfecti*" (ones under a vow whose works were deemed higher) also followed the so-called "evangelical counsels."

Unfortunately, this thinking was sometimes taken a bit to the extreme to mean that Christians were exempt "from obligation to perform any good works at all." However, Urbanus Rhegius, one of the evangelical preachers, is quoted by Wengert as saying "And if praying, fasting, holy days, and almsgiving are not required, then we will lie near the stove, warm our feet on its tiles, turn the roasting apples, open our mouths, and wait until grilled doves fly into them"⁵ a statement which sarcastically reacted to this extreme view.

¹ *Munyengerero Mtata* is a Lutheran Pastor in the Zimbabwean Lutheran Church, currently serving at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Saskatoon, SK.

² Timothy J. Wengert, "Introduction, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520)," *The Roots of Reform, The Annotated Luther: Volume 1* ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 260.

³ Wengert, "Introduction, *Treatise on Good Works*," 258.

⁴ Wengert, "Introduction, *Treatise on Good Works*," 258.

⁵ Wengert, "Introduction, *Treatise on Good Works*," 259.

The main thrust of the *Treatise on Good Works* is the resultant obedience of God's commandments coming out of faith, both of which are the "gift and work of the Holy Spirit." This thinking was, from Wengert's view, a dismissal of the late medieval understanding that ordinary Christians under grace were to fulfill the commandments, while those under the vow were to fulfill Christ's "counsels," creating classes of standards to be applied on different groups of Christians. This, one could argue, may have had the potential to create heretical implications that there were more important and less important Christians. However, Luther's approach to Good Works in this treatise actually debunks this potentially toxic understanding by setting a single standard for all Christians in the obedience to the Ten Commandments, which could be thought to contain enough works "to keep every Christian busy."⁶

The basic argument that Luther proffered contended that good works can only be understood from the perspective of the Ten Commandments (obedience of which is a result of faith). In this vein concerning the Third Commandment, Luther will reveal that prayer done in faith is a good work. This is so because obeying the Third Commandment leads to, among other works, prayer both for the individual and for the community.⁷ This, too, was revolutionary in that it is not the recitation of prayers but rather heartfelt begging of God that constituted true prayer.

At the beginning of this part of the Third Commandment, covering sections 4 and 10⁸ on personal prayer or individual prayer, Luther insisted that people should pray, but not necessarily as has been the case "by turning pages in a prayer book or counting beads on the rosary."⁹ Luther was not against prayer books or rosaries, but he was looking to assist people to re-envision prayer life as that which is built by the attitude to "earnestly seek aid, and place our faith and trust in God so intently that we have no doubts we will be heard."¹⁰ And this is the view that he maintained throughout the section. It was important for him to consistently state this because he had built a foundational argument that any work that is not informed by faith cannot fit into the category of good works. And so when one engaged in prayer, it was not enough to just open one's mouth, open a prayer book and follow the beads of a rosary, for example, but all these actions needed to be pushed by the faith and trust that in fact God was pleased and would indeed hear and respond.

At an individual level, therefore, Luther criticized the traditional modes of praying which depended on guidance and prescriptions of the religious authorities.¹¹ It appears that Luther had a sense that this practice had become too much of a habit that it no longer exhibited a sense of earnestness and trust in God by the people who prayed. Luther maintained that prayer is an act of faith and it appears that, for him, this faith is exhibited as one brings "particularly pressing needs before God," as opposed to the dutiful mumbling of prescribed words from the church's tradition.¹² In the Large Catechism, as well as in the

⁶ Wengert, "Introduction, *Treatise on Good Works*," 260.

⁷ Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good Works, 1520," *The Roots of Reform, The Annotated Luther: Volume 1*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 306.

⁸ Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 306-314.

⁹ Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 306.

¹⁰ Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 306.

¹¹ Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 306.

¹² Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 306.

Augsburg Confession and its Apology, this is connected to the notion that prayer or sacraments are effective “*ex opere operato*,” by the mere performance of the rite.

Luther went further to argue that this was the kind of prayer that God accepted, the one that was presented in faith, as opposed to doubting or mere reciting. However, Luther was open to the possibility that prayers could actually be offered in doubt rather than in faith.¹³ As far as he was concerned, in prayer there should have been no room for doubting because a number of scriptural references that he quotes bring assurances to those who pray, that what they pray for would indeed be answered. These assurances were the ones that awakened faith in those who prayed.¹⁴

The idea of unbelief, as Luther saw it, was manifested in two ways, that is, not believing that one’s prayer is pleasing to and heard by God, and testing God by limiting God about when, where and how to answer one’s prayer.¹⁵ One wonders though, what the issue was about doubting. It appears from the way Luther raised this issue, that it may have been a major issue that probably ate away the spiritual vitality of the church during his time. Without necessarily taking it too far, one would imagine that this ‘doubt’ may have been propped up by medieval scholastic theology. In this regard Luther offered an observation:

We find that many people pray, fast, create pious endowments, do this and that, and lead respectable lives in the opinion of others; but if you ask them whether or not they are certain that God is pleased with what they do, they do not know or at least have their doubts. Moreover, they cite learned scholars who do nothing but teach good works and claim it is unnecessary to have such certainty.¹⁶

If this connection is anything to go by, it may follow that the doubting that Luther was dealing with here emanated from this medieval theological understanding, which he felt was not supported by scripture. And he even went as far as calling it “sin”.¹⁷

The consequence of this kind of thinking may have been the inability to believe, where one felt that even though they would want to believe, they would not find faith inside themselves. Nonetheless, Luther went further to address this problem by answering the question, “What if I cannot believe that my prayer will be heard and is pleasing to God?”¹⁸ It may be important to note here that, as Luther presents it, this unbelief appears not to be a refusal to believe, but the incapacity that one sees prevailing against one’s willingness or openness to believe. The answer that Luther gives to this question clearly supports his earlier assertion that faith is a gift, because he maintains, “this is why faith, prayer, and other good works are commanded, so that you might see what you can and cannot do. Then, when you find that you are unable to believe and act in this manner, you may humbly lament this before God . . .”¹⁹ There is a deep paradox here: lacking faith, a person is driven by this very lack of faith to pray in faith. Faith, as a chief work, is not manufactured by human intentions,

¹³ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 307.

¹⁴ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 307.

¹⁵ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 308.

¹⁶ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 268.

¹⁷ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 308.

¹⁸ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 309.

¹⁹ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 309.

but comes from God. And so a realization that one cannot believe was, for Luther, a blessing because it then led the individual to dependence on God.

Besides true prayer being defined by faith, Luther posited the idea of inward prayer, which must inform outward prayer, as true prayer. This he called, in other words, “spiritual prayer.”²⁰ This was prayer that could be done whilst one was working, as one placed one’s needs and those of others before God and pleaded for help.²¹ This suggests that authentic prayer is a matter of the heart which should give shape to all other kinds of prayer, because faith is a matter of the heart.

Luther’s further reflection on prayer also recognized the hand of an evil spirit in hindering the people of God from praying. It was not just a limitation that one experienced naturally, but an evil spirit was a contributing factor to one failing, not only to pray, but also to believe when one prayed. He argued that the evil spirit takes away one’s “desire to pray” by restricting the conducive environment for prayer or by causing one to doubt one’s worthiness before God.²² This had devastating implications for the medieval scholastic theology that he was fighting against, because if it sowed the seed of doubt in people, just like the evil spirit did, then what would have been the source of this theology? The best way, then, to fight against this spirit was to understand that it was not on account of one’s worthiness that one and one’s prayers were pleasing before God, but on account of God’s commandment and God’s promises²³ that one would come confidently before God.

Sections eleven to sixteen deal with what Luther called “common prayer.”²⁴ Luther confirmed that this kind of prayer was the one that most suitably belonged to the Third Commandment, as it was work that benefited not necessarily the person who prayed, but those for whom one prays. Here Luther drove the point that the main purpose of prayer when the community of believers gathered was to offer prayers on behalf of everyone, particularly those in one’s vicinity.

It is interesting, for two reasons, to note that the biblical texts, including the book of Baruch, quoted in the introduction of this part seem to speak to the idea of peace. First, one might speculate that Luther was attempting to indicate the theological foundation for “common prayer.” If so, the implications are interestingly far-reaching. One implication is that raising individual needs collectively could possibly bring peace. As people in the same community identify with each other in their need(s) before God, this would probably inspire peace as people discover that they can share their needs and work to meet these through prayer before the God of peace. In fact, this argument seems to be in sync with the term “common” in that the gathered community finds its commonality in its need for God’s intervention. The second reason that Luther brought up the idea of peace from these pieces of scripture as both a pushing factor towards and the result of common prayer, was that this common prayer affected not only the gathered community alone, but it also spread into the domain of the world. It was not just leaders of leaders of the gathered community who were to be prayed for, but of the world at large. This prayer, then, crosses the bounds of the

²⁰ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 310.

²¹ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 310.

²² Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 311.

²³ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 311.

²⁴ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 314.

Christian faith into being inclusive; no wonder Luther would exclaim, “This common prayer is precious and the most powerful.”²⁵ It was world-transforming.

Luther does not stop here, however. He further asserted that the church gathered during Mass to offer this kind of prayer, without which there was no need for a Mass.²⁶ The primary reason for the gathering of the church was to pray. To this end, Luther maintained that this should be the characteristic of the assembly “throughout the Mass,” not that the preacher just offers prayers for everyone from the pulpit, but that everyone prays for the other in humility and faith.²⁷ The prayer that was offered in this manner was viewed by Luther to be the greatest force and a greater work than any other, one that countered everything that harassed the church.²⁸ In other words, this kind of prayer was thought to be efficacious. It must be noted that Luther did maintain the argument that he had laid in the personal prayer that this prayer was to be offered earnestly with “heartfelt cry of all the people.”²⁹ Also, the character of the evil spirit continued to fight to prevent the church from engaging in this kind of prayer.

Just as personal prayer was effective if done in faith, so also common prayer was equally effective, as would be seen in the examples of Abraham praying for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Elijah praying for both drought and rain.³⁰ In short, common prayer works. But this is not to imply that common prayer works in a similar fashion with magic (similar to the effectiveness of the sacraments through the mere doing of the works “*ex opera operato*”), as if things start to happen “only when the mouth mumbles.”³¹ In fact, Luther complains, “what is God supposed to do when you come to church with your mouth, a prayer book, and a rosary and set your mind on nothing other than getting through the words the prescribed number of times?” In explaining this ‘complaint’ by Luther, Wengert says, “At private confession, the priest would often assign the penitent a certain number of prayers like the Our Father and the Ave Maria to be said as penance. The rosary helped a person keep track of the number of times these prayers were recited.”³² Seemingly, for Luther, one had to bring concrete issues before a gracious Father and pray earnestly and trust that God would accept and hear this prayer, just as has been indicated earlier. He did not accept the notion that the church itself was what determined the efficacy of prayer, as long as it followed the prescribed number of prayers. Rather people needed to approach prayer just like subjects who would bring specific, well-laid down petitions to a powerful prince.³³ Prayer is relational in nature. It is the relation to God, established and maintained by faith alone, which determines what true prayer is.

Luther reiterated the concept of self-reflection in view of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer when one engages in prayer. This self-reflection, he argued, would make one see not only one’s life, but “all the lives in the whole Christian Church, especially those in the spiritual walk of life” where Christian virtues would be discovered to be lacking

²⁵ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 314.

²⁶ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 314.

²⁷ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 315.

²⁸ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 314.

²⁹ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 315.

³⁰ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 316.

³¹ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 316.

³² Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 316.

³³ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 317.

and that many other things are not in place.³⁴ Surely with this in mind, one would not fail to find something to pray for.

Luther suspected that the lack of earnestness and trust in God actually caused the calamities on the church. He stated that because some had ignored “the harm done to the whole Christian Church and say no prayers for it but instead laugh and take delight in passing judgement on their neighbours’ sins and gossiping about them in the worst way...” this had opened a window to allow the Turks to “devastate towns and the countryside with their inhabitants and destroy churches.”³⁵ Luther saw connections between calamities befalling the church and all communities and Christians neglecting prayer. Because of his understanding that prayer done in earnestness and trust was efficacious, these calamities were proof that Christians had ceased to pray, at least in effective ways. The “Turks” that Luther referred to were “The Muslim Ottoman Empire and its troops . . .” which had “threatened central Europe in the 1520s and 1540s. Belgrade and much of Hungary fell to the invading armies in 1521.”³⁶ The calamities that befell Christendom, at least as Luther saw it, was not due to some evil spirit breaking into the life of Christians, though he acknowledged that too, but mainly because of neglect of God’s word, which then gave way to “all kinds of sins.”³⁷

In summary, Luther pointed out that prayer was to be understood in the context of good works, which are the fulfilment of the Ten Commandments, which in itself is the fruit or result of the work of the Holy Spirit who gives faith. Prayer in the context of the Third Commandment would have been earnest and faithful pleading of God’s mercy by the gathered assembly for individuals themselves, but also more importantly, for everyone. This prayer was understood to be efficacious enough to cause the spread of peace, which in itself would have been the result of the fulfilment of the Ten Commandments.

Luther’s Understanding of Common Prayer in Other Writings

a. An Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer for Simple Laymen

In this exposition, which was published in 1519 – a year earlier than the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther had provided some kind of elementary explanations through sermons on the Lord’s Prayer for purposes of use by ordinary Christians in Wittenberg.³⁸ Although this reflection was not necessarily targeted for a particular context in which to pray, as it was a general reflection on the Lord’s Prayer, some of the issues that are raised are reflected in the section of Prayer in Luther’s exposition of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works*. First, in his introduction or foreword of this work he deals with “how we should pray.”³⁹ Luther quotes the Gospel of John 4:24, particularly the phrase “to pray in spirit,” which he expounds to mean “to pray spiritually,”⁴⁰ and the phrase “to pray in truth” as “directed against sham prayer.” He goes on to unpack these phrases arguing that “for the

³⁴ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 318.

³⁵ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 319.

³⁶ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” n. 83.

³⁷ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 319.

³⁸ Martin Luther, *An Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer for Simple Laymen (1519)*. *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, 79 Volumes. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann and Christopher Boyd Brown, gen. eds., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–), Volume 42: 57–58 (Hereafter cited LW).

³⁹ Luther, “An Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer,” LW 42:19.

⁴⁰ Luther, “An Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer,” LW 42:20.

sham oral prayer is the mouth's thoughtless mumbling and chattering . . . performed by the mouth, but not in truth."⁴¹ This is quite consistent with what he would maintain later in the *Treatise on Good Works* as has been demonstrated above. Second, in his explanation of the section on Prayer in the Third Commandment of the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther alluded to reflection on the Lord's Prayer as the guide that teaches a Christian to answer the question of what one "should request and lament in prayer."⁴² The question that follows then is how the Lord's Prayer guides in this respect, and to answer that, Luther in his exposition of the Lord's Prayer then divides this prayer into categories which he explains one after the other. The first, for example, is what he calls the "Introduction – Our Father, who art in heaven." For Luther, this introduction teaches one "to know how to address, honor, and treat the person to whom we submit our petition and how to conduct ourselves in [his] presence, so that [he] will be gracious toward us and willing to listen to us."⁴³ This speaks to the attitude that one carries when one goes before God in prayer. Not much discussion will be taken forward here save to say that Luther was pushing the argument that the Lord's Prayer instructed a believer on the attitude that one should carry when one engages God in prayer, and the content of one's prayer.

b. The Large Catechism

There is no discussion of common prayer in the explanation of the Third Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, as had been the case in the *Treatise on Good Works*. Rather, emphasis is put more on the Word, and the discussion on prayer is taken to the Second Commandment. Though Luther seemed to have dropped the idea of common prayer in this later work, he discussed prayer, in general, in quite a personal way. He argued that the Second commandment instructed believers to "call on God's name in time of need, or thank [to] and praise him in time of prosperity."⁴⁴

In the same explanation Luther brought a new concept of teaching children how to call on the name of God so that they would grow knowing the correct teaching. Indeed, this was quite a shift as prayer was taken into the home to be practiced at the level of family rather than only at church. It appears as though Luther was now more focused on raising Christian families where faith would be practiced effectively in the context of a home. It is clear when he advises, "for this purpose it also helps to form the habit of commending ourselves each day to God – our soul and body, spouse, children, servants, and all that we have – for the protection against every conceivable need."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, even in this personal, family devotional prayer approach one still finds a strand of the common prayer, which is, praying for the needs of others. It is not a prayer for just a single person but a prayer for everyone, and in fact, the family setting becomes the best context in which to learn to pray the common prayer.

⁴¹ Luther, "An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer," LW 42:20.

⁴² Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," 318.

⁴³ Luther, "An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer," LW 42:22.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," (hereafter cited LC), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 377–480) (hereafter cited as BC).

⁴⁵ LC, Ten Commandments, 73; BC 395.

Other Writers on Luther and Prayer

a. Charles Arand – The Battle Cry of Faith: The Catechisms’ Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer

Arand’s reflections on Luther’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer lead him to suggest that Luther views the Lord’s Prayer as the primary reference point concerning prayer. Unlike many of his day, Luther, according to Arand, decried the pettiness with which many approached the Lord’s Prayer mainly due to its common use.⁴⁶ Arand also observes that Luther responded to this sad situation in reflecting on the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer in both the Small and Large Catechisms, where, according to Arand, Luther’s theology and practice of prayer came together.⁴⁷ However, Arand goes further in exploring Luther’s reflection, he notes one important theological aspect to prayer which Luther had earlier in the *Treatise on Good Works* pointed out, and that was the concept of prayer as God’s command.⁴⁸ Luther had suggested a number of times that people prayed to fulfill a command.⁴⁹ This reflects the seriousness with which Luther took prayer. However, Luther also stressed the importance of prayer that is done sincerely. From this perspective then, it looks like some were beginning to feel that it is more important to be sincere in prayer than simply follow a command, which they probably felt had the potential to lead to hypocrisy.⁵⁰ However, as Arand points out, Luther warned against following one’s impulse, which is then given the power to determine what prayer is.⁵¹ The danger with this thinking would then be in limiting people from praying as often as they should.⁵² The flip side, which Luther raised a lot in the *Treatise on Good Works*, is the behavior of those “who have sensitive consciences who, when struck down by the Law, lament that they are not worthy to pray. They contend that only those who are saints, or special people of God, or pastors can truly pray in a way that God will listen.”⁵³ Luther, according to Arand, spoke against these two positions because he saw a human-centred understanding of prayer.⁵⁴

b. Timothy J. Wengert – Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism

Wengert’s fascinating reflections on Luther’s experiences with prayer at the beginning of his Introduction to Luther’s *Treatise on Good Works* exhibits another strand of common prayer stressed in this treatise: the confidence with which Luther approached God, having faith in the promise that God would hear him. This is important because in the *Treatise on Good Works* the theme of notion of God hearing prayer is one of the building blocks upon which one can confidently place one’s faith.⁵⁵ Interestingly, the theme comes up again as reflected by Wengert, though it must be understood that Luther’s understanding of the promise of being heard did not necessarily mean that God would do exactly what one

⁴⁶ 1 Charles Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith: The Catechisms’ Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol 21 (1995), 42.

⁴⁷ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 44.

⁴⁸ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 46.

⁴⁹ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 309–10.

⁵⁰ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 47.

⁵¹ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 47.

⁵² Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 47.

⁵³ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 47.

⁵⁴ Arand, “The Battle Cry of Faith,” 47.

⁵⁵ Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” 308–11.

would have prayed for. To this effect Luther, according to Wengert, affirms, “We have this advantage: that our prayer is always heard. Even if it is not heard according to our will, nevertheless it is heard according to the will of God, which is better than our will. If I did not know that my prayer would be heard, it would be the devil praying in my place.”⁵⁶ Wengert’s assertion, that “the link between faith, need and earnestness, as something coming through external necessity and experience, was crucial to Luther’s approach to prayer in the *Large Catechism*,”⁵⁷ rings true even in Luther’s exposition of prayer in the *Treatise on Good Works*.

With the exception of the shift in Luther’s reflection of prayer from the perspective of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works* to the perspective of the Second Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, the basic theological bricks that built Luther’s understanding of prayer, be it individual or communal, remain the same. Some of those theological underpinnings are that prayer is viewed as a command; that prayer will be heard and answered by God and that the believer should engage God in prayer with an attitude of faith and earnestness.

Conclusion

Luther’s reflection on prayer in a number of his writings, including the *Treatise on Good Works* and the *Large Catechism*, showed a thread of consistency in what Luther understood prayer to be. Luther maintained that prayer was God’s command that believers must obey. But it was not that they were simply to obey, but it was because God promised to hear and answer prayer, particularly prayer that was offered in faith and earnestness. Luther maintained this understanding even in his own life of prayer. The task of this paper was not to offer practical solutions, but engagement with the context so that the church might be enriched as it reflects on possible answers to its difficulties with common prayer.

⁵⁶ Timothy J. Wengert, “Luther on Prayer in the *Large Catechism*,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (2004), 251.

⁵⁷ Wengert, “Luther on Prayer,” 252.