

Compare the lutheran and calvinist reformations



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Like the family and the economy, religion is a universal and pervasive phenomenon, a part of the cultural system, because it is assumed to meet some basic need of human being. Religion is an integrated part of human experience and shows remarkable continuity through time. Even in the modern secularized societies in the West, religion has persisted and still exerts a great influence in the lives of people.

Almost all known peoples in all places and times have some set of specific cultural patterns made up of beliefs and codes of conduct, tinged with emotional views, an explanation or justification of human behavior and social organization regarding the distribution of power between the leaders and the governed, the moral code, the distribution of wealth, or the success of some and failure of others may be found in religion.

Religious beliefs and practices have been debated by various religious sectors and it includes the Lutheran and Calvinist reformations. This paper compares and contrasts the doctrines and beliefs between Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations.

II. Discussion

A. Calvinism and its beliefs

The theology and system of church practices based on the teachings of the protestant Reformation leader John Calvin. It is the doctrine of the Presbyterian and the Reformed churches and is part of the heritage of Baptists, the Congregationalists, and certain other Christian groups. Calvin's thought is most completely expressed in his Institute of the Christian

Religion (1536). Other significant documents of Calvinism are the Canons of Dort (1619), the doctrinal basis of the reformed churches; and the Westminster Confession (1646), the traditional Presbyterian creed.

Fundamental to early Calvinism was the belief in God's absolute sovereign will over the affairs of man. To do God's will was man's first duty. According to the doctrine of original sin, Adam, the first man, was created pure and did God's will. Adam's sin, however, resulted in man's fall from this state. Thus, all mankind was infected with "a total depravity," leaving man free to sin but not to do good. All were rightfully damned (R. Po-Chia Hsia & Henk Van Nierop, pp. 234-236, 2002).

The strict Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement held that Christ's death atoned for the sins of a limited few, not all mankind. The limited few, called the elect, were thus saved. According to predestination, Calvin's most widely known doctrine; God decreed eternal life for the elect and eternal damnation, or reprobation, for the rest. According to the idea known as irresistible grace, individuals elected by God to be saved by his grace could not choose to resist it.

Calvinist, like most other early Protestants, emphasized the doctrine of justification, which dealt with the condition of man's salvation. A saved individual was made righteous by God's grace, and by God's judgment was declared just, or acceptable.

Good works by an individual could not achieve his salvation or justification: he had to live by faith alone. However, his faith was expressed outwardly in strict moral and righteous conduct and good works. To a Calvinist, the ability

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to base one's life in faith was probable evidence that one was saved from sin and numbered among the elect (Kingdon, p. 45, 2006).

In Calvinism, Scripture became the supreme authority in faith and life. Calvinists believed that the Bible designated only two sacraments—baptism and Holy Communion. Calvin's notion of the church government in which the church elects elders, or presbyters, to govern its affairs came from the Bible and was adopted by the Presbyterian and the Reformed Churches. This idea of representational church government was an important influence on the development of modern democracy.

In the 17th century, some Dutch theologians and the English Puritans added to Calvinism the covenant theology. The covenant was a contractual relationship between the Christian and God. The sacraments were given as seals of the covenant. There were two covenants that God made with man—the covenant of works was made with Adam; the covenant of grace was made in Jesus Christ (Van Bruaene, pp. 481-489, 2004). The covenant theology, which became central to Puritanism in England and America, softened the doctrine of predestination by giving recognition to human cooperation in achieving salvation.

B. Lutheran and its beliefs

These are Protestant Christians who follow the teachings of Martin Luther, the leader of the German Reformation. Lutherans form the largest group of Protestants. The Lutherans are the largest religious group in Germany; they claim more than 95 percent of the people of the Scandinavian countries; and they have strong minorities in many other countries. Lutherans in the United

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States number about 8, 460, 000 and are the nation's fourth largest religious group.

Lutherans places strong emphasis on doctrine. It affirms that the Bible is the sole rule of faith and accepts all traditional Protestant Christian doctrines. Distinctive Lutheran beliefs are defined in Luther's two catechisms, the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalkaldic Articles, and the Formula of Concord (Anderson, pp. 121-125, 2001).

The chief Lutheran tenet is justification by faith alone. Salvation, according to this belief, does not come through foodworks. Rather, it comes by the faith of believers that God has forgiven their sins through the Sacrifice of Christ, and that by Gods grace they have been justified (become righteous).

Lutheranism has two sacraments, baptism and the Lords Supper.

Lutherans believe that in Holy Communion there is no physical change in the bread and wine, but that Christ is truly present to forgive sins and to renew the spiritual life of believers. Lutheran churches make greater use of liturgy the most Protestant churches, but there are differences in forms of public worship among Lutheran bodies (Braaten, pp. 83-86, 2004).

There are differences also in church government. The Lutheran churches in Europe have bishops. In the United State the local congregation is the unit of church organization and the source of authority. During the 19th century congregations combined in synods, or regional groupings (Arnold, p. 47, 2002). After 1900 many synods united to form national denominations.

Some synods are advisory bodies while others have a considerable amount of authority.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed in 1987 by a merger of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The denomination has 5,300,000 members, two of the denomination that make up the church were born out of mergers; and one, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, was a group that seceded from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (Braaten, pp. 83-86, 2004).

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod believes in strict adherence to the Bible and to all Lutheran confessions. This denomination, of German origin, was founded in 1847 by the Rev. Carl F. W. Walther. The Missouri Synod has about 2,630,000 members. It has many congregations in Canada (Rogness, pp. 364-366, 2000).

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is one of the conservative Lutheran bodies, holding without reservation to the Lutheran confessions and the infallibility of the Bible. The church was organized in Milwaukee in 1850. It has congregations in most states of the Union and has some 400,000 members. Other Bodies. There are several small Lutheran denominations.

They include the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (6,000 members), Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (19,000 members), Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (12,000 members), Church of the Lutheran Confession (9,000 members), Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (7,000 members), Evangelical Lutheran Synod (20,000 members), Latvian

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (14, 000 members), Protestant Conference (Lutheran), Inc. (1, 000 members), and World Confessional Lutheran Association (1, 300 members) (Nelson, p. 17, 2002).

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, by the early 20th century, only a few Protestant churches held to the strict Calvinism of the 16th and 17th centuries. Most churches characterized as Calvinist have either greatly modified or rejected such doctrines as election, predestination, and irresistible grace to give man a free will to determine his salvation. Moreover, there was much rivalry between Lutherans and the Reformed Church, which was founded by John Calvin. The reformed faith gained considerable support in some German states. During the 19th century the Lutheran and Reformed groups formed union churches in many of the states.

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