

# The comparison between martin luther and john calvin religion essay



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The 16th century was marked by two great leaders, Martin Luther and John Calvin, who represented the stepping stones for the Protestant Reformation. Both these men were against the Roman Catholic Church and had different views on religion and how it should be seen. Luther and Calvin had a very similar protestant based theologies. Calvin's admiration for Luther is evident because he refers to him as " an apostle"[1]. Luther was the founder of a group which is today known as the Lutherans. Both were very similar and at the same time different, each of them influenced Europe in a way. Calvin even influenced colonies of New England. Without them, contradicting the church, Protestantism would probably not be seen around the world.

Martin Luther and John Calvin had similar concepts of faith and justification towards God, which in consequence became Luther and Calvin's main currency of soul salvation. The Sermon on Good Works was Luther's first piece of writing which he writes about how only faith, not good works, benefits the soul for salvation. Luther realized that good works was not the path to take for forgiveness of sins, when he decided to achieve forgiveness by fasting many days and abstaining from sleep, but nothing happened. So from then on he discovered the bible, and found great guidance from it. He also believed that it is impossible to obey all of the proscriptions of the Old Testament thereby mercy from God and faith is the only way to salvation. " Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; Bad works do not make a bad man, but a bad man does bad works,"[2] (Wogaman p111) wrote Luther, in summary of Paul. He not only said that good works were imperfect and useless, but also declared that they were sinful acts. " Thus we sin even when we do good, unless God through Christ

covers this imperfection and does not impute it to us"[3](Luther p276). Not only does Luther say this but also Calvin's idea of faith can be seen when he says " All we assign to man is that, by his impurity he pollutes and contaminates the very works which were good. The most perfect thing which proceeds from man is always polluted by some stain. Should the Lords therefore bring to judgment the best of human works, he would indeed behold his own righteousness in them; but he would also behold man's dishonour and disgrace"[4](Westminster Confession). Calvin also believed that human nature was tainted and that people could do good works but no amount of good works would be enough to earn salvation. The grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone is the only way for redemption of sin, was Calvin's belief. Calvin greatly believed good works were useful, if done to help our neighbour. Calvin and Luther had mostly the same view of good works and salvation.

Calvin's theology was for the most part similar and on the same path as Luther's, Calvin was on the same side as Luther for the thought that the authority and ways of life of Christians were to be followed from the Scriptures and that it was not the Church itself that would tell the people what to do, but instead it would be the Scriptures, because everyone could read it them. They had a Christ centered theology. The Scriptures were to be read as it is and not to try and find the hidden meanings. They both believed that that Church was born from the Scriptures and not the way around[5]. Luther and Calvin both denounce the Pope and the churches for the used the money to create and beautify what they had instead of following the what Christ really wanted from them, which was to live in the simplest form and

educated others. They both had similar view of justification to god by faith. Luther thought that no good works were enough to reach salvation. Calvin had the idea that there was two group of people; the Elect and the non-Elect, which were chosen by God to be saved or not. Predestination was a key idea in Calvin's theology. He believed everything was already planned before even you were born. Luther believed that the state and the church should be separated. The state should have all the power. While on the other hand Calvin believed that the state and the church should not be subject to one another and vice versa. Calvin had restore Geneva, " The power of the sword and other parts of civil jurisdiction that bishops and priests had wrested from the magistrate"[6](Bouwsma p204) were given back to the king.

Calvin's ideas and theology has survived in communities in American history. The things that have been kept in notion from his works are to have a good work ethic and strong sense of family values. Calvin has influenced many fields like economics, politics, physical sciences and more[7]. Calvin's religious movement has influenced the economic thinking and behaviour of people such as Max Weber, R. H. Tawney and Talcott Parsons. They believed that Calvinistic beliefs and capitalism were connected. They called this " functional fit"[8]. Max Weber believes that Calvinism perhaps helped build an " elective affinity" for the development of capitalism, while on the other hand Tawny suggested the opposite. He thought that the Calvinist theology was adopted in capitalistic societies for this theology provided ideological explanations for economics practices which were considered morally questionable, such as interest in money[9]. Many may think that religion and scientific progress were not connected or had no relation between them, but

some sociologists say that Calvinism had a strong impact for scientific research and development[10]. Calvinism, which came from John Calvin, was also a changing point for the form of government that's present in our society. The American political structure was mostly copied from the British, while most of their government ideas had a Calvinistic sense[11]. Calvinism is also to blame for causing problems and it is thought that maybe Calvinistic thought contributed to a mindset which caused the Holocaust[12]. Martin Luther perhaps didn't affect as many sectors of life but he was the one who influenced John Calvin for his works. Luther had a great impact, for he was the first person to make the Bible available to all people. He also influenced Europe to see religious thoughts in a different way and most of all, he was responsible for weakening the Church's power[13].

Both theologies from Luther and Calvin are different and similar. Each of them are within the new Protestant paradigm, Luther's theology is with the individual person who is justified by faith, and for which such a person, good works naturally flow. Calvin's theology contrasts the glory of God with the depravity of man, and is more skeptical of the ability of the justified man to perform good works. Similarities in their Reformation essentials are more influential than their differences. Calvin was given the Reformation baton from Luther and his theology was created from Luther's. Both these men were used by God to restore the Gospel to His church[14].

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