

# The Reality of Luther's Theology – Part 3

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – An examination of the reality of Luther's theology, politically and ecclesiastically
2. aim – To cause us to understand some of the basics of the Protestant church in the world

### b. outline

1. The Effects of Luther's Theology
2. The Content of Luther's Theology

### c. overview

1. the **question** at the heart of this lesson
  - a. how do we get from one man's theological epiphany to a Reformation movement throughout W Europe? how do we get from Luther to Lutheranism (and, eventually, Protestantism as a whole)?
    1. the answer comes on two (2) distinct fronts (and lessons):
  - b. **(before)** a discussion of some of the *immediate* effects of his thinking in Germany (and beyond)
  - c. **(now)** an overview of where Luther's theology went following his new view of justification
    1. **IOW:** what kinds of *theological* "rethinking" had come about in Luther, which then "spread out" from him throughout Europe, changing both the political *and* ecclesiastical landscape
    2. **again:** this is taken from Gonzalez's chapter of Luther's theology at this point in the narrative
      - a. Luther came to view the Word of God (the Scriptures) as the *best* authority to reveal the gospel (over the papacy) – the revelation of Jesus
      - b. Luther came to distinguish between a theology of glory (centered around the pursuit of God through man's glory) and a theology of the cross (centered around the revelation of God in humility and sacrifice)
      - c. Luther came to a true distinction between law and gospel, where law becomes *for the believer* something to love and cherish, a guidance in life rather than a curse over it

## II. The Content of Luther's Theology

### Content

#### d. the Church and the Sacraments

1. Luther was *not* an individualist – he believed that the church was (still!) essential; that Christ had established the church and that Christians find their life *in the gathering*
  - a. **i.e.** Luther did not have any (initial) intentions of forming his own, separate church – he believed that the Christian life was to be lived in community (which he called "mother church")
    1. true, there is *direct* communion with God that each *individual* enjoys (via the Mediator)
    2. however, there is also an "organic" communion with God that occurs within the church
    3. specifically, by being a "*priesthood*" of believers (**1 Peter 2:5**), the people of God are priests *not just for themselves*, but for the *entire family* of belief, *out of which* believers become priests for the whole world
    4. **IOW:** Christians *need* the priesthood of the church, where other believers feed and nourish them – we "serve" each other by helping bring one another *before God*
    5. which is why Luther *denied* the ecclesiastical priesthood as the means of access to God – they were only a *part of the body* in which *all* lead one another to God
  - b. so, Luther's intention to *reform* the existing church (rather than start a new one) had results ...
2. Luther believed in the concept of *vocation* – that all honest occupations are equally valuable
  - a. vocation = the calling upon a man (believer!) to serve God in the world; the belief that all work is good and advances the cause of Christ upon the earth – **the Sanctity of the Common Life**
  - b. **i.e.** the monastic or bishopric life is no better than any other – to be a priest does not make you "better" simply because you serve in that capacity
  - c. **note:** Luther (as a man of his time) held that one's calling was determined by birth – later reformers would "expand" this view into the ability to move into "new" walks of life (as a *direct* calling of God; what we today would see as "the call" to ministry)

3. Luther also believed that the Word of God comes to us in the sacraments
  - a. sacrament (then and now!) = a ritual that conveys a certain and specific sense of the grace of God; a ritual that *transfers* something *tangible* from the hand of God to the individual
    1. **e.g.** in Catholicism, baptism transfers the righteousness of God to the child by removing the stain of original sin, thus including the child in the church (**i.e.** a baptismal regeneration)
  - b. for Luther, to be a *true rite* it had to be instituted by Christ *directly*, and must be a physical sign of the promise contained in the gospel – thus, Luther came to believe there were only two (2)
    1. then (and even now!), the Catholic church held that there are seven (7) sacraments
      - a. baptism, communion (the two Luther accepted), confirmation (the personal confirmation of the faith of the individual), confession (which Luther briefly toyed with keeping), marriage, holy orders (ordination to the priesthood), and extreme unction (the last rites of confession and confirmation of faith of the dying [or recently dead])
    2. so, Luther accepted the direct institution *only* of baptism and communion, for they are the only ones *specifically* ordained by Christ himself (in the Last Supper and the Great Commission)
  - c. so, for Luther, baptism *continued* to be a rite of inclusion in the covenant family, although his new view of justification *by faith* forced him to deny that the child was *regenerated* by the rite
    1. he justified *infant baptism* (**i.e.** before a direct profession of faith) by arguing that faith is always a free gift of God (not a human work), and that it is *God* who takes the initiative in bringing his own to himself – the church simply “proclaims” through the rite what God has declared
    2. thus, the individual could always “look back” upon his baptism in times of doubt or sin, and (in it) see the initiating work of God to draw him to faith in Christ
      - a. **e.g.** Luther would often appeal “I am baptized” when tried by doubt or temptation
    3. the view of Luther on baptism continued throughout the Reformation until the dawn of the Anabaptists, who insisted that baptism could only be performed *on a professor of faith*
      - a. **i.e.** paedobaptism is still the norm in many parts of Protestantism – we will discuss *our* differences with this position when we discuss the Anabaptist movement **later** ...
  - d. however, Luther saw communion as *very different* from the view of the church
    1. Luther disagreed with a number of “misinterpretations” of the sacrament:
      - a. he hated the idea of “private” Masses, where the intention was to provide, through the effort of the attendees and the taking of communion, some effect for those in purgatory
      - b. he rejected that the Mass was a “repetition” of the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary – that the priest was (in the Mass) “reoffering” Christ’s death to the Father and that those who ate from the table were coming before God “through” that sacrifice on the altar
      - c. he opposed the idea that simply “attending” Mass brought “merit” (in itself) to the individual
      - d. he denied the doctrine of “transubstantiation” – that in the Mass, the elements of bread and wine become the *literal* body and blood of Jesus
        1. which he attached to “Aristotelian” (**read: pagan**) metaphysics
        2. which he also argued made the Mass a “meritorious sacrifice” = that eating and drinking the elements *themselves* actually infused righteousness into the eater
        3. which led him to also deny the “reservation” of the sacrament = that the body of Christ remains in the bread even after the Mass is over (**i.e.** in the tabernacle)
    2. but, Luther did continue to place great emphasis on communion in the life of the Christian
      - a. although Luther *did* insist on the need for preaching in worship, he retained a strong conviction that the Word was made visible *primarily* in communion at the center
        1. later reformers would reverse this order, moving *preaching* to primacy
      - b. although Luther denied *transubstantiation*, he did believe that the rite was more than just a “memorial” to the work of Christ – that Christ was indeed “present”
        1. he believed that Jesus’ statement “*this is my body*” (**Matthew 26:26**) as a proof that there was some sort of “physical presence” of Jesus in the elements
        2. so, he insisted that eating was (in fact) to be nourished with the very body and blood of Christ – **i.e.** the elements do not “become” (literally) the body and blood of Jesus, but he is “present” in and around them in such a way that participants are nourished *directly*
        3. this became known as *consubstantiation* (he never used the term) = although the elements do not *transform* (**i.e.** trans-), Christ is *contained* (**i.e.** cons-) within them
    - c. Luther’s position was *highly unsatisfactory* to others around him, even to some at Wittenberg
      1. **e.g.** Zwingli and Luther would actually *debate* this issue, with Zwingli insisting that Luther had not gone far enough in recognizing the connection between justification by faith and the sacrament (**i.e.** that the phrase “*this is my body*” is not a reference to the *element*, but to the *one represented by the element*) – will discuss this in Zwingli **later**

4. in some ways, the modern church (particularly amongst the reformed) has had to wrestle with this
  - a. **e.g.** the constant debate between the *paedobaptist* position and the *credobaptist*, the debate over the *frequency* and *content* of the Lord's Supper, etc.
  - b. **e.g.** as seen in the *clear differences* established between the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Baptist over (even!) the term "sacrament" (vs. ordinance) in these rites

#### e. the Two Kingdoms

1. as a man of his time (**i.e.** living in the Holy Roman Empire), Luther also came to a new understanding of the relationship of the church and the state
2. Luther postulated that God has established *two kingdoms* in the world: one under the law and one under the gospel, *and that they must be distinct*
  - a. the state operates under law – the purpose of the state is to establish order in the world, to set limits to sin and its consequences – failure to do so results in chaos and anarchy (**Romans 13**)
    1. **note:** "law" (ITC) = the natural law over man established by God, not *arbitrary* rules of behavior established within the minds of sinful men and *imposed* without recourse to God's law
  - b. believers belong (primarily!) to the kingdom of the gospel – the purpose of the church is to establish the life of holiness in the elect, to commune with one another in worship and in spiritual discipline
  - c. **IOW:** each has its own sphere of influence – the state cannot enforce orthodoxy in the church, and believers should not expect the state to be ruled by the gospel
    1. rulers must follow the law, but they have no power in the church herself
    2. believers are not subject to the state, yet are still under its authority *in matters of law*
    3. **i.e.** because believers are still sinners, they must still be "managed" within the state of human affairs; the state must still impose law upon Christians (**see above**)
3. thus, Luther believed that the gospel could not be imposed upon society through the mandates of the state – only through the *means* available to the kingdom of the gospel could its reach be expanded
  - a. he was not a *pacifist* – he firmly believed that the state had the power to take up arms to defend order and to protect the citizenry from attack
  - b. and, he also taught that the state did not have the right to *force* orthodoxy in the nation
  - c. but ... Luther was (horribly!) *inconsistent with the application of this doctrine*
    1. **e.g.** he did insist that the state should take up arms to "put down" the Anabaptist movement
  - d. **IOW:** it was extremely difficult, *in concrete situations*, to implement his view of the two kingdoms
4. later reformers would struggle with this view, as well
  - a. **e.g.** Calvin would have to deal with his relationship with the state in Geneva, and the Anabaptists would push this doctrine to a *complete* separation of church and state
5. the modern church has struggle with this, too!
  - a. **e.g.** the question of including a flag of the nation in the church, patriotic services, the connection of immorality to law (**i.e.** abortion), the tax-exempt nature of the church, military service by believers, the connection of the church to Christian politicians, etc.