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Lutheranism

• Historical Intro

How are the structured/organized?

- Because there are different Lutheran communions, there is no singular form of church government, but the primary form of church government seen is local church autonomy in line with confessional standards.
- In Lutheranism, ordained clergy—“pastors”—are generally thought of as distinct from “elders,” who, despite being an extension of pastoral ministry, are conceived more of as assistants to the pastor.
 - The elders nevertheless share in shepherding ministry and directing the affairs of the church. In ILC churches, only men can serve as pastors, though men and women can serve as deacons/deaconesses.

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- Interestingly, however, it is far from clear that Luther himself actually rejected “double predestination.”
 - “St. Paul teaches us about the eternal providence of God. It is the original source which determines who would believe and who wouldn’t, who can be set free from sin and who cannot. Such matters have been taken out of our hands and are put into God’s hand....” Preface to Luther’s Commentary on Romans, previewing Romans 9.
 - “God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word. Thus, he does not will the death of a sinner, according to his word; but he wills it according to that inscrutable will of his. It is our business, however, to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone....” Luther, Bondage of the Will

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What do they believe about sanctification?

- Law vs. Gospel
 - The distinction between Law and Gospel is an indispensable part of Lutheran theology in general and sanctification in particular.
 - “All of Scripture is divided into two parts: commands and promises.” Luther, On Christian Liberty
 - “All of Scripture is either law or gospel.” Melancthon, Commonplaces
 - Law: demands perfection, conditional, brings knowledge of sin, consists in commands/moral demands
 - Gospel: presents Christ’s perfection, unconditional, overcomes sin, promise

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- The Law: Three Uses
 - Brings knowledge of sin and recognition that we need grace and a Savior (primary use)
 - Restrains sin and evil/mitigates corrupt action
 - Helps us see examples of love “fleshed out” and what kinds of actions please God
 - Pursuing the law in this third, positive way is where many Lutherans disagree.
 - “The law in its earliest expression is a positive statement of God's relationship to the world and the world's relationship to God. In this form the law is more indicative than imperative. *It is more description than it is requirement... Man does not need to be told how he is to be related to God or to other men, because he is by nature accomplishing all these things.* The distinction between indicative and imperative is theologically unjustifiable for saints as saints. The law begins to function only as negative imperative with prohibition when man no longer maintains his relationship to God.” Scaer, *Sanctification in Lutheran Theology*

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- “The dilemma of the law as both negative and condemning prohibition and positive Christological statement does not rest in God or in the law but in the Christian who is *simul justus et peccator*, believer and unbeliever. The man outside of Christ knows the law only as prohibition and condemnation. The man in Christ sees the law as a Christological activity in his own life. *The Christian in this life is both in and outside of Christ.*” Scaer, *Sanctification in Lutheran Theology*
- “In Lutheran theology justification describes the believer's relationship with God. Sanctification describes the same reality as does justification but describes the justified Christian's relationship to the world and society. *Justification and sanctification are not two separate realities, but the same reality viewed from the different perspectives of God and man. From the perspective of God the reality of the Christian is totally passive and non-contributory as it receives Christ only. From the perspective of the world, the same reality never ceases in its activity and tirelessly performs all good works.*” Scaer, *Sanctification in Lutheran Theology*

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Sanctification

- Nevertheless, the confessional Lutheran documents strongly support progressive sanctification and growth in holiness throughout the Christian life.
 - “These words say absolutely nothing about our will, nor do they say that it effects something, even in the newborn human being, of itself, but they ascribe that to the Holy Spirit, which cleanses human beings and daily makes them more upright and holier.” SD II.35
 - “Although those born anew come even in this life to the point that they desire the good and delight in it and even do good deeds and grow in practicing them, this is not (as was mentioned above) a product of our own will or power, but the Holy Spirit.” SD II.39
 - “As soon as the Holy Spirit has begun his work of rebirth and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that on the basis of his power we can and should be cooperating with him, though still in great weakness.” SD II.65

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What do they believe about the canon?

- Surprisingly, the (enormous) Book of Concord never defines/clarifies the canon for Lutherans. Nevertheless, Lutherans as a whole affirm the 66 books of the regular “Protestant” canon.
- Homologoumena vs. Antilegomena
 - Traditionally, the homologoumena has referred the uncontested books of the New Testament, while the antilegomena referred to the disputed books (e.g., Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, Jude, 2 and 3 John and Revelation).
 - While contemporary Lutherans differ as to the merits of the distinction, a meaningful part of the tradition would argue that while doctrine can be confirmed by the antilegomena, it should only be established by the books in the homologoumena as a matter of theological method.

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- Baptism
 - Luther and Lutherans hold strongly to baptismal regeneration—in baptism, new life is imparted, sins are forgiven and sinners are declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness through faith alone.
 - “Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practice all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts.” LC, 4.41
- Does this somehow compromise justification by faith alone? Not at all, says Luther:

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- “But as our would-be wise, new spirits assert that faith alone saves, and that works and external things avail nothing, we answer: It is true, indeed, that nothing in us is of any avail but faith, as we shall hear still further. But these blind guides are unwilling to see this, namely, that faith must have something which it believes, that is, of which it takes hold, and upon which it stands and rests. Thus, faith clings to the water, and believes that it is Baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life; not through the water (as we have sufficiently stated), but through the fact that it is embodied in the Word and institution of God, and the name of God inheres in it.” LC, 4.28-29
- The subjects of baptism: Infants—but how is this consistent?

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- Infant faith
 - Because faith is a gift, baptism effectively delivers supernatural grace, baptized infants are given faith at baptism and thus, there is no exception to the rule even if justification is ultimately rejected.
 - Ps. 22:9-10; 71:5-6; Lk. 1:14-15, 44; 18:15-17; Matt 21:15-16
 - LCMS: “Although we do not claim to understand how this happens or how it is possible, we believe (because of what the Bible says about Baptism) that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant.”
- What about repentance and belief that precedes baptism?
 - “Faith can also be created in a person's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's (written or spoken) Word. Baptism should then soon follow conversion (cf. Acts 8:26-40) for the purpose of confirming and strengthening faith in accordance with God's command and promise.” LCMS

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- All of the Christian life is a return to baptism
 - “These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify the power and operation of Baptism, which is nothing else than putting to death the old Adam, and after that the resurrection of the new man, both of which must take place in us all our lives, so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued.” LC, XIII, 4th part (infant baptism)
- The Lord's Supper
 - Lutherans hold strongly to the *corporeal* and *local* presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. They do not, however, believe in transubstantiation. Rather, they hold that one partakes in bread and wine along with the body and blood of Christ.
 - “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.” SC, The Sacrament of the Altar

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- Having said that, much like in baptism, Lutherans believe the Lord's Supper to offer genuine, robust grace, including the forgiveness of sins:
 - These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." SC, Sacrament of the Altar
- Absolution?
 - Lutherans believe that the pastor—as opposed to the Pope, the congregation or some higher bishop—holds the Office of the Keys described in Matthew 16:19, 18:18 and John 20:22-23. As such, after corporate confession during the service, the pastor forgives the congregation of sin.
 - "Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven." SC, Confession

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What do they believe about the sacraments?

- "I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself." SC, Confession
- While corporate confession and absolution is part of standard Lutheran liturgy, private confession and absolution is not required, though it may be encouraged.

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Evaluation

Things to Celebrate

- Justification by faith alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
- Law/Gospel Distinction
- A desire to remain connected to church history
- High view of word and sacrament
- Extensive confessional standards

Primary concerns

- Inconsistent theology of election and perseverance
- Sacramentalism