

The Reality of Luther's Theology – Part 1

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 **start** of the Reformation with Luther
 - a. his early life: a strict upbringing, which leads him into great spiritual turmoil regarding his own sin in comparison to God's holiness, inside the medieval teaching re: justification
 - b. his "conversion": a new understanding of the nature of the righteousness of God, not as holiness separating God from sinners, but what is imputed to the sinner through faith in Christ
 - c. his confrontation: two (2) sets of theses published to teach his new view of justification, coming into direct conflict with the pope selling indulgences
 - d. his condemnation: protected by Frederick the Wise, and dragged before several conclaves, ultimately being condemned at the Diet of Worms, only to be protected at the castle at Wartburg
2. **(now)** the **rise** of the Reformation church out of Luther ...
 - a. first, a discussion of some of the *immediate* effects of his thinking in Germany (and beyond)
 - b. second, an overview of where Luther's theology went following his new view of justification
3. **note:** the details below may seem overwhelming (and irrelevant), but ... they are essential for us coming to understand how some things came into being, and you will recognize them along the way

I. The Effects of Luther's Theology

Content

a. the effects at Wittenberg

1. **remember:** Luther had successfully "won" a number of his colleagues over to his new view of justification (and a number of other theological positions; **see below**) – this begins to have *real-world* effects upon the spiritual and ecclesiastical thinking and actions in Wittenberg
 - a. **i.e.** people who come to see that justification is no longer a *process*, will now begin to *apply* that thinking to *every other aspect of life* ... including the church, home, society, politics, and economics
 - b. **note:** Luther *himself* had not really implemented any substantial changes in the life of the church while in Wittenberg *prior* to Worms – his fear of God and of "overturning" the church *established by God* were frightening to him, so he had been *extra cautious* – others were *not so cautious* ...
2. while Luther was away at Wartburg (for 10 months), some of his colleagues began to make changes
 - a. Andreas Karlstadt (**i.e.** of the Leipzig debate) began to remove images of saints in the churches
 - b. he and Gabriel Zwilling (an Augustinian monk) began preaching fiery sermons to stir up the people
 1. their preaching was so effective, that it began to have *real consequences*
 - c. some monks and nuns left their monastic communities and were married (**see below**)
 - d. the Mass was simplified and German was substituted for Latin
 1. **i.e.** in the *vernacular* – something ordered in the Roman Church by Vatican II, and recently reinforced by Francis against the "apologetic" of Benedict XVI for the Latin Mass
 - e. Masses for the dead were abolished, along with fasting days and abstinence
 - f. Philipp Melanchthon (ma-LANK-than) **i.e.** another voice in the reforming efforts at Wittenberg and later; **see below**) began to offer the Cup during communion (something not done in the church)
3. Luther *initially* supported these changes, but he began to question *the excesses* of the movement
 - a. **e.g.** three laymen from Zwickau arrived at Wittenberg and began to claim that God spoke *directly* to them, and could decide matters of theology and ecclesiology *without the need for Scripture*
 1. **note:** this is *often* a side-effect of reformation – human beings taking what is *good* and sinfully taking it to extremes that were never intended, tearing at the "fabric" of the reformation itself
 2. Melanchthon appealed to Luther in how to handle it, and this caused Luther to leave Wartburg

3. he notified Fredrick that he was leaving, hoping that Fredrick would continue to protect him, but (ultimately) counting not on Fredrick, but on the hand of God over him
- b. so, Luther returned to Wittenberg to address the issue and provide leadership
 1. he returned on March 6, 1521, disguised as an Augustinian hermit
 2. he preached eight (8) sermons in the city church, which helped calm the situation
 3. he admonished the reformers for their lack of Christian love (**i.e.** not helping the weak to understand and “come along”), he warned against the use of force, he maintained that only the preaching of the gospel and persuasion should be used to effect reformation, and that many of the nonessentials (**i.e.** marriage of clergy, monasticism, fasting, images, etc.) should be left to the individual conscience
 4. **LOW:** Luther sought to find the *proper means* to produce reformation: through *persuasion* of the truth of the gospel which brings about true conversion, and not through force or zeal
4. a side-note (occurring in the events below but connected to the above): Luther **married** a former nun
 - a. a group of nuns in a nearby convent (spurred on by the “new” thinking in Wittenberg) sent word to Luther that they were convinced and sought his help in leaving
 - b. so, Luther did arrange for their escape, but now found himself needing to “provide” for them
 1. they needed a household in which to be supported, or arranged to be married
 - c. one of the nuns, Katharina von Bora, refused to marry her suitors, instead setting her eyes on him
 1. Luther’s friends suggested he marry her – he first joked about it, and said that he believed he would die soon as a martyr
 - d. but, Luther eventually agreed, and they were married
 1. they seemed to have a happy marriage, particularly one filled with humor (**e.g.** he called her “my lord Katharina”, she complained that he was a slob)
 2. they had six (6) children, and also cared for a number of orphans and students (**e.g.** he called his family a “small church”)
 3. out of this family life came the *Table Talks* that his students compiled as a series of conversations he had at home with his family
 4. the manner in which Luther educated his children has been cited as the *forerunner* to public education (although it might actually be a better forerunner of *homeschooling!*)

b. the socio-economic revolts

1. **in quick summary:** Charles V (after Worms) was determined to stamp out the “Lutheran” heresy in Germany, but a number of political issues kept him “busy”
 - a. **e.g.** constant struggle with Francis I of France; the death of Leo X (a few months before Worms), and his appointment of Adrian VI (the last non-Italian pope until John Paul II) to “reform” the church, Adrian’s death (1½ years in) and the rise of Clement VII who returned to Leo’s policies and (with Francis I) declared war on Charles (who invaded Rome, then repelled by a plague), and the attack of the Turks under Suleiman pulling Charles and Clement together to repel them
2. the Knight’s Revolt (1522-23)
 - a. the knightly class had seen its fortunes decline for some time, and they rebelled against Charles
 - b. they saw their struggle as a defense of the Reformation (Luther had not encouraged them)
 - c. defeated by the German princes, and Luther saw this as an *unwarranted* challenge to authority
3. the Peasant Rebellion (1524)
 - a. the peasant class had long suffered difficult economic conditions (rebellions a number of times)
 - b. they believed that the teachings of the reformers (**now**) supported their economic demands
 1. **e.g.** Thomas Müntzer (of Zwickau; see above) came preaching that the Spirit *outside of Scripture* was leading the peasants to establish a *theocratic* community
 - c. they developed *Twelve Articles* making both economic and religious demands, which Luther was unprepared to address (see his doctrine of the two kingdoms below)
 - d. Luther tried to “straddle the fence” – he addressed the princes, telling them the peasant demands were just, and he tried to persuade the peasants not to take up arms
 - e. in the end, Luther called upon the princes to suppress the movement – the result was a *bloodbath* (>100,000), even though Luther urged the princes for mercy
4. the consequences of the revolts: Catholic princes blamed Lutheranism for the revolt, and the split between the Catholic church and the Lutheran became more radical – vast numbers of peasants blamed Luther for betraying him and abandoned the “new” faith (or became more radical)

c. the advent of the Protestants

1. **note:** the events summarized above re: Charles V occurred between 1521 (when he left the country to deal with Francis) and 1530 (when he *finally* returned from his fighting with the Turks)
2. in the meantime ... the country was governed by the nobility, meeting at regular Diets
 - a. in 1523, at Nuremberg, the Diet adopted a policy of *tolerance* towards Lutheranism
 - b. in 1526, at Spire, the Diet formally withdrew the Edict of Worms, and granted the German states the freedom to choose its own religious allegiance (**i.e.** Austria and the S went Catholic, other areas began implementing Lutheranism)
- c. but, in 1529, again at Spire, the Second Diet *reaffirmed* the Edict of Worms, from pressure of an imperial intervention (**i.e.** that Charles would come back and *force* Lutheranism to be reversed)
 1. **remember:** it was Charles who declared the original edict against Luther, and remained stubbornly opposed to Luther as a heretic of the church – but, he had been *preoccupied* with political realities for the past 8 years ... now those issues were being resolved ...
 2. this prompted the Lutheran princes of the Diet to present a *formal protest* against the newly revived edict, thus receiving for themselves the title “**Protestants**”
 - a. so, although the title is often applied *generally* to the reformed branch of W Christianity, it has a more *specific* genesis and intention: a protest against the revival of a statement condemning Luther (and Lutheranism, by extension) in Germany
 - b. however (as seen above), a new view of justification by Luther eventually sweeps through his entire theological framework – the effect becomes *real* as those embracing his theology attempt to put it into practice, and this becomes a *de facto protestation* against what the church has been believing and doing for centuries
- d. so, in 1530, at Augsburg, the Diet gathered to hear an orderly exposition of the points at issue
 1. this (remember) was contrary to Charles’ view at Worms, where he refused to listen to Luther
 2. so, Philipp Melancthon outlined the main points of Lutheran theology *in contrast to Catholic teaching*, which became known as the **Augsburg Confession**
 - a. **i.e.** the first great Protestant Confession, which became the basis for Lutheran orthodoxy
 - b. **note:** later confessions were written by other groups to outline their specific versions of orthodoxy (**e.g.** Belgic Confession, 1561; Westminster, 1647; Baptist and Second Baptist, 1644 & 1689; Philadelphia, 1742; BF&M, 1925 & 1963)
 3. when the various signatories of the Augsburg Confession refused to abandon their faith, Charles (once again) was enraged and ordered that they must recant by April of 1531
 - a. **remember:** Charles held vast hereditary resources, and could easily have mustered them against the Lutheran princes, thus defeating them and ending Protestantism
 - b. so, the Protestant princes came together to create a common front, and Luther agreed that it was legal for them to take up arms in self-defense
 - c. a long war was anticipated, but (**in the providence of God**), Charles was forced (again!!) to postpone action because Francis of France came against him, and the Turks were back to avenge their previous defeat
 - d. so, the Protestants and Catholics agreed to the Peace of Nuremberg (1532)
 1. Lutherans would continue to practice their faith *as outlined in the Confession*, but would not seek to *extend it* beyond their territories in return for their support against the invaders

d. the effects of this decade

1. all of the above occurs *roughly* between 1521 and 1532 – a decade in the history of W Europe
2. it is a **decade** in which the Reformation is *solidified*:
 - a. first, by a theological “rethinking” of things, especially in the area of spirituality and worship
 - b. second, by the immediate *application* of that “rethinking”, including over areas that may not be *directly related* to the theological issues at hand (**i.e.** out of bounds)
 - c. third, by the *expansion* of that “rethinking” across the entire plain of social realities, especially in a world *dominated* by the church herself
 - d. fourthly, by the *establishment* of an “official” sense of that “rethinking” throughout the political, social, cultural, academic, and economic lives of millions now coming “out” from the single greatest political, social, cultural, academic, and economic force over them (**i.e.** the medieval church)
3. but ... what *precisely is* that “rethinking” that gets us to this point ... (**see below**)