

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 26 and POWER POINT 26:

CONCLUSION: PARADOXY:

1. If L represents a EV. Catholicism, (Some Confessional L like this) its paradoxes mean that it is likewise subject to attack from every side. Evangelicals consider L too Catholic, making fun of stale formality, its old fashioned music and ancient liturgy and more seriously questioning how L can save salvation by faith, yet hold to baptismal regeneration, and become appalled when the pastor says and gives absolution, forgiving sins. Catholics lump L and all other Protestants in fact, L are the worst because they started the "dissolution" of Christendom.
2. With Protestants, L did not go far enough in the Reformation, for keeping Papistical practices and idolatrous worship. Arminians attack L for not believing in the freedom of the will and leaving the door open for Antinomianism. Charismatics think that L are cold, Fundamentalists believe that L are strong on doctrine, but weak on morals.
3. While L are attacked on every side, L counter attack all. L condemn Arminians for denying Predestination and Calvinists for holding to double Predestination. Catholics and Charismatics are considered alike in believing that the Holy Spirit reveals Himself in humans, apart from the Word. Fundamentalists are savaged for their legalism. In fact, many L don't see themselves as Protestants at all.
4. The L synthesis is a baroque structure that can only be held together by a doctrinal rigor that constantly reinforces every point-Anglicans attempt a *via media* between Catholics/Protestants. which works through compromise, broad consensus and tolerance for differences. The L way is one of polarities. Each pole is to be maintained- heightened. Chesterton said in *Orthodoxy* of the paradoxes of Christianity is particularly descriptive of L theology: "We want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning." Christianity does not approach doctrinal issues such as the nature of Christ or the moral status of a human being in terms of the Aristotelian golden mean. Rather, "Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposite, by keeping them both and keep them furious."
5. L are Sacramental and Evangelical. Anglicanism, even with its high liturgy was still rejected by Continental L as being another variety of Calvinism. It articles it as being too wishy-washy and not clearly affirming the Real Presence. Evangelicals are not Evangelical enough, falling as they do into the trap of "decision theology," and moralism, and not trusting God to accomplish literally everything that is meaningful.
6. As a result, L theology embraces in one sense the whole range of Christian spirituality and is an entity unto itself. With its own spiritual disciplines that are quite alien of other traditions. Consider for example the way L oppose the so called TOG. TOG has its pretensions of power, victory and earthly success. L TOC, God reveals Himself in weakness, defeat and failure. Or The Bible, not just an info book, but a Sacramental means of grace. Or the way that God hides Himself in the material elements of the Sacraments in humiliation and defeat in what seems most secular and nonreligious. Or the exhilaration, under the G, of Christian Freedom.

LUTHERANISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE:

7. L is an immigrant faith, like Catholicism and Orthodoxy. L churches have always been culturally isolated and highly conscious of difference between mainstream American Protestantism. German L came to PA in Colonial times and Scandinavian L settled in the upper Midwest, bringing their churches with them, another group came for a different reason.
8. In 19th century Germany, efforts were made by post enlightenment princes to combine Protestant factions into one state church. Calvinists and L were forced to give up theological differences and combine into an EV REFORMED CHURCH. Remember EVANGELICAL is good news of the G and the continental term for L as opposed to the Reformed Calvinist. L were first the quintessential Evangelicals. The state churches were rationalistic, preaching agricultural techniques and doctrines of social progress rather than the G—the fruit of a new liberal theology being developed in German seminaries. In a typical German heavy handed way, pastors who opposed this ecumenical union were imprisoned and the so called “Old L” were persecuted. Scores of congregations that insisted on ‘classical’ L left all they owned and settled in America (Substantial others went to countries like Australia, Africa and Brazil).
9. These formed the more conservative L denominations like the LCMS and WELS, terms that refer to their origins and denominational headquarters. These churches are suspect of ecumenicalism. Like the Catholics, these Confessional L recognized that the Protestant Civil religion of the public school and contrary to their faith established an extensive system of Parochial schools to educate their children which would be supportive of their faith. The strain of L resisted assimilation into mainstream American religious life.
10. The terms, their two Kingdom theology enabled them to assimilate quite well into American society and economic life. Their churches were kept separate, untouched by the revivalism, social gospel, religious individualism and other trends of American religious life. The tendency toward isolationism is and inevitable polarity is accommodationism. The Colonial L and the Scandinavian L were not as strict as refugee-L. They debated how much they should adapt the religious life of their new homeland. Samuel Schumcker, an important 19th century theologian went as far to change the Augsburg Confession to a more Reformed view of the Sacraments. While many L went in this direction, another theologian Charles Krauth in a movement paralleling the Oxford Movement with Anglicanism, championed a revival of confessionalism and liturgical renewal.
11. L vacillate between the poles of separatism and accommodationism. Historically L denom. in America, have tended to drift towards the religious mainstream to lurch back onto their distinctiveness.
12. The LCMS in this past century went through a pragmatic ‘Civil War.’ It’s St. Louis Seminary gradually began to accept the view of Scripture of many other denominations, employing the historical-critical method that casts doubt on the authority of the Bible and adopting other tenets of Liberal theology. In the 1970’s the battle of the “Bible” erupted, when conservatives tasked the ‘moderates,’ who held an unorthodox view of the Scriptures. The latter walked out, set up their own seminary (called Sem.-In-Ex). And every congregation had to choose which side they were on. Unlike what happened in other congregations. The liberal left and the conservatives retained control, the opposite of what happened in other church bodies.

13. Today, the LCMS is facing a similar issue, but now the mainstream is not liberalism, but Evangelicalism. Many L have been jettisoning the liturgy and distinctive beliefs, and emulating and adopting Evangelical beliefs and techniques from the church growth movement, singing 'praise songs,' preaching sermons on 'pop psychology,' and abandoning spiritual heritage in favor of 'generic' American Protestantism.
14. In the meantime, the exodus of LCMS moderates served as a catalyst for the union of more liberal L church bodies. The result, The ELCA, (Ev. Luth. Church in America) and they continued going toward the rest of the way of mainline Protestantism. The ordination of women, leftwing political advocacy, embracing the ecumenical movement have made them less distinctive and more like generic American Liberal Protestantism. In some places genuine L has been hard to find. But as it always has, the pendulum may be starting to swing in the other direction.

LUTHERAN CONFSSIONALISM:

15. Today a new confessionalism is emerging in L circles. Just as many churches are going the way of American Evangelicalism with praise bands/overheads/screens. These confessionals are reemphasizing the historic liturgy, chanting, and making the signs of the cross. Some have reinstated the ancient L practice of private confession and absolution. They seem formidable. Close communion, pastoral authority, rigorous Catechetical instruction for converts, and forthright practices such as no weddings during Lent, and no congratulatory eulogies for funerals can be off-putting of easy going culture. But confessionalism is not the same as conservatism. (During the LCMS controversy over the Bible, 'high church' ceremonialists tended to be on the liberal side; today while theologically orthodox, they stand against the evangelical and fundamentalist tendencies in the church).
16. L allow a freedom in practice while insisting on agreement in doctrine. (Anglican tradition is the opposite, they insist on ceremonial uniformity, yet give doctrinal latitude). Conservative denominations like the LCMS and WELS remain rigorously confessional in upholding creeds and formulas in the Book of Concord. The present controversy (which is now somewhat diminishing) is over worship styles. The style is expressive of confessions, though there are serious fault lines are manifesting themselves in Lutheran denominations. Many L are along the spectrum of two poles, of low church informality and high church ceremonialism.
17. It is significant to confessional L pastors to bring back L traditions in worship and doctrine are those who came out of the seminaries beginning in the early to mid 80's. L are now getting disaffected Evangelicals, casualties of mega churches and refugees from generic American Protestantism. They're looking for meaningful worship and theological depth. The same could be said of Catholics dismayed by Post Vatican II liberalism and burned out secularists, who, broken by the law and renewed by the G, have come to Christ.

18. Confessional L are not ecumenical, they will never join the National Association of Evangelicals or The World Council of Churches. L institutions are so big with their seminaries, network of schools, colleges, publishing houses and denominational services they can be isolated and self contained. Though the ELCA pioneered ecumenical dialogue with the Reformed, Calvinist and Roman Catholics and believing that they have found agreement with Rome on the doctrine of justification, WELS and LCMS will have none of that. (There is also a conservative movement in the ELCA in conflict with institutional bureaucracy-since the time of this printing, there have been conservative splinter off of the ELCA and a continual exodus and sharp decline in membership). This wariness with ecumenicalism, and mainstream American style Christianity has kept them out of the mainstream and true to their theology.
19. Any genuine ecumenism, must avoid emptying Christ out of its distinctive content. And affirm what is most salient, and what is most "Christian" in the spectrum of Christian belief, from Traditional Catholicism to Protestant Fundamentalism. Which eschewing ecumenism as such, provides a framework-or rather a set of polarities in which this may be done.
20. Many confessional L call themselves Evangelical Catholics. They're catholic in their creeds, worship and sacramentalism and they are evangelical in their trust of the good news of Christ, in that we are saved in His cross. He saved us by sheer grace for a life of Christian freedom. Others call themselves "confessing evangelicals," allying with Reformed Christians to call today's doctrinally shallow evangelicals to the historic confessions of faith forged by the Reformation. From the L perspective, pure Catholics are in need of evangelical Reformation. Pure Evangelicals are in need of historical orthodoxy. The theological formulas that purport to show how both of these task can be done are collected in a volume appropriately titled, "*The Book of Concord.*"