

Lutheran beliefs—Russian Orthodox from me in bold

Overview

With the universal Christian Church, the Lutheran Church teaches and responds to the love of the Triune God: the Father, creator of all that exists; Jesus Christ, the Son, who became human to suffer and die for the sins of all human beings and to rise to life again in the ultimate victory over death and Satan; and the Holy Spirit, who creates faith through God's Word and Sacraments. The three persons of the Trinity are coequal and coeternal, one God.

The Russian Orthodox are the same

Being Lutheran, "our congregations accept and teach Bible-based teachings of Martin Luther that inspired the reformation of the Christian Church in the 16th century. The teaching of Luther and the reformers can be summarized in three short phrases: Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone.

Grace alone

God loves the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him and do not deserve His love. He sent Jesus, His Son, to love the unlovable and save the ungodly.

This is differently phrased, but elsewhere on the website they explain Adam's fall from grace, and the fact that ever after, everyone is born a sinner. Russian Orthodox talk of Original Sin—really, it amounts to the same. The difference is Russian Orthodox believe only baptism gets rid of original sin and brings grace. Lutherans believe that while baptism is highly desirable and should be done, (and, in fact, always IS done—to babies born to Lutheran families and people of any age who come to the church later) by reading the Bible and believing, grace will be given.

Faith alone

By His suffering and death as the substitute for all people of all time, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and eternal life for them. Those who hear this Good News and believe it have the eternal life that it offers. God creates faith in Christ and gives people forgiveness through Him.

For the Russ. Orthodox, faith is the start, but "works" are critical for anyone who has reached the use of reason. (Obviously, a dead baptised infant hasn't been able to do good works, but goes to heaven.) Luther made a huge big deal about "faith alone"—(many psychologists have written on his inner torments and his fears his "works" were insufficient and feel his slant on Scripture—and the Reformation!—grew out of his neurosis.) The Roman Catholics responding to Luther had as their mantra "Faith without works is dead!"

"faith and love"—the Lutherans attribute this to Orthodoxy—actually, it's faith, love and "good deeds." Obviously, if one truly loves God, one will live a virtuous life, but it's amusing how the Lutherans cannot bring themselves to allude to "works."

Scripture alone

The Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the sole rule and norm for Christian doctrine.

Huge difference here! It reduces the Pope to an administrative role, instead of the vehicle of continuing inerrant revelation through his occasional ex cathedra pronouncements. Ditto the various Orthodox Patriarchs—who can also rule inerrantly on faith and morals. Over the years, there have been minor divergences—the Pope declared Mary's "assumption" into heaven in the early 20th century (she didn't suffer the indignity of death but was kind of wafted up into heaven) while the Orthodox didn't follow suit.

Who is Jesus?

For more than 2,000 years people have asked the question, "Who is Jesus?". We were not present when Jesus lived on this earth, but in the Bible we have the record of his birth, life, death on the cross, and resurrection. Study of the Bible, God's Word, will enable you to seek out the answer to this age-old question.

Number and nature of sacraments:

Lutherans have only 2, according to their website: baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist.) Those, you see, are the only 2 mentioned in the Bible in which Jesus participated. (Showing up at the wedding at Cana didn't count.) Now, of course, Lutherans have church weddings and ordain ministers and pray for the dying and such, but don't consider them "sacraments"—mysterious channels of grace specifically ordained by God.

As I explained on the phone, both and Luther and the R. Orthodox believe in "transubstantiation"—that mysteriously and miraculously the *essence* of the bread and wine literally becomes the body and blood of Christ. However, the R. Orthodox believe only a priest ordained by a bishop who can trace his consecration back the apostles can validly consecrate the Eucharist. According to the R. Orthodox, all Lutheran ministers are just nice, misguided laymen, and when they have a communion service, the bread and wine are just bread and wine (no matter what these poor heretics think they're doing.)

Since Luther was only a monk, not a bishop, all his clergy are NOT priests *really.* (The Anglicans and Roman Catholics DO have "valid ordinations" and their bishops are really Bishops—but what they're up to is "unlawful"—they have the power but it's "wrong" of them to use it since they do not submit to an Orthodox Patriarch. The Roman Catholics would say the same of the Orthodox. These days, the Anglicans are too polite to say anything—BUT even dear John XXIII couldn't entice the Archbishop of Canterbury back to Rome, so the Anglicans aren't into Papal supremacy and inerrancy.)

The Orthodox have at least 7 sacraments (like the RC's)

1. baptism

2.

confirmation (chrismation)—this can be conferred only by a Bishop, involves anointing by holy oil (chrism). Chrism is used in a lot of Orthodox sacraments and only a Bishop can create chrism—yearly at Eastertide he blesses a huge batch and it's doled out to his parishes for the year.

3.

Holy Communion (Eucharist)

4. Penance (confession) The Lutherans **really** don't do this! Forgiveness comes from God alone.

Russian Orthodox DO go to confession and get absolution from a priest. Generally, the Liturgy is so long (3-4 hours!) that penitents—during the less important parts of the service—just stand with the non-officiating priest and talk with him and get absolved.

5. Holy Orders (ordination of priests—a seven-step process that stretches over years.) The Lutherans have ceremonies when a seminarian becomes a minister but don't consider it a sacrament.

6. Matrimony (remind me to tell you how amazingly elaborate weddings are for the Orthodox—even to the bride and groom wearing crowns!)

7. Extreme Unction (last rites, last anointing)—anointing and prayers for those gravely ill. (I have to make sure R. Orthodox do last rites—they seem to like anointings so much it's hard to imagine they'd pass up the chance.)

I have to re-read the material that saw coronation as a sacrament.

True visible church. . .

The Lutherans say "The Eastern Or. Church believes itself to be the true visible church on earth." Actually, they are "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." The apostolic is REALLY important to them.

Luther took off into heresy with his "faith alone, grace alone, scripture alone." Judging from the website, Lutherans recognize more commonalities with other churches and finesse the "apostolic succession," saying that the Bible alone, sincerely studied, will lead to faith.

Lutherans don't venerate saints, or officially recognize them. Everything is directly between God and the individual—the church exists to assist and expedite, to teach and comfort, but not to be an indispensable conduit or mediator between God and an individual. According to the Orthodox, the essential sacraments can only be lawfully conferred by their priests and bishops. And, of course, saints can intercede with God on a person's behalf, not to mention performing miracles.

More on this Tuesday.