

Why Should Millennials (and thinking people) Consider Traditional Lutheranism?

The following is an excerpt from the newly published book, *Where Christ is Present, A Theology for all Seasons on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation*. This is a collection of essays edited by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery and Dr. Gene Edward Veith, published by NRP Books, an imprint of 1517, The Legacy Project (www.1516Legacy.com).

If you are person who intuitively knows that there is more to Christianity than shallow slogans, concerts, and emotions then the traditional Lutheran Church may be what's missing in your life. Pastor Stanford recommends this book to anyone who is looking for a Christian life and congregation of truth, depth, and grace.

(Chapter 2, Religious Landscape in the 21st Century, Veith, pp.31-32)

Lutheranism is known for its refusal to force Holy Scripture into neat, rationalistic categories: the Christian is simultaneously a saint and a sinner; Holy Communion is bread and wine and also the true Body and Blood of Christ. Other distinctive Lutheran teachings are similarly paradoxical: the relation between Law and Gospel, the Two Kingdoms, the Theology of the Cross over against a “theology of glory.”

Lutheranism is both deeply Catholic and deeply Protestant. Lutheranism is *very* sacramental, insisting on Baptismal regeneration and that Christ's body and blood are actually given in Holy Communion. At the same time, Lutheranism is *very* biblical, insisting on the full authority and inerrancy of Scripture and that the Word of God also functions sacramentally, as a means of grace. Roman Catholics are sacramental, with the Bible playing a secondary role, while non-Lutheran Protestants tend to place their focus on God's Word. But Lutheranism denies the dichotomy, insisting on both Word and Sacraments. Lutherans, like Catholics, worship with the **historic liturgy**; [emphasis added] like Protestants, they emphasize preaching. Lutherans like the Orthodox, study the church fathers and, like the Catholics, study medieval theologians. They affirm and recite the ecumenical Creeds and think of themselves as being continuous with the historic church. Like Protestants, they cultivate a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Many Lutherans, in fact, prefer to call themselves, “evangelical catholics” – because they are not just “Protestants,” protesting or focusing on the errors of the papacy. They are “evangelical,” a

WHERE
CHRIST
IS PRESENT
*A Theology for All Seasons on the
500th Anniversary of the Reformation*



Edited by John Warwick Montgomery
and Gene Edward Veith

word that comes from the Greek word of the gospel. Historically, the term “evangelical was the original word for “Lutheran.” Many Lutherans, especially in Europe, prefer to be known as “Evangelicals.” That word is claimed by many groups in the United States, but Lutherans were at least the first evangelicals. They were called that because the gospel permeates everything in Lutheran theology.

For Lutherans, the Reformation was about reforming the historical church with the gospel—not knocking down the church and trying to build something new from scratch. The Augsburg Confession, perhaps the primary Lutheran statement of faith, describes the evangelical reforms that were necessary to return the church to the gospel of Christ, and it also describes what does not need to be reformed in the Christian tradition. As such, it expresses Christian catholicity.

Lutheranism also affirms what is best in the various Protestant theologies that were to come. Like Calvinism, it emphasizes God’s grace and that God accomplishes everything needed for our salvation. Like, Arminianism, it teaches that Christ died for all and that potentially anyone can be saved. Like, Baptists, Lutherans love reading the Bible and preaching. Like Fundamentalists, Lutherans understand that the church must be separated from the world, though Christians must be involved in the world as a force for good. Like Pentecostals, Lutherans believe that the Holy Spirit breaks into this world with supernatural gifts that convey a spiritual experience. Those gifts, for Lutherans, are the supernatural realities that are taking place in the sacraments.

With such comprehensive teachings, Lutherans find themselves assailed from all sides, Roman Catholics attack them for being Protestants, while Protestants attack them for being “too Catholic.” Arminians think they are too Calvinist, and Calvinists think they are too Arminian. Baptists disapprove of Lutherans for having too high a view of Baptism. Pentecostals think Lutherans are too rationalistic and not emotional enough, while Reformed think Lutheran theology, with its refusal to subject Scripture to rationalistic categories and insistence that Scripture must be taken in its natural, literal sense, is not rational enough.

Lutherans, who have a strong polemical tradition, often find themselves fighting on all side, taking on Roman Catholics, Calvinists, Arminians, Pentecostals—just about everybody. . .

As it did five hundred years ago, Lutheranism offers a way to reform the existing church—not just Catholicism but also Protestantism—by building it upon the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In doing so, Lutheran theology and practice is uniquely positioned to address the spiritual issues of our day and to bring Christ to the twenty-first century.

[Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, East Peoria, IL is a congregation rooted in the true evangelical doctrine as described above. We invite you to think about and measure what you find on our webpage against what has been written in the Bible. We also encourage you to visit us for worship and class.]