

Comparative Theology of the Reformation

Tracking the theological disputes that shaped the Reformation is challenging for many students. We have found this table to be a helpful way to make sense of some of the complexities of the religious debates in the sixteenth century. It is not intended to be exhaustive, nor does it necessarily describe the current doctrines of the various Christian denominations.

	Roman Catholic	Anglican*	Lutheran	Calvinist**	Zwingli**	Anabaptists
What is the proper form and function of the clergy?	Celibate priests A hierarchy of pope, bishops, priests, laity Only clergy may administer sacraments and interpret scripture	Married priests A hierarchy of king, bishops, priests, laity Only clergy may administer sacraments	Ministers and priesthood of all believers Ministers oversee sacraments and help explain scripture	Ministers, elders, deacons, people Ministers help explain scripture and provide moral guidance	Ministers Ministers help explain scripture and provide moral guidance	Ministers Ministers help explain scripture and provide moral guidance
What provides “justification” (i.e., removal from a state of sin)?	Faith and works	Faith (though some Anglicans believe in faith and works)	Faith: When one is justified, one is forgiven; therefore, one can repent fully and do good works. Good works are a <i>consequence</i> of justification, not a cause.	Faith: Good works may or may not be <i>evidence</i> of justification	Faith: Justification is God’s endorsement of the morals of the individual. Good works are a <i>precondition</i> of justification.	Faith
What is the proper relationship between state and church?	The Pope has spiritual leadership over the Catholic sovereigns	The head of state (the king) is also head of the church	Religious choices are up to the individual, but that person owes obedience to the lawful ruler Two kingdoms: spiritual and temporal	Religious organization dominates the state and, in fact, <i>is</i> the state (e.g., Geneva)	Religion dominates the state	

Appendix

	Roman Catholic	Anglican*	Lutheran	Calvinist**	Zwingli**	Anabaptists
What is the nature of the Eucharist?	Transubstantiation: The bread and wine are actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist		Consubstantiation: Christ is spiritually present in the Eucharist but not actually physically present	The Eucharist is just a symbol; there is no actual transformation of bread and wine	The Eucharist is a memorial, not a sacrifice	
Other Characteristics	Infant baptism Indulgences, purgatory, and saints Elaborate rituals and highly decorated churches	Infant baptism	Infant baptism	Infant baptism Predestination: “What must I do to be saved?” <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> , by Max Weber (1902) The elect	Adult baptism The Reformation is more concerned with the moral regeneration of the church, the community, than with the individual	Adult baptism
Where was this denomination strongest?	Italy, parts of Germany, Ireland, Poland, France	England	Parts of Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark	Netherlands, France, Switzerland—Geneva	Switzerland—Zurich	Switzerland, then various parts of Europe

* In the late 1500s, many Anglicans split from the Church of England and became Puritans. Puritans held more Calvinistic beliefs and sometimes rejected the religious authority of the Anglican hierarchy.

** In general, Calvin and Zwingli thought Luther was too subjective and too focused on the individual. They wanted criteria upon which to reform the church and society, which they found in Scripture. Luther was, in short, concerned with doctrine, while Calvin and Zwingli were concerned with life and morals.