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Christian Denominations More Alike Than Different

While researching the different Christian denominations, I found that several share the same basic beliefs. However, they do seem to be different, as you would expect them to be since they are essentially different religions. Despite the wide variety of Christian denominations, they are more similar than different because of their beliefs in Jesus as being fully God and fully man; they reject the idea of purgatory; and that their authority comes from the Bible alone.

To prove that Christian denominations are more similar than different, I will be concentrating on Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheranism religions. For this reason, I have organized my paper into three main sections, one section for each of the denominations. I will provide an account of their basic beliefs and prove that they are more alike than different. I will conclude with a fourth section that proves that even though these three religions are different, they are all built on the same basic principles.

Baptist

The Baptist religion has a long history. No one really knows exactly when it was started or founded. One old story tells that Paul the apostle or one of his disciples preached in Britain. At that time the majority of the people were Roman Catholic. After this some evangelical

groups popped up and survived the opposing of Romanism. These people were some of the pilgrims that came over to settle the American colonies.

The first documented Baptist church was started in around 1609 by John Smyth in the Netherlands. John Smyth led a group of English refugees known as separatists to the Netherlands who were escaping religious persecution in England. They were not immediately known as Baptist. They were not known as Baptist until Smyth decided that the members should not have just a confession of faith but should have a “covenant” with Christ. Smyth decided he must be baptized and baptized himself and then baptized others. Baptism was only for true believers.

There were traditionally two kinds of Baptists. John Smyth started what is known as the General Baptists. The other group were known as the Particular Baptist which was majorly influenced by the teachings of John Calvin. While the General Baptists were started by the people who separated from the Church of England, the Particular Baptists came from independent congregations. One of the main differences of the General and Particular Baptists were the General Baptists were baptized by the sprinkling of water and the Particular Baptists believed in the complete immersion in water.

Most people believe that Baptist got their name from John the Baptist, but this is not the case. The early Baptist churches were known as the “Baptized Churches”. Most of the non-Baptists called these believers Anabaptists. They didn’t like to be called this and eventually became known as simply Baptists.

“Baptists originated in England in a time of intense religious reform. They sought to recover and proclaim the faith of the New Testament as first given by Jesus and his apostles.

Since then they have spread their teachings and churches in many lands and many cultures. They have never wavered from that original desire to hold and proclaim the simple faith of the New Testament church.” (Baptist History and Heritage)

Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism was started by the German priest and Professor Martin Luther in 1519 by placing a list of 95 grievances with the Roman Catholic Church to the church doors in Wittenberg, Germany. About 20 years later, John Calvin refined those grievances in what is known as the Reformed Theology. John Knox, a Scotsman who studied under Calvin took his teachings to Scotland. From there, it spread to England, Holland, and France.

Rev. Francis Makemie, from Ireland brought Presbyterianism to the United States in 1706 in Philadelphia. One of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Rev. John Witherspoon, was a Presbyterian minister. He was also the President of Princeton University from 1768-1793. (Presbyterian Church History).

Lutheranism

Lutheranism was started in 1517 by Martin Luther. The Lutheran church is the oldest Protestant church tradition. Like the beginning of Presbyterianism, Lutheranism is the following of the teachings of Martin Luther, the German priest and Professor who posted his 95 grievances to the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The people who believed in Luther’s teachings became known as Lutherans. Their beliefs are based on his writings, also known as the Book of Concord. Lutheranism is one of the largest Protestant denominations today. Since their history is grounded in the Catholic Church, a lot of their worship and traditions are similar to that of the Catholic style.

The Similarities and Differences

Baptist, Presbyterians, and Lutherans all believe that the Bible is inspired, it was written by man, but inspired by God. All three believe their authority comes from the Bible alone, although the Presbyterians also believe in the Church's historic Confessions of Faith as well. The Presbyterians and Lutherans believe in the Apostles' Creed, which is:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen." (Christians Reformed Church)

The Presbyterians and Lutherans also believe in the Nicene Creed, which is quite a bit like the Apostles Creed. It is:

"We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,

Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.” (Christian Reformed Church)

The Baptist church does not accept any humanly devised confession or creed. They believe in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. All three religions believe in the one “triune” God; that He is the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. All three religions also believe that Christ is fully God and fully man. Baptists and Lutherans reject the idea of purgatory, which is defined as a place of suffering that is populated by sinners who could not enter heaven.

Conclusion

All three of these separate Christian denominations, the Baptist, the Presbyterians, and the Lutherans, were started by breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church, they all share

most of their basic beliefs. While all three of these religions believe in baptism, the Baptists believe in being baptized at an age of being able to make the decision yourself. The Presbyterians and Lutherans also baptize, but do so at infancy as more of a welcoming to the Christian family. There are many similarities between these three denominations. I believe that since they all started as a break from the Roman Catholic Church that a lot of their beliefs and traditions come from those basic concepts. I think that the Presbyterians and Lutherans are more alike than the Baptist, but that is because they were both started on the basis of Martin Luther. The Presbyterians just took their religion a little further by accepting the teachings of John Calvin and John Knox. While there are many differences between these denominations, there are just as many similarities. So, despite the wide variety of Christian denominations, they are more similar than different because of their beliefs in Jesus as being fully God and fully man; they reject the idea of purgatory; and their authority comes from the Bible alone.

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