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Lecture 6 – Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 17th Century

1. Introduction

- Before we begin – a prefatory note on terminology: when reading through Lutheran orthodoxy, and Lutheran scholarship you typically tend to see the use of the term “Calvinist” for what we term “Reformed” – this is of course because the Lutherans tend to see themselves as the true Reformers, and see the Reformed as “Calvinists”; Lutherans also refer to themselves as those who ought rightly be termed “evangelical”. That noted for your awareness as it may puzzle you on initial reading. We will use “Reformed” in this lecture as used both in the mainstream of historical theology scholarship and by the Reformed/Presbyterian churches.
- In most Modern CH surveys attention is given to the movement of Lutheran pietism, which began in the 17th century, continuing to strengthen and develop into the 18th century.
- However, what is more often overlooked is the concurrent and connected era of Lutheran orthodoxy.
- In many respects the relationship between the two is much like the relationship that we see in the Netherlands between Reformed orthodoxy and Reformed piety/experiential religion. While some individuals tend in one direction or another more strongly, there are also many figures who represent a union of these two strands or aspects.
- And so while today we will focus on Lutheran orthodoxy from the outset we want to realize that this is not inherently antithetical to Lutheran piety – though we will give special attention to the development of Lutheran piety and pietism in a coming class.
- As well, we want to be aware, that contrary to the perception commonly given in a number of ‘evangelical’, as well as secular church history surveys, the vitality of response to the Enlightenment was not merely a revivalist piety; there was a strong continuing stream of doctrinal orthodoxy, which correctly stood in harmony with concern for piety and desire for spiritual revival.
- Suprisingly little English language work has been done on the era of Lutheran orthodoxy; there is by contrast much more publication on Lutheran pietism of the late 16th to 17th century.
- In light of that, our notes here are going to be more succinct today, we’ll use what extra time we have to not only discuss the two readings from Lutheran orthodox theologians, but also engage in a discussion of this era more broadly – comparing with Reformed orthodoxy (both scholastic and piety), and as well with the contemporary situation across the English channel – the English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians.
- But first of all, what are the periods/divisions by historical theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy?
- Lutheran historians see a period of “**early Lutheran orthodoxy**” as being from 1580-c.1600 – the first decades after the Book of Concord, and a period which includes the latter years of second generation Lutheran Reformers.
- The second period is that of “**high orthodoxy**” which is seen as running from 1600-1685.
- A good essay showing the roots of Lutheran scholasticism as passing through Martin Luther himself is David Bagchi’s essay “Sic et Non: Luther and Scholasticism”, found in the volume *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*.
- As Justo Gonzalez notes, after Luther’s death, Melancthon took his place as the leading teacher of Lutheran theology.

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Melancthon

- His systematic exposition of theology, the *Loci theologici*, became a standard textbook for the study of theology among Lutherans.
- Melancthon had played a key role in the formulation of the **Augsburg Confession** (1530), which stood as a testament to early Lutheran orthodoxy.
- The later adoption of the **Book of Concord** (1580), which marks the beginning of the period of "early Lutheran orthodoxy" reflected the fact that the differences between Luther and Melancthon had continued an internal strife between Lutheran theologians. This was manifest in a variety of doctrinal areas – like the role of the law in preaching; the theologian Georg Major, who had been ordained by Luther and who studied at Wittenberg contended that good works according to the law were an important part of salvation even though one was saved by faith alone; opposing theologians argued that this was really a return to Rome, they emphasized the role of the law in convicting men of sin. Others were in debate over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and the roles of human will and divine grace in salvation.
- The **Book of Concord** (1580) included the **Formula of Concord** (1577) which took an intermediate position on most of these issues, excepting the Lord's Supper where it upheld the strict Lutheran view denying any significant difference between Zwingli and Calvin's views. Where Melancthon had argued that there was a difference between core and peripheral issues in theology, the latter being what he termed *adiaphora*, the Formula of Concord, while agreeing that some elements of theology were not essential to the gospel, none the less "peripheral" doctrines, as established by the church, should not be abandoned, even under persecution.
- The main figure in the formulation of the **Formula of Concord** was the German theologian **Martin Chemnitz**, who held substantially to strict Lutheranism, while sympathetic to Melancthon's methodology.
- Chemnitz, born in Treunbrietzen in Brandenburg in 1522, was a second generation Lutheran Reformer; he had studied under Luther and Melancthon at Wittenberg, and in 1554 came back to teach.
- A keen student of the Scriptures in the original languages, with an avid interest in the writings of the early church fathers, he sought to compile and assess the results of his studies using scholastic methods.
- Chemnitz's goal was to reconcile the various positions within Lutheranism, while delineating Lutheranism from Roman Catholicism and other forms of Protestantism – particularly Reformed theology.
- He wrote very extensively on church government, expositions of the Augsburg confession, produced volumes of sermons and devotional material, as well as theological treatises, many of which were in response to Jesuit challenges to Lutheranism.
- It was this effort towards a thoroughgoing Lutheran synthesis combined with polemical theology towards other bodies that came to characterize what we term **Lutheran orthodoxy** or **Lutheran scholasticism**.
- Lutheran scholasticism was in many respects very similar to Reformed scholasticism in its methodology, and as a result in the methodological character of its output. It was characterized by a great attention to theological detail, precision, and the desire to seek clarification and completeness in discussion of theological points as part of a greater whole: the creation of a comprehensive and unified systematic theology.
- Despite Luther's dislike of much of medieval scholasticism, it accepted Aristotelian and other methods of structure and organization.
- How was it similar to and different from Reformed scholasticism?

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Chemnitz

- Similarities included the use of scholastic methodologies, increasing refinement of definition, precision of terminology, and with this a growth in the content/amount of systematic theology produced.
- Similarities also included some of the opponents tackled: first among these for the Lutherans were the Jesuits, then there were also the Socinians... but the Calvinists were a key target as well.
- This of course reflects a key difference – there was a significant difference in terms of content in various areas, from understanding of the relationship of Old and New Testaments, to soteriological differences, and differences in theology of the sacraments, worship and church polity. Of course there were other areas of significant commonality in doctrine.
- Interestingly there seems to be significantly more anti-Reformed/Calvinist polemic among the Lutherans than there was anti-Lutheran polemic among the Reformed. Likely because the Reformed had a significant minority presence in parts of Germany, while the Lutherans had comparatively very little presence in Reformed regions of Europe.

2. Key Figures and Debates in Lutheran High Orthodoxy

- Key figures:
- **Johann Gerhard** (1582-1637) was one of the key Lutheran theologians of the transitional period from early Lutheran orthodoxy to the era of high orthodoxy.
- He studied at the University of Wittenberg from 1599, first taking lectures in theology, then medicine. By 1605 he was lecturing in theology at the University of Jena, and a year later appointed to the ecclesiastical post of superintendant in the Duchy of Coburg where he played a key role in the leadership of the Lutheran church.
- By 1616 he was back at Jena, now in the capacity of senior theological professor. He taught alongside Johann Major and Johann Himmel, the “three Johanns” of Lutheran orthodoxy.
- Gerhard was a very highly respected theologian during his lifetime – steadily received calls from other universities, including Wittenberg, and Uppsala in Sweden.
- He produced numerous exegetical, polemic and dogmatic works including the *Confessio Catholica* (1633-1637), an exposition of the Augsburg Confession, and the *Loci Communes Theologici* (1610-22), a vast and detailed work of systematic theology.
- In the generation following Gerhard, there are a number of other theologians worthy of note among the Lutheran orthodox:
- **Georg Calixtus** (1586-1656) was born in Schleswig and studied at Helmstadt university along with a number of others including Heidelberg.
- He travelled widely across Europe, including England, the Netherlands, France, Italy.
- Became friends with many, both Reformed and Roman Catholic; read widely, and developed an ecumenical spirit.
- Through his relationships, writing and teaching he sought to form a basis for overtures to both Roman Catholics and the Reformed.
- Unlike Abraham Calovius (who we'll consider next), Calixtus made a distinction between what he termed the essential and the secondary in Lutheran theology. He argued that while everything that is in Scripture is revealed by God, and thus ought to be believed, not all is of equal importance – only that which relates to salvation is absolutely necessary; the rest is equally true, but not essential to being a Christian.
- How to discern and delineate? Calixtus argued that during the first five centuries there was a consensus in the early church; what was declared heretical then should be now,

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Calixtus

but we ought not affirm anything essential for salvation beyond what was held then. He argued that if one did, then the early Christians could not have been saved.

- Calixtus' openness was evident in his statements regarding Roman Catholicism. He was willing in his engagement with Roman Catholics to state that the Pope did have a primacy in the Roman church, though it was one human in origin, simply a tradition. He was also willing to call the Mass a sacrifice.
- Calixtus served for years as a professor of theology at Helmstadt university, which became known as a leading center of "syncretism", as opponents termed his attempts for ecumenical engagement with Roman Catholics and the Reformed.
- All of this said, he did continue to argue at the same time that those who did not presently hold to the full Lutheran understanding were in error, but not heretics.
- His teaching and the response to it formed the "Syncretist Controversy" a fierce and divisive debate within Lutheranism at its peak between 1640-1685.
- **Abraham Calovius** (1612-1686) was one of the leading opponents of Georg Calixtus, whom Justo Gonzalez gives attention to in our text. Gonzalez somewhat negatively portrays the "growing rigidity" of Lutheran scholasticism, and puts Calixtus and the "syncretist movement" in a very positive light.
- Calovius was a gifted theologian – his *Systema locorum theologicorum* (1655-1677) a massive 12 volume work of systematic theology is rightly seen as perhaps the climax of Lutheran high orthodox theological productivity.
- Calovius manifests a very high regard and careful exposition of the doctrine of Scripture, and was a great opponent of Roman Catholicism and Socinianism.
- He was however also deeply opposed to Reformed theology. Calovius argued that one had to fully subscribe to Lutheranism (as formulated in its confessions/the Book of Concord) for salvation, and declared it was heresy that Roman Catholics or Calvinists could be saved as such.
- **Johann Andreas Quenstadt** (1617-1688) was a very conservative Lutheran scholastic with an irenic spirit. His works reflected a great care to be consistent with Lutheran confessions and a careful study of the Scriptures.
- **Johann Wilhelm Baier** (1647-1695) was born at Nuremberg. One of the latter generation of Lutheran high orthodoxy, he proved a capable student of languages and theology, becoming a professor of church history at Jena, where he also came to teach theology.
- Baier's contribution to Lutheran orthodoxy was significant – he wrote a leading theological compendium which stands as a key work of Lutheran high orthodoxy. The first edition completed in 1686, he set to work with substantial revision and expansion resulting in an enlarged edition in 1691.
- Baier's work would be widely used in Lutheranism, despite the fact that some of the conservative among the Lutheran orthodox felt that he manifested tendencies/sympathies towards the syncretists.
- **David Hollatz** (1648-1717) was another significant theologian of the latter part of Lutheran high orthodoxy.
- He continued the tradition of confessional Lutheran scholastic theology reflecting a synthesis of dogmatic and exegetical approaches to doctrine in several significant theological treatises.
- **Key debates:**
- We've already mentioned the "Syncretistic Controversy" of 1640-1685, but there are at least two others we should be aware of:

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Calovius

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Baier

- (1) One of the first major debates, prior to the "Syncretistic Controversy" was in the early period after the publication of the Book of Concord. (1580-1603)
- The debate broke out between **Aegidius Hunnius** and **Samuel Huber** on the doctrine of predestination. Historical theologians have argued that there was an inherent tension in the Formula of Concord's statement on election, and its treatment of the topic within the method of distinguishing between law and gospel.
- **Hunnus** took the side of a definition of the doctrine of predestination ~~comparatively~~ ^{arguing that God elected in view of} ~~similar to that within Reformed orthodoxy.~~ ^{faith -} ~~Opponents and some later Lutheran orthodox theologians moved in a more synergistic direction; interestingly the time period and content of the debate is set in a larger context which includes the Remonstrant/Arminian controversy.~~ ^{a faith also predestined sovereignly given}
- (2) Another debate developed in the 1610's again over further consideration of the Formula of Concord, in this case over Christological issues related to the 8th article – on the relationship of the divine nature to the human, particularly during the earthly ministry of Christ. Some argued that the divine nature was largely veiled or hidden in Christ, others that he emptied himself of divine characteristics, though not of divine nature.
- Having considered these briefly – and realizing there is a wealth of material to learn from in other areas of Lutheran orthodoxy – Lutheran exegetical work, preaching, catechizing, etc., and some fertile ground for the study of Lutheran-Reformed theological interaction and influences, we'll now turn to look at our two examples of theological writing from the era of Lutheran high orthodoxy: Baier's work on the minister, and Hollatz's work on the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament.

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Hunnus