

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	