

## Experiencing the Faith: (Lutheran) Christianity 101

### Introduction

Why did the Lutheran cross the road? *Answer:* To get to the middle. That's an inside joke. Martin Luther's well-thought way of looking at Christian faith finds itself midway between the traditionals (Catholics and Orthodox), the Evangelicals (Calvinists and Arminians) and the Radical Reformed. That wasn't meant to be any kind of compromise. It's just where a hard-fought faith and brilliance at Greek translation took Marty. That faith translates wonderfully into a profound joy in life, assurance in death, and confidence in God, who amazingly turns out to be your best friend.

Luther's thinking endures. How do we know? First it started the Reformation which spread to Scandinavia and England where it became the theology of the Anglican Church. "The Singing Church" didn't invent music in worships but with congregational participation, raised music to a whole new level. When the Moravians arrived as refugees to Germany in the early 1700s, they found Luther's belief system remarkably similar to their own which they had guarded for 300 years in the hollows and canyons of Bohemia. They calmed the warring European churches by spurring the daily life of faith in prayer, scripture reading, fellowship, service and witnessing. Moravians became the first interdenominational group, exporting their simple, profitable lifestyles of being a Christian to Catholics and Protestants alike. They were the first modern missionaries to places as distant as Greenland and the Virgin Islands. Upon reading Luther's *Liberty of a Christian*, Englishman John Locke devised a government system that men would really respond to (1679, *Two Treatises on Government*). But it was so foreign to a world of kings, it wasn't given much consideration, until the Founders of the United States of America put it into practice. The tolerant Anglicans seem to have spawned practically all the Protestants—Baptists, Methodists and Wesleyans who in turn spawned Pentecostals. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod became the fastest growing denomination in USA from the 1920s to the 60s. Today in Africa, there are 25 million Lutherans, one of the few European churches to appeal broadly and reform the culture of slave-owning and abuse of women.

Among the most creative Christians are Christian Contemporary Musicians, who write lyrical stories of lives found and renewed in tremendous ways by Christ. Yet these are not always considered correct or mainstream by many Christian institutions. Nonetheless, they are celebrated by a faith that gives God all the credit and glory for true belief that happens to real people. Often they make extraordinary points that would make Luther smile. God still works in mysteries, promises to be there in His Word and His Sacraments, gives quiet assurance even though the brain wallows through the mud of evil. You are still His child and the gates of hell will not

prevail against you. (Certified by this author whose brain has done its share of wallowing.)

Whether the reader is a Lutheran or not, this tome (a small book dedicated to learning) is designed to help you see how your faith can come to life and grow. It isn't meant to replace doctrinal instructional materials but rather is a practical guide for living. And it will touch on the Reformation history plus origins and culture of North American Lutherans.

I would like to acknowledge my editors, Shirley Zimmerman, Janet Goll, and David Birnbaum. A number of authors contribute to the text including Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*; E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*; Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization Vol. VI*; Craig Groeschel, *Hope in the Dark*; Janet Letnes Martin and Suzann Nelson, *Luther's Small Dictionary* (humor!) and numerous others that are hard to remember.