



LUTHERAN *Faith & Life*

# LIVING ROOTS

## A STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION



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**Living  
Roots:  
A Study  
of the  
Augsburg  
Confession**

**by Mary B. Havens**

**Augsburg Fortress  
Minneapolis**

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# Living Roots:

## A Study of the Augsburg Confession

### LIVING ROOTS: A STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

Lutheran Faith and Life Series  
Adult Student Book

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# Introduction

## To The Augsburg Confession

**Imagine the drama** as the meeting in Augsburg, Germany, was about to begin. The date was June 25, 1530. Philipp Melancthon, on behalf of the reformers, had drafted the document we now know as the Augsburg Confession. Martin Luther, probably pacing the floor as he waited for word of what happened, was hidden away in Coberg Castle 60 miles away. Being under censure of the church and ban of empire, Luther was in danger of losing life or liberty. The reformers read their document to Charles V, the secular ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, and to the assembled dignitaries.

This course takes a closer look both at the story behind the Augsburg Confession and at the contents of the first 21 articles.

The Augsburg Confession is divided into two parts. The first deals with doctrines (Articles 1-21) and the second with abuses in the life of the church which the reformers were correcting (Articles 22-28). The first six articles summarize teachings about God, original sin, Jesus Christ, justification, the ministry, and new life. The next large block of articles (7-15) primarily deal with the church, and the last six doctrinal articles (16-21) take up specific points such as free will, good works, the last judgment, and the saints.

Throughout all of the articles, the heart of

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*. . . through  
Christ God freely  
forgives sinners,  
accepts them as  
righteous,  
justifies them,  
and gives them  
eternal life.*

”

the gospel comes through: through Christ God freely forgives sinners, accepts them as righteous, justifies them, and gives them eternal life. This grace is received by faith alone; it cannot be earned in any way.

The Augsburg Confession is the first and oldest of a number of confessional documents produced during the Reformation. A product of turbulent times, the Confession is a fundamental declaration of the faith of the Lutheran church. The tone of the Augsburg Confession is friendly and conciliatory because at the time, the reformers still held out hope that their adversaries might be persuaded by what was said if they could hear it clearly stated. The Augsburg Confession was not intended to be sectarian, but rather was meant to address the faith of all Christians.

Occasionally readers will notice a reference to the "Unaltered Augsburg Confession," that is, the one written in 1530 and the focus of this course's study. In the years that followed, Melanchthon undertook extensive revisions of the Confession, and the 1540 edition is the one that is usually called the *Variata*, or altered edition. When Lutheran groups or individuals want people to know that they are subscribing to the *original* Augsburg Confession, they state clearly that they mean the unaltered edition.

The Augsburg Confession has proved its ability to continue to call the Lutheran church back to a true understanding of itself and the gospel. Today, when we are surrounded by so many religious teachings and movements, the confession can serve as a beacon of light, showing us where the truth is and pointing out the dangers when we move away from it. That is where the significance of the Augsburg Confession in the life of the Lutheran church lies: its teachings continue to speak to us today and be a faithful exposition of the gospel.

# A Confessing People

Jesus . . . asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-16).

**To be a Christian** is to be challenged to answer Jesus’ question—“Who do *you* say that I am?” It is of the very essence of Christianity to give witness to our faith, to respond to the amazing graciousness of God who gives us salvation. As Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). To be a Christian is to confess Christ. Like Peter, Christians are encountered by Christ, in Scripture and sacraments, and asked to answer: Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Why is Jesus of significance for my life? So what difference does Jesus—might Jesus—make for my, or anyone’s life?

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*Who do you say  
that I am?*

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## **People of the Way**

Faced with such questions, the early Christians formulated various creeds and confessional statements. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is the Christ, God's Son our Savior! Sometimes their confession appeared in the garb of hymns and liturgical responses. Colossians 1:15-20 is believed to be such a hymn from the early church. Gradually, in response to differing historical situations and many different challenges and invitations, longer and more detailed confessions were developed by the church. Three of these remain authoritative for us today: The Nicene Creed (from the fourth century), Athanasian Creed (fifth or sixth century), and the Apostles' Creed (earliest form, third century).

The early Christians did not understand confession as the mere reciting or memorizing of words in church. They knew they were to be living confessions themselves, bearing Christ to the world through their deeds as well as their words. Even their enemies and detractors, who in derision called them a "people of the way," noticed this. Christians were a people whose lifestyle—the way they lived, the decisions they confronted, the commitments they chose, the battles they fought—proclaimed their faith. Orthodoxy (correct teaching) manifested itself in orthopraxy (correct living). So to confess "Jesus is Lord" necessarily meant the dethroning of all false lords from their lives—status, wealth, power. Confessing meant that their lives spoke, walked, breathed, gave witness to the truth that there is one, and only one, Lord—Jesus the Christ, whose invitation to the church is "Follow me, I am the way, the truth, and the life." Throughout the centuries, the people of the way have followed.

## **Luther's Confession**

In the sixteenth century Martin Luther and his supporters were among those who



sought to walk the way of faithfulness. In doing so, however, they began to realize a need for “road repairs.” In some places the path was dusty; the witness to Christ was not as clear as it could be.

In other places on that road of faithful discipleship, ruts had developed and followers were stuck in them. For example, the doctrine that humanity must cooperate with God in achieving salvation (rather than receiving salvation as a free gift) left many, including Luther for a time, struggling to build ladders to heaven. But as he read Scripture, Luther began to discover a discrepancy between the way the church of his day was heading and the way Jesus called the disciples to follow. Luther found that the church of his day had perverted the nature of the gospel and was hopelessly entangled in a web of worldly affairs. It had been seduced by politics, business, finances, and entertainment, and gave little of its attention, energy, and talents to proclaiming and living the gospel.

Ultimately Luther felt compelled to speak. On Oct. 31, 1517, he posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. The first thesis reads, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (LW 31:25). To repent (Greek: *metanoia*) means to change direction, to turn around. When one is headed in the wrong direction, the call to repent is like a warning sign at the edge of a cliff. Stop! Turn around right now! This is the wrong way! The call to repent does not, however, just leave one standing on the edge, either of a cliff or of life, but one is turned and sent on the way by the call of Jesus: “Come to me . . . I am the way.”

In challenging the church to stop and listen anew to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live accordingly, Luther had absolutely no intention of breaking away from the Roman Catholic church. In fact, he could imagine

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*“I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine. Neither was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:22, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I—poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am—come to have men call the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians, after him whose teaching we hold.”*

(LW 45:70-71)

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nothing worse than the creation of a new church and rival church bodies. What he desired, and felt compelled by his vocation as a pastor and theologian in the church to insist upon, was reform of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church—a reform empowered and guided by Scripture. Luther's whole concern was that the church live up to its God-given task—proclaiming the gospel purely and clearly, the gospel (good news) that God gave his Son for our salvation.

Certainly not all agreed with Luther, especially Pope Leo X, who in 1520 excommunicated Luther from the Roman Catholic church, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who declared Luther an outlaw in 1521. Nevertheless, many joined their voices with Luther in calling for the reform of the church.

But why would anyone risk so much? Couldn't they have just held on to their religious beliefs quietly and privately? No, for many the issue at stake was salvation itself. Luther and his supporters wanted people to know their Savior; who freely and unconditionally saves sinners.

### **The Confession at Augsburg**

Charles V, secular ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, was forced to act. On one hand he sought to defend his land from foreign invaders, and on the other he sought peace within his empire. This became increasingly difficult as some citizens embraced Luther's teachings and others rejected them as heretical (teachings contrary to the church). Charles's very empire was a house divided, with Lutherans and other reform movements splitting away from the Roman Catholic Church. Somehow the religious dissension in his land had to find resolution. Charles had a choice: either legally suppress the Lutherans or grant them legal rights and status. In other words, either a "search and destroy" policy or a "live and let live" policy had to be implemented.

On Jan. 21, 1530, Charles invited all governing officials of the empire to a diet (general meeting) in Augsburg, Germany, in order to: “. . . allay divisions, to cease hostility, to surrender past errors to our Saviour, and to display diligence in hearing, understanding, and considering with love and kindness the opinions and views of everybody . . . so that we all may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church, and unity, even as we all live and do battle under one Christ” (Quoted in *Lutheranism* by Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, copyright © 1976 Fortress Press).

John Frederick of the district of Saxony (which included Wittenberg) asked the Lutheran theologians to prepare a confession of faith. What do Lutherans believe? Why are they willing to risk their life, goods, and honor for it? Philipp Melanchthon, a professor at the University of Wittenberg along with Luther, was given the task of soliciting and listening to various views and then drafting a document.

In April 1530 John Frederick, Philipp Melanchthon, and other theologians and government officials set out for the diet. Because he was still under censure of church and ban of empire, and so at risk of life and liberty, Luther stayed at the Coburg Castle, 60 miles distant from Augsburg.

All the while, Melanchthon continued to revise and shape the Augsburg Confession. In fact, even as late as the night before its presentation, he was revising and editing the text. He wanted every statement, every sentence, every clause to be a clear statement of Lutheran theology. At 3 P.M. on June 25, 1530, it was time for Melanchthon to put down his pen and for Chancellor Brueck of Saxony to stand before Charles V and the imperial court and read the Augsburg Confession.

This Augsburg Confession was the voice of a renewal movement within the catholic church giving answer to Jesus' question,

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**Philipp Melanchthon** was the professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg. In 1519 he earned a degree in theology but was never ordained, insisting that he was not called to Word and sacrament ministry.

In 1530 he composed the Augsburg Confession and then in 1531 the Apology (the defense) of the Augsburg Confession, both of which demonstrate Melanchthon's abilities as a scholar and faithfulness as a churchman.

Throughout his life he was a coworker with Luther, but not his puppet, in leading the reform movement. Often it was Melanchthon who represented Lutheranism before various political and church assemblies, because Luther was wanted dead or alive as a condemned heretic.

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*“I have read Master Philipp's Apologia (the Augsburg Confession) and it pleases me very much. I know of nothing to improve or change in it and that would not be appropriate anyway, for I cannot tread so softly and gently as he.”*

(Author's translation of Weimar edition of Luther's works, Briefe 5, No. 1568, 319-320)

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“Who do you say that I am?” The Confession answers: “We receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith” (Article 4). The Augsburg Confession is a bold, clear statement of the Lutheran confessors’ conviction that the story of Jesus told in Scripture is absolutely true!”

### **The Augsburg Confession: Evangelical Witness**

Frequently referred to as a symbolical (confessional) book, the Augsburg Confession is not an end in itself but bears witness to the Holy Scriptures. To the question, “Can we believe the Augsburg Confession?” we must ask, “Does it agree with the scriptural revelation of God’s saving event for us in Jesus Christ?” At Augsburg, the confessors answered in the affirmative: the Confession was in agreement with Scripture. Contemporary Lutheranism affirms this as well. “This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession” (ELCA Constitution 2:05).

As evangelical (gospel) witness, the Augsburg Confession directs us to speak and live in such a way that our lives proclaim the truth of God’s gracious love for all creation. The Confession proclaims that God’s love is unconditional (because God gives it to us as a gift) and is not dependent upon us—our decision or indecision, morality or immorality, or our achievements, merits, or skills.

### **The Augsburg Confession: Catholic Heritage**

The Augsburg Confession was not the “latest model” doctrine newly devised by the Lutheran confessors in 1530. Rather, it reflects the heritage of the church rooted in

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*“This is just about a summary of the doctrines that are preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction, the consolation of consciences, and the amendment of believers. Certainly we should not wish to put our own souls and consciences in grave peril before God by misusing his name or Word, nor should we wish to bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth . . . this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures.”*

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(BC 47.1)

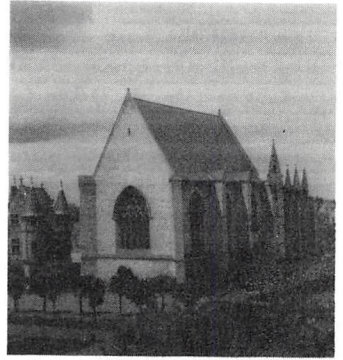


Scripture, the apostolic teachings, the wisdom and guidance of the early church theologian and teachers, and the example of our forefathers and foremothers in the faith. To say that we have an apostolic and catholic (universal) heritage is to say that as a church we share the message and mission of the Christian church of all time and places. As we might point out the heritage of a family member by saying "You have the eyes of your grandmother," so in the church we might observe, "You speak the same message as the apostles spoke." This is what is meant by the catholic heritage or legacy of the Lutheran tradition.

In the sixteenth century the reformers repeatedly affirmed their catholic heritage: "We have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church" (BC 95.5). Claiming to witness to the right, pure, and original faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, the Augsburg Confession was never intended as the private property of Lutherans. It can never be "ours" alone; it is the common property of God's church.

### **The Augsburg Confession: Ecumenical Vision**

Faithfulness to the gospel calls us to work diligently for the oneness of God's church. Jesus prayed "that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22). Because Charles V's summons sounded conciliatory, Melancthon and the reformers drafted the Augsburg Confession to reflect their hope for dialogue and ultimate reconciliation between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. That, of course, did not happen in the sixteenth century. But this does not cloud the ecumenical commitment and vision of the Augsburg Confession (see Article 7). The church is already one because its Lord is one. Today we need to work toward realizing that unity among the various Christian denominations.



## **The Augsburg Confession: Reforming Commitment**

The Augsburg Confession calls the church to be reformed and renewed by the gospel of the risen, victorious Lord, which is always a living Word. It addresses all times, places, and spaces with the incredible truth that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ, and that righteousness and eternal life are given to us. The cross and empty tomb are God's declaration that our destiny and the meaning of our lives belong with God. The Augsburg Confession commits us to proclaim the truth boldly and clearly—as well as to listen both boldly and clearly. It is to allow God's Word to shape our messages, traditions, rituals, and lives. Where God's Word lives there will invariably be some surprises, some reforming along the way.

## **The Augsburg Confession: Enduring Power**

Worldwide Lutheranism continues to affirm the Augsburg Confession as a standard for worship, doctrine, and piety. But truly one must ask how a document written in a time of castles, counts, and a common Christendom can still be relevant in a time of computers, condominiums, and competing denominations. Because the Confession was shaped by specific historic conditions, we simply cannot accept all of its content, expressions, and worldview as eternally valid. It is, after all, a sixteenth-century document. At the same time we cannot simply send the Augsburg Confession to a museum as if it were an irrelevant artifact. The Confession is no more irrelevant than the gospel to which it bears witness. Its enduring significance is its faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which called the church in 1530 and calls us today to be evangelical, catholic, ecumenical, and reforming. What does this mean?

Evangelical or gospel-centered: This means that we are a church committed to Scripture's testimony of Jesus Christ.

- Catholic (universal heritage): This means that as we proclaim that gospel our voices blend with Christians throughout the centuries who have witnessed in truth and deed to what God has done in Jesus Christ.
- Ecumenical: This means that we see and recognize as brothers and sisters in the Christian faith all who faithfully proclaim the gospel regardless of race, nation, or denomination.
- Reforming: This means that we are open to be surprised by God's continued presence and work in our midst.

Indeed, the Augsburg Confession is authoritative and instructive for us today because it confesses the gospel—the way things are, not the way we hope they will be—since God raised Jesus from the dead. To subscribe to the Augsburg Confession means to be committed to its vision of an evangelical, catholic, ecumenical, and reforming church.

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*“This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.”*  
(ELCA Constitution 2:07)

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## For Reflection

1. As personally as Peter, you, too, are addressed by the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). How do you respond?
2. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Lord in your life (Romans 10:9)?
3. Martin Luther did not approve of the name *Lutheran* for those who followed his leading. What do you think? What other names might have been chosen?
4. The Augsburg Confession calls for reform of the one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic church. How might such a call guide or determine our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic faith and other denominations?
5. As you reflect upon Christianity today, where do you see the need for reform and renewal? Is the church still "on the way," or have we taken some detours or run into some dead ends? Try writing a couple of "theses" proposing reform for the church today.

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## Our Prayers

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son our Savior (LBW p. 45).



# A Justified People

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

***The dying words of Jesus*** may seem to be a strange beginning to a discussion of the Augsburg Confession's Article 4 on justification. Yet these words say it all. "It is finished" is Jesus' victory shout. All the people and powers that would attempt to separate us from God's love have been defeated. It is finished; God's relationship to us is no longer in doubt. The final word has now been spoken: "You are mine." An early translation of Luther's words says we were "lost and condemned creatures." Now the good news is that Jesus Christ has saved and "redeemed me . . . freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to

“  
‘It is finished’ is  
Jesus’ victory  
shout.

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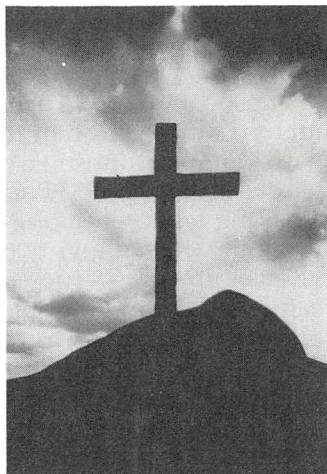
all eternity. This is most certainly true" (BC 345.4; See also The Small Catechism, Second Article of the Apostles' Creed).

### **The Meaning of Life?**

In the sixteenth century Luther was haunted by questions like these: Is God merciful? How can God forgive my sin? Does God love me? How can I be worthy of God's love? After years of despair and great effort to make himself worthy of God's love, Luther felt unable to find reassurance. Luther was paralyzed in fear of a God he had come to regard as a wrathful, punishing tyrant. Luther knew he could not do enough to be seen as righteous. He feared he was condemned to hell. The church's teaching about salvation intensified his fear. Salvation was viewed as a cooperative endeavor between God and humans. It worked like this: On their own, people are able to do many good and God-pleasing works (say prayers, visit shrines, help their neighbors, etc.), but they could not do enough to attain salvation. Then God entered as the one who made up the deficit for those who had done enough good works. The combination of many good works and God's grace could lead to salvation.

Obviously it mattered a great deal whether the individual did enough to be found worthy. Surely God could be counted on to do God's part, but how could a person accomplish enough of the needed good works? How could someone be sure? This became the place of unbearable pain for Luther. Precisely at the point where it promised to offer hope—salvation was within his grasp—the doctrine of cooperation led to uncertainty and despair. Could Luther be sure that he had done enough to merit salvation? Never. No one could ever be sure.

This is by no means just a medieval problem. Notions of cooperation are still alive, well, and kicking up a storm in preaching and piety today. We have probably all heard statements like this: "If you do certain



things or believe or feel certain ways, then God will love you or do certain things for you.”

Those “if you . . . then God will” statements convey a notion that we cooperate with God in attaining salvation. God is regarded as a cosmic Santa Claus who’s “making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out who’s naughty or nice.” God is the giver of presents—success, health, wealth, salvation, God’s love—but only to those who measure up. Yet, as in the sixteenth century, the question lingers: How can we ever be sure that we have done enough to satisfy or appease God?

Like Luther, at some time we all ask about life’s meaning: Is my life of value? For what reason or purpose do I exist? Does God love me or condemn me? Trying to find ultimate meaning of my life by doing all I can, pulling myself up by my bootstraps, or listening to my inner self is ill-advised. For one is then simply turned back on the questioning and doubting self. It would be like telling a person who’s run into a brick wall to back up and run harder.

There is only one answer to the questions of life’s meaning and of God’s love for us—the radical, audacious proclamation that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead. The Easter proclamation—Jesus is alive again and forever, and that in Jesus, God has declared an undying love for the whole world—is the gift of ultimate meaning and reassurance for my life and yours. How do you find a gracious God? You don’t, but God has found you and embraced you with God’s promised mercy.

In Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus’ death and resurrection destroyed sin and death and gave us new life, eternal life. God said “yes” to you, to me, to each of us. This “yes” is stronger than any and all “nos” that the world, the self, or even death might speak.

We all know, don’t we, the world’s “nos”? No, you are nobody! No, your life is without

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*But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.*

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(Romans 3:21-26)



meaning! No, there is no future, no hope for you! Louder and more lasting than all of these is God's "yes," affirming us as God's loved people; a people God literally has loved to death. "Yes! Yes, you are mine! Yes, I give you meaning and future and hope!" Lutherans understand justification as this "yes" of God. In Jesus Christ, God's gracious heart reaches out to retrieve the lost, heal the hurting, forgive sinners, and love us all.

### **Justification**

Luther spoke of justification as the forgiveness of sins, the redemption of the condemned, the payment of the ransom to free us. We who were separated from God because of our sin are redeemed and cleansed. We are brought back, reconciled to God by God's act of forgiveness.

Often a courtroom image is used to describe what Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. It is the last judgment and we stand as sinners before God. We deserve eternal damnation for offending the eternal God. But then the case suddenly takes an unexpected turn. God announces that we are acquitted, we are justified, we are seen as righteous—we are free to go. There was no plea bargaining, no sudden discovery of our innocence. We *are* guilty of sin. So what happened? God in Christ took on our deserved punishment. We are let off the hook because Jesus hung on the cross. Jesus, though sinless, endured the punishment for our sin.

The Bible has other helpful images to describe salvation in addition to the courtroom scene, but that was Luther's favorite. Some others include debts canceled, a load lifted, light breaking through darkness, life out of death, the unclean made clean, and the reconciliation of enemies.

Some theologians speak of justification as God's total acceptance of us despite our unacceptability. In other words, I am unworthy to stand before, or call upon, the holy God. I

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*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

(LBW p. 56; 1 John 1:8-9)

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sin; I fall tragically short of being the person God intends me to be. Many of my actions are unacceptable and I regard myself as unlovely and without any excuses. By all rights God should reject me, yet Scripture declares that because of what Jesus accomplished, God loves me and accepts me into God's family.

Justification has also been defined as the never-ending relationship that God establishes with us in Jesus Christ. In the midst of a world that knows too much about disposable relationships, the gospel declares that here is one that will never be broken—it is trustworthy and lifelong. Invariably we will ask, "But how could this possibly be? The world knows nothing of such relationships." This is certainly true. But it is not the world but God who establishes this relationship, and therefore it is forever. For God defeated all the powers, persons, principles—everything that would break the relationship God establishes with us. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed as our God who loves and risks, lived and died, and lives again for you, for me, for us, forever.

### **By Grace Alone**

The issue of justification hinged on the question of *how*. The Roman Catholic answer was that God gave grace to do good works, enough to prove oneself worthy and to receive forgiveness. Luther knew that was not the case.

It is through God's grace that we have salvation. We are justified because God has mercifully spoken "yes" to us in Jesus Christ. Luther said that we are "clothed in Christ's righteousness" to emphasize that we do not, cannot, acquire righteousness through our own skills, strategies, or strivings. It is not what we do, but what God has done!

We cannot merit Christ's righteousness in the sense of earning or deserving it. As the medieval doctrine of cooperation made so painfully clear, we can *never* do enough to

be right before God on our own merit. We need also to be aware of more subtle forms of the doctrine of cooperation. For example, grace is sometimes conceived of as a “jump start” for our weak spiritual batteries that enables us to go chugging along on our way to earning salvation. But God’s grace is not a “push” to get us going. It is all and everything. As Paul wrote, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). All the doctrines of cooperation, medieval and contemporary, teach that we must *do* something to obtain God’s grace. The Augsburg Confession tosses out all such doctrines and, on the authority of Scripture, insists that there is no way for us to get to God on our own. God has come to us in Jesus Christ and regards us as righteous because of him.

Justification is a radical act, even a daring move, on God’s part. Before any of our acts of repentance, despite any and all of our good works and our bad works, through Jesus Christ God declares us justified, reconciled, loved. There is nothing in us worthy of God’s love and nothing we can do to earn God’s favor. There is *nothing* about us that guarantees God’s continuing relationship with us. In fact, quite to the contrary. We are all sinners, nevertheless God freely decides for us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is God’s eternal guarantee that nothing will ever separate us from God’s love. As Paul exclaimed, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39). Because this guarantee of God’s fellowship and friendship is made by the risen Lord—the One victorious even over death, the last condition imposed on life—it

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*“Learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say ‘Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.’ Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners. On this account he descended from heaven, where he dwelt among the righteous, to dwell among sinners. Meditate on this love of his and you will see his sweet consolation.”*

(LW 48:12-13)

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is sure and certain. Absolutely nothing can stop God from keeping this promise. Whether or not you, I, or the world acknowledge it, God has already reconciled the estranged, forgiven sinners and welcomed home the wandering. Why? Because God loves us. Is there any reason for God to love us? No, but God does, and that is what grace is—God’s unmotivated free gift of love for sinners, God’s people.

### **Through Faith**

Faith itself is a gift of grace. As Luther confessed, “I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith” (The Small Catechism, Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed; See also BC 345.6).

Faith is absolute, unmixed dependence upon God and it is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit enables us to trust in God’s presence and power even when it seems impossible or improbable. So often we limit faith to what we, all by ourselves, can believe or know or feel. The trap we fall into when we do this is that old doctrine of cooperation, and with it we receive a good unhealthy dose of despair. Many church people voice sentiments like these: “If only you had more faith, God would heal this illness.” “If only you really and truly believe, then you will be more worthy.” “If you could feel God at work in your life, then you could accomplish so much.”

These “if onlys” pave the rocky road of despair. How can one ever believe enough? How much is *truly* believing? Is it more than *genuinely* believing? How do I make myself feel God’s presence? These are all questions we need not bother with and definitely should never ask. For faith is none of these. It is not just another good work, not just belief, not just historical knowledge, not acceptance of Jesus, not a good feeling

of God's presence. Faith is trusting and depending upon Jesus as Lord and Savior, and faith is a gift of God's grace. Melancthon wrote, "Faith alone, looking to the promise and believing with full assurance that God forgives because Christ did not die in vain, conquers the terrors of sin and death. If somebody doubts that his sins are forgiven, he insults Christ because he thinks that his sin is greater and stronger than the death and promise of Christ." (BC 127.147).

What is faith? In Luther's words: "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times" (LW 35:370).

### **Justification: A Way of Living**

As Lutheran Christians we commit ourselves to proclaim this truth that we are justified freely for Christ's sake through faith without the exertion of our own strength, gaining of merits, or doing of works. What does this mean? God unconditionally promises God's undying love for us. We need not, must not, despair of God's love. Jesus, the enfleshed Word of God, is the final and full decision of God about us, for us, with us.

It is widely believed that justification is the first doctrine of Lutheranism. One almost envisions a shopping list with justification at the top. But justification is not just one among many doctrines. It is the way we speak and live so that all that we do reflects the love of God for us. The Augsburg Confession challenges and invites us to nothing less than to live as beloved children whose words and deeds declare the truth that the future of us all is entirely and eternally in God's nail-pierced hands. That makes all the difference in the world. Thank God it is so!

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### **"Have No Fear, Little Flock"**

*Have no fear, little flock;  
Have no fear, little flock,  
For the Father has chosen  
To give you the Kingdom;  
Have no fear, little flock!*

*Have good cheer, little  
flock;  
Have good cheer, little  
flock,  
For the Father will keep  
you  
In his love forever;  
Have good cheer, little  
flock!*

*Praise the Lord high  
above;  
Praise the Lord high  
above,  
For he stoops down to  
heal you,  
Uplift and restore you;  
Praise the Lord high  
above!*

*Thankful hearts raise to  
God;  
Thankful hearts raise to  
God,  
For he stays close beside  
you,  
In all things works with  
you;  
Thankful hearts raise to  
God!*

(LBW 476)

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## For Reflection

1. In a world where we think we get what we deserve, how can we trust that this message of undeserved love is true?
2. If all are freely justified in Jesus Christ regardless of good or bad works, then God loves the most wanted criminal as much as me. Does that sound right? Aren't there some conditions that have to be met along the way?
3. Which of the pictures of salvation mentioned on page 19 are appealing to you (courtroom, life out of death, light breaking through darkness, etc.)?
4. Can I say "no" to God's love? If I do, will it change God's decision to love me?
5. What would you say or do in a Sunday school class or a children's sermon that might explain the Lutheran understanding of justification by grace?

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Lord God, we thank you for your gracious love by which you have redeemed us and freed us. Give us grace to believe and trust this good news. Help us also to live this day so as to praise you through lives that witness to your divine goodness and mercy.

## Our Prayers

# Freely and Forever Loved by God

**Freely and forever** loved by God in Jesus Christ, despite our faithful and faithless works—how can this be? How dare this be? Everything we have been taught tells us otherwise. We get what we deserve. There is, after all, no such thing as a free lunch. Value is determined by achievement. Acquire! Achieve! Actualize! In the judgment of the world, justification is both too good to be true (Whoever heard of unconditional love?) and offensive (How dare God love my “never-go-to-church neighbor” as much as me with all my “good Christian deeds”?). Unmerited, lasting love is simply not how things are done in the world.

## Who Says So?

The fundamental question is “Who says so?” Who has the authority to assert that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). Is there any objective basis for this? None other than “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

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*Paul said to the Corinthians, “I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”*

(1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

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God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:1, 14).

As Christians, we are not those who cross our fingers and wish it so, but those who look to the cross of Jesus and know it to be true. Jesus is God's Word, a promise that God gives our lives meaning and purpose, future and fulfillment. Not some other power, not some achievement, not luck or fate. Jesus Christ is our only hope. This we know because we've been told so. There is no clearer or more profound truth than the words of the hymn, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Who says we are justified by grace through faith? The Bible, which tells us of Jesus' love for us, says so.

Justification is not an idea or doctrine invented by the church. It is the event that happens as God's people are encountered by the gospel of Christ. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (LBW p. 57) announces the grace of the God who unconditionally loves us. The only proper response is to sing, pray, give thanks, greet each other in the Lord's name, and know the truth: God's love and life are given for sinners, for us.

### **To Know Jesus Is to Know God**

To talk of God is to talk of a babe born in a manger on a Bethlehem night; of a Jew dying on a Roman cross; of discarded burial cloths and an empty tomb. To know God is to know that there is no place so dark or insignificant or smelly that God, born once in a stable, will not be. To know God is to know that there is no power—sin, death, devil, depression, oppression, possession—that was not crucified to death on that Golgotha cross. To know God is to know that there is no problem—fear, failure, shame—that will entomb us, for the truly good news is that the stone has been rolled forever away. Christian talk of God tells the story of Jesus.

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*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.*

(Hebrews 12:28)

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*Apart from Christ you will not find God in heaven, in hell, or in the sea. Even if you were to go to heaven right now, you would nonetheless*

So Luther wrote, "Outside this Man Christ I must not search for God, and I will find no God. If I do find one, it will not be the true and the right God, but a wrathful one" (LW 23:89).

Jesus is not just a pointer to God as if to say God is like Jesus but also something else. To know Jesus is to know God. Lutheranism is committed to boldly assert that there is no God for us beyond the crucified and risen Jesus. In fact, Luther warns us: "To seek God outside Jesus is the devil." (Author's translation of Weimar edition of Luther's works, 40/3:337.11).

### **Article 1: God**

The fundamental point asserted by the Augsburg Confession is that God is revealed to us by what God does. God is the one who loves and cares for us from eternity to eternity.

With the ancient church, the Augsburg Confession affirms the triune God: The Father who gives us all; the Son who gives himself withholding nothing; and the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us through which we receive salvation. Using the words of the Athanasian Creed (LBW pp. 54-55), the Augsburg Confession asserts God's unity (one essence in three persons) and God's Trinity (three persons in one essence). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not just names but reality; they have true, genuine existence. Furthermore, the three persons of the Trinity are not successive and temporary appearances of God in the world, as if God first dressed up as Father, later changed clothes and came as Son, and then still later put on a Holy Spirit outfit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal distinctions in the godhead. Where God is, there is always the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But do we really know the triune God or is that teaching, as many have asserted, just speculation? Again, we know because Scripture tells us the story of Jesus, of the Father to whom Jesus prayed (John 17), and of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus prom-

*not come to God if you had not previously come to the Person of Christ, who is God and man. Now if the Father is in Christ, why search for Him elsewhere? . . . [seek] God nowhere but in the Christ who lies in the manger, or . . . on the cross, in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, or in the ministry of the divine Word, or with my neighbor or brother. That is where I will find Him.*

(LW 23:55-56)

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ised would be sent (John 14:25-26). We know because we have been told by the disciples and the early church of baptism in the triune name. We know because we, too, have been named by that name. You have been called a child of God baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Is this just a name? The Augsburg Confession insists “no.” There is one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the “one beside whom you shall have no other gods.”

Countless attempts have been made to explain the Trinity by using various objects. Some images may be helpful—the Trinity is like three branches of one tree. Others, despite repeated use, will always be wrong—the Trinity is not like water that can appear in the form of steam, liquid, or solid. This is the heresy known as modalism. Often we take the wrong approach, trying to explain the Trinity by the world when, in fact, it is the Trinity that explains the world.

Article 1 concludes with a “Who’s Who List of Heretics,” those who teach other than orthodox (correct) Christian faith. Condemned are those who assert the existence of a good god and an evil god who fight it out on the world’s stage (the dualists). Also deemed contrary to Scripture is the denial of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. The Son is not just a human, not even an exceptionally holy man. The Son is God who became a human being. So too, the Spirit is not the spirit of this world, or the spirit of the church, or my spirit, but God’s Holy Spirit. The Augsburg Confession pulls no punches. Those who deny the one triune God are outside the Christian church. The reason for such insistence is that the very gospel was perceived to be at stake: to deny the God of the Bible is to side with hopelessness and death; to confess God revealed in Christ is hope and life. Christianity is bound by and defined by the Scriptures, and it bears witness to and worships God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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*That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those which have actually happened [Romans 1:20]. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.*

(LW 31:40)

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**Modalism:** *The false belief that God existed in different “modes” but only in one mode at any one time. It taught that the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different and successive roles that God assumed.*

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### **Article 3: Jesus Christ**

“True God and true man”—this Jesus Christ was “truly born, suffered, crucified, and died. . . This same Christ also descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven. . . This same Lord Christ will return.” The emphasis upon “this same Christ” is important. It assures that this one on whom we Christians stake our lives can be found and identified. After all, we even know his mother’s name! We can rest assured—trust—that Jesus is real and pin our hopes and hearts on this one; Jesus is the source of lasting and true life for us.

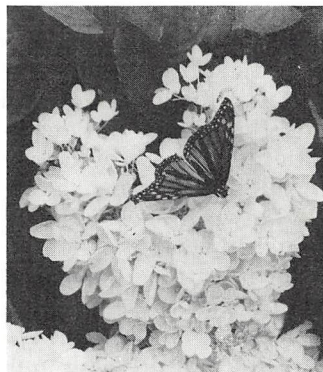
Our salvation depends upon the fact that this Jesus Christ is not only true man but is at the same time true God.

We are to seek no deeper or truer knowledge of God than Jesus. There is none, at least that we can know of. To see Jesus is to see God; to hear Jesus is to hear God; to know Jesus is to know God; and to receive the forgiveness of sins, freedom to live, hope for tomorrow, and eternal love from Jesus is to receive what only God can give.

Again, the Augsburg Confession refuses to play the speculation game of “what ifs” and “hows.” How are there two natures in one person? What if Jesus was not Jewish or not male? The Confession doesn’t even bother with such questions, and neither should we. That Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord is not a metaphysical problem to be solved (how could that be?) but a life giving reality to be celebrated (thank God it is so!). The Crucified lives for us—and therefore, and only therefore—do we have mercy, peace, and a hopeful future.

### **Article 17: The Return of Christ to Judgment**

This article affirms that “this same Christ” who lives and reigns forever will return and preside over a final judgment. Christ *will* have the last word. In accord



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*“I will remain with the divine Word and with this Person, the Lord Christ, and not with my own theories.”*

(LW 23:56)

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with Holy Scripture (Matthew 16:27; 25:31-32; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12), the Augsburg Confession speaks of a separation of believers (or godly) to eternal life and the ungodly to eternal condemnation; a judgment made by Christ. Note that the distinction is between “godly” and the “ungodly,” between those who live in trusting relationship with Christ and those who seek to live without God. What we must avoid is the temptation to be like God and begin to speculate, “Well, what about Joe? Do you think Josephine will make it? What about me?”

It is an unfounded fear of an unknown future that sparks such questions, for it is “the same Christ” born of Mary, who suffered, died, was buried and rose again, who lives and reigns eternally, who is in control. The future is entirely in God’s hands. What a word of comfort! We know those nail-pierced hands, the hands of love suffering for us. Do you fear a final judgment? There is nothing uncertain about it, for we will be seen as sinless, as godly, thanks to Christ’s redeeming work. Perhaps your fear is itself God’s grace at work calling you to listen and heed God’s Word, which even now calls the ungodly and makes them God’s own.

The Augsburg Confession rejects those who assert an earthly reign of the “godly” as a blasphemous attempt to play God. Reincarnation (implied in the rejection of apocatastasis, found in some texts) is also deemed heretical. These “notions” are rejected.

The story of Jesus tells us of one who sought and continues to seek us that we “may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity” (BC 345.4; See also The Small Catechism, Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed).

What a glorious vision! It is no wonder

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*Very truly, I tell you,  
anyone who hears my  
word and believes him  
who sent me has eternal  
life, and does not come  
under judgment, but has  
passed from death to life.*  
(John 5:24)

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that Christians have cried out “Maranatha!” (Revelation 22:20), that is, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Yes, come quickly!

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1. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Listen anew to these words from the beginning of our liturgy (LBW p. 57). They declare that the presence of the triune God is with you. What do the characteristics and work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit mean for you? How do you experience God’s triune presence in your life?

2. Some people find the names *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* too masculine and suggest alternatives like *Creator*, *Redeemer*, and *Sanctifier*; or *Parent*, *Jesus*, and *Spirit*. Are we free to change the names of the Trinity? What do you think the writers of the Augsburg Confession would say?

3. What are your hopes and fears about the last judgment?

4. So, what kind of God do you have?

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### **Trinity Sunday**

Almighty and ever-living God, you have given us grace, by the confession of the true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and, in the power of your divine majesty, to worship the unity. Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your eternal glory, one God, now and forever. Amen (LBW p. 24).

## **For Reflection**

## **Our Prayers**



# In Bondage to Sin

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (*LBW* p. 56; see also 1 John 1:8).

**Familiar words?** Comfortable words? Can we still hear these words convicting us or have they become like the whine of the over-worked air conditioner that used to keep us awake at night but which now puts us to sleep? If anything these words should shake us up, for they wrestle us to the ground and demand nothing less than absolute honesty. Be honest about your life, for “we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves” (*LBW* p. 56).

Accusing words! Uncomfortable words! You are a sinner, a lost and condemned creature! The blunt harshness would be all too horrible to bear were it not for the saving word of the Gospel. Only the Easter discovery—the stone has been rolled away—allows us to look, but not linger, in the tomb of death, despair, and the devil, *and* to know the ultimate defeat of those powers by Jesus Christ who forgives sinners and loves the ungodly. To be told the story of Jesus is the very empowerment to confess our ungodliness and sinfulness. “But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*LBW* p. 56; also 1 John 1:9).

“

*Be honest about your life, for ‘we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.’*

”

## Whatever Became of Sin?

Some years ago Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Bantam, 1988). The question is still timely. Why is it that sin is so infrequently mentioned in many of our congregations? As today's headlines make clear, sin has not been abolished. So where is it lurking, hiding, or loitering these days?

One place is in the open doorway of relativism, that is, where what was once a sin is now considered acceptable behavior. For example, few Christians bat an eye at the fact that nearly half of marriages today end in divorce. Of course the church should not start condemning and banning divorced people, but we should be honest. The Bible is not in favor of divorce (Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18), of relationships tragically shattered, of solemn promises irreparably broken. The Bible is also, it must be said, opposed to spouse-beating and abuse, adultery, lying, cheating, and similar violations of relationships. When these sins are committed, divorce may be the most loving and Christian response. But rationalizations—"if it's good for me," "if the world says it's OK"—do not provide an acceptable guide for Christian behavior. Our guide is the One who is good and who calls us to follow him.

We are called to be personally accountable for our behavior. In the story of Adam and Eve, their response to being caught was to blame someone else (Adam said "Eve told me to do it," while Eve said "Well, the serpent made me do it"). Today terrible, outrageous sins are excused by blaming it on society, parents, the system, or eating too much junk food. Society, TV, and the "experts" all tempt us to excuse sin or look the other way. The fact that this ax murderer ate too many cream-filled cupcakes doesn't excuse the sin. The church's mission is not to write excuses for sinners, but to offer them forgiveness in Jesus' name.

Another place where sin goes into hiding

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*"The chief evidence that we are indeed 'miserable offenders' is that we miserably fail to recognize or admit that we are miserable offenders! The people who party and make merry on the top floor of a skyscraper, while an undiscovered fire makes its way up the floors from the basement, do not know that they have a problem. They may feel, in their merriment, that they have no problems. Yet, in fact, they have a very pressing problem. They are more miserable than they know and that is their chief misery."*

(William H. Willimon, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life*, p. 54. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980)

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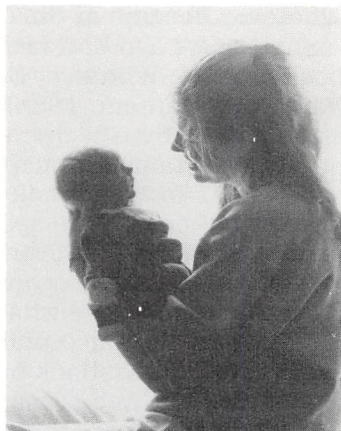
is in a moralism that defines sin as personal morality, usually codified in a list of don'ts. Don't drink, smoke, engage in premarital sex, play cards, dance, or waste time in frivolous pursuits. In saying so much, too little is actually said. For one thing, the corporate dimension of sin is often ignored. "No one is surprised . . . when abortion, lesbianism, or adultery are described as sinful. But how many of our fellow citizens would think of connecting sin with the arms race, or the greed of the First World, or ecological disasters created by high technology?" (From *God and Human Suffering* by Douglas John Hall, © 1986 Augsburg Publishing House).

Moralism tends to regard sins as faults that can be corrected through personal reform. The truth, though, is that sin is a terminal condition and requires a more radical cure. Sin is a most tenacious power that buries us in tombs of death and despair and bolts the door shut. There is no way out for us! We are lost and condemned creatures, in bondage to sin. And there we would remain were it not for the One who rolls stones away from tombs—the very power and presence of God in Jesus Christ whose will it is to forgive sinners, justify the ungodly, love the unlovable.

## **Article 2: Original Sin**

In witnessing to God's justification of sinners, the Augsburg Confession acknowledges our total dependence upon God to free us from sin's deadly hold on us.

In Article 2, original sin is defined as our innate inability to "have true fear of God" and "true faith in God." The Latin text of the Confession adds concupiscence to the list, which can be defined as falsely motivated and directed love, often with connotations of sensuality. St. Augustine described original sin as "curving in on ourselves"; a curve that invariably ends in despair or pride. On the one hand, the despairing soul



is convinced that God won't help, that family and friends don't care, and that strangers are indifferent. "I am alone." "There is no one." All hope is abandoned.

On the other hand, the prideful soul deludes itself in its own self-sufficiency. "I can do it alone." "I don't need anyone." The Augsburg Confession condemns Pelagianism because, if we can be righteous by our own powers, then Christ is not necessary.

Despair and pride are lonely places where God and others are tragically shut out of life. Eventually the soul simply curls up and dies.

All in all, original sin is our inclination (intensified by our socialization and encouraged by the world) to break the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God; you shall not have any other gods before me." Remember the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The bait dangled before them was the temptation, "Do you want to be like God?" (Genesis 3:5). They bit and were hooked, as we all are. We want to be God. We think we should be in ultimate control. We think it is our inalienable right to have it our way.

This is idolatry and it is at the root of all sins. We are inclined not only to break the First Commandment, but all the commandments. This sin is original (the root sin) and organic (it sprouts other sins). As Luther explained in the Smalcald Articles: "The fruits of (original) sin are all the subsequent evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false belief, idolatry, being without the fear of God, presumption, despair, blindness—in short, ignorance or disregard of God—and then also lying, swearing by God's name, failure to pray and call upon God, neglect of God's Word, disobedience to parents, murder, unchastity, theft, deceit, etc." (*BC* 302.2).

For Luther and the confessors, original sin is not an abstract theory but the way things are—the experienced reality of life that cannot be denied. To deny it is simply



to prove its pervasiveness and power. Do you doubt it? Look around! Look in the mirror! As the following illustration, related by William H. Willimon in *Sighing for Eden* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), makes clear, original sin is *not* just the story of Adam and Eve “once upon a time.”

Someone once asked Carlyle Marney, “Where is the Garden of Eden?” Marney replied, “Two-fifteen Elm Street, Knoxville, Tennessee.”

“You’re lying,” the person said. “It’s supposed to be someplace in Asia.”

“Well, you couldn’t prove it by me,” Marney said. “For there, on Elm Street, when I was but a boy, I stole a quarter out of my Mama’s purse and went down to the store and bought me some candy and I ate it and then I was so ashamed that I came back and hid in the closet. It was there that she found me and asked, “Where are you? Why are you hiding? What have you done?” Each of us can probably remember our own garden of Eden.

The punishment for our sinful condition is condemnation, eternal separation from God. But the gift of God, bestowed upon us in baptism, is salvation, eternal life with God. Arising out of those baptismal waters, we are justified sinners, sealed by the Holy Spirit, citizens of God’s kingdom. We are both sinners and righteous (*simul justus et peccator*). Although original sin and its fruits still remain with us in this world, they no longer reign in our lives. Jesus reigns!

### **Article 18: Free Will**

This is another verse of the Augsburg Confession’s unending hymn—that we are justified by grace through faith alone. Apart from Christ, we cannot attain God nor encourage God to forgive and be reconciled with us. Because we are in bondage to sin, our salvation is totally dependent on God’s will to bring us back into communion.

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*“Blessings abound  
where’er he reigns:  
The pris’ners leap to lose  
their chains,  
The weary find eternal  
rest,  
And all who suffer want  
are blest.”*

(LBW 530)

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*I do not understand my  
own actions. For I do not  
do what I want, but I do  
the very thing I hate. Now  
if I do what I do not want,  
I agree that the law is  
good. But in fact it is no  
longer I that do it, but sin  
that dwells within me. For  
I know that nothing good*

It is self-evident that we do possess a certain freedom of the will in regard to worldly matters, "civil righteousness." I freely choose to wear this green skirt, to eat this flavor of ice cream, and even choose to obey most of our government's laws. Of course, if I opt to be disobedient, I must accept the consequences. But I am free to choose. Measured by the world's standards, I can live a decent, honorable life without any help from God. As Luther reminded some "misbehaving Christians," even the "heathen" can be good citizens of this world.

With "spiritual righteousness," it is another story. I cannot choose righteousness or attain a state of being righteous before God. Apart from God's grace, we are not capable of "making ourselves acceptable to God, of fearing and believing in God; with our whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from our hearts." To assert, with article 18, that our will is in bondage is to say simply and clearly that God alone can extricate us from the shackles of sin. It is not to degrade humanity, but to acknowledge the infinitely great and marvelous grace of God.

### **Article 19: The Cause of Sin**

One question lingers: If we are in bondage to sin, totally dependent upon God's grace to release us, *who caused all this?* Article 19 answers: *Not God!* God is *not* the cause of sin. The fault lies with the wills of the devil and the ungodly. No explanation is really given for the ultimate origin of evil. "Who created or allowed these wills to become wicked?" This question does not get to the real issue here. In any case, there are at best only pseudo-answers to be given. For we have no logical, reasonable explanation for the illogical, unreasonable, inexplicable, and utterly tragic nature of evil and suffering. The concern of this article is to enlist Christians to battle. We can't coast or idle in neutral on this. The devil is stalking about in this world, looking for victory.

Luther was convinced of the reality of a

*dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

(Romans 7:15-20)

*"When Christians are not doing battle with the devil, or him who bites the heel, that is not a good sign, for it means that he who bites the heel is at peace and has his own way. But when he who bites the heel rages and has no peace, it is a sign that he, being under attack, shall be conquered, for it is Christ who is attacking his house. Therefore whoever desires to see the Christian Church existing in quiet peace, entirely without crosses, without heresy, and without factions, will never see it thus, or else he must view the false church of the devil as the real church."*

(LW 34:215)

personal devil who ruled this world (John 12:31, 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4), who has established his kingdom of sin and disobedience. As the devil misled Adam and Eve into sin, the devil still misleads us. The reality and testing of the devil is, for Luther, actually a backhanded confirmation of faith.

“When the devil comes and says, ‘You have sinned, hence you are mine,’ then . . . remember . . . the very reason he comes is that he smells in you something of faith and Jesus Christ. He does not go to sinners; he is not interested in them. In his very appearance he brings you the Gospel: you are of Christ.” (From *Encounters with Luther*, Vol. 4, ed. by Eric W. Gritsch, Martin Luther Colloquia 1985–1989, Institute for Luther Studies, Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary, 1990).

One notion that is implicitly rejected by Article 19 is that God punishes us for sin(s) by inflicting tragedy, illness, and crises, or that God sends such affliction to test or strengthen us. Such “theological abuse” can masquerade as “strong Christian faith” in our church and piety today. For example, one hears (speaks) statements like these: “God sent this illness to test you.” “The death of your child is God’s way of strengthening your faith.” “AIDS is God’s punishment on homosexuals.” Who would want such a God? This is *not* the God of Scriptures—the Father who weeps over the death of a sparrow; the God who refused to let suffering claim the future; the God who defeated death.

God does not cause evil but is the victor over it. Christ not only bore suffering on that cross, Christ triumphed over it; the one who descended into hell ascends to heaven. Yes, sin, evil, and suffering exist powerfully and persistently in this world, but they are not the last word. Jesus Christ, who is the promise of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, has the last word.

This truth enables us to be honest (we

have sinned) and hopeful (in Christ we are forgiven). It empowers us to live as Easter people who know that in Jesus Christ “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

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**1.** How would you define sin? What makes an action or thought sinful?

**2.** Who or what are the idols in your life? Who or what determines how you live today and what you hope for tomorrow?

**3.** Read the “Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness” (*LBW* p. 56). What does this confession say to you? What does it mean that we all say it together in church?

**4.** “This hurricane (illness, tragedy) is God’s means of testing you.” Why is this not a Christian response to evil and suffering? What is a Christian response to hurricanes, illness, tragedy?

**5.** How much are we able to do by our own powers, by our own free will, and where are the limits of our free will?

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## For Reflection

Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen (*LBW* p. 56).

## Our Prayers



# Gifts from a Gracious God

***We are a people*** who have something to say, sing, shout, live for, and celebrate. We are loved through eternity by God in Jesus Christ, who encounters us in our lostness with the cheering words “I am the way!” This is a graceful message of freedom and future, of love and life.

But how is it true for me? What difference does it make for me, for you? Living in a world that is moving too fast and filled with too much pain, we do not have the luxury of time or energy to spend with empty promises. It was no different for the confessors at Augsburg who risked their lives to confess that Christian hope is not a pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by kind of dream, but reality now for you and for me.

The this-worldly emphasis of the Augsburg Confession is most clearly evident in the description of the church. The church is where God imparts God’s saving love to us through concrete means. In many ways the church is like the Bethlehem stable; through both God comes to dwell in the midst of God’s people. Like that stable, the church shelters animals of all sorts, scared and sacred onlookers, Marys who bear the Christ, and mangers that hold him. Yes, like the Bethlehem stable, the church is so very ordinary and so very blessed.

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*We are loved through eternity by God in Jesus Christ, who encounters us in our lostness with the cheering words ‘I am the way!’*

”

## **Articles 5 and 14:**

### **On the Ministry and the Means of Grace**

How am I justified? Where does all this talk about God's unconditional love for sinners become the truth of God's unconditional love for me? Article 5 answers loud and clear: In order that we may obtain justifying faith God instituted the office of ministry. Why? To insure that the gospel is proclaimed through Word and sacraments. Accordingly, Luther called the church a "mouth house," existing only to speak the truth that we are God's justified children.

The doctrine of justification necessitates the public office of ministry. Since I receive the faith that justifies by hearing God's Word, someone must be speaking it. Accordingly, the church calls men and women to tend to the gospel and to see that it is truthfully, clearly, and publicly spoken within a specific congregation.

Ordained ministers do not produce or give faith. I do not run to a minister to obtain faith, but to hear and receive, in Word and Sacrament, God's declaration of everlasting love in Jesus Christ for me, for all. To hear in Word and Sacrament that God has called and claimed me is to be encountered by the living Christ, the Son of God, who knocks and says: "I am with you. I love and forgive you."

The Spirit of God who gives faith empowers our response. In the memorable words of Luther's Small Catechism (Third Article of the Apostles' Creed), "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith." Proclaimed in words, water, bread, and wine, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a living mighty Word through which the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of faith. The Holy Spirit opens our ears, eyes, hearts, and lives to God's presence, power, and purpose for our lives.

That the Holy Spirit works “when and where he pleases” emphasizes the free, unconditional gift of faith. God acts on our behalf, not because of our works or will, but as God chooses and wills. Accordingly, those who insist that one must prepare for the Spirit by doing certain activities or feeling prescribed emotions are condemned. It is not what we do or might do or even intend to do, but what God has done and is doing in our midst. So Luther adamantly insisted: “We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through God’s external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil” (BC 313.9-10). The claim of the Augsburg Confession is that God has ordained these concrete means—Word and Sacrament—through which the Holy Spirit breaks into our lives and history with his life and his story—that is, with the gift of life and future in Jesus Christ.

### **Articles 7, 8, 15: On the Church**

There are no “Lone Ranger” Christians. To be a Christian is to be part of that strange and strong community called the church. The Augsburg Confession defines the church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.” The church is not identified by legal constitutions, stained glass, membership, or pastor. The church is God’s people gathered by, and gathered around, the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, through which the Holy Spirit creates justifying faith. The church is God’s people gathered to celebrate the event of Jesus’ love.

But not all who gather around Word and Sacrament will necessarily be members of the church, will they? Article 8 is blatantly honest: “False Christians, hypocrites, and open sinners” eat at the Lord’s table and

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*“Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”*  
(BC 315.2)

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*“Not Rome or this or that place, but baptism, the sacrament, and the gospel are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally. Wherever there is baptism and the gospel no one should doubt the presence of the saints—even if they were only children in the cradle.”*  
(LW 39:75)

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even distribute his body and blood. There are tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30); good and bad fish in the net (Matthew 13:47-48). On earth the church is a mixed body.

The Donatists, who are condemned by the Augsburg Confession, insisted that the value of the sacrament depends upon the moral stature of the minister; in the hands of an immoral minister, the Lord's Supper is not a sacrament but only a snack of bread and wine. The Augsburg Confession, on the other hand, maintains that the efficacy depends only upon God's Word. Regardless of the personal qualifications (or disqualifications) of the minister or the communicant, Baptism is nonetheless effective and the Eucharistic bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

If not by the purity of its members, what identifies the Christian church? The marks of the church are the "purely preached Gospel" and the "rightly administered sacraments." The qualifications "pure" and "right" are not necessary except for emphasis. The Gospel is not quantifiable—"we heard a 75% Gospel today." Where it is preached, the Gospel clearly focuses on Jesus Christ as God's act of reconciliation. When that is not in the picture or is out of focus, then something other than the Gospel is proclaimed and those gathered to hear it are not the church. Similarly, the sacraments are rightly administered as Jesus instituted and commanded them. So although we may prefer pastries and coffee, we must obey Jesus' command, "Do this . . . eat this bread . . . drink the cup (fruit of the vine) . . . in remembrance of me . . . for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

This "one holy Christian church will be and remain forever." The church exists because it is God's, independent of all human success and failure. But how, in a world overpopulated with denominations, is the holy Christian church one? Because there

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*Donatus was a fourth-century bishop of Casae Nigrae in southern Numidia. He became the leader of a protest movement insisting upon the purity of the church. The church is a body "without spot or wrinkle." The members of the church should be pure and blameless. Those who professed to be Christians but whose lives did not manifest purity were nothing but hypocrites and false Christians. Holding this view, Donatus and his followers insisted that the sacrament was rendered invalid if administered by an unworthy minister. In other words, the power and effect of the sacrament depended upon the moral life of the minister.*

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is only one thing needful for the church's life: the audibly (sermon) and visibly (sacrament) proclaimed gospel. What unites the church is not doctrine or theology, but the gospel communicated in Word and Sacrament. The crucial question is not what we or "they" believe about the gospel, but what gathers us together. What is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament in this congregation? Where it is the truth of the crucified and risen Lord, there is the one holy Christian church.

But in this congregation the pastor wears a chasuble, in that one an alb, and in that one a suit. Are they all the one church? Yes, if the message proclaimed is of God's free love for sinners in Jesus Christ. In the matter of rites, rituals, vestments, committees, and furnishings, there is freedom as long as such traditions: 1) are not in conflict with the gospel or 2) contribute to peace and good order. We should always ask of our traditions, "Does this help the gospel to live among us or does it get in the way?"

### **Articles 9-13:**

#### **On the Word Experienced by the Senses *Baptism: Welcome!***

The risen Christ commands the church to call, claim, bless, and seal individuals in God's eternal grace through baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). In baptism God's "yes" to the individual is made visible and public: *Yes, you are my beloved child forever.* We are adopted by God and given name and identity, home and future. Baptism is the wet version of justification.

Baptism is freedom! We are released from the chains of sin, death, and the devil. No longer will this unholy trinity claim our lives. They may tempt and taunt us throughout our lives but they will not have the last word. For in baptism we are claimed by the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who claims us, ever and always! This means: "To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose

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*"The Holy Spirit has called me . . . in the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."* (The Small Catechism, Third Article of the Apostles' Creed).

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*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.*  
(Ephesians 2:19)

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of Baptism is to save. No one is baptized in order to become a prince, but . . . to 'be saved.' To be saved . . . is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever" (BC 439.24-25). At the font, God literally immerses us into God's story, which is the event of God's redemptive, restoring, recreative love.

Baptism is vocation. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The statement is both an indicative—"You are light!"—and an imperative—"Let your light shine!" (Matthew 5:14, 16). Baptism is our ordination to ministry in the world. We are sent to tell the story of God's lavish love which embraces us and which God extends to all (1 Peter 2:9).

Baptism is initiation! It is entrance upon a way of life in the community of faith. One of God's gifts to us is that of our brothers and sisters in the faith. As we face life's trials and temptations, we are never alone. God's family is always there. Just so, baptisms should not occur separate from the communal worship if humanly possible. The church's presence is part of baptism.

As the sacrament in which God embraces us with his justifying love, baptism is necessary for salvation because it is God's work, God's will, his Word. "For it is not man's baptism, but Christ's and God's baptism, which we receive by the hand of a man, just as everything else that we have through the hand of somebody else is God's alone . . . look upon the person administering it as simply the vicarious instrument of God, by which the Lord sitting in heaven thrusts you under water with his own hands, and promises you forgiveness of your sins, speaking to you upon earth with a human voice by the mouth of his minister." (LW 36:62-63).

So how do I know that I am justified? I am baptized! In moments of doubt and de-

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### **Holy Baptism**

*"We welcome you into the Lord's family. We receive you as fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the same heavenly Father, and workers with us in the kingdom of God."*

(LBW p. 125).

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spair, when life was too much or too little, Luther engaged in a little reality check: "I am baptized . . . I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body" (BC 442.44). The promise and the reality are yours too!

### **Eucharist: Come and Eat!**

Adopted into God's family, Christians are sustained and nourished by the meal Christ instituted (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). In this meal Christ is truly present in order to strengthen and reassure us of Christ's grace, forgiveness, and life for us. The Augsburg Confession allows for no other interpretation than the real bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We gather at the table not just to remember Christ, nor to sense Christ's spiritual presence. As we obey the command ("Take, eat"; "drink,") and hear the promise ("This is my body," "my blood"), Christ is really present ("for the forgiveness of sins").

In the Eucharist the family gathered at the table proclaims and experiences:

"Christ has come." The event of our salvation is the Lord's death, the broken body and blood poured out for us.

"Christ is risen." The living Lord is present with us as the host of the meal, feeding and giving us life.

"Christ will come again." This is the foretaste of the feast in the coming kingdom of God that we will celebrate with all God's people of all times and places.

In the Lord's Supper we are nourished by the very presence and power of God. It is our life-giving sustenance, our daily food for the journey, "So that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger" (BC 449.24).

### **Articles 11, 12:**

#### **On Remembering Whose We Are**

Our identity is established in baptism. We are God's children, blessed with God's



name, clothed in God's righteousness, fed at God's table, supported by God's family, destined for God's eternal kingdom. This is a fact beyond doubt or despair. Yet we don't always live as God's cherished children. We get off track, run the other way, hide in ditches. As Paul so honestly lamented: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19). Nevertheless, baptism is forever. God's call and claim remains constant: *You are mine*. To repent is to return to our baptism where once and always our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

Article 11 recommends the use of private confession as comfort for troubled consciences, although no one should be forced to enumerate all trespasses and sins. What is central is the words of absolution: "I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins." The fact beyond all doubt, despair, or dispute is that this is God's Word to us. Whether it is spoken through the voice of the neighbor, the pastor, the words of Scripture, the bread and wine of Communion, it is God's Word "for you." "Your sins are forgiven." We are free to start anew; hearing and following the risen Lord, "delighting in his will and walking in his ways" (*LBW* p. 56).

Article 12 says repentance consists of contrition and faith. In contrition, we accept God's judgment upon sin, but in faith we eagerly hear and receive the proclamation that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

Indeed there is something to say, shout, sing, live for, and celebrate. The forgiving, merciful God loves us eternally. Celebrate!

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1. Why do we have a pastor in this congregation? Who is a pastor? What makes a person a pastor? What does a pastor do? What should a pastor do?

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## For Reflection



**2.** No doubt we find the words of Article 8 reassuring in the face of clergy misconduct today. What might have been some of the concerns related to clergy abuse in Luther's day? What are they in our day?

**3.** Who is "worthy" to receive communion? Do you ever not attend communion because you feel that you are "unworthy" or not good enough? What is the proper state for receiving the body and blood of our Lord?

**4.** Why do we baptize infants? Should we have baptisms in the worship service or should they take place at another time? Should we celebrate our baptisms, even though they may have occurred many years ago and we cannot remember them?

**5.** What are some of the advantages of private confession? Scan the Order for Individual Confession and Forgiveness (*LBW* pp. 196-197). Would you consider using it or recommending it to someone?

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God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you sent upon the disciples the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, look upon your Church and open our hearts to the power of the Spirit. Kindle in us the fire of your love, and strengthen our lives for service in your kingdom; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever (*LBW* p. 23).

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## Our Prayers

# A Living, Busy, Active Faith

“I *kill* you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and I *make you born* into the Kingdom of God to serve him and to please him.” William H. Willimon, in his book *Remember Who You Are* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980), notes that quite frequently the Argentinian preacher Juan Carlos Ortiz uses this formula when he celebrates baptisms.

***I kill you!*** What a welcome into God’s family—you will die here! Rather shocking words, to say the least, but baptism is shocking. It is the death (drowning) of the old Adam and Eve and their idolatrous desires to be God, in ultimate control of everything and everybody. Just as shocking are the words that follow—I make you born into the kingdom of God. There is life after death! The living God gives birth to sons and daughters out of those graceful waters. Life for them (us) will never be the same again. It can’t be, because we have died and are raised to begin eternal life here and now.

## **Born Anew**

In baptism we are freely clothed in Christ’s righteousness, which is how Luther

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*The living God gives birth to sons and daughters out of those graceful waters.*

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describes justification. Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are free from anxious worry about our salvation, and so free to act in the world and in the life of the neighbor more bravely and with more kindness, persistence, and wisdom than we ever thought possible.

Faith in Jesus Christ, that gift the Holy Spirit gives through Word and Sacrament, is new life. Now we live with new vision and ventures, new possibilities and power. It is that life Paul celebrates in Galatians 2:19-20 or, in Luther's words:

"Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God . . . O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. . . . Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith" (LW 35:370-371).

Christian life witnesses to the transforming power of God in Jesus Christ who creates life out of death, power out of weakness, light out of darkness; who finds his family among the lost and alone.

### **Articles 6 and 20: On Living Faith**

Lutherans have long been accused of being "soft on sanctification," that is, not teaching about the Christian life with any intention or seriousness. This is illustrated by the often-told story of the Lutheran pastor who on his deathbed announced with certainty that he was "going to heaven because he had never done a good work in his life."

Lutherans have historically been oversensitive to works-righteousness, the notion that through our own achievements we can merit God's grace and mercy. Of course we

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*"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."*

(LW 31:344)

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*It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

(Galatians 2:20)

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can do no such thing, and we need to react with a loud and strong “no” to all claims that we can. Yet to go to the other extreme and become a slothful “pew potato” Christian is just as wrong. The Augsburg Confession states very clearly: “Faith should produce good fruits and good works” (Article 6, BC 31.1, German text).

“Faith is bound to bring forth good fruits and . . . it is necessary to do the good works commanded by God” (Article 6, BC 31.1, Latin text).

“Good works should and must be done” (Article 20, BC 45.27, German text).

Or as explained in the Formula of Concord, “Faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active. Whoever does not perform such good works is a faithless man, blindly tapping around in search of faith and good works without knowing what either faith or good works are, and in the meantime he chatters and jabbars a great deal about faith and good works. Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God’s grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures. This the Holy Spirit works by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to his glory, who has been so gracious to him. It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire” (BC 553.11-12).

The Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of life” who brings us forth from the waters of baptism to new life, nourishes that life at the Lord’s table, and daily calls us to venture into the abundance of that life in Jesus Christ.

By its very nature, faith in the risen, alive Jesus must be as alive and active. It is impossible for faith to be inactive, to not bear

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*“We are all equal, and we are all nothing. . . . If there is anything in us, it is not our own; it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift of God, then it is entirely a debt one owes to love. . . . And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself. . . . Thus my wisdom belongs to the foolish, my power to the oppressed. Thus my wealth belongs to the poor, my righteousness to the sinners. For these are the forms of God of which we must empty ourselves, in order that forms of a servant may be in us.”*

(LW 27:393)

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fruit, to remain in the tomb. The Augsburg Confession, however, puts works in their rightful place. Works are not rungs of a ladder into heaven, but doxology, a hymn of praise to God. Works are not the cause or condition for forgiveness, but they are the consequence of God's forgiving love. Good works are not necessary for justification but they are natural in the life of the justified Christian.

In Jesus Christ we are free from all concern about the future and so free to live now as a witness to that future; to live and to participate in God's freedom to love.

"[One] ought to think: 'Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ'" (LW 31:367).

### **Faith Alive in Love and Justice**

Faith expresses itself in works of love toward the neighbor and in acts of justice in the world. The good works that we are called to do are not self-devised or invented works but those that God commands. God does not call us to go on a pilgrimage to Wittenberg or Jerusalem, but God does call us to foster the life of our neighbor (Eighth Commandment). Article 20 lists these as God-pleasing works: to "call upon God, have patience in suffering, love one's neighbor, diligently engage in callings which are com-

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### **The Ten Commandments**

1. *I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods.*
  2. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*
  3. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*
  4. *Honor your father and your mother.*
  5. *You shall not kill.*
  6. *You shall not commit adultery.*
  7. *You shall not steal.*
  8. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
  9. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house.*
  10. *You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor's.*
- (The Small Catechism; Exodus 20:1-17)
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manded, render obedience, avoid evil lusts” (BC 46.37). We are to do these good works because: 1) God wills them; 2) through them we praise God, and; 3) the neighbor needs them!

Faith is not merely a private matter about my inner life or afterlife. On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus prayed, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. . . . As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15, 18). The gospel is that God did not abandon the world, but comes to us in our world, in our daily life. So faith sends us to this world which God so loved (John 3:16). We are sent—to the marketplace, political forum, emergency room, chancel, bus station, college campus, living room—to live the truth that Jesus is alive and so there is hope and meaning and future for us and all of creation.

In this world we are called to various vocations. Some are given the gifts and abilities to be health professionals, teachers, truck drivers, lawyers, salesmen and women, homemakers, or homebuilders. These vocations are the manglers where we are called to bear the Christ to the world, where we are empowered to be the Christ to the neighbor in love and service.

### **Article 16: On Christ and Caesar**

In witness to Scripture, the Augsburg Confession affirms life in this world as the arena where we are called to do good works. Article 16 says that one of those places is civil government. How should we regard government? Can we—should we—participate in government? Can Christians hold political office, pay taxes to support government, serve as soldiers, even wage war on behalf of the nation? Some individuals in the sixteenth century (and today) insisted that Christians must wash their hands completely of any involvement in civil affairs. Consistently they maintained that to

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*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.*

(Romans 13:1)

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be a Christian means to renounce and withdraw from the world.

Article 16 gives a different answer. With Paul (Romans 13), the Augsburg Confession regards government as one of the ways God cares for all people and all of creation. Government is instituted and ordained by God to preserve peace and good order, to strive for justice and protect the well-being of all the citizens. These are good and noble endeavors that Christians should support and defend. In fact, Christians should be visibly and vocally on the front line in the struggle for peace and justice for all. The limits of obedience owed to the government are reached when government demands are counter to God's demands. Then we are to obey God rather than human authority (Acts 5:29). Christians have one Lord and God whom we are to obey, serve, praise, and love with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27). All other authorities are derivative and secondary.

### **Article 21: On the Saints**

Christianity is not a private party. In baptism we are welcomed into God's incredibly vast and diverse family. In that family are the members of our local congregation, of our denomination, and the members of the church throughout the world. Christians can neither serve nor survive in isolation. There is always—thank God!—the brother and sister.

In fact, those who have gone before us are also a significant part of that family. Article 21 talks of the saints, that "great cloud of witnesses" who have preceded us in the faith (Hebrews 12:1), who serve as models for us. Their lives testify to the ways in which they bore Christ in witness and service. As we wrestle with the call to faithfulness—how to be a disciple of Jesus—the lives of the saints offer direction and encouragement. Their stories also serve to proclaim the gospel by witnessing to God's mercy in their lives.

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*For all the saints who  
from their labors rest,  
All who by faith before the  
world confessed,  
Your name, O Jesus, be  
forever blest.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*You were their rock, their  
fortress, and their  
might,  
You, Lord, their captain in  
the well-fought fight;  
You, in the darkness  
drear, their one true  
light.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

(LBW 174)

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For example, as described in *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*, translated and arranged by Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), Luther wrote of Mary: "Among the downtrodden people she was one of the lowliest, not a maid of high station in the capital city, but a daughter of a plain man in a small town. . . . And yet this was the one whom God chose. He might have gone to Jerusalem and picked out Caiaphas' daughter, who was fair, rich, clad in gold-embroidered raiment, and attended by a retinue of maids in waiting. But God preferred a lowly maid from a mean town. . . . 'Dear Mary,' said the angel, 'the Lord is with you.' "

Article 21 is clear—the saints do not intercede on our behalf like brokers striking a deal with God for us. Nor are the saints just the select few who have passed an official test of canonization. The saints of God are those who have passed through the graceful waters of baptism. The saints of God are those baptized children of all times and place who are marked with the cross of Christ forever and sent to bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world. The saints of God are those who go forward with God in obedience and hope—the people of the way whose words and life proclaim "glad tidings of great joy for all people." Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" for all and forever. Come along and follow!



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## For Reflection

1. What are some specific good works that you feel called to do? That is, where do your abilities and interests meet the needs of those around you?



**2.** “I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me” (*LW* 31:367). Reflect upon this statement made by Luther. Ask yourself, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29) and “Who is not my neighbor?”

**3.** Is Christian life joyful? Reflect upon your congregation. If our lives are to be living hymns of praise to God, how does your congregation sing their “life hymns”? Like a dirge, rock music, a march, a dance, a children’s song? In other words, how does your congregation experience the call to Christian life? With joy? With determination? With play? With celebration?

**4.** We are called to be obedient to the governing authorities. Are there times when we would have to disobey the government in order to be obedient to God? Give examples.

**5.** Name a saint (living or dead) who has modeled for you the Christian life. What qualities of that person would you like to emulate in your life?

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Lord God of our salvation, it is your will that all people might come to you through your Son Jesus Christ. Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection. We pray in his name. Amen (*LBW* p. 46).

## Our Prayers

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# The Augsburg Confession

## ARTICLES OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

### I. [God]

We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, one creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible. The word "person" is to be understood as the Fathers employed the term in this connection, not as a part or a property of another but as that which exists of itself.

Therefore all the heresies which are contrary to this article are rejected. Among these are the heresy of the Manichaeans, who assert that there are two gods, one good and one evil; also that of the Val-

entinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and others like them; also that of the Samosatenes, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and sophistically assert that the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are not necessarily distinct persons but that the Word signifies a physical word or voice and that the Holy Spirit is a movement induced in creatures.

### II. [Original Sin]

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and others who deny that original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ.

### III. [The Son of God]

It is also taught among us that God the Son became man, born of the virgin Mary, and that the two natures, divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ, true God and true man, who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried in order to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to propitiate God's wrath. The same Christ also descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, that he may eternally rule and have dominion over all creatures, that through the Holy Spirit he may sanctify, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, that he may bestow on them life and every grace and blessing, and that he may protect and defend them against the devil and against sin. The same Lord Christ will return openly to judge the living and the dead, as stated in the Apostles' Creed.

### IV. [Justification]

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become

righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

### V. [The Office of the Ministry]

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who fear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.

Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.

### VI. [The New Obedience]

It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God's sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants'" (Luke 17:10). The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, "It is ordained of God that whoever



believes in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit."

#### VII. [The Church]

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

#### VIII. [What the Church Is]

Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly, the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men, for as Christ himself indicated, "The Pharisees sit on Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2).

Accordingly the Donatists and all others who hold contrary views are condemned.

#### IX. [Baptism]

It is taught among us that Baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in Baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to him.

On this account the Anabaptists who teach that infant Baptism is not right are rejected.

#### X. [The Holy Supper of Our Lord]

It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected.

#### XI. [Confession]

It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However, in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, for this is impossible. Ps. 19:12, "Who can discern his errors?"

#### XII. [Repentance]

It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance, and absolution should not be denied them by the church. Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life



and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again.

Condemned on the other hand are the Novatians who denied absolution to such as had sinned after Baptism.

Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.

### XIII. [The Use of the Sacraments]

It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith. For this reason they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith.

### XIV. [Order in the Church]

It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.

### XV. [Church Usages]

With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church,

among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation. Moreover it is taught that all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel and the teaching about faith in Christ. Accordingly monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of foods, days, etc., by which it is intended to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.

### XVI. [Civil Government]

It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, take required oaths, possess property, be married, etc.

Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.

Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection requires the forsaking of house and home, wife and child, and the renunciation of such activities as are mentioned above. Actually, true perfection consists alone of

proper fear of God and real faith in God, for the Gospel does not teach an outward and temporal but an inward and eternal mode of existence and righteousness of the heart. The Gospel does not overthrow civil authority, the state, and marriage but requires that all these be kept as true orders of God and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life. Accordingly Christians are obliged to be subject to civil authority and obey its commands and laws in all that can be done without sin. But when commands of the civil authority cannot be obeyed without sin, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

#### XVII. [The Return of Christ to Judgment]

It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day for judgment and will raise up all the dead, to give eternal life and everlasting joy to believers and the elect but to condemn ungodly men and the devil to hell and eternal punishment.

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devil and condemned men will not suffer eternal pain and torment.

Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless.

#### XVIII. [Freedom of the Will]

It is also taught among us that man possesses some measure of

freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his heart. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, "Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God."

In order that it may be evident that this teaching is no novelty, the clear words of Augustine on free will are here quoted from the third book of his *Hypognosticon*: "We concede that all men have a free will, for all have a natural, innate understanding and reason. However, this does not enable them to act in matters pertaining to God (such as loving God with their whole heart or fearing him), for it is only in the outward acts of this life that they have freedom to choose good or evil. By good I mean what they are capable of by nature: whether or not to labor in the fields, whether or not to eat or drink or visit a friend, whether to dress or undress, whether to build a house, take a wife, engage in a trade, or do whatever else may be good and profitable. None of these is or exists without God, but all things are from him and through him. On the other hand, by his own choice man can also undertake evil, as when he wills to kneel before an idol, commit murder, etc."



### XIX. [The Cause of Sin]

It is taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws his support, the will turns away from God to evil. It is as Christ says in John 8:44, "When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature."

### XX. [Faith and Good Works]

Our teachers have been falsely accused of forbidding good works. Their writings on the Ten Commandments, and other writings as well, show that they have given good and profitable accounts and instructions concerning true Christian estates and works. About these little was taught in former times, when for the most part sermons were concerned with childish and useless works like rosaries, the cult of saints, monasticism, pilgrimages, appointed fasts, holy days, brotherhoods, etc. Our opponents no longer praise these useless works so highly as they once did, and they have also learned to speak now of faith, about which they did not preach at all in former times. They do not teach now that we become righteous before God by our works alone, but they add faith in Christ and say that faith and works make us righteous before God. This teaching may offer a little more comfort than the teaching that we are to rely solely on our works.

Since the teaching about faith, which is the chief article in the

Christian life, has been neglected so long (as all must admit) while nothing but works was preached everywhere, our people have been instructed as follows:

We begin by teaching that our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for us, for this happens only through faith, that is, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator who reconciles the Father. Whoever imagines that he can accomplish this by works, or that he can merit grace, despises Christ and seeks his own way to God, contrary to the Gospel.

This teaching about faith is plainly and clearly treated by Paul in many passages, especially in Eph. 2:8, 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast," etc.

That no new interpretation is here introduced can be demonstrated from Augustine, who discusses this question thoroughly and teaches the same things, namely, that we obtain grace and are justified before God through faith in Christ and not through works. His whole book, *De spiritu et litera*, proves this.

Although this teaching is held in great contempt among untried people, yet it is a matter of experience that weak and terrified consciences find it most comforting and salutary. The conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is, when it is assured and knows that for Christ's sake it has a gracious God, as Paul

says in Rom. 5:1, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God."

In former times this comfort was not heard in preaching, but poor consciences were driven to rely on their own efforts, and all sorts of works were undertaken. Some were driven by their conscience into monasteries in the hope that there they might merit grace through monastic life. Others devised other works for the purpose of earning grace and making satisfaction for sins. Many of them discovered that they did not obtain peace by such means. It was therefore necessary to preach this doctrine about faith in Christ and diligently to apply it in order that men may know that the grace of God is appropriated without merits, through faith alone.

Instruction is also given among us to show that the faith here spoken of is not that possessed by the devil and the ungodly, who also believe the history of Christ's suffering and his resurrection from the dead, but we mean such true faith as believes that we receive grace and forgiveness of sin through Christ.

Whoever knows that in Christ he has a gracious God, truly knows God, calls upon him, and is not, like the heathen, without God. For the devil and the ungodly do not believe this article concerning the forgiveness of sin, and so they are at enmity with God, cannot call upon him, and have no hope of receiving good from him. Therefore, as has just been indicated, the Scriptures speak of faith but do not mean by it such knowledge as the devil and

ungodly men possess. Heb. 11:1 teaches about faith in such a way as to make it clear that faith is not merely a knowledge of historical events but is a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of his promises. Augustine also reminds us that we should understand the word "faith" in the Scriptures to mean confidence in God, assurance that God is gracious to us, and not merely such a knowledge of historical events as the devil also possesses.

It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God's will and glorify him. It is always faith alone that apprehends grace and forgiveness of sin. When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works. Before that, when it is without the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak. Moreover, it is in the power of the devil, who drives poor human beings into many sins. We see this in the philosophers who undertook to lead honorable and blameless lives; they failed to accomplish this, and instead fell into many great and open sins. This is what happens when a man is without true faith and the Holy Spirit and governs himself by his own human strength alone.

Consequently this teaching concerning faith is not to be accused of forbidding good works but is rather to be praised for teaching that good works are to be done and for offering help as to how they may be done. For without faith and without Christ human nature and human strength are much too weak to do good works,



call upon God, have patience in suffering, love one's neighbor, diligently engage in callings which are commanded, render obedience, avoid evil lusts, etc. Such great and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, as he himself says in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

#### XXI. [The Cult of Saints]

It is also taught among us that saints should be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith. Moreover, their good works are to be an example for us, each of us in his own calling. So His Imperial Majesty may in salutary and godly fashion imitate the example of David in making war on the Turk, for both are incumbents of a royal office which demands the defense and protection of their subjects.

However, it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that we are to invoke saints or seek help from them. "For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), who is the only saviour, the only high priest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. Moreover, according to the Scriptures, the highest form of divine service is sincerely to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ in every time of need. "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

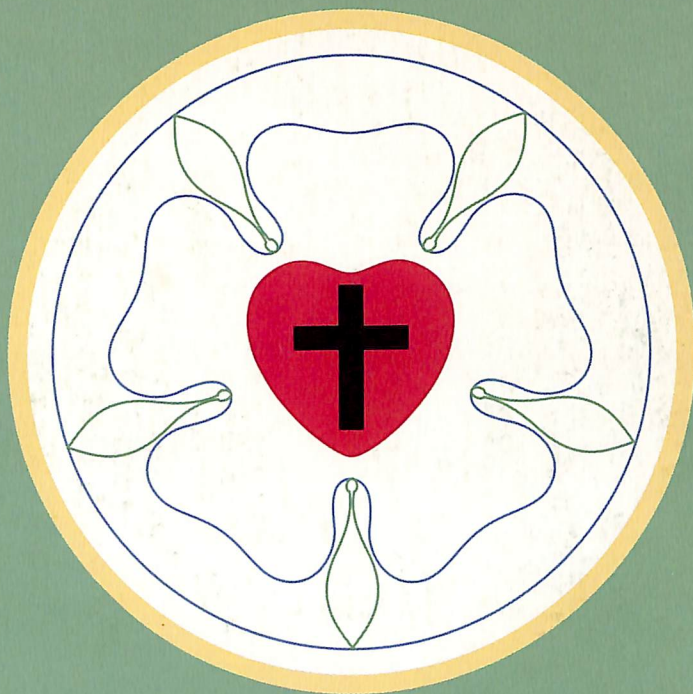
This is just about a summary of the doctrines that are preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction, the consolation of consciences, and the amendment of believers. Certainly we should not wish to put our own souls and consciences in grave peril before God by misusing his name or Word, nor should we wish to bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church (in so far as the latter's teaching is reflected in the writing of the Fathers), we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above. Therefore, those who presume to reject, avoid, and separate from our churches as if our teaching were heretical, act in an unkind and hasty fashion, contrary to all Christian unity and love, and do so without any solid basis of divine command or Scripture. The dispute and dissention are concerned chiefly with various traditions and abuses. Since, then, there is nothing unfounded or defective in the principal articles and since this our confession is seen to be godly and Christian, the bishops should in all fairness act more leniently, even if there were some defect among us in regard to traditions, although we hope to offer firm grounds and reasons why we have changed certain traditions and abuses.

ADULT

S T U D E N T B O O K



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