

# Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

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## The Unaltered Augsburg Confession Article XV & XVI - Order in the Church Part II



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### Review/Summary:

The Augsburg Confession is the specific Lutheran confession of the Christian faith which we believe, teach, and confess in our churches according to God's Holy Word. It was written by Philip Melancthon in consultation with Luther and others and presented to the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 AD. The aim of the confession was to present as fully as possible the doctrinal articles of the Orthodox Christian faith, as taught in Scripture and the "Church catholic" (universal). Rome had charged Luther and "the Lutherans" of teaching heresy. The Lutherans presented their case before Emperor Charles V, and the confession was accepted making it "legal" to be Lutheran Christians because our teachings did not dissent from the Orthodox Christian teaching of Scripture.

It consists of 28 articles of which the first 21 deal with the "chief articles of faith"— most following the model of Thesis-Antithesis. That is each states the belief we hold and then states the false beliefs which are condemned (as heresy). The last 7 articles are the abuses which had been corrected by the Lutherans, showing why Rome was actually guilty of heresy and justifying the changes made by the Lutherans with regard to customs and ceremonies.

**Article I: Of God**— This article proceeds from the creeds (especially the Nicene council) and teaches that there are three persons in the God-head who are of the same essence and power and who are co-eternal.

**Article II: Of Original Sin**— All men are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence (desire for sin); and this disease, or vice of origin is truly sin.

**Article III: Of The Son of God**— Christ Jesus, true God and true man, suffered and died to reconcile the Father unto us and be a sacrifice for all sins of men. He sends the Holy Spirit.

**Article IV: Of Justification**— The righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who believe.

**Article V: Of The Ministry**— In order that we may be brought to faith in Jesus Christ the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted by God.

**Article VI: Of New Obedience**— Faith must bring forth good fruits/works.

**Article VII: Of The Church**— There is one holy Church. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. It is enough for the true unity of the Church to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments (primary marks).

**Article VIII: What the Church Is**— Though the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless there are many hypocrites and evil persons in its midst. The sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and command of Christ even if they be administered by evil men.

**Article IX: Of Baptism**— Baptism is necessary to salvation. Children are to be baptized and through baptism they are received into God's grace.

**Article X: Of The Lord's Supper**— The body and blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine in the sacrament.

**Article XI: Of Confession**— Confession and private absolution ought to be retained in the Church, though enumeration of all sins is not necessary.

**Article XII: Of Repentance**— Repentance is necessary, and consists of contrition and faith.

**Article XIII: The Use of the Sacraments**— The sacraments are not only marks of professions among men, but signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, and are instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them

**Article XIV: Of Order in the Church**— No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called.

## Article XV Church Ceremonies

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach that ceremonies ought to be observed that may be observed without sin. Also, ceremonies and other practices that are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church (in particular, holy days, festivals, and the like) ought to be observed.

<sup>2</sup> Yet, the people are taught that consciences are not to be burdened as though observing such things was necessary for salvation [Colossians 2:16–17]. <sup>3</sup> They are also taught that human traditions instituted to make atonement with God, to merit grace, and to make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. <sup>4</sup> So vows and traditions concerning meats and days, and so forth, instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.

Note: Lutheranism embraces the good historic traditions of the Church, especially those of the Western Church. These include such things as following the pattern of the Church year, lectionary readings from the Bible, a liturgical order of worship, various festival days, vestments worn by clergy, and the use of candles, crucifixes, and other objects. As this article makes very clear, in the Lutheran Church, rites, decorations, or traditions are never used or followed to appease God’s wrath or to earn the forgiveness of sins. Lutheranism removed from the Church useless and harmful traditions such as monastic vows and insisting on certain foods on certain days. (See also Ap XV; SA III XV; FC Ep X and SD X.)

### Terms Defined:

**Atonement**— Refers to God’s act of dealing with the primary human problem, sin. Strictly means, “to be made up for” (as in making up for one’s sins). The Lutheran Confessions stress that human works and ceremonies have no atoning power; true atonement comes only in the saving work of Christ on the cross.

### Questions:

*Why do you think Article XV says that church ceremonies “ought to be observed” if they “may be observed without sin”?*

*What kind of things would that exclude?*

*What good is there in practicing human ceremonies in the church if they are not instituted by God?*

*What is the potential danger in observing ceremonies with great intentionality and reverence?*

*Read Galatians 4:8-11. What is meant by “observing special days, and months, and seasons and years”?*

*Does this passage of Scripture contradict Article XV or reinforce it? Explain.*

## Article XVI

### Civil Government

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach that lawful civil regulations are good works of God. <sup>2</sup> They teach that it is right for Christians to hold political office, to serve as judges, to judge matters by imperial laws and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take oaths when required by the magistrates, for a man to marry a wife, or a woman to be given in marriage [Romans 13; 1 Corinthians 7:2].

<sup>3</sup> Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these political offices to Christians. <sup>4</sup> They also condemn those who do not locate evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith, but place it in forsaking political offices. <sup>5</sup> For the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart (Romans 10:10). At the same time, it does not require the destruction of the civil state or the family. The Gospel very much requires that they be preserved as God's ordinances and that love be practiced in such ordinances. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is necessary for Christians to be obedient to their rulers and laws. <sup>7</sup> The only exception is when they are commanded to sin. Then they ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Note: It was important for Lutherans to make clear they did not share the beliefs of the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. Some of these radicals rejected all forms of order and authority, in both Church and State, even rejecting their homes and families in order to be "super spiritual." This article points to the biblical doctrine of the two kingdoms, a way of speaking about God's care for us spiritually through the Church and temporally through the various orders in society; chiefly, home and government. Christians live out their various callings in life in service to God and their fellow humans, doing so in the stations, or situations, to which God has called them. (See also Ap XVI.)

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [\*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions\*](#) (pp. 39–40). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

#### Terms Defined:

Anabaptists— The Anabaptists were the most radical wing of the Reformation. They stressed a personal conversion experience apart from any external means. Many modern Christian denominations across a wide spectrum were influenced by the Anabaptist tradition, including: Amish/Mennonite, Pentecostal, Baptist, American Evangelical/[Most] Non-Denominational, Assemblies of God, etc.

Civil— Referring here to matters in the political and secular realm of the state, as distinguished from religious or spiritual matters.

Ordinances— Legal requirements, especially those directing behavior and limits in a community for the good of community.

Magistrates— Local governmental officials, often related to the law (judges, police, etc.)

#### The Two Realms (Kingdoms)

Luther and the early Lutherans spoke of God's rule, reign, and governance of the world in terms of Two Realms. The "Realm of the Left" is God's power exercised in the secular realm through law, government, and political authority.

The "Realm of the Right" is God's power exercised in the spiritual realm through the gospel of forgiveness and grace.

Luther argued that the Church in his day had forgotten its God-given task of proclaiming the gospel, in its effort to exercise civil power (which God had entrusted to princes and governors). Likewise, Luther insisted that civil leaders had a godly responsibility to maintain order, enforce just laws, and serve their people under God's authority.

This idea of Two Realms of power has now led some to believe that Lutherans accept the more modern notion of the separation of church and state. But for Luther, both church and state were under divine authority, working together like God's right and left hands.

**Questions:**

*Can you think of any groups or individuals that reject participation or service in civil government on the basis of their faith?*

*Read Romans 13:1-7. When it says “all authorities that exist have been instituted by God” does this mean that we must always obey every authority?*

*Is there a time when we should disobey an authority? (Acts 5:29)*

*What consequences should we expect if we stand against authorities we believe are wrong? (John 18:36-38a)*

*How involved should Christians be in secular politics?*

*Should churches or their leaders take public stands on political issues?*

*If not, why not?*

*If so, what issues should these be?*

*What does God have to do with all these “civil matters”? Don’t we believe in the separation of Church and state?*

*On what basis do Lutherans believe that good citizenship is a way of living out one’s faith?*

### **Scripture Passages Cited:**

Galatians 4:8–11 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? <sup>10</sup> You observe days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Romans 13:1–7 (ESV)

#### **Submission to the Authorities**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Acts 5:29 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

John 18:36–38a (ESV)

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." <sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"