

Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession

Article XXI - XXVII



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: Of Church Ceremonies— Usages of ceremonies are profitable for good order and thus should be observed. Such observance, however, is not itself necessary unto salvation. Practices which are contrary to the Gospel should not be tolerated.

Article XVI: Of Civil Government— Lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and it is right for Christians to accept civil office, to be judges, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, make oaths, etc.

Article XVII: Of Christ's Return for Judgment— At the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and give to the godly and elect eternal life, but to ungodly men and the devils, torment without end.

Article XVIII: Of Free Will— Man has some liberty to choose in civil matters (horizontal righteousness), but he has no power without the Holy Spirit to work the righteousness of God (vertical righteousness), that is spiritual righteousness. Though nature is able in a manner to do outward works, such as to keep the hands from theft and murder (even in unregenerate man), yet nature cannot produce the inward motions such as the fear of God, trust in God, etc.

Article XIX: Of The Cause of Sin— The cause of sin is the will of wicked man and of the Devil.

Article XX: Of Good Works— This is a lengthy article and discusses the relation between faith and good works. We are saved through faith. Our works cannot reconcile us to God and merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification. On the other hand, being justified by faith we obey God and do good works in obedience to God and out of gratitude to Him in accordance with our Baptismal calling.

Article XXI: Of The Worship of Saints— Invocation of saints or asking help of them is not taught by Scripture. We should only pray to Christ our Mediator, High Priest, and Intercessor. The memory of saints may be set before us that we may follow their faith and good works.

— A Review of the Various Abuses that have been Corrected —

(These last articles are all lengthy because they deal with the abuses in the Church)

Article XXII: Of Both Kinds in the Sacrament— Both kinds/elements (bread and wine) in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be given to all communicants.

Article XXIII: Of The Marriage of Priests— It is not only lawful for priests to marry, but it is better that they do so.

Article XXIV: Of The Mass— This article deals with the abuses of the mass. The mass is to be used that the Sacrament of the Altar may be administered to those that have need of consolation. The mass consists in giving of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Article XXV: Of Confession— The Church teaches that confession and absolution should be highly prized. Absolution is the voice of God and pronounced by God's command. Through this use of the power of the Keys (Small Catechism - Office of the Keys), great consolation is brought to anxious consciences.

Article XXVI: Of The Distinction of Meats— This article deals with fasting. To fast has no meritorious value before God. To abstain from meat does not make man more pleasing in God's sight. Its value consists in training and subduing the body with its lusts and slothfulness.

Article XXVII: Of Monastic Vows— Monastic vows are rejected. The unmarried and secluded life in the cloisters is not more pleasing to God than the life in the home as father and mother, or in the

business affairs of everyday life. Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart and to trust that for Christ's sake we have reconciliation with God; and to pray to God with confidence and assurance. And further, to do our good works in our calling. Perfection does not consist in celibacy or begging or being dressed in unseemly apparel.

Article XXVIII: Of Church Authority— The power of the bishops and priests is a power to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. As bishops and priests, the ministers of the Gospel have no civil power.

Article XXI: Worship of the Saints

Editor's Note: The Early Church had developed an appreciation for those who confessed, and sometimes died for, their faith. However, deep corruption had developed within the Church regarding the honor given to the saints, resulting in what could only be described as idolatrous worship. Those who have gone before us in the faith are to be honored, remembered, and imitated according to our various stations and callings in life. That is clear. However, it is clearly contrary to Scripture to teach that the saints are to be prayed to and invoked for aid. There is simply no command, no example, and no promise in Scripture indicating that we should pray to our departed brothers and sisters in Christ. (See also Ap XXI; SA II II.)

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 44). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

[Note: In Scripture the word "saint" is used to refer to all those who have faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2), but in the context of this study, the term "saint" will be used only to refer to those who have been called from this earthly life.]

The Example of the Saints

In Article 21 our Lutheran forefathers began by pointing out the positive example the saints have for us: "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."

Scripture clearly sets before our eyes the faithful example of the saints as a blessing for us. The book of Hebrews states: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony*" (Hebrews 11:1-2). The rest of that chapter sets before us the example of specific saints and their lives of faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab and many more. Then we read: "*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*" (Hebrews 12:1).

As we look in Scripture, in ancient church history, and even in our own history, we find and remember many wonderful examples of faith in the lives of those who have lived and died before us. They can and do serve as an encouragement as we live our own lives of faith now. We also find many bad examples and many failures in their lives. The apostle Paul, citing the poor examples of the children of Israel, reminds us: "*Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*" (1 Corinthians 10:6). We can learn from the bad examples of others as well as the good.

If we know the failings of the saints it can help us to remember that they were not perfect. They were sinners, just the same as us. They were sinners who obtained the crown of life, not through their own works, but through faith in the work of Christ. For this reason the Lutherans continued this article by pointing out the errors taught concerning the role of the saints in the Roman Church:

“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 Timothy 2:5), who is the only savior, the only high priest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Romans 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. Moreover, according to the Scriptures, the highest form of divine services 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).”

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (pp. 44-45). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

The Dangerous Result

The biggest problem with the Roman teaching on the invocation of the saints was not in connection with prayer, but intercession. The Church taught that certain saints were in charge of certain parts of life. This may have been derived from the heathen religions which thought that the gods had certain areas of power or influence (cf. Apology, Article XXI, ¶ 32).

Even worse, the Church not only encouraged parishioners to pray to the saints, but also taught that the merits of the saints could be passed on to others, in effect taking the place of Jesus and minimizing His work of redemption.

Articles I through XXI: [A Summary Statement]

¹ This then is nearly a complete summary of our teaching. As can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church universal, or from the Church of Rome, as known from its writers. Since this is the case, those who insist that our teachers are to be regarded as heretics are judging harshly. ² There is, however, disagreement on certain abuses that have crept into the Church without rightful authority.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 44). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Beginning with Article XXII the Lutherans deal with those issues that they knew were in sharp disagreement with the teachings of the Roman Church. These issues include the Lord’s Supper (Articles XXII, and XXIV), the Priesthood (Articles XXIII and XXVII), Confession (Article XXV), Fasting and foods (Article XXVI) and the power of the church and bishops (Article XXVIII).

While the first twenty-one articles have a more conciliatory tone, these final articles are more bold, defensive, and even accusatory as they point out errors concerning Roman teaching and practice.

In the introduction to these articles the Lutherans state:

“From the above it is clear and obvious that nothing is taught in our churches concerning any articles of faith that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures or what is common to the Christian church. However, inasmuch as some abuses have been corrected... we are obliged by our circumstances to give an account of them and to indicate our reasons for permitting changes in these cases in order that Your Imperial Majesty may perceive that we have not acted in an unchristian and frivolous manner but have been compelled by God’s command (which is rightly to be regarded as above all custom) to allow such changes.”

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 44). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Article XXII: Both Kinds in the Sacrament

Editor's Note: Prior to the Reformation, the practice had developed of withholding the consecrated wine from the laity during the Lord's Supper. Only the consecrated bread was distributed to them. However, priests who celebrated Mass drank from the cup. Theories developed within the Church to help support this practice. One stated that the bread alone was enough for the laity, since Christ's body must also contain His blood. The practice of withholding the cup from the congregation was clearly contrary to Scripture and was an insult to God's royal priests—all those who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The Early Church Fathers spoke about *all* of God's people receiving both "kinds," or elements, of this Holy Meal.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*](#) (p. 45). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

The issue discussed in this article was the practice of giving only the bread of the Lord's Supper to the laity. Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper and distributed both the bread and the wine to His disciples. The apostle Paul directed the believers in Corinth to do the same. This sacrament was instituted to comfort and strengthen those who believe that here Christ gives His body and blood, with bread and wine, for the forgiveness of their sins.

Note: In 1963, the Second Vatican Council urged the Roman Catholic Church to restore the celebration of Holy Communion under both kinds, which has now become the norm in the Church once again.

Article XXIII: The Marriage of Priests

Editor's Note: Underlying the issue of forced priestly celibacy, as with other abuses arising in the Church, is the authority of the Church to command and forbid something not mentioned in Scripture. The Lutherans maintained that the Church has no authority from God to command what He has not commanded, nor to forbid what He has not forbidden. The Bible clearly teaches that the Apostle Peter had a wife. This example should have served as convincing proof that priestly marriages were God pleasing. That there are men who are given the gift of chastity is affirmed, but the view that the Church can, and should, forbid all who wish to be priests from marrying is resoundingly rejected. Marriage is a gift from God to be received with thanksgiving both by laypeople and clergy. To suggest otherwise is to introduce a teaching of the evil one into the Church.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*](#) (p. 46). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

The reason for this article was the abuses that were taking place by the priests as a result of vows of celibacy. The article begins, "Complaints about unchaste priests are common."

History of Priest Celibacy:

Throughout the history of the Church there were many attempts to make celibacy of the clergy mandatory. Already at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. we find a proposal to mandate clerical celibacy, including those clergy already married. While this was rejected by the Council of Nicea in 325, the movement toward clerical celibacy continued. During the following centuries several popes decreed celibacy: Damasus I (384), Siricius (385), Innocent I (404), and Leo I (458). In addition, local councils issued edicts imposing celibacy on the clergy: Carthage in Africa (390, 401-19); Orange (441) and Tours (461) in France; and Turin (398) in Italy. By the time of Pope Leo I (who died in 461), no bishop, priest, deacon, or subdeacon could be married.

In 1075, Pope Gregory VII forbade married priests from saying Mass or performing other ecclesiastical functions, and forbade the laity from hearing these Masses or participating in other liturgical functions offered by such priests. Finally, the First Lateran Council (1123) mandated celibacy for the Western clergy. The Second Lateran Council (1139) subsequently decreed Holy Orders as an

impediment to marriage, making any attempt at marriage by an ordained cleric invalid. In 1563, following the period of the Reformation, the Council of Trent stipulated that although celibacy was not a divine law, the Church had the authority to impose celibacy as a discipline.

The Catholic Church has continued to affirm the discipline of clerical celibacy (Second Vatican Council - 1965, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* - 1967, and the Code of Canon Law - 1983).

The Catholic Church currently states that they “forbid no one to marry. No one is required to take a vow of celibacy; those who do, do so voluntarily. They ‘renounce marriage’ (Matthew 19:12); no one forbids it to them.” Then they continue with this phrase: “The Church simply elects candidates for the priesthood from among those who voluntarily renounce marriage” (this is from the official website of the Catholic Church—www.catholic.com).

Article XXIV: The Mass

Editor’s Note: This article clearly demonstrates Lutheranism’s desire to continue—not to reject—the wholesome, beneficial, and historic worship practices of the Church. Lutheranism retained the traditional form of the Mass, that is, the service of Holy Communion. In many respects, the ceremonies and liturgy of the Lutheran Church were very similar to those of the Roman Church. The difference lay in Lutheranism’s rejection of false teaching concerning the Mass: that somehow, and without faith, simply by attending and observing the spectacle of the Mass, people could merit the forgiveness of sins. Worst of all was Rome’s teaching that a priest saying Mass is actually offering Christ in an unbloody manner to appease God and secure His favor. Masses became a source of considerable revenue for the Church, since people were encouraged to “sponsor” the saying of a Mass for their living—and dead—friends and relatives. All this is entirely contrary to Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper. He gave the Church this Sacrament as a gift and blessing, to be used in faith by the people of God.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 47). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

The doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is spoken of in the Augsburg Confession more often than any other doctrine. In Article X the Lutherans clarify their teaching on the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacrament, and demonstrate that they are not like the Zwinglians and others who teach otherwise. In Article XXII they clearly state their opposition to the Roman practice of withholding the cup from the laity, and describe the Scriptural command and historical support for giving both the bread and the wine to the common people. Now, in Article XXIV the Lutherans come to the heart of the issue surrounding the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper: The service of the Mass and its usefulness in teaching the people of the true use of the Lord's Supper.

There were a number of important issues that divided the Lutherans and Catholics on the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper at that time (and still today). We have already discussed the doctrines of Transubstantiation, withholding the cup from the laity (called “Concomitance”), and the sacrifice of the Mass as a satisfaction for sin. Here in this article the Lutherans also discuss a few other areas of disagreement. They include:

- The Language used in the service
- Preparation for the Lord’s Supper
- Private Masses for money
- Closed Communion
- How often Communion should be received.

These points were very important in the time of Luther, and they are just as important in our time as well.

Article XXV: Confession

Editor's Note: The practice of private Confession and Absolution with one's pastor has fallen out of use in many Lutheran congregations. This was never Luther's intention. Neither was private Confession and Absolution abandoned during the first two centuries of Lutheran history. What the Lutheran Reformation corrected were the false teachings about Confession. Problems arose in the Church when teachings about Confession made "satisfactions" such a prominent part of it. When people were told to do certain activities (e.g., repeating the Hail Mary or doing acts of contrition) to "make up" for their sins, Christ's Gospel was overshadowed, if not completely hidden. Lutheranism, therefore, did away with the anti-biblical teaching about satisfaction for sins and the requirement that people try to remember and confess each sin committed.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 49). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

In Article XI, which also dealt with the topic of Confession, we have already discussed the Biblical role of absolution as connected to confession and the errors (both perceived and real) on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. As we continue with the subject of Confession here in Article XXV, we will consider several other related issues. While there are similarities between these two articles, we see that this article is much more detailed.

Like Article XI, it contains two parts: The first paragraph deals with the benefit of absolution, and the second paragraph with erroneous teachings connected with confession.

Article XXV discusses the customs of private confession, announcement for communion and Confirmation. These practices are not directly commanded by God in His Word, though we see there is much scriptural support for what they do and that if they are used properly, they could each serve a spiritually useful purpose. At the same time, there is always a danger of making such useful customs "commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9) which lead to legalism and a work-righteous emphasis. It is better that we guard against such temptations, and still make proper use of the manifold blessings God offers to us through His absolution, instruction in His Word, and the reception of the Lord's Supper!

Note on Announcement for Communion:

The practice of going to private confession before receiving the Lord's Supper was introduced in 1523 at the church in Wittenberg by Luther's friend and co-reformer, Johannes Bugenhagen. At the same time we find the practice of announcing for communion being developed. In that same year Luther encouraged the practice of announcing for communion, writing, "...that notice first be given to the bishop, by those who are about to commune, that they request to be communed with the Lord's Supper, so that he may be able to know their names and their manner of life." (LW Volume 40: Church and Ministry II)

Finally, after a long period of being used side by side, around the early 1900s the old practice of private confession before communion began to die out and the practice of only announcing for communion took its place. Eventually, by around the 1960s to 1970s the practice of announcing for communion had almost entirely ceased, with the exception of registration cards or books in pews.

While the practice of announcement for communion does not necessitate a specific confession of sin on the part of the person announcing, its intentions are similar:

- It gives the pastor an opportunity to speak to each communicant privately, and offers the communicants an opportunity to talk with the pastor about anything that may be troubling them.

- By announcing, communicants should be reminded to “examine themselves” (specifically mentioned in the Small Catechism and in Augsburg Confession Article XXIV:Of the Mass), repent of their sins, and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.
- The people should want the pastor to know that they intend to participate in Holy Communion and that they are approaching the Altar in a worthy manner, as Scripture encourages *“Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.”* (Hebrews 13:17)
- It also helps the pastor to keep better attendance records and serves to see who may be straying from the faith, that they may be sought out and rescued.

Article XXVI: The Distinction of Meats

Editor's Note: Choosing not to eat particular foods, or any food at all, at particular times or on particular occasions is entirely a matter of Christian freedom. By the time of the Reformation, however, the Church had devised complex regulations commanding abstinence from certain foods on certain days. Church teaching misled people into believing that by following such regulations they merited God’s grace and favor. Such a theory is entirely contrary to the Gospel, overturns the all-sufficient merit of Jesus Christ, and replaces Him with human works. Contrived laws such as these placed enormous burdens on the common people, who frequently considered themselves less spiritual than the monks and nuns who adhered to these dietary regulations very closely. Bodily discipline and working to curb one’s sinful desires is entirely appropriate and necessary, but never is it to be suggested that such activities earn God’s grace. In highlighting the issue of dietary restrictions, the Augsburg Confession once more repeats that Lutherans do not do away with good traditions and practices, such as the order of Bible readings in the Communion Service, but only such things as take away from the Gospel.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions](#) (pp. 50–51). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Throughout the Augsburg Confession the Lutherans state the necessity of holding to the Scriptural doctrine of forgiveness of sin by grace, through faith, and not by works. By teaching that certain actions or customs merit God's grace, the Roman Church has led many away from the all-sufficient work of Christ as Savior and instead generates a false trust in the Church's man-made rules and regulations.

Article XXVII: Monastic Vows

Editor's Note: This article has in view Martin Luther’s experience in the monastery, along with what other former monks had to say about life in the cloister. The idea that a person should hide himself behind the walls of a monastery, and perform spiritual works to make himself more worthy of God’s favor, has no biblical justification at all. During the Middle Ages, many common people believed that only priests, monks, or nuns were truly performing spiritual work. But such a view contradicts God’s Word, which teaches how all of life is an opportunity to serve God—giving Him glory by serving our neighbor. Even today, it is assumed that activities at church are somehow of greater value than the common, everyday duties life requires of us. This article extols such biblical duties as being a faithful husband, wife, son, or daughter, and takes great care to reject monasticism and explain how harmful and dangerous it is for those who are entrapped in it. Forcing chastity on those who have not been given this gift is particularly harmful, since many are led to believe they merit God’s grace by means of their sacrifice, not the sacrifice of Christ.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions](#) (p. 53). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

This article is a follow-up to the church customs and traditions mentioned in Article XV. In that article the Lutherans stated that monastic vows were one of several customs which were abused in the Roman Church, and those abuses are taken up here in Article XXVII. Once again, the main concern was that the teaching about vows was obscuring the gospel message of salvation by grace.

Once again we see how the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ is corrupted and even destroyed by the teachings of the Roman Church (as in Article XXVI also in connection with their man-made customs). St. Paul writes: *"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is not work."* (Romans 11:6)

Article XXVIII: Church Authority

Editor's Note: Article XXVIII expands on Articles V and XIV. What authority, or power, do bishops have in the Church? Over the course of centuries, bishops had become not merely Church leaders, but political figures as well, claiming the right to govern both Church and State and to make and enforce laws in both realms. By returning to a biblical understanding of church, the Augsburg Confession clarifies that the true authority, or power, of bishops is the preaching of the Gospel, the forgiving and withholding of forgiveness of sins, and the administering of the Sacraments. The Church is not to interfere in the government, but is to keep its focus on the Gospel. This article is the foundation for the Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms: God's work and rule in the world by means of the Church (the kingdom or regiment of the right hand) and the State (the kingdom or regiment of the left hand). Bishops, or pastors, have authority in the Church only to forgive sins in the name of Christ, to reject false doctrine and reprove those who uphold it, and to exclude persons who refuse to repent of open and manifest sin. This article, like the others, places the focus on the chief teaching of the Gospel: we are justified by God's grace through faith in Christ alone.

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The church should keep to its work of preaching the Gospel for the salvation of souls, and not meddle in temporal affairs. The role of the pastor (and the church) is to lead people to the salvation won by Christ, and not to invent customs by which people think they earn their own salvation, which destroys the Gospel and leads people to destruction. May the Lord always bless our Gospel preaching!

Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession:

¹ These are the chief articles that seem to be in controversy. We could have mentioned more abuses. But here we have set forth only the chief points in order to avoid making this Confession too long. From these chief points the rest may be easily judged. ² There have been, for example, great complaints about indulgences, pilgrimages, and the abuse of excommunication. Our parishes have been troubled in many ways by dealers in indulgences. There were endless arguments between the pastors and the monks about who has the right in parishes to hear confessions, do funerals, give sermons on extraordinary occasions, and innumerable other things. ³ We have passed over such issues so that the chief points in this matter, briefly set forth, might be more easily understood. ⁴ Nothing has been said or brought up for the rebuke of anyone. ⁵ We have mentioned only those things we thought it was necessary to talk about so that it would be understood that in doctrine and ceremonies we have received nothing contrary to Scripture or the Church universal. It is clear that we have been very careful to make sure no new ungodly doctrine creeps into our churches.

⁶ We present these articles in accordance with Your Imperial Majesty's edict, in order to show our Confession and let people see a summary of our teachers' doctrine. ⁷ If there is anything that anyone might desire in this Confession, we are ready, God willing, to present more thorough information according to the Scriptures.

⁸ Your Imperial Majesty's faithful subjects:

⁹ John, Duke of Saxony, Elector. ¹⁰ George, Margrave of Brandenburg. ¹¹ Ernest, Duke of Lüneberg.

¹² Philip, Landgrave of Hesse. ¹³ John Frederick, Duke of Saxony. ¹⁴ Francis, Duke of Lüneberg.

¹⁵ Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt. ¹⁶ Senate and Magistracy of Nürnberg. ¹⁷ Senate of Reutlingen.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (pp. 62–63). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.