

Anniversary Readings from the Lutheran Confessions

Part B

Confessional wording taken from

Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959.

Apr. 23 Easter 2

The message of the Lutheran fathers has always been clear and consistent: We are not saved through any works or efforts of our own, but only by God's grace (Sola Gratia) through faith (Sola Fide) given through Scripture (Sola Scriptura).

FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME III. [THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH BEFORE GOD] Accordingly we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins purely by his grace, without any preceding, present, or subsequent work, merit, or worthiness, and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are accepted by God into grace and are regarded as righteous. We believe, teach, and confess that faith is the only means and instrument whereby we accept Christ and in Christ obtain the "righteousness which avails before God," and that for Christ's sake such faith is reckoned for righteousness (Rom. 4:5). We believe, teach, and confess that this faith is not a mere knowledge of the stories about Christ, but the kind of gift of God by which in the Word of the Gospel we recognize Christ aright as our redeemer and trust in him, so that solely because of his obedience, by grace, we have forgiveness of sins, are regarded as holy and righteous by God the Father, and shall be saved eternally.

Apr. 30 Easter 3

Good works do not merit salvation, neither do they deserve our boasting. Good works flow out from a faith which believes in Christ alone for salvation.

SMALCALD ARTICLES, III, XIII. [HOW MAN IS JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD, AND HIS GOOD WORKS] I do not know how I can change what I have heretofore constantly taught on this subject, namely, that by faith (as St. Peter says) we get a new and clean heart and that God will and does account us altogether righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our mediator. Although the sin in our flesh has not been completely removed or eradicated, he will not count or consider it. Good works follow such faith, renewal, and forgiveness. Whatever is still sinful or imperfect in these works will not be reckoned as sin or defect for the sake of the same Christ. The whole man, in respect both of his person and of his works, shall be accounted and shall be righteous and holy through the pure grace and mercy which have been poured out upon us so abundantly in Christ. Accordingly we cannot boast of the great merit in our works if they are considered apart from God's grace and mercy, but, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31). That is to say, all is well if we boast that we have a gracious God. To this we must add that if good works do not follow, our faith is false and not true.

May 7 Easter 4

Jesus is true God and true man in one. He was and is true God even when He had to suffer humiliation to save us. Today He remains true man even though He lives as our risen and ascended Lord with all power and glory.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME VIII. [THE PERSON OF CHRIST] According to the personal union he always possessed this majesty. But in the state of his humiliation he dispensed with it and could therefore truly increase in age, wisdom, and favor with God and men, for he did not always disclose this majesty, but only when it pleased him. Finally, after his resurrection he laid aside completely the form of a slave (not the human nature) and was established in the full use, revelation, and manifestation of his divine

majesty. Thus he entered into his glory in such a way that now not only as God, but also as man, he knows all things, can do all things, is present to all creatures, and has all things in heaven and on earth and under the earth beneath his feet and in his hands,⁸ as he himself testifies, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” and as St. Paul states, He ascended “far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.”¹ He exercises his power everywhere omnipresently, he can do everything, and he knows everything.

May 14 Easter 5

Because prayer is truly an act of worship, it should be reserved for God alone.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION, XXI. [THE WORSHIP OF SAINTS] ¹ 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. . . 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 savior, 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).

May 21 Easter 6

Because Christ feeds us with forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper, it is truly the world’s only “soul food” for sinners who daily need the forgiveness only God can give.

LARGE CATECHISM, V. [THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR] Now we come to its power and benefit, the purpose for which the sacrament was really instituted, for it is most necessary that we know what we should seek and obtain there. This is plainly evident from the words just quoted, “This is my body and blood, given and poured out *for you* for the forgiveness of sins.” In other words, we go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the words are there through which this is imparted! Christ bids me eat and drink in order that the sacrament may be mine and may be a source of blessing to me as a sure pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift he has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils. Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses.

May 28 Easter 7

In the Lord’s Supper we truly receive the very body of Christ which was born of the Virgin Mary, and the very blood of Christ which trickled down the wooden cross. This is not a magical transformation produced by a priest, but the result of God’s Word being connected to the earthly elements according to Christ’s command.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME VII. [THE HOLY SUPPER OF CHRIST] We believe, teach, and confess that in the Holy Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and essentially present and are truly distributed and received with the bread and wine. We believe, teach, and confess that the words of the testament of Christ are to be understood in no other way than in their literal sense, and not as though the bread symbolized the absent body and the wine the absent blood of Christ, but that because of the sacramental union they are truly the body and blood of Christ. Concerning the consecration we believe, teach, and confess that no man’s work nor the recitation of the minister effect this presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but it is to be ascribed solely and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. But at the same time we believe, teach, and confess with one accord that in the celebration of the Holy Supper the words of Christ’s institution should under no circumstances be omitted, but should be spoken publicly, as it is written, “the cup of blessing which we bless” (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23–25). This blessing occurs through the recitation of the words of Christ.

Jun. 4 Pentecost Day

The Holy Spirit's chief work is to make us holy by planting a saving faith in our hearts. He does this through His Word, in which He connects us to Jesus.

LARGE CATECHISM, III. [THE THIRD ARTICLE] Many other kinds of spirits are mentioned in the Scriptures, such as the spirit of man, heavenly spirits, and the evil spirit. But God's Spirit alone is called Holy Spirit, that is, he who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. As the Father is called Creator and the Son is called Redeemer, so on account of his work the Holy Spirit must be called Sanctifier, the One who makes holy...Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation.

Jun. 11 Holy Trinity Sunday

The Trinity is only one God, even though there are three "persons" in the one Godhead. This is a profound mystery which we do not understand, but we grab hold of it by faith.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION, 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.

VII. [THE CHURCH]

Jun. 18 Trinity 1 / Pentecost 2

"The Church" is not established by a man-made council or by any pope or emperor's will. "The Church" is established by God through His Gospel.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION, VII. [THE CHURCH] ¹ It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among who the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. ² 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. ³ It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. ⁴ 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."

Jun. 25 Trinity 2 / Pentecost 3

On this date in 1530, the Lutheran reformers presented the Augsburg Confession to clearly state what they believed and taught in contrast with the false teachings of the Medieval church. In this preface, the Lutherans specifically stated they were not making arguments from human reason, but "on the basis of the Holy Scriptures."

AUGSBURG CONFESSION [PREFACE] ⁶ In connection with the matter pertaining to the faith and in conformity with the imperial summons, Your Imperial Majesty also graciously and earnestly requested that each of the electors, princes, and estates should commit to writing and present, in German and Latin, his judgments, opinions, and beliefs with reference to the said errors, dissensions, and abuses. ⁷ Accordingly, after due deliberation and counsel, it was decided last Wednesday that, in keeping with Your

Majesty's wish, we should present our case in German and Latin today (Friday).⁸ Wherefore, in dutiful obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities and territories

Jul. 2 Trinity 3 / Pentecost 4

To have a "god" is to have something in first place in your heart. God's blessings only come to us through worshiping Him—the Triune God—alone. Salvation and eternal comfort do not come from any other source.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE FIRST COMMANDMENT] "You shall have no other gods."...Let everyone, then, take care to magnify and exalt this commandment above all things and not make light of it. Search and examine your own heart thoroughly and you will find whether or not it clings to God alone. Do you have the kind of heart that expects from him nothing but good, especially in distress and want, and renounces and forsakes all that is not God? Then you have the one true God. On the contrary, does your heart cling to something else, from which it hopes to receive more good and help than from God, and does it flee not to him but from him when things go wrong? Then you have an idol, another god. Consequently, in order to show that God will not have this commandment taken lightly but will strictly watch over it, he has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise. These should be thoroughly stressed and impressed upon young people so that they may take them to heart and remember them.

Jul. 9 Trinity 4 / Pentecost 5

The Ten Commandments are not meant to make life less enjoyable for Christians. Quite the opposite! The Ten Commandments show us how to honor God in our lives and, specifically in the Second Commandment, how to use God's holy name as a constant source of comfort.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE SECOND COMMANDMENT] "You shall not take the name of God in vain." As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and the tongue into the right relation to God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words...children should be constantly urged and encouraged to honor God's name and keep it constantly upon their lips in all circumstances and experiences, for true honor to God's name consists of looking to it for all consolation and therefore calling upon it. Thus, as we have heard above, the heart by faith first gives God the honor due him and then the lips do so by confession. This is a blessed and useful habit, and very effective against the devil, who is ever around us, lying in wait to lure us into sin and shame, calamity and trouble. He hates to hear God's name and cannot long remain when it is uttered and invoked from the heart. Many a terrible and shocking calamity would befall us if God did not preserve us through our calling upon his name. I have tried it myself and learned by experience that often sudden, great calamity was averted and vanished in the very moment I called upon God. To defy the devil, I say, we should always keep the holy name on our lips so that he may not be able to injure us as he is eager to do.

Jul. 16 Trinity 5 / Pentecost 6

It is important for us to regularly rest our bodies, but the most important kind of rest we can have is when we "rest" in God's Word through worship.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE THIRD COMMANDMENT] "You shall sanctify the holy day." Our word "holy day" or "holiday" is so called from the Hebrew word "Sabbath," which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from labor; hence our common expression for "stopping work" literally means "observing a holy day or holiday." We keep them, first, for the sake of bodily need. Nature teaches and demands that the common people...should retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. Secondly and most especially, we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer.

Jul. 23 Trinity 6 / Pentecost 7

To “honor” authorities—especially parents—is to do more than simply “love” them. Honoring someone means placing yourself beneath them. In giving the proper authorities such honor, God attaches His promise of blessings to us.

Large Catechism, I. [The Fourth Commandment] “You shall honor your father and mother.” To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction, above all estates that are beneath it, that he commands us not simply to love our parents but also to honor them. With respect to brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general he commands nothing higher than that we love them. Thus he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself. For it is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them...Over and above all this, another strong incentive for us to keep this commandment is that God has attached to it a lovely promise, “That you may have long life in the land where you dwell.” Here you see how important God considers this commandment. He declares that it is not only an object of pleasure and delight to himself, but also an instrument intended for our greatest welfare, to lead us to a quiet, pleasant, and blessed life.

Jul. 30 Trinity 7 / Pentecost 8

Though the Fifth Commandment forbids us to murder or physically harm our neighbor, even angry and hateful thoughts toward them is forbidden.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT] “*You shall not kill.*”... In the first place, we should not harm anyone. This means, first, by hand or by deed; next, we should not use our tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone; again, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be harmed; finally, our heart should harbor no hostility or malice toward anyone in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should be blameless toward all people in body and soul, especially toward him who wishes or does you evil. For to do evil to somebody who desires and does you good is not human but devilish...In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury.

Aug. 6 Trinity 8 / Pentecost 9

Marriage is the most important institution in God’s created order. This is because the Christian home is the children’s first church when parents teach their children God’s Word. And when parents teach their children the difference between right and wrong, their home is their first earthly government as well.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT] “You shall not commit adultery.”...Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God’s serious concern. For it is of the highest importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, promote knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, and fight against wickedness and the devil...Therefore I have always taught that we should not despise or disdain marriage, as the blind world and the false clergy do, but view it in the light of God’s Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. It is not an estate to be placed on a level with the others; it precedes and surpasses them all, whether those of emperor, princes, bishops, or anyone else. Important as the spiritual and civil estates are, these must humble themselves and allow all people to enter the estate of marriage, as we shall hear...For marital chastity it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable.

Aug. 13 Trinity 9 / Pentecost 10

Sometimes we can trick ourselves into thinking that it’s OK to commit “little sins” as long as we don’t commit “big ones.” But if we are dishonest and steal a little here and a little there, then it is the same as if we took the sum total of all our stealing and dishonesty and did it all at once. There is no difference between “little sins” and “big sins.”

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT] *"You shall not steal."* ²²⁴ For to steal is nothing else than to acquire another's property by unjust means. In a few words, this includes taking advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in loss to him. Stealing is a widespread, common vice, but people pay so little attention to it that the matter is entirely out of hand. If all who are thieves, though they are unwilling to admit it, were hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be empty, and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows... Suppose, for example, that a man-servant or maid-servant is unfaithful in his or her domestic duty and does damage or permits damage to happen when it could have been avoided. Or suppose that through laziness, carelessness, or malice a servant wastes and neglects things to the vexation and annoyance of his master or mistress. When this is done deliberately—for I am not speaking of what happens inadvertently and unintentionally—a servant can cheat his employer out of thirty or forty gulden or more a year. If a thief had taken such sums he would be strangled with a noose, but the servant may even become defiant and insolent and dare anyone to call him a thief!

Aug. 20 Trinity 10 / Pentecost 11

Our duty to our neighbor is to uphold their good name just as we would like them to speak well of us. There is no place for lying and gossiping among Christian people.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT] *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."* Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among men in public disgrace and contempt... Therefore, if you encounter somebody with a worthless tongue who gossips and slanders someone, rebuke him straight to his face and make him blush for shame. Then you will silence many a one who otherwise would bring some poor man into disgrace, from which he could scarcely clear himself. For honor and good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored... So you see that we are absolutely forbidden to speak evil of our neighbor. Exception is made, however, of civil magistrates, preachers, and parents, for we must interpret this commandment in such a way that evil shall not go unpunished... Likewise, although no one has in his own person the right to judge and condemn anyone, yet if they whose duty it is fail to do so, they sin as much as those who take the law into their own hands without such a commission.

Aug. 27 Trinity 9 / Pentecost 12

Our sinful flesh is so clever that we can deceptively work to tear down our neighbor, take his property, and ruin his reputation, and still convince ourselves that we have done nothing wrong because we didn't directly harm him. God, however, sees through our self-deception and judges us according to our covetous hearts.

LARGE CATECHISM, I. [THE NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS] *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house."* *"You shall not covet his wife, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle, or anything that is his."*... You must learn that God does not wish you to deprive your neighbor of anything that is his, letting him suffer loss while you gratify your greed, even though in the eyes of the world you might honorably retain the property. To do so is dark and underhanded wickedness, and, as we say, it is all done "under the hat" so as to escape detection. Although you may act as if you have wronged no one, you have trespassed on your neighbor's rights. It may not be called stealing or fraud, yet it is coveting—that is, having designs upon your neighbor's property, luring it away from him against his will, and begrudging what God gave him.