

2017 Confessions Reading Schedule

Bulletin Summary of Confessional Writings

The Augsburg Confession, presented to the secular government in 1530 (June 25), is the first great statement-of-faith of the Lutherans against the Medieval Church. It was written by Philip Melancthon, Luther's friend and fellow professor at Wittenberg.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was presented in 1531. It was written by Philip Melancthon (Luther's friend and fellow professor) to "defend" the original Augsburg Confession against criticism by further explaining its doctrine.

The Smalcald Articles were written by Luther himself in 1537. Luther was often ill and, being convinced he was approaching his end, he wrote these articles as a doctrinal "Last Will and Testament" to summarize the Bible's doctrine and unify the Lutherans around it.

The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, written in 1537 by Philip Melancthon (Luther's friend and fellow professor), was written to specifically outline the Lutheran position on authority in the Medieval Church.

The Small and Large Catechisms (1529) were written by Luther to help teach the faith in a simple way for all ages. We still use Luther's Catechisms to teach the Christian faith today!

The Formula of Concord (1577) was written to unify all Lutherans under one banner. When Luther died there was a vacuum for leadership in the church and several "parties" formed within Lutheranism—some began to deny the Bible's doctrine, and others wanted to keep it pure. Martin Chemnitz was a leader of the pure Lutherans and the chief editor of the Formula, an extremely detailed document defending the doctrine of the Bible against the false teachings of other church bodies.

2017 Year

Jan. 1 Christmas 1

Confessional Reading: The Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession, presented to the secular government in 1530 (June 25), is the first great statement-of-faith of the Lutherans against the Medieval Church. It was written by Philip Melancthon, Luther's friend and fellow professor at Wittenberg.

This reading describes how the child born in the manger is different from every other child ever born, and how only this Christ child could bring us salvation.

AUGSBURG CONFESSIO III. [THE SON OF GOD] ¹ It is also taught among us that God the Son became man, born of the virgin Mary, ² 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, ³ 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. ⁴ 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, ⁵ 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. ⁶ The same Lord Christ will return openly to judge the living and the dead, as stated in the Apostles' Creed.

Jan. 8 Epiphany of Our Lord

Confessional Reading: The Large Catechism

The Small and Large Catechisms (1529) were written by Luther to help teach the faith in a simple way for all ages. We still use Luther's Catechisms to teach the Christian faith today!

Here Luther shows us that Baptism has one purpose: To save us.

LARGE CATECHISM IV. [BAPTISM] ²³ In the second place, since we now know what Baptism is and how it is to be regarded, we must also learn for what purpose it was instituted, that is, what benefits, gifts, and effects it brings. Nor can we understand this better than from the words of Christ quoted above, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." ²⁴ To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save. No one is baptized in order to become a prince, but as the words say, to "be saved." ²⁵ To be saved, we know, 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.

Jan. 15 Epiphany 2

Confessional Reading: The Small Catechism

The Small and Large Catechisms (1529) were written by Luther to help teach the faith in a simple way for all ages. We still use Luther's Catechisms to teach the Christian faith today!

Baptism is water connected to God's Word by God's command. Here Luther refutes two false teaching regarding Baptism. First, he speaks against those who say the water itself (without the Word) has the power to save. Second, he speaks against those who say that there is no real power in the water or Word of Baptism.

SMALL CATECHISM III. [BAPTISM] ¹ Baptism is nothing else than the Word of God in water, commanded by the institution of Christ; or as Paul says, "the washing of water with the word"; or, again, as Augustine puts it, "The Word is added to the element and it becomes a sacrament." ² Therefore we do not agree with Thomas and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God's institution) and say that God has joined to the water a spiritual power which, through the water, washes away sin. ³ Nor do we agree with Scotus and the Franciscans who teach that Baptism washes away sin through the assistance of the divine will, as if the washing takes place only through God's will and not at all through the Word and the water. ⁴ As for infant Baptism, we hold that children should be baptized, for they, too, are included in the promise of redemption which Christ made, and the church should administer Baptism to them.

Jan. 22 Epiphany 3

Confessional Reading: The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was presented in 1531. It was written by Philip Melancthon (Luther's friend and fellow professor) to "defend" the original Augsburg Confession against criticism by further explaining its doctrine.

Here Melancthon answers the question of why we Baptize infants. In summary, if someone is a sinner, the only way to save that person is the Gospel. Therefore, because children are sinners, children need the Gospel. That's why children are included in God's command to "Baptize all nations."

APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IX. [BAPTISM] ¹ They approve the ninth article where we confess that Baptism is necessary for salvation; children are to be baptized; the Baptism of children is not useless but is necessary and efficacious for salvation. Among us, the Gospel is taught purely and diligently...It is most certain that the promise of salvation also applies to little children. It does not apply to those who are outside of Christ's church, where there is neither Word nor sacrament, because Christ regenerates through Word and sacrament. Therefore it is necessary to baptize children, so that the promise of salvation might be applied to them according to Christ's

command (Matt. 28:19), “Baptize all nations.” Just as there salvation is offered to all, so Baptism is offered to all—men, women, children, and infants. Therefore it clearly follows that infants should be baptized because salvation is offered with Baptism.

Jan. 29 Epiphany 4

Confessional Reading: The Augsburg Confession

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How do we believe the Gospel? God uses specific tools to create faith in our hearts. He uses His Word and His Sacraments, and He administers these Means of Grace to us through properly called ministers.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION V. [OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY] ¹ To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. ² Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. ³ 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. ⁴ [We reject]...others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.

Feb. 5 Epiphany 5

Confessional Reading: The Formula of Concord

The Formula of Concord (1577) was written to unify all Lutherans under one banner. When Luther died there was a vacuum for leadership in the church and several “parties” formed within Lutheranism—some began to deny the Bible’s doctrine, and others wanted to keep it pure. Martin Chemnitz was a leader of the pure Lutherans and the chief editor of the Formula, an extremely detailed document defending the doctrine of the Bible against the false teachings of other church bodies.

This reading describes the two basic teachings of the Bible: the Law which shows us our sin, and the Gospel which shows what God did through Jesus to save us from our sin.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, SOLID DECLARATION V. [LAW AND GOSPEL] ¹⁷ We unanimously believe, teach, and confess on the basis of what we have said that, strictly speaking, the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God’s wrath and temporal and eternal punishment... ²⁰ The Gospel, however, is that doctrine which teaches what a man should believe in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins from God, since man has failed to keep the law of God and has transgressed it, his corrupted nature, thoughts, words, and deeds war against the law, and he is therefore subject to the wrath of God, to death, to temporal miseries, and to the punishment of hell-fire. The content of the Gospel is this, that the Son of God, Christ our Lord, himself assumed and bore the curse of the law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through him alone we re-enter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sin, and are saved eternally.

Feb. 12 Epiphany 6

Confessional Reading: The Smaldcald Articles

The Smalcald Articles were written by Luther himself in 1537. Luther was often ill and, being convinced he was approaching his end, he wrote these articles as a doctrinal “Last Will and Testament” to summarize the Bible’s doctrine and unify the Lutherans around it.

God reveals His will to us in one, exclusive way: His Word. False teachings easily arise with people claim they have heard a message from God apart from His Word. Therefore, we can allow nothing but the Means of Grace to be the centerpiece of our Christian lives.

SMALCALD ARTICLES III, VIII. [CONFESSION] ³ In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts—that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure. Münzer did this, and many still do it in our day who wish to distinguish sharply between the letter and the spirit without knowing what they say or teach... ⁵ All this is the old devil and the old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve. He led them from the external Word of God to spiritualizing and to their own imaginations, and he did this through other external words... ⁷ Even those who have come to faith before they were baptized and those who came to faith in Baptism came to their faith through the external Word which preceded.

Feb. 19 Epiphany 7

Confessional Reading: The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was presented in 1531. It was written by Philip Melancthon (Luther’s friend and fellow professor) to “defend” the original Augsburg Confession against criticism by further explaining its doctrine.

Here the saving faith is presented very simply. Jesus won salvation for the world about 2000 years ago on the cross, but that does me no good until I am personally justified through faith. Thanks be to God, He gives me my own personal faith in Him through His Word and Sacraments.

APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IV. [JUSTIFICATION] ⁴⁵ Therefore, when a man believes that his sins are forgiven because of Christ and that God is reconciled and favorably disposed to him because of Christ, this personal faith obtains the forgiveness of sins and justifies us. In penitence and the terrors of conscience it consoles and encourages our hearts. Thus it regenerates us and brings us the Holy Spirit, so that we can finally obey God’s law, love him, truly fear him, be sure that he hears us, and obey him in all afflictions. It mortifies our lust. ⁴⁶ By freely accepting the forgiveness of sins, faith sets against God’s wrath not our merits of love, but Christ the mediator and propitiator. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ, it uses his blessings, it regenerates our hearts, it precedes our keeping of the law.

Feb. 26 Transfiguration of Our Lord

Confessional Reading: The Formula of Concord

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In this reading we behold the mystery of Christ: He is not two beings—one God and the other man. He is one being—both God and man in one. We cannot understand this logically but we grab hold of it through faith.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME VIII. [THE PERSON OF CHRIST] That the divine and the human natures are personally united in Christ in such a way that there are not two Christs, one the Son of God and the other the Son of man, but a single individual is both the Son of God and the Son of man (Luke 1:35; Rom. 9:5). We believe, teach, and confess that the divine and the human nature are not fused into one essence and that the one is not changed into the other, but that each retains its essential properties and that they never become the properties of the other nature. The properties of the divine nature are omnipotence, eternity, infinity, and (according to its natural property, by itself) omnipresence, omniscience, etc., which never become properties of the human nature. The attributes of the human nature are to be a corporeal creature, to be flesh and blood, to be finite and circumscribed, to suffer, to die, to ascend and to descend, to move from place to place, to endure hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and the like, which never become the properties of the divine nature.

Mar. 5 Lent 1

Confessional Reading: The Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession, presented to the secular government in 1530 (June 25), is the first great statement-of-faith of the Lutherans against the Medieval Church. It was written by Philip Melancthon, Luther's friend and fellow professor at Wittenberg.

Where does evil come from? Here Melancthon answers the question by pointing to the devil who, since the Fall into Sin, has now infected the whole world with his sinful nature.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION 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."

Mar. 12 Lent 2

Confessional Reading: The Smalcald Articles

The Smalcald Articles were written by Luther himself in 1537. Luther was often ill and, being convinced he was approaching his end, he wrote these articles as a doctrinal "Last Will and Testament" to summarize the Bible's doctrine and unify the Lutherans around it.

Luther struggled with his sins and felt guilty for them. Here he reminds us that the reason we commit actual sins against the Ten Commandments in our lives is because of the original sinful nature we've all inherited from Adam, our first sinful father.

SMALCALD ARTICLES III, I. [SIN] ¹ Here we must confess what St. Paul says in Rom. 5:12, namely, that sin had its origin in one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men were made sinners and became subject to death and the devil. This is called original sin, or the root sin. ² The fruits of this 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. ³ This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures (Ps. 51:5, Rom. 5:12ff., Exod. 33:20, Gen. 3:6ff.).

Mar. 19 Lent 3

Confessional Reading: The Augsburg Confession

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Some wrongly teach that sin is something we learn as we get older, but that we are born "blank slates." This is not what the Bible says. Our sinful nature actually goes so deep that it even infects us when we are newborns and babies.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION II. [ORIGINAL SIN]¹ 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.² 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.³ 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

Mar. 26 Lent 4

Confessional Reading: The Formula of Concord

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Sin is much like having a cold: If I am coughing and have a sore throat, these are symptoms of "the cold," but they are not really "the cold" itself. "The cold" is actually a virus infecting my body. So it is with my sin: The only reason I break the Ten Commandments is because I am already a sinner in nature. Therefore I am guilty of all sin whether I actually break the Ten Commandments or not.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, SOLID DECLARATION I. [ORIGINAL SIN]⁵ In the first place, it is an established truth that Christians must regard and recognize as sin not only the actual transgression of God's commandments but also, and primarily, the abominable and dreadful inherited disease which has corrupted our entire nature. In fact, we must consider this as the chief sin, the root and fountain of all actual sin.⁶ Dr. Luther calls this sin "nature-sin" or "person-sin" in order to indicate that even though a man were to think no evil, speak no evil, or do no evil—which after the Fall of our first parents is of course impossible for human nature in this life—nevertheless man's nature and person would still be sinful. This means that in the sight of God original sin, like a spiritual leprosy, has thoroughly and entirely poisoned and corrupted human nature. On account of this corruption and because of the fall of the first man, our nature or person is under the accusation and condemnation of the law of God, so that we are "by nature the children of wrath,"⁹ of death, and of damnation unless we are redeemed from this state through Christ's merit.

Apr. 2 Lent 5

Confessional Reading: The Augsburg Confession

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The solution for sin in our daily life is repentance. Repentance is simply the act of someone acknowledging their sin, hating their sin, and trying to reject and avoid their sin every day. This is only possible through faith in Jesus as the one who forgives all sins.

AUGSBURG CONFESSION XII. [REPENTANCE] ¹ It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance, ² and absolution should not be denied them by the church. ³ Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of ⁵ 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. ⁶ Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin would then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, “Bear fruit that befits repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

Apr. 9 Palm Sunday

Confessional Reading: The Formula of Concord

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God gives us Himself, the very price of our salvation, through the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Here the confessors review that in the Sacrament, Christ’s true body and blood are present, that they come to us only by God’s own working, and that they come to us only through His holy Word used according to His Command.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME VII. [THE HOLY SUPPER OF CHRIST] ⁶ **1.** 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. ⁷ **2.** 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. ⁸ **3.** 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. ⁹ **4.** 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.

Apr. 16 Easter Sunday

Confessional Reading: The Formula of Concord

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When we confess in the Creed, “He descended into hell,” we are not thinking about Christ’s suffering, but about His Easter victory. Christ descended to hell to proclaim His victory over the devil.

FORMULA OF CONCORD, SOLID DECLARATION IX. [CHRIST’S DESCENT INTO HELL] ¹ Different explanations of the article on Christ’s descent into hell have been discovered among some of our theologians just as among the ancient teachers of the Christian church. Hence we let matters rest on the simple statement of our Christian Creed, to which Dr. Luther directs us in the sermon that he held in the castle at Torgau in the year 1533, “I believe in the Lord Christ, God’s Son, who died, was buried, and descended into hell.” Herein the burial and the descent into hell are differentiated as distinct articles, ² and we simply believe that after the burial the entire person, God and man,

descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed hell's power, and took from the devil all his might.³ We are not to concern ourselves with exalted and acute speculations about how this occurred. With our reason and five senses this article cannot be comprehended any more than the preceding one, how Christ has been made to sit at the right hand of the almighty power and majesty of God. We must only believe and cling to the Word. Then we shall retain the heart of this article and derive from it the comfort that neither hell nor the devil can take us or any believer in Christ captive or harm us.