

Christian Belief

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**A Version for the
Twenty-First Century**

**Augsburg Confession
1530**

I. God

We confess God as infinite source of meaning and purpose, steadfast guarantor of existence, and compassionate power for life and hope. Some of us experience God as personal presence and companion or sacred mystery; others of us conceive God as complex philosophical construct or psychological projection. But all of us who call ourselves Christian point to Jesus as the sign and symbol of God in history and our best clue to God's identity; and we live out our relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition.

I. Of God

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term "person" they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans, who assumed two principles, one Good and the other Evil - also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who, contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that "Word" signifies a spoken word, and "Spirit" signifies motion created in things.

II. Nature

We understand and teach that nature is essentially ambiguous and in process and that human beings—members of an animal species that has evolved from primal origins and may yet evolve into something we cannot conceive—both carry and embody the characteristics of all nature and yet transcend the rest of nature and all other species. By our capacity to conceptualize, verbalize, and make conscious choices we humans seek understanding of nature. We construct and deconstruct nature intellectually and materially, developing ever new mental constructs to describe, define, and attribute meaning and purpose to nature and ever more powerful technologies to create new natural forms and destroy those that already exist. Moreover, while nature merely exists, human nature attributes moral significance to natural processes and in its constructive and deconstructive activities contributes to the “good” and “evil” it experiences in nature.

III. Jesus

Jesus—a Palestinian Jew of the first century who was executed by the ancient Romans—was a mediator of the sacred, a witty and ironic teacher of alternative wisdom, a subversive social critic, and the charismatic founder of a renewal movement (Marcus Borg). The God we trust is the sacred reality we see embodied in this Jesus. We read the stories of Jesus to learn the identity of God. His compassionate life, unjust death, and post-Easter presence shape a model of Christian life freed from self-absorption and paralyzing fear for courageous and hopeful engagement with the challenges of each new day.

II. Of Original Sin

Also they teach that since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They Condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

III. Of the Son of God

Also they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did assume the human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably enjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men

He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into heaven that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort, and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and

the power of sin.

The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

IV. God's View of Human Beings

We human beings can't be certain that other people will accept us unconditionally and remain committed to us and our well-being. We often need to win the approval of other people, even of our parents and other family members, by displaying good behavior and evidence of good character. But God loves and accepts every human being completely, unconditionally, and irreversibly, simply because we are God's own creation. Nothing that we think, say, or do can diminish or destroy God's inalienable commitment to us and our well-being, nor is there anything we need to think, say, or do to motivate or sustain God's love for us. Because we have nothing to fear from God, we are freed to focus our energies on the challenges and opportunities of life here and now.

V. Ministry

Because nature is inherently ambiguous, human beings will not, merely by observing nature directly, inevitably infer an abiding Compassion at the heart of things. Many have "seen" in nature only meaningless chaos or malevolent forces competing for dominance. The ministry of the Christian community is to offer through its words and actions its own vision, shaped by the story of Jesus, of a cosmos-in-process held within the care of a compassionate God, who loves, accepts, and sustains every creature, every human being without condition, without qualification, without limit.

IV. Of Justification

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. (Rom. 3 and 4)

V. Of the Ministry

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

VI. Goodness

Other animal species behave according to the instinctual regimen imposed on them genetically as an outcome of evolutionary development. Only human beings have the mental capacity to conceptualize moral options and the freedom—however limited—to will moral choices. To a limited degree we are constrained from behavior disapproved by society by the threat of punishment for violation of society's codes of behavior. But we learn the definition of "good" and "evil" by observing our elders, and we develop within ourselves the desire to be "good" and to do "good deeds," when we are treated so by our elders and have come to experience ourselves as safe, loved, and dependably provided for within their care and, ultimately, within the care of a compassionate, unconditionally loving God. "Goodness" cannot be legislated, commanded, or imposed; it can only be learned and caught from an environment characterized by goodness within a cosmos held by a good God.

VII. The Church

The Christian Church is the community of people who share together the stories of Jesus as their best clue to God's identity, who shape their lives by contemplating Jesus' compassionate life, unjust death, and post-Easter presence, and who live out their relationship to God and others within the framework of the Christian tradition. Uniformity of belief, understanding, lifestyle, and practice is not necessary to the unity of the Church.

VIII. The Character of the Church

Like all human beings, Christians are ambiguous, finite, and fallible works-in-

VI. Of New Obedience

Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10) The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: "It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone."

VII. Of the Church

Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. (Eph. 4:5,6)

VIII. What the Church Is

Although the Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers,

progress. The Church, therefore, makes no claims to intellectual, moral, or spiritual superiority, let alone perfection or even perfectibility. It candidly acknowledges its errors of interpretation, judgment, and practice and the limits of its knowledge, wisdom, and goodness. It promotes and encourages the ongoing challenge of critics within and without. It commits itself to a continuous process of re-evaluation, revision, reform, and renewal.

IX. Baptism

Baptism is the celebration in a Christian community of the unconditional love and acceptance that God gives to every creature. Through baptism, the identity of human beings as God's beloved children is enacted concretely and realized specifically for the baptized, empowering them for courageous and compassionate life in God's name.

X. Eucharist

The meal instituted by Jesus is performed among Christians to celebrate his life, death, and resurrection and to experience the presence of his enduring love and care within and among the members of the Christian community. Christians do not literally eat and drink Jesus' body and blood, but in their sharing of his meal many Christians do experience an extraordinary intimacy with him and reassurance of the love his life conveyed to all the world.

nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ: The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, etc. (Matt. 23:2) Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

IX. Of Baptism

Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God's grace.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.

X. Of the Lord's Supper

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise.

XI. Confession

When human beings feel the safety to disclose to another person without fear of condemnation, criticism, or reprisal, their most intimate thoughts and feelings and the behaviors—perhaps known only to them—of which they are frightened or ashamed, they are liberated from self-absorption in anxiety, guilt, and shame for a life more generously attentive to others. Therefore, Christians are encouraged to confess to other Christians whatever they have felt, thought, said, or done for which they experience fear, regret, remorse, shame, or guilt, so that they may receive from another person concrete confirmation of God's inalienable, dependable, and unconditional love and care specifically and explicitly for the ones who have made their confession.

XI. Of Confession

Of Confession they teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible according to the Psalm: Who can understand his errors? (Ps. 19:12)