

The Augsburg Confession

Translated from the German Text
Confession of Faith by Certain Princes
and Cities Presented to His Imperial Majesty
in Augsburg in the Year 1530.



The Augsburg Confession

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Preface

[1] Most serene, most mighty, invincible Emperor, most gracious Lord. A short time ago, Your Imperial Majesty graciously summoned an imperial diet to convene here in Augsburg. The summons indicated an earnest desire, first, to deliberate concerning matters pertaining to “the Turks, that hereditary foe of ours and of the Christian name,” and how this foe “might be effectively resisted with unwavering help”; [2] and second, to deliberate “and diligently to consider how we may act concerning the dissension in the holy faith and Christian religion and to hear, understand, and consider with love and graciousness everyone’s judgment, opinion, and beliefs among us, [3] to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth, and to lay aside whatever may not have been rightly interpreted or treated by either side, so that all of us can accept and preserve a single, true religion. [4] Inasmuch as we are all enlisted under one Christ, we are all to live together in one communion and in one church.” [5] Because we, the undersigned elector and princes, including our associates as well as other electors, princes, and estates, have been summoned for these purposes, we have complied and can say, without boasting, that we were among the first to arrive.⁶

[6] Moreover, Your Imperial Majesty graciously, most diligently, and earnestly desired, in reference to the most humble compliance with the summons and in conformity to it, as well as in the matters pertaining to the faith, that each of the electors, princes, and estates should commit to writing, in German and Latin, his judgments, opinions, and beliefs concerning said errors, dissensions, and abuses, etc. [7] Accordingly, after due consideration and counsel, it was proposed to Your Imperial Majesty last Wednesday that, in keeping with Your Majesty’s wish, we should present our case in German and Latin today, Friday.¹¹ [8] Wherefore, in most humble obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors’ and preachers’ teachings as well as of our faith, setting forth on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture what and in what manner they preach, teach, believe, and give instruction in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories.

[9] If the other electors, princes, and estates also submit a similar written statement of their judgments and opinions, in both Latin and German, [10] we are quite willing, in complete obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, our most gracious Lord, to discuss with them and their associates—as far as this can be done in fairness—such practical and equitable ways as may unite us. Thus, the matters at issue between the parties may be presented in writing on both sides; they may be negotiated charitably and amicably; and these same differences may be so explained as to unite us in one, true religion, [11] since we are all enlisted under one Christ and should confess Christ. All of this may be done in consequence of Your Imperial Majesty’s aforementioned summons and in accord with divine truth. We, therefore, invoke God Almighty in deepest humility and pray for the gift of his divine grace to this end. Amen!

[12] If, however, our lords, friends, and associates who represent the electors, princes, and estates of the other party, do not comply with the procedure intended by Your Imperial Majesty’s summons, so that no charitable and amicable negotiations take place among us, and if they are not fruitful, [13] we on our part shall not have failed in anything that can or may serve the cause of Christian unity, as far as God and conscience allow. [14] Your Imperial Majesty as well as our

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aforementioned friends, the electors, princes, estates, and every lover of the Christian religion who is concerned about these matters, will be graciously and sufficiently assured of this by what follows in the confession which we and our people submit.

[15] In the past, Your Imperial Majesty graciously intimated to the electors, princes, and estates of the empire, especially in a public instruction at the Diet of Speyer in the year 1526, that, for reasons there stated, [16] Your Imperial Majesty was not disposed to render a decision in matters pertaining to our holy faith, but would urge the pope to call a council. [17] Again, by means of a written instruction at the last diet in Speyer a year ago, the electors, princes, and estates were, among other things, [18] informed and notified by Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy, His Royal Majesty of Hungary and Bohemia, etc., and by Your Imperial Majesty's orator and appointed commissioners, "that Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy,¹⁸ deputy, and councilors of the imperial government, together with representatives of the absent electors, princes, and estates who were assembled at the diet convened at Regensburg,²⁰ had considered the proposal for a general council [19] and acknowledged that it would be fruitful to have one called. Since, then, the negotiations between Your Imperial Majesty and the pope resulted in a good, Christian understanding, so that Your Imperial Majesty was certain that the pope would not refuse to call such a council, [20] Your Imperial Majesty graciously offered to promote and arrange for the calling of such a general council by the pope, along with Your Imperial Majesty, at the earliest opportunity without putting any obstacles in the way."

[21] In this case, therefore, we offer in full obedience to Your Imperial Majesty even beyond what is required: to participate in such a general, free, Christian council, as the electors, princes, and estates have requested, with high and noble motives, in all the diets of the empire that have been held during Your Imperial Majesty's reign. [22] We also have, following legal form and procedure, called upon and appealed to such a council and to Your Imperial Majesty at various times concerning these most important matters. [23] We now once again adhere to these actions, and neither these nor any subsequent negotiations shall make us waver (unless the matters in dissension are in a charitable and friendly manner finally heard, considered, settled, and result in Christian unity, according to Your Imperial Majesty's summons), [24] as we herewith make public witness and appeal. This is our confession and that of our people, article by article, as follows.

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Articles of Faith and Doctrine

[I. Concerning God]

[1] In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea, [2] that there is one divine essence which is named God and truly is God. [3] But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. [4] What is understood by the word “person” is not a part nor a quality in another but that which exists by itself, as the Fathers once used the word concerning this issue.

[5] Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article, such as the Manichaeans, who posited two gods, one good and one evil; the Valentinians,³¹ the Arians, the Eunomians,³³ the Mohammedans, and all others like them; also the Samosatensians, old and new,³⁵ [6] who hold that there is only one person and create a deceitful sophistry about the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, by saying that the two need not be two distinct persons since “Word” means an external word or voice and the “Holy Spirit” is a created motion in all creatures.

[II. Concerning Original Sin]

[1] Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. [2] Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

[3] Rejected, then, are the Pelagians and others who do not regard original sin as sin in order to make human nature righteous through natural powers, thus insulting the suffering and merit of Christ.

[III. Concerning the Son of God]

[1] Likewise, it is taught that God the Son became a human being, born of the pure Virgin Mary, [2] and that the two natures, the divine and the human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ. He is true God and true human being who truly [3] “was born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to conciliate God’s wrath. [4] Moreover, the same Christ “descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, is sitting at the right hand of God” in order to rule and reign forever over all creatures, [5] so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, [6] and shield and protect them against the devil and sin. Finally, the same Lord Christ “will come” in full view of all “to judge the living and the dead ...,” according to the Apostles’ Creed. *Rejected are all heresies that are opposed to this article.*⁴²

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[IV. Concerning Justification]

[1] Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith [2] when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. [3] For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26*] and 4[:5*].

[V. Concerning the Office of Preaching]

[1] To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. [2] Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. [3] It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

[4] Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external⁴⁹ word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.

[VI. Concerning the New Obedience]

[1] It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God. [2] For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says [Luke 17:10*]: "When you have done all [things] ..., say, 'We are worthless slaves.'" [3] The Fathers also teach the same thing. For Ambrose says: "It is determined by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved and have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit."

[VII. Concerning the Church]

[1] It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

[2] For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. [3] It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. [4] As Paul says in Ephesians 4[:4–5*]: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

[VIII. What Is the Church?]

[1] Likewise, although the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous, [2] the sacraments—even though administered by

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unrighteous priests—are efficacious all the same. For as Christ himself indicates [Matt. 23:2–3*]: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat....”

[3] Condemned, therefore, are the Donatists and all others who hold a different view.

[IX. Concerning Baptism]

[1–2] Concerning baptism it is taught that it is necessary, that grace is offered through it, and that one should also baptize children, who through such baptism are entrusted to God and become pleasing to him.

[3] Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the baptism of children is not right.

[X. Concerning the Lord’s Supper]

[1] Concerning the Lord’s Supper it is taught that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper and are distributed and received there. [2] Rejected, therefore, is also the contrary teaching.

[XI. Concerning Confession]

[1] Concerning confession it is taught that private absolution should be retained and not abolished. However, it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sins,⁶⁴ [2] since it is not possible to do so. Psalm 19[12*]: “But who can detect their errors?”

[XII. Concerning Repentance]

[1] Concerning repentance it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance [2] and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. [3] Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than [4] to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin, [5] and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace. [6] Then improvement should also follow, and a person should refrain from sins. For these should be the fruits of repentance, as John says in Matthew 3[:8*]: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

[7] Rejected here are those who teach that whoever has once become righteous cannot fall again.

[9] However, also condemned are the Novatians, who denied absolution to those who had sinned after baptism.

[10] Also rejected are those who do not teach that a person obtains forgiveness of sin through faith but through our own satisfactions.

*Also rejected are those who teach that “canonical satisfactions” are necessary to pay for eternal torment or purgatory.*⁷⁴

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[XIII. Concerning the Use of Sacraments]

[1] Concerning the use of sacraments it is taught that the sacraments are instituted not only to be signs by which people may recognize Christians outwardly, but also as signs and testimonies of God's will toward us in order thereby to awaken and strengthen our faith. [2] That is why they also require faith and are rightly used when received in faith for the strengthening of faith.

[3] *Rejected, therefore, are those who teach that the sacraments justify ex opere operato without faith and who do not teach that this faith should be added so that the forgiveness of sin (which is obtained through faith and not through work) may be offered there.*

[XIV. Concerning Church Government]

Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.

[XV. Concerning Church Regulations]

[1] Concerning church regulations made by human beings, it is taught to keep those that may be kept without sin and that serve to maintain peace and good order in the church, such as specific celebrations, festivals, etc. [2] However, people are also instructed not to burden consciences with them as if such things were necessary for salvation. [3] Moreover, it is taught that all rules and traditions made by human beings for the purpose of appeasing God and of earning grace are contrary to the gospel and the teaching concerning faith in Christ. [4] That is why monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of foods, days, and the like, through which people imagine they can earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel.

[XVI. Concerning Public Order and Secular Government]

[1] Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God [2] and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority; be princes and judges; pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws; punish evildoers with the sword; wage just wars; serve as soldiers; buy and sell; take required oaths; possess property; be married; etc.

[3] Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.

[4] Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection means physically leaving house and home, spouse and child, and refraining from the above-mentioned activities. In fact, the only true perfection is true fear of God and true faith in God. For the gospel teaches an internal, eternal reality and righteousness of the heart, not an external, temporal one. [5] The gospel does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God and demonstrate in these walks of life Christian love and true good works according to each person's calling. [6] Christians, therefore, are obliged to be subject to political authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that may be done without sin. [7]

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But if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5[:29*]).

[XVII. Concerning the Return of Christ to Judgment]

[1] It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, [2] to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, [3] but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.

[4] Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devils and condemned human beings will not suffer eternal torture and torment.

[5] Likewise rejected are some Jewish teachings, which have also appeared in the present, that before the resurrection of the dead saints and righteous people alone will possess a secular kingdom and will annihilate all the ungodly.

[XVIII. Concerning Free Will]

[1] Concerning free will it is taught that a human being has some measure of free will, so as to live an externally honorable life and to choose among the things reason comprehends. [2] However, without the grace, help, and operation of the Holy Spirit a human being cannot become pleasing to God, fear or believe in God with the whole heart, or expel innate evil lusts from the heart. [3] Instead, this happens through the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God. For Paul says (1 Cor. 2[:14*]): “Those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit.”⁹⁴

[4] In order that it may be recognized that nothing new is taught here, these are the clear words of Augustine concerning free will, quoted here from the third book of the *Hypognosticon*: “We confess that there is a free will in all human beings. For all have a natural, innate mind and reason—not that they can act in matters pertaining to God, such as loving or fearing God with their whole heart—but they do have the freedom to choose good or evil only in the external works of this life. [5] By ‘good’ I mean what can be done by nature: whether to work in the field or not, whether to eat and drink, whether to visit a friend or not, to dress or undress, to build a home, to marry, to engage in a trade, and to do whatever may be useful and good. [6] To be sure, all of this neither exists nor endures without God, but everything is from him and through him. On the other hand, a human being can by personal choice do evil, such as to kneel before an idol, commit murder, and the like.”

[8] *Rejected here are those who teach that we can keep the commandments of God without grace and the Holy Spirit. For although we are by nature able to do the external works of the commandments, yet we cannot do the supreme commandments in the heart, namely, truly to fear, love, and believe in God.*

[XIX. Concerning the Cause of Sin]

Concerning the cause of sin it is taught among us that although almighty God has created and preserves all of nature, nevertheless the perverted will causes sin in all those who are evil and despise God. This, then, is the will of the devil and of all the ungodly. As soon as God withdrew his hand, it turned from God to malice, as Christ says (John 8[:44*]): “When [the devil] lies, he speaks according to his own nature.”⁹⁷

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[XX.] Concerning Faith and Good Works

[1–2] Our people are falsely accused of prohibiting good works. But their writings concerning the Decalogue and other writings demonstrate that they have given good and useful account and admonition concerning proper Christian walks of life and works, [3] about which little had been taught before our time. Instead, for the most part childish, unnecessary works—such as rosaries, the cult of the saints, joining religious orders, pilgrimages, appointed fasts, holy days, brotherhoods, and the like—were emphasized in all sermons. [4] Our opponents also no longer praise such unnecessary works as highly as they once did. [5] Moreover, they have also learned to speak now of faith, about which they did not preach at all in former times. [6] Rather, they now teach that we do not become righteous before God by works alone, but they add faith in Christ, saying that faith and works make us righteous before God. [7] Such talk may offer a little more comfort than the teaching that one should rely on works alone.

[8] Because at present the teaching concerning faith, which is the principal part of the Christian life, has not been emphasized for such a long time, as all must admit, but only a doctrine of works was preached everywhere, our people have taught as follows:

[9] In the first place, our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace. Instead, this happens through faith alone when a person believes that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator to reconcile the Father. [10] Now all who imagine that they can accomplish this by works and can merit grace despise Christ and seek their own way to God contrary to the gospel.

[11] This teaching about faith is publicly and clearly treated in Paul at many places, especially in Ephesians 2[:8–9*]: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast....”

[12–13] That no new interpretation is introduced here can be demonstrated from Augustine, who diligently deals with this matter and also teaches that we obtain grace and become righteous before God through faith in Christ, and not through works. His whole book *On the Spirit and the Letter* proves it.

[15] Now although untested people despise this teaching completely, it is nevertheless the case that it is very comforting and beneficial for timid and terrified consciences. For the conscience cannot find rest and peace through works but by faith alone, when it concludes on its own with certainty that it has a gracious God for Christ's sake, [16] as Paul says (Rom. 5[:1*]): “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.”

[19] In former times people did not emphasize this comfort but instead drove the poor consciences to their own works. As a result, all sorts of works were undertaken. [20] For the conscience forced some into monasteries, in the hope of obtaining grace there through the monastic life. [21] Some devised other works as a way of earning grace and making satisfaction for sins. Many of them discovered that a person could not obtain peace by such means. [22] That is why it became necessary to preach this teaching concerning faith in Christ and diligently to emphasize it, so that each person may know that God's grace is grasped by faith alone, without merit.

[23] We must also explain that we are not talking here about the faith possessed by the devil and the ungodly, who also believe the story that Christ suffered and was raised from the dead. But we are talking about true faith, which believes that we obtain grace and forgiveness of sin through Christ.

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[24] All who know that in Christ they have a gracious God call upon him and are not, like the heathen, without God. [25] For the devil and the ungodly do not believe this article about the forgiveness of sin. That is why they are enemies of God, cannot call upon him, and cannot hope for anything good from him. Moreover, as has now been indicated, Scripture talks about faith but does not label it knowledge such as the devil and the ungodly have. For Hebrews 11[:1*] teaches that faith is not only a matter of historical knowledge, but a matter of having confidence in God to receive his promise. [26] Augustine also reminds us that we should understand the word “faith” in Scripture to mean confidence in God—that God is gracious to us—and not merely such knowledge of these stories as the devils also have.

[27] Further, it is taught that good works should and must be done, not that a person relies on them to earn grace, but for God’s sake and to God’s praise. [28–29] Faith alone always takes hold of grace and forgiveness of sin. Because the Holy Spirit is given through faith, the heart is also moved to do good works. [31] For before, because it lacks the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak. [32] Moreover, it is in the power of the devil who drives our poor human nature to many sins, [33] as we observe in the philosophers who tried to live honestly and blamelessly, but then failed to do so and fell into many great, public sins. [34] That is what happens to human beings when they are separated from true faith, are without the Holy Spirit, and govern themselves through their own human strength alone.

[35] That is why this teaching concerning faith is not to be censured for prohibiting good works. On the contrary, it should be praised for teaching the performance of good works and for offering help as to how they may be done. [36] For without faith and without Christ human nature and human power are much too weak to do good works: [37] such as to call on God, to have patience in suffering, to love the neighbor, to engage diligently in legitimate callings, to be obedient, to avoid evil lust, etc. [38] Such lofty and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, [39] as he himself says in John 15[:5*]: “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

[XXI. Concerning the Cult of the Saints]

[1] Concerning the cult of the saints our people teach that the saints are to be remembered so that we may strengthen our faith when we see how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith. Moreover, it is taught that each person, according to his or her calling, should take the saints’ good works as an example. For instance, His Imperial Majesty, in a salutary and righteous fashion, may follow the example of David in waging war against the Turk. For both hold a royal office that demands defense and protection of their subjects. [2] However, it cannot be demonstrated from Scripture that a person should call upon the saints or seek help from them. “For there is only one single reconciler and mediator set up between God and humanity, Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 2[:5*]).¹¹⁷ He is the only savior, the only high priest, the mercy seat, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8[:34*]). [3] He alone has promised to hear our prayers. According to Scripture, in all our needs and concerns it is the highest worship to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ with our whole heart. [4] “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous ...” [1 John 2:1*].

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[Conclusion of Part One]

[1] This is nearly a complete summary of what is preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction and the comfort of consciences, as well as for the improvement of believers. For we certainly wish neither to expose our own souls and consciences to grave danger before God by misusing the divine name or Word nor to pass on or bequeath to our children and descendants any other teaching than that which accords with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since, then, this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and is, moreover, neither against nor contrary to the universal Christian church—or even the Roman church—so far as can be observed in the writings of the Fathers,¹²⁰ we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above. That is why those who undertake to isolate, reject, and avoid our people as heretics, without having themselves any solid basis in divine command or Scripture, act in a very unfriendly and hasty manner, contrary to all Christian unity and love. [2] For the dissension and quarrel are chiefly over some traditions and abuses. Since, then, there is nothing unfounded or deficient in the principal articles and since this our confession is godly and Christian, the bishops should in all fairness act more leniently even if there were a deficiency in regard to tradition—although we hope to offer solid grounds and reasons why some traditions and abuses have been changed among us.¹

¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). [*The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*](#) (pp. 30–60). Fortress Press.