

**December:** The Creed (Book of Concord, pp. 431-440)

For Luther, one comes to *know* God by receiving with joy and thanksgiving His gifts, up to and including especially the gift of a share in His own eternal life of Triune community through union with Jesus Christ. The Creed tells us “what we are to *know*” about God, since knowledge is power, and the power in question is the power to become children of the heavenly Father in union with the Son and so to live as beloved children of God. To be sure, this is no ordinary knowledge which in its scientific objectivity brackets out the subjectivity of the person who knows. Rather, it is extraordinary knowledge which gives the object of knowledge, Jesus Christ and the Triune God, by impartation of the Spirit of God forming a new subjectivity. The Spirit works trusting faith in Christ in His personal promise to be there for us; the Spirit does this by way working a joyful exchange of human sin for Christ’s righteousness. In just this way of an extraordinary nuptial of Christ and faith the Spirit transforms the human subject.[1][1] That yields the Hebrew kind of *knowledge* of God imparted to faith – “a mighty, living active thing” -- just as Spirit-given faith is operative in love.

For centuries the Apostles’ Creed had been divided into twelve articles, each one supposedly having been contributed by the one of the original twelve apostles so that they would have uniform doctrinal statement before setting out on separate ways. It is interesting to reflect on the hermeneutical supposition involved in this artificial organization of the Creed into twelve parts; such reflection helps us to appreciate all the more Luther’s retrieval of the original baptismal context and thus the Trinitarian structure of the Creed. The twelvefold division reflected a concern for the authority of a linguistically uniform formulation of the faith, historically grounded in the supposed fact of an original apostolic consensus. The idea was that whatever local customs and diverging vocabularies or theological conceptualities developed later on, the original faith of the apostles is available as a standard clearly enunciated in the Creed. This concern for mere authority and merely linguistic uniformity invested in the exact formulations of the Creed, however, does not correspond to historical reality. Nor does it actually appreciate the Creed’s true contribution: defining Christian faith as baptism by Spirit-given union with the Son into the eternal life of the Triune God.

The Apostles’ Creed, derived from the old Roman baptismal creed, became the standard liturgical Creed in the Western Latin churches because of its role in the conversion of human subjectivity that takes place in sacramental baptism. The threefold profession is made of the Father who sends, the Son who is sent and the Holy Spirit who unites the believer with the Son sent from the Father by repentance and faith, to live before Him now and forever. By this narrative summation, the Creed articulates the unity of creation, redemption and fulfillment, as Luther sets it against every form of Gnostic dualism (including the modern dualism of the spheres of creation and redemption that Bonhoeffer attacked): “God has created us for no other reason than to redeem us and bring us to Himself.” With this dynamic Trinitarian unity of the testaments, Luther frames the preaching of God’s Word as law and gospel by the Pauline purpose clause: “God has consigned all to sin in order to have mercy on all.”

With its 1<sup>st</sup> personal pronoun, “I believe” (in distinction from the “We believe” of the Nicene Creed) the Apostles’ Creed works to reinforce the ongoing baptismal transformation of the believing subject as one who has died with Christ to sin to rise up daily to newness of life. Thus,

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[1][1] Dennis Ngien, “Theology and Practice of Prayer in Luther’s Devotional and Catechetical Writings,” pp. 52-56.

in Luther's exposition, the individualizing *pro me* ("for me") nature of appropriating faith is continually underscored: "I believe that God has created *me*... I believe that Jesus Christ is *my* saving Lord... I believe that the Holy Spirit has called *me* by the gospel..." (The "we" of the Nicene Creed, by contrast, works to identify communities of faith united in the confession of the true and full deity of the Son, "of one being with the Father;" it is an ecclesial creed that reflects an ongoing decision for orthodoxy and against the Arian heresy).

Sometimes nowadays it is urged that Luther, unlike Melanchthon, had no use for a so-called Third Use of the Law, i.e. not only to curb sin politically or to reveal sin theologically but positively to guide the believer in newness of life. Whatever subtleties involved here in the differences between Luther and Melanchthon (and Calvin), Luther cannot be more explicit than the Creed, telling us what God does for us and gives to us, enables us to fulfill the Ten Commandments. The reason has to do with the aforementioned unity of the Testaments. For there is only "one, true God," so that all that God does for us in the Creed cannot but return us to the First Commandment. The First Commandment, in turn, can function as demand ("Have no other gods") or promise ("I am the LORD your God"), depending upon the context. Luther expounds the First Article of the Creed to bring out its deep correspondence to the First Commandment: we are to have no other gods *because* only the One who is creator of all that is other than Himself can *truly* help in every time of need. We should learn from the First Article, then, that no one has life in and of herself, but instead that each and every life is given, nurtured and preserved in God's continuous act of creating. If we realized this, we would see that we are duty bound to acknowledge our continuing dependence on God along with our interdependence with God's creatures in praise and thankful obedience to this heavenly Father's good will. To live accordingly we would love God above all and all creatures in and under God. Just so, Luther notes, "if we believed this article it would terrify us," exposing our human failure and driving us onto to God's further works of redemption and fulfillment.

Why would it "terrify" us? Believing is not merely holding theoretically to the beliefs listed in the Creed, but using these beliefs knowledgably (as we said at the outset) to interpret one's experience, so that love and desire for God who gives all things is kindled in the heart. But in fact, we are full of doubts and fears, resignation and apathy, always on the cusp of spiritual despair. Taken seriously, taken existentially, taken *pro me* all the way down to the core of one's being, we come by way of these beliefs to the terrifying insight that our actual lives of unbelief rob God of the praise we owe Him, just as they rob neighbors of the love they need from us and deprive the world of the hope we ought to have for it.

But how can love for God who gives in continuous creation be kindled in the heart that is thus alienated and, if truthfully self-aware, terrified? Only by turning to the Second Article, telling of the heavenly Father's Son, who completely gives Himself to me, the helpless sinner, in order to become my saving or redeeming or liberating Lord. Luther holds together all three of the traditional accounts of the saving work of Christ (satisfaction of God's wrath, liberation from demonic powers, and moral example) and weaves them together into a whole. He does not pit one motif against the others. Christ is our liberator from the demons, reconciler with God and the trail-blazing pioneer for us to follow as disciplined children of God, "disciples." "In Christ God

shows Himself as He really is and breaks through the ambiguous (promising or threatening) image that is pending about Him in the Commandments.”[2][2]

Certainly, in this interlocking whole of New Testament teachings about the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Luther puts the price Christ paid with his “holy, innocent and precious blood” at the center; this is the costly cost paid by the humble Son of God for what I, the proud creature, owed. Christ fulfilled and indeed surpassed the law by loving God above all in obediently loving unworthy sinners more than Himself. This sacrifice of atonement is the Christological basis, Luther avers, of the Reformation’s doctrine of justification by faith. Christ gives us His righteousness only by taking on Himself our sinfulness. Only in this “joyful exchange” am I turned from my faithless, loveless, hopeless self-absorption to an new ex-static, ec-centric existence that lives in joyful faith before God the heavenly Father and Spirit-charged love for all in need. Sustained in Romans 8 hope for this groaning earth to which Christ will come for the “redemption of our bodies,” believers look beyond the sufferings of this present time to the coming of the earth’s merciful and eternal King at His Parousia.

For this perseverance in hope, not least of Christ’s gifts is His own messianic Spirit, who first led Him through the cross to the crown and who now makes believers *Christ-ians*, i.e., Luther’s “little Christs,” priestly mediators of God redeeming love to the world as they die to self to rise in newness of life. There is a Trinitarian reciprocity at work here. The Son obtains us by His life’s oblation; the Spirit brings us to fulfillment by preaching the Son to us, telling what He has done for us. The persons and their works are distinguishable yet inseparable. Hence, where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to sanctify by granting faith and newness of life. And where the Holy Spirit is not given, Christ remains a distant historical exemplar or a heavenly ideal with no power to change us. Moreover, there are many kinds of spirits, Luther notes, each with its own agenda. But only the Spirit of the Father and the Son is Holy, that is, the One who sanctifies believers by uniting them with Christ to live before God the heavenly Father. Accordingly, *knowing* Christians are to *test* the spirits, to see whether they are of “the one, true God.”

The Holy Spirit first leads us, Luther notes with emphasis, into His holy community, there to preach, offer, bestow, and apply Christ to us. The holy community is not the building, but the unique people in the world, the “little flock” of the Good Shepherd, or, as I like to put, the *beloved community*. As the Spirit gave Mary to conceive of Christ, so the Spirit gives the ecclesia to be the “mother” of all believers, who conceives and bears every believer by the Word of God.

So Luther describes personal conversion not as a secret, inward, private event that then looks out to associate with the like-minded or like-feeling in a self-selected religious club. Rather, he thinks of the holy community of the Holy Spirit, the divinely given mediator who creates believers by the Word and sacraments. In this precise sense, Luther affirms that outside the ecclesia there is no salvation, i.e. outside the external Word and its public community by which the Spirit works, there is no saving transformation of the human subject in conformity with Jesus Christ. But here believers bear with one other, forgiving as they have been forgiven.

Of course, this “exclusivity” raises for us today the problem of religious pluralism and public tolerance. Since for Luther faith must be free to be faith at all, we have a resource (endorsed by

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[2][2] Klaas Zwanepol, “The Structure and Dynamics of Luther’s Catechism,” *Acta Theologica* 2011 31/2 p. 404.

Rome for modern times in the Second Vatican Council) for endorsing religious tolerance. But we also have a mandate to be truthful about *differences*; genuine differences are the very presupposition of religious tolerance and the political need for it. Unless we are to think that salvation is conceived identically in the world religions --it is *not*; that is the *very* reason why the religions are *different*!—it is simply analytical true, true “by definition,” that there is no union with Christ for eternal life in the Trinity outside the ecclesia. With this clarity of mind and forthright truthfulness, we come to a genuine knowledge of different “salvations” on offer in the world. That is the real difference that divides religions as distinct communities in the world. On this level, what we can rather hope for is “achieving disagreement” in which hearing the other’s critique conduces to humility.

And that brings us back to Luther. Luther stresses that the ecclesia actually has a peculiar, paradoxical righteousness. Its virtue is that sins are confessed rather than protested. Here mutual forbearance rather than self-righteous grandstanding prevail. The reason is that believers are still in process, *homo viator*, pilgrims trekking through the wilderness, on the way but not yet arrived. Their newness of life is only partial. For they are still organically connected by their participation in the common body to structures of malice and injustice that continue to infiltrate their newborn subjectivities and attempt to prevail over them. Thus battle of the Spirit against the flesh commences on baptism day to conclude on resurrection day. In the interim, the life in the holy community is struggle and resistance, until all things are made new. To persevere in this struggle, the catechism next gives from words from the Lord’s own lips that daily implore the victory of God’s reign.

[The series takes a January break and returns in February with Luther’s commentary on the Lord’s Prayer].

## Second Part: The Creed (p. 431-440)

Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian teaching, and in it we have seen all that God wishes us to do and not to do. The Creed properly follows, which sets forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in short, it teaches us to know him perfectly. It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us. For, as we said above, they are set so high that all human ability is far too puny and weak to keep them. Therefore it is just as necessary to learn this part as it is the other so that we may know where and how to obtain the power to do this. If we were able by our own strength to keep the Ten Commandments as they ought to be kept, we would need nothing else, neither the Creed nor the Lord’s Prayer. But before we explain the usefulness and necessity of the Creed, it is enough, as a first step, for very simple people to learn to grasp and understand the Creed itself.

In the first place, the Creed used to be divided into twelve articles. Of course, if all the elements contained in Scripture and belonging to the Creed were gathered together, there would be many more articles, nor could they all be clearly expressed in so few words. But to make it most clear and simple for teaching to children, we shall briefly sum up the entire Creed in three main articles, according to the three persons of the Godhead, to whom everything that we believe is related. Thus the first article, concerning God the Father, explains creation; the second, concerning the Son, redemption; the third, concerning the Holy Spirit, being made holy. Hence the Creed could be briefly condensed to these few words: "I believe in God the Father, who created me; I believe in God the Son, who has redeemed me; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who makes me holy." One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore also three articles or confessions. Let us comment briefly on these words.

### *The First Article*

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, CREATOR of heaven and earth . . ."

This is the shortest possible way of describing and illustrating the nature, will, acts, and work of God the Father. Because the Ten Commandments have explained that we are to have no more than one God, so it may now be asked: "What kind of person is God? What does he do? How can we praise or portray or describe him in such a way so we may know him?" This is taught here and in the following articles. Thus the Creed is nothing else than a response and confession of Christians based on the First Commandment. If you were to ask a young child, "My dear, what kind of God do you have? What do you know about him?" he or she could say: "First, my God is the Father, who made heaven and earth. Aside from this one alone I regard nothing as God, for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth."

For the highly educated and those somewhat more well informed, however, all three articles can be treated more fully and divided into as many parts as there are words. But for the young pupils it is now enough to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article deals with creation. We should emphasize the words "creator of heaven and earth." What is meant by these words or what do you mean when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator," etc.? Answer: I hold and believe that I am God's creature, that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding, and the like; my food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, servants, house and farm, etc. Besides, he makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life—sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; day and night; air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; birds, fish, animals, grain, and all sorts of produce. Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has life—or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned—from ourselves, nor can we by ourselves preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All this is comprehended in the word "Creator."

Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes, but also that he daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us. But further discussion of this subject belongs in the other two parts of this article, where it says, "Father almighty."

Hence, because everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given, sustained, and protected by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

Here much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator.

Therefore, if we believe it, this article should humble and terrify all of us. For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and with all that we have, especially those who even fight against the Word of God. Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge that they owe it to God to serve and obey him for all these things.

For this reason we ought daily to practice this article, impress it upon our minds, and remember it in everything we see and in every blessing that comes our way. Whenever we escape distress or danger, we should recognize how God gives and does all of this so that we may sense and see in them his fatherly heart and his boundless love toward us. Thus our hearts will be warmed and kindled with gratitude to God and a desire to use all these blessings to his glory and praise.

Such, very briefly, is the meaning of this article. It is all that ordinary people need to learn at first, both about what we have and receive from God and about what we owe him in return. This is knowledge of great significance, but an even greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given to us himself with all creation and has abundantly provided for us in this life, apart from the fact that he has also showered us with inexpressible eternal blessings through his Son and the Holy Spirit, as we shall hear.

### *The Second Article*

“And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our LORD. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary the virgin. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father almighty. From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

Here we get to know the second person of the Godhead, and we see what we have from God over and above the temporal goods mentioned above, namely, how he has given himself completely to us, withholding nothing. This article is very rich and far-reaching, but in order to treat it briefly for children, we shall take up one phrase and in it grasp the substance of the article so that everyone may learn from it, as we have said, how we are redeemed. We shall concentrate on these words, “in Jesus Christ, our LORD.”

If anyone asks, “What do you believe in the second article about Jesus Christ?” answer as briefly as possible, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord.” What is it “to become a lord”? It means that he has redeemed and released me from sin, from the devil,

from death, and from all misfortune. Before this I had no lord or king, but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness.

For when we were created by God the Father and had received from him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all misfortune. As a result, we lay under God's wrath and displeasure, sentenced to eternal damnation, as we had merited it and deserved it. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us because of our misery and distress and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers have now been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, righteousness, and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace. As his own possession he has taken us under his protection and shelter, in order that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.

Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word "LORD" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there. The remaining parts of this article simply serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished—that is, how much it cost Christ and what he paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under his dominion. That is to say, he became a human creature, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, so that he might become Lord over sin; moreover, he suffered, died, and was buried so that he might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owed, not with silver and gold but with his own precious blood. And he did all this so that he might become my LORD. For he did none of these things for himself, nor had he any need of them. Afterward he rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father. The devil and all his powers must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the Last Day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc.

But the proper place to explain all these different points is not in the brief children's sermon, but rather the longer sermons throughout the whole year, especially at the times appointed<sup>136</sup> for dealing at length with such articles as Christ's birth, passion, resurrection, ascension, etc. Indeed, the entire gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully.

### *The Third Article*

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the community of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and the life everlasting. Amen."

To this article, as I have said, I cannot give a better title than "Being Made Holy." In it are expressed and portrayed the Holy Spirit and his office, which is that he makes us holy. Therefore, we must concentrate on the term "HOLY SPIRIT," because it is so precise that we can find no substitute for it. Many other kinds of spirits are mentioned in Scripture, such as the human spirit, heavenly spirits,<sup>139</sup> and the evil spirit. But God's Spirit alone is called a Holy Spirit, that is, the one who has made us holy and still makes us holy. As the Father is called a Creator and the Son is called a Redeemer, so on account of his work the Holy Spirit must be called a Sanctifier, or one who makes us holy. How does such sanctifying take place? Answer: Just as the Son obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc.,

so the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That is, he first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as Lord, unless these were 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 so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not remain buried but be 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, this redemption. Therefore being made holy is nothing else than bringing us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, to which we could not have come by ourselves.

Learn this article, then, as clearly as possible. If someone asks, What do you mean by the words "I believe in the Holy Spirit"? you can answer, "I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as his name states." How does he do this, or what are his ways and means? Answer: "Through the Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." In the first place, he has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.

Where he does not cause it to be preached and does not awaken the understanding of it in the heart, all is lost, as happened under the papacy, where faith was swept completely under the rug and no one recognized Christ as the Lord or the Holy Spirit as the one who makes us holy. That is, no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that he won such a treasure for us without our works and merits and made us acceptable to the Father. What was lacking there? There was no Holy Spirit present to reveal this truth and have it preached. Rather, it was human beings and evil spirits who were there, who taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. Therefore there was no Christian church. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ. Let this be enough about the substance of this article. But because the parts enumerated in it are not quite clear to the common people, we shall run through them briefly.

The Creed calls the holy Christian church a *communio sanctorum*, "a communion<sup>145</sup> of saints." Both expressions have the same meaning. In earlier days the phrase was not included, and it is odd and not understandable when put into German. If we were to render it clearly, we would have to speak quite differently in German. The word *ecclesia* properly means nothing but an assembly in German. But we are accustomed to using the word *Kirche*, which the common people understand not as an assembled group of people, but as a consecrated house or building. But the house would not be called a church if it were not for the single reason that the group of people come together in it. For we who come together choose a special place and give the house its name because of this group. Thus the word "church" really means nothing else than a common assembly and is not of German but of Greek origin, like the word *ecclesia*. In that language the word is *kyria*, and in Latin *curia*. Therefore, in our mother tongue and in good German it ought to be called "a Christian community or assembly,"<sup>150</sup> or best and most clearly of all, "a holy Christian people."



Likewise, the word *communio*, which is attached to it, should not be translated “communion” but rather “community.” It is nothing but a comment or interpretation by which someone wished to explain what the Christian church is. But some among our people, who understand neither Latin nor German, have rendered it “communion of saints,”<sup>153</sup> although no German would talk that way or understand it. To speak proper German we ought to say “a community of saints,” that is, a community that is composed only of saints, or, still more clearly, “a holy community.”<sup>155</sup> This I say in order that the word might be understood; it has become so established in usage that it cannot well be uprooted, and it would be next to heresy to alter a word.

This is the meaning and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God’s Word, which is the beginning point for entering it. Before we had come into this community, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. The Holy Spirit will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces.

Further we believe that in this Christian community we have the forgiveness of sins, which takes place through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire gospel. This encompasses everything that is to be preached about the sacraments and, in short, the entire gospel and all the official responsibilities of the Christian community. Forgiveness is constantly needed, for although God’s grace has been acquired by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet we are never without sin because we carry our flesh around our neck.

Therefore everything in this Christian community is so ordered that everyone may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs appointed to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live on earth. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are a part of this Christian community. Here there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.

Outside this Christian community, however, where there is no gospel, there is also no forgiveness, and hence there also can be no holiness. Therefore, all who would seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from this community.

Meanwhile, because holiness has begun and is growing daily, we await the time when our flesh will be put to death, will be buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously and arise to complete and perfect holiness in a new, eternal life. Now, however, we remain only halfway pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must always work in us through the Word, granting us daily forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness. In that life there will be only perfectly pure and holy people, full of integrity and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all misfortune, living in new, immortal, and glorified bodies.

All this, then, is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, to begin and daily increase holiness on earth through these two means, the Christian church and the forgiveness of sins. Then, when

we pass from this life, in the blink of an eye he will perfect our holiness and will eternally preserve us in it through the last two parts of this article.

The phrase “resurrection of the flesh,” however, is also not good German. For when we hear the word *Fleisch*<sup>160</sup> we think no farther than the butcher shop. In proper German we would say “resurrection of the body.” However, this is not of great importance, as long as the words are rightly understood.

This, then, is the article that must always remain in force. For creation is now behind us, and redemption has also taken place, but the Holy Spirit continues his work without ceasing until the Last Day, and for this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all his work. For he has not yet gathered together all of this Christian community, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness. Therefore we believe in him who daily brings us into this community through the Word, and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins. Then when his work has been finished and we abide in it, having died to the world and all misfortune, he will finally make us perfectly and eternally holy. Now we wait in faith for this to be accomplished through the Word.

Here in the Creed you have the entire essence, will, and work of God exquisitely depicted in very brief but rich words. In them are comprehended all our wisdom, which surpasses all human wisdom, understanding, and reason. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God might be and what he might think and do, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and, moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has also given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. For, as explained above, we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the LORD Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

These three articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites—even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God—nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and condemnation. For they do not have the LORD Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

From this you see that the Creed is a very different teaching than the Ten Commandments. For the latter teach us what we ought to do, but the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us. The Ten Commandments, moreover, are written in the hearts of all people, but no human wisdom is able to comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. Therefore the Ten Commandments do not succeed in making us Christians, for God’s wrath and displeasure still remain upon us because we cannot fulfill what God demands of us. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts.

This is enough now concerning the Creed to lay a foundation for ordinary people without overburdening them. After they understand the substance of it, they may on their own initiative learn more, relating to these teachings all that they learn in the Scriptures, and thus continue to advance and grow in understanding. For as long as we live we shall have enough here in the Creed to preach and learn.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 431–440). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.