

• Chief Articles of Faith •

Council of Nicaea—The first general council of the church, held in A.D. 325 in the city of Nicaea (in present-day Turkey). More than three hundred bishops discussed various issues, especially condemning the teachings of an Egyptian named Arius, who taught that Jesus was a lesser God than the Father. Our Nicene Creed is named after that meeting. In its present form, it dates to 381.

Manicheans—Followers of a religion of Persian origin that said there were two competing gods, one good and one evil.

Valentinians—Early heretics who combined Christian ideas about God and creation with secret mystical ideas referred to as Gnosticism.

Arians—Followers of Arius (see Council of Nicaea above).

Eunomians—Fourth century heretics who believed Jesus and God were almost totally unlike each other.

Muslims—Followers of Mohammed are also included here since they deny the Trinity.

Paul of Samosata—Another early heretic. He denied that Jesus was eternal.

Pelagius—A heretic who lived about A.D. 400. He denied that Adam's sin was passed down to his descendants. Therefore, a person could become sinless if he tried hard enough.

Article 1: About God

1] Our churches are united in teaching what the **Council of Nicaea** decreed: it is true that there is only one divine being, but there are three persons; and that this should be believed without a doubt. 2] In other words, there is one divine being, which is called God and which truly is God. He is eternal, has no body, has no parts, has all power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. 3] Yet there are also three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are of the same being and power and are equally eternal. We use the word *person* in the same way the early Christians used it. 4] It does not mean a part or quality of another being but something that exists in and of itself.

5] Our churches condemn all heresies that have sprung up against this teaching, such as the **Manicheans**, who taught there were two divine beings, one good and the other evil. We also condemn the **Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Muslims**, and all others like them. 6] We also condemn the ancient and modern followers of **Paul of Samosata**. They claim that there is only one divine person. Through clever and ungodly reasoning, they argue that the Word [Christ] and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons, but that “Word” means only a spoken word, and that “Spirit” refers to a movement within created beings.

Article 2: About Original Sin

1] Our churches also teach that since Adam's fall into sin, all men who are fathered in the normal physical way are conceived and born with sin. This means that they are born without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with evil desires. 2] This disease, or original sin, truly is sin. It condemns and brings eternal death to those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

3] Our churches condemn the followers of **Pelagius** and all others who deny that original sin is truly sin. Such people argue that humans can be justified before God by their own strength and reason. This lessens the glory of Christ's work and its benefits.

Article 3: About the Son of God

1] Our churches also teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed vir-

gin Mary. 2] Therefore, he has two natures, one divine and the other human. They are united in one person and cannot be separated. Thus there is only one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the virgin Mary. He truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried. 3] He went through all this so that he could restore us to peace with the Father and be a sacrifice, not just for original sin, but also for all other sins.

4] The Word [Christ] also went down into hell, and truly rose again the third day. Afterward he went up into heaven so that he might sit on the right hand of the Father. There he rules forever and has power over all creatures, making holy all those that believe in him. 5] He does this by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and make them alive, as well as defending them against the devil and the power of sin.

6] This same Christ will openly come again to judge the living and the dead, etc., as the Apostles' Creed says.

Article 4: About Justification

1] Our churches also teach that humans cannot be **justified** before God by their own power, **merits**, or deeds. Rather, they are freely justified **for Christ's sake** through faith. 2] By *faith* we mean this: that they believe that they are both received into God's favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. For by his death, Christ has paid the debt for our sins. 3] Thus God views the person who has this faith to be righteous in his sight (Romans 3 and 4).

justified—Declared not guilty.

merits—Things that are worthy of praise or a reward.

for Christ's sake—Because of what Christ did.

Article 5: About the Ministry

1] So that we might receive this faith, God established the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. For the Holy Spirit is given to people through the Word and sacraments, the tools through which God works. 2] Whenever and wherever it pleases God, this ministry creates faith in the hearts of those who hear the gospel. 3] And the gospel message is this: that not because of our own merits, but for Christ's sake, God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace because of what Christ did.

4] We condemn the **Anabaptists** and all others who believe that the Holy Spirit can come to people without the external Word, through their own preparations, thoughts, and actions.

Anabaptists—A group whose name means "to be baptized again." The Anabaptists started as followers of Luther but came to believe that the Holy Spirit did not work through infant baptism, so adults needed to be baptized again. They also taught that the Holy Spirit would come to man directly, without use of Word or sacrament.

Article 6: About New Obedience

1] We teach that this faith must bring forth good fruits and that one must do the good works commanded by God, in accord with

Ambrose—A famous bishop of the Italian city of Milan from 374 to 397. He was considered one of the four most important teachers of the western church.

God's will. However, one must never rely on such works to earn justification in God's eyes. **2]** For we receive forgiveness of sins and justification only by faith. Christ himself says, "When you have done everything . . . say, 'We are unworthy servants'" (Luke 17:10). The church fathers teach this same thing. **3]** **Ambrose** says, "God has established that whoever believes in Christ freely receives the forgiveness of sins. He is saved without works, by faith alone."

Article 7: About the Church

1] Our churches also teach that there is and always will be one holy church. The church is the gathering of all believers, in which the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are properly administered.

2] For true unity in the church, it is enough to agree about the teaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. **3]** It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rituals or church ceremonies that have been set up by humans, should be the same everywhere. **4]** As Paul says, "One body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Article 8: What the Church Is

1] The church actually is the gathering of all saints and true believers. But in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with the believers. Because of this, we may at times need to receive the sacraments from evil men. As Christ says, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2). **2]** Both the Word and the sacraments are able to produce their results because Christ instituted them and commanded us to use them. This is true even when they are given and administered by evil men.

3] We condemn the **Donatists**, and those like them, who say it is wrong to use the ministry of evil men in the church, and who think the ministry of evil men is wrong and has no power.

Article 9: About Baptism

1] About Baptism our churches teach that it is necessary for salvation, **2]** and that through Baptism God offers us his grace. Also, children ought to be baptized. Those brought to God through Baptism are received into God's grace.

3] We condemn the **Anabaptists**, who reject the baptizing of children and say that children are saved without Baptism.

Donatists—During the early persecution of Christians, many weak Christians denied their faith. After the persecution ended, some repented and asked to be allowed to enter the church again. The Donatists said that this should not be allowed. When it was allowed, they left and formed their own churches. They were especially numerous in North Africa (present-day Algeria and Tunisia). They further taught that if a pastor was found to have committed a bad sin, the baptisms and other acts he had performed would not have godly power.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

Article 10: About the Lord's Supper

1] About the Lord's Supper our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under the forms of the bread and wine and are given to those who eat the Lord's Supper. 2] We reject those that teach anything else.

Article 11: About Confession

1] About confession our churches teach that **private absolution** should be kept in the churches and not stopped. When confessing sins, however, it is not necessary to confess all sins individually. 2] For that is impossible. As the psalm says, "Who can discern his errors?" (Psalm 19:12).

private absolution—The practice of confessing sins to a pastor in private and receiving the personal assurance of forgiveness from him.

Article 12: About Repentance

1] This is what our churches teach about repentance. For those who have fallen from faith after Baptism there is forgiveness of sins whenever they repent. 2] The church should also announce forgiveness to such people who are returning in repentance. Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: 3] First, there is contrition. Contrition is the terror that fills the conscience because of the knowledge of sin. 4] The second part of contrition is faith. This faith is given birth by the gospel, or by absolution, 5] and it believes that for Christ's sake sins are forgiven. 6] It also brings comfort to the conscience, and delivers it from its terror. Finally, good works must follow, for these are the fruits of repentance. Like John the Baptist says, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

7] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who say that those who have once been justified cannot lose the Holy Spirit. We also condemn those who argue that some people can become so perfect in this life 8] that they no longer sin.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

9] The **Novatians** also are condemned, for they will not give absolution to people who have fallen from faith after Baptism, even though they have repented.

Novatians—Like the Donatists (see the note in Article 8), this early group refused to allow Christians who had denied their faith to re-enter the church, even if they repented. They were especially strong in Rome in the third century.

10] We also reject those who do not teach that forgiveness of sins comes through faith but who urge us to earn God's grace by making payments of our own.

Article 13: About the Use of the Sacraments

1] This is what our churches teach about the use of the sacraments. The sacraments were not only set up to be marks of confession to identify Christians but especially to be signs and promises of God's will towards us, 2] and were set up to awaken and confirm the faith of those who use them. Therefore we must

just by taking part in them—The belief that faith was not needed, but that just going through the act of being baptized or receiving the Lord Supper was enough to receive their blessings. This is called *sacramentalism*.

use the sacraments so that faith, which believes the promises that are offered and seen in the sacraments, can grow.

3] We therefore condemn those who teach that the sacraments bring justification **just by taking part in them**, as well as those who do not teach that a faith which believes in the forgiveness of sins is needed for the proper use of the sacraments.

Article 14: About Church Order

This is what our churches teach about church order. No one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he has been called in a proper and normal way.

Article 15: About Church Customs

1] This is what our churches teach about church customs. Church customs that were set up by humans may be practiced only if they can be used without sinning. Customs should be followed if they are useful for peace and good order in the church, such as celebrating particular holy days, festivals, and the like.

2] But people must be strongly reminded that such customs must not harm the consciences of others, as when it is taught that such customs must be followed in order to receive salvation.

3] We also strongly state that man-made traditions that were started in order to win God's favor, to earn God's grace, or to pay for sins are in conflict with the gospel and the doctrine of faith. Therefore the vows taken by monks and traditions about not eating meat on certain days and celebrating certain festival days cannot be used properly. 4] They are contrary to the gospel since they have been established to earn God's grace and to pay for sins.

Article 16: About Civil Affairs

1] This is what our churches teach about the police and civil affairs. Properly established government laws and authorities of the land are good works from God. 2] Also, it is proper for Christians to hold government office, to serve as judges, to judge matters on the basis of royal and other existing laws, to hand down just punishments to those who do evil, to fight in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to own property, to make an oath when required by government officials, to marry a wife, or to be a bride.

3] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who forbid Christians to hold public office.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

4] We condemn also those who do not seek Christian holiness by fearing God and in faith but by avoiding their responsibilities as citizens. 5] For the gospel does not teach an outward and temporary righteousness but an eternal righteousness of the heart. Nor does it destroy the state or the family but very much insists that God has commanded them, and so they must be preserved. It tells us to show our love by respecting these institutions that God has established. 6] Therefore, Christians must obey their own government officials and laws, 7] except when such command them to sin. Then they must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Article 17: About Christ's Return to Judgment

1] Our churches also teach that at the end of the world, Christ will appear as a judge. 2] He will raise up all the dead. He will give eternal life and everlasting joy to the godly and elect. 3] But he will condemn the ungodly and the devils to punishment without end.

4] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who think that the punishment of demons and those people whom God condemns will not last forever.

5] We also condemn all others who are now spreading the Jewish idea that before the dead are raised, the godly will rule this world and that everywhere the ungodly will be overcome.

Article 18: About Free Will

1] This is what our churches teach about free will. Human will does have some freedom to choose to act justly in society and to make choices in matters grasped by human reason. 2] But it has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to produce righteousness in God's eyes, that is, spiritual righteousness. For following human nature a person cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). 3] But this righteousness is produced in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word. 4] This is what **Augustine** says in Book 3 of his *Admonition against the Pelagians*:

We agree that all people have a free will, free in that it can make decisions with its human reason. But it can not, without God, either begin or complete any godly things. It can only do so in the deeds of this life, whether good or evil. 5] I call those works good which arise from the good in nature, such as deciding to work in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to wear clothes, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn various useful skills, or any other good deeds having to do with this life. 6] For all of these things are

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

Augustine—Bishop of Hippo in North Africa (Algeria) from A.D. 395 to 430, another of the four great teachers of the western church. He spent much time writing against the teaching of Pelagius and his followers who said that man had a free will and therefore could do good by his own power if he wished.

Admonition against the Pelagians—Thought in Luther's day to be a work of Augustine. Today scholars feel it was not. In any case, the ideas it expresses are in agreement with those taught by Augustine.

dependent on the loving care of God. Yes, by him and through him they have come into being and continue to exist.

7] I call those works evil such as the decision to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc.

Pelagians—Followers of Pelagius (see previous note).

substance of the act—It is enough to obey the law outwardly in its main points (that is, not to murder anyone, not to take another man's wife, etc.).

8] We condemn the **Pelagians** and all others who teach that without the Holy Spirit, by the power of human nature alone, we are able to love God above all things. Or that by our own power we can do the commandments of God according to the **substance of the act.** 9] For, although human nature is able in one sense to do the outward act (that is, it can keep the hand from stealing and murdering), yet it cannot produce the inner realities, such as the proper fear of God, trust in the works of God, holiness, patience, etc.

Article 19: About the Cause of Sin

This is what our churches teach about the cause of sin. Although God does create and preserve the natural world, yet the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, that is, of the devil and ungodly men. Not having God's help, this evil will turns itself away from God, as Christ says, "When he lies, he speaks his native language" (John 8:44).

Article 20: About Good Works

1] Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding people to do good works. 2] But our teachers have written about the Ten Commandments and written other similar books which show that they have given the people useful teaching about the various roles and positions in life. They have pointed out the deeds that are God pleasing in the various roles and positions. 3] In earlier times preachers taught little about such things. They only urged people to do childish and useless deeds, such as celebrating particular holy days or certain **fasts**, taking part in **lay societies**, going on **pilgrimages**, having services in honor of saints, using **rosaries**, becoming **monks**, and the like. 4] Since our opponents have been warned about these things, they are now unlearning them and are no longer preaching about these useless deeds as before. 5] In addition, they begin to talk about faith, something they were amazingly silent about before! 6] They teach that we are justified not by works alone, yet they join faith and works together, and say that we are justified by faith and works. 7] This teaching is better than the one they taught before and can give more comfort than what they used to teach.

8] The teaching about faith, which should be the most important teaching in the Church, has remained unknown for a very long time. For everyone must agree that there was the deepest silence in sermons about the righteousness of faith. Only the teaching

fasts—The Catholic Church taught that people could earn favor with God if they did not eat meat on Friday or went without food for certain periods of time.

lay societies—Religious clubs organized to do good works and worship together.

pilgrimages—People also sought to earn God's favor and blessings by visiting the graves of saints and other special places.

rosaries—Repeating over and over a special prayer called the *rosary*.

monks—Men and women who took oaths to live in poverty, not to marry, and to serve the church by living in communities apart from the rest of society.