

Councils, Confessions, Creeds, and Catechisms

The Smalcald Articles – 1537 – Dr. Martin Luther

The context of the articles:

- * Luther anticipated an invitation to the council at Mantua in 1536, but the pope, Paul III, moved it. In preparation for a likely summons, Luther prepared these articles as a statement of doctrine on behalf of the reformed.
- * The ecclesiastical/political environment was tense and corrupt with the pope clearly over the church, and heavily influencing the “Romish court.”

The content of the articles:

- * Part One – The points of agreement between the reformed church, and the Roman Catholic Church.

- The doctrines of the Trinity, the hypostatic union, the Apostles Creed.

- * Part Two – Four doctrines of severe contention.

- Justification is by faith alone, in Christ alone.

- The Catholic Mass is the “most horrible abomination” because:

1. It is a human invention.
2. It is unnecessary to godliness.
3. It is an inferior means of receiving the sacraments.
4. It is and has been corrupted.
5. It is a condemnable attempt to salvific reconciliation.
6. It has given birth to “numerous vermin-brood of manifold idolatries.”

- 1) Purgatory

- 2) The testimony of evil spirits in the form of the dead.

- 3) Pilgrimages

- 4) Fraternities organizing masses

- 5) Relics

- 6) Indulgences

- 7) Invocation of the saints

“In short, the Mass itself, and anything that proceeds from it, and anything that is attached to it, we cannot tolerate, but must condemn...”

- The failing of cloisters (EG monasteries, abbeys, etc.) to promote godliness, but have been corrupted.

- “The pope is not... the head of all Christendom, but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome...”

- * Part Three – A Statement of Faith.

- Our sin nature is inherited originally from Adam, and causes sinful behavior

- The Law points out our sinful behavior, and thus our sin nature

- Repentance from sin must be thorough and complete in a believers life

- The gospel as a constant help against the urges to sin

- * Note * Four elements make up this gospel: the preaching of God’s Word, baptism, sacrament, and corporate worship and fellowship.

- Baptism as a cleansing agent when in conjunction with God’s Word

- The sacrament (consubstantiationally) must be partaken by the believer.

- The keys are the authority of the church to decide on matters of sin.

- Confession (formal with absolution) is vital, but not mandatory.

- Excommunication is the corporate discipline of unrepentant sinners.

- Ordination of true bishops is vital to the purity of the church.

- Priests can and must marry to avert “sins of unchastity.”

- God’s church isn’t synonymous with the Roman Catholic Church.

- Justification, monastic vows, and human traditions are the last three items.