

## **The “Genius” of Lutheranism**

By "Genius" we do not mean a very bright individual, such as Luther, but the peculiar character and animating spirit of Lutheranism, which distinguishes it from other denominations. So the Genius of Lutheranism is that which makes it Lutheran, its unique characteristics. The Genius of Lutheranism can be seen in its doctrine, in its hymnody and style of worship, and in its piety or practice. When we speak of Lutheranism, we do not mean all those who call themselves Lutheran, but those who truly follow the letter and the spirit of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

### **Holy Scripture**

Lutheranism is distinguished by its attitude toward Scripture and its use thereof. We Lutherans regard Scripture as the Word of God. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2Pet 1:21 God is the sole author of the Bible, although He used various penmen to write it down at His impulse and by His inspiration, not only of the ideas written there, but of every single Word, every letter, and every form in the Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew Scriptures. We believe Jesus when He said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matt 5:14 Not the smallest letter, nor the smallest part of a letter shall pass away, since they are not man's words and letters, but God's. Since it is all God's words, there can be no mistakes or contradictions in the Bible, and it can never err. Our confessions say, "The Word of God cannot err." (LC,747,57) Since it is the Word of God, it is always true, and we believe what it says, even if all science, philosophy, logic, and reason say otherwise. The Bible is therefore the source of all our doctrine. Any teaching that does not come from the Bible does not belong in our pulpits or classrooms, and we will not teach it. If all the world laughs at our doctrine or persecutes us because of it, we will not surrender it, but hold fast to it and teach it wherever we can.

The Bible is also the sole standard of truth among us. It is the touchstone by which we test whether any doctrine is true or false. What it teaches we will teach; what it condemns we will condemn. We take the Bible seriously. The Bible's teachings are also the basis of church fellowship, and we will fellowship all those who confess what Scripture teaches, but we will not fellowship those who teach contrary to it, even in a single article. You cannot hold to the Bible and contradict it at the same time.

The Lutheran Church invites everyone to compare its doctrine with Holy Writ, that they may see that we actually teach according to it. In our Catechism the Bible passages are printed out for that very purpose, for everyone should judge for himself whether our doctrines are true or not. We know that many churches claim that they teach the Bible, but Lutheranism actually does, while others contradict it with other doctrines.

We apply this principle also to our behavior, or our ethics. The Bible is our judge, and it decides whether it is right or wrong to do this or that. We are neither permissive nor legalistic. We are only as strict as the Bible is, and only as lenient as the Bible is. If we find that we are sinning by living otherwise than God's Word teaches, we are determined

to acknowledge our sin, beg the Lord for forgiveness, and mend our ways according to the Bible. If we find God's doctrine or God's commandments to be too hard, unreasonable or impractical in today's world, we do not reject them but acknowledge that God's ways are above ours and are right and good, and we submit our minds and wills to God's, and we change our ways and obey His Word. As St. Paul says, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Rom 12:2

The Scripture principle also implies the Confessional principle. We take our Confessions seriously, too - not as equal to the Bible but under it; nevertheless, they serve as a standard of doctrine and practice, too. Every one of our pastors and congregations subscribes to the Confessions as a correct presentation of the doctrines of the Bible that they confess. We subscribe to them because they teach Scripture, not merely insofar as they teach it. Our subscription means that we agree to teach according to the Confessions, i.e., according to Holy Writ. So the Confessions also serve as a standard for judging whether any particular doctrine may be taught among us. Our Confessions also serve to show that our doctrine is the doctrine of the Bible, so all the world may know what we teach, and that we indeed teach the Bible. They also serve to standardize and regularize our teachings. You can expect to hear the same doctrine from place to place and from year to year. It does not change with the whims of this pastor and that pastor.

## **Sin**

Lutherans also know about Sin. They know that Original Sin, inherited from Adam and Eve and often called "The Old Adam," is damnable in itself, and they know that it is the total corruption of human nature and is enmity against God, even in the newest newborn and the unborn fetus, and that it continues throughout life in this world. Lutherans do not treat sin as merely a disease or a slight flaw, for it is the greatest catastrophe that ever befell the human race. Nor do Lutherans deny that sin exists in anyone, not even in little children. For that reason we know it is necessary to baptize our children, that they might be forgiven for being sinners. Original sin was absent only twice: in Adam and Eve before they fell, and in Christ.

Lutherans also know what sin is. It is not a mere mistake or error in judgment, but "sin is the transgression of the Law." Sinful deeds are the fruit of the corrupt tree of original sin. They are its symptoms. Jesus said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Matt 15:19 It is not sins that make a person sinful, but sins are committed by sinners. From sinful deeds corruption spreads through the whole person even further, and by them every kind of damage and injury is done in the world: accidents, injuries, sicknesses, crimes, grief, sorrow, suffering, unhappiness, pain, confusion, ignorance, cruelty, death, and anything else you can name. Though the world hates to hear of sin, and in some churches it is hardly mentioned at all, conscience knows that it is there and that it cannot be denied. Churches that do not preach of sin are not doing their people any favor, but deceive them. And those who teach that sin is easily overcome or set aside or counter-balanced are lying.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

God demands that sinners repent. In many churches sin is treated otherwise, as something to be overcome by using the right procedures, perhaps, or methods; or repentance is not even mentioned or asked. Without repentance there can be no forgiveness. Repentance is the awareness that one is guilty and damnable because of his sin, and awareness of the need for forgiveness from God. We learn of repentance from the publican in the temple, and we learn of impenitence from the Pharisee's boast. Lutherans are a confessing church, not like Rome with its confessional booths and its penance, but confessing nevertheless. Every week as we begin our Communion service we confess our sins and ask absolution, or we are assured of forgiveness and the Holy Ghost. Other churches, except for the Episcopal, do not do that.

### **Christ-centered**

Lutheranism is also Christ-centered, for Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." John 14:6 And St. Paul said, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." 1Cor 2:2 And in 4:5 "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Our sermons are about Christ, our services are about Christ, we worship God in Christ, we praise Him, we sing of Christ in our hymns. Christ is the Sun of righteousness that sheds His light in every congregation and in every Christian life. Our faith is faith in Christ. He said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." Acts 1:8 And His apostle said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Acts 16:31

Jesus Christ is the one true God, the second Person in the Holy Trinity, who was also true man, conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary. He did not first become God when He was baptized, but was already God in all eternity, before His conception, or incarnation. The two natures are not separate in Him, but they are distinct. He did not turn into a man, but He remains fully God, and He took on a human nature exactly like ours but for sin. He retains all the divine attributes and did not empty Himself of His divinity or of His divine powers. At the same time, He also possesses all the attributes of man. Man did not become God in Him, but remains man. He is still a true man to this day and always shall be, though glorified. Wherever the Son of God is, there is the man Christ Jesus; there is His human nature, and He is never without it. And whatever He does, He does through His human nature, and He never acts without it.

### **Atonement**

Just as important as His Person is His work. The Son of God became man to serve as our Messiah, our promised Savior. He served in our place, fulfilling the Commandments for us and suffering the penalty for us for breaking them. He went to the cross to suffer the wrath of God which was against us sinners, and there He experienced the pangs of hell for us, acting as our Substitute.

This is called His atonement. It is also called reconciliation and propitiation. Most people believe they can and should make atonement for themselves, that they can satisfy God by making payment for their own sins, perhaps by offering something to God, some money or goods, or good works to counterbalance their offenses, or by suffering some pain or loss, or even by dying. It is a vain dream. Sin is too big an offense against God, so big that no one can make a big enough payment. The prophet Micah asks, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" 6:7 And the Psalmist testifies that "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." 49:7 No one but God can pay that much. Our Catechism tells us that Jesus had to be true God so that His fulfillment of the Law could suffice for all men, and that His suffering and death might be a sufficient ransom for all men, and so that He might be able to overcome death and the devil for us. He also had to be a true man, so that He could be under the Law and so He could suffer and die, since God cannot suffer and cannot die otherwise.

## **Justification**

Lutherans also insist on the purpose and fruit of Christ's atonement, which is our justification, or the forgiveness of sins. Jesus told the disciples on the way to Emmaus, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:46-47 To justify means to declare or pronounce someone innocent or righteous, as a judge or jury does in court, and it is God who justifies. He is the Judge. Psalm 32 says, "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." That is the Bible's definition, and Lutherans believe and teach it. It does not mean to make righteous or to empower anyone to become righteous.

Justification is, on the one hand, universal and objective; that is, because Christ died for sins, God declared the whole world righteous, before there was any faith and regardless of faith. And on the other hand, we are justified by faith, or through faith, meaning that faith is the way we receive forgiveness. For what can faith believe but that God has forgiven me? I cannot believe in forgiveness that will only come if and when I believe. For how can I come up with the needed faith? Faith is not my accomplishment or my work. I can only believe the fact, and I can only trust in God when I know He forgives me. St. Paul writes in Rom 4:5, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Luther writes in the Large Catechism, under the V Petition, "Therefore there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses. Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it.)" Trig. 723.

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law," says St. Paul in Rom 3:28. Works have no place in justification. God does not forgive

anyone because he does good works, for no one can do enough good works to please God and render Him gracious. Righteousness by works is the notion that inhabits every human breast. Man in his pride wants to feel that he has done it himself, and that God owes him eternal life and every blessing. He feels either that he has done enough to be right with God, or else that he can do enough with just a little more effort, like a man chasing the horizon, thinking he will reach it if he just goes a little faster, but his chase is hopeless. In the Large Catechism Luther says, "In short, if God does not forgive without ceasing, we are lost." LC, V Petition, Trig, 723

Yet the apostle is not saying that we need not bother to do good works; we are to do them indeed. But he is saying that our justification, or His forgiveness, does not take our works into account. They do not contribute in the least to our justification. God's grace is based entirely on Christ's works and on His innocent suffering and death. Nor does our faith earn or merit forgiveness. Forgiveness is completely free to us, already paid for by Jesus Christ, and we receive it "without money and without price." Isa 55:1 "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Eph 2:8-9 "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Rom 6:23

## **Conversion**

"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom 5:1 But how do we get that faith? Lutherans know from the Bible that God gives the Holy Ghost and faith by the Gospel. It does not come from inside us. Within us is nothing but iniquity by nature. In our Catechism we confess, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Most churches do not agree. The Reformed churches do; to an extent they teach that man cannot come to faith of himself, but the Holy Ghost converts sinners unto faith. They have their own twist on it, though, saying for one thing that He calls only the elect, whom He has chosen to be saved, while the rest are passed by at best. They also say that He calls them, not necessarily by the Gospel, but without it; also that He is not always in earnest when He calls, but calls only some effectually. He does not will everyone to be saved.

Meanwhile, most other Protestants teach that man contributes to his own conversion. He co-operates with God. According to Rome, God gives some kind of prevenient grace, a power poured into man from on high, so that he can earn an increase in that grace. That grace is not the favor or forgiveness of God, but power to love and do good works. Their doctrine is called Semi-Pelagianism. Right next to it is Arminianism, the doctrine of the Methodist churches, including the Holiness and charismatic churches. It teaches that God does His part, and man must do his part by believing. God promises, man believes. Man chooses to believe in Jesus. Next to that are the Synergists, who teach that man co-operates somehow in his conversion, even if it be as little as this, that he offers no resistance. These are all varieties of the same thing. In answer the Bible says, "The

carnal mind is enmity against God." Rom 8:7 And Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." John 15:16

## **Means of Grace**

The Holy Ghost works His miracles of faith, both conversion and preservation, by the Gospel, by the Means of Grace. A Means of Grace is a channel or instrument or means by which the forgiving grace of God is conveyed from His heart to yours, producing joy and comfort in your heart. There is actually only one Means of Grace, and that is the Gospel, but it comes in different forms, in the form of the Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. You could even add absolution, signing for the deaf, or pictures in stained glass windows. God does all His spiritual work in man by these Means of Grace. This is as much a fundamental doctrine of Scripture as the atonement and justification. Jesus said, "The words which I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life." John 6:63 In the Smalcald Articles Luther writes,

"In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world, having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power, and strength of all heresy, especially that of the Papacy and Mohamet. Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and the Sacraments."

The Spirit does not simply come upon people and move and shake them and bring forth signs and wonders such as tongues, healings, and miracles. Nor does He produce a second blessing of moral perfection, whereby some are able to lead a holy life and leave sin behind. The curious and the thrill-seekers are bored with such simple things as the Gospel, water, bread and wine, and they expect earth-shaking spectacles. In earlier church history there was disregard of the Bible in favor of the ritual and the Sacrament; then came the Calvinists and other would-be reformers that in theory denied the power of the Means of Grace in favor of invisible workings of the Spirit, usually accompanied, though, by the Word or Sacrament. Now the charismatic or Pentecostal movement, while they may use the Bible assiduously, insist on feeling the Spirit and seeing His signs.

How few are they who rely on the Means of Grace and look to them for assurance, faith, the Holy Ghost, strength, sanctification, and preservation! No church but the Lutheran Church does so.

## **The Sacraments**

Lutherans also believe that the Sacraments are Means of Grace. They, too, as well as the Word, convey the forgiving grace of God from His heart to ours and so strengthen faith and produce joy and peace in believing. The Sacraments are not ordinances, Law, empty or symbolic ceremonies, mere signs or pictures of God's grace or of repentance and faith, rites of initiation, mere fellowship meals or remembrance ceremonies, but Means of Grace. Both Sacraments are Gospel, not Law nor anything else. The

Sacraments are signs and seals of the Gospel, but the Gospel accompanies the signs and seals in the sacramental words, and the elements are comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word.

Holy Baptism is the washing of regeneration. By it we and our children are born again unto faith in Christ. By it our sins are washed away, and we are also now saved. We are buried with Christ into His death and raised again with Him to new life, and we receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism does not take away sin itself, however, but takes away the guilt of sin. And although many Protestants argue that Baptism cannot save because faith saves, Lutherans know that faith is the receiving hand. Baptism is God's giving hand. Baptism is Gospel.

The Lord's Supper also conveys the forgiving grace of God to us. With our mouths we receive the body and blood of Christ along with the bread and wine; in our ears we receive the Gospel of forgiveness of sins, which is the chief thing in the Sacrament, and which we receive by faith. We are to remember and proclaim His sacrificial death in this Supper until He comes again, and we have fellowship or communion with one another by receiving it together, but the Gospel is the chief thing. We come to the Sacrament first and foremost for forgiveness and for the strengthening of our faith by the Gospel. The Sacrament is the Gospel. Since we know, teach, and believe that, we can never take part in a sacrament where the body and blood of Christ are not even offered, nor can we be satisfied with half a sacrament, nor can we participate in using it as a sacrifice or sin-offering, since Christ was sacrificed for us once for all.

## **Sanctification**

Lutherans also understand sanctification aright. Sanctification has two sides to it; actually three. The broad meaning includes conversion, faith and justification; the narrow meaning is the renovation that takes place in us, so that in Christ a man is a new creature, who is devoted and dedicated to the love of God and his neighbor. Sanctification is God's work in us, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil 2:13. Sanctification, or love, is the fruit of saving faith in Christ. Sometimes the word Sanctification is also used to refer to good works.

The motive for good works, or the driving force of sanctification, you might say, is gratitude to God for our redemption and our justification and the hope of eternal life. "We love him because he first loved us." 1John 4:19 But there are few beside Lutherans who believe that. With some churches the driving force is fear, fear of damnation. The church simply commands and demands proper behavior. With some churches the motive is that you can become your very best, you can "make a difference," you can gain merit with God, you can cancel out your sins, you can earn heaven or earn an increase of grace; you can do it. It is the way you become justified, they say. Hence many churches constantly preach good works and how to achieve them. Lutherans teach good works, too, but we preach Christ crucified.

Lutherans also understand that sanctification is never perfect in this life. In heaven we will be no longer sinners, but until then "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Gal 5:17 Yet there are churches that teach perfect sanctification, usually bestowed sometime after you become a Christian. They believe they have left sin behind and are no longer sinners at all. If they do things contrary to the commandments, those are not really sins. But in Romans 7:14 the great apostle Paul says, "We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." The Psalmist confesses, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" 130:3 And St. John teaches us that "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." 1John 1:8-10. Perfect sanctification is a lie. Lutherans well know it. They know they are sinners; they grieve that it is true, they pray for grace, and they say with St. Paul in Phil 3:12-14, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

## **Law and Gospel**

Lutherans distinguish Law and Gospel properly. The Law is for contrition, which it works by exposing sin and the wrath of God. The Law also tells us what Christians should do when they love God and believe in Christ. The Gospel is for consoling the contrite sinner with the forgiving grace of God and the hope of heaven. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Isa 66:3 We keep them separate and distinct. We resist the impulse to mix them together or interchange them, for if the Gospel promise is mixed in with the Law, who will repent? And if the demands of the Law are mixed with the Gospel promise, who can take comfort? And, for that matter, where will the love come from that will keep the commandments? Although it is a difficult art, learned in the school of experience, we are very careful not to apply Law where comfort is needed, nor to apply the Gospel where repentance is needed, lest souls be lost. Many churches have no idea of Law and Gospel. They preach a Gospel that is really Law, as though your salvation and your standing with God depend on what you do. Or they preach Law that is so watered down with the goodness of God that they comfort those who should be afflicted. That is how the old Adam likes it. Isaiah writes, "Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." 26:10 Distinguishing Law and Gospel aright is called "rightly dividing the Word of truth," 2Tim 2:15, which refers to applying it, but it also suggests understanding it. There are passages in the Bible that seem to contradict each other terribly, but that make perfect sense if you distinguish the Law from the promise. In Lutheran churches you find the Scriptures rightly divided, not confused and unsettling, but you will find yourself going forth, eager to please God and serve your neighbor, your heart full of comfort in Christ Jesus.



In genuinely Lutheran churches the Gospel predominates. Therefore they are properly called "Evangelical Lutheran Churches." Our churches are not establishments of the law. In the Large Catechism it says, "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other." LC, III Art., Trig. 693

The Evangelical nature of Lutheranism is also seen in our order of service. As noted above, there is forgiveness right at the beginning of the services, but if you follow the service all the way through, you find grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, and the love of God throughout. Our hymns are evangelical. Most of them are about sin and grace, regardless of the topic of the hymn. In the Kyrie and the Gloria in Excelsis we praise Christ especially for His atonement. The Epistles and Gospels of course are Christ-centered. In the Creed we confess Christ our Savior and the forgiveness of sins. The sermon in Lutheran churches is always supposed to be about sin and grace and Christ and salvation. The prayers are in Christ's name and stress God's grace and mercy. The Sacramental portion of the service stresses the work of Christ, the mercy of God, and peace through forgiveness of sin. If you go to other kinds of churches, a few will be mostly evangelical, but many are about man and his duties, and not about Christ.

## **The Church**

Lutherans also know what the Church is. It is believers, and Christ is the one Head of the Church. The only power the church or its ministers has is the Word of God. In obedience to God, believers gather around God's Word and Sacraments and form local congregations, and congregations elect qualified men as pastors to administer the office of the keys among them, the peculiar church power to remit the sins of penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent. Our Augsburg Confession teaches in Art. XIV that "No one should publicly teach in the church or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called."

Many people say the Keys are not enough, that the church has to be able to enforce Christian behavior on its members, so it must have power over people. Indeed, it does not satisfy them to have such power in the congregation, but they gather power in church bodies, finally ruling over the local church and its people. Congregations must be autonomous. They may belong to church bodies, but they must retain all authority locally.

Lutherans know who the Antichrist foretold in the Bible is; he is the Pope of Rome, past, present and future (if God still permit). He is the enemy of Christ and His Church, arrogating to himself the power of Christ as His vicar and pontiff, condemning the saving doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ, polluting Christendom with his false doctrines, and making merchandise of men.

## **Church Fellowship**

True Lutherans also understand fellowship and its perversion, which is called Unionism. God requires that we acknowledge and practice fellowship with true brethren. Paul says in Galatians 6:16, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." But God forbids us to have fellowship with all that teach contrary to His Word, saying in Romans 16:17, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." Yet this is a very unpopular doctrine, hated and denounced as loveless by many. We can explain the simple doctrine of fellowship and unionism all day long, and most people and most churches will not understand it, but many will caricature it and condemn it. Unionism, or fellowship without agreement in doctrine, is the rule in Christendom today. Genuine Lutherans obey the Lord's wise commandment. Orthodoxy is not an onerous burden, nor is it a great intellectual achievement; it is simple faith in God and His Word.

These are some of the fundamental doctrines of the Lutheran Church. We could mention others, but this list should suffice for the present. These are doctrines that we will insist upon and we will not let others be taught among us. These doctrines are purely Biblical. They are taught us of God, not of the imaginations of our own hearts. These articles are the Genius of Lutheranism, the distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran Church, and they make us quite different from all other denominations.

Should we then be proud to be Lutherans? Proud? No. Jeremiah 9:23 writes, "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." Being Lutherans does not make us greater, better, or smarter than other people, but it does make us more blessed than most. It is a great blessing from God to have His Word and doctrine pure and the Sacraments as Christ gave them to us. So we should be grateful to God that He placed us in the Lutheran Church and in Lutheran homes, that we might know Him and His Word and be well armed against the lies and temptations of Satan, the world, and our own flesh. May God keep us and our churches faithful.