

More Student Theology from that Augsburg Confession Class in Springfield, Illinois.

Colleagues,

Here's more good stuff from students in the "Lutheran Confessions" class that Ron Neustadt and I taught last term.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

To a student's term paper on "Faith" EHS responded:

1. Louise, you have found many of the very best Bible passages about faith and woven them together. Good. However . . .
2. The "big" fight at the time of the Augsburg Confession was "Just what does that little word FAITH mean?"
3. Both sides quoted many Bible passages about "faith"—many of them the great passages you have collected in your term paper.
4. The problem is: You never get around to talking about that difference of opinion in your paper, so I can't tell "which side you are on," in the conflict about the meaning of FAITH. From this term paper I really cannot tell what you learned in our course. Can't tell if you really "got" the central point that Ron and I were trying to show to the class in the Augsburg Confession and Apology.
5. Just quoting the Bible passages isn't enough. You need to tell us what's really inside that word "FAITH."
6. At the time of Augsburg one side said: Faith is saying

“Yes” to all the true-and-right things about God and the world that are revealed in the Bible, and then are taught in the church. The special word was “assent.” That meant saying “yes” to what the Bible and the church teach.

7. The other side said: Faith is trusting the PROMISE that Christ gives us when he says “Son (daughter), be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven. I did it all FOR YOU on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Trust me. Hang your heart on my offer “
8. These two ideas about faith are not the same.
9. Which side are you on? And WHY do you choose that side? Why would anybody want to choose that side? That’s what the Augsburg Confession is all about.
10. So here’s what is still needed to make your term paper a good term paper for our course: Take all those “juicy” Bible passages about faith and “check them out.” Show what the difference is if you say “Faith = saying yes to all the true statements revealed in the Bible” or if you say “faith = hanging your heart on Christ and trusting his PROMISE.”

Kristin Fair March 18, 2008

*Final exam – Lutheran Confessions Class. Three Essays Essay #1
Augsburg Confession Article 2–Original Sin*

Article Two of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say that original sin is a fatal flaw of human beings for which the only cure is Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are naturally inclined to do what we want to do and not what God wants us to do. This is called concupiscence. We lack fear of God and trust in God. Our very life—our daily thoughts, words, and deeds—is shaped by this concupiscence. We cannot escape on our own. This relates to the “hub” of the wheel because we are justified by our faith. The good news is we don’t HAVE to overcome our own

concupiscence. We are not the instruments of our own salvation. Therefore, because Jesus died for our salvation, our constant return to our own way of doing things and our constant forgetfulness to trust in God does not have to permanently separate us from God and we do not have to bridge that gap ourselves. If we trust the free gift of salvation from Jesus, then he is the representative for us to God. This article relates to the rim of the wheel, which is the distinction between law and gospel, by taking out the “you gottas” and giving ease of conscience to the people and making use of Christ. A false teaching concerning this article comes in the Confutation. The confutators believed that concupiscence was not a fatal flaw intrinsic of our very inner selves. Instead, they saw concupiscence as merely a loss of control over our inner drives-the “seven deadly sins.” None of the sins were “that bad” on their own, they were only bad when we lost control of them. The cure, then, would be to gain control once again over our inner drives of gluttony, pride, lust, envy, etc. The response to that false teaching, which also goes along with the hub of the wheel, is that if we can “fix” our own problem of original sin-i.e. when we get out of control, simply regain control-then where does the good news of Christ fit in? If we can justify ourselves, what need have we for Christ to have died? In order to ease consciences of those that cannot “fix” their desires and inner wants-that would be everyone-we need to make use of the good news of Christ.

Essay #2

Augsburg Confesion Article Six–New Obedience

In article six of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, the Reformers say that doing good works is a result of good faith, not a requirement for salvation. Good works are the fruit of

justification, not the cause. The reformers wanted to keep good works in the horizontal relationship between us and our neighbors and out of the vertical relationship with God. Because we are justified by faith alone (art. 4), we cannot use good works to “earn” our salvation. If we believe that we can earn our salvation through good works we lose the promise of Jesus. This relates to the hub of the wheel because we are justified by our faith, not our actions, and therefore hear the good news of Christ. We do not have to earn our salvation, which again, we could never do. The distinction between Law and Gospel is evident in this article because the Law says “you gotta” do good works in order to be justified and made right with God. The Gospel says, Jesus died for you and for your sake so that you are justified by your faith and therefore you are free to do good works. A false teaching on this article is again found in the Confutation and is also found in life in the theology of glory ministries. Basically, the confutators said that if good works were not a requirement of salvation then no one would do good works. The theology of glory says that if you do good things for others, God will reward you with glory for yourself. Both of these false teachings can be answered similarly with the distinction between Law and Gospel. Again, the Law (i.e. the Confutators, and the theology of glory) says you must do good works in order to be justified. But who among us could ever do enough good works in our life to make up for the wrongs that we do every day? No one can. Save for Jesus Christ. How can this be “Good News” for the people? It can’t. The Good News, the Gospel, says that Jesus Christ was the only one to live such a life. Then he died and rose again in order to justify us to God. We don’t have to do anything to earn that-not even good works. This eases the consciences of the people AND makes use of Christ. However, because we are justified by our faith and don’t have to earn our salvation, we are free to express our faith through good works for others.

Essay #3

How—if at all—has this class changed your “working theology”?

My “working theology” has not dramatically changed during the course of this class, but has been strengthened by this class. To explain, I will say that in the beginning of my first year in the program I had a lot to learn about the Lutheran faith. I had been a Lutheran my whole life and had never heard-or didn't remember from catechism-a lot of the core principles of the Lutheran faith and of the Augsburg Confession. Not only in this class, but in all the classes I have taken in the past three years, I have learned so much about my faith and have come to truly know that it is the right place for me. When we studied Luther and his life, I related so much to his feelings of inadequacy and the feeling that he could never earn God's love or his own salvation because he could never be “good enough.” Though to many of my peers I am considered a “goody two shoes” and have always strived to do what is right, I knew that it was never enough. I was bothered by that, especially as I attended college and shortly after graduation. I began the SAM classes a couple of years after finishing college. It was a hard time for my faith. Not many people my age share my desire to attend church and participate fully. I knew that I was not always making the choices in my life that God would want me to make. It was in learning about Luther that I heard about his way of reading the bible so that it makes use of Christ and how we are justified by faith alone. That has been a comfort to me countless times in the past few years. During this course, I was reminded constantly of the promises made to me because of my faith in Christ. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology repeat this over and over and over again. As I struggle in life as a young, single teacher looking for a permanent job and longing to be a wife and mother, I have been very frustrated at

times when it seems that God's plan does not match my own plan for my life. (Ah, that concupiscence again!) Since I started the program, I have moved (multiple times), changed churches, changed jobs (multiple times), gained and lost a long term boyfriend, and have even worked two jobs at once. The Good News that I have heard repeatedly during this and all courses of the SAM program has been my guiding force and my saving grace. Regardless of what I am asked or not asked to do after my commissioning, I will forever be grateful of the strength in faith these classes have given me throughout a time in which I felt constantly tested. I always take something from each class that becomes part of my "working theology," so in that sense, my working theology has somewhat changed in this class. I have a few quotes to illustrate. One is actually from Pastor Hoy from our last class and it is "I do not take care of Number One; Number One takes care of me." I have another quote from you, Pastor Ron, from our preaching class. "Are you preaching the Good News of Jesus? Did Jesus Christ need to die in order for you to preach this sermon?" Pastor Schroeder, my quote from you will always be unforgettable-"You don't have to worry about covering your own ass because Christ did it for you." (See-I listen and take notes-maybe a little too well!) In any case, I have felt strengthened and faithfully guided by this class and in learning more about the Lutheran faith. I also have to say, Pastor Ron, that when you said to me that "she gets it..." It was the highest compliment I have ever received. And it helped more than you could know...because I didn't always "get it." But I do now.

Kristin Fair

Term paper: Justification by Faith Alone: What does that mean today?

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were yet still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:1-11.

How the above text is interpreted, and even more so how the Bible is interpreted, influences how different groups think salvation is achieved and what the benefits of Christ are to them. Article Four of the Augsburg Confession and the following Apology highlight the way in which the Reformers viewed not only the Bible, but how they viewed justification by faith. The Confutators’ response shows how they read the Bible and how their view of justification is different.

The Augsburg Confession, article four, is very concise. It says only that we cannot earn our salvation through our own merits, works, or satisfactions. We receive forgiveness of sins in God’s grace through Christ by our faith alone. For God will “regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight.”

The Catholic Confutation agrees that we are justified by God's grace, but it also says that merits (our rewards for works done) count. They quote countless Bible passages that seem to support the performing of good works in order to be saved. They believe that salvation does come only through the grace of God. However, they believe that the grace of God allows them to do the works that earn them the merit they need to be made right from God. How then, can the Reformers say that we are saved by faith alone? The Confutators insist that if we are saved through faith alone, then no one will do any good works. If we believe that our sins are forgiven by the grace of God solely by our faith in him, why would any one do any good works?

This brings the Reformers back to the question about how we read the bible. The Apology for Article four begins with several pages about how the Reformers read the Bible and what it means for salvation through Jesus Christ. For Luther and the Reformers, the Bible should be read through the lens of Christ's death on the cross for us. In other words, the Bible needs to be read in a way that articulates the Good News of Jesus Christ. Two questions have to be asked about every confession taken from the Bible, according to the Reformers: 1) does it unburden people's consciences or does it leave them burdened and 2) does it necessitate the death of Christ?

For the Reformers, merit-based salvation can only lead to the despair of the people. The law always condemns and those that do not hear the gospel will only hear the despair of death. "They never believe that they perform anything deserving a merit of condignity, and so they rush headlong into despair unless, beyond the teaching of the law, they hear the gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of faith." And "...if we had to believe that after our renewal we must become acceptable not by faith on account of Christ but on account of our keeping of the law, our

conscience would never find rest. Instead it would be driven to despair." He then quotes Romans: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

So say the Reformers then, "For why was it necessary to give Christ for our sins if our merits could make satisfaction for them? Therefore, whenever we speak about justifying faith, we must understand that these three elements belong together: the promise itself; the fact that the promise is free; and the merits of Christ as the payment and atoning sacrifice."

And later, "Scripture calls eternal life a reward, not because it is owed on account of works, but because it compensates for afflictions and works, even though it happens for a completely different reason."

What about today, then? There are all sorts of religions and messages based on the theology of glory— or merit based salvation. If you do this.... then God will.... Televangelists, mega churches, and contemporary "Christian" authors make millions of dollars every year promoting the theology of glory. What can be said to those that believe that the actions they do in this life will determine their eternal destination? Not only that, but also that their current victories and triumphs or downfalls and despairs in life are the result of how "good" they have been in God's eyes. What can be said to them?

Those that follow the law and not the gospel have been around since Jesus' time. When Jesus healed a blind man, the crowd asked who had sinned to make the man blind, him or his parents. During Luther and Melanchthon's time televangelists and mega churches didn't exist, but those that followed the law were around. And the message was the same as today, if you..... then God will.....

What Luther and Melanchthon said then can still be said to the

theology of glory subscribers today. They state in many ways what the theology of glory leads to: "Experience proves that hypocrites who try to keep the law by their own strength cannot accomplish what they set out to achieve." "If indeed the forgiveness of sins depended upon the condition of our works, it would be completely uncertain. For we never do enough works." And: "For it is false that we merit the forgiveness of sins through our works."

Again, they would point to justification "sola fide" (by faith alone). They quoted John 8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." "Therefore reason cannot free us from sins and merit forgiveness of sins." "Since we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation on account of Christ by faith alone, faith alone justifies." They choose to hear the Word of the Bible as a promise: because God.... then you...

To be sure then, the followers of the theology of glory would ask, what then, happens to good works? The Reformers said this: "We reject the notion of merit. We do not exclude the Word or sacraments, as the opponents falsely charge... To be sure, love and good works ought to follow faith." "Thus good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving toward God. Likewise, good works ought to follow faith so that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others, in order that others may be invited to godliness by our confession."

So what, then, can we say about justification by faith (sola fide)? It uses the benefits of Christ for their intended purpose, gives hope to the people, and hears the Good News of Christ rather than the condemning word of God's law. As a Lutheran Christian, living in this world, and knowing that I can never follow the law to its last letter, I am comforted and I have faith in something I can hold onto. Knowing how many people subscribe to the theology of glory, I think "no wonder

we feel our world is full of despair.”

Marilyn Weingarz

Term Paper: Child of Law – Child of Grace

Preface: Enrolling in the SAM [=Synodically Authorized Minister] course of study was a decision made to discover more about our Lutheran heritage and the Bible. While a lifelong Lutheran, my study of the Bible has been casual, to say the least. While comfortable with my Lutheran background, a little more specific knowledge certainly couldn't hurt. So, while others began the course in preparation for service as preachers and teachers, my objective was personal enlightenment. How could this three-year course of study benefit me? That being said this treatise may not fulfill the requirement of the paper, as it is personal.

Child of Law – Child of Grace

A Tale of Two Sisters

Being the first born of four bestows a great deal of responsibility. You are the eldest sibling and thus bear some responsibility for the actions of the younger. It also conveys a certain amount of authority. Having experienced some of life's trials, it is easy to convey those activities to the others in the flock. This I did with great gusto! Being the first born also requires that you meet your parents' expectations whether conveyed or perceived. Who knows, you may be their only contribution to the world gene pool!

For whichever or whatever reason, I can recall being a “good” child. Did as I was told, tried diligently to meet the expectations of parents and teachers, including those entrusted

with teaching me the Good News. I duly prepared my memorization work for each Sunday morning. Loving to sing it was no task to memorize Sunday School songs and hymns. I especially recall preparing for my confirmation oral test, diligently preparing the answer to the assigned question. I also recall our pastor telling us that should we forget the proper response or have a case of “nerves” to simply recite the ABCs. Remember we’re talking no amplifications systems, a small church with a class of twenty and not an empty pew in the house. No one could hear what you said anyway!

Having completed the prescribed study for confirmation, I could now share in the “mystery” of communion. Most important of which was the placement of the alms box behind the altar into which you were to place a special offering as you went from the bread to the wine side. (Now where was I going to get another nickel?) It wasn’t until the installation of our next pastor, a much younger individual who later became Bishop of the Illinois District, that I finally began to grasp some of the concepts vaguely described previously. What I had garnered through those first 18 years or so was the concept of Law – thou shalt NOT!

A great deal of this Law Concept spilled over into my everyday life. I was very big in keeping my younger sister on the straight and narrow, better her than me. I was always quick to point out that she had colored outside the lines and would grade her accordingly as we played school. It never seemed to bother her as she continued the practice and still does.

During high school I became aware that my Roman Catholic friends had a different method to their worship. They endured not having meat on Friday and going to confession on Saturday afternoon. I didn’t envy the meatless days, but the opportunity to be able to tell someone about your faults and then have the faults erased by praying a few prayers seemed to hold some

merit. Theirs was a “color within the lines faith.” No doubt about what was expected or how to fulfill the requirements. Who knew and, of course, no one mentioned “ex opere operato.” Same for making a sign of the cross and genuflecting! Weren’t they more pious for showing reverence to God? It would be the 1970s and the introduction of the Lutheran Book of Worship that making the sign of the cross became “acceptable” in my neighborhood. Still, no one made mention of the fact that Dr. Martin Luther used this method to remind himself of his baptism in Christ. It didn’t help that the pastor of our congregation at that time while using the sign of the cross to bless the congregation, never “crossed” himself.

While I remember my grandparents and parents visiting with the Pastor for the purpose of confession and announcing for communion, that concept waned in my youth. Just give the ushers your communion card. Many years later I would sit in our church office and dutifully record all who had communed each month. I remember being challenged by an Intern that recording communions should only be done by a pastor, not a lay person. He was a fine Missouri Synod candidate lost in our ALC world. Not much emphasis was placed on the Service of Confession that was recited during worship.

I continued the practice of doing things by the book as a young wife and mother. A friend once called me a “mean mom” because of the requirements and restrictions I placed on our sons. There were chores to be done, homework was to be duly completed, instruments practiced, rooms to be straightened. Even my sons complained that they were the only kids in the class who got their homework graded twice – at home and at school. In spite of these “rigors,” both grew into adulthood, and are contributing members of society. I was certainly very good at the “ya gottas,” especially when it pertained to others.

Since my sister did not live in the same community after marriage, she managed to escape my stringent oversight. She allowed her daughters to bake and ice cookies, never caring that it took hours to clean the kitchen later. She actually encouraged her children to try all kinds of things. The one thing my sibling seemed never able to accomplish was regular church attendance. She obviously was aware of my "excellent" record of attendance, so what was her problem? In spite of her non-attendance, she continued to grow in grace and nurture those whom she encountered along the way as a friend, neighbor and teacher. Her example and encouragement have led many of her students to major achievements in the field of theatre. And I would bet none of them recall her asking them to "color inside the lines."

Years ago in the course of complaining about something that I deemed not right, my sister very quietly said to me, "Not everything is perfect in our lives." Well, maybe not in hers, but And thus, through the years, without trying, my imperfect, caring, nurturing sister showed me the face of grace.

It has taken me a long time to acknowledge that it is not about me. It has taken me several decades of running into the stone wall to realize that no matter what I do there is always someone who does it better. I specifically recall a sermon series "Child of Law, Child of Grace," and thinking it had been written about me and my sister, especially since the Pastor who delivered the sermons was my boss. His comparison of the two individuals and their traits was right on!

Dr. Hoy's course, God-World Connection, using CRUX to help us see more clearly our dependency on the Christ of the cross, was a mind-opening experience. And now Dr. Schroeder's Wheel of the Augsburg Confession has helped to reiterate even more how each

part of our daily lives and the life of our church hinge on the crucified Christ. Where was this emphasis before in my life? Did I neglect to find it on purpose? Have I been really good at not listening to messages from the pulpit? No, I think it is a continuation of the “I can do it myself” syndrome that has been my life.

A good friend once said she wished the Holy Spirit would write her notes about what she is to do with her life. This from someone whose life is filled with study and leading a godly life. (And here again my fallacy as I almost typed “good works.”) I, too, would appreciate daily emails entailing what my actions for the day are to be. Instead I’m left to bumble along using the instructions of the Catechism, the guidelines of the Confessions and my own intellect to find the right path. How do I know the path is the one designated by the Holy Spirit?

Each Article of the Augsburg Confessions is a guidebook for our lives. I like exact instructions and there they are. Even more usable are Dr. Luther’s teachings in the Catechisms and since much of the Small Catechism returns from memory at times unbidden, I just need to pay attention. The old pastor’s penchant for memorization continues to serve me well.

All of the aspects of the Augsburg Confession intertwine to define us as Lutheran: Baptism, forgiveness, faith , justification – all of God’s right hand kingdom, as well as guidelines for our daily lives within our communities and among our neighbors as we work in God’s left hand kingdom. We gain understanding and respect for the views of not just other Lutherans, after all we have been known to choose different flavors of jello, but for the rest of our secular world. God has placed us in this world for various purposes and, while I’m still not always certain what mine might be, the determination

will be made with more understanding and hopefully, acceptance. It will become easier as I let the peace and grace of Jesus the Christ become ever more dominant in my life, when I acknowledge with each breath that everything and, yes, anything, is possible because He has paid our dues (yes, I worked in a bank and think debit/credit); that he has made satisfaction for us. We are his redeemed siblings, children of the Heavenly Father.

Now comes the pleasure of letting faith grow, of finding the Good News of our Savior in every aspect of life. Day by day to love Him more dearly, see Him more clearly and share Him with those whose lives may touch mine and by prayer those whom I will never know or even see.

My sister still colors outside the lines and even encourages her grandchildren to do so. I have made a few inroads into that practice as I allow my grandchildren much more leeway than I did my sons. I think because of age and life experiences, and not formal education, I have learned to be more accepting of people, though not always of practices. Some things will never be right for me, but I will be more aware of "ya gottas" and try not to impose them on others. "Amazing Grace....was blind but now I see....."

Conclusion: And so as you can readily see this is no scholarly study. I hope that I have conveyed in some small measure how dear to me this course of instruction is and why I consider listening to you two teachers more important than writing or discussing papers. I have a huge education deficit and not a lot of time to try to overcome it. I need to cram every minute with all I can. I thank you for offering all you have for my edification.