The Smalcald Articles

[Part I]

The first part of the Articles treats the sublime articles of the divine majesty, namely:

**1.** That Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one divine essence and nature, are one God, who created heaven and earth, etc.

**2.** That the Father was begotten by no one, the Son was begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son.

**3.** That only the Son became man, and neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit.

**4.** That the Son became man in this manner: he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, without the cooperation of man, and was born of the pure, holy, and virgin Mary.﻿﻿ Afterwards he suffered, died, was buried, descended to hell, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven; and he is seated at the right hand of God, will come to judge the living and the dead, etc., as the Apostles﻿’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Catechism in common use for children﻿﻿ teach.

These articles are not matters of dispute or contention, for both parties confess them.﻿﻿ Therefore, it is not necessary to treat them at greater length.

[Part II]

The second part treats the articles which pertain to the office and work of Jesus Christ, or to our redemption.

[Article I. Christ and Faith]

1 The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “﻿was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification﻿” (﻿Rom. 4:25﻿). 2 He alone is “﻿the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world﻿” (﻿John 1:29﻿). “﻿God has laid upon him the iniquities of us all﻿” (﻿Isa. 53:6﻿). 3 Moreover, “﻿all have sinned,﻿” and “﻿they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood﻿” (﻿Rom. 3:23-25﻿).

4 Inasmuch as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in ﻿Romans 3﻿, “﻿For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law﻿” (﻿Rom. 3:28﻿), and again, “﻿that he [God] himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus﻿” (﻿Rom. 3:26﻿).

5 Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised,﻿﻿ even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, “﻿There is no (tr-463) other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved﻿” (﻿Acts 4:12﻿). “﻿And with his stripes we are healed﻿” (﻿Isa. 53:5﻿).

On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.

Article II. [The Mass]

1 The Mass in the papacy must be regarded as the greatest and most horrible abomination because it runs into direct and violent conflict with this fundamental article. Yet, above and beyond all others, it has been the supreme and most precious of the papal idolatries, for it is held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass (even when offered by an evil scoundrel) delivers men from their sins, both here in this life and yonder in purgatory, although in reality this can and must be done by the Lamb of God alone, as has been stated above.﻿﻿ There is to be no concession or compromise in this article either, for the first article does not permit it.

2 If there were reasonable papists, one would speak to them in the following friendly fashion:

“﻿Why do you cling so tenaciously to your Masses?

“﻿**1.** After all, they are a purely human invention. They are not commanded by God. And we can discard all human inventions, for Christ says, ‘﻿In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men﻿’ (﻿Matt. 15:9﻿).

3 “﻿**2.** The Mass is unnecessary, and so it can be omitted without sin and danger.

4 “﻿**3.** The sacrament can be had in a far better and more blessed manner — indeed, the only blessed manner — according to the institution of Christ. Why, then, do you drive the world into wretchedness and woe on account of an unnecessary and fictitious matter when the sacrament can be had in another and more blessed way?

5 “﻿Let the people be told openly that the Mass, as trumpery, can be omitted without sin, that no one will be damned for not observing it, and that one can be saved in a better way without the Mass. Will the Mass not then collapse of itself — not only for the rude rabble, but also for all godly, Christian, sensible, God-fearing people — especially if they hear that it is a dangerous thing which was fabricated and invented without God’s Word and will?

6 “﻿**4.** Since such countless and unspeakable abuses have arisen everywhere through the buying and selling of Masses, it would be prudent to do without the Mass for no other reason than to curb such abuses, even if it actually possessed some value in and of itself. How much the more should it be discontinued in order to guard forever against such abuses when it is so unnecessary, useless, and dangerous and when we can obtain what is more necessary, more useful, and more certain without the Mass.

7 “﻿**5.** The Mass is and can be nothing else than a human work, even a work of evil scoundrels (as the cannon﻿﻿ and all books on the subject declare), for by means of the Mass men try (tr-465) to reconcile themselves and others to God and obtain and merit grace and the forgiveness of sins. It is observed for this purpose when it is best observed. What other purpose could it have? Therefore, it should be condemned and must be abolished because it is a direct contradiction to the fundamental article, which asserts that it is not the celebrant of a Mass and what he does but the Lamb of God and the Son of God who takes away our sin.﻿”﻿﻿

8 Somebody may seek to justify himself by saying that he wishes to communicate himself for the sake of his own devotion.﻿﻿ This is not honest, for if he really desires to commune, he can do so most fittingly and properly in the sacrament administered according to Christ’s institution. To commune by himself is uncertain and unnecessary, and he does not know what he is doing because he follows a false human opinion and imagination without the sanction of God’s Word. 9 Nor is it right (even if everything else is in order) for anyone to use the sacrament, which is the common possession of the church, to meet his own private need and thus trifle with it according to his own pleasure apart from the fellowship of the church.

10 This article concerning the Mass will be the decisive issue in the council. Even if it were possible for the papists to make concessions to us in all other articles, it would not be possible for them to yield on this article. It is as Campegio﻿﻿ said in Augsburg: he would suffer himself to be torn to pieces before he would give up the Mass. So by God’s help I would suffer myself to be burned to ashes before I would allow a celebrant of the Mass and what he does to be considered equal or superior to my Saviour, Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are and remain eternally divided and opposed the one to the other. The papists are well aware that if the Mass falls, the papacy will fall with it. Before they would permit this to happen, they would put us all to death.

11 Besides, this dragon’s tail — that is, the Mass — has brought forth a brood of vermin and the poison of manifold idolatries.

12 The first is purgatory. They were so occupied with requiem Masses, with vigils, with the weekly, monthly, and yearly celebrations of requiems,﻿﻿ with the common week,﻿﻿ with All Souls﻿’ Day, and with soul-baths﻿﻿ that the Mass was used almost exclusively for the dead although Christ instituted the sacrament for the living alone. Consequently purgatory and all the pomp, services, and business transactions associated with it are to be regarded as nothing else than illusions of the devil, for purgatory, too, is contrary to the fundamental article that Christ alone, and not the work of man, can help souls. Besides, nothing has been commanded or enjoined upon us with reference to the dead. All this may consequently be discarded, apart entirely from the fact that it is error and idolatry.

13 The papists here adduce passages from Augustine and some of the Fathers﻿﻿ who are said to have written about purgatory. They suppose that we do not understand for what purpose and to what end the authors wrote these passages. St. Augustine﻿﻿ (tr-467) does not write that there is a purgatory, nor does he cite any passage of the Scriptures that would constrain him to adopt such an opinion. He leaves it undecided whether or not there is a purgatory and merely mentions that his mother asked that she be remembered at the altar or sacrament. Now, this is nothing but a human opinion of certain individuals and cannot establish an article of faith. That is the prerogative of God alone. 14 But our papists make use of such human opinions to make men believe their shameful, blasphemous, accursed traffic in Masses which are offered for souls in purgatory, etc. They can never demonstrate these things from Augustine. Only when they have abolished their traffic in purgatorial Masses (which St. Augustine never dreamed of) shall we be ready to discuss with them whether statements of St. Augustine are to be accepted when they are without the support of the Scriptures and whether the dead are to be commemorated in the sacrament. 15 It will not do to make articles of faith out of the holy Fathers﻿’ words or works. Otherwise what they ate, how they dressed, and what kind of houses they lived in would have to become articles of faith — as has happened in the case of relics. This means that﻿﻿ the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel.﻿﻿

16 The second is a consequence of this: evil spirits have introduced the knavery of appearing as spirits of the departed﻿﻿ and, with unspeakable lies and cunning, of demanding Masses, vigils, pilgrimages, and other alms. 17 We had to accept all these things as articles of faith and had to live according to them. Moreover, the pope gave his approval to these things as well as to the Mass and all the other abominations. Here, too, there can be no concession or compromise.

18 The third are pilgrimages. Masses, forgiveness of sins, and God’s grace were sought here, too, for Masses dominated everything. It is certain that we have not been commanded to make pilgrimages, nor are they necessary, because we may obtain forgiveness and grace in a better way and may omit pilgrimages without sin and danger. Why do they neglect their own parishes, the Word of God, their wives and children, etc. and pursue these unnecessary, uncertain, harmful will-o﻿’-the-wisps of the devil? 19 They do so simply because the devil has possessed the pope to praise and approve of these practices in order that great multitudes of people may turn aside from Christ to their own merits and (what is worst of all) become idolaters. Besides, it is an unnecessary, uncommanded, abortive, uncertain, and even harmful thing. 20 Therefore there may be no concession or compromise here either.

21 The fourth are fraternities.﻿﻿ Here monasteries, chapters, and vicars have obligated themselves to transfer (by legal and open sale) all Masses, good works, etc. (tr-469) for the benefit of the living and the dead. Not only is this mere human trumpery, utterly unnecessary and without command, but it is contrary to the first article, concerning redemption.﻿﻿ Therefore, it is under no circumstances to be tolerated.

22 The fifth are relics. In this connection so many manifest lies and so much nonsense has been invented about the bones of dogs and horses that even the devil has laughed at such knavery. Even if there were some good in them, relics should long since have been condemned. They are neither commanded nor commended. They are utterly unnecessary and useless. 23 Worst of all, however, is the claim that relics effect indulgences and the forgiveness of sin and that, like the Mass, etc., their use is a good work and a service of God.

24 The sixth place belongs to the precious indulgences, which are granted to the living and the dead (for money) and by which the pope sells the merits of Christ together with the superabundant merits of all the saints and the entire church. These are not to be tolerated. Not only are they unnecessary and without commandment, but they are also contrary to the first article, for the merits of Christ are obtained by grace, through faith, without our work or pennies. They are offered to us without our money or merit, not by the power of the pope but by the preaching of God’s Word.

The Invocation of Saints

The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of the Antichrist. It is in conflict with the first, chief article and undermines knowledge of Christ. It is neither commanded nor recommended, nor does it have any precedent in the Scriptures. Even if the invocation of saints were a precious practice (which it is not), we have everything a thousandfold better in Christ.

26 Although angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ himself also does), and although saints on earth, and perhaps also in heaven, do likewise, it does not follow that we should invoke angels and saints, pray to them, keep fasts and festivals for them, say Masses and offer sacrifices to them, establish churches, altars, and services for them, serve them in still other ways, regard them as helpers in time of need, and attribute all sorts of help to them, assigning to each of them a special function,﻿﻿ as the papists teach and practice. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone. 27 As a Christian and a saint on earth, you can pray for me, not in one particular necessity only, but in every kind of need. However, I should not on this account pray to you, invoke you, keep fasts and festivals and say Masses and offer sacrifices in your honor, or trust in you for my salvation. There are other ways in which I can honor, love, and thank you in Christ. 28 If such idolatrous honor is withdrawn from angels and dead saints, the honor that remains will do no harm and will quickly be forgotten. When spiritual and physical benefit and help are no longer expected, the saints will cease to be molested in their graves and in heaven, for (tr-471) no one will long remember, esteem, or honor them out of love when there is no expectation of return.

29 In short, we cannot allow but must condemn the Mass, its implications, and its consequences in order that we may retain the holy sacrament in its purity and certainly according to the institution of Christ and may use and receive it in faith.

Article III. [Chapters and Monasteries]

1 The chapters﻿﻿ and monasteries which in former times had been founded with good intentions for the education of learned men and decent women should be restored to such purposes in order that we may have pastors, preachers, and other ministers in the church, others who are necessary for secular government in cities and states, and also well trained girls to become mothers, housekeepers, etc.

2 If they are unwilling to serve this purpose, it would be better to abandon them or tear them down rather than preserve them with their blasphemous services, invented by men, which claim to be superior to the ordinary Christian life and to the offices and callings established by God. All this, too, is in conflict with the first, fundamental article concerning redemption in Jesus Christ. Besides, like other human inventions, all this is without commandment, unnecessary, and useless. Moreover, it causes dangerous and needless effort, and accordingly the prophets call such service of God *aven,﻿﻿* that is, vanity.

Article IV. [The Papacy]

1 The pope is not the head of all Christendom by divine right or according to God’s Word, for this position belongs only to one, namely, to Jesus Christ. The pope is only the bishop and pastor of the churches in Rome and of such other churches as have attached themselves to him voluntarily or through a human institution (that is, a secular government).﻿﻿ These churches did not choose to be under him as under an overlord but chose to stand beside him as Christian brethren and companions, as the ancient councils﻿﻿ and the time of Cyprian﻿﻿ prove. 2 But now no bishop dares to call the pope “﻿brother,﻿” as was then customary,﻿﻿ but must address him as “﻿most gracious lord,﻿” as if he were a king or emperor. This we neither will nor should nor can take upon our consciences. Those who wish to do so had better not count on us!

3 Hence it follows that all the things that the pope has undertaken and done on the strength of such false, mischievous, blasphemous, usurped authority have been and still are purely diabolical transactions and deeds (except what pertains to secular government,﻿﻿ where God sometimes permits much good to come to a people through a tyrant or scoundrel) which contribute to the destruction of the entire holy (tr-473) Christian church (in so far as this lies in his power) and come into conflict with the first, fundamental article which is concerned with redemption in Jesus Christ.

4 All the pope’s bulls and books, in which he roars like a lion (as the angel in ﻿Rev. 10:3﻿﻿﻿ suggests), are available. Here it is asserted that no Christian can be saved unless he is obedient to the pope and submits to him in all that he desires, says, and does.﻿﻿ This is nothing less than to say, “﻿Although you believe in Christ, and in him have everything that is needful for salvation, this is nothing and all in vain unless you consider me your god and are obedient and subject to me.﻿” Yet it is manifest that the holy church was without a pope for more that five hundred years at the least﻿﻿ and that the churches of the Greeks and of many other nationalities have never been under the pope and are not at the present time. 5 Manifestly (to repeat what has already been said often) the papacy is a human invention, and it is not commanded, it is unnecessary, and it is useless. The holy Christian church can exist very well without such a head, and it would have remained much better if such a head had not been raised up by the devil. 6 The papacy is of no use to the church because it exercises no Christian office. Consequently the church must continue to exist without the pope.

7 Suppose that the pope would renounce the claim that he is the head of the church by divine right or by God’s command; suppose that it were necessary to have a head, to whom all others should adhere, in order that the unity of Christendom might better be preserved against the attacks of sects and heresies; and suppose that such a head would then be elected by men and it remained in their power and choice to change or depose this head. This is just the way in which the Council of Constance acted with reference to the popes when it deposed three and elected a fourth.﻿﻿ If, I say, the pope and the see of Rome were to concede and accept this (which is impossible), he would have to suffer the overthrow and destruction of his whole rule and estate, together with all his rights and pretensions. In short, he cannot do it. Even if he could, Christendom would not be helped in any way. 8 There would be even more sects than before because, inasmuch as subjection to such a head would depend on the good pleasure of men rather than on a divine command, he would very easily and quickly be despised and would ultimately be without any adherents at all. He would not always have to have his residence in Rome or some other fixed place,﻿﻿ but it could be anywhere and in whatever church God would raise up a man fitted for such an office. What a complicated and confused state of affairs that would be!

9 Consequently the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ,﻿﻿ and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts)﻿﻿ and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc. So St. Jerome writes that the priests of Alexandria governed (tr-475) the churches together and in common. The apostles did the same, and after them all the bishops throughout Christendom, until the pope raised his head over them all.

10 This﻿﻿ is a powerful demonstration that the pope is the real Antichrist﻿﻿ who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power, which amounts to nothing since it is neither established nor commanded by God. 11 This is actually what St. Paul calls exalting oneself over and against God.﻿﻿ Neither the Turks nor the Tartars, great as is their enmity against Christians, do this; those who desire to do so they allow to believe in Christ, and they receive bodily tribute and obedience from Christians.

12 However, the pope will not permit such faith but asserts that one must be obedient to him in order to be saved.﻿﻿ This we are unwilling to do even if we have to die for it in God’s name. 13 All this is a consequence of his wishing to be the head of the Christian church by divine right. He had to set himself up as equal to and above Christ and to proclaim himself the head, and then the lord of the church, and finally of the whole world. He went so far as to claim to be an earthly god﻿﻿ and even presumed to issue orders to the angels in heaven.﻿﻿

14 When the teaching of the pope is distinguished from that of the Holy Scriptures, or is compared with them, it becomes apparent that, at its best, the teaching of the pope has been taken from the imperial, pagan law﻿﻿ and is a teaching concerning secular transactions and judgments, as the papal decretals﻿﻿ show. In keeping with such teaching, instructions are given concerning the ceremonies of churches, vestments, food, personnel, and countless other puerilities, fantasies, and follies without so much as a mention of Christ, faith, and God’s commandments.

Finally, it is most diabolical for the pope to promote his lies about Masses, purgatory, monastic life, and human works and services (which are the essence of the papacy) in contradiction to God, and to damn, slay, and plague all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations of his above all things. Accordingly, just as we cannot adore the devil himself as our lord or God, so we cannot suffer his apostle, the pope or Antichrist, to govern us as our head or lord, for deception, murder, and the eternal destruction of body and soul are characteristic of his papal government,﻿﻿ as I have demonstrated in many books.﻿﻿

15 In these four articles they will have enough to condemn in the council, for they neither can nor will concede to us even the smallest fraction of these articles. Of this we may be certain, and we must rely on the hope that Christ, our Lord, has attacked his adversaries and will accomplish his purpose by his Spirit and his coming.﻿﻿ Amen. 16 In the council we shall not be standing before the emperor or the secular authority, as at Augsburg,﻿﻿ where we responded to a gracious summons and were given a kindly hearing, but we shall stand (tr-477) before the pope and the devil himself, who does not intend to give us a hearing but only to damn, murder, and drive us to idolatry. Consequently we ought not here kiss his feet﻿﻿ or say, “﻿You are my gracious lord,﻿” but we ought rather speak as the angel spoke to the devil in Zechariah, “﻿The Lord rebuke you, O Satan﻿” (﻿Zech. 3:2﻿).﻿﻿ [[1]](#footnote-1)

Discussion Questions on The Smalcald Articles (Parts I & II)

1. “On this article [of Christ and Faith] rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil and all our adversaries will gain the victory” (Part I, Art. I, para 5). Explain why Luther thought all teaching rested upon this one article. Why would loosing this article mean victory for their opponents?
2. In what way did the Roman view of the Mass contradict the first article? What other modern day practice can you think of that also contradicts the first article in a similar way?
3. In Part II, Article II, para 13-15 [page 3], Luther argues whether or not Augustine agreed with the teaching of purgatory. For what reason does Luther say that it doesn’t matter if Augustine taught purgatory or not?
4. List two reasons Luther opposes the requirement of pilgrimages.
5. If someone told you to pray to St. Cayentano to help you find a job, drawing from Luther in the Smalcald Articles, how might you respond to him or her?
6. Who is the head of the church? How would you defend your answer from Holy Scripture?
1. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000, c1959), 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)