

Theological Essentials

Introduction: The purpose of this class – catechesis, proper theological preparation before making your vows before God and the Church. Your vow on All Saints, Easter Vigil, Pentecost, or Epiphany are akin to Wedding Vows.

The three main questions this class hopes to answer giving you a reasonable understanding of the weight of your commitment.

1. **What must I believe to be a Christian (status confessionis)?**
2. **What am I proclaiming when I am baptized/renew baptism/made a member/confirmed?**
3. **What am I committing to in lifestyle by becoming a Christian/proclaiming my faith (spiritual disciplines)?** 1 John 2:1, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”

“True Christian and evangelical theology means confession of true belief does not occur apart from a life of moral obedience and genuine worship.” – Roger Olsen

What must I believe to be a Christian (status confessionis)?

“We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.” – Nicene Creed

1. Special Revelation and the Trinity

What is the Core of Christian belief?

Status Confessionis are the Christian Essentials that are “Believed by All Christians, All Times, Everywhere.” Fundamentalists elevate all beliefs to status confessionis while Liberals lower all status confessionis to be as inclusive as possible. It is important to have boundaries to our beliefs. The Great Tradition is made up of One Canon, Two Testaments, Three Creeds, Four Councils and Five Centuries. Scripture first and foremost plus the Church’s historical and traditional creeds (Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed, Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, & Council of Chalcedon). All of the Creeds and Councils are informed by Scripture. (Note: documents at the end of your packet). Within the boundaries of Status Confessionis beliefs are a plethora of optional Christian beliefs, known as the adiaphora beliefs. Christians have the freedom to disagree on these beliefs without jeopardizing their place within The Kingdom of God.

What is the Christian belief about God?

God does not fit our categories and it’s important to recognize how our categories create our view of God. The communicable attributes from Biblical Witness are: love, mercy, goodness, holiness, peace, righteousness, faithfulness, & knowledge. The incommunicable attributes from Hellenistic philosophy include: infinite, incorruptible, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable, impassible, & eternal. Divine love is the constitutive attribute of God. “God is love, and this love is holy. God is love, and this love is righteous.” God’s love is at work, then, in the destruction of sin and of human persons as sinners. **Note,**

underline and never forget: this destruction takes place in the outpouring of God's wrath on Jesus Christ.

Christians emphasize the one-ness (unity) and three-ness (trinity) of God. Oneness means we worship **one** God, who has one single **substance**. Trinity means that God has three **distinct persons** who share the **same (homoousios)** substance. Heresies: God becomes the father, then becomes the son, then becomes the spirit – one identical person with three modes. God is hidden but projects three distinct images or persons. Origen introduces “homoousios” which means “of one or the same substance.” Council of Nicaea in AD 325 adopts Origen's language. Arius wanted to say that Jesus was of “similar” (homoiousios) substance, not the same; that Jesus was created before time. Then the Cappodocian Fathers came up with “hypostasis” (persons) to speak of God's three-ness. Thus we have the basic Latin Principle “opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt” which means “the operations of the Trinity towards what is outside itself are indivisible” or basically what we end up saying about the nature of one person of the Trinity must also be said of all three.

2. The Fall

How has sin affected us?

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were created with the possibility of not sinning (posse non peccare) according to Augustine. They were given free choice and had the possibility of remaining obedient to God never allowing sin to enter creation. But they chose to sin. Now as descendants of Adam we have inherited sin, original sin. We are all affected in some way according to the core of Christian belief. Christians differ on the details of how we are affected by original sin. We now cannot avoid sinning (non posse non peccare – status confessionis). Pelagius' view of sin has been rejected as heresy by the Church in the 5th century with the help of Augustine. Pelagius believed that humans could still live without sinning; that Adam's sin affects only Adam and not humankind. Some Christians also believe we are damned by Adam's sin, i.e. inherited guilt. Others strongly uphold personal responsibility for sin, i.e. we are damned only for our own sin. Therefore we all agree upon the doctrine of original sin (status confessionis) to mean there is not a single facet or area of human life which is untouched by sin. Therefore all humans are damned by their own sin, and no human can avoid sinning. And the punishment for sin has been laid upon Christ making forgiveness available to those who put their hope and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

“We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” – Nicene Creed

3. Christology and Eschatology

What is the Christian belief about Jesus?

Christology is the article by which the Church stands or falls. The two natures of Christ, the humanity of Christ and the divinity of Christ, are the issues at stake in Christology. Regarding the humanity of Christ, he is said to be anhypostatic (having no center of existence in himself) and enhypostatic (having his center of existence in God). Christ and true humanity are both of these. The center of existence is in relation to God not in oneself. As far as Christology goes, we want to emphasize Christ's unity with God and his distinctiveness as the 2nd person of the Trinity. When either Christ's humanity or his divinity is emphasized over the other, heresy is birthed (Docetism, Gnosticism, Ebionism). Thus the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon was written. Mary is labeled the *theotokos* (God –bearer) rather than *christotokos* (simply Christ bearer) against Nestorius' wishes who overemphasized the distinctiveness of Christ's humanity. The Chalcedonian Definition is "a unity-in-distinction." This is called *hypostatic union* (two realities exist in a unity). Christ's person is never to be separated from his salvific work. His being is tied invariably to his function as the Savior of the world. His function is broken down into 3 roles: Prophet, Priest, and King. He is never in only one role, nor does he switch from one role to another. He serves in all 3 roles simultaneously even now. As the priest, he is both the priest and the sacrifice. And his death atones for the sins of the world.

What do all Christians believe about the end times?

The Eschaton is an event – the coming of Christ. It is a disruptive event, a disruption of the present evil age. All Christians believe that Christ will return and judge the world. This is a non-negotiable Christian belief. However, the manner of his return is a much disputed issue among Christian theologians and scholars.

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen." – Nicene Creed

4. Salvation (how are we saved?)

What do all Christians believe about salvation? As theology in the Western world developed, the ideas of justification and sanctification became divorced. Luther reminded the world that justification is by faith rather than the medieval world's understanding of justification as a gradual acquisition of virtue and righteousness. The focus in the Medieval world was on God's grace through the sacraments with the hope that at the end of your life, you might be justified by God based on how you lived your life. At the Reformation, Luther adjusted this understanding of salvation by emphasizing justification by faith at one's baptism. So the Western world shifted from "salvation by grace" to "salvation by faith." Salvation by faith includes the idea of alien righteousness or imputed righteousness (forgiveness is unconditional) rather than proper righteousness (forgiveness is conditional upon transformation). However, we would argue that it is important to put an end to the divorce between these 2 ways of understanding salvation. After all the word for justification and sanctification were the same word both in the Latin and in the original koine Greek of the New Testament. Therefore from birth & baptism on, your life is about sanctification & justification. It is completely appropriate to say, "I was saved when I put my faith in Jesus, I am being saved as I follow him, and I will be saved when I breath my last breath." All 3 are true simultaneously. As a side note: (I give this to you for free) Aristotle believed that actuality is prior to potentiality, who you are determines who you can be. But Luther reversed the two with regards to

righteousness. Who you can be, your potential for righteousness as God sees you, determines who you are in actuality right now. You are righteous right now, by imputed righteousness, Christ's righteousness. Therefore your potentiality precedes your actuality. I am righteous now which imputed to me makes me begin to reflect this truer reality about me rather than my present actuality. This is like the idea of affirmation, naming some small potential in a child as existing already, (what a good dancer you are, Alyana), calls the good thing forward in that child so that they live as if they already possess the goodness, which causes them to later possess it substantially.

To be a person of faith means to be ex-centric, in the literal sense of having a center outside of oneself. To be a Christian means to have one's center in Jesus Christ in the reversal of the sinful process of self-dependence or autonomy. In the words of St. Paul, "I no longer live, Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Through the work of the triune God, we are made holy. The goal of justification is that we would live a sanctified life: a life of faithful obedience.

5. Ecclesiology & Worship

What do all Christians believe about the Church?

The Church is identified as those who listen to Scripture, confess Jesus Christ and testify to this reality in the world. Calvin says: "From this the face of the church comes forth and becomes visible to our eyes. Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists. If it has the ministry of the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church. For it is certain that such things are not without fruit" (Calvin). In summary, Word and Sacrament. These break down into four activities: public reading of the Bible, apostolic teaching and proclamation of the gospel, the sacramental (worship & liturgy) life of the Community, the fellowship or communion (koinonia) and care/service (diakonia) of the people of God. Can you be a Christian outside of the Church? Calvin says no, along with Cyprian.

Why is worship essential for Christians?

Worship, regardless of the variety of styles or methods, is essential to the life of a Christian and the life of the Church in that it becomes the sacramental life of the Community of faith. As ex-centric people, we have our center in the Triune God. It is important weekly to replace our center in him, and to exalt him for his ontological being and his acts towards his creation.

What am I proclaiming when I am baptized/renew baptism/made a member/confirmed?

6. Questions

Baptisands:

Do you desire to be baptized?

Renewals:

Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?

Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

Reception:

Do you desire to be received into the fellowship of this church?

All:

Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Then everyone renews the baptismal covenant which is the Apostles Creed.

What am I committing to by becoming a Christian/proclaiming my faith (spiritual disciplines)?

7. Daily Life with Jesus in Prayer and Scripture
8. Using spiritual gifts to Serve the Church and Mission of God
9. Chastity: A commitment to Sexual purity
10. Ultimately: Lifelong Growth, lifelong servitude to Christ

“True Christian and evangelical theology means confession of true belief does not occur apart from a life of moral obedience and genuine worship.”

Scripture References Supporting the Status Confessionis of the Nicene-Creed:

I believe in (Romans 10: 8-10; 1 John 4: 15)
One God (Deuteronomy 6: 4, Ephesians 4: 6)
Father (Matthew 6: 9)
Almighty, (Exodus 6: 3)
Creator of heaven and earth, (Genesis 1: 1)
and of all things visible and invisible; (Colossians 1: 15-16) and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, (Acts 11: 17)
Son of God (Matthew 14: 33; 16: 16)
begotten (John 1: 18; 3: 16)
begotten of the Father before all ages; (John 1: 2)
Light of Light (Psalm 27: 1; John 8: 12; Matthew 17: 2,5)
true God of true God, (John 17: 1-5)
of one essence with the Father, (John 10: 30)
through Whom all things were made; (Hebrews 1: 1-2)
Who for us and for our salvation (I Timothy 2: 4-5)
came down from the heavens ((John 6: 33,35)
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, (Luke 1: 35)
and became man. (John 1: 14)
Crucified for us (Mark 15: 25; I Corinthians 15: 3)
under Pontius Pilate, (John 1: 14)
He suffered, (Mark 8: 31)
and was buried; (Luke 23: 53; I Corinthians 15: 4)
Rising on the third day according to the Scriptures, (Luke 24: 1; 1 Cor. 15: 4)
And ascending into the heavens, (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 10)
He is seated at the right hand of the Father; (Mark 16: 19; Acts 7: 55)
And coming again in glory (Matthew 24: 27)
to judge the living and dead, (Acts 10: 42; 2 I Timothy 4: 1)
His kingdom shall have no end; (2 Peter 1: 11)
And in the holy Spirit, (John 14: 26)
Lord (Acts 5: 3-4)
the Giver of life, (Genesis 1: 2)
Who proceeds from the Father, (John 15: 26)
Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, (Matthew 3: 16-17)
Who spoke through the prophets; (I Samuel 19: 20; Ezekiel 11: 5, 13)
In one, (Matthew 16: 18)
holy, (I Peter 2: 5, 9)
catholic (Mark 16: 15)
and apostolic Church; (Acts 2: 42; Ephesians 2: 19-22)
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; (Ephesians 4: 5)
I expect the resurrection of the dead; (John 11: 24; I Cor. 15: 12-49)
And the life of the age to come. (Mark 10: 29-30)
Amen. (Psalm 106:48)

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.