Hope and Change You Can Believe In
A Day of Reflection on the Lord's Word and the Coming of His Kingdom

Session I: Conversion (Hope and Change)
Session II: Law and Gospel (Theses on Lutheran Evangelism)
Session III: “I Object!”
Session IV: Courage and Conversation
   (Ten Commandments in the News, The Casual Apologetics Game)

Session I: Conversion (Hope and Change)

The Augsburg Confession tells the story...

**Article I: Of God.**

1) Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; 2) that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and 3) yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” 4) they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

5) They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans, who assumed two principles, one Good and the other Evil: also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. 6) They condemn also the Samosatene, old and new, who, contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” signifies motion created in things.

**Article II: Of Original Sin.**

1) Also they teach that since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with 2) concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.

3) They condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ’s merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

**Article III: Of the Son of God.**

1) Also they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did assume the human nature in 2] the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably enjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the
Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and 3] buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men. 4] He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into heaven that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify 5] them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort, and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. 6] The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles’ Creed.

Article IV: Of Justification.
1] Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for 2] Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. 3] This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.

Article V: Of the Ministry.
1] That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, 2] the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear 3] the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.

4] They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article VI: Of New Obedience.
1] Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God’s will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification 2] before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants. Luke 17, 10. The same is also taught by 3] the Fathers. For Ambrose says: It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone.

Article VII: Of the Church.
1] Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

2] And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and 3] the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. 4] As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5. 6.
Session II: Law and Gospel (Theses on Lutheran Evangelism)

It a common misconception that "Lutherans don't do Evangelism". This is not true. What is true is that when Lutheran go about the business of evangelism, they often abandon their Lutheran doctrine. These theses are an attempt to begin with our Lutheran theology and paint a picture of what Evangelism is and is not.

I. The Scriptures rightly understood give all glory to God and all comfort to terrified consciences. False doctrine does the opposite, either taking glory from God or comfort from the conscience, or both.

II. Natural man is blind, dead, and an enemy of God (Anthropology, Original Sin), and therefore cannot cooperate with God in conversion. It must be stated plainly that the will of man plays no part in conversion. Therefore all attempts to induce an emotional response for God (and other such revival shenanigans) will be carefully avoided. Never would an unbeliever be told that he must “accept Jesus” or “receive Him” or “open his heart” or “pray a prayer.” Such things are impossible. Any discussion of evangelism that speaks or implies man’s cooperation takes glory from God and robs consciences of comfort.

III. Moreover, natural man is hostile to God (Original Sin again). Therefore the Lutheran church expects persecution of the Lord's Word and His people.

IV. God alone redeems, justifies and converts sinful man (Monergism). Because conversion is God's work, we should pay attention to how He does it (rather than making stuff up).

V. The Holy Spirit creates faith (Sanctification in the broad sense, the Third Article of the Creed). The Lutheran Church therefore lives in the confidence of faith, knowing that the coming of the Lord's kingdom depends not on her own efforts, but on the free work of the Holy Spirit. The evangelism efforts of the Lord's church begin with prayer to God who desires all to be saved, and trusts that He hears and answers this prayer.

VI. And more, the Holy Spirit creates faith “when and where it pleases Him”, not when it pleases us. This means, among other things, that it is impossible to judge mission faithfulness through numbers.

VII. The Holy Spirit uses means to convert man (what we often call “the means of grace”, but what our confessions call “the means of the Spirit”). The means of the Spirit is the word of God, through which He shows our sin (Law) and promises forgiveness (Gospel). There are no other means of the Spirit, there are therefore no other means of evangelism.

VIII. Correspondingly, repentance embraces two parts: contrition and faith.
Both contrition and faith are the works of the Holy Spirit, meaning that man is passive in this work of the Holy Spirit. (“Repent” is a command kept only by the work of the Holy Spirit.) The distinction between law and Gospel is at the heart of everything the church does, says, etc. We can judge mission faithfulness on the Gospel rightly preached and the sacrament rightly administered. Any wrongly divided law and Gospel is not properly the work of Evangelism.

IX. Furthermore, the proper distinction between law and Gospel is a personal and individual distinction. As Luther taught us, the Law is for the proud and puffed-up, the Gospel for the despairing. This means that evangelism cannot be programmatic or scripted, but that the conversation between the church and the unbeliever will include listening and an attempt to discern the condition of the person to apply the proper word of God at the proper time.

X. Even furthermore, this means that “Evangelism Training” will be nothing more than continued study and meditation on the proper distinction between law and Gospel.

XI. The Word of God, being the means of the Holy Spirit in creating faith in the heart of sinful man, is effective. It is a false and dangerous tendency to treat the Word of God as mere information that only has benefit when accepted and acted upon (as is the case with American Evangelicalism). The Gospel is the authoritative declaration of sins forgiven (Absolution). In fact, the central act of Evangelism is not asking the unbeliever to come to Jesus, but rather, in the name of Jesus, forgiving their sins. Evangelism is the Church speaking the Absolution to the World.

XII. Through the Sacraments, as through the Word, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith. The Lutheran Church therefore recognizes the central role of baptism in the evangelism of the world. It is impossible to talk about evangelism Biblically without speaking about the Lord's gift of baptism.

XIII. The means of grace are resistible. Therefore the Church expects rejection. Furthermore, the Lutheran church resists the temptation to look for “more efficient means” of evangelism, as if we could find something less resistible than the divinely appointed means.

XIV. A Christian is still a sinner in need of the Lord's mercy. Therefore the church, knowing her own sin and the superabundant grace of God, gladly welcomes sinners into her midst to hear of the Lord's love and mercy. A church/congregation without this hospitality has lost her first love.
Session III: “I Object!”

I. Christians are a bunch of hypocrites. (Christians are jerks.)

II. If God was so good, why is there so much suffering in this world? (God's a jerk.)

III. All roads lead to heaven.
    (“I'm a good person.” “What about the people who've never heard about Jesus?” “COEXIST”
    “How could so many people all be wrong?”)
    (God's a nice guy.)

IV. I'm a Muslim.

V. Science disproves the Bible. (Evolution.)
Session IV: Courage and Conversation

Ten Commandments in the News

Obama assails oil industry's 'cozy relationship' with government
The president says he will 'close the loophole that has allowed oil companies to bypass environmental reviews.' A new effort is underway to stop the Gulf of Mexico leak.

16 dead in bloody street battles in Bangkok
AP Thai soldiers look up from their position while dispersing anti-government protesters who occupied a street intersection on Friday, May 14, 2010 in Bangkok. Clashes between Thai troops and anti-government protestors have claimed 16 dead and left dozens wounded in two days of fighting that has turned the heart of the capital into a war zone, official sources said Saturday.

Hispanic Lawmakers Weigh Solutions to Illegal Immigration
Hispanic lawmakers and groups who have voiced opposition to Arizona's immigration enforcement law told Fox News how they would tackle the nation's illegal immigration problem.

The Casual Apologetics Game

“Oh you're a Lutheran! What do Lutheran's believe in anyways?”

“Are you born again?”

“Day's like this make me think of how wonderful the world would have been before people were around to mess it up!”

“Jesus was a hippie.”