

Article III

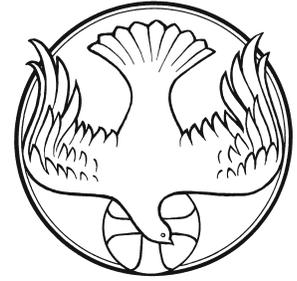
³⁴ I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

³⁵ I cannot connect this article (as I have said) to anything better than Sanctification. Through this article the Holy Spirit, with His office, is declared and shown: He makes people holy [1 Corinthians 6:11]. Therefore, we must take our stand upon the term *Holy Spirit*, because it is so precise and complete that we cannot find another. ³⁶ For there are many kinds of spirits mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, such as the spirit of man [1 Corinthians 2:11], heavenly spirits [Hebrews 12:23], and evil spirits [Luke 7:21]. But God's Spirit alone is called the Holy Spirit, that is, He who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For just as the Father is called "Creator" and the Son is called "Redeemer," so the Holy Spirit, from His work, must be called "Sanctifier," or "One who makes holy."

³⁷ *"But how is such sanctifying done?"*

Answer, "The Son receives dominion, by which He wins us, through His birth, death, resurrection, and so on. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit causes our sanctification by the following: the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That means He leads us first into His holy congregation and places us in the bosom of the Church. Through the Church He preaches to us and brings us to Christ."

³⁸ Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe on Him, and have Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel [1 Corinthians 12:3; Galatians 4:6]. The work of redemption is done and accomplished [John 19:30]. Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, and so on [Colossians 2:3]. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew about it, then it would be useless and lost. So that this treasure might not stay buried, but be received and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed. In the Word He has the Holy Spirit bring this treasure home and make it our own. ³⁹ Therefore, sanctifying is just bringing us to



The Small Catechism The Third Article Sanctification

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Christ so we receive this good, which we could not get ourselves [1 Peter 3:18].

⁴⁰ Learn, then, to understand this article most clearly. You may be asked, “What do you mean by the words *I believe in the Holy Spirit?*”

You can then answer, “I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as His name implies.”

⁴¹ “But how does He accomplish this, or what are His method and means to this end?”

Answer, “By the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. ⁴² For in the first place, the Spirit has His own congregation in the world, which is the mother that conceives and bears every Christian through God’s Word [Galatians 4:26]. Through the Word He reveals and preaches, He illumines and enkindles hearts, so that they understand, accept, cling to, and persevere in the Word” [1 Corinthians 2:12].

⁴³ Where the Spirit does not cause the Word to be preached and roused in the heart so that it is understood, it is lost [Matthew 13:19]. This was the case under the papacy, where faith was entirely put under the bench. No one recognized Christ as his Lord or the Holy Spirit as his Sanctifier. That is, no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that He has gained this treasure for us, without our works and merit [Romans 4:6], and made us acceptable to the Father. ⁴⁴ What, then, was lacking? This: the Holy Spirit was not there to reveal it and cause it to be preached. But men and evil spirits were there. They taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. ⁴⁵ There is no Christian Church in that. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord.

⁴⁶ Let this be enough about the sum of this article. But since the parts that are numbered here are not quite clear to the simple, we shall go over them also.

⁴⁷ The Creed calls the “holy Christian Church” a “communion of saints.” Both expressions, taken together, are identical. But in the past the expression “communion of saints” was not there. This phrase has been poorly and unwisely translated into the German as a *communion* of saints. If it is to be rendered plainly, it must be expressed quite differently in a German way. In the same way, the word *ecclesia* properly means in German “a gathering.” ⁴⁸ But we are used to seeing it translated as the

word *Church*, by which the simple do not understand a gathered multitude but the consecrated house or building. This is true even though the house ought not to be called a Church, just because the multitude gathers there. For we who gather there make and choose for ourselves a particular place and give a name to the house according to the gathering.

So the word *Church* really means nothing other than a common gathering, and is not really German, but Greek (as is also the word *ecclesia*). For in their own language the Greeks call it *kyria*, as in Latin it is called *curia*. Therefore, in real German, in our mother tongue, it ought to be called “a Christian congregation or gathering” or, best of all and most clearly, “holy Christendom.”

⁴⁹ So also the word *communio*, which is added, ought not to be translated “communion,” but “congregation.” It is nothing else than an interpretation or explanation by which someone meant to show what the Christian Church is. Our people understood neither Latin nor German. They have translated this word “communion of saints,” although no German dialect says this or understands it this way. But to speak correct German, it ought to be “a congregation of saints”; that is, a congregation made up purely of saints, or, to speak yet more plainly, “a holy congregation.” ⁵⁰ I say this in order that the words “communion of saints” may be understood. The expression has become so established by custom that it cannot be cast aside easily, and it is treated almost as heresy if someone attempts to change a word.

⁵¹ But this is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ [Ephesians 1:22]. ⁵² This group is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with many different gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms [Ephesians 4:5–8, 11]. I am also a part and member of this same group, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses [Romans 8:17]. I am brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Spirit through having heard and continuing to hear God’s Word [Galatians 3:1–2], which is the beginning of entering it. In the past, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing about God and about Christ [Romans 3:10–12]. ⁵³ So, until the Last Day, the Holy Spirit abides with the holy congregation or Christendom [John 14:17]. Through this congregation He brings us to Christ and He teaches and preaches to us the Word [John 14:26]. By the Word He works and promotes sanctification, causing this congregation daily to grow and to become strong in the faith and its fruit, which He produces [Galatians 5].

⁵⁴ We further believe that in this Christian Church we have forgiveness of sin, which is wrought through the holy Sacraments and Absolution [Matthew 26:28; Mark 1:4; John 20:23] and through all kinds of comforting promises from the entire Gospel. Therefore, whatever ought to be preached about the Sacraments belongs here. In short, the whole Gospel and all the offices of Christianity belong here, which also must be preached and taught without ceasing. God's grace is secured through Christ [John 1:17], and sanctification is wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian Church. Yet because of our flesh, which we bear about with us, we are never without sin [Romans 7:23–24].

⁵⁵ Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. So even though we have sins, the <grace of the> Holy Spirit does not allow them to harm us. For we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but <continuous, uninterrupted> forgiveness of sin. This is because God forgives us and because we forgive, bear with, and help one another [Galatians 6:1–2].

⁵⁶ But outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not found, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness. Therefore, all who seek and wish to earn holiness not through the Gospel and forgiveness of sin, but by their works, have expelled and severed themselves <from this Church> [Galatians 5:4].

⁵⁷ However, while sanctification has begun and is growing daily [2 Thessalonians 1:3], we expect that our flesh will be destroyed and buried with all its uncleanness [Romans 6:4–11]. Then we will come forth gloriously and arise in a new, eternal life of entire and perfect holiness. ⁵⁸ For now we are only half pure and holy. So the Holy Spirit always has some reason to continue His work in us through the Word. He must daily administer forgiveness until we reach the life to come. At that time there will be no more forgiveness, but only perfectly pure and holy people [1 Corinthians 13:10]. We will be full of godliness and righteousness, removed and free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body [1 Corinthians 15:43, 53].

⁵⁹ You see, all this is the Holy Spirit's office and work. He begins and daily increases holiness upon earth through these two things: the Christian Church and the forgiveness of sin. But in our death He will accomplish it altogether in an instant [1 Corinthians 15:52] and will forever preserve us therein by the last two parts [of the Creed].

⁶⁰ But the term “resurrection of the flesh” used here does not agree with good German wording. For when we Germans hear the word *flesh* [Fleisch], we think of nothing more than a butcher block. But in good German wording we would say “resurrection of the body.” However, it is not a big issue, as long as we understand the words right.

⁶¹ Now this is the article of the Creed that must always be and remain in use. For we have already received creation. Redemption, too, is finished. But the Holy Spirit carries on His work without ceasing to the Last Day. For that purpose He has appointed a congregation upon earth by which He speaks and does everything. ⁶² For He has not yet brought together all His Christian Church [*Christenheit*] [John 10:16] or granted all forgiveness. Therefore, we believe in Him who daily brings us into the fellowship of this Christian Church through the Word. Through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins He bestows, increases, and strengthens faith. So when He has done it all, and we abide in this and die to the world and to all evil, He may finally make us perfectly and forever holy. Even now we expect this in faith through the Word.

⁶³ See, here you have the entire divine essence, will, and work shown most completely in quite short and yet rich words. In these words all our wisdom stands, which surpasses and exceeds the wisdom, mind, and reason of all people [1 Corinthians 1:18–25]. The whole world with all diligence has struggled to figure out what God is, what He has in mind and does. Yet the world has never been able to grasp <the knowledge and understanding of> any of these things. But here we have everything in richest measure. ⁶⁴ For here in all three articles God has revealed Himself and opened the deepest abyss of His fatherly heart and His pure, inexpressible love [Ephesians 3:18–19]. He has created us for this very reason, that He might redeem and sanctify us. In addition to giving and imparting to us everything in heaven and upon earth, He has even given to us His Son and the Holy Spirit, who brings us to Himself [Romans 8:14, 32]. ⁶⁵ For (as explained above) we could never grasp the knowledge of the Father’s grace and favor except through the Lord Christ. Jesus is a mirror of the fatherly heart [John 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3], outside of whom we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But we couldn’t know anything about Christ either, unless it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit [1 Corinthians 2:12].

⁶⁶ These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and separate us Christians from all other people on earth. Even if [or:Even if we were to concede that]* all people outside Christianity—whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites—believe in and worship only one true God, they still do not know what His mind toward them is and cannot

expect any love or blessing from Him. Therefore, they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Corinthians 2:9–16; Hebrews 6:4–6].

⁶⁷ From this you see that the Creed is a doctrine quite different from the Ten Commandments. For the Commandments teach what we ought to do. But the Creed tells what God does for us and gives to us. Furthermore, apart from this, the Ten Commandments are written in all people's hearts [Romans 2:15]. However, no human wisdom can understand the Creed. It must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone [1 Corinthians 2:12]. ⁶⁸ The teaching <of the Commandments>, therefore, makes no Christian. For God's wrath and displeasure abide upon us still, because we cannot keep what God demands of us. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us godly and acceptable to God. ⁶⁹ For by this knowledge we have love and delight in all God's commandments [Romans 7:22]. Here we see that God gives Himself to us completely. He gives all that He has and is able to do in order to aid and direct us in keeping the Ten Commandments. The Father gives all creatures. The Son gives His entire work. And the Holy Spirit bestows all His gifts.

⁷⁰ Let this be enough about the Creed to lay a foundation for the simple, so that they may not be burdened. Then, if they understand the substance of it, they themselves may afterward strive to gain more, refer to these parts whatever they learn in the Scriptures, and may ever grow and increase in richer understanding [Ephesians 4:14–15; 2 Peter 3:14]. For as long as we live here, we shall daily have enough to do to preach and to learn this.