



# The Christian Faith

**ROBERT KOLB**



Copyright © 1993 Concordia Publishing House  
3558 S. Jefferson Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973. Used by permission.

Scripture references marked KJV are taken from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

Manufactured in the United States of America

# Contents

I	Our Faith and the Faith	7
II	God	30
III	Creator and Creatures	48
IV	God Provides	73
V	Sin and Evil	87
VI	God's Law	106
VII	The Person of Christ	122
VIII	The Work of Christ	136
IX	Justification	157
X	The Holy Spirit and the Conversion of the Sinner	179
XI	Holy Scripture	196
XII	The Living Voice of God's Word	207
XIII	Baptism	215
XIV	The Lord's Supper	228
XV	The Sanctified Life, or New Obedience	244
XVI	The Church	257
XVII	The Public Ministry	276
XVIII	Last Things and the New Beginning	287

## Chapter I

# Our Faith and the Faith

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). “And God said, ‘Let there be . . . ’” and all that exists came into being—by the power of his Word (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ ” (Rom. 10:14–15).

God likes to talk. He began the world by talking it into existence. When his human creatures doubted his Word and fled from his presence, he came to call them back to himself (Gen. 3:9). To reclaim and restore his people, God has placed his power in human language: the good news that draws people to trust in him. His good news is the power he uses to bring people to salvation (Rom. 1:16). God’s good news for his fallen human creatures restores them to that relationship within his grace and favor for which he designed them in Eden. This message of forgiveness and new life restores these fallen creatures to a full and perfect relationship with him—from his perspective. That righteousness is ours because we are made to grasp its word of promise in faith (Rom. 1:17).

### **We Live by Faith**

This book is entitled *The Christian Faith*. We use the word *faith* in two different senses. *Faith* can refer to the object of our trust—what we believe in. *Faith* also refers to the human act of believing, of trusting, of placing our confidence in and depending on someone or something. Faith—in the second sense—is the very core of our being. It is our basic grasp on reality. If faith is misplaced, then all of life is skewed. If faith is misdirected toward one of God’s creatures, rather than being directed toward our Creator himself, then life goes sour and spoils.

## THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

*Faith*—in the sense of the trust that provides the core orientation for our lives—is among the most important words in the human language. The contemporary Harvard psychologist Erik Erikson has affirmed what the biblical writers told God’s people centuries ago. He has devised an eight-stage basis for analyzing human development, the course of human life. The first and fundamental stage of human existence (in the years between birth and age two), according to Erikson, revolves around trust or faith. This fundamental orientation largely determines the way in which individuals view the world. Learning to trust—or to mistrust—frees or binds us at all subsequent stages of our development. Learning to trust—or learning not to trust—the world around us determines much of our personality and the course of our life, Erikson insists.<sup>1</sup>

We trust first of all our mother and then our father, Erikson observes, because we are first of all children, infants, dependent creatures. Born into this world, we are at the mercy of those around us. They become objects on which we depend. How they perform as objects of our dependence determines how we view ourselves—and everyone and everything around us.

From those whom we trust we gain a sense of identity, security, and meaning. Without a sense of who we are, without a sense that we are safe and that we will continue to exist, without a sense that our lives have purpose and worth, we die. People wither when they have little or no sense of identity, security, and meaning. Being unsure about our identity, our security, and the meaning of our lives takes a tremendous physiological toll—to say nothing of the psychological damage such uncertainty inflicts upon us. We cannot survive without a sense of our ultimate identity, security, and meaning.

### **We Find Identity, Security, and Meaning in Our God(s)**

In his explanation of the first commandment in the Large Catechism, Luther defines the word *g-o-d* in terms of trust: “A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. . . . That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”<sup>2</sup> According to

## OUR FAITH AND THE FAITH

Luther everyone has a god, for everyone needs to depend ultimately on someone or something—or several persons and things for identity, security, and meaning. False gods abound. Trusting false gods is the root of all disruption in human life, that is, of all sin. But no one can exist for long without a god or two.

God has fashioned his human creatures to find some identity, security, and meaning in other persons and places than in himself. God has so structured human life that we find secondary levels of identity, security, and meaning in family members, in our work, in our accomplishments in the community, and in our service in our congregations. Behind such secondary sources of identity, security, and meaning, however, lies what ultimately gives us our “name,” our sense of who we are. Behind these secondary sources of security and meaning lies what ultimately gives us haven from life’s storms and what affirms that our persons and actions are ultimately worthwhile. That primary source of identity, security, and meaning is our god.

We can easily pervert what God has given us as secondary sources of identity, security, and meaning into gods. My wife is a wonderful gift of God. Much of my identity is wrapped up in being her husband. But I can become an idolater in my marriage. I can regard her as my ultimate source of identity. When I do so, I put us both in prison. I imprison her in my false set of expectations for her, which she cannot possibly meet. She is a fine wife; as a god she has her inadequacies. And I imprison myself in her inability to meet my expectations for a god. I inflict suffering on both of us through impossible expectations when I worship her instead of cherish her as a gift of God.

My occupation may become an idol in a similar fashion. Our jobs are gifts of God, avenues of service to other people and to the whole of his creation. We get some sense of identity from them. At a party, when we meet someone, we often identify ourselves by our occupation and place of employment. But when we cannot feel secure apart from knowing that we will never be fired, or when our life’s sense of worth depends on getting a promotion or a raise, then we have turned God’s good gift into an idol.

We all have many sources of identity, security, and meaning. We all have systems that offer some kind of promises for our lives from these sources, these gods. Systems of establishing our ultimate sense

## Chapter IV

# God Provides

God claims that he has all life in his hands, and that he provides us with body and soul, limbs and senses, reason and faculties of mind, food and clothing, and everything else that we have and are. Our belief that God is daily and richly taking care of us provides a foundation for our entire life of trust. It provides the framework in which we praise our God in songs of the heart and deeds that touch the needs of others.

### **God Provides for His Own**

God provides for all, for everyone and everything in his entire creation. He keeps it and us running. “In him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). He upholds the universe by his word of power (Heb. 1:3). The God who made the world and everything in it, Paul told the Athenians, fashioned every human nation on the face of the earth. He has allotted them periods of time and geographical boundaries for their lives. Paul then used the words of the ancient poet Aratus, and perhaps also Epimenides, in confessing that in God we live and move and have our being and that our existence stems from him (Acts 17:24–28). He has promised to keep the seasons in their places (Gen. 8:22). God makes his sun rise on the evil as well as the good and sends the rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). He preserves humankind and animal life (Ps. 36:6), and he provides for the interworking of all parts of his creation (Ps. 104:10–31).

God’s people are particularly conscious of his role in their lives from conception and birth (Ps. 139:13, Job 31:15, Jer. 1:5) to death (Matt. 10:28–31). He who keeps inventory of the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30) holds his thinking, willing people in his own hand and plan (Ps. 37:24; Prov. 16:9). He keeps his people in his sight, delivering them from death and keeping them alive in famine (Ps. 33:13–

## Chapter IX

# Justification

Paul posed the human dilemma in Rom. 3:10–12: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless, there is no one who does good, not even one.” And no one will become righteous in God’s sight by doing the works of the Law (Rom. 3:20).

Human performance does not produce human righteousness; even in Eden, human performance resulted from human righteousness. God’s grace fashioned the human creature in the first place. Only God’s grace can restore the righteousness of the relationship that he created between himself and humankind at creation. “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:23–25 RSV).

*Justification* comes from the Latin word *justitia*, which can be translated both “righteousness” and “justice.” The biblical teaching regarding justification defines the right relationship between God and his human creatures. It tells how God restores fallen sinners to that right relationship with himself, rescuing them from sin and death, restoring them to life itself. Human life, in its completeness, embraces at its very core this right relationship with God. Righteousness in his sight is life itself.

Just as God created humankind without compulsion or condition, as a free act of love, so he has re-created humankind without compulsion or condition, as a free act of love. This act of creating anew may be described as salvation or reconciliation or liberation. It is best described as “justification,” even though for unbelievers in our culture this term usually means something quite different than the biblical understanding of the word. If I justify myself in modern North American English, I am usually trying to explain why

## Chapter XIV

# The Lord's Supper

People need to eat. People love to eat. Meals do much more than sustain life. They do that, to be sure, but they also provide the occasion for families to feel at home with one another. They serve as expressions of thankfulness and celebration. God loves us, his children, so much that he has provided us with his life-giving Word in the setting of a meal. God not only comes to give us new birth through the most common element of life in his creation, water, joined to his Word. He also feeds us, the most common event in human life, by joining his Word to bread, which carries the human body of Christ, and to wine, which carries his blood. His love embraces us as his Word reaches into our lives in all its various forms.

### The Names of the Supper

Like the meals of daily life, the Lord's meal has occupied a central place in the lives of his people throughout most of Christian history. The meal is called by several names. It is his meal, and so believers have called it "the Lord's Supper." There he is both chef and entree. He prepares the supper, and he is the supper. Because the church celebrates this meal at the altar, it is also called the "Sacrament of the Altar." It is often called "Holy Communion," for there are three kinds of "unity" or "union" that take place in this feast. There is the union of bread with body and of wine with blood, as Saint Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 10:16. There is the union of Christ with his people as he gives them his body and blood (Matt. 26:26–28). This meal also unites Christ's people with one another, one body in one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17).

Christ called his meal a new *diathēkē*.<sup>1</sup> This Greek word can mean "covenant," or "last will and testament." If the word is understood as covenant, it must be understood as the kind of covenant that is given by the king to his vassals. The king offers; the king

## Chapter XVII

# The Public Ministry

God fashioned human nature. He knows what his human creatures need, as individuals and as groups. All groups of human beings have structures by which they are organized and led. God designed the public ministry as an office or structure within his church for the public dispensing of his means of grace. The public ministry provides public leadership for the priests, who constitute the church.

### **The Public Ministry and the Royal Priesthood of Believers**

God has called all believers to approach him and to serve him as his priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; Rom. 12:1). This relationship is anchored first of all in the realm of the vertical. Above all, it involves being the child of God, in his presence—although it also involves worshiping and witnessing alongside other believers in the horizontal realm, in the church, where God's people are gathered by the Word in oral and sacramental forms. The public ministry, on the other hand, is firmly anchored in the horizontal realm, as a calling of service to other believers. It brings the power of God in his Word, the instrument of God's kingdom, to his priests. Thus, this calling of the horizontal realm is God's public instrument for establishing and sustaining the vertical relationship of the members of Christ's body.

Those who hold the office of the public ministry do not, by virtue of their office, have a vertical relationship that is different from other members of the congregation. They differ only in the horizontal calling God has given them in the church. God calls the public ministers of the church to serve him by serving their fellow believers with the public application of God's Word to their lives.