



## THE ANGLO-LUTHERAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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- A MEMBER OF THE AUGUSTANA EVANGELICAL CATHOLIC COMMUNION -

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### POSITION PAPER: THE PAPACY

The Anglo-Lutheran Catholic Church (ALCC) accepts the Treatise On the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), The Smalkald Articles (1537), and The Formula of Concord (1580) all of which are part of The Book of Concord (1580), but only "insofar as" they are trustworthy witness to the Gospel and in accordance with authentic catholic faith and tradition. Accordingly, we as a Church, take the following major exceptions to parts of the above-named confessional documents.

1. The ALCC officially recognizes the Pope as the proper, true, and valid Bishop of Rome and Primate of the Church of Italy with full ecclesiastical jurisdiction within that Diocese and Church. We also accept his historical position as Bishop of Rome: the "opposite number" of the Patriarch of Constantinople, his equally historical position of the "first among equals" of the Bishops of Christ's Holy Church.
2. The ALCC officially recognizes the historical fact that the Pope is the actual successor to St. Peter, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Rome. In that primal and fundamental sense, the Pope is "Peter," and the Vicar of Christ as declared by the Western Church for two thousand years. The ALCC holds that Christ's declaration of Peter as the rock on which the Church will be built is the faith and person of St. Peter, not his faith alone. The ALCC holds that if Christianity is ever to reunite in one ekklesia, all of Christianity will simply have to come to terms with that fact sooner or later.
3. The ALCC officially affirms that the Pope is by default, the principle spokesperson for Western Christianity. On the other hand, the ALCC affirms that the Pope's authority beyond the Diocese of Rome and Church of Italy outside the Roman Catholic Church and those Churches in sui iuris union with the Church and Bishop of Rome is moral rather than legal at this time.

That moral authority is considerable however, is backed by two thousand years of Sacred Tradition, and is worthy of recognition and the utmost respect for both the Office and the person. The Anglo-Lutheran Catholic Church accords him that respect. In the Eucharistic liturgy of the ALCC, the Prayer of the Church includes a prayer for the Pope by name.

4. The ALCC is not under the ecclesiastical authority of the Pope at this time. That said, we listen to Pope very carefully and follow his encyclicals and decrees as closely as possible. When the ALCC does disagree with the Pope, it is only reluctantly, after careful consideration and study, and then with the greatest love and respect.

The ALCC affirms the Doctrine of the Infallibility of Christ's Holy Church-at-large in all its several divisions and branches under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit in all matters pertaining to our salvation, and as a corollary to this teaches that when the Pope is teaching something which we must believe in order to be saved, he is, at that time under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and is speaking infallibly. The ALCC leaves it to the Church's Systematic Theologians to determine the number and occasion of those infallible statements.

5. The ALCC officially and emphatically declares that the Pope is not "the antichrist." He never was, and he never will be. We also hold that the Roman Catholic Church is not the "apostate church of the antichrist" or "the whore of Babylon." Those portions of The Book of Concord (1580) and other subsequent Lutheran writings alleging that are simply wrong, and in no way a witness to the Gospel. Even though individual Popes, being human, may not always have served Christ as well as they might have, they all did the very best they could under the circumstances; and the merits of Christ are more than sufficient to cover their failings. For those failings, Christ has no doubt forgiven them. They all had faith in Christ, and by that faith all have certainly been saved.

6. It is the official position of the ALCC that the Pope should not properly have any civil, secular, temporal power. Given the immense spiritual responsibilities of the Papacy, the Church should be thankful that the Pope has finally been relieved of that temporal authority for the most part, and may now concentrate on his spiritual duties as Bishop of Rome, Primate of Italy, Bishop of Rome, Successor to Saint Peter, and by default, the primary spokesperson for Western Christianity.

7. As Evangelical Catholic Lutherans one of our primary goals of the ALCC is visible, corporate union with the Bishop and See of Rome as an entity of Lutheran heritage in whichever form is most practical.

8. The ALCC officially believes, teaches, and declares that the Wittenberg (Lutheran) Reformation was an enormous and tragic mistake which, from its inception, was handled very badly by all sides. The differences between Rome and the Lutherans as stated in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology though significant, were by no means serious and substantial enough to be "church-dividing." The concerns of Father Martin Luther could have been easily dealt with through dialogue and negotiation. A solution that all sides could be enthusiastic about was not unattainable at all.

The break with Rome was a tragedy and was completely unnecessary. The fact is that Fr. Luther only intended to lead a "course-correction" in the Church to which everyone belonged. He did not intend to create a division in the Church or to start a new Church. Through mis-communication, misunderstanding, misguided personal agendas, unfortunate political and financial considerations, unnecessarily inflammatory rhetoric from all sides, the inappropriate meddling of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in the affairs of the Church, poor crisis management, deficient "people skills," egos of Olympic proportion on all sides, and the effects of the root sins of pride and avarice, the fabric of Christ's Holy Church was needlessly torn asunder. "The baby was not only thrown out with the wash-water but was then almost beaten to death with the tub." The ALCC observes the traditional Lutheran Feast of the Reformation not as a feast of

triumph but rather as a penitential day. ALCC altars are vested either in red or in penitential purple, and the day is observed as an occasion to pray for the reunification of the Church.

9. The ALCC rejects the condemnations of the Pope and the institution of the Papacy contained in the Treatise On the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), The Smalkald Articles (1537), and The Formula of Concord (1580), contained in Book of Concord (1580) because the parts of those documents which condemn the institution of the Papacy and identify the Pope as an "antichrist" are not trustworthy witnesses to the Gospel.

10. The ALCC formally accepts, subscribes to and is bound by the doctrines, formulas, and conditions of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) which was signed by representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in Augsburg, Germany in 1999. Pursuant to the JDDJ the ALCC also rejects all condemnations of the Papacy contained the documents contained in the Book of Concord (1580).

11. It is the position of this branch of the Evangelical Lutheran Church that with the signing of the JDDJ resolving the primary theological which led to the initial phase of the Wittenberg (Lutheran) Reformation, the Reformation is over. The only issues remaining to be resolved prior to reunification of the Churches of the Lutheran World Federation and allied Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are administrative issues of "command, control, and organization." The ALCC looks forward in joyful anticipation to the day when those administrative concerns will also be resolved and the people and clergy of the ALCC, and all Evangelical Catholic Lutherans, will return to visible unity with the Bishop and Church of Rome.