Article XIII: The Use of the Sacraments

Introduction:

God gives the Sacraments to His people for their forgiveness, life, and salvation, and this happens as they call forth trust and confidence in Christ, the Savior. By the sixteenth century, the Roman Church had developed a complicated sacramental system that had transformed the Sacraments into meritorious works performed by priests. This was especially evident in the Mass, where priests "sacrificed" Christ again and again on behalf of the living and the dead. The Bible, however, reveals the key to the Sacraments: the promises of God. God attaches His Word of promise to the element of the Sacrament – water, wine, or bread – and gives and strengthens the faith of those receiving them.

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[1] Our churches teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but even more, to be signs and testimonies of God's will toward us. [2] They were instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Therefore, we must use the Sacraments in such a way that faith, which believes the promises offered and set forth through the Sacraments, is increased (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

[3] Therefore, they condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify simply by the act of doing them. They condemn those who do not teach that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven, is required in the use of the Sacraments.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who ordained the Sacraments?

2. How many Sacraments are there (Apology XIII)?

3. Are the Sacraments merely outward signs?

4. For what two reasons were the Sacraments instituted?

5. What is required of a Christian for the proper use of the Sacraments?

6. What is the purpose of the Sacraments?

7. What does 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 say about the reception of the Lord's Supper?

8. What is condemned in Article XIII? (*Ex opere operato*)

Conclusion:

The Sacraments are not merely religious ceremonies or symbols of our faith; they are God's gifts to His Church, through which Christ gives His grace, forgiveness, and the strengthening of faith. As Article XIII teaches, the Sacraments were instituted by Christ to be signs and testimonies of God's gracious will toward us, awakening and confirming faith in those who receive them. Their power does not depend upon the worthiness of the minister or the strength of the recipient's faith, but upon Christ and His Word of promise. Therefore, we do not come to the Sacraments primarily to do something for God, but to receive what God has promised to give us. When our faith is weak or our consciences troubled, God directs us away from ourselves and toward Christ and His objective promises in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. For this reason, we should treasure the Sacraments as the visible word/the Gospel and gladly receive them as Christ's gracious gifts for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith.