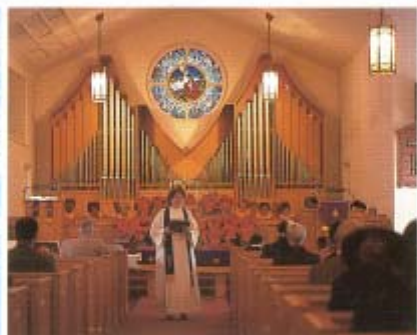
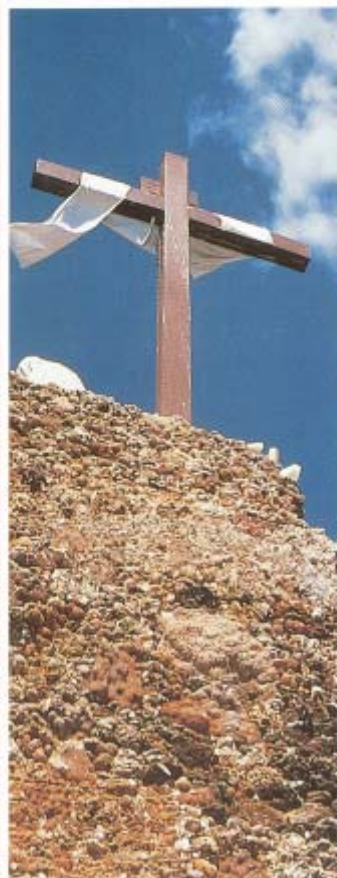


# BASICS IN LUTHERAN DOCTRINE



# 1 UP RELIGION

## DOWN RELIGION

Once upon a time two people went to church to pray. The well-respected Sunday school teacher looked proudly up to heaven and prayed, 'I thank you, God, that I am better than most people. I give 10 percent of my income to the church and pray every day.'

"A loan shark sat way in the back, looked at the ground and sobbed, 'God, help me; I'm a sinner.' I tell you that this person, rather than the other, went home right with God."

### 3 STATEMENTS

- "Up religion" insists that our relationship to God depends on what we do to get up to God.
- "Down religion" (Christianity) insists that God comes down to us where we are.
- God comes down to us in promises that create faith in us.

### the *Source* Up and Down Religion

The world has two kinds of religion: up religion and down religion. "*Up religion*" insists that our relationship to God depends on what we do to get up to God. When we practice this form of religion, we put God up on a pedestal and insist that God give us strict rules in order that we might measure up and get up to God.

Up religion also figures that human beings are separated from God. It tells us we can overcome this, however, if we just work hard enough. One form of up religion insists that since we cannot make it up to God on our own, God helps us as long as we take the first step and try hard enough to follow. Whatever approach we take—having to do a lot to get up to God or having to do only a lit-

tle—the result remains the same: our relationship to God depends upon us. We call this “justification by works” or getting right with God by what we do.

*“Down religion” (Christianity) insists that God comes down to us where we are.* The Christian message opposes up religion at every turn. First, it does not put God up on a pedestal. Instead God comes down to earth on the cross, in this world’s suffering and pain. God is not just a rule maker or judge, but a gracious parent, loving Savior, and giver of life (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

In down religion, human beings no longer have to try to impress God with what they have done in order to stay on God’s good side. In down religion no one can make any claim to God or God’s love. God is in control, so we must look to God for every gift. Everything depends upon God living up to God’s own promises. This means we cannot earn or deserve what God gives.

In down religion God does not send rules and regulations that challenge us to climb up to God. Instead *God comes down to us in promises that create faith in us.* God spoke this promise to Abraham, assuring him that he would become a great nation. To the Israelites, God promised to be

their God. God’s promise became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ who embraced the whole world in his life, death, and resurrection. God also speaks this promise to us when we become God’s children in Baptism, when God forgives us because of Jesus Christ, and when God supports our lives each day.

Lutherans call down religion “justification by faith”—being put right with God by God’s faith-creating promise.

Our whole study of basic Lutheran teachings will distinguish up religion from down religion.

1. How do you understand “up religion”?

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2. Define “down religion” in one sentence.

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3. How is faith created by God?

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## Bewitched!

Christians have often described God's relation to humanity in terms of up or down religion. When the apostle Paul heard congregations in Galatia had traded God's promise for their own works, he wrote them an angry letter. Read Galatians 3:1-9.

1. Which way of receiving God's Spirit (verses 1,2) sounds like up religion? (Check one.)

- ☐ a. Publicly portraying Christ as crucified.
- ☐ b. Receiving the Spirit by works of the law.
- ☐ c. Receiving the Spirit by hearing with faith.

2. How would Paul (down religion) answer the question in verse 5? (Check one.)

- ☐ a. We earn God's Spirit through our works.
- ☐ b. God gives the Spirit by hearing with faith.
- ☐ c. We can never tell how God will work.

3. In verse 6, what was the basis of Abraham's relation to God (called *righteousness*)?

- ☐ a. He earned it by following God's rules.
- ☐ b. God automatically liked Abraham because God likes everybody.
- ☐ c. Abraham believed God's promise.

When have you been "bewitched" into thinking you can earn God's love? When do you hear the promise?

## Credo

Through the ages, Christians have confessed their faith in this God who comes down. In the Nicene Creed (written in A.D. 381), we confess that "for us and for our salvation he (Jesus Christ) came down from heaven." In 1530, Lutheran Christians used the Augsburg Confession to share their faith:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is

forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.

From *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. Copyright © 1959 Fortress Press.

1. Underline the part of the Augsburg Confession that rejects up religion.

2. Circle the part that describes down religion.

3. Put dashes under the section that defines in what Lutherans believe.

4. Confess your own faith by completing these statements.

My relationship to God is not based upon

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Instead, God relates to me by

\_\_\_\_\_

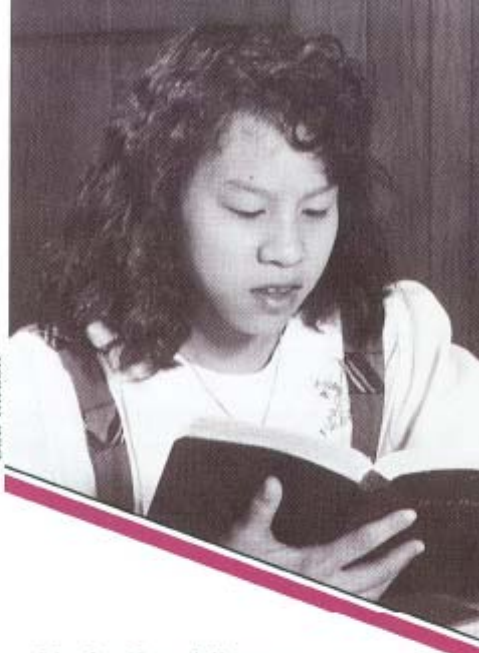
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## Shaping life

### Up or Down

Up religion and down religion are not simply two options for us to choose between. Up religion is a natural part of every human religious thought. Down religion is a gift that God gives through faith in God's promise.

BOB TAYLOR



Mark the following statements with a "U" for up religion or a "D" for down religion. Then discuss your opinions.

\_\_\_\_ 1. I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

\_\_\_\_ 2. Only if you decide to make Jesus your personal Lord and Savior will you be saved.

\_\_\_\_ 3. Bible reading, prayer, and worship make a person more acceptable to God.

\_\_\_\_ 4. At least I pay attention in confirmation class more than other people I know.

\_\_\_\_ 5. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

## What Do You Say?

Up religion and down religion are more than just ideas or theories about God. These two "religions" affect our whole life! Read the following story and consider your response.

A pastor went to the hospital to visit an older man. They had never met before, and the old man told her that the cancer that had been in remission for three years had returned. He

thought that he was going to die. He concluded tearfully, "I've always tried to live a good life. But, now I just don't know if I've done enough."

If you were the pastor, what would you say?

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Put yourself in the man's shoes. What would the pastor need to say to help you understand the message of down religion?

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## Further Opportunities

### Bible Reading

Select one passage from the list below. Be prepared to tell what you learn from it about up religion and down religion.

- Romans 3:20-28
- Philippians 3:2-11
- Luke 15:1-10

### Memory

Learn from memory Romans 3:28. Then learn the part of Article IV of the Augsburg Confession that was quoted on pp. 4-5.

### Activity 1

Listen for examples of down religion in sermons, scripture readings, classes, worship, and even in your daily conversations. List some examples and bring them to class next time.

### Activity 2

We find down religion in the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness in Lu-



theran *Book of Worship* (page 56). Study its words and use those parts that help you believe God comes down to you.

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### Activity 3

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Collect ideas and statements in which you or people you know most often confuse human effort with God's grace.



## FOCUS

### *On the Augsburg Confession*

In addition to Martin Luther's Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession is an important explanation of the Christian faith for Lutherans. In 1530, Charles V, Emperor of Germany, summoned all his princes to a meeting (called a *diet*) in the German city of Augsburg. There, he demanded that each give an account of his faith. Luther, having been declared an outlaw of the empire for his teaching, could not attend the diet. Instead, his colleague, Philip Melanchthon, first wrote a short work defending reforms undertaken by their prince in the territory of Saxony. Then, to counter attacks on basic Lutheran teachings, he produced a longer statement.

On June 25, 1530, that document, known as the Augsburg Confession, was read before the Emperor and other dignitaries. Of its 28 separate articles, the heart of the Augsburg Confession is Article IV. From this statement of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ flow other articles on ministry, the church, good works, and the sacraments. Since its presentation, the Augsburg Confession has shown itself to be not simply a onetime statement of Lutheran teachings, but a confession of faith used and cherished today.