

## **The Book of Concord FAQ**

### **What is the Book of Concord?**

The Book of Concord is a book published in 1580 that contains the Lutheran Confessions.

### **What are the Lutheran Confessions?**

The Lutheran Confessions are ten statements of faith that Lutherans use as official explanations and summaries of what they believe, teach, and confess. They remain to this day the definitive standard of what Lutheranism is.

### **What does Concord mean?**

Concord means "harmony." The word is derived from two Latin words and is translated literally as "with one heart."

### **What does Confession mean?**

When used in this context, confession means "to say what you believe." The Lutheran Confessions are statements of faith that Lutherans use to say to the world, "This is what we believe, teach and confess."

### **What is in the Book of Concord?**

The Book of Concord contains the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord.

### **What are the Ecumenical Creeds?**

Creed is from the Latin word credere, which means "to believe." The three creeds in the Book of Concord are the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. They are described as "ecumenical," meaning "universal," because they are accepted by the majority of Christians worldwide as correct expressions of what God's Word teaches.

### **What is the Augsburg Confession and Apology of the Augsburg Confession?**

In the year 1530, the Lutherans were required to present their confession of faith before the Holy Roman Emperor in Augsburg, Germany. The Augsburg Confession was publicly presented on June 25, 1530. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was written to defend the Augsburg Confession. Apology means "defense" when used in this way.

### **What are the Small and Large Catechisms?**

Martin Luther wrote two handbooks in 1529 to help families and pastors teach the basics of the Christian faith. The Small Catechism and the Large Catechism are organized around six topics: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. The catechisms were so universally accepted that they were included as part of the Book of Concord in 1580.

### **What are the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope?**

Martin Luther wrote a set of doctrinal articles in 1537 for an alliance of Lutheran princes and territories, known as the Smalcaldic League. Luther's articles were widely respected and were eventually included in the Book of Concord. At the same meeting that considered Luther's articles, Philip Melancthon was asked to expand on the subject of the Roman papacy and did so in his treatise, which was also later included in the Book of Concord.

### **What is the Formula of Concord?**

After Luther's death in 1546, various controversies arose in the Lutheran Church in Germany. After much debate and struggle, the Formula of Concord was adopted in 1577 by over eight thousand princes, political rulers, theologians, and pastors, effectively ending the controversy.

### **Who wrote the Book of Concord?**

The ancient creeds in the Book of Concord were prepared by early church pastors and theologians. Philip Melancthon, a layman, was a professor of Greek and theology at the University of Wittenberg. He was chiefly responsible for writing the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and the Treatise on the

Power and Primacy of the Pope. Martin Luther wrote the Small and Large Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles. A group of Lutheran theologians prepared the Formula of Concord. They were Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker, David Chytraeus, Andrew Musculus, and Christopher Koerner.

### **Since we have the Bible, why do we have the Book of Concord?**

The Lutheran Confessions are a summary and explanation of the Bible. They are not placed over the Bible. They do not take the place of the Bible. The Book of Concord is how Lutherans are able to say, together, as a church, "This is what we believe. This is what we teach. This is what we confess." The reason we have the Book of Concord is because of how highly we value correct teaching and preaching of God's Word.

### **A friend of mine says it is wrong to use creeds or confessions. How do I respond?**

The Bible itself not only contains numerous confessions and statements of faith by believers, but it also urges us to confess the faith. If a confession is completely in accord with Scripture, we can hardly claim that the content of the confession is merely "man-made" (1 Corinthians 12:1–3).

### **Are the Lutheran Confessions just for pastors and theologians?**

No. They are for all people: pastors, theologians, and laypersons alike. They are important statements of faith. They are not necessarily easy to understand, but they are so important that everyone who is a Lutheran should be aware of what the Book of Concord is and should have a copy of the Lutheran Confessions. There is an edition of the Book of Concord prepared specifically for laypeople to read, filled with notes, annotations, illustrations, and many other useful materials to aid reading and understanding. It is titled *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* and is available from Concordia Publishing House. You may order a copy on the Internet, or by calling 800-325-3040.

### **What documents should a layperson read first in the Book of Concord?**

The Small Catechism is called "The Layman's Bible" by the Formula of Concord because it does such a good job of summarizing the most important teachings of the Bible. The Large Catechism would be the next document to read carefully. The Augsburg Confession is the primary Lutheran Confession and should be read by every layperson. The Smalcald Articles are lively, bold, and powerful and capture readers' interest. The time and attention needed to read the longer documents in the Book of Concord are well worth the effort since they are filled with such powerfully comforting and instructive biblical truth.

### **What is a confessional Lutheran?**

A confessional Lutheran is a person who uses the documents contained in the Book of Concord to declare his faith to the world. The contents of the Book of Concord are cherished by such a person precisely because they are powerful means by which the correct teachings of Holy Scripture can be taught and shared with other people. The spirit of confessional Lutheranism is reflected well in the last words written in the Book of Concord: "In the sight of God and of all Christendom, we want to testify to those now living and those who will come after us. This declaration presented here about all the controverted articles mentioned and explained above—and no other—is our faith, doctrine, and confession. By God's grace, with intrepid hearts, we are willing to appear before the judgment seat of Christ with this Confession and give an account of it (1 Peter 4:5). We will not speak or write anything contrary to this Confession, either publicly or privately. By the strength of God's grace we intend to abide by it." (FC SD XII 40).

### **What is an "unconditional subscription" to the Confessions?**

Confessional Lutheran pastors are required to "subscribe," that is, to pledge their agreement unconditionally with the Lutheran Confessions precisely because they are a pure exposition of the Word of God. This is the way our pastors, and all laypeople who confess belief in the Small Catechism, are able with great joy and without reservation or qualification to say what it is that they believe to be the truth of God's Word.

### **Why is an unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions so important?**

Authentically Lutheran churches insist on a subscription to the Confessions because they agree with the Bible, not merely in so far as they agree with Scripture. Otherwise, there would be no objective way to make sure that there is faithful teaching and preaching of God's Word. Everything would depend on each pastor's private opinions, subjective interpretations, and personal feelings, rather than on objective truth as set forth in the Lutheran Confessions.

### **Do all Lutheran churches have the same view of the Book of Concord?**

No. Many Lutheran churches in the world today have been thoroughly influenced by the liberal theology that has taken over most so-called "mainline" Protestant denominations in North America and the large Protestant state churches in Europe, Scandinavia, and elsewhere. The foundation of much of modern theology is the view that the words of the Bible are not actually God's words but merely human opinions and reflections of the personal feelings of those who wrote the words. Consequently, confessions that claim to be true explanations of God's Word are now regarded more as historically conditioned human opinions, rather than as objective statements of truth. This would explain why some Lutheran churches enter into fellowship arrangements with non-Lutheran churches teaching things in direct conflict with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

### **Do other churches have confessions like the Lutheran Church?**

Yes, they do. Most other churches have confessions scattered throughout various books. The Book of Concord is unique among all churches in the world, since it gathers together the Lutheran Church's most normative expressions of the Christian faith into a single book that has been used for nearly five hundred years as a fixed point of reference for the Lutheran Church. Other churches have various catechisms and confessions they can point to, but few have as complete a collection of confessions that has received as much widespread use and support, for so long a time, as the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord of 1580.

### **Summing things up...**

To be a Lutheran is to be one who honors the Word of God. That Word makes it clear that it is God's desire for His Church to be in agreement about doctrine and to be of one mind, living at peace with one another (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11). It is for that reason that we so treasure the precious confession of Christian truth that we have in the Book of Concord. For confessional Lutherans, there is no other collection of documents, statements, or books that so clearly, accurately, and comfortingly presents the truths of God's Word and reveals the biblical Gospel as does our Book of Concord. Hand in hand with our commitment to pure teaching and confession of the faith is, and always must be, an equally strong commitment to reaching out boldly with the Gospel and speaking God's truth to the world. That is what confession of the faith is all about, in the final analysis. Indeed, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13). This is what it means to be, and to remain, a genuine confessional Lutheran.

by Rev. Paul T. McCain, May 3, 2008

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