

# With the Same Heart

An overview of the Book of Concord

Session 9 - The Formula of Concord,  
Background and Context



# Warm up question

What do you think are  
some of the  
controversies within  
the Lutheran church  
today?



# A New Era

It was 1577. Luther had been dead for 31 years. Melanchthon, the author of so many confessional Lutheran documents, had died 16 years prior.

Lutheranism was facing a splintering effect in terms of its theology. John Calvin's further reforms to Roman Catholic theology had begun to take root in Lutheran lands. Melanchthon himself before his death had altered the Augsburg Confession. He altered the content the real presence in the Lord's Supper in order to open the door for Calvin to sign it.

Furthermore, there were discussions happening within Lutheran theological circles that questioned the orthodox Lutheran position on such basics as Original Sin, Free Will, and the necessity of certain Church Ceremonies.

To some it seemed that the Lutheran church, which remained impervious to the pressures of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, might die a death of infighting and internal issues.

- *Question:*
- *What are the internal issues that face church bodies today?*



# The New Team

Jakob Andrae and Martin Chemnitz who would later gather together the official Book of Concord in 1580, began to write articles about the issues and share them with 8 other important Lutheran leaders of their time.

These articles came out of a meeting in Torgau that had been called by the Elector of Saxony, who had seen the splintering effects within Lutheranism and wanted to stop them.

Two documents had already connected certain Lutheran churches regarding these controversies, but neither had done a complete job. These were the Swabian-Saxon Accord of 1574 and the Maulbron Formula of 1576. Taking these documents and meeting in March and May of 1577, these 12 Lutherans met in Marburg Germany and agreed the writing and sent it to print, calling it: “[A] Brief Summary of the articles which, controverted among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession for many years, were settled in a Christian manner at Torgau in the month of June, 1576, by the theologians which there met and subscribed.” They called it the Torgau book for short.

• *Question:*

*What issues come up in the Lutheran church after the writing of the book of Concord, even in our era today?*



# The Torgau Book

The Torgau book was a success and was later revised into two documents: a shorter, thesis like treatment of the issues; and a longer set of essays on the issues. These would become the Epitome and the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.

The Elector of Saxony and several other Lutheran princes appreciated having these documents as they solidified answers on these questions. The documents were accepted and made binding by the electors and princes of 2/3rds of the German churches of the time. Notably, the pastors in the areas ruled by these princes were duty bound to accept the theological stance of those princes.

However, not everyone was happy about the Torgau book, which was refused by a variety of Lutheran principalities in Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Even Queen Elizabeth I in England was lobbying against its acceptance in Germany. These would eventually take a more Calvinist approach to theology.

- *Question:*
- *How do you feel about the princes basically making the call on what theology was preached in their kingdoms?*



# The issues

The Torgau book which later became the Formula of Concord addressed twelve major issues that were to some degree unaddressed or under-addressed by the Augsburg documents. These issues were:

Original Sin, Free Will, The Righteousness of Faith before God, Good Works, Law and Gospel, The Third Use of the Law, The Holy Supper of Christ (mostly concerning the real or true presence), The Person of Christ, the Descent into Hell (notably rejected by Calvin), Church Ceremonies and Adiaphora, Foreknowledge and Election of God, and Heresies and other sects.

These issues formed the different articles of the Formula.

- *Question:*
- *Looking beyond the “trees” to see the “forest”, what does it look like*  
*Lutheranism was struggling with at the time?*



# The Formula and the Concord

It could be said that the Formula of Concord is the document that gave rise to the entire Book of Concord itself. In 1580, having settled most of these controversies among the churches that accepted the Formula, Andrae and Chemnitz put together the Book of Concord as a compendium of basic Lutheran theology. This was called the “Corpus Doctrinae,” the body of doctrine, and later became known as the “Book of Concord.” The latter title was meant to show the unity found in those churches that accepted these basic Lutheran doctrines. It was meant to be a final answer to the controversies that might arise among Lutherans.

- *Question:*
- *Today, LCMS pastors are bound together by these documents still. How has the Book of Concord done?*



# Epitome and Solid Declaration

The Formula of Concord is given in those two original formats: the shorter, thesis-like statements of the Epitome and the longer essay like format of the Solid Declaration. The Epitome's format is interesting. It begins with an opening question, called "The Principal Question". From this Principal Question, then, are two numbered lists. The first numbered list is the "Affirmative Theses," which go through what the Lutherans DO believe about this question. The second numbered list is the "Negative Theses" listing what Lutherans do NOT believe about this question.

The Solid Declaration then gives commentary on these two lists, showing how they work together in harmony and giving further explanations of the issues presented.

- *Question:*
- *How does the format of this document help the reader understand?*





# On Original Sin

The principal question on Original Sin, the first article of the Formula of Concord, was written like this:

“Whether original sin is properly and without any distinction man’s corrupt nature, substance, and essence, or at any rate the principal and best part of his essence [substance], namely, the rational soul itself in its highest state and powers; or whether, even after the Fall, there is a distinction between man’s substance, nature, essence, body, soul, and original sin, so that the nature [itself] is one thing, and original sin, which inheres in the corrupt nature and corrupts the nature, another.”

Summarizing the points of the affirmative list, Lutherans believe that Original Sin does exist and that it is not a human quality on its own, but is the result of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin which is now shared by all human.

Summarizing the points of the negative list: Lutherans reject the idea that mankind holds within its power any ability to become holy on its own accord, but that mankind needed a perfect human Savior who came in Christ.

- *Question:*
- *Why do you think this was a question being wrestled with?*



# Next Time - The Formula of Concord

Next week we will walk through the contents of the Formula of Concord and finish our study of the Book of Concord

