

With the Same Heart

An overview of the Book of Concord

Session 1 - What is the Book of Concord?
& The Ecumenical Creeds



Warm up question

What does it mean for something to be “Lutheran”?



What is the Book of Concord?

The Book of Concord is a collection of about 9 documents written around the period of the Reformation. Originally most of these documents were written to explain the position of the Lutheran reformers to the Roman Catholic church of the day.

As time went on, the Book of Concord became the standard for determining what theology was truly “Lutheran.”

The word “Concord” means “with the [same] heart”.

- *Question:*
- *What are some other examples of things that validate or authenticate something?*



Parts of the Book of Concord

There are 9 parts to the Book of Concord

- The Three Ecumenical Creeds
 - 100's AD to 700's AD - Various Writers
- The Augsburg Confession
 - 1530 - Largely Philip Melancthon
- The Apology (or "Defense") of the Augsburg Confession
 - 1531 - Largely Philip Melancthon
- The Smalcald Articles
 - 1536 - Martin Luther
- The Treatise on (or "Against") the Power and Primacy of the Pope
 - 1537 - Philip Melancthon
- The Small Catechism
 - 1529 - Martin Luther
- The Large Catechism
 - 1529 - Martin Luther
- The Formula of Concord - Epitome
 - 1577 - Largely Martin Chemnitz
- The Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration
 - 1577 - Largely Martin Chemnitz

- *Question:*
- *What do you notice about the timing of the various parts of the Book of Concord?*



The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Book of Concord

While all Lutheran bodies respect the Book of Concord, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) is specific in its use of the Book of Concord.

First of all, LCMS congregations and pastors “subscribe” or “put themselves beneath” the whole Book of Concord. Some other Lutheran bodies will only require subscription to the foundational Augsburg Confession.

Secondly, LCMS congregations and pastors subscribe in a different way than some other Lutherans. This difference is found in two different Latin words: “quia” (meaning “because”) and quatenus (meaning “in so far as”).

- *Question:*
- *What are some other examples of oaths of office or “subscriptions” to guiding beliefs?*



Creeds and Confessions

One of the ways that Lutherans talk about the Book of Concord is to say that it is “the Book of Confessions” or “the Lutheran Confessions”. This simply means that these are beliefs that Lutherans speak together as the truth about what the Bible has to say.

Lutherans will say that these Confessions are the “norma normata” (the normed norm) while the Bible is the “norma normans” (the normING norm). Both the Bible and the Confessions are “normative” therefore in Lutheran theology, but the Bible shapes (or norms) the Confessions while the Confessions are shaped by the Bible.

This is similar to how we view the Creeds - which are not the Bible in and of themselves, but they are shaped by the Bible.

Lutherans in the Reformation did not take this for granted as the Roman Catholic church and its use of tradition and the power of the pope were essentially used to shape the interpretation of Scripture.

- *Question:*
- *In the United States, our Constitution is the “norma nomans” of the legal system. How does the Book of Concord work like the legal system under the Constitution?*



The Ecumenical Creeds

Every collection of the Book of Concord starts with the three “ecumenical” Creeds. The word “ecumenical” comes from a Greek word “oikoumene” meaning “the inhabitants [of earth]”. It was used by the early Greeks to indicate where there was Greek culture as opposed to where there were “barbarians” (this could be compared with Jews vs. Gentiles). Early Greek Christians coopted this word to mean “all Christians” as opposed to non-Christians.

These ecumenical creeds were meant to be the beginning of common ground for Christians before getting into the specifics of the Lutheran distinctions that follows in the other documents.

The three ecumenical creeds are: The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

- *Question:*
- *Without using the Creeds, what would you say are the beliefs that connect Christians and exclude non-Christians?*



The Three Creeds

Like documents within the Book of Concord and the books of the Bible, each of the Three Creeds are written in a specific time and context.

- The Apostles Creed was written in around 100 AD. We don't know exactly who wrote it, but it appears to have been written in order to solidify the basics of the Christian faith against false teachings.
- The Nicene Creed was written in the mid 300's. It was largely written to defend against the Arian heresy which claimed that Jesus was not "fully" God, but was only similar to God (and therefore not really a part of the Trinity)
- The Athanasian Creed was likely written in the 700's, but we're not sure exactly when or by whom. It was attributed to Athanasius by a theologian in the 1600's, but modern scholars think it is very unlikely it was written by this church father who died in the mid 300's. It also is written against Trinitarian heresies that sought to make Jesus different from the Father.

- *Question:*
- *What theological issues do you feel a modern day creed would address?*



Next Time - The Augsburg Confession

Next time we will get into the most formative document of the Lutheran Reformation: the Augsburg Confession.

