

A Brief History of Lutheranism in America

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint from which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16

What does it mean to be Lutheran in America? What does it mean to be Lutheran?

1546 – Martin Luther dies. Smalcald war begins. The Schmalkaldic War begins.

1580 – Publication of the Book of Concord. Serves to unite much of Lutheranism.

- The Augsburg Confession of 1530, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531)
- The Smalcald Articles Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537)
- The Small Catechism of Martin Luther (1529), The Large Catechism of Martin Luther (1529)
- Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord (1577)

1618 – The Defenestration of Prague, 30 Years War between Protestant Estates and Habsburgs

1648 – Peace of Westphalia, greater autonomy for states such as Bavaria and Saxony

1635 – 1705 – Life of Philipp Jakob Spener. Known as the “Father of Pietism.”

1675 – Publication of Pia Desideria by Spener. Six proposals to restore the life of the church:

- The earnest and thorough study of the Bible in private meetings, ecclesiolae in ecclesia ("little churches within the church"). The Christian priesthood being universal, the laity should share in the spiritual government of the church. A knowledge of Christianity must be attended by the practice of it as its indispensable sign and supplement.
- Instead of merely didactic, and often bitter, attacks on the heterodox and unbelievers, a sympathetic and kindly treatment of them. A reorganization of the theological training of the universities, giving more prominence to the devotional life
- A different style of preaching, namely, in the place of pleasing rhetoric, the implanting of Christianity in the inner man, the soul of which is faith, and its effects the fruits of life

1663 – 1727 – Life of August Hermann Francke – noted Pietist and professor at Halle.

1664 – First Lutheran congregation chartered in North America, in present day Manhattan.

1694 – University of Halle founded. Known center of Pietism. Later sends missionaries to America.

1742 – Henry Melchior Muhlenberg establishes a confessional basis for his congregation

1748 – Henry Melchior Muhlenberg organizes a ministerium in Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Ministerium pledges fidelity to the Augsburg Confession. They drop the reference to the confessional documents from their constitution in 1792.

1786 – New York Ministerium is founded. No confessional subscription. Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg, son of H.M. Muhlenberg, is a member of the Continental Congress.

1817 – Prussian Union established. Saxon Lutherans, under guidance of Martin Stephan, begin to consider emigrating to the new world to avoid unionism with the Reformed church.

1817 – Claus Harms releases theses alongside the 300th anniversary of the Reformation:

- The Evangelical Catholic is a glorious Church; it holds and conforms itself chiefly to the Sacraments. The Evangelical Reformed is a glorious Church; it holds and conforms itself chiefly to the Word of God. More glorious than both is the Evangelical Lutheran Church; it holds and conforms itself both to the Sacraments and the Word of God. Into this Lutheran Church both the others are developing, even without the intentional aid of men. But the way of the ungodly shall perish, says David (Ps. 1:6). (the conclusion of Claus Harms' 95 Theses)

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1820 – The General Synod is formed. First national Lutheran body formed in the U.S. from the Pennsylvania Ministerium, the North Carolina Synod, the New York Ministerium, and the Synod of Maryland and Virginia. Constituting documents do not include a confession basis.

1820 – Tennessee Synod formed by Paul Henkel and his son, David. Strong confessional position.

1821 – Publication of a common agenda (service book) for the protestant churches in Prussia.

1826 – Samuel Simon Schmucker heads up first American Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg (PA)

1838 – Martin Stephan and the Saxon immigrants leave for the New World.

1839 – Founding of Concordia College (the log cabin) in Perry County.

1839 – JAA Grabau and other members of the Lutheran congregations in Erfurt and Magdeburg emigrate from Prussia to America, settles in Buffalo, New York and form Buffalo Synod.

1847 – Formation of the Missouri Synod in Chicago. Pledges fidelity to the entire Book of Concord.

1851 – Samuel Simon Schmucker writes *The American Lutheran Church*:

- The first feature of improvement...is the entire rejection of the authority of the Fathers in ecclesiastical controversy. ...it is a principle which the experience of ages has clearly established, that in all controversies..., the bible, the whole bible, and nothing but the bible...
- Another feature of improvement in the Lutheran church consists in her no longer requiring assent to the doctrine of the real presence of the Saviour in the eucharist.
- The last item of improvement...is the practice of the Lutheran church in this country, not to bind her ministers to the minutiae of any human creed. The bible and the belief that the fundamental doctrines of the bible are taught in a manner substantially correct in the Augsburg Confession, is all that is required. ...

1851 -Henkel publishes first English translation of the Book of Concord in American history.

1855 – Schmucker's *Definite Synodical Platform*, American Recension of the Augsburg Confession

- The five “errors” in the historic Augsburg Confession that were edited out of the American version were: 1) Approval of the Ceremonies of the Mass, 2) Private Confession and Absolution, 3) Denial of the Divine Obligation of the Christian Sabbath, 4) Baptismal Regeneration, and 5) the Real Presence.

IX. Concerning baptism, our churches teach, that it is “a necessary ordinance,” that is a means of grace, and ought to be administered also to children, who are thereby dedicated to God, and received into his favor.

X. In regard to the Lord's Supper they teach that Christ is present with the communicants in the Lord's Supper, “under the emblems of bread and wine.”

1867 – General Council formed primarily from Pennsylvania Ministerium., opposes General Synod

1872 – Galesburg Rule in America – Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors, Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants. Charles Porterfield Krauth is key theological leader for General Council

1872 – Synodical Conference formed from Wisconsin Synod, Missouri Synod, and others

1882 – Ohio Synod withdraws from the Synodical Conference over the predestinarian controversy

1882 – Henry Eyster Jacobs publishes a new English translation of the Book of Concord.

1918 – General Synod merges with the General Council and the Synod of the South, forms ULCA – United Lutheran Church in America. Formed largely from German speaking church bodies.

1921 – Missouri Synod publishes the Concordia Triglotta (Book of Concord) with introductions

1930 – Ohio, Buffalo, Iowa, and Texas synods joined to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC)

1959 – Theodore Tappert edits a new English translation of the Book of Concord.

1960 – ALC, United Ev. Luth. Church (Danish), Ev. Luth. Church (Norwegian) form new ALC

1962 – Formation of the Lutheran Church in America from the ULCA, the Suomi Synod (Finnish, formed in 1890), the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish, formed in 1872) and the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church (Swedish, formed in 1860).