

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 140 Reformation & the Book of Concord

Previously we focused primarily on the first 1500 years of Christianity's history. Now, we will proceed from there forward, focusing on the Lutheran perspective. We just celebrated the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing of the 95 theses to the castle church in Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517. This is seen by most of the world as the beginning of the Reformation. The 95 Theses themselves were primarily concerned with the practice of selling indulgences; full-fledged Lutheran theology was "hammered out" much more thoroughly in the years that followed. From the time of 1517 and on, the Reformation can be covered from many historical angles, but I would like to track it through its clear confession of biblical truth as we believe, teach, and confess it today. Because of Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, these confessional documents were mass-produced and distributed, spreading the faith eventually all over the world.

1529 is the next significant date. Luther wanted to produce a simple tool for parents to use to teach their children the faith. So, he produced **The Large and Small Catechisms**, which give the clearest and briefest explanations of what the 10 commandments, creeds, Lord's Prayer, baptism, confession & absolution, and Lord's Supper mean in the daily life of every Christian. In the same year Luther was brought before the diet (a royal legislative court) at Worms and on the 18th of April, refused to recant his writings with the famous "Here I Stand" speech. On the 25th of May (the next month), Luther was made an outlaw by that same court.

Many would contend that June the 25th, 1530 is the date that should be celebrated as the birth of the Reformation, because this is when **The Augsburg Confession** was presented. In order to exclude the people, the little chapel of the episcopal palace was appointed in place of the spacious city hall where the meetings of the diet were held. Written copies in German and Latin were presented. The document was read before Emperor Charles V (initially against his wishes) and the electors of the Roman Empire from 3 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Christian Beyer, a Saxon chancellor, read it aloud in German quite loudly, so that the crowds in the courtyard could hear each word through the open windows. The originals no longer exist, but it was soon published and widely distributed.

In 1531, **The Apology to the Augsburg Confession** was published. The Roman Catholic church refuted the Augsburg Confession, and the Apology was published to clarify and explain the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations contained in their response and asserted by many others who disagreed with the Augsburg confession.

In 1537, Luther wrote **The Smalcald Articles** in preparation for an ecumenical council. When the council took place, however, the Lutherans were not allowed to make any presentations. Luther was very ill when he wrote it, and many refer to the document as his theological last will and testament.

Philip Melancthon wrote **The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope** in 1540 at a conference of theologians and princes in Smalcald. It summarized the view of the papacy taught by Luther and was endorsed along with the Augsburg Confession and The Apology by all present.

Due to doctrinal disagreement between Lutherans on a number of issues, the elector (a regional prince who votes for or "elects" the emperor) of Saxony assembled respected theologians to produce **The Formula of Concord** in 1577 to provide a common confession regarding the disputed issues.

In 1580, **The Book of Concord** (a collection of the aforementioned documents) was published for the first time in Dresden. This book is the confessional standard for all orthodox Lutheran church bodies today. LCMS pastors publicly commit to teach in accord with its confessions at their ordinations and installations. All LCMS congregations also have an unalterable article in their constitution that commits them to teach in accord with the Book of Concord's confessions.

We believe, teach, and confess that The Book of Concord is the clearest expression of biblical truth currently in existence. In 2006, CPH published a readers' edition of The Book of Concord, which I recommend as a great historical and theological reference to have in your home library.