

# Survey of the Lutheran Confessions

## Brief History of Creeds and Confessions

### Arianism and the Triumph of Orthodoxy

Arius: "There was a time when he was not"

Athanasius ("black dwarf") (295-373): "God became Man that we might become God"

Gregory of Nazianzus: "What he has not assumed, he has not healed"

Gregory was one of the "Great Cappadocians"

Gregory of Nazianzus ("Gregory the Theologian") – Great Eastern hymn writer

EOC's 3 Great Theologians

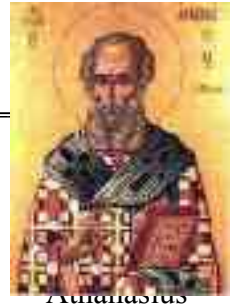
Sts. Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory Palamas (14<sup>th</sup>), & Symeon the New (10<sup>th</sup>)

Gregory Palamas—hesychia; Symeon the New—divine light

Gregory of Nyssa – Great Eastern mystic

Gregory complained in the early 380s in Constantinople: "If you ask someone for change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and Unbegotten.... If you say to the attendant 'Is my bath ready?', he tells you that the Son was made out of nothing."

Basil the Great – Father of Eastern monasticism



### Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381)

Council of Nicea (325)

Mostly Eastern bishops with some papal legates

Sided with the Orthodox (homoousios, not homoiousios)

A half-century of debate on how to interpret the creed followed

homoousios vs. homoiousios

Arians vs. Athanasius and Cappadocians

Athanasius was exiled numerous times

Once to Rome where he won the bishop and West to Nicene cause

Nicene creed finally affirmed and fixed at Council of Constantinople (381) (2<sup>nd</sup> Ecum. Council)

### The Council of Chalcedon (451)

Nicea and Constantinople settled the controversy over Christ's divinity, now nature the issue  
Alexandria

soteriology – divinity of Christ and unity of persons

Apollinarianism took it to far (human soul and will replaced by divine energy)

Antioch

morality – humanity of Christ and distinction between persons

Nestorianism took it too far (two boards glued together – denied theotokos)

West



played a balancing act between the two  
stuck to Tertullian's classic formula (two natures, one person)



Christotokos or Theotokos

Series of illegitimate/dishonest councils by Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch

Theodosius II arrested both and negotiations led to "formula of union"

Cyril's council's actions against Nestorius were allowed to stand

The Robber Synod in Ephesus (449)

Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria, extreme Alexandrian, controlled council

Manhandled papal legates

Renounced "two natures" as heretical

Theodosius II, with a nice gift from Alexandria, supported the Robber Synod

Theodosius II fell off his horse and died.

His sister Pulcheria succeeded him, called a new council in Chalcedon at request of Leo

Fourth Ecumenical Council (Ephesus was the Third Ecumenical Council-431)

The Council of Chalcedon

Condemned Dioscorus & Eutyches (Christ one substance with Father, not us)

Forgave all others from Robber Synod

Issued "Definition of Faith of Chalcedon"

Rejected both extremes

Leo's Tome to Flavian won the day



Leo X

## Reformation

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Martin Luther's (1483-1546) Religious Development

Unflinching faithfulness to conscience (which was scrupulous)

This led to a problem in wrestling with God's justice (a Righteous Judge)

The monastic life failed to cure him of these concerns, scruples, etc.

From 1505 on, Luther devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures

Soon after he began teaching in Wittenberg in 1512, Luther had his "tower experience"

Romans 1:17

Luther's life and theology became Christocentric

The Ninety-Five Theses

Upset over the abuse of indulgences (Tetzel, Albrecht of Mainz, etc.)

Still very much a Roman Catholic

Not questioning papal supremacy, purgatory, indulgences per se

Main point: salvation through penitence, not purchase

Written in Latin for scholarly discussion, soon translated into German, published by ambitious men



The Pope's Dilemma

There was a sensitive political situation in Europe as a whole

The HREmperor, Maximilian, the most powerful man in Europe, was not long for this world

Concern about who would be elected his successor

The Turks were at the door

Pope dependent on HRE & other monarchs to slow/stop Muslim advances

Wanted to avoid French or Spanish power grab, however

The pope's candidate to succeed Maximilian was Frederick the Wise of Saxony

Even though Charles V elected, papacy still had to use kid gloves with Frederick

Still needed his assistance and vote in the future

Frederick loved his new university and Luther was bringing it students and fame

The Course of Action against Luther

Leo X with time realized this was not just an unimportant quarrel among monks

Luther was disrupting Albrecht of Mainz's income from indulgences

The Dominicans (Tetzel a Dominican) and Albrecht did not like this

Step 1: Let the brothers handle it

Leo X ordered Augustinians to deal with their erring brother

Luther asked to attend order's regular meeting at Heidelberg in 1518

Luther presented defense, attacked Aristotelian theology & freedom of will

Martin Bucer and many others were won to his cause; he left a hero

Step 2: Summons to Rome

On August 1, 1518, the pope summoned Luther to Rome to answer for his heresy

Frederick the Wise refused to let him go

Luther instead given a hearing at Augsburg late in 1518 before Cardinal Cajetan

Cajetan was there to get a recantation, not to hear a defense

Luther returned to Wittenberg

Luther saw a copy of the warrant for his arrest on his way back to Wittenberg

Luther appealed to a general council

Step 3: Bribery

As Maximilian dying, pope sent Karl von Miltitz to Frederick with golden rose

Given to one ruler each year for service to the Church

An oblique statement hinted at a cardinal's hat for Luther

Frederick the Wise and Luther stood firm and nothing came of it



Step 4: Debate

John Eck, theologian & gifted debater, challenged Andreas Carlstadt to debate

Point was to get to Luther through Carlstadt (who had zeal but not knowledge)

Debate began June 27, 1519—day before Charles V was elected

Eventually Luther jumped in and debated Eck for ten days

Main issue became ecclesiastical authority

Luther held papacy ruled from human, not divine, right; even councils could/did err

Eck used church fathers; Luther used Scripture

Winner never determined

Main result Luther's increased dependence on Bible & development of theology

Step 5: Bull

October 1520, Leo issued bull of excommunication Exurge Domine

Luther was given 60 days to recant

Bishops were destroy all of Luther's works

Christians forbidden to "praise, print, publish, or defend them"

Luther and students/faculty at University of Wittenberg burned it

The Pope asked the Emperor to enforce the bull and send Luther to Rome

The Emperor insisted on taking it before the HRE representatives at his first diet

The Diet of Worms (January, 1521)

It was unusual for heretics to be brought to such a high court

Perhaps Charles V thought the splendor would awe Luther into submission

Charles, like Cajetan, was not there to listen, but to receive a recantation

Luther thought he would be given a chance to make a defense

For this reason, he asked for another day to reply

April 19, 1521 made his second appearance to give his reply to the demand for a recantation

In his best preaching voice he replied:

"Unless I shall have been convinced by the witness of Scripture or of evident proof



for reason—for I do not believe either pope or councils by themselves, since it is agreed these have often made mistakes and contradicted themselves—I am overcome by the Scriptures I have quoted, my conscience is captive to God’s Word: I cannot, I will not, revoke anything, for to act against conscience is neither sage nor honest.” –“Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”

He then left with a gesture of victory and returned to his quarters  
Luther said after his departure:

“A single monk led astray by private judgment has set himself against the faith held by all Christians for a thousand years or more and impudently concludes that all Christians up to now have been in error.”

The Diet delivered its verdict a month later

Luther was an outlaw and to be arrested after 21 days

On arrest, he was to be kept prisoner subject to penalties of his excommunication

The Land of the Birds

Luther’s safe conduct was honored and he left

Frederick the Wise had him abducted on the way to Wittenberg and taken to a secret location

A band of “hoodlums” overtook his wagon

In a rouse abduction, he was taken to the Wartburg

He stayed there for over a year, as Junker Georg, protected from the imperial ban

Luther translated the New Testament, wrote a Postille, and generally hated country life as a whole

Luther was aching to get back to Wittenberg, and Carlstadt’s antics provided the final impetus

Luther returned & preached Invocavit sermons to stem tide of radical reformation

### Marburg Colloquy

Ulrich Zwingli was a Swiss Reformer from Zurich

Rejected efficacy of sacraments

Mixed Church and State

Often more humanist than reformer

In a way, laid the road for Calvin

Lutheran princes wanted unified “Protestantism”; had two theologians meet

This took place at Marburg in 1529

The main issue quickly became apparent: the real presence in the Lord’s Supper

They had “basically” agreed on fourteen of fifteen points

Luther carved “This is my body” in the table

Incorrect view of the Sacrament usually leads to/springs from an incorrect view of the incarnation

The two also disagreed on Church and State issues—Luther held the two must be separate

Compare/contrast the 4<sup>th</sup> century Church with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Church. How did the Creeds with the Lutheran Confessions originate? What were the similar challenges? What were the common causes and results? Were there any major differences? How did orthodox, confessional Christians respond in each case? Why? How promising did things look at the time? What was the ultimate result of the controversies?



Zwingli

## Biblical Imperative to Confess

Matthew 10:32-39 (ESV)

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, [33] but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

[34] "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. [35] For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. [36] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. [37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 12:8-9 (ESV)

"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, [9] but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Romans 10:8-10 (ESV)

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); [9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree (literally, speak the same words) and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

1 John 4:1-3 (ESV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

1 John 2:23 (ESV)

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

2 John 1:7-11 (ESV)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. [8] Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. [9] Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [10] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, [11] for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Revelation 3:5 (ESV)

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

With the exception of 1 Corinthians 1:10, all these passages use the Greek word ὁμολογέω, which means to think or speak the same (homo-same / logos-word / logizomai-think,consider,declare). What is the significance of this word?

It is also important that Christ is called the Word (Logos). Why?

## The Role of the Lutheran Confessions

norma normans – “the norming norm” or “the ruling rule” or “the measuring measure”

norma normata – “the normed norm” or “the ruled rule” or “the measured measure”

Which of these two are the Confessions? How does each define our doctrine and practice? How do we properly use each? What is the danger of pitting the two against each other? What is the danger of equating them?

## Confessional Subscription

There are two forms of subscription to the Lutheran Confessions that church bodies require of their candidates for the ministry. “I subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions. . .

quia – ‘because’ they agree with Scripture.”

quatenus – ‘in so far as’ they agree with Scripture.”

Which does the Wisconsin Synod require? Why? What is the problem with the other form of subscription?

## Preface to the Book of Concord

The Preface is found on pages 29-38.

Read paragraphs 1-6. Summarize.

Read paragraphs 23-25 (Conclusion). Summarize.

## Individual Confessions

### Small Catechism (1529)

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One of many “catechisms” written by Lutherans at the time, the Small Catechism, written by Luther, was written to be “a layman’s Bible,” to teach the basics of the Christian faith.

### Large Catechism (1528)

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Based on catechetical sermons delivered by Luther, the Large Catechism is an expanded version of the Small Catechism, intended to assist pastors and parents in teaching the basics of the Christian faith.

### Augsburg Confession (1530)

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Charles V called the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and invited the Lutheran princes to attend

Promised them a hearing, which gave the Lutheran princes high hopes

The Lutherans wanted a unified confession of their beliefs and a disputation of false accusations

Philipp Melancthon given job; Zwinglians (& Anabaptists?) had own confession

Luther couldn’t go— under ban; stayed across border in Coburg Fortress

“I cannot tread so lightly”

Melanchthon used of Marburg, Schwabach, and Torgau Articles  
Brueck and Beyer, German chancellors, read the AC in German and Latin  
Brueck wrote Preface and insisted on reading in German  
The Lutheran princes and entourage rose for the confession  
It was read in a firm voice with people even standing outside to hear it  
The Emperor ordered a refutation drafted  
Catholic theologians presented Confutation, refused to give the Lutherans copy  
From all accounts, this was a pathetic document  
The Emperor declared the AC unacceptable and ordered submission to RCC theology  
Soon, not war with the French, but with the Turks, demanded the Emperor's attention  
Needing German armies, the Emperor was forced to sit tight and delay action  
Charles had to delay action until Thirty Years War (15 years later, a year after Luther's death)



### Apology to the Augsburg Confession (1530)

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Lutherans wanted to present Apology to Augsburg Confession, but Emperor refused to accept  
Luther was concerned Melanchthon had yielded too much to the papists in the Apology  
This is nevertheless an apt, true, and courageous confession of the biblical, Christian, Lutheran faith!

### Smalcald Articles (1537)

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When Lutherans thought there may be a council at Mantua, they asked Luther to draft these  
The council never met and became the Council of Trent  
Trent had Lutheran representatives, but had no intention to listen to them  
Martin Chemnitz ("the second Martin") later tore Trent apart in his Examen  
The end result was not universally popular among Lutheranism because SA were too Lutheran  
Melanchthon signed with disclaimer  
Most polemical & most Lutheran (in keeping with Luther's tone & spirit) of Confessions

### Formula of Concord (1577)

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Most extensive and greatest Lutheran Confession, divided into Epitome and Solid Declaration  
Written by six Lutheran theologians to unify post-Luther Lutheranism  
Jacob Andreas and Martin Chemnitz the premier theologians

## Concluding Thoughts

For whose sake do we confess the faith?

What is the standard for what must be confessed?

Why must a confession be clear? Why is an ambiguous confession an oxymoron?

There are three tiers of authority in the Christian Church: Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, other good Christian writings. How is each to be accepted and employed? How do they relate to each other.

Why was it so important for the confessors to demonstrate that the teachings of the Lutheran church were catholic (small "c") and apostolic, in addition to biblical?

The word "concord" means peace. How can confessions create peace? Don't many say creeds divide?

What is dangerous about a “me and my Bible” mentality that rejects a study of church history, creeds, or confessions?

A wise Lutheran theologian once said something along these lines, “We do not claim that the Confessions could not err. We simply claim that they have not erred.” Explain what he means. How is this different than how Rome accepts the writings of the church Fathers, the decisions of church councils, the proclamations of the popes, etc.?

The Confessions bid us to proclaim the gospel in Word and Sacrament. How does this affect both doctrine and practice? How do both doctrine and practice confess the faith?

What is the relevance of the Lutheran Confessions today?

Close your eyes (no cheating) and see if you can name the three creeds and six confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Which Lutheran Confessions are the easiest to study? Which are more difficult?