



WITH INTREPID HEARTS WE BELIEVE, TEACH, AND CONFESS

A General Introduction to the Book of Concord

This declaration . . . is our faith, doctrine, and confession.
By God's grace, with intrepid hearts, we are willing to appear before
the judgment seat of Christ with this confession.

—Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XII 40

Intrepid hearts indeed! What could possibly be so important that you would stake eternity on it? What gives a person such courage and conviction? Only one thing—the truth. This is what this book is all about, the truth of God's Word.

God's people have always spoken this way. For example, the psalmist wrote, "I will speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame" (Psalm 119:46). Peter confessed his faith when Jesus asked him what he believed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Paul wrote, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13).

Lutherans have used the Confessions of faith contained in this book for nearly five hundred years as their public witness and testimony of what the Bible teaches. These Confessions give clear, unambiguous, and certain witness to the Christian faith. They unite all those who bear the name Lutheran and wish to be—and remain—genuinely Lutheran. That is why this book uses the word *Concordia* as a title.

The Meaning of Concordia

Concordia comes from two Latin words meaning "with" and "heart." It describes a commitment to the truth so strong and so deep, it is as if those who share it have a single heart beat. To many twenty-first-century minds, the claim that there is objective truth is regarded with deep suspicion. To suggest that there is one, and only one, absolute truth about God is regarded by many today as absurd, foolish, ridiculous, or the sign of an intolerant and weak mind. Sadly, even many modern Christians now view claims of truth and certainty with a good deal of suspicion.

But truth and falsehood are real. It is possible to know truth and it is necessary to reject all errors that contradict the truth. God reveals absolute truth in His Word,

which is precisely what the documents in the Book of Concord assert, with complete and total conviction.

The Bible is the rock-solid foundation for the documents in the Book of Concord. Christians who embrace the documents in this book as their teaching, their belief, and their confession also believe that it is possible for people to know and be certain about truth. They are convinced. They are certain. They are sure. Why? Because of the One who has called them to this conviction: the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

Genuine, Historic Lutheranism

To embrace the freedom of truth means rejecting the slavery of error. That is why this book uses two phrases to capture the essence of biblical confession: “we believe, teach, and confess” and “we reject and condemn.” One cannot believe, teach, and confess the truth without also rejecting and condemning everything that endangers or contradicts the truth. This spirit of “confessional Lutheranism” is what continues to animate people today who hold to this collection of affirmations, professions, and confessions of faith.

Not all churches that go by the name “Lutheran” still regard the Book of Concord as highly as they once did. Some prominent Lutheran Church bodies in the United States and around the world regard these statements of faith as “historically conditioned.” They say that the older confessions are not necessarily correct in what they teach about God’s Word. These churches have embraced various ecumenical agreements with non-Lutheran churches that contradict what Lutheranism has taught historically.

Confessional Lutheran churches regard these compromises not only as a compromise of historic Lutheranism, but also as an actual denial of the truth of God’s Word. (A most serious matter indeed!) It is important to keep in mind this distinction among churches that use the name “Lutheran.” This is all the more reason to make sure that these Confessions are not merely historical documents in congregations that are genuinely Lutheran. They must be well known by laypeople and church workers alike.

Historic, genuine Lutheranism holds that the Bible is actually the Word of the Living God. We believe that it is both incapable of error and free from error. We hold strongly to the Lutheran Confessions because we are absolutely convinced that these confessions of faith are a pure exposition and explanation of God’s Word. Lutherans agree with the apostle Peter, who said, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

When God the Holy Spirit gives the gift of trust in Jesus Christ as the Savior, this gift of faith creates a desire to confess, to bear witness, to testify, to proclaim, and to speak this faith. That is what the documents in this book are all about. They are not musty, old relics from history. They are the living confession of God’s people, who have clung to the truths in these documents for nearly five hundred years. Today, we

who hold to these Confessions make the Book of Concord our confession, our witness, our public testimony of what the Bible teaches. With Martin Luther, we say, “Here we stand. We cannot do otherwise. God help us. Amen.”

A Story of Personal Sacrifice for the Truth

The historical introductions in this book will help you understand the personal sacrifice made to achieve this “Concordia,” this harmony in the teaching of God’s Word. During the years when these Confessions were written and defended, faithful men and women of God, both laypeople and clergy, sacrificed all they had—in some cases their very lives—to defend and extend the truths of God’s holy Word as confessed by the Lutheran Church. Men died in battle fighting to defend the right to teach Lutheran precepts in classrooms and preach the Lutheran faith in pulpits. They died defending their cities and towns—and most important, their convictions—from armies of political and church leaders trying to stamp out Lutheranism forever.

For example, during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) Roman Catholic rulers attacked the Protestant regions of Germany with the hope of stamping out the Reformation. The battles that followed forced tens of thousands of people out of their homes. Disease and famine deepened the misery, causing a level of suffering similar to what we see today in parts of Africa. Finally, the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus II (1594–1632), led his armies to defend the Protestants. His army’s victory at the battle of Lutzen ensured the survival of the Reformation. But Gustavus himself died in the fighting. Every Lutheran who values his or her Confession of faith should remember this “Lion of the North” and thank God for his sacrifice.

The courage of the first Lutherans is awe-inspiring for us today. It is difficult for us to imagine sacrificing everything for the sake of what we believe. It is hard for us today to even imagine a situation similar to what happened to Lutherans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Today, the attitude toward truth is very much one of compromise at all costs, rather than confession at all costs. There is within many churches today a “go along to get along” attitude. This attitude was around at the time of the writing of the Lutheran Confessions as well, but was eventually resoundingly rejected.

A Book for All People

Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther explained how important the Book of Concord is for all Lutherans.

The Book of Concord should be in every Lutheran home. For that reason [our Church] should provide a good, inexpensive copy, and pastors should see to it that every home has one. . . . If a person isn’t familiar with this book, he’ll think, “That old book is just for pastors. I don’t have to preach. After [working] all day, I can’t sit down and study in the evening. If I read my morning and evening devotions, that’s enough.” No, that is not enough! The Lord doesn’t want us to remain children, who are blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine; instead of that, He wants us to grow in knowledge so that we can teach

others. (*Essays for the Church*, vol. 2 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992], 51)

This is not just a book for pastors and church “professionals” or “academics.” In fact, it is important to realize that the people most directly responsible for the Lutheran Confessions were laymen, not pastors and theologians. At tremendous personal risk to their own lives, their property, and their profession, laymen boldly stepped before the emperor and the pope’s representatives. They asserted that these Confessions were their own. They did not back down or compromise. For this reason, it is unfortunate that down through the years the Book of Concord has come to be regarded more as a book for pastors and professional theologians.

Tucked into the middle of this book is the most widely used of all the Lutheran Confessions: Martin Luther’s Small Catechism. Luther wrote this document not simply as a resource for the church and school, but, first and foremost, for the head of the household. Luther intended this little book to be used by laypeople, daily, to help them remain anchored to the solid teachings of God’s holy Word, the Bible. So keep this important fact in mind: The Book of Concord exists because of the faith and conviction of laypeople, who risked their very lives in order to have these Confessions produced, published, and distributed. The Book of Concord is a book for all Christians, church workers and laypeople alike.

Christians who want to be true and faithful to the teachings of the Bible return, again and again, to this book. In these confessions of faith they find agreement, unity, and harmony in the truths of God’s Word. These documents never take the place of the Bible. They distinguish between what the Bible teaches and the false teachings of others, which undermine the use of God’s Word. They give Christians a common voice to confess their faith to the world.

Reaching out boldly with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the goal of the Lutheran Confessions. They are not to be treated like museum pieces, kept under glass as interesting curiosities. Neither are they holiday decorations taken out once a year and admired, soon to be put away and forgotten. Nor are the Lutheran Confessions clubs used to bash people or shields to prevent contact with others or trophies set on a shelf. The Lutheran Confessions are resources for extending and defending vigorously the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are powerful tools for everyone to use, in all circumstances, for preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and all the truths of God’s Word in the church, school, home, workplace, community, and throughout the world.

Lutherans particularly enjoy “Concordia” through these confessions. United in common conviction about God’s Word, they live together with a common heartbeat, declaring to the world and to one another, “This is what we believe, teach, and confess.”