

I Believe It! Lutheran Confessions

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1 Grace to You

Fifty Years that Changed the World

On June 25, 1530 Philip Melanchthon read the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V and the dignitaries gathered at the Diet of Augsburg. This assembly was the first attempt by the Lutheran community to define itself before civil and church authorities.

On June 25, 1580 the complete Book of Concord was put on sale for the first time. It is a collection of all the writings that are acceptable for Lutherans.

During those intervening 50 years, Europe was transformed politically, socially, economically and religiously. In the midst of this great change the "Lutheran" pastors and teachers carried on a constant debate to define those things that are necessary to be a Christian. The fruit of those discussions are found in the writings of the Book of Concord, which are also known as the Lutheran Confessions.

"But these writings are over 400 years old," you say. "Why should we still study them today?" It is true that some of the concerns of the sixteenth-century reformers are not hot issues for us today. But what is important is the central focus upon Jesus as the one who gives us life, forgiveness, and salvation. The Lutheran Confessions remain a valuable tool to remind us to keep first things first, and in doing that they can also guide us as we live in a changing world.

It Was in the News

The Diet of Augsburg brought together princes and theologians from across the Holy Roman Empire in an attempt to resolve the recent religious controversies brought on by the teachings of the outlawed German monk, Dr. Martin Luther. He was not present because there were criminal warrants against him. Luther was reportedly hiding nearby and was in constant contact with Philip Melanchthon and the other reformers.

The Augsburg Confession was presented by Melanchthon to outline the many areas in which the reformers protested the church's current practices. He stressed that the Protestant theologians consider the scriptures as the final authority in doctrinal disputes—not Roman Catholic traditions or practices that are contradictory to the teachings of the Bible. The Roman Catholic theologians responded by continuing to disapprove of the protests. And the emperor declared the protesting theologians to have been wrong, and ordered them to take back their protests. Melanchthon led the delegation in refusing this demand. Then he and the other rebellious theologians left with their supporting princes.

Some of these writings are meant to be aids in Christian education.

Others are more argumentative and were written in response to those who opposed the Reformation movement.

Still others were written specifically for the Lutheran community and were attempts to resolve internal disputes and disagreements.

All of them focus on the grace of God as the source of Christian faith, and an appeal to the Bible as the final authority for both faith and life.