

History of the Church & the Lutheran Confessions

History of the Church

ca. A.D. 33 – Christ’s death, resurrection, & ascension

45-60 – Most of the Epistles and Synoptic Gospels written.

54-68 – Emperor Nero reigns. First major persecution of Christians

66-69 – Siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Romans

95 – Ap. John exiled to the island of Patmos; Gospel of John written ca. 85 ca. 35-99 – Clement, bishop of Rome, ordained by St. Peter (?). Known for his letter to Corinth which asserted authority of deposed presbyters since they had been appointed by Apostles [Office of Keys].

ca. 90-120 – **Didache**, a great resource for early church catechesis.

67-110 – **Ignatius**, bishop of Antioch, student of Apostle John, martyred in Rome (lions?). Christological interpretation of the OT. NT not yet canonized, but Gospels/Epistles used in churches.

69-156 – **Polycarp**, bishop of Smyrna, student of Ap. John, burned at stake in Rome (extant witness of his martyrdom). 1 of 3 chief “Apostolic Fathers” (Clement, Ignatius). His name means “much fruit”.

100-165 – **Justin Martyr**, philosopher by training, Justin emphasized Christological interp. of the OT (“Logos” in Israel’s history), wrote against Marcion, who taught a dualism of a good & evil God (Gnosticism). First Christian “Apologist.” *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Student Tatian composed the *Diatesseron*, important witness to the authority of 4 Gospels.

130-202 – **Irenaeus**, student of Polycarp, bishop of Lyons, writes against Gnosticism, emphasizing Scripture and tradition (“Rule of Faith”).

160-220 – **Tertullian**, a lawyer, first Latin writer of the Western church. Established technical church vocabulary such as “Trinity”.

185-254 – **Origen**, bishop of Alexandria, an “Alexandrian theologian” (emphasis on allegory, purpose of Scripture is “intellectual truths” which mere history may be concealing.) *Hexapla*, “first text critic”.

ca. 200 – Muratorian Canon: oldest list of most NT books found in 18th cent.

260-339 – **Eusebius**, bishop of Caesarea, “Father of Church History”.

295-373 – **Athanasius** of Alexandria defends doctrine of Trinity.

306-337 – Reign of Constantine, first emperor convert to Christianity.

312 – Constantine’s victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, fighting under the banner of the Christian cross, turning point for Christian church.

325 – 1st Ecumenical Council of Nicaea; adopts Nicene Creed, repudiates Arianism (“There was a when when He was not”)

381 – Council of Constantinople; repudiates neo-Arianism; revises Creed re: Holy Spirit (325 Creed ended simply with “I believe in the H.S.”; this one also adds H.S. to the incarnation)

ca. 330-390 – “Cappadocia Fathers”: **Basil the Great**, **Gregory of Nyssa**, & **Gregory of Nazianzus** “one substance in three persons” (*homoousios*)

349-407 – **John Chrysostom** (“Gold-mouthed”), bishop of Constantinople, “Antiochene Theologian” (emphasis on ‘typology’, prophecy has two-fold purpose, historic and messianic; and ‘theory’, higher meaning of Scripture based firmly on the letter). Famous preacher.

340-420 – **Jerome**, bishop of Rome, translates Bible into Latin (Vulgate)

354-430 – **Augustine**, bishop of Hippo, prolific writer on Original Sin, distinguishes Law/Promises, writes against Pelagius.

375-444 – **Cyril of Alexandria**, leader in Christological controversies.

431 – Council of Ephesus; repudiates Nestorianism (Christ is 2 persons, crypto-adoptionism), Mary was *Theotokos* (God-bearer), repudiates Pelagianism (free will in conversion; denies Original Sin)

451 – Council of Chalcedon; hypostatic union of the 2 natures of Christ; a healthy compromise of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools.

540-604 – **Gregory the Great**, last great Latin father/Classical theologian. Temporarily ends era of authoritative interpretation of Scripture.

673-735 – **Venerable Bede**, first “English” theologian (Benedictine monk).

1054 – “Great Schism”, break of communion between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Rome’s ecclesiastical and theological decisions hereafter are made in isolation of rest of Christianity.

ca. 604-1517 – “Medieval Period of the Church”. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), “Philosophy is the handmaiden of theology”; Aristotelian method to interpret Scripture.

1483-1546 – **Martin Luther**, Reformer who returned theology to the Scriptural/Authoritative principle, ministerial use of reason (Cf. 540-604)

1517 – Martin Luther nails 95 theses in Wittenberg, Germany.

1530 – *Augsburg Confession (AC)* presented to Emperor Charles V on June 25th

1531 – *The Apology* is presented in defense of the AC.

1537 – Luther writes *Smalcald Articles*, a “last will and testament” of faith that was intended to be presented at a general council in Mantua, Italy. Council was postponed until 1545; SA were never presented.

1545-1563 – Council of Trent (Rome only); repudiates “Protestants”, defines role and canon of Scripture. *The Examination of the Council of Trent* by Martin Chemnitz (“the Second Martin”) is still the best analysis of Rome’s Council of Trent to this day.

1577 – *Formula of Concord* written in response to false teachings by erring Lutherans and the Reformed, who misused or changed the meaning of time-tested words which led to confusion and error.

1580 – Book of Concord assembled, published June 25th on 50th anniversary of AC

1869-1870 – Vatican I (Rome only); Papal infallibility and primacy in church governance, repudiates rationalism.

1962-1965 – Vatican II (Rome only); addresses ecumenism (liturgy).

Explanation of the Book of Concord: The Lutheran Confessions

The Confessions were published on June 25, 1580, in Dresden, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. The intention of the Confessions was to achieve uniformity and consensus in doctrine for the Lutherans. They are “not judges like Holy Scripture... only a witness of the faith” (Introduction to the Formula.)

Contents of the Book of Concord:

- ✓ Creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian): Their inclusion demonstrates the *catholicity* (universality: all times and places) of the Reformers.
- ✓ Augsburg Confession (AC) – Presented on June 25, 1530 to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg. The Imperial Diet was called, in part, after the Lutheran princes issued a *Protestio* (hence, they were called Protestants by Rome) because of an Imperial Edict at Speyer in 1529 which reversed a decision made three years earlier that gave local princes jurisdiction over their own religious matters. The Emperor also needed peace b/c of imminent war with the Turks. The AC was a comprehensive statement of faith that relied heavily on 3 important documents: the seventeen Schwabach Articles (Oct. 1529) prepared by Luther, the Marburg Articles (Oct. 1529), which attempted to reconcile the differences between Ulrich Zwingli and Luther (*Hoc est Corpus Meum!*), and the Torgau Articles (March 1530), which was a summary of the Lutheran confession intended to be presented at Augsburg. After learning that John Eck had prepared a lengthy, slanderous attack on Luther, the Torgau Articles needed to be scrapped, being replaced with the more thorough and comprehensive AC we have today.
- ✓ Apology (Ap) – Apology means “a defense.” This document was a “defense” of the AC in response to a Roman Catholic document called the “Confutation”, which the Lutherans were not permitted to read, but only hear. Melanchthon wrote the Apology in 1531.
- ✓ Smalcald Articles (SA) – Despite not ever being presented at a general council (see *History of the Church* above), these articles by Luther are still an official confessional document in the Lutheran church.
- ✓ Treatise on the Power & Primacy of the Pope (Tr) – Instead of the SA, this treatise by Melanchthon was adopted to be presented at Mantua. It analyzes the medieval papacy and describes the power of bishops.
- ✓ Small Catechism (SC) & Large Catechism (LC) – Composed in 1529 after Luther discovered local pastors and laity knew next to nothing about the Bible and its teachings.
- ✓ Formula of Concord (FC) – Composed of two different documents. The Epitome (Ep) and the Solid Declaration (SD). (See *History* above.)

A Brief Synopsis of the Reformation

Martin Luther was born on November 10th, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. He was a Roman Catholic. His Father wanted him to become a lawyer. After his friend was struck by lightning, he prayed to St. Ann that if his own life was spared, he would become a monk. He became a monk and re-discovered the Gospel after he read the book of Romans.

On October 31st, 1517 (All Hallow’s Eve), Luther nailed 95 theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The 95 theses were statements that troubled him about the Roman Catholic Faith.

The Roman Catholic Church excommunicated him at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He refused to take back what he had said and written about the teachings of the Bible. He said, “I refuse to recant. I can do no other. Here I stand. God help me, Amen.” Back then if you were excommunicated, it meant that you could be murdered without any judicial consequence. As a result, Luther fled and hid in the Wartburg Castle for some time. There he translated the New Testament into the German language in 1522 (whole Bible in 1534). On June 13, 1525, Luther got married to Katharine Von Bora.

In 1529, Luther published his Small Catechism, which was intended for parents to teach their children in their homes, as well as aid pastors in teaching young people in preparation for Holy Communion. The Large Catechism was also published that year.

On June 25, 1530, with the Reformation gaining momentum, the Lutherans presented the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg, which was intended to bring about unity between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans in preparation for imminent war with the Turks. The Augsburg Confession was a statement of what the Lutherans believed. The Roman Catholics responded with a document called the

Confutation. The Lutherans then responded to that with a document called *The Apology*, which means “The Defense”, in 1531. The Lutherans were *defending* their beliefs stated in the Augsburg Confession. Philip Melancthon wrote both the *Augsburg Confession* and *The Apology*, with Luther’s approval.

Luther died on February 18, 1546. After his death, numerous controversies broke out concerning doctrine. It wasn’t until 1580 that the *Book of Concord* was put together, which contained all the important documents of doctrine that the Lutherans confessed to be their beliefs. This book is also called *The Lutheran Confessions*.