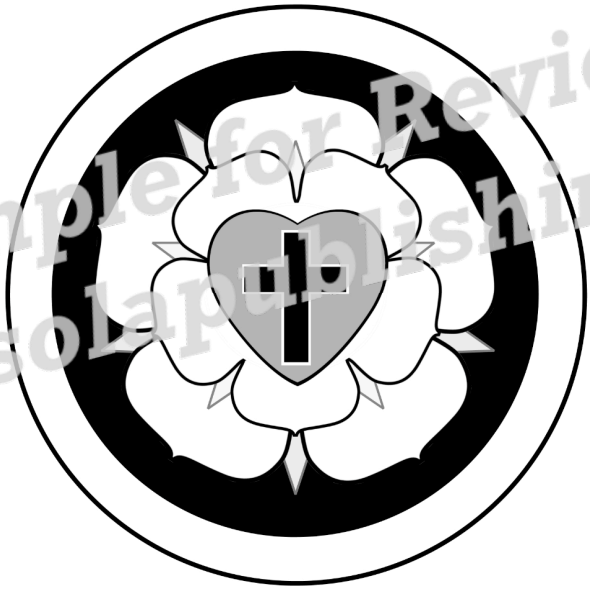
Sola Publishing - Book of Concord Series

A Reading and Discussion Study of

The Augsburg Confession

"As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it." (2 Timothy 3:14)



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A Reading and Discussion Study of

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As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus… For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.
(2 Timothy 3:14-16, 4:3-4 NRSV)

Introduction to the Series

One of the greatest challenges facing the Christian Church in our day is to avoid losing our hold on the foundations of our faith. When faced with the pressures of an ever-changing world, the temptation is to abandon the teachings passed down to us, in favor of new belief systems that appear to be more in tune with the fads of modern culture.

But this temptation is nothing new. As Scripture shows, from the beginning of the Christian Church, the lure to abandon the Word of God for "teachers to suit our own desires" has been an ever-present reality for people of faith.

It was this very issue that was at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther and his colleagues struggled to remain faithful to the Word of God in an age where the institution of the Church itself had turned away from its own historical teachings, in favor of new ideas and human traditions. At this significant time of the Church's history, God brought about amazing renewal and reform, calling his people back to his Word and to a faith with integrity.

Lutherans are the heirs of a deep and rich theological tradition that comes out of this era. By studying the original confessions of faith that were written at the time of the Reformation, we can come to understand better the central themes of "Grace Alone", "Faith Alone", and "Scripture Alone" as they apply to our own lives of faith.

For this reason, Sola Publishing offers this series on the Book of Concord, focusing on texts from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. This "Reading and Discussion Study of the Augsburg Confession" is the first in the series, focusing on the biblical foundations of Lutheran theology, with the hope that we all may "continue in what we have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom we learned it."

Rev. Steven E. King
January 2008

The Book of Concord

The Book of Concord — also known as the "Concordia" — contains a number of documents that together are referred to as *the Lutheran Confessions*. To 'confess' is to speak the truth out loud. In this sense, all of the documents in the Book of Concord are public statements of faith, and serve as a summary of what Lutherans believe to be the basic doctrinal teachings of Scripture.

Originally written in German and Latin, there are many editions of the Book of Concord translated into English. The edition recommended for use with this study is: ***"Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions – A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord."*** (© 2005, 2006 Concordia Publishing House; General Editor Paul T. McCain).* The page numbers listed in the sessions of this study correspond to pages in this edition.

While other versions of the Book of Concord may also be used with this study, the *Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* was chosen because it not only contains the actual texts of the Lutheran Confessions, but many additional introductions, explanatory notes, glossaries, and pictures as well. Like the notes in a Study Bible, these additional articles and images serve to provide the reader with a host of helpful information and commentary, as well as insights into the original context of these writings.

For information on what to look for in this edition, please refer to the introductory articles, especially the "User's Guide" on p. xxvii.

* "*Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions – A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*" can be obtained through Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, through their website: www.cph.org

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The Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession is the first major document of the Book of Concord. Written by Luther's student and colleague Philip Melanchthon in 1530 A.D., it was presented to Emperor Charles V at the imperial diet (assembly) he had called to meet in the city of Augsburg, Germany.

The tenor of the language in the Augsburg Confession is not so much a condemnation against the Roman Catholic tradition, as it is an argument by the Lutheran reformers that their churches faithfully represented and upheld the biblical and historical tradition of the Christian Church. The document outlines the Lutheran position on basic articles of faith, as well as on issues of controversy. After its initial presentation, the Augsburg Confession took on a much broader significance as a public declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran faith.

A more detailed introduction to the history behind the Augsburg Confession can be found on pp. 21-26 of the text.

How to Use This Study

This study was meant to be led in a small-group question and discussion format. There are assigned readings from the Augsburg Confession for each session, along with four related Scripture texts. Each session includes a time for introductory comments, as well as a dozen or so specific questions on the readings. These are meant to help participants understand the confessional and biblical texts and what they mean for our present lives of faith. It is recommended that participants read all the assigned materials and go through the questions prior to the group session.

Depending on a group's size and level of participation, each session should take between one to two hours to cover the materials. Leaders are encouraged to re-word questions, or ask new ones to help participants think about what they are reading. The accompanying Leader's Guide for this study was meant to provide additional background commentary to help leaders facilitate discussion. Care should be taken not to use the Leader's Guide to stifle or cut off discussion too quickly by treating it as an "answer book."

The study was written as an eight session course, with an optional introductory session included.

Summary of Sessions & Readings

The following is a summary of the sessions included in this study. The assigned readings are meant to be completed prior to the scheduled class session:

● Introduction *(optional)*

- Editor's Introduction pp. 19-26
- Augsburg Confession: Preface pp. 27-28

❶ Christ Alone

- Confession: Articles I-IV pp. 31-33
- Scripture: Colossians 1:9-20, Psalm 51:1-12, Romans 3:19-26, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

❷ Gathered in Faith

- Confession: Articles V-VIII pp. 33-34
- Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 10:5-17, Matthew 7:15-27, Matthew 13:24-30

❸ Means of Grace

- Confession: Articles IX-XIII pp. 35-38
- Scripture: Acts 2:38-42, Titus 3:3-8, 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, 2 Corinthians 7:5-13

❹ Good Order

- Confession: Articles XIV-XVII pp. 38-40
- Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 1 Corinthians 14:20-33, Galatians 4:1-11, Romans 13:1-7

❺ Do's, Don'ts & Can'ts

- Confession: Articles XVIII-XX pp. 40-44
- Scripture: Romans 3:9-20, Romans 8:1-8, James 1:12-27, Galatians 5:1-14

❻ Level Ground

- Confession: Articles XXI-XXIII pp. 44-47
- Scripture: Revelation 19:6-10, 1 Corinthians 11:17-32, Galatians 6:1-10, 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

❼ True Worship

- Confession: Articles XXIV-XXVI pp. 47-53
- Scripture: Luke 18:9-14, John 20:19-23, Psalm 32:1-11, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

❽ In, But Not Of

- Confession: Articles XXVII-XXVIII pp. 53-63
- Scripture: John 17:6-19, Luke 3:7-14, Acts 5:27-32, 1 Peter 5:1-11

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Session One: Christ Alone

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you reign in eternal majesty and glory. We praise you for coming into our world through your Son Jesus Christ, to save us from our bondage to sin. Give us your Holy Spirit, so that we would trust in your Word and look to you as our Redeemer and Lord; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

HYMN: ***"Our Hope is Built on Nothing Less"***

The Augsburg Confession

Read these articles from the Augsburg Confession:

1) Article I:	**God**	p. 31
2) Article II:	**Original Sin**	p. 31
3) Article III:	**The Son of God**	p. 32
4) Article IV:	**Justification**	p. 32

Some Definitions:

- **Council of Nicaea:** This general assembly of the early Church was held in 325 A.D. It clarified the language used to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, and produced the statement of faith that has come to be known as the Nicene Creed.
- **Divine essence:** This refers to the being and nature of God, in and of himself.
- **Person:** The term 'person' is used to denote each of the three distinct members of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- **Sophistry:** Intellectual manipulation by the use of clever words and arguments is sophistry.
- **Concupiscence:** This word, used often by early Church theologians, refers to the internal desire and inclination toward sin and selfishness.
- **Sanctify:** To make holy; to set apart for God.
- **Justify:** To make right (with God).
- **Satisfaction:** To satisfy is to do what is necessary to address, fulfill, or pay for.

Initial Observations

A. As you read the articles assigned for this session, what initial questions come to mind?

B. Is there a common theme that underlies or unites these individual articles?

C. On first reading, is there anything in these articles that you are not sure that you believe?

Scripture Lessons

Write a brief summary of the following Scripture passages, and consider how they relate to the text from the Augsburg Confession:

a) **Colossians 1:9-20**

b) **Psalm 51:1-12**

c) **Romans 3:19-26**

d) **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

For Further Reading

The Apology (Explanation) of the Augsburg Confession goes into greater detail on the rationale and basis for these Articles. An explanation of Articles I-IV is found on **pp. 74-102**.

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Discussion Questions

Based on the readings, consider and discuss the following questions:

1. What does it say about Lutheran identity to affirm that we teach the Nicene Creed? Is ours a separate religion from that of the Roman Catholic Church? Why is this important?

2. Is a single pie cut in three pieces a good image to describe the Trinity? Why or why not? How does Colossians 1:19 address this question?

3. What does the word "person" make you think of? Is there a difference in understanding God as a divine ***person*** rather than as a divine ***force***?

4. Can some debilitating conditions be in-born? If possible, should such conditions be corrected, or does being born a certain way mean it is God's will? How should we address situations where change or healing is not possible?

5. Is there a difference between a simple **lack** of trust in God, and the **inability** to trust in God? Which description better fits the reality of sin that Paul describes in Romans, Chapter 3?

6. Why do you think that Article II pairs "without the fear of God" and "without trust in God"? How do fear and trust go together in faith?

7. What does it mean to say that the divine and human natures of Christ were **inseparably** joined? Do they remain distinguishable? Are they still joined in the risen and ascended Christ?

8. In your own words, how would you explain what Christ accomplished for us on the cross? Why does Article III stress his sacrifice for both original sin **and** actual sins?

9. Notice how many "action words" are ascribed to Christ in Article III. What does this say about our salvation? What part do **we** play in all this?

10. How does Article IV on Justification, follow from the logic of Article II on Original Sin? Why can we not get from II to IV without the certainty of Article III?

11. For whose sake does Article IV say that God accomplished human salvation? What does this mean?

12. What word from Romans 3:19-26 means the same as "favor"? Does this mean that God plays favorites? Explain.

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Heresy: (n.) - false or erroneous doctrine

The Augsburg Confession often clarifies its teaching by contrasting it with opposing beliefs. Ancient heresies tend to reappear in the Church at different times under different names:

Manicheaens: followers of ancient religion that believed in two god-like forces, Good versus Evil, locked in an eternal struggle.

Valentinians: a group of gnostic Christians from the second century who believed that the Son and the Spirit, among other personified virtues, were merely "emanations" (aeons) from the true God.

Arians: followers of Arius, an influential teacher of the early fourth century who denied the full divinity of Christ, saying he was a lesser being. Eunomianism was a later form of Arianism.

Mohammedans: an archaic term used to refer to Muslims and the religion of Islam, included here because they specifically deny the Trinity.

Samosatenes: followers of Paul of Samosota denied that the Word and Spirit were divine persons, but simply expressions of God's power.

Pelagians: followers of the fifth century Pelagius, who taught that human beings had the power to save themselves by acts of human 'free-will' cooperating with the grace of God.