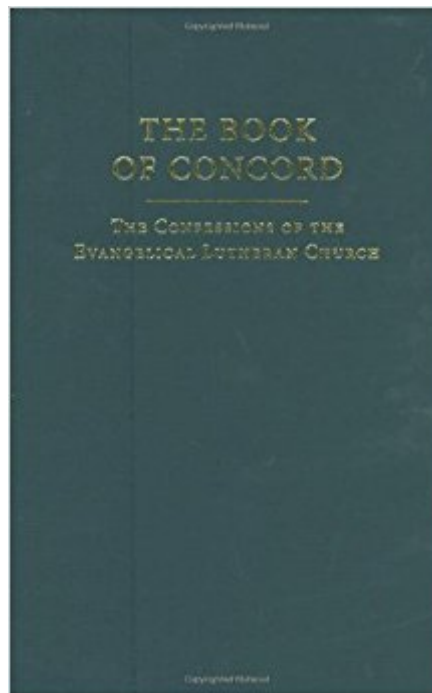




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# The Book Of Concord: The Confessions Of The Evangelical Lutheran Church



## Synopsis

Commissioned in 1993, this new translation of The Book of Concord brings a new generation of scholarship and sensitivities to bear on the foundational texts of Lutheran identity. The fifth English translation since 1851, this edition succeeds that edited by Theodore Tappert published in 1959 by Muhlenberg Press. A review of the text in light of a mountain of new scholarship and other factors dictated the new translation and apparatus, including changes in the English language over the past forty years, differences in the training and preparation of seminarians and pastors, limitations in the introductions and annotations to the various parts of the book, new knowledge of the history and theology of these very documents, and the occasional error in Tappert's translation. Kolb and Wengert's team of leading Reformation historians was augmented by consultation with one hundred other scholars and teachers who use The Book of Concord continually, and two other teams of scholars who have reviewed the translations. In coming years, two volumes of related documents will follow. Benefits of this new translation: Expanded introductions and annotations offer richer historical context New translation aims at accessible but accurate translation Format is easier to read and use Leading American scholars have been involved or consulted

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## Customer Reviews

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Introduction From the second century on Christians have expressed the biblical faith in summaries that served to identify the church's public message. The Greek word *symbolon*--a technical word for creed--identified the function of such summaries of the church's teaching as its identifying statement of belief, purpose, and mission. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds both offered believers guidance for public instruction and witness and also served to regulate and evaluate the public theology of the church's teachers. They demarcated lines between errors that had attacked the faith and biblical truth. When Emperor Charles V called upon the Lutheran princes and municipal governments to identify their public teaching in 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg, the Wittenberg theologians and their associates from other territories, under the leadership of Martin Luther's colleague, Philip Melanchthon, composed what they called a confession of the faith (after considering the label defense [apology]). That document, the Augsburg Confession, became recognized as the public symbol of the Evangelical Lutheran movement. It became the legal definition on which the political toleration of its adherents was based through the religious Peace of Augsburg of 1555. By 1555 the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, and Luther's Catechisms were also being used alongside the Augsburg Confession to describe and define what the Wittenberg reformers intended as reform and thus to regulate ecclesiastical life in various territories that had accepted the Reformation. The doctrinal controversies of the 1550s and 1560s necessitated further definition of public teaching, however, in the view of many Lutheran governments. Some of them sponsored the composition of additional confessions of faith, while others assembled confessional documents in collections called a *corpus doctrinae* (body of teaching). Melanchthon and other Wittenberg theologians had first used the term *corpus doctrinae* for the fundamental summary of the Christian faith, a term akin to analogy of faith. Later the term designated documents that could help determine the elements of the analogy of faith, and from 1560 it was employed to entitle a formal collection of such documents. In that year a printer in Leipzig, Ernst Vgelin, published a collection of the ancient creeds and eleven confessions and theological treatises from Melanchthon's pen as the *Corpus doctrinae Philippicum*. That collection became the legal definition of the faith in electoral Saxony in 1566 and in other lands at about the same time. Similar *corpora doctrinae* were published in a number of other principalities in the 1560s; they usually included Luther's Smalcald Articles and Catechisms as well as the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, along with one or more other local confessional documents. Two *corpora* assembled by Martin Chemnitz in 1576, for the principalities of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, provided a model for the Formula of Concord. The authors of the Formula of Concord responded to objections from followers of

Melanchthon who treasured the *Corpus doctrinae Philippicum*, and therefore they did not use the term *corpus doctrinae* when they prepared the Formula for publication with the ancient creeds of the church, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and Luther's Smalcald Articles and Catechisms after the completion of the Formula of 1577. One of the leading figures in its composition, Jakob Andreae of the University of Tbingen, was commissioned to compose a preface for this collection of documents that would speak for the princes who had sponsored the drive for Lutheran reconciliation and unity which the Formula had climaxed. In it he sketched the history of the conflicts over the interpretation of Luther's teaching. Andreae's efforts included tireless travels and diplomatic negotiations that finally brought Elector Ludwig of the Palatinate into concert with the other two leading Evangelical princes of the German Empire, the electors of Saxony and Brandenburg, August and Joachim II. These three, joined by eighty other princely and municipal governments, led 8,188 theologians into subscription of the Formula of Concord by 1580, and the Formula and other confessions were published as the Book of Concord on the fiftieth anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, on 25 June 1580. The Book of Concord received criticism from certain quarters, particularly the followers of Matthias Flacius Illyricus regarding the doctrine of original sin expressed in the Formula, and from those whose spiritualizing view of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper led them to reject the Formula's sacramental theology and its Christology. Nonetheless, some two-thirds of German Protestants found in the Book of Concord an authoritative expression of their faith and a hermeneutical basis for interpreting scripture

While there are a few translations of the Book of Concord around, this one does well as an alternative to Tappert's translation or the overly-cumbersome Triglotta. This translation is easy to read and the explanatory notes are well written and easy to comprehend. This is as good a translation for laymen as Tappert, and good value for money as well.

After having a chance to read more of this new translation of the Book of Concord, I still conclude that this book is--overall--very good. Yes, the translation does pluralize some areas where the original was singular, such as Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments in his Small Catechism. Nevertheless, such pluralizations seem natural to the modern ear and tongue and do not seem a deliberate ruse to avoid using "he, him, or his," such as the explanation of who is my neighbor. The translators and editors should not have allowed these subject-verb-predicate mismatches, but were probably allowed for political correctness. However, other areas are deliberately so worded for modern correctness, such as portion of the Smalcald Articles where the

translators change singulars to plurals to avoid reference to male clergy. Translators are not to make something likeable to the modern reader but make it understandable. So my first impressions were off a bit, but not much on pluralizations for political correctness. The references and historical background in the footnotes are superb and bests any BOC yet to come to print. This alone makes the book worth its purchase--so much so students of the Confessions should have this volume and use it! It was especially refreshing to see incorrect references in previous Book of Concord editions corrected in this edition. The biggest possible "problem" with this BOC is its use of Melancthon's second Latin version of the Apology as the basis for the translation. Kolb and Wengert do make a serious case for their decision, much of which has merit. I do not have the historical or theological qualifications, however, to say definitively if using Melancthon's second Latin version was the best choice or not, but readers should be aware of this decision. In short, this edition does have some shortcomings of which readers should be aware. However, it is the most readable BOC to date and has the best footnotes of any BOC, bar none. Thus, if you want to read the Lutheran Confessions, then buy this edition and read it. However, for serious study, cross-refer this edition with the Concordia Triglotta to hone in on the original authors' intents.

This Book of Concord (BOC) is the latest in succession of Book of Concord translations, some of which includes Henry Eyster Jacobs' 1882 translation, the Concordia Triglotta (a very good version!), and the Theodore Tappert 1959 version. This latest edition takes advantage of recent scholarship, research that was not available when the earlier BOCs were published. Thus, this edition has a richer selection of historical notes and introductions, which is quite helpful to the modern reader. In addition, some minor changes have taken place in English usage during the last 40 years and, naturally, translators should incorporate such changes. Last, this BOC corrects the sporadic error in the Tappert translation, the standard version now in use (Tappert was a bit on the pietistic side). Some other participating translators besides Kolb and Wengert are Eric Gritsch of Gettysburg Seminary and James Schaaf, now deceased, who taught at Trinity Seminary in Columbus, OH. Unfortunately, this BOC also incorporates biblical citations from the New Revised Standard Version. For accuracy, if one Bible version had to be used, this reviewer would have preferred the Updated Version (1995) of the New American Standard Bible. The contents of this BOC are quite standard, but are worth mentioning for the non-Lutheran reader. The contents include a Preface, an Introduction, a list of abbreviations, and the original 1580 Preface to the Book of Concord. Next are the Three Common Creeds of the Christian Faith, the Augsburg Confession (1530), The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession (September 1531), the Smalcald

Articles (1537), Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), Luther's Small Catechism (1529), Luther's Large Catechism (1529), and the Formula of Concord (1577). Several indices then follow: an Index of Biblical References, a Biographical Index, and a Subject Index. One of my first concerns with this BOC translation is that it would be "politically correct" and avoid male-gender pronouns. This reviewer could not find any such overt bias. Nevertheless, a thorough reading is needed to confirm this observation, but light reading here and there has found no such tendency. Since "conservative" Lutherans use the confessions the most, it would be financially unwise for Fortress Press to estrange one of their largest markets for this new BOC by using "inclusive" language: the LCMS, the WELS, the ELS, and other confessional Lutheran groups. In conclusion, this latest BOC seems to be a fine translation and worthy to augment other BOCs now in print. However, this reviewer is unqualified to make a broad endorsement and recommend that this BOC should become the new de-facto version to be used. Await word from confessional Seminaries for that. Until then, enjoy reading!

Wonderful book! and very timely! D.K.H. Alt

Very informative book for those interested in Lutheran doctrine and its history.

It was a book I lost when my house flooded. I am teaching a class and it has come in handy. Good resource.

Should be in every Lutheran's library.

This a great book. What a difference it makes to read the Concord in modern English. This edition really does help the modern reader in understanding the fundamentals of not only the Lutheran doctrine but true basics of faith for a Christ follower.

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