

P R A I S E F O R
F A I T H F U L L Y F O R M E D

Pastor Andy Wright poses three fundamental questions—regarding God’s identity, what it means to be human, and how we relate to God’s creation—as the framework for setting forth the testimony of the Book of Concord that defines the Lutheran confession of faith in Christ and proclamation of the message of Scripture. This volume takes readers into the text of the Lutheran confessional documents and engages the foundations of our trust in the Creator; the restoration of our humanity through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ; and the work of delivering absolution and new life of the Holy Spirit. Wright’s guide to exploration of the historical confessions effectively stimulates individual readers and study groups to absorb the confessions’ content into their own way of thinking.

—ROBERT KOLB, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY,
CONCORDIA SEMINARY, ST. LOUIS

To the lay reader, Pastor Wright has given an inviting—and highly teachable—introduction to the documents that make us Lutheran Christians. To the pastor, he’s given a thoughtful review in which we’ll each still discover new gems. To both, he’s given a reading of the confessions and a hearing of Christ that puts them in the context of life—as perhaps has never been done quite this way before.

—DR. CARL C. FICKENSCHER II, PROFESSOR OF PASTORAL MINISTRY
AND MISSIONS, CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

The Lutheran Confessions are a tremendous gift for us all. *Faithfully Formed* connects the Lutheran Confessions to everyday life and ordinary questions. Pastor Wright has authored a wonderful resource for living out our confessional heritage. I am excited to use this book within my congregation!

—REV. DR. A. TREVOR SUTTON, SENIOR PASTOR,
ST. LUKE LUTHERAN CHURCH; AUTHOR OF *BEING LUTHERAN*



Faithfully Formed

.....

The Lutheran
Confessions
in Daily Life

.....

ANDY WRIGHT



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A B B R E V I A T I O N S

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
FC	Formula of Concord
FC Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism of Martin Luther
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism of Martin Luther
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

- AC XX 4** (Augsburg Confession, Article XX, paragraph 4)
- Ap IV 229** (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, paragraph 229)
- FC Ep V 8** (Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Article V, paragraph 8)
- FC SD X 24** (Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article X, paragraph 24)
- LC V 32, 37** (Large Catechism, Part 5, paragraphs 32 and 37)
- SA III I 6** (Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article I, paragraph 6)
- SC III 5** (Small Catechism, Part III, paragraph 5)
- Tr 5** (Treatise, paragraph 5)

This book aims to show and help Christians see how they are formed by God's Word as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions. The Book of Concord is practical and speaks to our daily lives as we live in faith toward God and in love toward our neighbors. It helps us confess Christ and see how we think, speak, and act as the baptized children of God. It calls us to repentance as it preaches that we have failed to be conformed to the Word of God and sinned against Him in our various walks of life. It also teaches and shows the path God would have us walk as His people who have been bought with His own blood. Above all, it gives us Jesus as pastors preach to us how God has forgiven our sins on account of Christ and how we now stand righteous before the throne of God.

This book has come about from numerous Bible studies, discussions, papers, lectures, and sermons as well as the overall pastoral care of God's people. Time and again, it never ceases to amaze me how practical the Lutheran Confessions are in the lives of God's people. I will forever remember serving a congregation in Iowa and meeting on Thursday mornings at 6:30 for a men's Bible study. We had previously studied various books of the Bible and did a study on the Reformation. This led to some questions from the group about the Lutheran Confessions, so I very eagerly encouraged us to go through the Book of Concord.

There were a few grumbles at the beginning of the study. Finally, one morning we were reading and discussing the article concerning confession in the Smalcald Articles. One of the men, a retired farmer who had been on board with the study in theory but hadn't yet seen any real practical use for it, made a comment about how confession got him thinking about Christ and the Gospel. The article on confession in the Smalcald Articles, something he had never ever heard or thought of before, turned on a light bulb that helped him connect the dots to understand more about the Gospel. It formed how he

looked at the means of grace and prompted him to encourage his children and grandchildren with the Gospel.

That incident is not an isolated one. I've been a pastor for a little over a decade now and have used the Lutheran Confessions in so many ways and circumstances. I've used them rejoicing with a couple preparing for marriage. I've used the Lutheran Confessions and Christ's gifts with a mother who just lost her child. I've used them as a father with my own children. I've used them to help teach future pastors on another continent. The list goes on, but the Lutheran Confessions are the same. They have formed me to think confessionally.

I love the Lutheran Confessions because they teach and preach Christ and His Word. Above all, they confess the Scriptures. They form and shape us, as they have been normed and formed by the Word of God, and we confess these documents with the whole church through the ages. We confess this same faith as the apostles, countless church fathers, saints, martyrs, Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard, C. F. W. Walther, and saints in Iowa and Kansas. Think about it. This great treasure we have in these documents is good, true, and beautiful to read, study, and confess.

Introduction

Christians think differently and look at the world differently. That doesn't mean we stand on our heads or walk backward down the street. It means that because we are in Christ and have His Word, we think differently than the fallen world around us. God, through Paul, writes in Romans 12:1–2, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Perhaps you have heard these verses before or even read and come back to them often. Regardless, we hear through these words that God calls us to present our lives as living sacrifices. This is done as we live in faith toward God and in love toward our neighbors. This means not conforming to the world but being transformed by the renewal of our minds. The Greek word here is related to the word “metamorphosis” that is used when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. Now God is not saying we change from being a man or woman into a frog or a butterfly. No, He teaches us that as baptized children of God, we are new creations. We have been crucified with Christ, and there are real ramifications for our lives even now. The world around us isn't supposed to form how we think, speak, and act. Our minds instead have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and how we think, speak, and act is formed and conformed to the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures.

The Lutheran Confessions understand this as they confess the Scriptures. As Lutherans, we often get asked, “What is the relationship between the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions?” As people who teach *sola Scriptura* (or Scripture alone), where do the Lutheran Confessions fit into this? Isn’t God’s Word, well, enough? Some drive a wedge between these two biblical concepts—Scriptures and confessing the faith. They may say, “I don’t have any creeds. I have the Bible.” How should we respond?

Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are not opposed to each other. The Word of God creates the confession and provides the substance of the Lutheran Confessions. The fruit this confession produces, which has been formed by the Word of God, is the confession of that same thing that brought it about. For example, the Gospel produces faith, and faith confesses the Gospel. In Matthew 16:13–19, we read that flesh and blood did not reveal Jesus as the Christ to Peter; it was the Father in heaven. What Peter said is what the Scriptures had testified to him about Jesus. His confession is an answer back in faith.

One often sees two terms used in theology when studying the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. These are *norma normans* and *norma normata*. *Norma normans* means “the ruling rule” or the “norming norm,” which refers to the Bible as that which determines doctrine.

The Lutheran Confessions speak about the Holy Scriptures in this way in numerous places, with the beginning of the Formula of Concord being one of the most well known. It states, “First, <we receive and embrace with our whole heart> are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel. They are the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.” Scripture “norms” all teaching, teachers, and practices in the church because it alone

is God's Word. This means that everything we believe, teach, and confess comes only from the Scriptures.

The second, *norma normata*, means the "ruled rule" or the "normed norm." In this way, there is a measure by which teachers and practices in the church are judged if they are faithfully teaching what the Scriptures teach. An example of this can be seen in the doctrine of Holy Baptism. What Baptism is and everything it entails is taught in the Bible. When a document in the Lutheran Confessions (like the Small Catechism) teaches about Baptism, it confesses, or says back, what the Scriptures reveal Baptism is, what Baptism gives, and what Baptism means for our lives. The same goes for other topics and themes. All these confessional documents, though, give a public witness of what we believe the Scriptures teach. They are used to compare teachings and teachers in a similar way to the Scriptures so that when you encounter a teaching on Baptism, if it is line with the Small Catechism or the Augsburg Confession, then you know this is what the Scriptures teach since the Lutheran Confessions are faithful witnesses of the Scriptures.

Doctrine is practical. The Lutheran Confessions show this well as we think about confessing the faith to one another in our homes, churches, schools, jobs, communities, and anywhere else God has placed us. The Lutheran Confessions organize and summarize the truths of God's Word in ways in which we can study and discuss with one another and give answer to the world around us. Questions like "Who is God?" can be answered with "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . ." We give answer based on what God has revealed to us about who He is in the Bible and the Creeds. These foundational sources form and aid what we confess.

We are not alone in our answer. The Lutheran Confessions unfurl the flag, so to speak, and identify us as those who believe what we do about justification, the church, and everything else. What does a Lutheran believe about the church? The Lutheran Confessions answer this by asking a similar question: What does the Bible teach about the church? What the Lutheran Confessions

teach is what the Scriptures teach because they are normed by the Scriptures themselves.

The Lutheran Confessions are nothing apart from the Word of God. With God's Word, however, they are a great treasure of the church that speaks the Christian faith in this world. Just as the Holy Scriptures are relevant for our lives, so are the Lutheran Confessions. While we might not be engaged in the same discussions or controversies as some of the writers of the various documents, the truth of what is written still shines through presently. When Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of living God" (Matthew 16:16), there was no time stamp on that; it is the rock of the church that will never crumble or decay. That same clear confession is made today by the church of Christ and each of us as individual members of that Body.

The Lutheran Confessions are used and confessed in our lives. They are not simply documents mentioned in our church constitutions or documents we studied in seminary and then never used in our lives. The Lutheran Confessions help us think confessionally as we look at our lives and our confession of Christ. We use them in ways that help us "think about" (to borrow a phrase used in the Formula of Concord) issues, concepts, and various other aspects we face as the baptized people of God. We think about and confess the Lutheran Confessions, which is to say we are thinking about and confessing the Holy Scriptures. This is the confidence we have in God's Word.

It is with that confidence that we join with the signers of the Formula of Concord in understanding what it means to have God's Word and give answer before God and the world:



In the sight of God and of all Christendom <the entire Church of Christ>, we want to testify to those now living and those who will come after us. This declaration presented here about all the controverted articles mentioned and explained above—and

no other—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 and give an account of it [1 Peter 4:5]. We will not speak or write anything contrary to this Confession, either publicly or privately. By the strength of God’s grace we intend to abide by it.²



² FC SD XII 40.

Introduction and Summaries to the Documents of the Book of Concord

CONCORDIA: THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Note: *The following few pages are a simple review of contents of the Book of Concord. If you are already familiar with these, feel free to skip ahead to Section I.*

The Lutheran Confessions are documents that confess the Holy Scriptures. These various texts are contained in the Book of Concord. It is also known as Concordia, as the title page of the Book of Concord, published in 1580, has the word *Concordia* written in red above all the other text. The word *Concordia* comes from a word meaning harmony or unity. That's an important thing that tells us the purpose of these documents. They are unified and confess the truth of the Scriptures in the past, the present, and future.

THE THREE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

The three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds of the Christian Church make up the first document in the Lutheran Confessions. Creeds are formal statements of what one believes. Because the faith confessed in the Lutheran Confessions is nothing new, the Three

Ecumenical Creeds are placed first. The Ecumenical Creeds clarify the faith confessed in the Scriptures and passed down through the ages beginning with the apostles.

The Ecumenical Creeds are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian. The oldest of these is the Apostles' Creed, which dates back to the second century. It is a baptismal creed (or statement of faith made during Baptisms). The second, as we know its form today, is the Nicene Creed. It comes out the affirmations of the Scriptures of two councils that addressed false teachings about Jesus and the Trinity. Those two councils were the Councils of Nicaea, held in 325, and Constantinople, held in 381. Lastly, the Athanasian Creed dates to sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries. Athanasius did not write the text, but it is named after him. Athanasius was at the Council of Nicaea and defended the doctrine of the Holy Trinity against false teachings.

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

Sometimes called the Magna Carta of the Lutheran Church, the Augsburg Confession was written by Philip Melanchthon, a close colleague of Luther in Wittenberg. Various other documents by Melanchthon were incorporated into this confession. It is common for the Lutheran Church to be referred to as the church of the Augsburg Confession. This is true in some of the documents in the Lutheran Confessions. The Augsburg Confession is broken into two parts. The first part, Articles I–XXI, address the chief articles of the faith. The second part, Articles XXII–XXVIII, addresses many of the specific abuses that occurred within the Roman Catholic Church. Even with these two parts, the whole of the Augsburg Confession comes back to and stems out of Article IV, “Justification.”

This confession of faith was presented to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at a diet (imperial meeting) in Augsburg on June 25, 1530. It was presented by Melanchthon along with various princes as they answered what the true faith is and what was being taught and confessed by the pastors and people in their regions.

THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

The Apology is a response to the response of papal or Roman theologians in a document called the Confutation. The Apology was also written by Melanchthon and published in 1531. It defends what the Augsburg Confession states and takes a more in-depth look at some of the articles as it addresses the implications of various theological topics and assertions. It serves the church well to see how the confession made at Augsburg the year prior was nothing new. The Apology helps the church proclaim Christ and His Word faithfully and console God's people.

THE SMALCALD ARTICLES

As the Reformation was in full swing, the reformers kept open the possibility of a future council to discuss the issues at hand between the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church. Luther wrote the Smalcald Articles at the end of 1536 at the request of his ruler, John Frederick. The articles were intended to be discussed at a theological conference of theologians and lay leaders at Smalcald, Germany. These articles were never used as originally envisioned, however. Instead, Luther used them as an opportunity to confess the faith clearly and boldly after he had suffered a significant illness.

The Smalcald Articles are divided into three parts. The first part deals with a confession of who God is and is a summary of the Ecumenical Creeds, which confess the Holy Trinity. The second part deals with our redemption in Christ and includes articles that address the abuse of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone, such as the sacrifice of the mass and the papacy. The third and final part contains articles to be discussed, which really is to say to be confessed over and above errors that have arisen.

TREATISE ON THE POWER AND PRIMACY OF THE POPE

This document was the third in the Lutheran Confessions written by Melanchthon. Along with some of the background to the

Smalcald Articles, this document, which was written in 1537, was to be attached to the Augsburg Confession to clarify Lutherans' understanding of the papacy. Sometimes, though, this document is seen as an addendum to the Smalcald Articles.

The purpose of this document is to clearly lay out the erroneous teachings regarding the papacy and the impact these have on other articles of the faith, such as the office of the ministry, the church, and, most especially, salvation. Addressing the claims of the papacy and what this means, this document rightly points to how the doctrine of the papacy has the marks of the antichrist.

THE SMALL AND LARGE CATECHISMS

Serving as a visitor at various churches in Saxony, Luther observed the need to teach the faith to families. Pastors were also in dire need of catechesis so that they could remain students of God's Word and the doctrine it teaches. Luther began preaching three series of sermons, each varying in number, on the catechism (the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, which were the primary texts of catechisms at the time) in 1528. The final ten sermons on the catechism were preached in November and December 1528 and served to form much of the basis and content of what became the Large Catechism.

In 1529, the Large and Small Catechisms were published. The Large Catechism was published before the Small Catechism and has a very distinct sermon sound and tone to it. It is intended to aid pastors and fathers as they teach the faith to God's people. The Small Catechism was published as a handbook of the Christian faith for fathers to teach their households the things of God as they are summarized in the Six Chief Parts.

As a note, throughout history, some other documents have been attached to various editions of the Large and Small Catechisms and the Book of Concord. Some examples include "A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors" and "The Baptismal Booklet." These were included at the end of some editions of the Small Catechism.

“A Brief Exhortation to Confession” was included in a revised edition of the Large Catechism in 1529 but was not included in the 1580 edition of the Book of Concord.

THE FORMULA OF CONCORD, EPITOME AND SOLID DECLARATION

The final document in the Lutheran Confessions, the Formula of Concord, has two parts. The Epitome is the shorter, abridged version of the longer Solid Declaration. These were written as one document in 1577. Several authors such as Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker, Jacob Andreae, David Chytraeus, Christopher Cornerus, and Andrew Musculus contributed to this document along with several other writers. The Formula of Concord addressed many issues that arose in the Lutheran Church both from within and outside, such as Calvinism. The Formula of Concord continues the confession of faith already made in the previous documents of the Lutheran Confessions as it seeks to make this bold and faithful confession amid new and reoccurring controversies.

At first glance, the Formula of Concord, especially the Solid Declaration, may appear to be a lofty theological treatise. While this is the case, the concern is for the proclamation of Christ, the consolation of God’s people, the church, and the unity or Concord they have in the Scriptures. This is the unity found in the doctrine they believe, teach, and confess.

A CATALOG OF TESTIMONIES

This list of references and quotes was appended to many early editions of the Book of Concord. This catalog was included to show and reaffirm that Formula of Concord’s confession of the person of Christ was not anything new and, in fact, was in harmony with the orthodox faith throughout church history.

NAME	DATE	AUTHOR	SUMMARY
Apostles' Creed	Second Century	Unknown	Baptismal creed used in Rome.
Nicene Creed	325, 381	Assembled church leaders at the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Constantinople (381)	Creed intended to clearly state, on the basis of Scripture, that Jesus Christ is true God, equal with the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is also true God, equal with the Father and the Son.
Athanasian Creed	Sixth–Eighth Centuries	Unknown; named after the great church father Athanasius, who was instrumental in the drafting of the Nicene Creed	Confession of the teaching of the Trinity and the person and work of Jesus Christ.
Small Catechism	1529	Martin Luther	A short work that was to educate the laity in the basics of the Christian faith.
Large Catechism	1529	Martin Luther	A series of re-edited sermons of Luther that cover the same chief parts of Christian doctrine as the Small Catechism.
Augsburg Confession	June 25, 1530	Philip Melancthon	The chief Lutheran Confession, which was presented by the earliest Lutherans to Emperor Charles V at the Imperial Diet of Augsburg as a statement of the chief articles of the Christian faith as understood by Lutherans; also contains a listing of abuses that the Lutherans had corrected.

NAME	DATE	AUTHOR	SUMMARY
Apology of the Augsburg Confession	May 1531	Philip Melanchthon	A lengthy defense authored by Melanchthon after the Roman theologians had condemned many of the teachings of the Augsburg Confession; rightly considered a Christian classic.
Smalcald Articles	1536	Martin Luther	Articles of faith intended by Luther to be an ecumenical platform for an upcoming church council; stated what the Lutherans could not compromise and why.
Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope	1537	Philip Melanchthon	A supplement to the Augsburg Confession that gives the Lutheran position on the pope.
Formula of Concord	1577	Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker	A restatement of some teachings in the Augsburg Confession over which Lutherans had become divided. The Solid Declaration is the unabridged version. The Epitome is an abridged version intended for congregations to study. More than 8,100 pastors and theologians signed it, as well as more than 50 government leaders.

SECTION I



Who Is God?

*W*hy is it important to not only believe in God but to know who He is?

It's often said that the two topics you don't talk about with people are religion and politics. The reason given is because everyone seems to have his own thoughts on the matter. We are taught, too, either directly or indirectly, that religion and the things of God are personal or private matters. God, though, shows us something about Himself in all of this, including how easily we can try to create our own gods (even if we don't realize this is happening).

There is only one true God, the Holy Trinity. God is knowable as He reveals Himself. He is not simply some deity in the sky but personal, and He knows us personally. Our confession about God rests on who He tells us He is according to His Word. Seeing God revealed to us in the Scriptures means we see our God, who has redeemed us in Christ and is still at work in our lives through the means of grace.

Do We Know Who God Is?

*The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons
in one divine essence and nature [MATTHEW 28:19],
are one God, who has created heaven and earth
[1 CORINTHIANS 8:6].³*

As I began writing this, it was the festival of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Church Year. The Holy Gospel appointed for this day is Matthew 16:13–19. In that reading, Jesus asks the question, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (v. 13). After the disciples give Him some answers, Jesus asks them, “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 14).

That’s quite a question, isn’t? Really, though, this is the question all of us are asked as we bear the name of Christ in this world as His people. God’s Word speaks and gives us both the content and the faith to confess Christ. It’s really nothing short of a miracle that this happens. It’s also a wonderful blessing in our lives to have this confession placed upon our lips. The Christian faith is not some abstract philosophical concept. The Christian faith is knowable and personal. That gets, then, to the answer of Peter in Matthew 16:

3 SA Preface The First Part.

“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (v. 16). Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the Son of God.

This confession of Christ has been made by Christians throughout history and continues throughout the world. We don’t stand alone in our confession of Christ. As we think about what God has given to us and revealed about Himself through the Scriptures, we see the Three Ecumenical Creeds confess what the Scriptures teach. This is where the Ecumenical Creeds and their explanations are helpful for us not only in understanding who God is but in how we speak about God in our lives and confess Him in various situations.

There is a reason why the Book of Concord begins with the Three Ecumenical Creeds. They lay out what God clearly teaches in His Word about who He is and what He has done in Christ. This is what has been said about Him for centuries and up to now. The Scriptures have not changed, so our confession of what the Scriptures teach does not change. In this unchanging biblical confession, we are joining with company that goes back 500; 1,700; and 2,000 years!

The Ecumenical Creeds also help us as we go about our lives confessing Christ. They shape how we speak about God and how we know and make distinctions about who God is and is not. One of the misnomers about the Creeds is that when they were written, people devised new teachings about God. For example, some people today claim that until the Council of Nicaea in 325, no one had ever thought of Jesus and the Father being one God. Some claim the Council decided to “make” Him God. No, that’s not the case. What is said and confessed in the Creed(s) about Jesus is made clear in the Scriptures. These three Creeds—the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian—are simply confessing or mirroring what the Scriptures teach. They are doing this as they also reject false teachings contrary to the Scriptures.

The Lutheran Confessions also show us how Scripture is clear. The Bible contains many things that are hard to understand, to be sure, but that does not negate the fact that what the Scriptures teach are clear. The Lutheran Confessions show how Christians of

different times, locations, and languages can confess the faith in the same way because of the clear content of the Scriptures.

The divine authorship of the Scriptures is paramount to understanding and forming the confession of the Christian faith. Apart from this inspiration of God, there is neither reliability nor need for concerning oneself with the Bible, either as the only source of what it means to confess the faith or for the content of this confession. Likewise, if there are any errors in the revealed Scriptures, any confession of that Word of God would be subject to scrutiny.

If God's Word is clear, then a clear confession is possible, and one can confess truth over and above error. If there is ambiguity in God's Word, then confession would, in turn, be impossible. Peter would have had to answer Jesus' question in Matthew 16 differently: "Well, it is not really clear who You are, so who am I to say what is right?" The clarity of the Word of God and the confession of the faith are important.

In some ways, then, there is a sort of principle the Creeds lay out when it comes to confessing Christ. This recurs throughout the Lutheran Confessions. One theologian once wrote that the Lutheran "regards confessional statements as a systematized compilation of Biblical principles of faith, the decisional premises for life, rather than a restrictive straitjacket. The anticonfessional Christian seeks the broadest base for agreement and cannot understand the need for delineating doctrine in clear detail."⁴ We confess the truth and reject what is false. That may seem like an obvious point, but really, something very important forms our thinking. By contrast, neither delineating truth from error nor making a clear confession of faith is restrictive. There is something very freeing with the Lutheran Confessions, as they don't subject us to the whims and ways of the day or the loudest voice and personality of the time. Confessing faithfully who God is and what His Word says gives us the freedom

4 Robert D. Preus and Wilbert H. Rosin, eds., *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 93.

to always speak the truth in all places. Underpinning all of this is the clarity of Scriptures and the fact that the author is none other than God Himself.

God reveals Himself, and we confess Him. In a broad sense, we acknowledge that God is not one option among many. There is only one God. Likewise, Jesus says in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Likewise, in Acts 4:11–12, God teaches, “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

The temptation to want to seek a god or a religion apart from the one true God is real. There are plenty of false teachings in the world around us that want us to conform to false beliefs and ways of life. Every day, a new in vogue mindset is crying out, seeking to be the loudest voice and gain headway in the hearts and minds of people. Even the saying “I am spiritual but not religious,” which is a few years old now, is alive and well. All these mindsets tempt us to place man at the center of the universe and seek to claim a false virtue to somehow place themselves above the Christian faith.

The devil, the world, and our fallen flesh want a god who is moldable on the one hand and unknowable on the other. If our spirituality can define who God is, then we don’t have to worry about how we think about God or what we say about Him. In this mindset, we are in the driver’s seat, and God is whoever I want Him to be.

This is nothing new though, and it shouldn’t surprise us. The Smalcald Articles confess something that helps us see the danger around us and calls us back to where we should find God in our lives:



All this is the old devil and old serpent [Revelation 12:9], who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts. He led them away from God’s outward Word to spiritualizing and self-pride [Genesis 3:2–5]. And

yet, he did this through other outward words. In the same way, our enthusiasts today condemn the outward Word. Yet they themselves are not silent. They fill the world with their babbling and writings, as if the Spirit could not come through the apostles' writings and spoken Word, but has to come through their writings and words. Why don't they leave out their own sermons and writings and let the Spirit Himself come to people without their writings before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures? We do not have time now to argue about this in more detail. We have treated this well enough elsewhere.⁵



The devil knows that God is real and that He speaks truth. The devil also knows how God reveals Himself to us and works in our lives. From the very fall into sin, Satan went after the Word of God and tried to spiritualize things for us humans and disconnect God from His Word. Take away the Word of God, and you take away not only how we know God but how He has promised to work and give us His gifts in Christ.

In this way, God does not leave us searching but speaks. His Word speaks to us even now as we go through this life, and we do not have to wonder, *Did God really say that?* For the Holy Scriptures tell us what God has really said. The devil wants obscurity and ambiguity, whereas the Scriptures and the confession of them are clear and precise.

When questions arise about what we believe, God calls us to confess Him. We do so as people known personally by God and who confess Him in a very personal way. When we confess Jesus and what He has done, we do so as a people who belong to Him. This forms not only how we confess Jesus but what we say about Him.

5 SA III VIII 5–6.