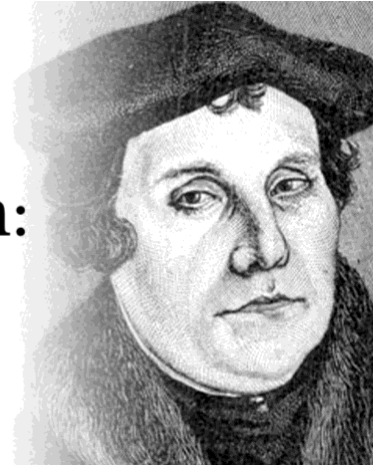


# From Spark to Firestorm: Reformation Events after 1517



## Introduction

Watch a [YouTube video](#) from the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC about the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Take a guess. What percentage of the people at Redeemer know such a thing ever happened?

## Historical Background to the Diet of Augsburg & the Augsburg Confession (1530)

Ever since the Diet of Wörms in 1521, Luther had been declared an outlaw. The Edict of Wörms did not protect Luther from murder and condemned all who possessed his writings. In the meantime, it proved too extreme to actually enforce in the complicated political situation of the Holy Roman Empire. When the Catholic authorities took notice of Lutheranism's spread and increasing support, they formed the League of Regensburg and Dessau in 1524-1525, two political/military alliances in southern and northern Germany respectively, to counteract the growth of Lutheranism. In 1526, the Holy Roman Empire met at the First Diet of Speyer, which essentially gave each territory the freedom to pursue religious affairs as they saw fit. This, then, led to opposition that demanded the Lutherans be dealt with. Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, the duke of Bavaria and the emperor's half-brother, in particular spoken out against the Lutherans, especially Philip of Hesse and Elector John of Saxony, two Lutheran supporters, who did not join the League of Dessau and thus publicly stated their support for the Reformation. In 1529, the Holy Roman Empire met again at the Second Diet of Speyer and revoked the First Diet of Speyer. Roman Catholicism should be tolerated in Lutheran territories, but not vice versa. To this the Lutherans gave a formal *protestatio*, a Latin legal term for an appeal to the previous precedent. This gave rise to the name "Protestant."

In the meantime, however, Emperor Charles V was mainly concerned about the Turkish invasion. In October 1529, his forces turned back the Turks from Vienna. On February 24, 1530 (his birthday), the pope crowned him emperor – a demand after Charles V previously attacked Rome and imprisoned the pope. With this political and military high, Charles V announced another imperial meeting to convene in Augsburg – in the south of Germany, closer to Rome. With this diet Charles intended to secure further support against the Turks and to rectify religious errors and divisions. His words were, at least on paper, quite conciliatory and promised to give everyone a fair hearing.

† Some content taken from "Introduction" in *Luther's Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 5-8.

The Lutheran delegation arrived in the city of Coburg on April 15 and left Luther there at the Elector's southern-most castle. Luther was technically still an outlaw, and thus it was far too risky to bring him to Augsburg, outside Lutheran territory. From Coburg Luther kept in touch with the proceedings at Augsburg. Once the Lutheran delegation arrived in Augsburg, they would not participate in the Catholic Corpus Christi festival. Elector George of Brandenburg said that he would be willing to give up his life – to which Charles V said in broken German, “Elector, no head off.” With time on his hands at the Coburg Castle, Luther wrote his *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg*, which was finished in May and quickly sold out in Augsburg in early June. During this time at Coburg, Luther again felt isolated, like at the Wartburg, and also received the tragic news of his father's death.

The Diet of Augsburg opened on June 20, 1530. In contrast to the Diet of Worms, where only Luther stood before the emperor, now many of the powerful German princes stood before the emperor. On June 25, the Lutherans presented the Augsburg Confession. The German Chancellor Christian Beyer read the Augsburg Confession to the emperor. It was signed by the German princes and thus was a confession of faith by laypeople. The Lutherans had previously drafted articles of faith at the city of Torgau in March, which served as a guideline for the Augsburg Confession. It was largely the work of Philip Melancthon, Luther's associate, who wrote in a far more balanced and academic tone than did Luther. The Lutherans, especially Melancthon, were still hoping for reconciliation on the basis of God's Word. As the Diet of Augsburg progressed, however, Luther wrote to Melancthon on June 29 that too many concessions had already been made. In fact, Luther's *Exhortation* was much more willing to expose the abuses of the Catholic church, since he felt that would lead other bishops to join the Lutheran cause.

In the immediate aftermath, the Catholics responded to the Augsburg Confession on August 3 with the Confutation. This led the Lutherans to write a defense, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which was offered (but not accepted) on August 22. The Diet of Augsburg finally closed on November 19. The Lutherans were given until April 15, 1531, to come back to the Catholic Church or else face military action. On April 15, 1531, the Lutheran responded with the publication of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, making this date the final split between the Lutheran and Catholic Church. Charles V would eventually take military action on the Lutheran territories in the Smalcald War right after Luther died.

Despite the complicated aftermath, Augsburg is a defining event in the Reformation. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology are included in the Book of Concord, the historic confessional documents of Lutheranism. June 25, 1530, the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, is sometimes called “the birthday of the Lutheran Church,” since the Augsburg Confession became an official document of the empire, and for the first time, another church was recognized.

### **Discussion of Luther's *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg* (1530)**

*Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! It is not suitable for me to appear personally at this diet, dear sirs. Even if I had to or should appear, nothing useful could come of it, since amid such pomp and activity nothing of consequence would thereby be accomplished. Nevertheless, in addition to my spiritual presence (which I wish to prove with my whole heart with God's help diligently and sincerely through prayer and entreaty to my God), I have undertaken to be among you also in writing with this mute and weak message of mine.*

The reason for this is that my conscience drives me to entreat, implore, and admonish you all in a friendly and cordial way not to let this diet slip by or use it in vain. For God gives you grace, opportunity, time, and cause through our most gracious Emperor Charles to do and accomplish much and great good through this diet, if you only want to. He now certainly speaks as St. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 6[:1–3], “We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.’ Behold, now is an acceptable time and a day of salvation,” for you above all. We see and hear how the hearts of all people watch and wait upon this diet with great expectation that good will come of it.

Should, however, this diet (may God graciously favor it!) adjourn without result and nothing worthwhile be accomplished, after the whole world has been appeased and teased along for so long a time with diets and councils and all hope has been false and in vain, it is to be feared that despair will result. Everyone will become far too tired of the false hope and waiting, and the vain staring in expectation will produce impatience and make bad blood. For the situation cannot and may not remain any longer as it now is, especially with you and your estate and system. That you know and feel better than I can tell you. Therefore I, too, am now doing what I do for your own good and for the sake of peace and unity. ...

Since I now come to the point that people have forgotten how things stood in the world before my teaching began and no one now wants to admit to having ever done wrong, I must drag out the old skeletons and place before the eyes of the clergy their forgotten virtue so that they may see or reflect once more on what conditions would be like in the world if our gospel had not come. We, too, may see for our comfort what manifold glorious fruits the Word of God has produced. We wish to begin precisely at the point where my teaching began, that is, with indulgences. ... [Note: Luther then goes on at length to talk about indulgences, confessionals, penance, excommunication, the Lord’s Supper, and celibacy.]

From this it follows that all the practices named above, no matter how childish and laughable they are, nevertheless seriously storm against and corrupt the Christian faith and the truly necessary things referred to above, as though there were no help unless one has kept them. For we have unfortunately had the experience up to now that such child’s play and fool’s play has been, and still is, practiced more often and more seriously than the really important things. We are of the opinion, then, that if we can help retain such children’s games as are tolerable for the sake of the young without any disadvantage to the really serious important matters, we shall gladly do so. But that we should hold them as articles of faith and even play the fool in bishops’ hats, nothing will come of that, let him be angry or laugh who will! (LW 34:9-10,15,59)

Describe Luther’s concern with what is going to happen at Augsburg.

Contrast Luther’s tone at the beginning of this selection with the end.

## Discussion of the Preface to the Augsburg Confession (1530)

Note: Melancthon's lengthy introduction was replaced with one by Chancellor Bruck.

*Most serene, most mighty, invincible Emperor, most gracious Lord:*

*A short time ago Your Imperial Majesty graciously summoned a diet of the empire to convene here in Augsburg. In the summons Your Majesty indicated an earnest desire to deliberate concerning matters pertaining to the Turk, that traditional foe of ours and of the Christian religion, and how with continuing help he might effectively be resisted. The desire was also expressed for deliberation on what might be done about the dissension concerning our holy faith and the Christian religion, and to this end it was proposed to employ all diligence amicably and charitably to hear, understand, and weigh the judgments, opinions, and beliefs of the several parties among us to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth, to put aside whatever may not have been rightly interpreted or treated by either side, to have all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted under one Christ. Inasmuch as we, the undersigned elector and princes and our associates, have been summoned for these purposes, together with other electors, princes, and estates, we have complied with the command and can say without boasting that we were among the first to arrive.*

*In connection with the matter pertaining to the faith and in conformity with the imperial summons, Your Imperial Majesty also graciously and earnestly requested that each of the electors, princes, and estates should commit to writing and present, in German and Latin, his judgments, opinions, and beliefs with reference to the said errors, dissensions, and abuses.*

*Accordingly, after due deliberation and counsel, it was decided last Wednesday that, in keeping with Your Majesty's wish, we should present our case in German and Latin today (Friday).*

*Wherefore, in dutiful obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities and territories.*

*If the other electors, princes, and estates also submit a similar written statement of their judgments and opinions, in Latin and German, we are prepared, in obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, our most gracious lord, to discuss with them and their associates, in so far as this can honorably be done, such practical and equitable ways as may restore unity. Thus the matters at issue between us may be presented in writing on both sides, they may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ. All of this is in accord with Your Imperial Majesty's aforementioned summons. That it may be done according to divine truth we invoke almighty God in deepest humility and implore him to bestow his grace to this end. Amen.*

*If, however, our lords, friends, and associates who represent the electors, princes, and estates of the other party do not comply with the procedure intended by Your Imperial Majesty's summons, if no amicable and charitable negotiations take place between us, and if no results are attained, nevertheless we on our part shall not omit doing anything, in so far as God and conscience allow, that may serve the cause of Christian unity.*

*Of this Your Imperial Majesty, our aforementioned friends (the electors, princes, and estates), and every lover of the Christian religion who is concerned about these questions will be graciously and sufficiently assured from what follows in the confession which we and our associates submit.*

*In the past Your Imperial Majesty graciously gave assurance to the electors, princes, and estates of the empire, especially in a public instruction at the diet in Spires in 1526, that for reasons there stated Your Imperial Majesty was not disposed to render decisions in matters pertaining to our holy faith but would diligently urge it upon the pope to call a council.*

*Again, by means of a written instruction at the last diet in Spires a year ago, the electors, princes, and estates of the empire were, among other things, informed and notified by Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy (His Royal Majesty of Hungary and Bohemia, etc.) and by Your Imperial Majesty's orator and appointed commissioners, that Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy, administrators, and councilors of the imperial government (together with the absent electors, princes, and representatives of the estates) who were assembled at the diet convened in Ratisbon had considered the proposal concerning a general council and acknowledged that it would be profitable to have such a council called. Since the relations between Your Imperial Majesty and the pope were improving and were progressing toward a good, Christian understanding, Your Imperial Majesty was sure that the pope would not refuse to call a general council, and so Your Imperial Majesty graciously offered to promote and bring about the calling of such a general council by the pope, along with Your Imperial Majesty, at the earliest opportunity and to allow no hindrance to be put in the way.*

*If the outcome should be such as we mentioned above, we offer in full obedience, even beyond what is required, to participate in such a general, free, and Christian council as the electors, princes, and estates have with the highest and best motives requested in all the diets of the empire which have been held during Your Imperial Majesty's reign.*

*We have at various times made our protestations and appeals concerning these most weighty matters, and have done so in legal form and procedure.*

*To these we declare our continuing adherence, and we shall not be turned aside from our position by these or any following negotiations (unless the matters in dissension are finally heard, amicably weighed, charitably settled, and brought to Christian concord in accordance with Your Imperial Majesty's summons) as we herewith publicly witness and assert.*

*This is our confession and that of our associates, and it is specifically stated, article by article, in what follows.<sup>2</sup>*

Contrast the tone of the Augsburg Confession with the selections of Luther's writing you have read.

How was the Lord guiding history to not have Luther write the Augsburg Confession?

Agree/disagree: "At this point of the Reformation, the Lutherans were naïve to expect any kind of agreement or reconciliation with the Catholics."

<sup>2</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 24–27.

## Applying the Augsburg Confession Today

Discuss any or all of these in small groups:

1. The Augsburg Confession was essentially a layperson's confession of faith. How many of the Lutheran confessions of faith – the three Creeds, Luther's Small & Large Catechism, the Augsburg Confession & Apology, the Smalcald Articles, & the Formula of Concord – would you feel comfortable signing your name under? Did the laypeople back then understand and personally embrace their Lutheran faith more than laypeople now? Why or why not?
2. People around the world – including us at Redeemer – celebrated 2017 as the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. Should the date instead be 2030? 2031? Develop some reasons for what should be considered “the birthday of the Lutheran church.”
3. Consider the tone of the preface to the Augsburg Confession. Many people today consider WELS to be the church that is against everything, not for anything. To what degree is that stereotype legitimate/not legitimate?

## Conclusion

On a scale of 1-10, how much do Lutherans today subscribe to their historic faith? How can we increase that number?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>They don't even know what their faith is about.</i>		...			<i>They understand it, but it's "my church's faith," not "my faith."</i>		...		<i>Ready to put their signatures under it.</i>