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THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN CONTEXT

Walter A. Ritter

Lutherans cannot truly look forward into the 1980s without first looking back to the 1520s and 1530s — to the “confessional rocks” from which they were hewn.

THE DIET OF AUGSBURG

Saturday, June 25, 1530 was a “red-letter day” — politically, ecclesiastically and doctrinally, if not even socially and economically. For two solid hours, from 3-5 PM, the evangelical Saxon Chancellor Christian Beyer read the German “Augsburg Confession” aloud to Emperor Charles V, to representatives of the political estates of the Holy Roman Empire, and to papal legates, cardinals and theologians. Elderly chancellor Gregory Brueck stood by with the Latin version in case the Emperor would not relent on his request to have it read in Latin. But Augsburg was on German soil, Elector John of Saxony had reminded him, and in German it was to be. This day climaxed the imperial Diet at Augsburg which the emperor on January 21 had summoned to begin April 8th. It was delayed, was formally opened on June 20, and continued for about five months.

After this initial climax, another came on August 3 when the papal party presented its fifth revision of the “Pontifical Confutation.” (The emperor had judged the earlier drafts too long, too bitter and too condemnatory.) It had been drafted by about two dozen Roman theologians headed by Eck, Faber, and Cochlaeus, selected by the papal legate, Campegius, and approved by the emperor himself. This was a double climax for the Evangelicals. The Confutation was not simply a statement on matters at issue between both sides, as the emperor had requested initially; it was a refutation of the Evangelical’s statement in the Augsburg Confession. Secondly, it was already a judgment rather than a statement of evidence and, according to the Evangelicals, it was scurrilous and full of exegetical stunts, historical inaccuracies, and blanket condemnations which failed to distinguish the Evangelicals from the Zwinglians, Swiss Reformed, and the radi-

cal reformation sects such as the Anabaptists. About two weeks after the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, two other confessions were noted. Zwingli of Zurich sent his "Ratio Fidei" to the Diet, and the four south-German imperial cities of Strassburg, Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau submitted their "*Confessio Tetrapolitana*", prepared by Bucer and Capito. Zwingli fought especially for the representation view on the Lord's Supper, while the Bucerians espoused a typological view and a "spiritual eating." However, these were not publicly read and did not constitute a climax. Only two years later these four cities subscribed the Augsburg Confession.

A third climax came on September 22 when Melancthon presented the emperor with his Apology to the Augsburg Confession — a combined defence of the Augsburg Confession and refutation of the papal Confutation. It was much shorter than the present Apology in the Book of Concord. The emperor immediately declined it and returned it since he had previously ruled that his final decision should be agreed to without any further replies. Moreover, his response should not be printed and disseminated. So without benefit of a copy of the Confutation, a first Apology was prepared, chiefly from notes taken by Camerarius during its public reading.

The fourth climax came on the following day when the emperor departed from Augsburg, as did also Elector John and Melancthon. The remaining two months were spent by the papal party preparing the first and then a second and final draft of the Augsburg Edict. It called for enforced capitulation by the Evangelicals by April of 1531 and a reinstatement of the conditions enunciated ten years earlier in the Edict of Worms, 1521.

LUTHER AND AUGSBURG

Luther did not attend the Diet at Augsburg. He spent these months at Castle Ebernberg in Coburg, 150 miles north of Augsburg. Elector John forbade his attendance, fearing for his life since he would have been too close to the south-German border to assure constant protection against the papal ban imposed on him ten years prior. While at Coburg in the company of Veit Dietrich, Luther spent his time translating the Old Testament, praying incessantly, and writing constant letters of advice and encouragement to the evangelical theologians and princes at Augsburg.

In Coburg, Luther even wrote his own "Augsburg Confession" in early June under the title, "Admonition To The Spiritual Estates Assembled at the Diet at Augsburg."¹ But it was meant only for the Evangelicals as "my way of being present with you." It called on them to remember their office and calling, to be humble before God, and to recognize "the acceptable time, the day of salvation." After reminding them that he had had to fight harder against the Enthusiasts than against the Papacy² he presented them with eight articles on papal abuses: 1) Indulgences and fourteen related abuses; 2) the blasphemy of confessionals; 3) the soul-murder

1. Johann Georg Walch, editor, *Doktor Martin Luther's Saemmtliche Schriften*, revised edition, 25 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880-1910), 16:946ff. Latter numerical reference is to column, not page. This work is subsequently referred to as "*Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition."

2. *Ibid.*, col. 951.

involved in confession without absolution; 4) the unforgiveable sin of papal Penance and the oldest heresy in the world called Satisfaction; 5) Private Masses and Pilgrimages as the monk's whore; 6) the Epicurean robbery in the "greater ban" — that is, the civil penalties added to excommunication; 7) the anti-scriptural and anti-traditional invention of the Sacrament under one kind; and 8) clerical celibacy as the mark of Antichrist who, according to Daniel 11:37, "will give heed to neither God nor women". On the latter article, Luther wrote that by this practice the Roman Sodomites, as shepherds and hunters of whores, have turned the *Eheloser Stand* into the *Ehrloser Stand*. Celibate abbots and abbesses represent the devil and his wife, and "these two roosters on one manure pile cannot stand each other."³ No doubt the presentation of this "Confession" would not have made Augsburg more memorable for Lutherans!

Yet this private Augustana is instructive for understanding the real one. In it Luther drew up a list of over one hundred abuses in the "hypocritical church" that needed to be discussed at Augsburg and prior to it another one of over thirty "necessary articles to discuss in the true church."⁴ One item on the latter was on "The Reading and Interpretation of the Scriptures." Rather than a request for an article on the nature, authority, inspiration and canon of the Scriptures, it reflected his concern for Christocentric interpretation or reading.

The lack of an article *De Scriptura* in the Augsburg Confession was questioned by critics at the Diet.⁵ But no such article appeared, either in the early or the final drafts. Nor was such article included in any of the later Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord. This impressive fact is not to be explained in terms of Melancthon's politically motivated desire to "tread softly" at Augsburg. Rather, it is unnecessary from the premises of Lutheran theology since the authority and interpretation of Scripture is implicitly present in all articles of an evangelical confession. Schlink sees in this absence a "theological decision" which focuses on the desire to avoid the biblicism of the earlier *Ansbach Counsel* (1524) in favor of the *Viva Vox Evangelii*.⁶

But much more needs to be said on this matter. In view of Occam's prevailing definition of heresy as the failure to acknowledge all the books in Jerome's Vulgate and their entire contents as equally inspired and authoritative, the absence of an article or two defining canon, inspiration, and authority is highly significant. Its absence is not due to the oft-stated assumption that these topics were not matters in dispute. Only six weeks after Luther's death, the Council of Trent delineated the canon as necessarily including also the deuterocanonical books or O.T. Apocrypha.⁷ In the same session it defined inspiration as *Spiritu Sancto dictante*.⁸ Furthermore, the inclusion of such articles in the Reformed confessions, even before Trent, also

3. *Ibid.*, col. 977.

4. *Ibid.*, cols. 981ff.

5. Inge Lonning, "The Holy Scriptures," *The Lutheran Church — Past and Present*, Vilmos Vajta, editor (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), pp. 89f.

6. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J.A. Boumann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 2, 6.

7. In session IV, April 8, 1546. See H.J. Schroeder, editor and translator, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1941), pp. 17-18.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

testifies to this subject as a matter in dispute. Indeed, the omission of articles on the Scriptures and the Canon constitutes a unique theological feature of every official Lutheran Confession and of all ecumenical Creeds, in contradistinction to both Roman and Reformed Confessions.⁹ Thus the Swiss Reformed responded to the 1536 papal proposal for a General Council with the First Helvetic Confession (1536) whose first three articles treat of Scripture, Scripture interpretation, and of the fathers. The Lutherans responded with the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, both of which were without articles about the Scriptures!¹⁰ After Trent (1546-63 intermittently), the Calvinistic Confessions expanded the existing articles on the holy Scriptures¹¹ while the Lutherans finally responded in the introductions to the Formula of Concord in the relatively meager description of "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (SD, Summ Form 3, Tappert, pp. 503f).

Luther's private Augsburg Confession did not imply his dissatisfaction with the real one. On July 6, 1530 he wrote from Coburg to Cordatus: "It is especially dear to me that I have lived to this hour in which Christ, through his so great confessors in so great an assembly was publicly glorified through this truly exceptionally beautiful Confession. Thus the word in Psalm 119:46 was fulfilled: 'I spoke of your testimonies before kings, and was not ashamed.'"¹²

Because of the Confession, Luther called the Diet priceless and held it to be "the last trumpet before the final judgment" where "our Confession and Apology came to light in a blaze of glory."¹³ As late as May 10, 1541 he referred to it as "the beloved Confession."¹⁴

But the significance of this "beloved Confession" must lie far beyond Luther's disposition toward it, for this disposition is an ambivalent one. When Elector John sent Luther an early draft from Melancthon, asking him to revise, delete, or add to it, Luther replied, "I have read the Apology (i.e. the Augsburg Confession) of Magister Philip. It pleased me right well and I do not know what to improve or change in it; neither would it be proper for I cannot tread so gently and quietly."¹⁵

9. "Canonical Scripture" is used in the Book of Concord only once, i.e., in the Latin version of the Augsburg Confession, Article 28, par. 28 in Tappert p. 85. Unless otherwise indicated, reference to the Lutheran Confessions are based on Theodore G. Tappert, editor, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

10. The Smalcald Articles were divided into three categories: agreed, non-negotiable and "matters which we may discuss with sensible men, or even among ourselves," Tappert, p. 302. Subjects listed in category 3 are on basic doctrine!

11. 1559 — French Confession, Articles 3-5; 1561 — Belgic Confession, Articles 3-6; 1566 — Second Helvetic, Articles 1-2; 1560 — Scots, Article 18-20; 1562 — Thirty-nine Articles, 6-7; 1615 — Irish Articles, 2-6; 1647 Westminster, Article 1, sections 1-9! See Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, three volumes, sixth edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), pp. 360-62, 384-89, 237-40, 460-66, 489-92, 526-28, 600-605.

12. *Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition, 16:915. The Scripture quotation is from the Vulgate.

13. Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, three volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), selection 2706-6.

14. Letter to Duke John Fredrick in *Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition, 16:672.

15. Quoted by Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession. A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg press, 1930), Sec. 1, p. 68.

But on June 29, just after the presentation at Augsburg, Luther responded to Melancthon's inquiry as to how much could be yielded in the forthcoming discussions. He answered, "As far as I am concerned too much has already been yielded in this Apology . . . I am prepared to yield everything to them if we are but given the liberty to teach the gospel. I cannot yield anything that militates against the gospel."¹⁶ (Melancthon expressed the same thought with regard to papal jurisdiction in his provisional subscription to the Smalcald Articles seven years later.) Four days later Luther again wrote to Melancthon at Augsburg, "Yesterday I carefully reread your Apology (i.e. the Augsburg Confession) and it pleased me exceedingly. But it errs and sins in one respect. It is in conflict with the sacred scriptures where Christ says concerning himself, 'We will not have this man to reign over us' and it speaks contrary to the judgment of Psalm 118:22, 'the stone which the builders rejected . . .'"¹⁷ Two months later Luther again warned Philip about restoring jurisdiction to papal bishops.¹⁸ With increasing fear for Melancthon's conciliatory mood in the negotiations which followed the presentation, Luther wrote to Justus Jonas on 21 July, ". . . your Apology steps softly and . . . has veiled the articles of Purgatory, the adoration of the Saints, and especially that of the Antichrist, the Pope."¹⁹

It was no doubt Luther's fear of Melancthon's concessions which, at least in part, accounts for his preparation of his own Apology to the Augsburg Confession and to add the "missing articles," especially the one on the Papacy. By order of the Elector John, Luther did just that when he prepared articles for the Smalcald Assembly in February 1537. The Smalcald Articles are therefore conceived as an addendum to the Augsburg Confession.²⁰ At first they not only failed to meet with immediate approval, but several even added provisional notes to their subscriptions. Their dissemination reveals something further. The same penchant for revision which became so troublesome for Melancthon in later years also characterized Luther. Luther revised the Smalcald Articles *after* their subscription by the faculty at Wittenberg and *before* publication. Melancthon outdid Luther by spending a decade in constant revision, expansion, and deletion in both the Latin and German version of the Augsburg Confession in the Apologies, and in his commonly used "*Loci Communes*."²¹

While there are over fifty early extant manuscripts of the Augsburg Confession from the year 1530, none of them are identical to the documents submitted at Augsburg. Emperor Charles V had the German copy sent to the Imperial Archives at Mainz from which it vanished. It was probably first removed by Eck for disputing

16. Quoted in Fredrick Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 19.

17. *Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition, 16:913.

18. Letter of 26 August quoted in Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 509.

19. Quoted in Bente, p. 20. He notes another manuscript reading in which the noun *Leisetreterin* is used instead of the verb *leisetreten*, thus calling the Augsburg Confession a "soft-pedar."

20. See Tappert, p. 287.

21. Editions of 1521, 1535, 1542 and 1548. See *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelischen Lutheranischen Kirchen*, fifth edition (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Rupprecht, 1964), p. xix. Hereafter referred to as *Bekenntnisschriften*.

with the Evangelicals at Worms in 1540. Here he insisted that Lutherans have variant Augsburg Confessions and do not themselves know which one is correct. This German copy may finally have been taken along for use at the Council of Trent.

The Latin Confession was sent to Brussels. Under orders from King Philip II of Spain, Duke Alva retrieved it and presumably took it to Spain "so that such a damned work might forever be destroyed" and lest the Evangelicals "regard it as a Koran." The official version soon needed to be carefully designated,²² especially since the *Variata* was the more popular and commonly used edition.

The meaning and significance of this "common confession of the reformed churches"²³ must now be traced to its parentage before we attempt to perceive its present-day significance. This is somewhat involved since, among its progenitors, we must count at least ten documents, some by virtue of their similarity, others by virtue of their antipathy. These documents help to shape both form and content of the Augsburg Confession. Some of them are quoted directly by the Augsburg Confession while others indicate intentional changes affected in the Augsburg Confession.

THE PROGENITORS OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

Elert traces the evangelical confessional process negatively, from the 1521 Edict of Worms in the refusals of the princes to suppress "the Lutheran heresy" and, positively, from the "Twenty Three Ansbach Articles in the Form of Questions" (*Ansbacher Frageartikel*) of 1524 and the answers provided for these questions in the "Ansbach Evangelical Counsel" (*Ansbacher Ratschlag*) of the same year.²⁴ Reu concludes that the Ansbach Counsel can be "rightly called the first evangelical confession of Franconia." He designates John Rurer and Adam Weiss as the probable authors, takes note of a similar "Evangelical Counsel" of 1524 in Nuernberg authored by Osiander and others, and concludes that evangelical confessions did not begin in electoral Saxony.²⁵ This Ansbach Counsel is noteworthy for placing statements on the central article of Justification toward the end while concentrating on doctrines of Church and Sacraments. Significantly, it also begins with an introductory statement and some articles on the authority of the Scriptures. Its preamble has the unusual (and modern!) heading: "Against Those Who Consider the Gospels Credible on the Basis of Human Confirmation." The third article deals with "Expounding the Divine Scriptures." It disclaims the identity of faith with the acceptance of biblical statements or biblical facts.²⁶ Similarly, the Schwabach Articles of

22. Quoted in Bente, p. 21. See also Solid Declaration, Summary Formulation 5, Tappert, p. 504.

23. Tappert, p. 504.

24. Werner Elert, "The Church's Faith and Confession in the Light of Marburg and Augsburg," translated by A.R. Wentz, *Lutheran Church Quarterly* 2 (October, 1919):409ff. See also Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, translated by Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 91, 376-77.

25. Reu, 1:217, note 19.

26. Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, pp. 92, 183-84.

1529 and the Copenhagen Articles of 1530 cite scripture passages and references in their opening articles. In spite of these precedents, Luther's Marburg Articles of 1529 and the Augsburg Confession departed from this established approach. Elert observes that the earlier approach could easily have led to a biblicism which is illustrated in many Reformed Confessions.²⁷

There is no evidence of Luther's direct involvement in the aforementioned "Counsels". But he either composed or approved other early so-called "Ordinances" e.g. "Ordinance of a Common Chest at Leisnig 1523",²⁸ "Church Order of Brunswick 1528" which contain similar doctrinal instruction and directions on matters of parish administration.

But it was these Counsels and Ordinances which culminated in the "Visitation Articles 1527" and the "Instruction for Parish Visitors 1528".²⁹ Piepkorn calls these the earliest documents "to achieve a quasi-symbolical status in the Lutheran movement."³⁰ These eighteen articles were written by Melancthon at the request of Elector John. But Luther reviewed and approved them and added a Preface to explain their purpose.³¹ In their relation to the Augsburg Confession, they are important for several reasons. They show that, unlike many Reformed Confessions,³² evangelical confessions soon departed from the earlier custom of including matters of parish administration and forms of worship.

Secondly, they contain the resolution of the first internal Lutheran debate. It was between Melancthon and Agricola who charged Philip with a Roman view of repentance. Luther mediated. Melancthon won. They also reveal a remarkable "confessional patience" on the part of Luther who "refused to follow the Elector's suggestion and omit the passages which gave pastors permission to administer the sacrament in one kind in cases where weak consciences seemed to justify this as a temporary measure."³³ This leniency is also felt in Article XXII of the Augsburg Confession (Of Both Kinds) which does not yet deny that a truncated sacrament is either invalid or inefficacious but only that it represents "an unjust custom introduced contrary to God's command and also contrary to the ancient canons." (AC 22/10, Tappert, p. 50.) Among Evangelicals patience permits a lag between practice and doctrine. "But in 1538 when a second edition was printed, Luther did withdraw this concession. Luther refused too, to be concerned about the Romanist claim that the treatment on repentance represented a retraction of his earlier stand."³⁴ The paragraphs which Luther deleted in 1538 had stated, "First . . . this teaching shall be presented without compromise to everyone, including the weak and the obstinate. Secondly, where there are weak Christians who as yet have not heard, or been sufficiently instructed and strengthened by the word of the gospel, and so, out of

27. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

28. *Luther's Works: American edition*, Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman, editors, 50 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-79), 45:159ff.

29. *Luther's Works*, American edition, 40:265ff.

30. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Melancthon the Confessor," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (September 1960):541-546.

31. *Luther's Works*, American edition, 40:263ff.

32. E.g., *The Anglican Book of Common Prayer*.

33. *Luther's Works*, American edition, 40:266; introduction by C. Bergendoff.

34. *Ibid.*

weakness and terror of conscience rather than obstinacy cannot receive both kinds, one may allow these to take communion in one kind for the time being; and where they ask for it the pastor or preacher may so administer it. The reason is this: In this way the doctrine of both kinds will not be weakened or compromised, but only the application or use of the doctrine will be temporarily postponed through Christian patience and love. So Christ was patient with his apostles in many things which were not right . . . Love forgives and endures its inadequate application. Further, it is uncharitable, even unChristian, to force these weak ones to receive the sacrament in both kinds or to withhold it in one kind . . . So also Paul tolerated circumcision and Jewish food, all the while freely proclaiming freedom in regard to food.”³⁵

But in September 1530, during the Diet at Augsburg, Luther published his “Judgment on the Resolution at Augsburg,” which read, “If they require that the matter of using the sacrament under one or both kinds be left free according to each one’s conscience and desire, this could in no way be accepted and introduced. For in this way we would absolve those of sin who receive only one kind contrary to the institution and command of Christ.”³⁶ The obvious contradiction is simply due to different audience context. Evangelical concern and Christian love can easily be “caught in contradictions.”

Luther’s Preface to the “Instruction” is also important because it reveals his understanding of a formal Confession. It is not a legalistic decree but rather a statement voluntarily received, historically confined, and subject to improvement. He writes, “While we cannot issue any strict commands as if we were publishing a new form of papal decrees, but are rather giving an account or report which may serve as a witness and confession of our faith . . . we hope (our pastors) will willingly and without compulsion, subject themselves in a spirit of love to such visitation . . . until God the Holy Spirit brings to pass something that is better through them (i.e. the parish pastors) or through us.”³⁷ It is in a similar spirit that the Augsburg Confession ended with the comment, “If anyone should consider that it is lacking in some respect, we are ready to present further information on the basis of the divine Holy Scriptures.” (AC, Concl. 7, Tappert, p. 96)

Another document from Luther’s pen gave form and content to the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession. It was written in April 1527 and was titled: “That These Words of Christ: This Is My Body etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Enthusiasts.”³⁸ It was directed especially against the “murder” of specific words in the biblical formula by different theologies: of the *Tuto* (sic! *touto* GK.) by Carlstadt, of the word IS by Zwingli through his *Deutelei* (represents), and of the word BODY by Oecolampadius. The procedure in the Augsburg Confession is to avoid the names of contemporary individuals. It also consistently refrains from condemning whole

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-91.

36. *Luther’s Works*, St. Louis edition, 16:1543.

37. *Luther’s Works*, American edition, 40:272. John T. Mueller, *Die Symbolischen Buecher der Evangelischen Kirche, Deutsch und Lateinisch*, ninth edition (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1900), p. xxviii, refers this comment to the Augsburg Confession. Schlink, p. 23, footnote 16, observes that the last proviso recognizes confession as “eschatological event.”

38. *Luther’s Works*, St. Louis edition, 20:762ff.

groups as groups. It rather speaks its condemnation to the teaching found within groups, at least among some exponents of the group. Its judgment on Reformed and Anabaptist teaching is expressed by a stronger *damnant* (*Verdammen*), while articles involving Roman teaching are usually only disapproved (*improbant*) or rejected (*Verworfen, reiiunt*).³⁹ That Article X (Lord's Supper) uses the milder expression against Zwinglianism is the only exception to this rule.⁴⁰ It probably reflects Melancthon's hope for reconciliation with the Swiss. He deleted the entire rejection in his 1540 *Variata*. It seems that he even omitted it in the first drafts of the Augsburg Confession, but finally inserted it at the instigation of Luther.⁴¹

The effect of Luther's 1527 document ("That These Words . . .") is also seen in the Augsburg Confession's omission of scriptural references in the first three articles and in the ninth and tenth. Luther had opened his 1527 discussion against Zwingli with a claim that Satan himself had invented the *Sola Scriptura* slogan. Satan had done this in order to penetrate the Scriptures and to make of them a *Ketzerbuch* whereby he could establish many sects. Historically, Luther goes on, this necessitated the calling of many councils in the early church to make many rules and ordinances alongside of the Scriptures so that it was said, "The scriptures are not enough; one must also have the interpretations of councils and of the fathers." From this claim Satan developed the papacy in which, today, only human commands and patristic glosses count.⁴² Because, said Luther, the Enthusiasts argue from a unique "flat" usage of scripture texts, he would diligently expound, from the whole of scriptures, their favorite passages i.e. John 6 ("the flesh profits nothing") and the Ascension accounts (by which they "proved" an absent Christ). Having done this at great length, Luther ended with extensive discussion on the patristic evidence from Augustine, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hilary, and Cyprian. He wanted to show "the winebibbers and bread eaters" who have only a "baker's God" that they can have no fellowship with evangelicals whose Mighty God makes Himself edible and drinkable in the Supper.

In March of 1528 Luther penned his masterful "*Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis*,"⁴³ usually called the "Great Confession" in distinction from his "Small Confession"⁴⁴ written in 1544. Both were written against the Enthusiasts, and both are subscribed by the Book of Concord.⁴⁵ The lengthy Great Confession consists of three parts which Luther defines as: 1) to show and warn Evangelicals that the Enthusiasts are in no way using my theology; 2) to examine all scriptural statements on the Supper; 3) to enumerate all the articles of my faith in order to prevent, after my death, the already common claim that I agreed with their doctrine, or at least would have, by that time, changed some of the articles of my faith.⁴⁶ He then lists over thirty articles which embrace both doctrines and abuses under five general subjects:

39. *Bekenntnisschriften*, p. 64, footnote 4. Thus the Latin version of Article XII on Repentance condemns teachings of the Anabaptists and Novatians but rejects those of Rome.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 65, footnote 4.

41. *Bente*, p. 18.

42. *Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition, 20:763-64.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 894ff.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 1764ff.

45. Tappert, pp. 505, 584, 592, 608, etc.

46. *Luther's Works*, St. Louis edition, 20:896, 1095.

1) The Triune God; 2) Redemption, including Original Sin, Free Will, Human Traditions, the Three Divine Estates; 3) The Holy Spirit, including his means of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; 4) The Church, including Forgiveness, the Papacy, Purgatory, Invocation of Saints and the other five Roman sacraments; 5) Resurrection and Final Judgment. These articles, without their anti-Roman clauses, and with an article on Justification to replace the one on the Holy Spirit, became the basis for the seventeen articles in Luther's Schwabach Articles".⁴⁷

THE "FIRST" LUTHERAN SYMBOLICAL BOOK

Kidd calls the Schwabach Articles "the first of the Lutheran symbolical books."⁴⁸ During August-September, 1529 Luther led several Wittenberg theologians (Melanchthon, Jonas, Bugenhagen) in drafting them for presentation at the first Smalcald Convention in October, 1529. Melanchthon took this document along to the Diet at Augsburg and used it as the basic source for the first section of the Augsburg Confession, i.e. Articles 1-21. However, the last Article in this section of the Augsburg Confession derives not from Schwabach, but from the Great Confession and the Instruction for Parish Visitors. Nor does the method in the Augsburg Confession (Article III) of subsuming a statement on the Holy Spirit under Christology come from Schwabach.⁴⁹ Nor could the Schwabach Articles bequeath their method of citing the scriptures in Articles 1-3 without reference to Nicaea or the Creeds. This development does not show that Luther desired more scriptural support while Melanchthon was satisfied with mere dogma. Luther himself indicates otherwise when he developed his fifteen "Marburg Articles" from the Schwabach confession.

The Marburg Articles were especially prepared for a meeting with Zwingli, October 2-4, 1529. They already indicate the pattern of not citing scriptural testimony exemplified in the first articles of the Augsburg Confession. This is especially significant in view of Luther's insistence on using patristic evidence against the Enthusiasts as he had done against Zwingli in his 1527 "That These Words . . ." The first article of Marburg cites only Nicaea and the Nicene Creed. Only three of the fifteen articles cite testimony from the scriptures.⁵⁰ At the Marburg Colloquy the Zwinglians had declined the scripture-referenced Schwabach Articles especially because Article X spoke of Christ's Presence as being IN bread and wine. Soon after Augsburg the representatives of Memmingen felt that unity with the Zwinglians could have been achieved at Marburg if the formula of Augsburg Confession Article X (present-under-distributed-received) had been used instead of the formula in the Schwabach Articles (in). No doubt the Schwabach confession indicates Luther's design to narrow and refine the description of the sacramental Presence in the context of his growing suspicion of Zwinglianism.⁵¹ This is further attested by his

47. *Bekenntnisschriften*, p. xv.

48. James B. Kidd, editor, *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 245.

49. *Bekenntnisschriften*, p. xv.

50. Article 8 — The External Word; Article 9 — Baptism; Article 13 — Traditions.

51. *Reu*, Sec. 1, pp. 30, 237.

strange definition of the Church in Schwabach Article XII, “The church is nothing else than believers in Christ who hold, believe, and teach the above-mentioned articles and parts.”⁵² The “above-mentioned articles” included almost every doctrinal article: Deity, Christology, Original Sin, Justification, Faith, Baptism, Eucharist, Absolution, The Church. In a week or two, at Marburg, Luther would obviously meet a supreme challenge in laying to rest so many counts against the Zwinglians. He succeeded but only for a very short time.

Another development in the Marburg Articles comes close to being without parallel. They present the Evangelical’s use of the confessional appendix or *Zettel*. By this device both sides in dialogue subscribe not only a common agreement but also a notice of disagreement. At Marburg this notice or appendix read, “And although we are not at this time agreed as to whether the true Body and Blood of Christ are bodily present in the bread and wine, nevertheless the one party should show to the other Christian love, so far as conscience can permit, and both should fervently pray God Almighty that, by His Spirit, He would confirm us in the true understanding.”⁵³ This notice of disagreement was signed by Luther, Melanchthon, Jonas, Osiander, Brenz, and Agricola for the Evangelicals and by Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bucer and Hedio for the other party. In a private proposition, Luther added to the notice a still further concession which reflected on his former writings: “We herewith declare and state that the *argumenta* and reasons found in our books concerning the Sacramentarians are not directed against Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and their adherents, but against those who totally reject the presence of the body in the Supper.”⁵⁴ Yet the meeting ended without a Lutheran concession to the request for a joint communion service. Eight months later while at Augsburg, Melanchthon no doubt mellowed Augsburg Confession Article X as he reminisced on the Marburg meeting. Also Luther and other Evangelicals were undoubtedly thoroughly disillusioned when they learned that Zwingli had submitted his own Confession at Augsburg (*Ratio Fidei*) in order to disassociate himself from the Lutheran view.

LUTHER’S CATECHISMS

But 1529 was an eventful year also for another reason. In April and May Luther’s Large (“German”) and Small Catechisms appeared. These pedagogical confessions demonstrate Luther’s desire for core summaries which illustrate, demonstrate, and characterize rather than define. Even key words like “adultery” in the sixth commandment and “kingdom” in the second petition are left undefined in spite of the question: “What Does this Mean?” Instead these words are given non-static descriptions. Also the subtitles for each chief part indicate that the Catechism is meant to illustrate methodology: “*How, in a very plain form . . .*”⁵⁵ It is not simply a book of

52. *Ibid.*, Sec. 2, p. 43.

53. *Ibid.*, Sec. 2, p. 46.

54. Quoted in Ernest G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times, The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 710.

55. The German reads “*wie*” and is consistently mistranslated in Tappert, pp. 342ff., as “form in which.”

fixed content. Both Catechisms show that Luther is more interested in the diversity of biblical exegesis than in the systematics of dogma, hence his creedal interest centers on administration of the Gospel rather than on providing definitions for it. This approach affected the Augsburg Confession in a direct way, as it did also other documents in the Book of Concord. The various articles in the Augsburg Confession intend to be a methodological display. They are not simply “a declaration of our confession and the teaching of our preachers” (AC, Concl.6, Tappert, p. 95) but more importantly, as the Preface has it, a confession of our pastor’s and preacher’s 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. (AC, Preface 8, Tappert, p. 25)

Even until the Formula of Concord (though hardly during the subsequent age of Orthodoxy) this dynamic view of Evangelical creeds and Confessions prevailed. The Epitome describes creeds and Confessions as “witnesses to the FASHION IN WHICH the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times . . . setting forth HOW at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood (and explained) in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and HOW contrary teachings were rejected and condemned.” (Epitome, Comprehensive Summary 2,8, Tappert, p. 465.) It is just as important to underline the HOW as it is the WHAT! After all, it is easy to speak of the crucifixion of Christ without proclaiming the Gospel, says the Epitome. (Epitome 5/9) It all depends on HOW one does it, not simply on what one says.

Especially the Small Catechism demonstrates another Evangelical concern — the desire for flexibility in content and phrase. Luther published at least five editions of the Small Catechism during his lifetime, amending scriptural citations, adding or deleting whole portions, and changing the basic text. If Melancthon had an ever-amending Augsburg Confession, Luther had an ever-amending Catechism. Nor is it known that Luther ever voiced objections toward Melancthon’s amendments, not even toward the *Variata* or the Calvinized later editions of the *Loci Communes*. In its historical context the Augsburg Confession has but one form, that of 1530 at Augsburg. But as existential proclamation it can be constantly revised and amended.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

One more document affected the Augsburg Confession negatively. The arch-foe of the Evangelicals was John Eck from the University of Ingolstadt. He had debated with Luther both at Leipzig in July 1519 and at Worms in April 1521. On March 14, 1530 he published his “404 Articles” or Propositions.⁵⁶ When they came to the attention of the Evangelicals already assembled at Augsburg for the Diet, the whole plan changed from a mere defence of corrected abuses to an additional presentation on articles of faith. By May 11, Melancthon had sent to Luther at Coburg the new enlarged response. It was now based on both the Schwabach Articles in Part I and on the Torgau Articles in Part II. The preface of Eck’s publication indicates his pur-

56. English text in Reu, Sec. 2, pp. 97ff.

pose: to incite the Emperor to use “the final solution” against Luther and his followers in accord with the Edict of Worms. After citing many of Luther’s colorful epithets,⁵⁷ Eck proceeded to list the 41 articles of Luther which were condemned at Worms. These were followed by 354 quotations and misquotations, all without context, from the writings of Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Bucer, Anabaptists and others. He had hoped to use the Diet at Augsburg to debate all 404 “propositions!” His frequently recurring phrase is “To God alone all glory.” This publication affected especially Article XIV (“we are unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass”) and Article XXVIII (the non-obligatory nature of the Lord’s Day) in the Augsburg Confession. Ultimately “the dregs of Eck” (Apology 22/11, Tappert, p. 238) came up for extensive treatment in the Apology.

One further requirement needs to be proposed for proper understanding of the Augsburg Confession. Two narrowly contemporaneous documents should be studied in conjunction with it. The first is the Papal Confutation, showing how the Roman party heard the Lutherans.⁵⁸ It not only presents a survey of medieval theology and performs many exegetical stunts, but it also contains many interesting observations and cogent reflections from patristics which raise some questions for Lutherans. It demonstrates that Lutheran criticism was often directed more against a vulgar Roman theology than against its official and proper form e.g. that those in Orders do not claim perfection but to be in a state for acquiring it; that holding marriage to be a sacrament is not disparagement but elevation; that Christ’s passion is satisfaction for Original Sin while the Mass is satisfaction for actual sin is not taught. The extensive “bite” in the Confutation led Melanchthon to his still more extensive Apology, especially when the heart of the Evangelical theology was attacked. Apology Article IV on Justification comprises 30% of the total content. It represents one of the most scholarly evangelical productions in both biblical exegesis and methodology and in patristic citation. It was here that Melanchthon struggled to demonstrate that biblical theology must be both Christocentric and sacramental, and must properly distinguish between law and gospel. This Apology qualifies as “required annual reading” for all Lutheran clergy today.

Confessional scholars have expressed a variety of opinions on Luther’s disposition to the Augsburg Confession which help point to an evangelical description of its significance. No doubt one could agree with any of them. Theo. Kolde maintained that chancellor Brueck’s prefatory praise of the Roman Emperor could not have elicited Luther’s approval.⁵⁹ T.G. Tappert held that Luther supported the Augsburg Confession in spite of its omissions because he saw in it the “occasional nature” of any confession and its lack of finality as a system of doctrine.⁶⁰ Herman Sasse suggested that Luther would have written it differently.⁶¹ Lewis W. Spitz was

57. E.g., the church is a harlot; bishops are worms; monasteries are brothels; princes are louse’s eggs.

58. English text in *Reu*, Sec. 2, pp. 348-83.

59. Cited in Schmauk, p. 337.

60. Theodore G. Tappert, “The Symbols of the Church,” *What Lutherans Are Thinking*, E.C. Fendt, editor (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1947), p. 358.

61. Herman Sasse, *Here We Stand. The Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, translated by Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 92.

of the view that Luther's views on the Papacy were deliberately avoided at Augsburg.⁶² Ingetraut Ludolphy conjectured that Luther felt "almost good" about the Confessions.⁶³ Ernest G. Schwiebert felt that Luther found much wanting also in its omission of statements on the "universal priesthood of believers" and his views on the sacraments.⁶⁴ Gerhard Ritter maintained that its timid spirit was foreign to Luther and must have been so increasingly as his polemics grew more violent with age.⁶⁵ Michael Reu concluded that its testimony is "not free from shortcomings."⁶⁶

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62. Lewis W. Spitz, "The Formula of Concord, Then and Now," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 8 October, 1977:18-19.
63. Ingetraut Ludolphy, *From Luther to 1580: A Pictorial Account* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 132.
64. Schwiebert, p. 728.
65. Gerhard Ritter, "The Founder of the Evangelical Churches," *Luther: A Profile*, H.G. Koenigsberger, editor (New York: Hill and Wang, 1973), pp. 90-92.
66. Reu, Sec. 1, p. 113.

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