

# A Different Spirit

By Joel D. Fredrich

The title phrase, “A Different Spirit” refers to the famous words of Luther to Bucer at the close of the Marburg Colloquy (Oct. 3, 1529):

Our spirit is different from yours; it is clear that we do not possess the same spirit, for it cannot be the same spirit when in one place the words of Christ are simply believed and in another place the same faith is censured, resisted, regarded as false and attacked with all kinds of malicious and blasphemous words. Therefore, as I have previously stated, we commend you to the judgment of God. Teach, as you can account for it before God. (AE 38:70-71; WA 30 111: 150, 6-11)<sup>i</sup>

In view of the historical context of these words, we may take them as an expression of Luther’s attitude toward all his opponents at Marburg.

It is clear from this and from many other statements that Luther regarded the denial of the real presence as an error which made church fellowship between himself and the errorists impossible. Therein lies the *fundamental* significance of the Marburg Colloquy. As far as I am aware, historians are unanimous in recognizing this. Whether they approve of Luther’s action or not, all would acknowledge that the theological and world-historical significance of the colloquy turns on this one fact, that for Luther, doctrinal considerations were foremost. Johann Aurifaber, one of Luther’s students, gives the essence of the event in one sentence: “The Wittenberg theologians were unwilling to regard the Swiss theologians as their brothers or receive them as such, lest they be thought to approve their false teaching.”<sup>ii</sup>

Although there is a consensus concerning this fundamental point of historical interpretation, differences of opinion arise when some of the secondary issues come under consideration. One of these is the meaning of Luther’s pronouncements on his opponents. The question might be worded in several ways. To what extent did he condemn them? How close to them did he feel? Did he consider them as fellow Christians whose request for fellowship had to be refused in order to give them an unmistakable testimony to their error; or did he allow the possibility that they might have saving faith without committing himself to a judgment of their hearts; or did he regard them as lost souls and even testify publicly to their apostasy from Christ?

In the January, 1931 *Quartalschrift*, August Pieper answered these questions without hesitation. According to Pieper, Luther at Marburg did not deny the possibility of saving faith among his opponents. Pieper goes so far as to say that Luther definitely recognized them as Christians. In view of its importance as part of our Wisconsin Synod heritage, I will quote the pertinent passage at length:

Previously we portrayed the stern judgment which Luther passed on Zwingli’s personal Christianity before and after Marburg. At the colloquy itself, where Luther made the declaration concerning the different spirit, he regarded Zwingli and the friends who accompanied him as Christians. When he called Bucer a good-for nothing to his face, that was said half seriously and half as a friendly admonition. Quite often he called Oecolampadius a pious man, and at Marburg he thanked him for his friendly and cooperative manner. On the whole the personal tone of the disputation remained within the boundaries of Christian propriety. If anyone, it was Zwingli who forgot this once or twice. He, too, received from Luther an acknowledgement of his Christian behavior. Indeed, Luther wouldn’t have dealt with him at all if he had seriously regarded him on this occasion as an unbeliever. Above all, however, his drafting of the Marburg Articles is evidence that he went as far as possible both in recognizing the Christianity of Zwingli’s teaching in view of the latter’s concessions at Marburg and in promising to maintain a friendly posture toward him in the future. Thus Luther did not deny Zwingli the *Christian* spirit. (Pieper’s emphasis)<sup>iii</sup>

I gather from conversations with professors and fellow students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary that some men in our circles would agree. Perhaps not all of these would fully endorse Pieper's interpretation. But there are those who would concur at least in the claim that Luther at Marburg did not deny the personal Christianity of his opponents.

It is my aim in this paper to present sufficient evidence from sixteenth century sources to show that this view of Luther's pronouncements at the Marburg colloquy is untenable. On that occasion Luther made it quite plain that he regarded his opponents as non-Christians. This thesis can be established conclusively on the basis of a few quotations from the reports and letters of those who were participants or witnesses at the colloquy. But the statements Luther made will be more easily understood in the larger context of the controversy and of Luther's theology. Accordingly it will be convenient to present this study in four sections: 1) before Marburg; 2) at the colloquy; 3) Luther's view of doctrinal error; and 4) concluding remarks and questions for further discussion.

Although I regard the main thesis of this paper as incontestable, there will be along the way a number of conclusions concerning related matters which involve some rather fine and elusive points of interpretation. These conclusions are necessarily more tentative. My research into the primary sources is very fragmentary, and I have only scratched the surface of the vast secondary literature which the specialists have produced. I would be grateful for any corrections or divergent interpretations based on a rereading of the evidence cited here or on documents which I have neglected.

## **I. Before Marburg**

This is not the place to sketch the course of the entire controversy. What follows is a collection of representative statements made by the disputants during the years leading up to the colloquy. These quotations will provide a frame of reference for evaluating the verbal exchanges at Marburg.

My impressions of the polemical writings issued during this period could be summarized in this manner:

- 1) Strongly worded accusations and name-calling are heard coming from both camps. On both sides we find writers deploring the bad motivation and evil spiritual guidance which are at work among their opponents. Sometimes the charges and countercharges are remarkably similar in wording.
- 2) In spite of superficial similarities, a basic difference emerges. The protests, charges, and abusive language employed by the Zwinglians were generally tempered by the recognition that their opponents were fellow Christians nonetheless. In contrast to this, Luther concluded very early in the controversy that his opponents were outside the Christian Church and wrote against them accordingly.
- 3) Many of Luther's colleagues did not share his convictions on this point at first, but the years of controversy brought about a much greater consensus with regard to the spiritual status of the opponents. In this respect, the Marburg Colloquy marks a high point in the solidarity of the Lutheran theologians.

We now turn to the evidence on which the foregoing analysis is based. First we will consider the attitudes of the leading Swiss and South German theologians who denied the real presence; then, that of Luther; finally, that of Luther's colleagues.

Bucer had provoked Luther and Bugenhagen by introducing some unwarranted observations on the sacrament into his Latin translations of Luther's *Postille* and Bugenhagen's commentary on the Psalms. The writings which Bucer issued to defend himself against their charges offer a good example of his view of the controversy.

Bucer's answer to Luther (March 29, 1527) includes the following countercharge:

But you are writing against all reason, and you want to take from us all faith, even though we preach nothing but the Word of God. Supposing that we do err in this matter—are we then supposed to be unable to teach anything correctly? (St. L XX: 1594, 25)

He goes on to cite indications that "Luther's spirit in this controversy is not that of Christ" (1595, 28) but rather that here "prevails the spirit of a man, which knows nothing of the claims of love" (1598, 35). Bucer refers to what he had previously written—that those who are involved in the quarrel over the sacrament are nevertheless "brothers and excellent servants of Christ" (1599, 38), and he still sees no reason to change that opinion:

Now as for those who confess and teach this [the core of Christian doctrine] and do not oppose it in their works, why shouldn't we regard them as Christians and true servants of the Gospel even if they don't understand one or more passages of Scripture correctly, especially since there is no one who doesn't make a mistake therein from time to time? (1599, 39).

Using this general principle, Bucer makes the application to Luther and his allies:

Accordingly we regard you as truly Christian and honorable servants of Christ since you believe and teach that your salvation and that of all the elect stands solely on the death of Christ, not on any human merit (1601, 44).

From this point of view, Bucer is distressed to see Luther insisting that one side or the other had to be the devil's (1601, 45); to hear that Luther is consigning his opponents to Satan for judgment day (1603, 50); to be deprived of the name *Christian* and to be called a *sacramentarian* instead (1602, 47). Let Luther acknowledge that such actions show a spirit much different from Christ's spirit (1601, 45); let him allow the Spirit of Christ to rule in him (1603, 50).

Bucer's answer to Bugenhagen, written a few days earlier (March 25, 1527) contains similar remarks. Bugenhagen's written protest against Bucer (published without prior private admonition and even, according to Bucer, containing false charges) is something which Bucer "cannot ascribe to the Spirit of Christ" (St. L XX: 1601, 2). He ends with a prayer that Christ "grant that we be likeminded in Him and also preach His Word in One Spirit" (1615, 29).

These two writings by Bucer contain specimens of his attitude toward his opponents. On the one hand there is an unmistakable conviction that he is dealing with fellow Christians and brothers in the faith; on the other, there is a recognition that the unity of the Spirit is still far from complete since the opponents allow their own spirits to overrule the Spirit of Christ in this matter.

### Zwingli

Zwingli's attitude toward Luther is similar, at least in its broad outlines, to that of Bucer. There are, however, some differences between Bucer's style of polemics and Zwingli's. Zwingli is more vehement in his use of invective. Where Bucer maintains a realistic tension between recognition of a Christian brother and criticism of the non-Christian spirit at work in that brother, Zwingli presses matters so far that he sometimes becomes quite inconsistent.

In Zwingli's earliest written contributions to the controversy, he refrained from attacking Luther by name in an attempt to preserve the peace within the evangelical movement as much as possible.<sup>iv</sup> Nevertheless, he became convinced quite early that another spirit was making headway among the evangelicals. In a letter to the ministers of Basel (April 5, 1525) he writes:

Although we all have the same word as far as the letters go, nevertheless we do not follow the same meaning; therefore we do not have the same internal Word, which alone is the food of souls. If anyone admits this (as none can deny: for we see that many depend on the same Word, but still disagree), then the consequence is that those who argue to this degree while using the same Word, are not led by the same spirit. Therefore, since even among brothers there is today no small dissension concerning the Eucharist, it can't be denied that some are giving ear to a spirit other than the divine one. We are being tried by the desire of glory, the fear of death, and Satan himself . . .<sup>v</sup>

Though he saw evidence of a different spirit and even named "Satan himself," he still spoke of "brothers." For Zwingli, the victories of Satan among the evangelicals did not invalidate the unifying rule of the Holy Spirit. This conviction became evident in a publication of 1526 in which he emphasized the common ground he shared with Luther:

[Luther] and I will indeed be united with each other . . . And though there be some disagreement between us, it can't create any prejudice among the faithful, for they know whom they have believed—not Luther or Zwingli, but Christ Jesus, our Lord. To Him be honor and praise! For Luther and I have one faith on Him and in Him.<sup>vi</sup>

A few pages later he expressed the same thought with explicit reference to the Holy Spirit:

. . . there is among the faithful no disagreement in the faith, nor can there be any, for they have one Spirit.<sup>vii</sup>

However, as the controversy continued, the polemical expressions became more frequent, more intense, and more personal. Although Zwingli had directed his first attacks against the traditional Catholic dogma instead of naming Luther as the opponent, it was inevitable that Luther should feel the sting of the epithets with which Zwingli reproached the conservatives. Indeed, Luther sensed the inconsistency of the opponents' demand for moderation in his polemics as long as they were going to use abusive terms like "idolatry" and "an edible God." Already in November, 1525 he complained, "They want us to abstain from insults while they themselves burden us with insults which are not to be endured." (WA Br 111: 608, 6f.)

Zwingli later acknowledged (in his preface "To the Reader" in the *Friendly Exposition* of 1527) that his previous polemical writings had indeed been aimed at Luther even though the name had been omitted. At the same time he denied the use of abusive language—that was all on Luther's side—and promised that although he would henceforth be addressing Luther by name, he would continue to refrain from abusive language.<sup>viii</sup> Zwingli's diagnosis of Luther as a man beset but not yet destroyed by stubbornness and self-conceit<sup>ix</sup> finds expression in positive, even friendly remarks along with stern reproof. At the writing of this pamphlet, he still thinks that Luther is truly a Christian ("as I think there is no probable reason for doubting," *ut esse nihil ambigendum fortasse duco*<sup>x</sup>), though his thoughts are clouded, "bloated by empty glory," so that he "prefers to see not only human but even divine matters shaken rather than have his own opinion give way."<sup>xi</sup> Toward the end of the *Friendly Exposition*, Zwingli lists four contentions Luther had made concerning the sacrament, designates them as unscriptural, and adds in each case the refrain, "It is an error, and if you persist, impiety."<sup>xii</sup>

Apparently he never turned that warning ("if you persist") into a verdict ("since you persist"); for although Luther resisted all Zwingli's admonitions and thus could be said to have persisted in his error, Zwingli

did not draw the conclusion and charge Luther with actual impiety. As long as he saw evidence of Luther's adherence to the gospel, he would not make such a judgment. But since in Zwingli's view such errors concerning the sacrament could lead to complete apostasy, he was concerned to sound the warning with all severity.

To the best of my knowledge, the most severe public condemnation of Luther from Zwingli's pen is a section of his *That These Words of Christ "This Is My Body . . ." Will Always Retain Their Ancient, Single Meaning* (1527). Taking some of Luther's name-calling as a starting point, Zwingli wonders what Luther means by *Scwärmer*; if it means deceiver or madman, he suggests that the name belongs instead to those

who want to eat [Christ's body] in a fleshly way and extend it contrary to any possible meaning of His own Word according to the divine nature; who want nevertheless to take it entire into a human mouth and eat it; and whoever does not abandon such opinions [*wer sölchs nit nachlasst*], is a fanatic [*Schwärmer*], fool, bumpkin, yes a devil, murderer and corrupter of souls.<sup>xiii</sup>

Quite obviously he is aping Luther's vehement denunciations, but even so, he does not go as far as Luther. In Zwingli's usage here, names like "devil" lose their full force. He qualifies them with the phrase "whoever does not abandon such opinions"- very much in the same vein as the warning against impiety "if you persist." Besides, these harsh words occur in the context of a treatise which is still willing to regard Luther, in spite of all his bitterness, as a fellow Christian.<sup>xiv</sup>

Evidently the Swiss reformer was not very much concerned about making a consistent impression when he spoke of Luther's spirit. Outbursts of severe condemnation are found side by side with words of praise and fraternal recognition. Zwingli probably thought that his polemical approach was the inevitable application of the law/gospel dialectic to the situation: let the erring brother hear the law in its most scathing form, but do not deny him the gospel encouragement of the name "brother." It then becomes a question of how to evaluate the individual expressions Zwingli employs by way of preaching the law: one could imagine that even Zwingli's followers might regard some of his attacks on Luther as unwarranted overstatements or poorly chosen expressions that would promote misunderstanding rather than clarity. But however uneven the tone of Zwingli's writings may seem, there is no need to regard his repeated fraternal recognition of Luther as hypocrisy.

### Oecolampadius

Oecolampadius follows much the same approach in his polemical writings. In June, 1526, Luther had provided a preface for the German edition of the *Swabian Syngamma*, an anti-sacramentarian treatise by Brenz and other Lutheran theologians in Germany. Oecolampadius then issued his *Reasonable Answer* to Luther's preface. He addresses Luther in this way:

I do not gladly oppose you, whom I acknowledge as a worthy and precious servant of the gospel . . . yet, now God lets us recognize that you also, being human, may err and fall. (St. L XX: 582, 2)

The same point is made in various ways. We are to open our eyes, says Oecolampadius, and learn that "the ability of each one is small and vain, as so quickly proves to be the case with a man when the Lord withdraws His hand" (583, 5). "The old Adam dominates too much in your writings against Carlstadt, and the abusive language scatters the wholesome teaching contained in them" (587, 12). As for the use of invective by himself and his associates, Oecolampadius writes:

According to you, we must be false prophets and blasphemers of God, and you furnish your reasons. Namely, that we call your God a bread-God and a baked-God, and we call you eaters of God's flesh and drinkers of God's blood. My Martin, how dearly I wish that the matter would be presented as it really is. This is how it stands: apart from the matter of the sacrament, we praise you as faithful

coworkers and preachers of the inexpressible majesty of God. But here in this matter you step out of the path. Therefore when we indicate your error of understanding, there follow such unseemly absurdities which such words bring with them; otherwise we have no fondness for mockery. (588, 17)

The last sentence is as unclear in the original as in my translation. I take it that he is excusing the use of shocking names (“unseemly absurdities,” *ungebührliche Ungeschickte*) by his party on the grounds that the names are a logical conclusion of Luther’s error of understanding. They are shock treatment, not a judgment placing the Lutheran theologians on a par with heathen idolaters. As with Zwingli and, to a lesser degree, Bucer, so also here one may feel compelled to criticize the style of polemics as unwarranted and misleading.<sup>xv</sup> But it would be completely one-sided to draw conclusions only from the words of censure and warning. Here again we find clear evidence that Luther was regarded as a brother in the faith in spite of his alleged error.

### Luther

As we have seen, the all-too-common notion that only Luther engaged in harsh polemics and that his opponents’ publications were pure mildness, is a misinformed view, to say the least. But, as we shall see, it would be equally naive to represent the controversy as a simple matter of give and take where the feelings were mutual.<sup>xvi</sup> During the period leading up to the Marburg Colloquy, Luther consistently ascribed his opponents’ work to Satan and denied them any place in the Holy Christian Church. Given this difference of attitude on his part and his gift for incisive writing, it was only natural that he should express himself in polemical language more vehement than any of the condemnations employed by Bucer, Oecolampadius, or even Zwingli.<sup>xvii</sup>

An important factor in this difference of approach was Luther’s previous experience with Carlstadt. Along with other aberrations, Carlstadt had adopted the symbolical view of the Lord’s Supper and had opposed Luther’s conservative understanding of the sacrament. Once the matter had come up, Luther quickly reached certainty in his convictions—not only that the symbolical interpretation was unscriptural, but that Carlstadt himself was no Christian. Rather he was a heretic, a tool of the satanic spirit of fanaticism. At least by the beginning of 1525, Luther was confidently denying Carlstadt’s personal faith. In a private letter dated January 11, 1525, he expressed the opinion that Carlstadt had committed a mortal sin against better knowledge and was now hurrying to hell (WA Br 3:410). Later that year he published his book *Against the Heavenly Prophets*. . . , in which he repeatedly asserted and even swore that Carlstadt had no faith in God (WA 18:202, 3-6; 121, 15ff.; 122, 1ff.; 207, 20ff.).

As the controversy concerning the sacrament spread, Luther extended the same judgment to everyone who attacked the theology of the real presence, notably Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bucer. In Luther’s opinion, all were exponents of the same spirit of Satan. The intensity of his opposition to the adversaries increased as the controversy continued. Apparently he knew little or nothing of Zwingli until August, 1524, when he was informed of Zwingli’s denial of the real presence.<sup>xviii</sup> For about a year after that, Luther’s public contributions to the debate continued to concentrate on Carlstadt—the others were spared public condemnation by name until September, 1525,<sup>xix</sup> when Luther first criticized Zwingli in print. Even so, his private letters from late 1524 and early 1525 make it clear that he had already identified the spirit of his opponents. A letter from the autumn of 1524 speaks of Zwingli and Leo Jud as followers of Carlstadt’s teachings on the Lord’s Supper (WA Br 3:373; AE 49:88-90), and one from early 1525 says much the same about Oecolampadius and others. Accordingly they share in the same condemnation as Carlstadt. Luther’s letter to Gregor Casel (November 5, 1525) bluntly states that “one group or the other must be ministers of Satan, either they or we” (WA Br 3:605, 42). At this point, however, he still has hopes for their recovery (606, 98).

In subsequent writings, the polemic becomes increasingly emphatic. Although the opponents offer varying exegetical explanations of their doctrine, this does not obscure for Luther their hellish unity: they constitute a single sect with three heads<sup>xx</sup> (January 4, 1526—WA 19:121). God has delivered them to Satan to punish their unspeakable despisal of the Word of Grace (September 13, 1526—St. L XVII: 1545). In spite of all their claims, they have never known Christ—instead, they are a fulfillment of II Thessalonians 2:10-11, “God

will send them powerful errors, so that they believe the lie” (September 13, 1526-St. L XXVII: 1584). In the treatise *That These Words of Christ, “This Is My Body” etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* (Spring, 1527), Luther asserts again that it is the devil who speaks through them (WA 23:79; AE 37:23).<sup>xxi</sup> and he adds that he doubts whether an “arch-fanatic” would ever be converted (WA 23: 75; AE 37:20). Here, too, we find his favorite rejoinder to the argument that the Zwinglians believed the entire gospel except for this matter: “When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire Godhead and makes light of all blasphemy” (WA 23:83; AE 37:26). Nevertheless, Luther is still praying for them (WA 23:85; AE 37:27). In the following year, he published his *Large Confession* (Spring, 1528), in which he denounced Zwingli unsparingly as one who “is completely perverted and has entirely lost Christ” (WA 26:317; AE 37:206). Still harsher were the words:

I testify on my part that I regard Zwingli as unchristian, with all his teachings, for he holds and teaches no part of the Christian faith rightly. He is seven times worse than when he was a papist, according to the declaration in Matthew 9 [12:45], “The last state of that man becomes worse than the first.” I make this testimony in order that I may stand blameless before God and the world as one who never partook of Zwingli’s teaching, nor will I ever do so (WA 26:342; AE 37:231).

The publication of the *Large Confession* brings us within about a year and a half of the Marburg Colloquy. I know of no evidence that Luther softened his appraisal of the opponents during the last months before the colloquy. Rather he continued to deny any claim to faith on their part. On May 22, 1529 he wrote to his elector a warning against involvement in a federation together with those who contend against the Sacrament, “the willful enemies of God and His Word” (WA Br 5:77, 35ff.). As late as July/August of 1529—about two months before the colloquy—Luther rejected the oft-heard plea to overlook one small area of disagreement in the interest of forming a federation:

There is all too much in the one [article] . . . for therein all the other articles become impure, as James [2:10] says, “Whoever offends in one point becomes guilty of all.” Whoever denies a single article is no less an un-Christian than Arius or one of his kind” (WA Br 5:80, 49ff.).

As a final evidence of Luther’s position, we cite the *Schwabach Articles*, which were formulated during the summer of 1529. Luther was not the sole author but had a hand in their composition; and we may infer his approval of their contents from the fact that he took a copy along to Marburg and used it as the basis for the set of articles he was asked to draft at the end of the colloquy. The structure of the *Schwabach Articles* is particularly interesting. The twelfth of the seventeen articles speaks of the Holy Christian Church in terms of the preceding eleven: “This Church is nothing other than the believers in Christ, who believe and teach the above-mentioned articles and items and for that reason are persecuted and martyred in the world . . .” (WA 30 111: 89, 17). Evidently the Lutherans would not think of believers in Christ in connection with a denial of the real presence, which is affirmed in Article 10.

To summarize Luther’s position, we could note three points: 1) The development of the controversy prompted him to treat all his opponents as he had treated Carlstadt; 2) Luther’s concept of confessional responsibility obligated him to disassociate himself completely from this pernicious error—even to the point of making judgments about the faith of his opponents; and 3) his view of the unity of doctrine made plausible the conclusion that the proponents of this error must be apostates from the whole of the faith. We shall consider the second and third points at greater length in Part III of this paper.

### **Luther’s Followers**

Luther’s colleagues and theological allies were not as he was to brand the adversaries as non-Christians and tools of Satan. On October 3, 1525, Johann Brenz wrote to Bucer a letter defending the

theology of the real presence against the attacks of men such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bucer himself. Nevertheless, Brenz in this letter still referred to his former teacher Oecolampadius as “an excellent bishop in the church” (St. L XVII: 1572,3). In conclusion he suggested to Bucer, “let us earnestly pray together that God would grant us to be like-minded,” and he referred to Bucer and the rest of the preachers at Strassburg as “my lords and brothers in Christ” (1578, 18).

Justus Jonas provides a similar example from the following year. It seems very likely that by this time, Luther’s denunciation of the opponents as non-Christians was common knowledge in theological circles. Jonas, however, writes to Bucer on June 24, 1526:

I have carefully read the booklets of Oecolampadius and Zwingli on the Eucharist, as many as are now extant . . . But although otherwise you teach the same Christ and the same manner of justification as we do, yet since we say and believe that the words are to be understood simply, just as they sound, how could we then remain silent or overlook this teaching of yours without blasphemy? . . . Otherwise we have always embraced as brothers Oecolampadius, Zwingli, you, and Capito, Hedio, and the rest on account of outstanding learning both in Scriptures and in other good literature.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Bucer passed this information along to Zwingli in a letter dated July 9, 1526: “[Jonas writes that] today he still embraces you, Oecolampadius, and us as his brothers and friends, but that he will never approve our doctrine.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

I have not found any evidence of this type among the theologians of the Lutheran camp for the years 1528-1529. By then, I take it, Luther’s insistent and uncompromising condemnations had brought many of his most prominent followers to a similar viewpoint. Of course, there were still many voices in Germany pleading that a single article of doctrine should not prevent Christians from establishing ecclesiastical and political union. But those who were committed to Luther’s theology of the real presence began more and more to echo Luther’s voice also in the matter of condemnations. His staunch supporters in Nurnberg were as pessimistic as Luther himself about the proposed colloquy, and on June 22, 1529 the preachers of that city sent an official opinion to Chancellor Baier to warn against a federation with the Zwinglians: “One should make a distinction between believing and unbelieving partners in a federation”—otherwise it would be just like a federation between Judah and Egypt.<sup>xxiv</sup> As in Luther’s writings, the language leaves no room for recognition of the opponents as Christians.

## II. At the Colloquy

The passage by Pieper which was quoted in the introduction includes references to the tone of the discussion at Marburg. It will perhaps clarify matters if we give attention to the tone of the proceedings as we investigate the colloquy and especially those statements which pertain most closely to the thesis of this paper.

The atmosphere of the colloquy is best discerned by the reader who examines all the extant reports and epistolary references made by the disputants themselves or witnesses of the debate. Unfortunately no official minutes were taken. We are dependent for most of our information on accounts drawn up from memory on the basis of private notes. These reports are accessible in their original form in WA 30 111; translations appear in AE 38. It is also instructive to study Walther Koehler’s tentative reconstruction of the colloquy. Koehler presents his reconstruction in two stages: a collation of the original German and Latin texts to show where the several reports overlap and how they may be pieced together, and a recasting of this collection of snippets into continuous direct discourse in German, the language used during the discussions.<sup>xxv</sup> Hermann Sasse’s reconstruction, similar in its intentions to Koehler’s German version, is available in English.<sup>xxvi</sup> The original reports are so brief that even when all the material is compiled, it represents at best only the highlights of the debate. But from such reconstructions the reader can get a vivid impression of what it was like to be a witness.

Unfortunately the translations, the reconstructions, and even the original texts of the reports may give some false or misleading impressions in just those areas that pertain to the present thesis. We will consider a few of these instances. Johann Brenz, one of the Lutheran observers, reported on the colloquy in a letter dated November 14, 1529 to Hans Schradin, pastor at Reutlingen. Brenz was not present for the preliminary discussions on October 1, 1529, when Luther met privately with Oecolampadius and Melancthon met with Zwingli, nor did he witness the first plenary session on the following morning. He arrived during the afternoon session on October 2 and observed the debate from that time until the conclusion of the discussions on October 4. He characterized the proceedings in this way:

Everything was transacted in a most courteous manner and with the utmost decorum except that Oecolampadius, of whom everyone expected a milder manner, at times appeared quite obstinate, although not insulting. Even Zwingli repudiated the obstinate nature of his speech. You would have heard no other appellations than these: Dearest Sir, Your Grace, and similar expressions. No mention of either schism or heresy was made there; you would have alleged that Luther and Zwingli were brothers, not opponents. (AE 38:74) [*Nulla ibi mentio* σκισματος, *nulla ἀρέσεως dixisses Lutherum et Zuinglium fratres, non adversarios.* WA 30 111: 152, 12ff.]

The last remark should not mislead us into supposing that Luther met with Zwingli on a fraternal basis. Brenz is emphasizing the surprisingly peaceful tone of the discussion: though the two leaders were actually opponents and not brothers, one might have concluded otherwise from their courteous speech.<sup>xxvii</sup> Even at that, Brenz is overstating the case a little. Walther Koehler comments on this passage:

As Jonas and the course of the colloquy indicate, the prominence which Brenz gives to the mutually peaceable manners is somewhat optimistic (*schönfärberisch*). Capito and Bucer (Corp. Ref. II 238) speak of a tumultuous colloquy (*colloquium tumultarium*). But the spirit of the discussion on the whole was peaceable.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Something of Luther's attitude became evident already at his first encounter with Bucer. The Saxon delegation arrived early on September 30, and the two groups exchanged polite greetings. Luther smiled also when he faced Bucer, but, as biographer Hastings Eells recognizes, "Bucer must have felt far from comfortable when Luther pointed a finger at him and exclaimed, 'You are a rogue!'"<sup>xxix</sup> The allusion to his perfidious translation of Luther's Postille was plain enough. And on the following day, an interview between Luther and Bucer resulted in a declaration by the former that would have applied equally to all the opponents. Hedio reports:

Today Bucer, after he had conferred at length with Luther, finally heard: "You are of the devil, and if you have a true faith and the scriptures, you will likewise hand me over to Satan because I oppose your opinion."<sup>xxx</sup>

It is revealing that Luther expected the opponents to condemn him as severely as he condemned them; for a theologian to do less would be to concede that he was uncertain of the Scriptures on this matter or that the doctrine was an unimportant one. We will see that Luther made similar statements with regard to the refusal of fellowship at the end of the colloquy. Attempts have been made to draw conclusions from the worship practices which were followed at Marburg. Sasse offers this discussion of the issue:

The question has sometimes been asked whether and how far a *communio in sacris* had been practiced between the participants at Marburg. In answering that question we must keep in mind that at that time there was no 'Lutheran' or 'Reformed' churches in the later sense of those designations. All participants were 'Catholic' Christians who wanted the Catholic church reformed, even if they differed

as to the way of such reformation. Consequently, the modern problem of altar-, pulpit-, and church-fellowship among churches did not yet exist. It can be said that there was no common celebration of the Sacrament. The sermons preached before Luther arrived have been mentioned. Luther himself preached a sermon on ‘The great, noble article of faith, called Forgiveness of Sins’, probably not on Sunday but on the day of departure. In his *Table Talk* there is an indication that he heard two sermons at Marburg, one preached by Zwingli and another by Bucer. The program on Sunday, October 3, would have left room for a very early service only. The common meals, of course, began with a prayer. Hedio relates that on Monday Luther ‘blessed the food’. As was the custom at that time at the meals of noblemen, some poor boys present said the prayers or the responsories, for which they later got their meal. When the Lord’s Prayer was said, probably in the old way, with the liturgist beginning and the ‘choir’ joining in with the Fourth Petition, Luther added to ‘Hallowed be Thy name’ the words ‘condemned be our name more than a thousand devils.’ This little incident shows that, at least on that occasion, Luther could pray together with, or at least in the presence of, people with whom he was negotiating, before he had to deny them full fellowship as Christian brethren.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Tom Hardy has contested this view in his study, “*Communicatio in Sacris* in the Lutheran Church.” He represents the practice of the first Lutherans as follows:

A doctrinal discussion at which *consensus de doctrina* is achieved, is closed with common communion . . . On the contrary, before consensus the delegates could not have part in fellowship in divine service. In Marburg, for instance, there is found no mention of common prayer.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Hardt’s note on this passage contains more detail:

When the grace at a meal is mentioned, Luther officiates at it with responses and other singing given by school boys summoned thither (W. Koehler, *Zwingli und Luther*, Vol. II, p. 118). At this particular meal there was only *one* non-Lutheran present! “Common meals” have evidently not customarily taken place as Sasse supposes in *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis, 1959) p. 219; for in such case Hedio would not write, “*Eodem die pransus cum eis*”. This note shows that a common meal was an exception. That Luther officiated at the saying of grace in the presence of a heretic, has, of course, nothing to do with *communicatio-in-sacris*. The heretic just observed “*praesentia passiva*”. In opposition to Sasse (p. 218) we will definitely maintain that at this time there was to be found a “Lutheran” or “Reformed” church “in the later sense of those designations.” Where variant doctrines are to be found, there exist as a matter of course variant churches!<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The whole matter of fellowship-consciousness and fellowship practice among the first Lutherans deserves more investigation, but it is clear that the extant evidence for the practices at Marburg are inconclusive for the present thesis. None of the practices at the colloquy are inconsistent with the view that Luther regarded his opponents as non-Christians.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Hedio’s report of the final plenary session (afternoon of October 3) gives faulty information which could foster an erroneous interpretation if it were left uncorrected. On the whole Hedio’s report is our most important source for the colloquy. It is plainly based on notes taken during the sessions. But it appears in a few instances that the reporter, in his haste to take down as much as possible of the dialogue or at least the line of thought, failed to indicate a change of speakers. Hedio ascribes to Luther a fairly long section of argumentation which includes this item in the third person: “He [Luther] asks that we seek the middle ground on which we can agree so that there may be no dissension among the people and so that this very bad disagreement might be removed” (AE 38:34). Gottfried Hoffmann has demonstrated quite satisfactorily that this lengthy speech which

Hedio places after Luther's name is really an exchange between Luther and Oecolampadius, and it seems probable that Oecolampadius is the one who urged an agreement on the "middle ground," not Luther.<sup>xxxv</sup>

A few lines later in the same report there is a speech by Luther which is poorly translated in AE 38:35. There we read:

*Luther* wants to abide by his faith, nor can he yield. He commits us to God and his judgment. Luther then thanks [Oecolampadius] for having explained his views in a friendly manner. He also thanks Zwingli, although he had spoken more sharply. He asks him to pardon his own sharp words if, yielding to flesh and blood, he had spoken such. He desires that their common cause unite them mutually.

The last sentence is the problem. Sasse's version makes much better sense in context: "Let there be a mutual pardoning."<sup>xxxvi</sup> In Luther's judgment, as long as they could not agree on the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, there was no "common cause" to "unite them mutually."

Toward the beginning of the discussions and once again at the end we find those statements by Luther which come closest to allowing the opponents recognition as fellow Christians.<sup>35a</sup> In neither case does he do so, but he at least looks forward to the possibility. From the first plenary session (morning of October 2) Hedio reports this exchange:

[Zwingli] begged them not to bear him any ill will; he desires their friendship and is not embittered. He likes to see the faces of Luther and Philip.

*Luther* promised that they would lay aside all passions for the sake of God and the prince. What is lost, is lost. Let us hope for the future. Even if they cannot agree on everything, they might discuss at the close of the colloquy whether or not they can regard each other as brethren (AE 38:21).

It is an indication of Luther's open-mindedness that, though he was absolutely convinced of the truth of his sacramental theology, face to face discussion with the opponents might possibly alter his verdict on them. Perhaps they could eliminate their disagreement on the essential points; then it would be conceivable that they might regard each other as Christians in spite of some lesser disagreements. Until that time, however, there would be no fraternal recognition on his part. The second passage to be considered in this connection comes from the final private negotiations that took place on the evening of October 3. The host of the colloquy, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, left no stone unturned in his efforts to promote concord, and at his urging Luther drafted a formula for both sides to consider. This was an almost hopeless attempt at achieving concord, based as it was on the remote possibility that the disputants had been talking past each other all along and had really been in agreement concerning the essential matter of the real presence. If this were so, the Lutherans would immediately recognize the Zwinglians as fellow Christians. On the chance that the formula would be acceptable to the Swiss, Luther framed the first part of it as follows:

We confess that, by virtue of the words, "This is my body, this is my blood", the body and blood are truly—that is, substantively and essentially, but not quantitatively or qualitatively or locally—present and distributed in the Lord's Supper. Since we so far have held the opinion that our dear sirs and brethren, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and their adherents, totally reject the Real Presence of this body and blood, but now in a friendly colloquy have found it to be otherwise, we now declare and state that the arguments and reasons found in our books concerning the Sacrament are not directed against and do not apply to Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and their adherents, but against those who totally reject the presence of the body in the Supper.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Unfortunately, Zwingli and his followers could not accept the proposed formula. Zwingli could speak of the presence of Christ in the sacrament, but he meant that it takes place only in the sense that the believer

embraces Christ spiritually through faith. Luther's formula, however strongly it emphasized the supernatural manner of the sacramental presence ("not quantitatively or qualitatively or locally"), was too realistic in its emphasis on Christ's humanity to satisfy Zwingli. He could not conceive of Christ's body and blood being "truly (*wahrhaftiglich*) . . . substantively (*substantive*) and essentially (*essentialiter*)" present. Thus the proposal came to nothing, and with it the anticipatory words of fraternal recognition.

The investigation so far has not produced any positive evidence that Luther regarded his opponents at Marburg as Christians. Now we will consider some of the statements which clearly show Luther's condemnation of them at the conclusion of the discussions. Here the evidence is incontrovertible. Perhaps some one still has his doubts about the earlier sessions and supposes that Luther may have tacitly allowed the Christian status of the Swiss while the debate was in progress. I have shown why I consider that an unrealistic interpretation. But at any rate, there is no room for doubt when we come to the closing pronouncements which Luther made concerning his adversaries. When the Swiss and the Strassburgers went home, there was no question in their minds as to how Luther viewed them.

We are now ready to evaluate the famous statement which was quoted at the beginning of this study: "Our spirit is different from yours . . ." The discussion on the afternoon of October 3 had failed to produce agreement between the Swiss and the Wittenbergers. The exchanges between the two groups ended with Luther and Oecolampadius telling each other to pray for enlightenment. At this point Jacob Sturm took the floor on behalf of the Strassburg delegation. They had come to Marburg with the understanding that only one doctrine was contested, but during the colloquy they had heard Luther allude to errors on their part concerning the Trinity and other doctrines. Accordingly, permission was given to Bucer to present the doctrines of the Trinity, the Person of Christ, original sin, Baptism, justification, and the ministry of the Word as they were being taught at Strassburg. Bucer then asked Luther to testify that their doctrine was orthodox on these points. Luther's response and the ensuing dialogue, as reconstructed and translated by Sasse, are as follows:

**Luther:** No, I cannot do that. I am neither your Lord nor your judge. You reject me as well as my doctrine. Thus, I cannot regard you as my disciples. We were well aware that you desire to spread your doctrine under our name. I have now heard you, but I do not know whether or not you teach the same at home. Therefore I refuse to give you a testimony. Nor do you need it. For everywhere you boast that you have not learned from us. It is evident that you have not learned from us. I do not want to be your teacher. As to our teaching, you have my writings and my confession.

**Bucer:** Will you recognize me as a brother, or will you show me my errors that I may overcome them?

**Luther:** I am neither your Lord, nor your judge, nor your teacher. Your spirit and our spirit cannot go together. Indeed, it is quite obvious that we do not have the same spirit. For there cannot be one and the same spirit where, on one side, the words of Christ are accepted in sincere faith, and, on the other side, this faith is criticized, attacked, denied, and spoken of with frivolous blasphemies. Therefore, as I have told you, we commend you to the judgment of God. Teach as you think you can defend it in the sight of God.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Here we have a restatement of the charge that the opponents speak at the bidding of their master, Satan, whereas the Lutherans speak by the enlightenment of the Holy Ghost. Those are the two spirits that cannot go together. The German word for "spirit," *Geist*, has many of the same semantic values as its counterpart in modern English. The same can be said of the Latin word which Luther employed on other occasions, *spiritus*. Each of the words can be used to indicate an obviously personal being (such as Satan, or the Holy Spirit, or the spirit of the New Man) or an impersonal quality (as when we speak of "school spirit" or "the Christmas spirit"). It is sometimes a difficult word to pin down exactly because of the way one shade of meaning leads into another. But here there should be no doubt that *personal* spirits are intended by Luther. The controversy up to this point had featured countless references to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the influence of the devil. A

reading of the first few pages of Luther's *That These Words . . . Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* should be enough to convince anyone that the word "spirit" is generally used in the personal sense in the sacramental controversy. At Marburg, Luther's pronouncement concerning the different spirit is a natural outgrowth of his earlier usage. He understands the issue as a point which divides the church of God from the synagogue of Satan, and for that reason he finds it appropriate to adapt the language of I John 4: 1-6 with all its implications for the status of the errorists.<sup>38a</sup>

August Pieper came short of a thorough understanding of Luther's declaration when he answered the title question of his article, "What was the 'other spirit' with which Luther reproached the Zwinglians?" by saying that "Luther did not deny Zwingli the *Christian* spirit" and by devoting his attention to the spirit of rationalism.<sup>xxxix</sup> It is in many ways a perceptive study, and it is relevant because of the connection between rationalism and the work of Satan. No doubt Luther spoke as he did largely because he saw rationalism dominating the theology of his opponents. But the evidence of rationalism emboldened him to condemn them categorically in the words, "Yours is a different spirit." Thereby he did deny them the Christian spirit, the Holy Spirit Himself.

The reaction of the opponents shows that they understood it in this way. Luther remembered well the emotions which were stirred at that last plenary session, and he related the incident vividly to Jacob Propst of Bremen in a letter dated June 1, 1530.

With many words they assured us that they were willing to agree with us to this extent, that the body of Christ is truly present in the Supper but spiritually. This they said only in order that we might deign to call them brothers and thus feign concord with them: the very thing which Zwingli, openly weeping<sup>xl</sup> in the presence of the Landgrave and the officials, was pleading for in these words, "There are no people on earth with whom I would rather be united than with the Wittenbergers." With all their zeal and energy they urged it so that they might seem to have concord with us, with the result that they could never bear to hear from me this word: "You have a different spirit than we do." They were completely incensed as often as they heard that. Finally we conceded, as the last article indicates, that though they were not indeed our brothers, nevertheless they would not be deprived of our love (which is owed even to an enemy). They were moved to extreme indignation because they could not obtain the name of brother but were compelled to leave as heretics, even though we agreed to maintain peace meanwhile in our respective writings, in the hope that God might open their hearts. (WA Br 5:340, 46ff.).

It is clear from this account that Luther made his declaration more than once, that he intended it to apply not just to Bucer but to all the Zwinglians, and that they understood it as such. It is revealing to compare this episode with an earlier one. According to Hedio's report of the morning session on October 2, Zwingli had mentioned as a precedent the early fathers who tolerated some disagreements within their communion, and so he had made an appeal to Luther. Unfortunately Hedio breaks off in mid-sentence and does not give the content of the appeal; Scultetus, an early editor of the report, offers a conjecture which is here enclosed in brackets:

**Zwingli:** . . . In fact, you yourself recognize that spiritual eating gives comfort. And since there is agreement on this point, which is the main one, he begs, for the sake of the love of Christ [that no one be accused of heresy on account of this dissension]. The early fathers, even if they disagreed, nevertheless did not condemn one another in such a way (AE 38:20).

Whether the conjecture is accurate or not, it reflects the prevailing understanding of theologians in the Middle Ages and Reformation era that a heretic is necessarily outside the Holy Christian Church. We should keep this in mind when we read in Luther's letter to Propst that the opponents became very agitated because "they were compelled to leave as heretics" instead of brothers. They cringed when Luther spoke of a different spirit, and well they might, because the sting of exclusion from the church was intentional. It is hard to imagine

them reacting so violently if they had understood spirit” in an impersonal sense. It was perfectly obvious by that time that the two theologies had different tendencies, and that the Zwinglians gave more room to the claims of reason. To have heard that they were infected with rationalism would have meant little to them. What really hurt was to hear themselves still being labeled as disciples of the devil in spite of all their confidence that a peaceable, face-to-face discussion would prove to Luther that his previous judgment of their spirit had been misinformed. Only in this way can we account for the emotional outburst which followed Luther’s pronouncement.

On that note the last plenary session ended, and the theologians were dismissed to their rooms with the understanding that Landgrave Philip would arrange private negotiations in the hope of establishing concord. Brenz reports on these final negotiations (evening of October 3 and morning of October 4), and his report confirms the interpretation which was presented in the preceding paragraph. We learn from Brenz that the emotions of the opponents were still running high and at one point almost got out of control; but more significant than their reaction is the statement by the Lutheran theologians which provoked it. Brenz gives this sketch of the developments which followed the afternoon session:

After the meeting had been dismissed, the prince left no stone unturned in determining whether some way of agreement among us could be found, urging, begging, suggesting, admonishing, and demanding from each one of us separately, apart from our own judgments, that we consider the cause of the Christian commonwealth and remove the discord from our midst. However, we who affirm the presence of the body of Christ would have gladly received our opponents into fellowship with us if they had turned away from their error. Since no kind of an agreement could be reached with them, *we decided unanimously that they were outside of the fellowship of the Christian church and that we would not recognize them as brothers and members of the church.* This decision seemed so harsh to our opponents that the negotiations almost ended in strife; for surprisingly they wanted to have us as brothers (AE 38:78 — my emphasis).<sup>xli</sup>

The first half of the italicized statement makes the Lutheran verdict upon the Zwinglians unmistakably clear. The second half shows that Luther and his followers regarded the terms “brother” and “member of the church” as synonymous. To refuse to recognize someone as a brother was the same as refusing to recognize him as a Christian. To the best of my knowledge, exceptions to this rule are rare in Luther’s usage of the terms. Letters written by Luther and Melanchthon shortly after the colloquy provide additional confirmation and supplementary information with regard to their attitude toward the Zwinglians. On October 4 Luther wrote to his wife that the “friendly colloquy” was over and had failed to bring about unity on one article of faith; he cited the opponents’ best arguments but added, “My opinion is that God blinded them so that they could bring forward nothing [worthwhile]” (WA Br5:154, 3-16). On the same day he wrote to Nikolaus Gerbel in Strassburg:

. . . they yielded from their position on many points, but remained stubborn in the one article concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. So they were dismissed in peace . . . Love and peace we owe even to enemies. They were plainly told that if they do not accept the truth concerning this article, they can enjoy our love at least, but they cannot be regarded by us in the number of Christ’s members (WA Br5:155).

The next day Luther and Melanchthon gave a rather guarded opinion of the opponents in a letter to Landgrave Philip, who was favorably inclined toward the Swiss:

Though the opposition claims to have reason enough for their teachings, we fear that they have not yet been severely tried [*angefochten*] in their conscience concerning this matter. It is indeed our

opinion that they mean it well, but one will find that their arguments do not satisfy the conscience, since they go contrary to the actual meaning of the words “This is my body” (WA Br 5: 158, 76ff.).

Melanchthon’s letter (? October 5, 1529) to Elector John of Saxony shows that the two sides had radically different views of what constitutes fellowship. The Lutherans could account for the Zwinglian request for fellowship only as an astonishing inconsistency:

At the close of the affair, Zwingli and Oecolampadius implored that we might receive them as brothers. Such a thing we were in no way willing to allow, and we sternly told them that it astonished us to wonder with what conscience they were willing to regard us as brothers if they thought we were in error. For how would they be willing to tolerate it if our doctrine would be taught, held, and preached among them alongside their doctrine? Now, such a thing might be permitted if we weren’t regarding each other as excommunicated (*wenn wir einander nicht excommunicirten*—St. L XVII: 1946).<sup>xlii</sup>

Melanchthon’s letter (? October 5, 1529) to Duke Henry of Saxony mentions the same astonishment and adds that when the Zwinglians requested fellowship, the Lutherans took it for “a sign that they didn’t attach much weight to their cause” (St. L XVII: 1949-1950).<sup>xliii</sup> Another document that gives supplementary information is Luther’s letter of October 12, 1529 to Johann Agricola. Luther ascribes the refusal of the opponents to yield in the matter of the Sacrament to “fear and shame more than malice”, meaning that the Swiss would be too ashamed to admit defeat when they returned to their congregations. He also gives his understanding of the peace which was to prevail:

We gave them our hands as a token of peace and love, so that the harsh writings and words might cease for the time and each one might teach his opinion without invective but not without defense and confutation. Thus we parted . . . (WA Br 5: 160, 13ff.).

One question should perhaps be considered at this point: Did the Lutheran verdict upon the Zwinglians apply only to the leaders or to the congregations as well? A parallel case would be the *Schwabach Articles*, particularly Article 12 with its “narrow” definition of the church as those who believe the “above-mentioned articles,” including the article on the Sacrament of the Altar. Köstlin writes:

That he wishes to have the content of faith fixed in such a dogmatic way and includes also his statements concerning the Lord’s Supper, corresponds entirely to the decisiveness with which he made ecclesiastical fellowship with the Zwinglians dependent on the acceptance of these statements. The question might be raised whether it might not after all still be possible for Christians among the sacramentarians to participate in the fellowship of Christ and in salvation, just as Luther had previously expressed himself and continued to do so in the case of Christians in the false papal church; but here Luther says as little about the former group as he does about the latter.<sup>xliv</sup>

Just as the *Schwabach Articles* say nothing about the possibility of salvation for members of the Zwinglian congregations, so we find no evidence of a discussion of this matter at Marburg. The report on the colloquy which Luther made from the pulpit (October 24, 1529) includes the line, “If we were to receive them as brothers and *sisters*, then we would have to approve of their teaching” (my emphasis—WA 28:669, 15). But all that proves is that Luther, while speaking to the laity in Wittenberg, was mindful that the decision at Marburg would prevent union with the Swiss laity as well as their leaders. Although I have not found much on this point in Luther’s writings of this period, it is clear that the laity question was a live issue in the months after the colloquy. In November or December of 1529, Chancellor Brueck, a Lutheran, presented his *Opinion* in an attempt to firm up those leaders who were still inclined toward a federation with the Zwinglians. The first part

of the *Opinion* rehearses all the reasons which were being urged in favor of the federation, and one of them is that “in the cities which have Zwinglian preachers, there are without doubt many true Christians who do not accept the erroneous view of the sacrament, and to say the least we ought to consider their welfare.”<sup>xlv</sup> Another reason was that the large degree of agreement at Marburg showed that the Zwinglians were weak in faith and should be received as brothers in the hope of future deliverance from their one error.<sup>xlvi</sup> But in the second part, Brueck presents his refutation of these arguments together with additional reasons for refusing the federation.

All the subterfuges that have been used by Zwingli and Oecolampadius have been exposed by Luther and the others, and the latter properly quote the saying of James, He who transgresses one commandment is guilty of the whole law. It is therefore evident that those who hold and adhere to this error, whether they be shepherds or sheep, are apostates and heretics.<sup>xlvii</sup>

There is much more of the same. Admonition has been given so often and so publicly that “the whole world knows it” and “the sheep to whom they preach are without excuse”; now that the Marburg colloquy has taken place, “neither their shepherds nor their sheep may plead weakness and ask for patience until God give them more grace, etc.”<sup>xlviii</sup> As for the claim that the Swiss congregations contain many orthodox Christians, Brueck answers that this is irrelevant for a federation between cities and that it is uncertain in any case.<sup>xlix</sup> We should keep in mind, however, that what Brueck says is a development of certain strands of Luther’s theology and not necessarily identical with the views of Luther himself or those of his closest colleagues. A few months later (June 11, 1530) Melancthon and Brenz expressed themselves in a less sweeping manner as they wrote to Landgrave Philip:

In the first place, as far as brotherhood is concerned, it may be that one should tolerate as brothers those Christians who err and yet do not defend the error, as Christ Himself tolerated His disciples. But those who present and defend false doctrine can not be regarded as brothers, for one certainly should not allow incorrect doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Although we find evidence of disagreement within the Lutheran territories concerning the status of the opponents and different shades of opinion among the staunchest theologians, we may still recognize Marburg as a high point in Lutheran solidarity over against the Zwinglians. Earlier in the controversy, even theologians such as Brenz and Jonas had differed with Luther in their estimation of the Zwinglians. At the colloquy, however, the Lutheran theologians who were present were unanimous in declaring that the opponents were, in Brenz’s own words, “outside of the fellowship of the Christian church.” This conviction of the theologians soon bore fruit among the princes and officials of the Lutheran states. We have already mentioned Brueck as one who urged the full Lutheran verdict upon the Zwinglians without hesitation. An equally firm position was taken by the Elector of Saxony and Margrave George of Brandenburg. By way of preparation for an October 16 meeting of the leading Lutheran princes at Schwabach, the Elector and the Margrave wrote an exhaustive letter to Landgrave Philip of Hesse. Reu describes it in this way:

In unmistakable language it announces the break with those of the South and, if the Landgrave persists in his stand, also with him. The princes declare that they could not, with a good conscience, think of defending with arms anyone who advocates a doctrine which they themselves, by the grace of God, “recognize as a sham and an unbelievable piece of business,” and so important “that not only those who, for the sake of the doctrine, adhere to it are to be reckoned as unbelievers and under the wrath of God, but also everyone who through association, assistance and aid shares in it.”<sup>li</sup>

A few weeks later the princes met at Smalcald (beginning on November 29, 1529) to consider how they might make an appeal to the emperor against the decree he had made at the second diet of Speyer. Again our source is Reu:

It was thought by the Saxons that also in the matter of the appeal they no longer could go with all the signers of the Protest, but only with those with whom they were one in faith. At first this went too far even for the Margrave's representative; but the Elector's bitter word, "Those cities who teach wrongly regarding the Sacrament, consciously sin against the Word of God and the Holy Spirit," and Brueck's "opinion" brought them again into line. That the Elector took this stand was partly due to the fact which the advocates of the federation again and again emphasized, that the federation is a necessary consequence of the Protest . . . But even if the Elector did not lack a number of non-religious reasons, not they, but the religious ones were the driving factor in his stand against a common Protest and Appellation, and for opposing a proposed federation without a united confession.<sup>lii</sup>

Luther's decisive words of condemnation at Marburg, by which he denied the Zwinglians a place in the Holy Christian Church, were a rallying point for his fellow theologians and were soon echoed also by secular leaders of Lutheran territories at crucial moments in their negotiations.

### **III. Luther's View of Doctrinal Error**

Because a large number of Luther's works are still unknown to me, this portion of the paper must necessarily be sketchy. Nevertheless, I believe that the materials gathered here may be helpful if one wishes to see the Marburg Colloquy through Luther's eyes and appreciate those elements of his thought which shaped his words of condemnation. To achieve that aim, we must take note of his trenchant and occasionally puzzling statements on the subject of doctrinal error.

With regard to orthodoxy, there are in Luther's writings a number of emphases. We will begin with two of them. Sometimes he discusses orthodoxy with special reference to the nature of Christian doctrine as a unit which admits of no deviation, and sometimes he makes special reference to God as the one who preserves His church in the full truth. It is apparent that these points are complementary, the two sides of a single coin; for Christian doctrine derives its inviolable, self-consistent character only from the God who gives it to the church.

We have already encountered statements in which Luther during the course of the eucharistic controversy condemned the Zwinglians unreservedly because of his view of doctrine as a unit which is destroyed by the denial of a single article (cf. above, beginning at p. 7, ln. 30, and continuing through the 1<sup>st</sup> half of p. 8). We can be sure, however, that this way of regarding doctrinal error is not something incidental to his contention for the real presence. It is not an item of speculation offered in passing and then just as quickly abandoned. Rather, the thinking which led him to condemn the Zwinglians as non-Christians is the result of convictions about orthodoxy which antedate the sacramental controversy, and we can get an idea of the importance which Luther attached to these convictions if we take a sampling of statements made over a long span of years and in a variety of theological contexts.

Both of the emphases mentioned above, the insistence on the all-or-nothing character of doctrine and the view that God preserves the church in all the truth, can be found in Luther's early writings. The former point is enunciated already in the lectures on Romans. His glosses on Rom. 3:20, delivered in the winter of 1515-1516, contain his unusual interpretation of James 2:10.

But if faith justifies with its own works, but without the works of the Law, then why are heretics regarded as beyond justification, since they also believe and from this same faith produce great and sometimes even greater works than the other believers? And all the people in the church who are spiritually proud, who have many and great works which also surely proceed from faith, are such people

also unrighteous? Does something other than faith in Christ with its good works seem to be required for justification?

James answers the question briefly: “Whosoever . . . fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (2:10). For faith is indivisible. Therefore it is either a whole faith and believes all that is to be believed, or it is no faith, if it does not believe one part. The Lord thus compares it to one pearl, to one grain of mustard, etc. Because “Christ is not divided” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13), therefore He is either completely denied in one unit, or else He is completely affirmed. He cannot be at the same time denied in one word and confessed in another. But heretics are always picking out one thing or many from those which are to be believed, against which they set their minds in their arrogance, as if they were wiser than all the rest. And thus they believe nothing which is to be believed and perish without faith, without obedience toward God, while still in their great works, which are so similar to the real ones (AE 25:235-236).

The same exegesis of James 2:10 appeared repeatedly in subsequent years and became a favorite argument against the Zwinglians. Luther was aware that he was not applying the verse in the same way St. James did, but it expressed his own viewpoint so admirably that he offered this conjecture in his treatise *That These Words . . . Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* (1527):

St. James asserts, “Whoever offends in one point is guilty in all respects.” He possibly heard the apostles say that all the words of God must be believed or none, although he applies their interpretation to the works of the law (WA 23:83; AE 37:26).

He returned to this thought in 1531 in his lectures on Galatians (published 1535):

James said very beautifully, not by his own spirit but undoubtedly on the basis of what he had heard from the fathers (James 2:10): “Whoever fails in one point has become guilty of all of the Law.” Therefore doctrine must be one eternal and round golden circle, in which there is no crack; if even the tiniest crack appears, the circle is no longer perfect (WA 40 11:47, 15ff.; AE 27:38).

The same lecture series presents a corollary to this principle with application to the Zwinglians. After developing his thoughts on Gal. 6:1 he tells us:

On the basis of this we can well understand that the forgiveness of sins should not prevail in the area of doctrine, as the Sacramentarians maintain, but in the area of life and works. Here let no one condemn another . . . Thus we do not deny forgiveness to the Sacramentarians or other founders of wicked sects; but we sincerely forgive their insults and blasphemies against Christ, and we shall never again mention the injuries they have inflicted upon us, *on the condition that they repent, forsake the wicked doctrine with which they have disturbed the churches of Christ, and walk in an orderly way together with us* (my emphasis—WA 40 11:142; AE 27:111-112).

Another instance of Luther’s use of Jas. 2:10 (1529) has already appeared in this paper (p. 15), as also the approving remark made by Brueck (P. 34). A similar use of the passage occurs in the *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544—AE 38:312).

The mere fact that Luther cited it repeatedly over a span of almost thirty years suggests how important this train of thought was to him. Such an impression is only strengthened by the observation that he is introducing a considerable distortion of the passage by his use of it. Would an outstanding exegete like Luther depart so markedly from the simple meaning of the words if he did not have a special case to plead? Another revealing example of Biblical interpretation is his treatment of Matt. 5:19 (*Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, published 1532). The all-or-nothing view of doctrine made it almost inevitable that Luther would adopt

an interpretation (I would say misinterpretation) at least as old as Augustine. He begins with a paraphrase of Matt. 5:19 which he puts into the mouth of Christ:

”I will make this very strong,” He says. “Not only will I not abolish them. But, if any preacher *relaxes or ignores the tiniest part*, he should know that he is no preacher of Mine, but is damned and excluded from the kingdom of heaven.” The phrase “shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” means simply that he shall not be in the kingdom of heaven, but that, as he considers it a trifle to despise God’s command, so he also shall be despised and rejected.

. . . I have said that here Christ is not talking primarily about life, *but about doctrine* (my emphasis—AE 21:71-72).

The complementary view of orthodoxy as something which God promises to His church also finds expression throughout Luther’s career. We can refer to it most conveniently as his assertion of the doctrinal infallibility of the church. For Luther this is more than a guarantee that some kind of minimal faith in Christ will be kept alive among men until the end. His conception of infallibility is so comprehensive that he can even proceed from it to a judgment of errorists as *extra ecclesiam*. Therein the point of contact with the all-or-nothing view of doctrine, and thus also the relevance for the controversy with the Zwinglians, becomes especially clear.

Luther briefly asserts the doctrinal infallibility of the church in two publications of 1520: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (WA 6:561, 25f.; AE 36:108) and *Against the Bull of the Antichrist* (WA 6:615, 5-10). He formulates his position sharply in the *Response to the Book of Master Ambrose Catharinus . . .* (1521):

You most foully abuse the name “church” when you insist that everything done by the pope or yourselves has been done by the church. *We, too, confess that the church does everything correctly*. But you are not dealing correctly when you designate as church that which you cannot show to be the church and when you wretched servants of Satan present under the name of church more often the synagogue of Satan and force us to honor as a deed of the church a deed of Satan. The Holy Spirit rules the church, but now it has been shown that the pope and his church are ruled more often by the spirit of Satan. *For the Spirit of Christ and—he spirit of Satan do not rule in the same place* (my emphasis—WA 7: 713 , 6ff.)<sup>liii</sup>

That this test can be used to judge the spiritual status of individual teachers, is evident from the restatement of this position in *The Bondage of the Will* (1525). In reply to the objections of Erasmus, he writes:

First, we do not say that this error (the rejection of the “chief doctrine of the gospel”) has been tolerated by God in his Church or in any of his saints. For the Church is ruled by the Spirit of God and the saints are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:[14]). And Christ remains with his Church even to the end of the world [Matt. 28:20]; and the Church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth [I Tim. 3:15]. These things, I say, we know; for the creed that we all hold affirms, “I believe in the holy catholic Church”; so that it is impossible for the Church to err, even in the smallest article. And even if we grant that some of the elect are bound in error all their lives, yet they must necessarily return to the right way before they die, since Christ says in John 10[:28]: “No one shall snatch them out of my hand.”

But here is the task, here is the toil, *to determine whether those whom you call the Church are the Church, or rather, whether after being in error all their lives they were at last brought back before they died* (my emphasis—AE 33:85).

This clearly indicates that the criterion of doctrinal error is a meaningful one for determining who does not belong to the church. However, it is equally clear from other writings that Luther does not claim doctrinal infallibility for himself or any other individual in post-apostolic times in the same way that he attributes it to the universal church. His *Theses Concerning Faith and Law* (1535) make the distinction.

- 59. For we are not all apostles, who by a sure decree of God were sent to us as infallible teachers.
- 60. For that reason, it is not they, but we, since we are without such a decree, who are able to err and waver in the faith.
- 61. Hence, after the apostles no one should claim this reputation that he cannot err in the faith, except only the universal church (AE 34:113).

The question arises at this point: is it not inconsistent for Luther to say that the doctrinal infallibility of “the universal church does not pertain to individuals but at the same time to use his understanding of the universal church’s doctrinal infallibility as a basis for declaring that individuals are outside the church? For this is what Luther suggests to Erasmus concerning the false teachers of the Roman establishment and what he asserts emphatically in the case of Zwingli and any others who reject the doctrine of the real presence. Three answers present themselves as possibilities which need to be evaluated. 1) Perhaps Luther never resolved ‘his point of tension in his understanding of doctrinal error, and as a result there are inconsistencies in his statements over the years.—That there was *some* unresolved tension in his thinking seems to me very likely. But if this alone is to be the explanation, a very damaging case can be made against Luther’s polemics in the sacramental controversy. Then his decision to condemn the Zwinglians as non-Christians, while maintaining that he himself and all other post-apostolic Christians might err in matters of doctrine, appears to be a capricious, even a reckless act based more on prejudice than legitimate theology. On such a view, it would be difficult to account for the unmistakable sincerity and earnestness of his polemics. Some additional factor(s) would seem to be necessary for a more plausible explanation. 2) Perhaps someone would suggest that when Luther asserts the doctrinal fallibility of individuals in the church (as in Theses 60 and 61 above), he means nothing else than that they may at some time go astray in doctrine and thus automatically become apostates from the church.—This seems most unlikely. Though a believer in Christ may fall from faith, Luther’s wording of the theses indicates that he has a wider range of possibilities in mind. Thesis 61 speaks of “wavering” (*labi*) in the faith, and Thesis 58 says “we are inconstant in spirit, and the flesh wars with the spirit.” The choice of language is much better suited to the imperfections that characterize the sanctified life than to the falling of an individual from grace. It shows that Luther could conceive of Christians making doctrinal errors and still remaining Christians. But how this differs from the case of the Zwinglians remains to be seen. 3) The only other explanation which might elucidate Luther’s statements is the supposition that the nature of the error makes a difference. To this we shall devote attention in subsequent paragraphs.

There are two considerations which can be taken into account in the evaluation of a doctrinal error. One is the importance of the issue at stake. The other is the presentation of testimony against the error; a false doctrine held in the face of repeated testimonies to the truth represents a worse situation than a false doctrine that is ventured on the basis of a confused, imperfectly instructed understanding. We will see what role this latter consideration had in Luther’s thinking before returning to the other, namely, the relative importance of the articles of doctrine. In *The Bondage of the Will* (autumn of 1525) Luther was addressing himself to a controversy that had arisen quite recently. With this in mind, he testified that the views Erasmus had published in his *Diatribes* or *Discourse Concerning Free Choice* (September, 1524) were wrong and had pernicious consequences, but at the same time he credited Erasmus with a faith better than the un-Christian arguments of the *Diatribes*:

Do you not see that in this part your book is so impious, blasphemous, and sacrilegious that it is without an equal anywhere? I am not, as I said above, speaking of your heart, nor do I think you so abandoned that at heart you desire either to teach these things or to see them taught and practiced. But I am trying to show you what frightful things a man is bound to babble if he undertakes to support a bad cause, and what it means to run counter to divine truth and divine Scripture when we put on an act to please others and play a part that is foreign to us against our conscience (WA 18:620; AE 33:43-44).<sup>liv</sup>

Erasmus, however, did not listen. He reasserted his position in *A Defense of the Diatribe* (Part 1, 1526; Part 11, 1527), and Luther, having given testimony, took a darker view of Erasmus because of his persistence in error. The Table Talks record occasions from later years when Luther called Erasmus a heretic, a heathen, and an atheist.<sup>lv</sup>

This can serve as an example of the way Luther's attitude toward errorists could be affected by considerations of testimony and persistence. Indeed, there is a notable application of this principle to the eucharistic controversy in the *Brief Confession* of 1544:

For it is certain that whoever does not rightly believe in one article of faith, or does not want to believe (after he has been admonished and instructed), he surely believes no article with an earnest and true faith. And whoever is so bold that he dares to deny God or to accuse him of lying in one word, and he does this maliciously in opposition to that about which he was once or twice admonished and instructed, he also dares (and he certainly does it, too) to deny God in all of his words and to accuse him of lying. For this reason we say that everything is to be believed completely and without exception, or nothing is to be believed. The Holy Spirit does not let himself be divided or cut up so that he should let one point be taught and believed as trustworthy and another as false—except in the case where there are weak believers who are willing to let themselves be instructed and are not stubbornly opposing his truth (WA 54:158; AE 38:308).

References to the presentation of admonition appear also at earlier stages of the controversy, though usually Luther mentions it only to defend his unqualified condemnation of the Zwinglians. His point is that his original verdict upon them is vindicated by their obvious refusal to heed admonition and instruction. But as we trace the controversy back to the point at which Luther first encounters Zwinglianism in the wake of his experiences with Carlstadt, we find that Luther labeled the Zwinglians as non-Christians in a very short time—so short, in fact, that considerations of testimony and persistence in error seem to have played little or no part in the formation of his verdict upon the Swiss. The conclusion seems inevitable that Luther passed judgment swiftly and decisively *primarily* because of the importance he attached to the doctrine of the real presence. This brings us back to the other factor mentioned above. Some points of doctrine are more important than others, and accordingly some errors call for more drastic rebuke than others, even to the point of denying the errorist's personal Christianity. That is nothing surprising in itself. Every Christian who takes the Bible seriously as God's Word knows that a repudiation of salvation by grace or a denial of the Incarnation, to mention two examples, would mean apostasy from Christ. What seems strange to many present-day Christians is that Luther treated the doctrine of the real presence as something equally crucial. Nevertheless, that is the explanation which does the most to elucidate his actions and statements in the eucharistic controversy. This is evident, for example, from Luther's conference with Gregor Casel in November, 1525. It was still quite early in the controversy with the Swiss, but his judgment was fixed. It is true that in Zwingli's case there was the evidence of a second error as well. Casel reports that in Luther's opinion, "Zwingli has never known Christ, because he errs in a most important article by saying that original sin is not a sin" (WA Br 3:610, 80f.). But the same report shows that Luther also made an announcement that would apply to all opponents of the doctrine of the real presence: "I will regard all those who contend that the body is not present as estranged (*alienos*) from the faith" (WA Br 3:611, 127). He makes no mention here of a period of admonition and instruction before extending the

verdict to other individuals. This corresponds to his tendency in subsequent writings to look beyond the individual cases and emphasize rather that all the "sacramentarians" were manifestations of one demonic spirit. "I consider them all part of the same cake," he later wrote (AE 38:304). The same blanket rule which Luther laid down to Casel in 1525 was still in effect twenty years later. In the twenty seventh thesis of *Against the Thirty-two Articles of the Louvain Theologians* (1545) he says:

We earnestly believe that the Zwinglians and all sacramentarians who deny that the body and blood of Christ are taken with the bodily mouth in the venerable eucharist are heretics and estranged (*alienos*) from the church of God (WA 54:427; AE 34:356).

That it was the importance of this article of faith, even apart from considerations of testimony, which determined Luther's comprehensive verdict, is corroborated by an undated item in the *Table Talks*:

The person who denies God is called, and is, godless; such are the sacramentarians, for they deny the essence and the use of the sacrament. The others, who deny only the use of the sacrament, are not godless but weak in the faith (WA TR 6: No. 6875—cf. No. 3442).

Adolf Harnack's conclusion was that Luther by his contention for the real presence "stamped it as an *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*."<sup>lvi</sup> Harnack, writing from a theological position worlds apart from Luther's, discussed the matter at greater length in an unsympathetic way. But he does indicate correctly the prominence which Luther gave to the doctrine of the real presence, at least in the controversy with the Zwinglians. Sasse's careful study of the entire matter in *This is My Body* brings out the reason for this prominence in the opening words of the Conclusion: 'This sacrament is the Gospel.' This was Luther's great discovery."<sup>lvii</sup> Earlier he remarks that "for Luther the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, based solely on the Words of Institution, was always an article of Christology."<sup>lviii</sup>

Such a view certainly marks the Sacrament as a matter of crucial importance for Luther, and this is confirmed by some of the reformer's strongest statements on the subject. In his letter Concerning Rebaptism (1528) he has this to say of the "Anabaptists and enthusiasts":

They take a severe stand against the pope, but miss their mark and murder the more terribly the Christendom under the pope. For if they would permit baptism and the sacrament of the altar to stand as they are, Christians under the pope might yet escape with their souls and be saved, as has been the case hitherto. But now when the sacraments are taken away from them, *they will most likely be lost (mussen sie wol verloren werden), since even Christ himself is thereby taken away* (my emphasis—WA 26:148-149; AE 40:233).

In the 1531 lectures on Galatians he includes a discussion of the essence of the church as part of his commentary on Gal. 1:2.

Therefore the church is holy even where the fanatics are dominant, so long as they do not deny the Word and sacraments; if they deny these, they are no longer the church. Wherever the substance of the Word and the sacraments abides, therefore, there the holy church is present, even though Antichrist may reign there . . . . The Jews, the Turks, and the fanatics are not the church, because they oppose and deny these things (WA 40 1:70-71; AE 26:25-26).

And in the lectures on 1 John we find this comment on Chapter 4, Verse 2 (delivered on October 2, 1527):

The spirit of the Sacramentarians denies grossly that Christ came in the flesh when they say that Christ's "flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63), likewise that the spirit must do everything, that Baptism amounts to nothing. Therefore he is not of God (WA 20:727, 36ff.; AE 30:286).

As Luther saw it, the Zwinglian error meant the loss of the Word, the Sacraments, and Christ himself. From that perspective it is not surprising that he could hardly conceive of salvation in the case of someone who rejected the essence of the Lord's Supper. The conclusion which I have reached is that Luther throughout his career insisted, at least in theory, on the absolute cleavage between the church and false doctrine, since the universal church for him is infallible in matters of faith and since Christian doctrine by its very nature is believed on an all-or-nothing basis. How he applied this conception in practice depended on the kind of error he encountered. In the case of the Zwinglians, the error was a matter of such grave consequences that they were judged to be outside the pale of the church. That Luther asserted this so readily, so resolutely, and so repeatedly is a measure of the crucial importance given to the Sacrament in his theology. His polemics increased in harshness during the first years of controversy (1524-1528), and that no doubt was the result of the Zwinglians' refusal to heed his admonitions; but failure to accept his instruction was not the most decisive factor in his condemnation of them as non-Christians. Above all it was the importance of the doctrine of the real presence which moved Luther to make this judgment at the beginning of the controversy and thereafter—also at Marburg. There are still a few loose ends to be dealt with. If the importance of the article on the Sacrament was such a decisive consideration, what are we to make of those statements which explicitly assert the inviolability of all the articles, even the least significant ones? We have already seen a number of quotations of this kind, and a particularly vivid example from *That These Words . . . Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* could be added:

When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy. There is only one God who does not permit himself to be divided, praised at one place and chided at another, glorified in one word and scorned in another. The Jews believe the Old Testament, but because they do not believe Christ, it does them no good. You see, the circumcision of Abraham (Gen. 17:10ff.) is now an old dead thing and no longer necessary or useful. *But if I were to say that God did not command it in its time, it would do me no good even if I believed the gospel* (my emphasis—WA 23:85,1ff.; AE 37:26). 49

My impression is that Luther was willing to make such a bold statement of his view of doctrine for the sake of the principle he wished to communicate, but that he was considerably more moderate in his application of the principle when he encountered a lesser error. One thinks of the distinction he made between those who contest the use of the Sacrament ("weak in the faith") and those who reject the essential matter of the real presence ("godless"—WA TR 6: No. 6875). I am not aware of any cases in which a comparatively insignificant error such as belief in transubstantiation became the basis for an anathema.

Can we then discern a clear dividing line in Luther's theology between what we might call fundamental and non fundamental articles? I do not believe that this can be done with exactness, but we do become aware of degrees of importance. First of all it is clear that the words "doctrine" and "article of faith" can be used in the most comprehensive sense to designate the content of any Bible passage. In the treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets . . .* (1525) he observes that exegesis is not bound to an unidiomatic, woodenly grammatical approach to language; but if it were, "how many new articles we would have to establish, if we were to master the Bible in all passages according to grammatical rules?" (WA 18:157; AE 40:167). It is the sort of remark which reflects his commitment to every word of Scripture. But at the same time his perception of God's intentions in the Bible is such that he can summarize the whole body of revealed doctrine in terms of the most important items. These are the "articles of faith" which come up again and again for detailed discussion in his lectures, sermons, and writings. We find them assembled in the confessions drafted by Luther and his coworkers. These

documents can serve as a guide to the more prominent teachings of the Bible, and within some of the confessions we have indications of a distinction which corresponds still more closely to our understanding of fundamental doctrines. The *Schwabach Articles* are a case in point. Each of the seventeen sections is called an “article,” but the first eleven are given special prominence by virtue of the definition of the church in Article 12. Articles 1-11 cover the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Person and work of Christ, original sin, man’s helplessness and salvation through faith, the sacraments, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the freedom with which private confession and the means of grace are to be enjoyed. That at least is a rough indication of the “fundamentals” as the reformers saw them. These articles account for most, if not all, of the ecclesiastical boundaries which were drawn in the controversies of Luther’s lifetime. Interestingly, the above list corresponds quite closely to the material which Luther, moved by pastoral concerns, incorporated in the *Small Catechism* (1529) as a brief summary of Biblical doctrine for the laity. It was when Luther encountered errors on these points (e.g., the Trinity, the Person of Christ, justification by faith, original sin and total depravity, the necessity of the Word, Baptism, and the real presence) that he uttered his severest condemnations, including the explicit verdict of apostasy.

There is one more question to be taken up in this discussion of Luther’s view of doctrinal error. During the early years of the controversy with the Zwinglians, Luther’s judgment of the opponents was remarkably consistent. That was true from the beginning of the strife through the conclusion of the Marburg Colloquy. Did his view of the Zwinglians soften in later years? In answer it must be said that in the post-Marburg phase of the controversy we find a greater variety of reactions on Luther’s part, sometimes to a baffling degree. Yet there is little evidence that Luther ever relented in his judgment that a denial of the real presence means a loss of—faith. At Marburg both parties had agreed to abstain thereafter from *ad hominem* abuse, but, as Luther indicated to Agricola (WA Br 5: 160, 13ff.), this would not keep him from confessing his faith with “defense and confutation.” In point of fact, there were no major polemical writings from either side for more than ten years. Instead, Luther continued to warn against the error in sermons, lectures, letters, and “table talks” that are salted with criticism of the opponents. His estimate of Zwingli only deteriorated when he found reason to suspect that some of the actions of the Swiss at Marburg had been hypocritical (WA Br 5:340, 63ff.) and when he learned that Zwingli was propounding shockingly un-Biblical theories in his last works (AE 38:289-291). His soldier’s death at Cappel in 1531, thought Luther, was a judgment of God upon false doctrine (WA TR 1: No. 140). The only hope that he might have been saved was the possibility that God might have converted him from heresy in his last moments (WA 30 111:550). In spite of that possibility, Luther thought it best to assume on the basis of his evident heresy that he had been damned. A *Table Talk* entry from the period December 11, 1532 to January 2, 1533 reads:

It is far better and safer to declare Zwingli and Oecolampadius [who had died soon after Zwingli] damned rather than saved, even though one should do them violence thereby; for it is beneficial to guard and frighten the living and future generations in this way. But to call them just and holy, as their co-religionists do, harms many and confirms all sectarians in their error (WA TR 3: No. 2845a).

The fear was expressed that Bucer would come to a similarly bad end if he failed to repent (WA TR 1: No. 140), although Luther had high hopes of his return to the faith (WA Br 6:60; WA TR 1: No. 101). Indeed, from 1530 to 1536 Bucer exerted himself strenuously in the cause of establishing a concord. His conviction was that all the parties had misunderstood their opponents and become entangled in logomachy in spite of a fundamental agreement concerning the Sacrament. For Bucer, an indication of this was that he himself had misunderstood Luther’s doctrine all along. Luther absolutely refused to accept this explanation, but he became increasingly confident of Bucer’s sincerity. The latter’s untiring efforts to present the South German and Swiss teaching in a favorable light elicited something of a concession from Luther, whose instructions to Melancthon concerning the approaching conference at Cassel included this remark:

I myself, as Christ is my witness, would redeem this strife with my body and blood, even if it meant dying more than once. But what should I do? Perhaps they are caught in the other opinion with a good conscience; therefore let us bear with them. If they are sincere, the Lord Christ will free them. I, on the other hand, am caught in this opinion, certainly with a good conscience (unless I do not know myself). Let them bear with me also, if they are unable to agree with me. Now if they wish to hold their opinion concerning the presence of Christ's body with the bread and desire that we nevertheless tolerate each other, I will tolerate them quite gladly, in hope of future fellowship. For meanwhile I cannot have fellowship with them in faith and feeling (December, 1534—WA 38:299, 8ff.).

Did the possibility that they might be caught in error “with a good conscience” imply that they might even be Christians? It is possible, although it is difficult to be sure. But even if Luther was conceding that they might be Christians, the chance was too doubtful for Luther to consider fellowship as long as the doctrinal disagreement remained. Not until they met at Wittenberg in 1536 was he satisfied that Bucer's party was cured of heresy concerning the Sacrament, whereupon he extended the right hand of fellowship to them for the first time since the controversy had begun. Most of the Swiss had no part in this Wittenberg Concord, but two years later there were signs of progress on that front as well. A visitor came to Wittenberg from Bern with encouraging news of efforts toward concord (WA TR 3: Nos. 3836 and 3840). Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, wrote a warm and deferential letter to Luther as to a brother and proposed an exchange of opinions by correspondence in the interest of establishing “mutual friendship, never to be broken” (March, 1538—WA Br 8:207,19). Luther expressed his own hopes in a letter to Duke Albrecht of Prussia, May 6, 1538:

Matters with the Swiss, who until now have disagreed with us concerning the Sacrament, are taking a good course; may God help them further! For Basel, Strassburg, Augsburg, and Bern, together with some others, have adopted a very fine attitude toward us. This we acknowledge in a friendly way, and I hope that God will put an end to this scandal . . . (WA Br 8:215, 32ff.).

When it became evident, however, that neither the Swiss nor the Lutherans would yield their distinctive teachings, relations between them deteriorated.

More disappointments were in store for Luther. During the years following the establishment of the Wittenberg Concord, Bucer refrained from making a clear rejection of Zwinglianism, and Luther took it as a mark of hypocrisy; he began to contemplate severing relations and issuing a new confession (WA TR 5: No. 5730). A new set of attacks by Caspar Schwenkfeld, as well as the existence of widespread confusion over the elimination of the elevation of the host in the Wittenberg liturgy, convinced Luther that another statement was necessary. So that no one might accuse him of hypocrisy and vacillation, he issued his *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* in 1544. It was intended to be a final stroke against the devil and his following of “fanatics.” In a mood of anger, bitterness, and earnest devotion he rehearsed the old arguments and condemnations with one addition: Christians should not pray for the leaders of the opposition because they have committed “sin which is mortal,” as it is called in 1 John 5:16 (AE 38:296). A few brief references to the controversy appeared in the writings of his last two years (e.g., in 1545: *Against the Thirty-two Articles of the Louvain Theologians*, Theses 15 and 27—AE 34:355-356), but nothing comparable in scale to the *Brief Confession*. Oddly enough, the last years of Luther's life have some curious and almost inexplicable features. Though the *Brief Confession* was uncompromising in its stance against Zwinglianism, it was surprisingly silent about Bucer and Melancthon, who by this time was a defector from sacramental orthodoxy. Köstlin offers this interpretation:

Luther had no intention of surrendering any portion of the content of faith which he had presented, especially his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, nor did he actually surrender anything. Yet this

does not mean that every one of these articles, which he regarded as inviolable, was of perfectly equal importance for him, nor does it mean that it would have been impossible for him to have fellowship with any theologian who failed to satisfy him in one of these articles. In any event, historical evidence against such a view can be found in his continuing relationship to Melancthon. The latter now occupied a position with regard to the sacrament . . . closer to Bucer than to Luther. This also appeared clearly enough in that which the more recent editions of his *Loci* said and omitted to say about the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, Luther not only maintained fellowship with the coworker and friend God had given him while intentionally refraining from pursuing the differences; but he also used the publication of his own works in 1545 as an opportunity to praise the current edition of the *Loci* as an exceedingly fine book for the training of theologians without mentioning anything of its deficiencies.<sup>lix</sup>

Even if Köstlin is completely right, it is a difficult episode to understand. To balance his interpretation we might suggest the following. Luther, no doubt, was distressed to see signs of Melancthon's drifting from orthodoxy, particularly with regard to the Sacrament, but the situation presented him with a dilemma. Perhaps he felt that he really ought to discipline Melancthon but was deterred by the thought of the tremendous scandal that would arise if the two leading reformers, who had stood shoulder to shoulder from the beginning of the Reformation, should come to a parting of ways. His own death was approaching and might keep him from restoring peace if a crisis would develop--hence, perhaps, his silence in the *Brief Confession* and his toleration of Melancthon, inconsistent though it was with the theology he had confessed for years.<sup>lx</sup>

Equally puzzling is his generous estimate of Calvin. Luther read some of his works and encountered his less than satisfactory views on the Sacrament. But, as Philip Schaff puts it, "Luther never said one unkind word of Calvin": he read his books with "singular delight," called him a pious man, and showed himself willing to bear something (i.e. , different views on the real presence) from such a good man.<sup>lxi</sup> One begins to wonder whether Luther in his last years may have confined his vehement polemics to the crassest kind of sacramental spiritualism and adopted a more lenient attitude toward subtle divergences from his own formulas. Gross Zwinglianism was still the mark of the devil, but maybe the subtle errors came from believing hearts.—I have no great confidence in this suggestion, but otherwise I am completely unable to account for the contrast between the bitterness of the *Brief Confession* and the approval accorded to Calvin.<sup>lxii</sup>

#### IV. Concluding Remarks and Questions for Further Discussion

Conservative Lutherans of the twentieth century are so much in agreement with Luther in other respects that they may be surprised to encounter his evaluation of doctrinal error. Four hundred years of denominational history has done much to encourage a more restrained judgment with regard to the consequences of certain errors. If I may cite my own case as evidence, it was a surprise to discover Luther's point of view—the more so because I had previously been exposed to an inadequate interpretation of his actions at Marburg (not August Pieper's article, but a similar view)—and that feeling of surprise remained strong in the course of my research as I came to see the extent to which Luther's thinking was colored by inferences I do not share. That accounts for the decision to include, at the risk of being tedious, the abundance of documentation which has made this paper so lengthy. I might add that I have presented with comparable fullness such evidence as might seem at first to be damaging to my thesis. As for the paragraph from Pieper's article that has been under consideration, two things remain to be said. Viewed from one perspective, it is understandable that such an interpretation should arise. We who admire Luther and claim a large measure of like-mindedness with him are only too likely to credit him with thoughts which are second nature to us but alien to him. It is a natural mistake, and if I were asked to give Luther's views on some other topic without the benefit of careful study, I would perhaps distort them in the same way. From another perspective, however, the publication of the cited paragraph is a disturbing sign. Pieper was a penetrating theologian, and he had studied some of the very source materials which make his interpretation untenable. Such a situation raises concern in a more vital area. If it is possible for Reformation

history to be distorted in such a way that Luther is wrestled into harmony with current opinions, what is likely to happen in Biblical interpretation? The New Testament is that much farther removed from us in time, cultural setting, and language. It is a tiny corpus of writings compared with the vast resources that make it easier for the Reformation historian to step out of his own time and enter the world of Luther. The New Testament scholar labors under these disadvantages especially when he wrestles with the finer points of interpretation. If he is a conservative Christian, he will surely feel closely akin to the Apostles. What combination of circumstances could create a greater likelihood of unintentionally smuggling present-day nuances of opinion into the exposition of Biblical doctrine instead of judging one's own conceptions solely on the basis of a historically sound reading of the text? It is because of this danger that the pressure of traditionalism must always be combated by study undertaken in a self-critical spirit.

The drama of the face-to-face debate at Marburg reached its climax when Luther uttered his unforgettable word, "You have a different spirit." For that reason it has been cited frequently in the course of struggles between the Lutheran church and other denominations. But the parallel is not an exact one if the speaker recognizes the Christianity of the opponents or has no intention of denying them the Holy Spirit.<sup>lxiii</sup> We may still see the issues as sharply as Luther saw them; but when it comes to drawing conclusions about the opponents, what was black and white for Luther has a gray look today.

The Marburg Colloquy is intrinsically important in church history, but it has an added measure of significance in view of its historical context. Less than nine months after the colloquy, the Augsburg Confession was composed and read to the emperor. The Catechisms were written in the same period, and the Smalcald Articles come only a few years later. It is not improbable that the insights into Luther's theology which are obtained from a study of Marburg and the sacramental controversy will prove relevant for a historically sound reading of the Lutheran Confessions. Indeed, the Formula of Concord directs us to Luther as the foremost exponent of the Augsburg Confession and instructs us to decide questions about the meaning of the Augsburg Confession (and thus by implication all the Lutheran Confessions) on the basis of Luther's writings (FC SD VII, 41). Here I write with the greatest hesitation. The authoritative status of the Confessions in the Lutheran church makes a Seminary student reluctant to view them critically, and I have not made a sufficiently thorough study of them to be able to speak conclusively. If I venture to bring the Book of Concord into these concluding remarks and questions, it is only because I would gladly have answers for some doubts about the content and implications of a few phrases in the Confessions. I should like to be able to make as confident a subscription as those Lutheran fathers who resolved not to depart from the "contents or phrases" of the Confessions.<sup>lxiv</sup>

1. How much is included in the ecclesiology of Augustana VII and Apology VII-VIII? There is no doubt in my mind that the modern attempt to conceive Augustana VII in terms of a minimal gospel is a hopelessly unhistorical endeavor. But a different problem arises in connection with Apology VII-VIII, 31: "We are talking about true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God." This reference to Augustana VII seems to reflect a view that the *Una Sancta* (where there is "true spiritual unity" arising from "faith in the heart") is limited to the association of confessionally united Christians (those who "agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel" in all articles and concerning "the correct administration of the sacraments"). Why else would Melancthon go so far as to identify the unity described in Augustana VII as "true spiritual unity without which there can be no faith in the heart"? He could easily have established the area of his concern as doctrine in antithesis to ceremonies without going that far. This unwelcome interpretation of the confessional statements is all the more difficult for me to evade because it is so plainly in harmony with those points which Luther made in the eucharistic controversy. We saw earlier how vigorously he asserted his views on the church's infallibility and the consequences of doctrinal error, and how much this line of thought influenced his associates in 1529. The historical perspective suggests that it should not be surprising to find such a view reflected in Melancthon's confessional writings of 1530 and 1531. It is of course encouraging to read in Apology VII-VIII, 20, 21 that the "unprofitable opinions" which do not overthrow the foundation" are "forgiven or even corrected"; but then it becomes a question of what in Melancthon's view is an unprofitable opinion and what belongs to the foundation. I am left with an unpleasant

choice: either the ecclesiology of the Augustana and its Apology contains elements of a view I do not share, or else a sound ecclesiology is presented in a somewhat muddled and inconsistent way.

2. The Scriptures present the unity of the Holy Christian Church as a matter of faith, not sight. My conception of it is that Christ's believers are one on the basis of justifying faith in the vicarious atonement, no matter how small that faith may be or how many errors may coexist with it. To me it would seem most natural to express this as unity *in spite* of sects and schisms. Luther puts it in a slightly different way: the "little holy flock" is "called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united without sect or schism" (Large Catechism, Creed, 51). Ordinarily I would not quibble about the phrase "without sect or schism" because it is capable of conveying a perfectly satisfactory meaning. But I do wonder what Luther meant by it and what it meant to his contemporaries, because Luther had what I would consider an over-developed conception of the church's infallibility, and he explicitly attached it to the statement in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church" (cf. p. 41 above).

3. Was there perhaps a slight shift in the application and understanding of the *damnamus* between the time of the first Reformers and that of the Formula of Concord? For Luther, the words "condemn" and "anathema" are used to mark false teachings and their adherents as *extra ecclesiam* (cf. Note 54). But even though the words were heavily loaded, the early Reformers used them without qualification for the most part. For example, the antithetical method of the Augustana is to strike a blow and let the chips fall where they will: "our churches condemn those who teach" the contrary doctrines. A later generation found it necessary to qualify its condemnatory clauses with cautious restrictions. Over the objections of some who urged unqualified condemnation of errorists,<sup>lxv</sup> the Preface to the Book of Concord included a lengthy explanatory paragraph. The main concern is summed up in these words:

There are also many other reasons why condemnations cannot by any means be avoided. However, it is not our purpose and intention to mean thereby those persons who err ingenuously and who do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word, and far less do we mean entire churches inside or outside the Holy Empire of the German Nation. On the contrary, we mean specifically to condemn only false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents and blasphemers.<sup>lxvi</sup>

As part of the Preface, this paragraph is, I take it, confessionally binding. Does it intend also to qualify the condemnations of the earlier Confessions?

It would be interesting to pursue the study of the condemnation pronouncements made by Lutherans from about 1520 to 1580. Perhaps Johannes Brenz, whose career covers most of the span, could serve as a focus. In his contributions to the eucharistic controversy we encounter an interesting progression of statements. He extended warm fraternal recognition to the opponents early in the strife; a few years later he expressed his condemnation of them as *extra ecclesiam* together with utter astonishment that they could recognize any faith in Christ among the Lutherans at Marburg;<sup>lxvii</sup> and toward the end of his life he published the tempered judgment of errorists which corresponds to the official view of the Book of Concord:

I do not condemn the churches of the (Zwinglians), because God's clemency is so great that even amid the doctrine of the Baalites he reserves for himself seven thousand men who do not bend their knees before Baal; but I do condemn their pernicious dogma, and if they persist in error, we truly feel pain at heart . . .<sup>lxviii</sup>

4. Even if it can be demonstrated that there is complete continuity between the early Reformers and the Formulators in the matter of condemnations, it remains to be seen whether a shift has taken place in the four hundred years since the Formula. The point of the Preface is to refrain from condemning whole churches as well as pious individuals who are being misled. Such a point is worth making only if the condemnation is viewed as something stronger than identification of a doctrinal fault. All the Lutherans were agreed that the

Zwinglian churches were open to the charge of sin in this sense, yet they were to be spared the *damnamus*. Plainly the condemnations spoken of here are formal pronouncements that the condemned are *extra ecclesiam*. But the Preface, while observing a distinction between error and errorist up to a certain point and emphasizing the error as the primary object of the condemnation, deliberately *condemns* the "stiff necked proponents and blasphemers."

This point was reiterated in the Apology of the Formula of Concord, written in 1581 by Chemnitz, Seinecker, and Kirchner. Indeed, the lay people who follow their false teachers all the way fall under the same condemnation:

When the sheep are in complete agreement with the sacramentarian shepherds and together with them believe and blaspheme against the wholesome doctrine concerning the Person of Christ and the Holy Supper, also refuse to receive or tolerate instruction, there is no doubt that they are no longer Christ's sheep. For John 10 expressly says that his sheep hear his voice, but a stranger they will not follow.<sup>lxix</sup>

Are we ready to draw the same conclusion? Imagine a Reformed person today who after ample and repeated admonition concerning the real presence persists in his error and rejects the true doctrine as a sinful human invention. That would constitute both stubbornness and blasphemy. Would not the Preface obligate us to condemn such a person in the full sense of the word and conclude that he is without doubt not one of Christ's sheep? I am not yet ready to do so: the "saving inconsistency" of men's thoughts suggests that a greater degree of restraint is in order when we draw conclusions about a person on the basis of his doctrinal error.

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<sup>i</sup> From the report of Andreas Osiander. In this paper, quotations from editions of Luther's works will generally be indicated in the text according to the following format: AE (American Edition) volume: page; WA (Weimar Edition) volume: page, line; St L (St. Louis Edition) volume: column, paragraph. In WA, the series *Briefwechsel* is designated by WA Br; the series *Tischreden* by WA TR. For the latter I have used entry numbers rather than page numbers.

For the sake of easier reading, quotations from sixteenth century sources and from the secondary literature will appear in English. The original language will usually be evident from the titles as they appear in these notes. Unless AE is cited or a translator's name is indicated, the translations are mine.

<sup>ii</sup> *Johann Aurifabers Erzählungen, was sich mit Luther von Jahr zu Jahr zugetragen habe*, Anno 1529. St L XXIIb: 3266, 14.

<sup>iii</sup> August Pieper, „Worin bestand der ‚andere‘ Geist, den Luther den Zwinglianern vorwarf?“ *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January, 1931), p. 11.

<sup>iv</sup> The same is true of the writings of Oecolampadius; cf. Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und seine Schriften*, fourth unaltered edition (Berlin: Wiegandt & Schott, 1889), Vol. II, pp. 81-82. (Hereafter cited as Köstlin, *Martin Luther*.)

<sup>v</sup> Zwingli, *Opera*, ed. Schuler and Schulthess (Turin: 1828ff.), Vol. VII, p. 390.

<sup>vi</sup> „Uiber den ungesandten Sandbrief Johannes Fabers“ in Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. II-2, p. 445.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451. Hans von Schubert, *Bekennnisbildung und Religionspolitik 1529/1530 (1524-1534): Untersuchungen und Texte* (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1910), p. 4, has this comment on Zwingli's reference to "one spirit": "Compare in this connection the well-known saying of Luther to Bucer at Marburg: '—our spirit is different from yours; it is clear that we do not possess the same spirit' . . . and Luther's letter to Propst, May 1, 1530 . . . Perhaps Luther thought of this passage on that occasion."

<sup>viii</sup> From the *Amica Exegesis*. . . Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. III, pp. 462-463.

<sup>ix</sup> So Köstlin, *Martin Luther*, Vol. II, p. 99.

<sup>x</sup> Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. III, p. 560.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 560.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 560

<sup>xiii</sup> Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. II-2, 28.

<sup>xiv</sup> Cf. the appeal at the end, *Ibid.*, p. 93: “Here is my humble plea to you, dear Luther, that you will not rage in this matter, as you have done until now; rather, if you are Christ’s, we are his also. Now it is in no way fitting for us to go against each other or deal with God’s Word in this way. Therefore act with Christian self-discipline; we will do the same. . .” These remarks put the previous warnings into perspective and exemplify the attitude he wished to communicate in his *published* writings. In private correspondence he sometimes gave free rein to his anger and exasperation. Lewis Spitz writes: “In March 1528 Luther published his *Great Confession Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, striking a condescending tone. Zwingli was furious and announced that he did not like to be ‘treated like an ass.’ In a rage he wrote on August 30, 1528, to Conrad Sam at Ulm:

That rash man Luther keeps killing human and divine wisdom in his books, though it would have been easy to restore this wisdom among the pious. But since the heretics, that is, his followers, together with the wicked, have become so deaf to all truth that they refuse to listen, I was for a long time doubtful about expending this enormous labor which I knew would be in vain. . . . May I die if he does not surpass Eck in impurity, Cochlaeus in audacity, and, in brief, all the vices of men!”

Apparently Spitz is quoting from the new critical edition of Zwingli’s works in *Corpus Reformatorum*. This letter does not appear in the Schuler and Schulthess edition, so I have been unable to read the rest of it.

<sup>xv</sup> In view of the way Zwingli and his associates continually recognize Luther as a fellow Christian, I wonder whether misunderstanding may have arisen over nuances of pneumatology. When they suggest that the Spirit of God has abandoned Luther (e.g., Oecolampadius, *Reasonable Answer*, St L XX:599), he takes it in the worst sense and resents it deeply. He understands such an expression the way he would expect it to be understood if he used it against them: as a word of censure that necessarily implies a complete lack of faith in Christ (cf. the opening remarks in *That These Words of Christ. . . Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, especially AE 37:21: “Since they regard us as ‘un-Christians’ whom the Spirit of God has forsaken. . .”). But since his opponents still acknowledge him as a Christian, is it not more likely that they mean a good deal less—perhaps that the Holy Spirit has abandoned Luther only in so far as the prophetic office is concerned? In other words, is Oecolampadius suggesting that Luther has not lost faith in Christ, only a special charism?

<sup>xvi</sup> The wonderfully informative introductory materials and annotations in AE 37 need to be used with caution by anyone who is inclined to regard the controversy as a succession of exchanges that were equally hostile or equally friendly. Robert H. Fischer, the editor and translator of AE 37, writes in his introduction to the volume (p. xx): “Each side declared the opposing position un-Christian. Luther repeatedly charged that his adversaries were led by an evil spirit, and the Swiss and the Strassburgers repeatedly charged that the Spirit of Christ had forsaken Luther.” Both of these statements are true; but they do not eliminate the possibility that the meaning and implications of such declarations could be significantly different if they occur in different contexts and are the work of different authors. It is also potentially misleading when Luther’s version of a charge made against him by his opponents is illustrated by short quotations or bare references without quotation. For instance, when Luther asserts that “they regard me as full of devils” (AE 37:23), the footnote to this passage says: “E.g. Oecolampadius, cited in WA 23, 287.” However, the statements by Oecolampadius assembled in, WA 23:287 are somewhat less violent than Luther’s allusion; there is a difference between ascribing an error to the counsels and presence of Satan and saying that a person is completely possessed by demons (“full of devils”). It seems quite clear that Oecolampadius was aware of the difference, for he considered it outrageous when Luther consigned him wholly to the devil. In a letter to Zwingli (May 20, 1528), he says he will send a few lines to Wittenberg so that Melancthon and Luther can see “whether we are fanatics and demon-possessed (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□)” (Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. VIII, p. 190).—It is not my intention to fault Fischer’s editing, which on the whole is admirable. He cannot print everything and address himself to every concern. But the auxiliary materials do need to be analyzed and used with discrimination.

<sup>xvii</sup> My investigation of some of the major sources corroborates one of the conclusions offered by Mark Edwards in his much more comprehensive study, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). “In controversies between evangelicals and Catholics, each side accused the other of satanic motivation and exchanged the vilest personal abuse; in controversies among evangelicals, the accusation of demonic possession and the *ad hominem* abuse tended to come more from Luther than from his opponents” (pp. 196-197). *Müintzer* is the only exception mentioned by Edwards; his works rival Luther’s in vituperative force.

<sup>xviii</sup> Köstlin, *Martin Luther*, Vol. II, p. 66; Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren*, p. 82.

<sup>xix</sup> Edwards, p. 84.

<sup>xx</sup> The three heads are Carlstadt with his *touto*, Zwingli and Oecolampadius with their *significat*, and a third view that emphasized spiritual food.

<sup>xxi</sup> Luther's opponents complained that in this treatise he mentioned the devil seventy-seven times (Edwards, p. 102).

<sup>xxii</sup> Gustav Kawerau, ed., *Der Briefwechsel Des Justus Jonas* (reprint-Hildesheimi Georg Olm, 1964, two volumes in one binding), Vol. I, p. 100 (No. 98).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Zwingli, *Opera*, Vol. VII, p. 521.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Hans von Schubert „Bündnis und Bekenntnis 1529/1530: Der Toleranzgedanke im Reformationszeitalter“ (Leipzig: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1908), p. 13.

<sup>xxv</sup> Walther Koehler, *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion* (Leipzig: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1929), Thereafter cited as Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body. Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, revised Australian edition (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977).

<sup>xxvii</sup> It is only in this sense that the Saxon Chancellor Brueck can speak of “brotherly” dealings at Marburg: “. . . at the recent Marburg conference they have been persuaded and admonished in all brotherliness so that neither their shepherds nor their sheep may plead weakness and ask for more patience until God give them more grace, etc.” (November/December 1529)—quoted from M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), Part II, p. 63 (Reu's translation).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*, P. 52.

<sup>xxix</sup> Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p. 93. This is the remark Pieper refers to in the word “Nichtsutz” (good-for-nothing). The evidence for it is found only in Hedio's report, which gives Luther's words in Latin: *tu es nequam*. Cf. Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*, p. 39.

<sup>xxx</sup> Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*, p. 49, under the heading „Kleinere Mitteilungen vom 1. Oktober.” Eells (*Martin Bucer*, p. 93) offers a different version which seems to allude again to Bucer's translation of Luther's Postille as a betrayal: “You are of the devil, and if you had a correct belief and the Scriptures, you would not have betrayed me to Satan when I opposed your opinion.” This, however, is not linguistically accurate, and I know of no reason to doubt the wording of Hedio's report at this point. Koehler reproduces the original form of Hedio's report as follows: *Bucerus hodie, cum multa cum Luthero contulisset, audiit tandem: „Du bist des Teuffels und so Du ein rechten Glauben hast” et scripturam, trades et-Jam me Sathanae, qui opiniononi tuae repugno* (p. 49).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Sasse, *This Is My Body*, pp. 176-177. Ample references to the sources are given in Sasse's footnotes.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The article appears in English translation on pp. 4-5 of the Lutheran Synod Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 4 (June, 1963).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> We may hardly assume that Luther's conception of fellowship practices as an expression of a confessional position was identical with the highly developed awareness that is current among conservative Lutherans today. Consider what Luther is reported to have said on one occasion: “Even in a Romanist church, he said, at a public mass he would adore the host” (cited by Preserved Smith, *A Short History of Christian Theophagy* Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1922, p. 120. The quotation is drawn from the *Table Talk* as selected and translated by Smith and Gallinger, but unfortunately their edition gives no references to the sources. So far I have been unable to locate this item in WA TR.)

<sup>xxxv</sup> Gottfried Hoffmann, *Marburg 1529—Eine Verpasste Gelegenheit?* (Oberurseler Heft 1—Oberursel, no date), pp. 12-20.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 212. The original text is “Vult, ut caussa committatur mutuo” (Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*, p. 125), which Koehler translates as „Ich möchte, dass die Sache gegenseitig beigelegt werde” (P. 37).

<sup>35a</sup> There is a letter by Bucer (October 18, 1520) which reports that at the conclusion of the Colloquy, when the Landgrave was still urging mutual recognition, Luther gave in for a moment: “Lutherum autem semel consensisse, sed mox a Philippo retractum.” Even if it is true, it is only an exception that proves the rule. More likely, however, it involves a misunderstanding on Bucer’s part. On the very day of which he speaks (October 4, 1529), Luther wrote to his wife that they had refused the Landgrave’s urgings: “We did not like this fraternizing, though we wanted to be peaceful and amicable.” Cf. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 233.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Quoted by Sasse, *This Is My Body*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>38a</sup> Cf. Luther’s lectures on 1 John (Autumn, 1527), particularly his commentary on 1 John 4:2 (AE 30:286, quoted in Part III of this paper).—To some it may appear as if my understanding of Luther’s pronouncement is an implausible exaggeration, but I wish to stress that it is the only plausible interpretation of the words in their historical context. Preserved Smith (*A Short History of Christian Theophagy*, p. 160) writes: “Luther refused the proffered hand of Zwingli with the remark, especially stinging on account of its previous connotation, that the Swiss had a different spirit from his own.” An even clearer confirmation comes from a sixteenth century source. The *Histori dess Sacramentstreits* by Kirchner, Selnecker, and Chemnitz (1591 quotes Luther’s word concerning the different spirit and gives this comment in the margin: „Sacramentierische Geist ist nicht der H. Geist” (p. 145). Luther’s letter to Propst is also reproduced, and at the place where Luther reports his statement about the different spirit, the marginal comment reads: „Zweierley Geist/ D. Lutheri (heilig) und Zwingels geist/ der da selbst bekennet/ er wisse nit/ ob er schwartz/ oder weiss sey” (p. 161).

<sup>xxxix</sup> C. F. W. Walther likewise interprets Luther’s pronouncement only in terms of an impersonal spirit of rationalism:

“What was Luther’s meaning when he uttered those words: ‘Yours is a different spirit from ours?’ Unquestionably this: ‘If you poor mortals were merely caught in an error because of your human weakness, we could, yea, we would have to, regard you as weak, erring brethren, but still as our brethren, because you would surely be soon rid of this single error of yours. But that is not the case; the difference between you and us is this, that yours is a different spirit.’

“What spirit did Luther find lacking in the Swiss? Unquestionably the spirit to which the Lord refers when He says, Matt. 18,3: ‘Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Indeed, my friends, that is the spirit which Zwingli and his followers lacked and which those who follow in his footsteps in our day are still lacking. It is the spirit of childlike simplicity which takes the Father in heaven by His words. The spirit of the Zwinglian, Calvinist, and unionistic churches is nothing else than the rationalistic spirit, the spirit of doubt and uncertainty which, like unenlightened, unregenerate Nicodemus, queries before every mystery of the Holy Scriptures: ‘How can these things be?’ John 3,9.” *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, no date), p. 165. —The evaluation of Pieper’s interpretation which is presented in the text of this paper is applicable also to this quotation from Walther.

<sup>xl</sup> Osiander also mentioned Zwingli’s tears in his report (AE 38:70; Koehler, *Rekonstruktion*, p. 168).

<sup>xli</sup> The words “we decided unanimously that they were outside of the fellowship of the Christian church and that we would not recognize them as brothers and members of the church” are absolutely clear, and though the report was written after the colloquy, it is the work of a theologian who participated in the negotiations. We have no reason to doubt Brenz’s competence to present the matter accurately. For this reason, it defeats me how Pieper could come to the wrong conclusion about the Lutheran verdict upon the Zwinglians at Marburg. Pieper’s *Quartalschrift* articles on Marburg (1930) and the “other spirit” (1931) are based on a study of Koehler’s *Rekonstruktion* (1929). The WLS Library copy of Koehler’s work bears Pieper’s distinctive marginalia and underlinings. Evidently the key passage in Brenz’s report was of special interest to Pieper; it is one of the statements that is underlined, and he translates it as part of his summary of the events at Marburg (*Quartalschrift*, Vol. 27, No. 4, p. 259). His inadequate theory about the division at Marburg, published in the face of Brenz’s clear statement to the contrary, can only be described as a *tour de force* of tendentious interpretation.

<sup>xlii</sup> The text of this letter is also accessible in *Corpus Reformatorum*, Vol. I, 1101, Brief No. 637. Melancthon speaks of the matter here from the standpoint of the Lutheran decision. The Zwinglians did not excommunicate the Lutherans.

<sup>xliii</sup> *Ibid.*, 1106.

<sup>xliv</sup> Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und ihrem inneren Zusammenhange*, second, revised edition (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1901), Vol. I, p. 475.

<sup>xlv</sup> M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction*, Part II, p. 61. This collection of sources appears in English translation. The original German text of Brueck's *Opinion* is reproduced by Hans von Schubert, *Bekennnisbildung und Religionspolitik 1529/1530 (1524-1534): Untersuchungen und Texte*, pp. 144-152.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Reu, *The Augsburg Confession...*, Part II, p. 60.

<sup>xlvii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 63.

<sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 63.

<sup>xlix</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 64.

<sup>l</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, Vol. II, 93, Brief No. 718.

<sup>li</sup> Reu, *The Augsburg Confession...*, Part I, p. 26.

<sup>lii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, . 35-36. Reu's discussion of the relative importance of confessional and political reasons for the actions of the Elector suggests the possibility of raising the same question in the case of other key figures in the confessional movement. It would appear that the princes were not the only ones whose confessional statements might have been colored by political aims. Köstlin sees this as a factor in the unanimity of the Lutheran theologians at Marburg: "Luther's associates were in complete agreement with his resoluteness. Indeed, Melancthon in particular supported him in this, as Bucer later complained; in Melancthon's case the chief motive for this was undoubtedly the fear that a fraternal tie with the Zwinglians would make reconciliation with the emperor and the greater part of the empire completely impossible. Accordingly he spoke about Emperor Karl and King Ferdinand in a conspicuously favorable way at Marburg" (*Martin Luther*, Vol. II, p. 140).

<sup>liii</sup> This reflects Luther's understanding of the word *condemn*. One condemns for doctrinal reasons, thus removing heretics from the church. To condemn is to draw the line between church and non-church. Accordingly it is an inappropriate action to take against Christians in matters of life and non-doctrinal errors: "'What is not against you, is for you.' Therefore, whatever is not rebuked as heretical is thereby praised as Christian, since no error does injury in the church except heresy. For although I may well be in error if I regard the pope as holy and everyone as pious, yet the error is not heretical or damnable or injurious. But when one condemns erroneous articles, only injurious doctrine is being condemned, that which makes un-Christians and heretics. *If one were to condemn all the errors of Christians, there would not be a single Christian left, since no one is without sin and error*" (*Against the Bull of the Antichrist*, 1520—WA 6:618, 10ff., my emphasis). Luther's understanding of anathema is the same: WA 10 II:84, 3ff (1522), WA 40 1: 116-117 (1531).

<sup>liv</sup> Characteristically, Luther immediately cites James 2:10. In keeping with his generous estimate of Erasmus's heart, he does not use the passage to label Erasmus as one who has already taken the fatal step of denying an article of faith, nor does he present his interpretation of it as explicitly as he does in the writings against the Zwinglians. Nevertheless, the reason for citing James 2:10 here is to warn Erasmus that he will be guilty of denying all Christian doctrine if he adopts in his heart any one of the blasphemous views he had expressed.

<sup>lv</sup> Cf. the editor's introduction to *The Bondage of the Will*, AE 33:12. The index to the *Table Talks* in WA TR 6 under the name Erasmus reveals the frequency with which Luther commented on him, generally in a negative way. For examples from the early 1530s, cf. WA TR 1: Nos. 484: 797, and 837.

<sup>lvi</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmenschichte*, Vol. 3 (fourth revised and expanded edition—Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1910), p. 889.

<sup>lvii</sup> Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 328.

<sup>lviii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>lix</sup> Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie*. Vol. I, P. 490.

<sup>lx</sup> Since capable historians (Köstlin, Schaff) are skeptical of its authenticity, I am relegating to the notes the astonishing remark which Luther is alleged to have made to Melancthon at the end of his life: “Philip, I confess that the matter of the Lord’s Supper has been overdone” (der Sache vom Abendmahl viel zu viel gethan sei). Cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (second revised edition—Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), Vol. VII, Chapter 7, Section 109, p. 659.

<sup>lxi</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 659-660.

<sup>lxii</sup> To give the reader the benefit of an overview by an outstanding scholar of Luther’s conception of fundamental doctrine, cf. *Luthers Theologie* as translated from the second German edition by Charles E. Hay (*The Theology of Luther in its Historical Development and Inner Harmonv*—Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897, Vol. II, pp. 270-273). Inevitably some of the inconsistencies of Luther’s judgments over the years are passed over in a presentation as short as Köstlin’s, and his interpretation of at least one episode (i.e., the course of Luther’s dealings with the Bohemians) has been contested in more recent scholarship; but on the whole his summary of Luther’s position is admirable.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Pieper’s article provides us with an example of positive recognition of the Reformed: “Thus Luther did not deny Zwingli the *Christian* spirit. No, we wish to deny the Christian spirit neither to Zwingli and his coworkers, nor to the much more profound but also more dreadful Calvin and his friends, above all not to the great mass of Reformed believers. The majority of the Reformed confessional writings are pervaded by such a clear, pure, deep, and comprehensive knowledge of the chief articles of the gospel, such a pious feeling and holy zeal for the preservation of God’s Word and the increase of Christ’s kingdom, especially also for the godliness of the individual believer and for good order in all aspects of church life, that even a strict Lutheran feels his heart glowing with thanks to God for this. Yes, even the person who considers himself deeply grounded in Lutheranism will find after a study of the best Reformed literature that he is compelled to the admission: Lutheranism does not have everything—we have much to learn also from the Reformed church” (*Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 11).

<sup>lxiv</sup> Preface to the Book of Concord (*Concordia Triglotta*, p. 22)—German: “weder in rebus noch phrasibus abzuweichen.” The Latin text is even more emphatic: “Quare etiam nos ne latum quidem unguem vel a rebus ipsis vel a phrasibus, quae in illa habentur, discedere . . . decrevimus.

<sup>lxv</sup> Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p.11, fnt. 5.

<sup>lxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>lxvii</sup> AE 38:79; WA 30 III:155, 22ff.

<sup>lxviii</sup> *De Maiestate Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*. Brenz (Opera Omnia—Tübingen: George Gruppenbach, 1590—Vol. 8, p. 970).

<sup>lxix</sup> Quoted in H. R. Frank, *Die Theologie der Concordienformel* (Erlangen, 1858), Vol. I, p. 26.