

FORMULA OF CONCORD - Article IV
"Of Good Works"
from the Thorough Declaration

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W.E.L.S. Dakota-Montana District
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THE FORMULA OF CONCORD

Thorough Declaration Article IV Of Good Works

Historical Introduction:

For the most part, Article IV is reaction to false doctrine which was coming from Lutheran theologians concerning good works. According to the Historical Introduction in our "Concordia Triglotta", Melanchthon is the real father of the "Majoristic" controversy.¹ He was the first (in his "loci" of 1535) to introduce and cultivate the phrase: "Good works are necessary to salvation." Later, during the duress of the Augsburg Interim (1548), Melanchthon followed the conciliatory path. At the behest of Maurice, Melanchthon consented to elaborate a compromise document to the Augsburg Interim--- the so-called Leipzig Interim.² In this "betrayal of Lutheranism", faith is coordinated with other virtues, and good works are declared to be necessary to salvation.³ Wording such as: "no one can be saved without love and good works. Yet we are not justified by love and good works, but by grace for Christ's sake." was acceptable to Roman Catholic doctrine.⁴ And this came just at a time when there was special need of a clear, correct confession against all sorts of corruptions and adulterations of the article of Justification.⁵ While the captive Elector was determined to die rather than to submit to the Interim, and while hundreds of Lutheran ministers were deposed, banished, imprisoned, and some of them even executed because of their devotion to the truth, Melanchthon was unwilling to expose himself to the anger of the Emperor.⁶

However, as shown by his prior teachings of 1535, such wording concerning good works came not entirely because of duress. Indeed, as late as 8 years after Maurice had ended the Interim's force, the Leipzig and Wittenburg theologians still defended the position they had occupied during the Interim.⁷ The real trouble and danger within Lutheranism concerning the doctrine of Free Will and of Good Works existed because Melanchthon's doctrinal views were not as far apart from those of the Leipzig compromise as is frequently assumed.⁸

Melanchthon excused the (good works are necessary to salvation) mode of speech as being in agreement with that used by Paul in: Rom.10:10 --with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.;

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2Cor.7:10 --for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.; and Phil.2:12b. --work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.⁹

However, when the controversy on good works began, and George Major zealously championed the restored formula, Melanchthon stepped aside. He advised Major and others to not use the phrase he had fostered.¹⁰

As a result, his devoted student and active member of the Wittenburg faculty, George Major, became the named father of the controversy. He not only "taught hitherto, and still teach, and henceforth will teach all my life: that good works are necessary to salvation"; but also condemned all those who taught otherwise.¹¹ "Furthermore I say, let him who teaches otherwise, even though an angel from heaven, be accursed!"¹²

Later on in the controversy, Major modified his flat statement by explaining that good works are necessary to salvation not in order to obtain, but to retain salvation.¹³ (This new slant is dealt with in part III. B. of the Outline)

Another man prominent in the controversy and in essential agreement with Major was Justus Menius. He replaced the words "good works" by "new life", "new righteousness", "new obedience", and affirmed "that it is necessary to our salvation that such be wrought in us by the Holy Ghost."¹⁴ "Works", said Menius, "must not be introduced into the article of justification, reconciliation, and redemption; but when dealing with the article of sanctification, then it is correct to say, 'Sanctification, or renewal of the Holy Spirit, is necessary to salvation.'¹⁵ He also maintained, "that good works are necessary to salvation in order that we may not lose it again."¹⁶

With the exception of Menius and other adherents in Electoral Saxony, Major was firmly opposed by Lutheran ministers and theologians everywhere. As soon as the controversy began, men such as Flacius clearly saw the utter falsity of Major's statements. He showed that Major's proposition, taken as it reads, can be interpreted only in a papistical sense, and that no amount of explanations is able to cure

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it of its ingrained falsity.¹⁷ Flacius demanded an unqualified rejection of the statement, "good works are necessary to salvation" -- a demand with which Major as well as Melanchthon refused to comply.¹⁸

The Formula of Concord sanctioned the attitude of Flacius. It flatly rejected the false and dubious formulas of Melanchthon, Major, and Menius concerning the necessity of good works to salvation.¹⁹ In clear cut doctrinal expression, the Formula of Concord rejects the Majoristic formula, not because it is ambiguous, but because it is inherently false.²⁰

Nicholas Amsdorf, the intimate and trusted friend of Luther, in his zeal to oppose Majorism, went one step too far -- over the precipice.²¹ He declared, "good works are detrimental and injurious to salvation." Perhaps he did it for effect, using the statement as Title for a tract against Majorism. However, Amsdorf had left out the important modification which Luther had always added: "-- if one presumes to be justified by them."²² Although Amsdorf's flat statement was apparently false, and thus resulted in no historical consequence, the Formula of Concord most emphatically rejects the error of Amsdorf as offensive and detrimental to Christian discipline. For the question was not what Amsdorf meant to say, but what he really did say.²³ (this is Outline part III. C.)

Not all misquoting of Luther was done by accident or had so little consequence. From the beginning of the Reformation, the Romanists had slandered Luther by maintaining that he condemned good works and simply denied their necessity. A similar charge was made by the Majorists against their opponents generally.²⁴ The "Anti-nomians" as well as several other opponents of the Majorists were unwilling to allow the statement, "good works are necessary." The latter falsely interpreted the proposition as necessarily implying coercion.²⁵

The Formula of Concord maintains that it is correct to say, "good works are necessary." It points to Christ and Paul using just such terminology as: (necessity, needful, ought, and must) regarding good works. (Outline part II. A.) It adds that the first meaning of "necessarium" and "debitum" is not "extortum

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coactione", but the eternal and immutable order of divine wisdom.²⁶
Thus it is an immutable divine order that the rational creature obeys
God.²⁷

This ends the historical introduction to Article IV.

Because the Outline of the Thorough Declaration does not follow the same order of subjects as the Historical Introduction, here follows a main part listing from the Outline so that the reader may familiarize himself with the areas of greater interest,

(Part I.) of the Outline states points "concerning which there is no controversy among our theologians."

(Part II.) of the Outline states the Lutheran (Biblical) position concerning the necessity of good works. This is against the "Antinomian" claim and the Papists who would place Luther among the Antinomians.

(Part III.) of the Outline deals with the Majoristic Propositions. It was these propositions which presented the greatest danger to the Lutheran church and specifically to the doctrine of Justification by Grace alone.

(Sub-part C. of Part III.) deals with Amsdorf's paradoxical assertion.

All foot notes in the Historical Introduction are from the--
Concordia Triglotta, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, Mo. 1921edn.
(Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books, by F. Bente)

1-p.112	8-p.99	15-p.118	22-p.122
2-p.98	9-p.115	16-p.118	23-p.123
3-p.99	10-p.114	17-p.119	24-p.123
4-p.114	11-p.115	18-p.121	25-p.123
5-p.114	12-p.115	19-p.121	26-p.124
6-p.98	13-p.116	20-p.122	27-p.124
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OUTLINE OF
The Formula of Concord Article IV Of Good Works
(Thorough Declaration)

- I. There is no controversy among our theologians concerning the following points: 7
- A. That it is God's will, order, and command that believers should walk in good works 7
 - B. That the good works of believers are pleasing and acceptable to God for the sake of the Lord Christ, by faith, because the person is acceptable to God. 8
 - C. That it is impossible to separate works from faith 12
- II. In the Augsburg Confession and its Apology these expressions are often used and repeated that good works are necessary. 14
- A. For in the Holy Scriptures the words necessity, needful, and necessary, ought, and must are used concerning what we are bound to do because of God's ordinance, command, and will. (Rom. 13:5 1Cor. 9:9 Acts 5:29 John 15:12 1Jn.4:21) 14
 - B. Therefore the expressions (that good works are necessary, and that it is necessary to do good) are used with propriety to rebuke and reject the secure, such as the Epicureans. (They fabricate for themselves that there could be in a heart true faith and at the same time the wicked intention to persevere and continue in sins.) 15
 - C. In these expressions the meaning must be: (a necessity of Christ's ordinance, command, and will, and of our obligation, but not a necessity of coercion.) 16
 - 1. Coercion is wrung from one without and against his will 17
 - 2. Such coerced (hypocritical) works God does not want Ps.54:6 2Cor.9:7 God loveth a cheerful giver) 17
 - D. However, it is false and must be censured when it is asserted that good works are free to believers in the sense that it were optional with them to do or to omit them. 20
- III. When it is taught that good works are necessary, it must also be explained why and for what reasons they are necessary. 21
- A. Modes of speech which draw and mingle works into the article of Justification and Salvation should not be taught, defended, or excused in our churches. 22
 - 1. Such usage is directly contrary to the doctrine concerning the exclusive particles in the article of Justification and Salvation (Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Romans 4:6 David describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.) 22

Outline of Formula of Concord Article IV - continued

III.

A.

2. Such usage does spiritual harm. 23
 - a. It takes from afflicted, troubled consciences the comfort of the Gospel.
 - b. It gives occasion for doubt.
 - c. It strengthens presumption in one's own righteousness
 - d. It is accepted by the Papists and adduced against the pure doctrine of the alone-saving faith.
 - e. It is contrary to the form of sound words. Such as 24
Romans 4:6 blessedness is only of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."
3. Dr. Luther too has condemned these propositions concerning 24
the necessity of good works for salvation.
 - a. In the false prophets who led the Galatians into error 25
 - b. In the Papists, in very many places 26
 - c. In the Anabaptists when they say: (We should not indeed 27
rest faith upon the merit of works, but we must nevertheless have them as things necessary to salvation.)
 - d. In others among his own followers who say: (although 28
we require works as necessary to salvation, yet we do not teach to place trust in works. On Gen. 22.
4. Such expressions originated from the Interim and were 29
renewed in consequence of it.

B. Neither are good works necessary to preserve faith, right- 30
eousness, and salvation. 35

1. Although, contrary to the Epicurean delusion, scripture 32
teaches that evil works destroy faith. (Pieper III p.23)
1Cor.6:9 "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, --- shall inherit the kingdom of God."
Col. 3:6 "For which things sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience."
2. Although scripture exhorts to good works.
 - a. To make our calling and election sure (our own account) 33
 - b. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (P.III 2
1Thess.4:3 (our Lord's Account)
 - c. That the Christian life be witness to the world (P. III 29)
(the world's account)
3. Nevertheless the Spirit and gifts come to one on account 34
of grace, through Christ, and are retained by faith alone.
Romans 5:2 "By whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."
 - a. That the promise of receiving and retaining righteous- 35
ness and salvation may be firm and sure to us.
 - b. That the decree of the Council of Trent and whatever 35
elsewhere is set forth in the same sense is justly to be rejected.

III.

- C. Nor may the flat statement "that good works are injurious to salvation" be tolerated, employed, nor defended in the Church of Christ. 37 39 40
1. Phil. 3:7ff. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." does not say the works are "loss" but that the false confidence placed in the works is "loss". 37
 2. In believers good works are indications of salvation when done in the sense in which God requires them (from true causes and for true ends). 38
 3. Christians should be admonished and urged to good works most diligently. 40

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