

Formula of Concord—Article VII, of the Lord's Supper

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The thrust of the Formula of Concord is totally different from that of the other Lutheran confessions. The latter are directed against the prime heresies of the Antichrist and of Reformed circles, yes, even against certain errors outside the pale of Christendom. Not so the Formula. Its target are the heresies which had reared their ugly head within the confines of Lutheran circles. A study of the article OF THE LORD'S SUPPER demonstrates this fact conclusively and clearly. This reveals why an acquaintance with the historical background of Article VII is required should the subject in question and the manner of treating it be understood properly. Our cognizance of the need for such an acquaintance, we trust, will justify the disproportionate divisions of this study, namely, the division into 1) the historical setting of Article VII and 2) the actual study of the article's content.

Part I: The Historical Setting of Article VII

By means of a broad overview, we shall have passed in review historical data, not only as far back as the year of Luther's death but back as far as the time when the Augsburg Confession was in preparation.

Perhaps we recall some occasional remarks of the Great Reformer. He spoke of the Augsburg Confession's manner of presenting its subject matter as one of treading mildly, as we might call it, pussyfooting. He said, e.g., "I cannot step so gently and softly." He even felt some doctrinal issues were omitted which had better been included, namely articles on Purgatory, the Adoration of the Saints, and the Antichrist. He surely minced no words in a statement like the following:

I have received your Apology (name employed for the Augsburg Confession) and cannot understand what you mean when you ask what and how much should be yielded to the Papists...As far as I am concerned, too much has already been yielded in this Apology.

Since the article on the Lord's Supper is our prime concern at this time, we note with special interest that it was apparently at Luther's insistence that Article X of the Augustana concluded with the damnatory clause, "and they reject those that teach otherwise."

None of us in this assembly need be told at whom Luther's aforementioned volleys were aimed. And this was at the time when Melancthon was considered "still in full accord with Luther doctrinally." In spite of Luther's deep appreciation of and sincere admiration for Melancthon's unusual gifts, the man's nature was for Luther a matter of no small concern. He perceived his colleague to be not only a mildmannered person, but also a theologian not above being bent "by every wind of doctrine." As much as even a Luther might have profited from a bit of Melancthon's conciliatory spirit, in Melancthon's case this virtue was obviously misused and led to a sad end.

If Melancthon's *modus operandi* did not appear too reprehensible prior to 1530, its true colors were readily perceptible almost immediately after the presentation of the Confession at Augsburg. In spite of apparent agreement with Luther's solidity, Melancthon seemingly always had as his goal the reuniting of the divided elements of the church. Thus viewed, all his efforts and methods, as we may say, "add up." Sufficient witness is offered by these words from his Preface to the Apology:

It has always been my custom in these controversies to retain, as far as I was at all able, the form of the customarily received doctrines, in order that at some time concord might the more readily be effected.

The truth is that Melanchthon referred to himself as a “peripatetic who loved the golden mean.” The goal for which he strove consistently explains the fate of the Augsburg Confession after 1530. According to the custom of the day, he did in his capacity as the Confession’s “editor” have the right to file and polish the document even after its presentation. Was this privilege perhaps employed as a convenient device by which the editor was preserved from any suspicion that the content of the Confession was actually undergoing alteration?

This is certain, alteration was occurring. Believing the Confession was his private property, Melanchthon in several areas so altered the text that his “improvement” eventually gave rise to speaking of the Variata over against the original text presented at Augsburg.

It is that article which especially concerns us that fared the worst. In it Melanchthon certainly made concessions to both opponents. Even Calvin declared that he signed the Confession in the sense in which its author explained it. That is hardly surprising when we note the alteration Article X experienced. The original version read thus:

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise.

Now mark how it reads after Melanchthon’s “improvement”:

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that with the bread and wine there truly are exhibited the body and blood of Christ to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord.

One immediately notes the omission of the antithetical statement of the original text. In addition, what remains of the original, to say the least, permits of a totally different and also entirely incorrect meaning. In charity, we are allowing that with his alteration Melanchthon did not directly introduce heresy. Yet this is evident, he did speak in the fashion of the Oracle at Delphi. About the ambiguity of the revised version there can be no question as attested by the reaction to the alteration on the part of opponents on both sides. The Variata’s double-talk caused both sides to regard their positions as sheltered by the revision. Aware of the course Melanchthon was pursuing with apparent consistency, we will hardly disagree with the bold statement of Kolde, a professor at Erlangen in the 1880’s: “It should never have been denied that Melanchthon’s alterations involved real changes.”

It is a sad fact, sad yet at the same time absolutely true, that it was not the Lutherans but rather Dr. Eck who first discovered the Confession’s alterations. And he, with others of his church, used Melanchthon’s tampering to shame the Lutherans, charging them with disharmony in their own ranks and failure to know which was their authentic confession.

We must admit, to a certain extent the charges were justified. For some time the Lutherans used the Variata. We do not mean to imply that this use was tantamount to agreement with the revision. Possibly the continued use was attributable to ignorance of what had transpired. On the part of some, it was perhaps even a failure to recognize the seriousness and intent of the revisions. This we are safe in saying, the majority surely did not want to depart from the fine declaration of the Invariata’s Article X. To this they bore witness in their Preface to the *Book of Concord*:

Therefore we have decided in this writing to testify publicly, and to inform all, that we wished neither then nor now in any way to defend, or excuse, or to approve, as agreeing with the Gospel-doctrine, false and godless doctrines and opinions which may lie concealed under certain

coverings of words (in the Variata). We, indeed, never received the latter edition (of 1540) in a sense differing in any part from the form which was presented (at Augsburg).

Though they were, no doubt, and understandably so, somewhat ashamed because of what had happened, loyal Lutherans left no doubt about their feelings when they perceived what were Melanchthon's intentions. They were determined to counteract them. They roundly renounced the Variata and pledged allegiance "to the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession delivered to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the great Diet." When the Formula of Concord was adopted, they were careful to prevent a wrong impression this action on their part might give. This they wanted all to know, the adoption of another confession did not in any way indicate on their part disagreement with the Invariata.

Someone might now rise in Melanchthon's defense and ask, "What about the Apology's article on the Lord's Supper? This was written after the Augsburg Confession. This does not contain the various objectionable features just mentioned." That is true, but this must not be forgotten: the Apology originated in 1530. Melanchthon penned it immediately after the appearance of the Pontifical Confutation. Even Melanchthon's revisions of the Apology do not reveal the trend evident in the Augustana's revisions. The fact is, the tone of the Apology, though still temperate, is sharp when compared to that of the Augsburg Confession.

There may have been good reason for this also. In the Apology's article on the Lord's Supper Melanchthon was not endeavoring to show where the Roman Catholic position deviates from that of the Lutherans. He was rather trying to show that both parties recognize the Real Presence. Accordingly, no actual rejection of Transubstantiation is found, the reason being that no rejection was intended. The thrust of the Apology's article is Communion under one form or one kind as opposed to Communion under both kinds.

Though we in no way wish to deify Luther, it will serve the purpose of this historical review to note what was the Reformer's reaction to what was happening in the Lutheran camp. Very much conscious of what this was, Luther, just prior to his last visit to Eisleben, invited as his house guests some of the foremost Wittenberg theologians, including Melanchthon. In parting and in leaving stern words for them to ponder, he pleaded that they might remain steadfast in the Gospel. He stressed that, as he foresaw the situation, some outstanding brethren would fall away as soon as he (Luther) and a few others were dead. He added:

I do not fear the Papists. They are primarily rude, uneducated asses and Epicureans; but our brethren will do the Gospel violence because they went out from us, because they were not of us (I John 2:19). These will damage the Gospel more than the Papists.

Even more relative to our particular topic are the words Luther posted in the form of a sign over the entrance to his study. It read: "Our professors need to be examined regarding the Supper of the Lord."

From the following, addressed to George Major, it is evident that Luther pulled no punches no matter with whom and to whom he was speaking:

By your silence and palliation, you make yourself suspect. If you really believe as you confess in my presence, then say it also in the church, in the public lectures, in the sermons and private conversations, and strengthen your brothers and help the erring to regain the right way, and counter the saucy spirits, otherwise your confession is hypocritical and has no value. Whoever holds his teaching, faith and confession true and certain, he cannot stand in the same stall with others who perpetrate false doctrine and are given to it, nor can he speak favorably of the devil and his stooges. A teacher who is silent over against errors, and still poses to be a true teacher is worse than an evident fanatic and with his hypocrisy perpetrates more damage than a heretic, and is not to be trusted. He is a wolf and a fox, a hireling and a belly server, and despises and surrenders doctrine, the Word, faith, the Sacrament, churches and schools. Either he secretly couches under one blanket with the enemies or he is a doubter and wind watcher and wants to see how things will fare, whether Christ or the devil will succeed; or he is altogether uncertain

and not worthy to be called a scholar, to say nothing of being called a teacher, and does not want to anger anyone, nor speak the Word for Christ, nor hurt the devil and the world.

Though it occurred for the most part after Luther's death, the fruit of the pussyfooting and the lack of fortitude which the Reformer had detected and scorchingly renounced, surely did become evident. Luther died on Concordia Day. As he feared and often stated, with him died the *concordia* in the Lutheran Church. *Das grosze calamitas*, so dreaded by Luther, was not long in descending upon his dear church. In his last sermon preached at Wittenberg in 1546 Luther said:

I predict that if God does not give us loyal pastors and public servants, the devil will devour our church through factious spirits and will not desist and cease till he has finished it. That's his goal. Where he cannot accomplish it through the Pope and Emperor, he will effect it through those who are in accord with us in doctrine.

Were one to be satisfied with a shortsighted view of the situation, the conclusion that Luther's predictions failed would be almost inevitable. We are, for example, thinking of Melanchthon's reaction to the Augsburg Interim. This document, you recall, was an attempt to effect at least a temporary peace until a council (Trent) could be held. The Interim, executed in 1548, permitted the Lutherans to practice otherwise than the laws of celibacy demanded and to celebrate the Holy Supper under both kinds. It did, however, demand recognition of the Pope as the head of the church on the part of the Lutherans and the endorsement of articles allowing truth and error equal status. Melanchthon was among those who refused to accept the Interim. In fact, he at first spoke vehemently against it.

A longer view reveals a different picture. If it ever was sincere, Melanchthon's opposition to the Interim did not long endure. He definitely weakened and, together with his colleagues, let himself be persuaded to produce a statement called the Leipzig Interim. This document was unduly conciliatory and made damaging concessions to the Papists. The truth of this is borne out by the fears expressed by those who wanted to be loyal Lutherans and who had looked to Melanchthon for leadership following Luther's death. Further witness is offered by the strife among the Lutheran theologians. Flacius, later in 1561, attributed the change of attitude to a failure to regard the Pope as the Antichrist.

For the most part this finished Melanchthon with the loyal Lutherans. They were bitterly disappointed by him when they were hopeful of having him as their champion. They actually regarded him as a traitor and parted company with him. Small wonder, even Calvin took Melanchthon to task for the Leipzig Interim.

The sad consequence of what Schaff labels the mistake of Melanchthon's life was the evolution of factions in the Lutheran Church. One group was known as the Gnesio-Lutherans. As the name implies, this faction, including among others Flacius, Heshusius, and Amsdorf, pledged itself to total loyalty to Luther's doctrine pure. True, some of these later became extremists. Yet, under God, it is to them we are indebted for the retention of the truth in those trying times.

A second party is often labeled the silent center. These, to be sure, personally stood firm. But, at least for the first, they did not let their voices be heard in defense of the position they held. Thank God, these men, especially Chemnitz, Selnecker, and Andreae, did become vocal before it was too late and became most influential and instrumental in the production of the Formula.

The faction because of which the Formula of Concord originated and which especially concerns us in the present study was known by names like the Philippists, the Melanchthonians, the Interimists, the Synergists, and, above all, the Crypto-Calvinists. The last name mentioned pinpoints the issue involved in the controversy occasioning Article VII of the Formula. Though, understandably, there is some overlapping with other controversies of that day, we shall attempt to restrict ourselves to the essentials pertinent to the Lord's Supper. It is, of course, true that there are two articles of the Formula dealing with this Sacrament, namely Articles VII and VIII. We limit the present discussion to that which is contained in Article VII.

No doubt Francis Pieper hit it on the head when he stated, "...the error of synergism dulled his (Melanchthon's) discernment in matters of the Christian truth."¹ In the last analysis, it was synergism to which the theology of the Leipzig Interim is attributable. In the interest of synergism, the Interim made a conscious effort at compromise.

What accounts for this intrusion of a theology so diametrically opposed to what the Reformer had championed? Though we do not presume to know the full answer to this question, perhaps what some have considered the answer to be has merit. This is certain, the answer given contains a warning ever worth noting. The answer attributes the change in Melanchthon to his humanistic tendencies and his great admiration for philosophy. It certainly makes sense that whoever is inclined in the directions mentioned will attempt to balance reason against the Word of God. Obviously, the Lord's Supper offered Melanchthon fertile soil to exploit his so-called scholarliness. His method of operation was undoubtedly, to begin with, very subtle. Allbeck says, "...Melanchthon and his followers were hiding Calvinistic interpretations in their wordings of the doctrine of the Person of Christ and of the Lord's Supper" so that "secretly Calvinistic phrases in distinction to such as are truly Lutheran were being employed."²

Specifically, Article VII is directed against Reformed errors which "had wormed their way"³ into some of the Lutheran schools and churches. Particularly, it was the heresy lying concealed in Calvin's *Consensus Tigurinus*. Adorned with glittering and seemingly orthodox phrases, this document deceived many relative to the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. No wonder, Crypto-Calvinists hid behind such "good words and fair speeches," pretending to be loyal Lutherans, even occupying the highest offices in Lutheran circles.

It is not too difficult to detect Calvin's erroneous views as the dominant ones and largely responsible for the writing of Article VII. It is true, Calvin did append his signature to the Augsburg Confession and was even considered to be a Lutheran by some. But his signing of the confession occurred in 1539 or 1540. Likewise, he wanted it understood that his subscription was "in the sense in which the author himself had interpreted it." That means that his endorsement was of the Variata. Though the contention that "the finite is not capable of the infinite" was so formulated by Zwingli, essentially the same reasoning underlies Calvin's beliefs and shaped his theology.

In proof of the above, we cite the following words from Calvin's *Consensus Tigurinus*:

In so far as Christ is a man, He is to be sought nowhere else than in heaven and in no other manner than with the mind and the understanding of faith. Therefore it is a perverse and impious superstition to include Him under the elements of this world.⁴

Later Calvin bluntly declared that the words of institution of the Lord's Supper are "to be taken figuratively"⁵ and that the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper is only *respectu fidei*⁶ (with respect to faith).

Precisely the theology just stated in capsule form is the one which some Lutherans secretly adopted and gradually began to peddle in the place of the Real Presence. Boldly they made propaganda for this position while being and also acting as signatories to the Augsburg Confession. Being in the position of leadership in this guileful strategy, Melanchthon "must be regarded as the spiritual father of the Crypto-Calvinists."⁷

It is difficult to state exactly when Melanchthon's stance changed to the degree that it was apparent to others. He was, to be sure, always inclined in the direction of compromise, but for some time he was, at least in

¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), I, 91.

² Willard D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1952), p. 243.

³ F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 173.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

his public statements, positive and eloquent in his defense of what Luther had said and written. Though many loyal Lutherans were long in detecting it, the neo-Melanchthon apparently was born and developed in the years 1530–1540. This is certain, by the 1550's he no longer veiled his conversion to Reformed views. By this time, his previous silence over against heretics had virtually become a vocal approval of them. By this time, Calvin and his adherents considered Melanchthon to be in sympathy with their cause. Why wouldn't they? Now Melanchthon was accusing those teaching the Real Presence of being guilty of "bread-worship" and "cannibalism." He charged them with teaching "a new and foolish doctrine" because they insisted that Christ's human nature possessed omnipresence in consequence of the Personal Union. In 1557 he brazenly declared that "they (the Calvinists and Zwinglians) teach nothing foreign to the Augsburg Confession." We know, of course, [that he was speaking of the Variata]⁸, which was the only version of that Confession which Melanchthon at the time recognized.

What lay behind Melanchthon's Jekyll and Hyde maneuver could charitably be explained by his fear of dissension in a weak church. That thinking would fully account for the ambiguity so prevalent in much of his earlier writing, e.g., on the Lord's Supper.

Undoubtedly, because of Melanchthon's earlier prominence and his close association with Luther, Crypto-Calvinists found favorable soil in which to grow and spread. It is not surprising to what extent it penetrated the Lutheran schools and won adherents in former staunch Lutheran bastions. The situation must surely have driven the faithful defenders of confessional Lutheranism to tears. Well might they have lamented, *O tempora! O mores!* The following certainly sums up well what they had to experience:

Thus Wittenberg, during Luther's days the fountainhead of the pure Gospel and stronghold of uncompromising fidelity to the truth, had become a veritable nest of fanatical Crypto-Calvinistic schemers and dishonest Anti-Lutheran plotters...⁹

Among the Lutherans, one of the foremost to recognize Melanchthon for what he was and one of the first openly to oppose the Crypto-Calvinist chief was Joachim Westphal. In 1553 he authored a book (*Correct Faith Concerning the Lord's Supper*) in which he most positively contended for the scriptural and truly confessional Lutheran teaching with respect to Holy Communion. The treatment accorded Westphal by the Crypto-Calvinists in consequence of his bold confession was not too much unlike the mud-slinging of a political campaign. It calls to mind the practice of yelling especially loudly where the argument for a cause is unusually weak.

Likely the first and foremost incident that gave the impetus for constructing an article on the Lord's Supper in the Formula of Concord was the appearance of the publication called *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae or Corpus Doctrinae Misnicum or Philippicum*. This collection of symbolical books was published by Melanchthon's son-in-law, Caspar Peucer. The preface was written by Melanchthon himself. The publication boldly asserted error's right in the church and made for itself the claim that it advocated the position "of the steadfast and unanimous confession of the true and Christian doctrine in which the schools and churches of these Electoral Saxon and Meissen territories have remained and persevered in all points according to the Augsburg Confession for now almost thirty years against the unfounded false charges and accusations of all lying spirits."¹⁰ No wonder that loyal Lutherans reacted and boldly asserted concerning the altered Augsburg Confession contained in the *Corpus Misnicum* that Melanchthon

⁸ The phrase in brackets was added by the online editor. It is assumed to be the thought that was intended (but missing) in this sentence.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

has changed the said Augsburg Confession so often that finally he has opened a window through which Sacramentarians and Calvinists can sneak into it. One must watch carefully, lest in course of time the papists also find such a loophole to twist themselves into it.¹¹

Melanchthon died in 1560 soon after the appearance of the *Corpus*. The Philippists continued to parade their wares. Especially from 1570 on they published and broadcast documents and textbooks, often anonymously, which no longer concealed but rather commended the Calvinistic slant. The following statement of a catechism published in 1571 especially interests us:

The ascension was visible and corporal; the entire antiquity has always written that Christ's body is restricted to a certain place wherever He wishes it to be; and a bodily ascension was made upwards.¹²

There is no misunderstanding of the above statement possible; in no uncertain terms it intends to and does reject the doctrine of the Real Presence. Any Calvinist would be happy to append his signature and subscription.

Still the Philippists persisted in their attempts to deceive. Even when shown which position their catechism advocated, they insisted that they had not forsaken the true Lutheran position. Future statements were, if this was possible, even more brazen in advancing the Reformed teaching, but always under the guise of being loyally Lutheran. Those who adhered to Luther's stance concerning Christ and His two natures were openly slandered by being labeled Marcionites, Manichaeans, Arians, Nestorians, and the like. The Crypto-Calvinists insisted that what they said was so said merely to oppose a "local presence" and a Capernaite eating and drinking.

As the serious warning it should be for us, we do well to note another way which bred and fostered the Calvinistic invasion into Lutheran circles. It was the vast amount of Calvinistic literature used in Lutheran circles, even in Lutheran schools. How extensive this was is apparent from the lament of a Lutheran printer that Lutheran works went begging for sales. The treatment accorded such as were professedly Gnesio-Lutherans affords further proof of what was going on.

Perhaps success had been too easy to come by. Possibly "success" on the part of the Philippists accounts for the turn of events. Success seemingly made the Crypto-Calvinists cocky. It was undoubtedly a step prompted by foolhardy cocksureness which caused the tide to turn against them. Likely, this, more than anything else, united the loyal Lutherans and stirred them to action.

We have reference to the publication entitled *Exegesis Perspicua*. In this document the goal of the Philippists was so stated that any misunderstanding of it was no longer possible. Thus it was worded, "to deal a final blow to Lutheranism in order to banish it forever from Saxony."¹³ Here ambiguous language was no longer employed. Coupled with the deception perpetrated in producing and publicizing the *Exegesis*, this work opened the eyes of many who heretofore had been duped.

There were, to be sure, other incidents which unmasked the Crypto-Calvinists and generated zeal for action on the part of the loyal Lutherans. One we may call ploughing "with the heifer" of the Elector August of Saxony to win him for the Crypto-Calvinist side. Perhaps the trick was none too clever to begin with, but this is certain: it backfired. We mention another device which met a similar fate. It was the fabrication that Luther had in private discussion with Melanchthon admitted to having gone too far in his battle with the Sacramentarians, that he had overstated the case but was unwilling to retract lest all his other teachings also become suspect.

Fired by such devilish machinations, the loyal Lutherans now lost no time in swinging into action, both to thank God for opening their eyes and also in adopting measures to fortify that which had been attacked. One of the first and foremost means employed was a confession bearing an unwieldy label, namely *Brief Confession*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

and Articles Concerning the Holy Supper of the Body and Blood of Christ. This document at times also called the *Torgau Confession*, clearly repeated the true Lutheran position and pledged adherence to this position for all times.

The *Torgau Confession*, though well intentioned, left something to be desired. Haste to counteract the damage done by the Crypto-Calvinists may account for the confession's weaknesses. For one thing, it lacked the definite antithesis called for by the polemics now surely in place.

If we were to designate one person who more than the others let himself be heard in favor of a new confession and who also worked hard for it, that person was Jacob Andreae. It is true, the conference to which he presented his suggestions concluded its consideration with a negative decision concerning the matter. But this could not dampen Andreae's zeal. Having been one of those so long duped by the Crypto-Calvinists, he would not be silenced. If anything, it made him more determined. He made visits to loyal Lutherans; he preached sermons on the issues. Happily, he was well received; so were his sermons. In fact, his sermons were regarded so highly that suggestions were made that the contents of the sermons be adapted to a confessional structure and, mark it, be presented in "thesis and antithesis." The ensuing product received the name of the *Swabian Concordia*, also known as the *Tuebingen Book*. This became the first draft of the eventual *Formula of Concord*. It contained eleven articles of which that dealing with the Lord's Supper was No. 8.

Revisions did follow, to be sure. In these, it was Martin Chemnitz, above all, who played a dominant role. To him is attributed much credit for the "clarity and correctness which characterize" the *Formula*. In the revision, known as the *Swabian-Saxon Concordia* (of 1574) the article on the Lord's Supper experienced considerable alteration. It also became Article VII.

The fact that this latter version contained many quotations from Melanchthon is, apparently, the chief reason why it did not become the final form of the *Formula*. It seems some feared, and perhaps justifiably, that the inclusion of such quotations could provoke continued discussions and thus delay the acceptance of a much-needed confession.

Another document appeared on the scene in 1576. It is known as the *Maulbronn Formula*, a document considerably less extensive than the *Swabian-Saxon Concordia*. It avoided technical Latin terms and any reference to Melanchthon whatsoever. In this document the article on the Lord's Supper is No. 6.

In spite of the desire for an early appearance of the finished product, more deliberations did occur. The resultant form of the confession has the name *Torgau Book*. In reality, it was a combination of the *Swabian-Saxon Concordia* and the *Maulbronn Formula*, being a recasting and revision of the first with the additions of desirable features of the second.

Its completion occasioned great joy among the loyal Lutherans. Yet justifiable celebration was not permitted to minimize nor overlook the grave responsibility involved in accepting another confession. The *Torgau Book* was, therefore, sent to various princes and estates. It was to be thoroughly examined and tested by theologians.

In general, the response to the *Torgau Book* was favorable. The main objection concerned the confession's length. As a result a condensed version was prepared by Andreae, which we know as the *Epitome*. The original version was called the *Thorough or Solid Declaration*.

Because the responses, mentioned above, were considered at the Cloister Bergen and because it was there that the final editing was done, the revision was given the title, the *Bergic Book—1577*. On May 28, 1577, the *Bergic Book*, or also known as the *Formula of Concord*, existed as a completed document. Whether this date should be regarded as the one when the *Formula* gained confessional status in the Lutheran Church depends on whether the date of its actual completion is used or whether other factors, e.g., the subscription to it and the formal inclusion in the *Lutheran Book of Concord*, are considered determinative.

Part II: A Study of the Article's Content

If the review just completed served its intended purpose, it should have evidenced two factors: 1) the reason for and full justification of an article on the Lord's Supper in a confession sorely needed by the Lutheran

Church at the time in question; 2) the peculiar thrust which characterizes the article we are considering. Relative to this thrust, this must, however, not be forgotten: Article VIII, OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST, is also in the picture and complements the article before us.

Perhaps because of the one-sided coverage the final form of the confession accorded the doctrine in question, the authors seemingly were intent upon preventing a wrong understanding the article's limited content might create. They were concerned that no one at some future time consider Article VII to be a complete and exhaustive treatment of the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar. To that end, their introduction, both in the Epitome and Solid Declaration, summarizes the vast amount of historical background, pinpointing precisely which were the conditions in the church necessitating the article in question and determining its content and thrust. This is also apparent from the reduction of the *status controversiae* to this proposition: "Chief Controversy between Our Doctrine and That of the Sacramentarians..."

Somewhat enlarged, the proposition revolves about three questions: 1) whether bread and wine alone are present in the Supper; 2) whether the body and the blood are received only through faith, i.e. spiritually; 3) whether only believers receive Christ's body and blood. Whatever of Article VII may appear irrelevant to the points enumerated they wanted to have viewed as addenda required for the development of theses and antitheses pertinent to the three questions. The Epitome, in making its case, conveniently labels the respective divisions through the use of headings called *Affirmativa* and *Negativa*.

To a large degree, the *Affirmativa*, defined as the "confession of the Pure Doctrine concerning the Holy Supper against the Sacramentarians," restates and reformulates the historic position of loyal Lutherans. Though such a presentation was in no small measure repetitive, it was definitely not accidental. It was to demonstrate that the stance stated is the unanimous consensus of Lutherans loyal to God's Word. The Epitome presents a resume of what "we believe, teach, and confess" in ten concise theses. The Solid Declaration devotes a considerable amount of space to a demonstration of the declared consensus directly by means of citations from previous confessions and especially from the writings of the great Reformer himself.

The passages included accomplish their purpose well. The stance relative to the Lord's Supper now being defended by loyal Lutherans does not differ one iota from the position held in prior times on such pertinent issues as: what is present in the Sacrament, which role consecration plays, how the elements of body and blood are received, by whom they are received, and what, respectively, the reception means for believers and unbelievers.

Obviously, another step is vital to the presentation of the case. Is the position advocated by Luther and the Confessions scriptural? Now the authors come right to the heart of the entire issue: the words of institution. Already the solemnity of the occasion when the words were spoken, namely, that they were intended to be the Savior's last will and testament and an "abiding memorial," they argue, attests that a literal understanding of the words is indicated.

The same, they continue, is demanded by proper hermeneutics. Such hermeneutics renders impossible the interpretation of which the Sacramentarians are guilty. Hermeneutics simply does not permit that Jesus' words be "interpreted and explained as allegorical, figurative, tropical expressions, according as it seems agreeable to our reason, but with simple faith and due obedience to receive the words as they read, in their proper and plain sense...not to be diverted therefrom by objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to reason."¹⁴ To illustrate their intent, the framers suggest that the same attitude must be taken over against the words of Christ as Abraham showed over against the promise concerning Isaac, as impossible as this promise seemed to his reason.

The authors also emphasize the nature of the various scriptural accounts relative to the sacrament. Those of the Evangelists as well as that of St. Paul, they demonstrate, are a simple historical presentation which compel an interpretation consistent with the manner of presentation.

The interpretation on which the writers insist, they contend, is furthermore demanded by the analogy of faith. The employment of the word "communion" in I Corinthians 10:16 supports, yes, underscores the Real

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

Presence, for Paul is not speaking of “a spiritual, but of a sacramental or oral participation of the body of Christ” by believers and unbelievers, rendering Judas and such like him guilty of much more than judgment over against mere earthly elements.

As we next undertake the consideration of the *Negativa* of the seventh article, we do well to give some attention to the Formula’s condemnations in general. This aspect of the confession occasioned no small amount of battling between the framers and their followers. The question of the propriety of polemics was also involved. No doubt, political involvements prompted some to insist on eliminating entirely, or at the very least on stating in as mild manner as possible, anything of an antithetical nature.

The maneuvering of the anti-polemics is detectable early in the Formula’s development and fabrication. Almost at the outset, it was determined that no names, save that of Luther, should be mentioned in the document. This decision held—with but one exception. The final product contains no names of persons nor titles of books in its antithetical sections. The one exception is the name of Beza, the man often regarded as Calvin’s successor. This is certain, Beza opposed as strongly as anyone the Lutheran doctrines of the Real Presence and the Person of Christ.

In pursuing the developments leading to the Formula’s final form, one also detects the logomachy going on. Those involved were very concerned about a question like this: Which word should be utilized, the milder term *improbamus* (we disapprove) or the sharper *damnamus* (we condemn). The discussion and argumentation, in turn, led to considering such matters as these: Dare the impression be given that errorists rather than errors are being condemned? Would the omission of all condemnation not serve to establish the heresies of Zwingli and Calvin?

The battle was long and often severe. It continued virtually to the last days of the confession’s production. In general, we can say that the advocates of using the sharper *damnamus* prevailed. With respect to the article on the Lord’s Supper, the Augustana’s “we reject” was even strengthened and sharpened. In the Formula the antithesis is introduced thus: “we unanimously reject and condemn.”

In spite of the final outcome, namely, that definite and sharp antithetical statements were included in the confession, the infighting among the framers was no doubt wholesome. It no doubt served to keep out of the confession words and feelings which would be bound to irritate and antagonize, words, e.g., like the following:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the Sacramentarians, nor stand in the way of the Zwinglians, nor sit in the seat of the Zurichers.¹⁵

Gensichen expresses the happy solution which characterizes the final draft thus:

Clearly noticeable is the endeavor to steer clear of a dangerous onesidedness and to do justice to both demands—on the one hand the firmness needed for the sake of the issue and on the other hand the moderation and caution for the sake of love.¹⁶

Any outcome other than the one manifested by the finished product could have been sad indeed. To eliminate any and all statements rebuking sharply the errorists because of their errors would have been a departure from the good and sound practice of Christ, of the apostles, of Luther, and of previous Lutheran particular creeds. On the other hand, avoiding unnecessary irritation and antagonism demonstrates a restraint and moderation consistent with true charity, even for the errorists, to say nothing of love for those “misled” by the heretics. Perhaps the end result serves as a wholesome warning of a misuse of the *damnamus*, namely, employing such a device simply in the interest of condemnation and thereby giving rise to what has been termed a “doctrinaire attitude” or even a dead orthodoxy. Blessed is the church which practices polemics, but more blessed is the church whose practice of polemics is manifestly an act of love.

¹⁵ Hans-Werner Gensichen, *We Condemn* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), p. 118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

As we now direct our attention to the *Negativa*, we shall briefly list the heretical teachings both rejected and condemned. With respect to Rome, the *damnamus* pinpoints Transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass, Communion under one form or kind, and the adoration of the host. Except for Theodore Beza, no heretic of the other opposing party is mentioned by name. What is condemned is, according to Allbeck's summarization, the following:

...a purely symbolic interpretation of the words of institution; a merely spiritual presence in the Supper; bread and wine are simply signs of fellowship; the elements are only signs of the absent body of Christ; the elements are merely signs to confirm faith; the believer receives by faith only the power of Christ; the only mode of receiving Christ is spiritually by faith; Christ's body is locally present in heaven alone; a real presence in the Supper is impossible; faith produces Christ's presence, and the words of institution may be omitted; believers receive Christ, not in the Supper, but in heaven; the unworthy do not receive Christ in the Supper; worthiness consists, not in faith, but in man's own preparation; lack of such preparation brings condemnation; the consecrated elements should be adored; Capernaitic eating.¹⁷

We note, in passing, that Antithesis No. 19, a statement obviously against Roman heresy, in some way was included in the portion directed especially at Reformed false teachings, possibly to counter a charge against the Lutherans by the Reformed.

The Solid Declaration undertakes a refutation of the chief heresies which require more than mere mention in the interest of the thrust intended by Article VII. This is done, in the first place, by a recognition of two kinds of eating, with the Spirit and by faith on the one hand and the type which may be called oral or sacramental. The former occurs when God's Word is preached or read. This kind of eating, to be sure, also happens in the Lord's Supper. The second type is one which occurs only in the Supper. In the case of the eating done in faith it serves as a positive pledge of forgiveness. In the case of the unbeliever, the eating and drinking, though also of the body and blood, is unto the "judgment" indicated by the so-called binding or retaining key. Lest any misunderstanding occur as to who precisely is meant by an unworthy guest, the confession wants this clearly understood: With the unworthy guest it definitely is not designating one who is weak in faith. It declares positively that both a weak as well as a heroic faith cling to the same object.

When a person with Calvinistic leanings rejects the Real Presence, his attitude in this matter is, no doubt, at least in part attributable to his stance over against the Word itself, namely, that he regards it to be a "dead letter." At any rate, the fathers now proceed to show precisely what alone accounts for the Real Presence. That is the Word with its inherent omnipotence and efficacy. As is true of God, so it is likewise true of God's Word. No "variableness or shadow of turning" of the Word's power and ability are possible. To illustrate their point, the writers of the confession refer to God's declaration to our first parents, "Be fruitful, and multiply." As the words quoted continue unalteringly powerful and efficacious, even so does the Lord's pronouncement connected with His Supper.

What has been stated needs to be stated lest the conclusion be drawn that consecration or distribution or reception—all constituent elements of the words "this do"—effect the Real Presence. What has been said must also be said lest it be thought that faith is the efficient cause of the Real Presence and that, accordingly, those without faith do not receive the body and the blood. The validity and efficacy of the sacrament are in no way or in no degree dependent upon the ministrant or the recipient.

It appears that the Formula's authors deemed the other "various imaginary reasons and futile counter-arguments of the Sacramentarians" hardly worthy of mention, and, hence, these they dismiss with two brief remarks: 1) that Luther has well revealed how foolish they were; and 2) that no new arguments had been advanced since Luther's days.

¹⁷ Allbeck, *Studies*, p. 276.

As a reminder of the “reasons upon which” Luther rested his case “in this matter,” the writers then append Luther’s four points, namely: 1) Christ’s Personal Union; 2) God’s right hand is everywhere; 3) the reliability of God’s Word; and 4) that for God “many modes of being in any place” are possible, e.g., those of which He informs us in His Word, the local and comprehensible, the spiritual and hence incomprehensible, the heavenly or omnipresence as in the Real Presence, plus any other modes He might choose, not mentioned in His Word.

Nineteen terse antithetical points form the Solid Declaration’s conclusion. Essentially, these statements correspond to the Epitome’s twenty-one points constituting its *Negativa*.

This, then, along with eleven others, is the article composed in the sincere hope of bringing an end to the thirty year’s war in the Lutheran Church. Through this presentation on the Lord’s Supper and its various other companion articles, the loyal Lutherans sought to restore peace in a church whose very existence was threatened by most trying conditions within itself. While the Formula admittedly failed to accomplish completely its intended purpose, it did fully succeed in what we may regard as a greater mission: It presented the truth of God which leads to peace, in clear and exact language. This is the seventh article’s and so also the entire Formula’s highest boast.

That the Formula would fail in effecting what it was intended to achieve was predictable. Relative to peace, other than that in the heart of believers, it is ever true: “Peace, peace, and there is no peace.” The title, the Church Militant, is indeed apt and totally justified for the church in time. It would be folly to think that the church bearing the honored name of the great Reformer would be an exception. Our days surely afford all the proof necessary against harboring vain hopes. Today’s Lutheran Church is most assuredly “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.” Our time is one reminiscent of the post-Luther era. Warningly, our time cries out: He that has eyes to see, let him see.

Lamentable? Most certainly! Yet let our lamentation never prevent or in the least divert us from contending for the faith once delivered to us—also in the Formula of Concord.

It hardly need be said—or does it?—that the conditions surrounding us in the church, also in the Lutheran camp, strongly suggest faithful study of our confessions. No doubt, at least to a degree, the situation Dr. Walther bemoaned seventy years ago accounts for the sad condition within today’s Lutheranism. He contended that unfamiliarity with the Lutheran Confessions had occasioned the sad result that false teachers could invade the Lutheran Church, that Lutheran Christians could be shepherded by false prophets, and that good sound literature could be replaced with literature containing poison. The following, which appeared in the *Confessional Lutheran* in 1959, surely warrants careful reflection:

Much of the “fuzzy” thinking and superficial theology practiced by some in our ranks...has its source in Anglican works rather than Lutheran treatises; and the way to get such individuals...into orbit again is...through Lutheran sources. This, of course, requires some familiarity with Luther’s views and those expressed by our Confessions.

As important as our familiarity with our confessions may be, their status as the *norma normata* indicates clearly what, above all, needs our constant and prayerful searching. A brief item in a recent *Reader’s Digest* makes the point in question very well. Playwright George S. Kaufmann was suffering from a certain ailment. A friend suggested a doctor, recommending this particular doctor especially because he also had a remarkable knowledge of the theater. To his friend’s well-intentioned suggestion Kaufmann replied: “The kind of doctor I want is the one who, when he’s not examining me, is home studying medicine.” Enough said—especially in a day when activism is so apparent in the church and our ministry can so easily degenerate into a much-ado about *allotria* while we are duped into believing we are really about the Lord’s business.

The Lord’s advice is still good and timely: “To the law and to the testimony” (Is 8:20). We trust we still regard God’s counsel as that which is best for His church, for the church whose very existence cost Him so dearly.