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A CONFSSIONAL, DOGMATIC VIEW OF MARTYRDOM AND THE CROSS

by Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.

This article considers martyrdom and the cross from the perspective of the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition in a historical context.

Introduction

LET US CONSIDER MARTYRDOM and the cross from the perspective of the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition. However, please note that I am, in respect to my discipline, a historian. What that means in the context of this writing is that, while we will look at the confessional witness to martyrdom and the cross, we will also place this witness in a historical context for the sake of learning how Lutherans have actually lived the relationship that proceeds from their dogmatic commitments.

Luther's theological breakthrough has been more than adequately chronicled and examined. Scholars like Marc Lienhard and others have demonstrated the centrality of Christ.¹ And yet, despite the insightful and careful work of such thinkers, many continue to simplify Luther's thinking to the point of absurdity.

On more than several occasions within recent months, I have encountered people who should know better than to refer to Luther or "Lutheranism's" position on death and resurrection of Christ as "Gospel reductionism." The argument goes something like this: Luther taught rightly that we are saved by grace alone through faith because of Christ. However, this theological insight has been reduced to the crass and largely meaningless presentation of the Gospel, usually within sermons, to something like the following: you have sinned; Jesus died and rose to take away your sins; believe this and you are saved. This, again, is wrongly identified by some

as Gospel reductionism. It is not. Gospel reductionism, properly defined, is the teaching identified with the former faculty majority of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis during the 1960s and 1970s, which identified the Gospel as the one doctrine of the Scriptures and which limited the authority of the Bible to the argument that it carried this one doctrine of the Gospel. Care must be taken when using theological formulations that are deeply embedded in specific historical contexts.

However, this does not change the fact that such a presentation as outlined above, while it does communicate the basics of the Gospel, is in fact theologically reductionist and does not sufficiently capture the fullness of the biblical witness regarding the Gospel as it is rightly confessed by Lutherans.

Martin Luther, *Theologia Crucis* and *Life under the Cross*

For Luther, the Gospel centered in the cross of Jesus Christ was the core of biblical witness. His well-known thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation captures this reality: "He

deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."² With his excommunication from the church (*Exsurge Domine*), and condemnation at the Diet of Worms, Luther lived under the reality that his life might be forfeit at any moment for the last quarter century of his life.

Care must be taken when using theological formulations that are deeply embedded in specific historical contexts.

¹ Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg, 1982).

² Hermann Sasse, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," in: *Briefe an Lutherische Pastoren*, Nr. 18, trans. Arnold J. Koelpin (October, 1951), <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SasseCross.pdf>; Heino O. Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63 (1999): 169–204, <http://media.ctsfw.edu/303>.

In the context of that reality, Luther lived a remarkably “normal” life. He married and had children. He suffered health issues, like many of us as we age, and he did rather well for himself financially. Yet each day was lived under the threat of death — of martyrdom and the cross. This reality, and the difficulties of life in 16th century Germany, led Luther consistently to think about death. He would argue that this was not born of morbidity, but that it was part of the Christian life.

In 1527, Luther published “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague.” In it, he considered the variety of responses that Christians may have, both good and evil, to the threats to this body and life. Sounding remarkably pastoral, Luther states that, “Since it is generally true of Christians that few are strong and many are weak, one simply cannot place the same burden upon everyone.” Yet he recognizes that there are condemnable actions, for instance, in avoiding death. Of course, there are times one should not be condemned for such. On the other hand, simple fear of death can lead to condemnation. As he writes: “For instance, in the case of a man who is imprisoned for the sake of God’s word. In such a situation everyone has Christ’s plain mandate and command not to flee but rather to suffer death, as he says, ‘Whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven’ and ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,’” Matthew 10.”³

But what about if there is no issue of disobedience involved? Here Luther distinguishes between following one’s vocation and living out the life of faith. For example, if one is a parent or guardian and children are involved, one is obligated to care for them no matter what the risk to one’s own well-being. On the other hand, “Where no such emergency exists and where enough people are available for nursing and taking care of the sick and where, voluntarily or by orders, those who are weak in faith make provision so that there is no need for additional helpers, or where the sick do not want them and have refused their services, I judge that they have an equal choice either to flee or to remain.”

His conclusion is sound: “If someone is sufficiently bold and strong in his faith, let him stay in God’s name; that is certainly no sin. If someone is weak and fearful, let him flee in God’s name as long as he does not neglect

his duty toward his neighbor but has made adequate provision for others to provide nursing care. To flee from death to save one’s life is a natural tendency, implanted by God and not forbidden, unless it be against God and neighbor...”⁴

In a nice summary, he instructs Christians on how to think about death.

“You ought to think this way: Very well, by God’s decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and person where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely”⁵

It is all a matter of perspective. Because Christ has suffered death, once for all, we need no longer fear death. Indeed, Christ’s death is our death and his resurrection is our resurrection. As such, death no longer holds us in its terrifying grip. In his “A Sermon on Preparing to Die,” he points us away from ourselves to Christ:

“Tenth, you must not view or ponder death as such, not in yourself or in your nature, nor in those who were killed by God’s wrath and were overcome by death. If you do that, you will be lost and defeated with them. But you must resolutely turn your gaze, the thoughts of your heart, and all your sense away from this picture and look at death closely and untiringly only as seen in those who died in God’s grace and who have overcome death, particularly in Christ and then also in all his saints.

In such pictures death will not appear terrible and gruesome. No, it will seem contemptible and dead, slain and overcome in life. For Christ is nothing other than sheer life, as his saints are likewise. The more profoundly you impress that image upon your heart and gaze upon it, the more the image of death will pale and vanish of itself without struggle or

³ Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague,” in Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1989), 737–38.

⁴ Luther, “Whether One May Flee,” 739–40.

⁵ Luther, “Whether One May Flee,” 749, 755.

battle. Thus your hearth will be at peace and you will be able to die calmly in Christ and with Christ”⁶

The Augsburg Confession and Life Under the Cross

The immediate precursor of the Diet of Augsburg, and thus the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, was the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529. Though the First Diet of Speyer (1526) had decreed that until a general council for Germany be held, it was necessary for each estate to regulate its own religious affairs (*cuius regio, eius religio*), the present Diet mandated that it be illegal for any person to join any false faith or sect. This mandate prompted the evangelical party to register its protest and testimony that, “in matters pertaining to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls, every man must himself give an answer to God for his conduct so that in this respect no man can conceal himself behind other people’s acts or behind majority resolutions.” Further, because the doctrine of the evangelicals was founded upon the Word of God, they would not deny their position “unless we are shown to be in error by a Council, or by the holy, pure, divine biblical Scriptures.” Such a denial of their position would entail much more than a mere politicizing move in order to gain the emperor’s favor.

In order to combat the problems that faced the disunited church, Charles V called for a Diet at Augsburg in 1530. To present the evangelical faith at this meeting, the Elector of Saxony, John Frederick appointed Luther, Justus Jonas, Johannes Bugenhagen and Philip Melancthon with the task of summarizing the differences between the evangelicals and the papists. Melancthon, due to Luther’s absence at Augsburg, became the chief author of the evangelical’s apology. Though essentially completed by May 11, Melancthon continually involved himself in the process of revision. Still, the Confession, having been prepared and readied for presentation, was read for the first time publicly, June 25, 1530.

The document itself is ecumenical in scope and irenic in nature, seeking to downplay the differences of opinion

that were giving rise to hostilities between the evangelical party and the Romanists. Still, it is truly a Reformation document and positively puts forth the predominant ideas of the evangelical party. As such, it is necessary now that we look at this work in terms of its nature as a representative document of the evangelical cause.

The first article of the Augsburg Confession treats God. The evangelicals placed this article first, not only because it is fundamental, but also to show the catholic nature of the evangelical movement. This group did not reject the

time-honored formulations of the early church and its councils. Rather, they affirmed the expressions of the councils and thereby indicated their rightful place in the flow of the church and its history.

Articles II and II, which speak of original sin and the Son of God respectively, are also catholic in nature. The first confesses that all men are conceived and born sinful and so are in need of the Savior, who is confessed in the third. However, as one delves into the language of the articles more closely, the evangelical position begins to become clearer.

Though still adhering to the church’s historical position, the Confession now begins to hint at the principle which determines the very existence of the evangelical party. Article II condemns the Pelagians and those “who deny that the vice of origin is sin and who obscure the glory of Christ’s merits and benefits by contending that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.” Similarly, though Article II confesses the Chalcedonian formula regarding the person of Christ, his work of atonement is said to “reconcile the Father to us and be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men.” Further, Christ’s benefits are available to those whom he has sanctified, that is, those who believe in him. Thus, though not the primary purpose of the articles, Melancthon has still provided a clear espousal of the Reformation teachings of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*; his purpose in introducing these ideas becomes clear in the following articles.

Articles IV–VI form the heart and center of the Augsburg Confession and inform all of the preceding and following articles. These brief articles define what it

Luther’s followers,
like Luther himself,
lived under the
threat of martyrdom.
In some cases, they
were imprisoned and
deprived of their
livelihoods. In others,
they offered their very
lives as a confession of
their faith.

⁶ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die,” in Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 643.

means to be evangelical. Foremost among these is article IV which reads:

Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for of Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Rom. 3–4).

Coming immediately upon the heels of this statement concerning justification by faith apart from works is the article on the ministry of the church. One must recall that originally there were no titles separating the articles of the Confession, and thus, we find the important introductory words of Article V: "Ut hanc fidem consequamur." This article takes the thought of Article IV and develops the thought more fully:

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel. That is to say, it is not on account of our own merits, but on account of Christ. That God justifies those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

Furthermore, article VI also develops the personal ramifications of the article of justification as it pertains to the individual and his Christian life when it begins, "Item docent, quod fides debat bonos fructus parere":

Our churches also teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits and that it is necessary to do the good works commanded by God. We must do so because it is God's will and not because we rely on such works to merit justification before God, for forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith, as Christ himself also testifies, "When you have done all these things, say 'we are unprofitable servants'" (Luke 17:10).

One of the most obvious of these good fruits is the life of faith in Christ lived out in the context of the cross. Article XX, paragraphs 35–40, captures this reality:

Hence it may be readily seen that this doctrine is not to be charged with prohibiting good works, but rather the more to be commended, because it shows how we are enabled to do good works. For

without faith human nature can in no wise do the works of the First or of the Second Commandment. Without faith it does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross, but seeks and trusts in man's help. And thus, when there is no faith and trust in God all manner of lusts and human devices rule in the heart. Wherefore Christ said, John 15:5: Without Me ye can do nothing; and the Church sings:

Lacking Thy divine favor,
There is nothing found in man,
Naught in him is harmless.

The Roman Catholic Confutation responded to Article 20 of the Augustana by stating:

In the 20th article, which does not contain so much the confession of the princes and cities as the defense of the preachers, there is only one thing that pertains to the princes and cities: viz. concerning good works — that they do not merit the remission of sins, which, as it has been rejected and disapproved before, is also rejected and disapproved now. For the passage in Daniel is very familiar: "Redeem thy sins with alms," Dan. 4:27; and the address of Tobit to his son: "Alms do deliver from death and suffereth not to come into darkness," Tobit 4:10; and that of Christ: "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you," Luke 11:41. If works were not meritorious, why would the wise man say: "God will render a reward of the labors of his saints?" Wisd. 10:17. Why would St. Peter so earnestly exhort to good works, saying: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence by good works to make your calling and election sure?" 2 Pet. 1:19. Why would St. Paul have said: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name?" Heb. 6:10. Nor by this do we reject Christ's merit, but we know that our works are nothing and of no merit unless by virtue of Christ's passion. We know that Christ is "the way, the truth and the life." John 14:6. But Christ, as the Good Shepherd, who "began to do and teach," Acts 1:1, has given us an example that as he has done, we also should do, John 13:15. He also went through the desert by the way of good works, which all Christians ought to pursue, and according to his command, bear the cross and follow him. Matt. 10:38; 16:24. He who bears not

the cross, neither is nor can be Christ's disciple.

In response to the Roman party, Melancthon strongly countered this argument in Apology IV, "Of Human Traditions in the Church:"

45] And of the mortification of the flesh and discipline of the body we thus teach, just as the Confession states, that a true and not a feigned mortification occurs through the cross and afflictions by which God exercises us (when God breaks our will, inflicts the cross and trouble). In these we must obey God's will, as Paul says, Rom. 12:1: Present your bodies a living sacrifice. And these are the spiritual exercises of fear and faith. 46] But in addition to this mortification which occurs through the cross [which does not depend upon our will] there is also a voluntary kind of exercise necessary, of which Christ says, Luke 21:34: Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting. And Paul, 1 Cor. 9:27: I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, etc. 47] And these exercises are to be undertaken not because they are services that justify, but in order to curb the flesh, lest satiety may overpower us, and render us secure and indifferent, the result of which is that men indulge and obey the dispositions of the flesh. This diligence ought to be perpetual, 48] because it has the perpetual command of God. And this prescribed form of certain meats and times does nothing [as experience shows] toward curbing the flesh. For it is more luxurious and sumptuous than other feasts [for they were at greater expense, and practiced greater gluttony with fish and various Lenten meats than when the fasts were not observed], and not even the adversaries observe the form given in the canons.

The Death of Luther and the Interims — Context for Martyrdom and Confession

Luther had consistently expected to die during the great part of his adult life — either from bad health or at the hand of his antagonists. He lived until Feb. 18, 1546. Shortly after his death, martyrdom and the cross came upon his followers.

In June 1546, roughly four months following Luther's death, Charles V entered into his German War against the Smalcaldic League and soundly defeated the league at the battle of Mühlberg on the Elbe, April 24, 1547.⁷ Following his victory at Mühlberg, Charles convened what has come to be known as the "Armored Diet" at Augsburg (due to the presence of Charles' army). Charles, elated with his victory over the German princes, promised he would "teach the Germans Spanish." The Diet produced the document known as the "Augsburg Interim," written by Julius Pflug, Michael Helding and the Lutheran Johann Agricola, which was pronounced by the emperor May 15, 1548. The purpose of this document was both theological

While there were not a large number of Lutheran martyrs, their presence is irrefutable. Confessing the faith once delivered to the saints in accordance with the Augsburg Confession placed one in a dangerous situation.

and political in orientation; it sought to regulate outwardly and temporally the affairs of the church, until the Council of Trent would finally settle the religious controversy precipitated by the evangelicals. It reintroduced many of the abolished Roman Catholic practices such as the jurisdiction of bishops, transubstantiation and the seven sacraments. These emphases led to the characterization that the document was a first step back toward the full Catholicization of the evangelical churches.

Theologically, the document was craftily constructed. Julius Pflug incorporated much Romanist theology into the document, but did so in terms that some Lutherans found acceptable. It effectively neutralized the "battering ram of the Reformation," the twin points of marriage of priests and communion in both kinds, by building these points into the Interim, thus robbing the evangelicals of one of their most effective propaganda elements.

Following the proclamation of the Interim, Charles V went forth with his army and began to subjugate southern Germany to the Interim. The army was followed by

⁷ This war has generally come to be called the "Smalcald War." Let the reader keep in mind the purposes of Charles V in pursuing this tact. He was not simply a power hungry despot, but felt he was serving God and the church by trying to restore political and religious unity to the Holy Roman Empire. See above note 2. For treatments of the Smalcald League see Thomas A. Brady, Jr., "Phases and Strategies of the Schmalkaldic League: A Perspective after 450 Years," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983), 162–181; Theodore Hoyer, "The Rise and Fall of the Schmalkaldic League: The Treaty of Passau, 1552," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 23 (1952), 401–417 and "The Religious Peace of Augsburg," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26 (1955), 820–830.

priests who reconsecrated the cathedrals of the South to the Roman Catholic Church. Cities such as Strassburg, Ulm and Constance were subjected to the Interim, and political power was transferred from protestant families to those loyal to Charles' Habsburg agenda.

Meanwhile, Moritz of Saxony, who had betrayed Ernestine Saxony and usurped the electoral authority to himself by making a treaty with Charles V to the effect that Moritz would fight with the emperor in return for the guarantee of territory⁸ and the title of elector, helped the emperor in his efforts to subjugate Elector John Frederick by invading his land while he was away in the Smalcald War. But Moritz was uncomfortable with the provisions of the Interim and sought a Saxon solution that would enable him to gain the support of his evangelical subjects and at the same time keep the emperor from invading Saxony.⁹

Moritz's solution to the problem was to scheme to bring about a document that would satisfy the emperor both theologically and politically. He held a number of meetings in the summer and fall of 1548 to try and achieve this end. The first meeting was held in Meissen and the introduction to the Interim was read. The clause in the Interim that states that the Interim only applied to Lutherans and not genuine Roman Catholics exposed the document as a means to bring the Lutherans back into the Roman fold. At this time, the Lutherans looked to Philip Melanchthon for leadership. It was a time for confessing, but Melanchthon was not up to the challenge. Politically, he feared for the safety of the church, and thus he formulated his position in terms of spectatorship, making a distinction between the private opinions of the theologians and the public affairs of the Princes. Melanchthon's position was consistent, however; being a humanist, he held to the Greek principle that truth emerges through discussion and dialogue. Melanchthon was challenged in his views by Matthias Flacius Illyricus.¹⁰

⁸ Namely, the protectorate of the bishops of Magdeburg and Halberstadt.

⁹ The fear that motivated Moritz toward this end should not be underestimated; he expected the emperor to invade Saxony at any time and subject it to the same treatment which southern Germany had experienced.

¹⁰ Flacius, a former student of Luther, was at this time living in Wittenberg. For background on Flacius see Oliver K. Olson, "Matthias Flacius Illyricus, 1520–1575," in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 1–17; Oliver K. Olson, "The Importance of Matija Vlačić," *Dialogue* 15 (Summer 1976), 202–06; Jörg Baur, "Flacius — Radikale Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72 (December 1975), 365–80.

Flacius held, as Luther had before him, that God's truth is revealed in the Word and that the preaching of the Word of Truth binds one. Melanchthon's view held the field at Meissen; he saw only the "danger of confession" and proposed that each individual must decide these matters of conscience personally.

Moritz, still seeking an answer, called a meeting at Pegau, to which he invited Bishops Pflug and Helling. Pflug refused to bend on the question of the Mass Canon. Melanchthon, on the other hand, yielded on justification by faith *alone*, thus bowing to the pressure of Pflug, who sought to make room for the freedom of the will. Pflug held that while man cannot begin salvation, he is moved by the Spirit to good works which *are* meritorious. Thus the conclusion of Pegau is a compromise that gives up the evangelical principle of justification by faith alone — both faith and works are affirmed.

After Pegau, the idea of producing Saxon exceptions to the Interim emerged through the influence of Joachim of Brandenburg. At Torgau, the arguments began to shift from the theologians to the secular counselors, to whose ideas the theologians would subsequently react. Melanchthon continued to urge caution; Flacius implored confession. Many of the Roman Catholic rites began to find their way into the compromise documents (e.g., confirmation, the Litany etc.).

At Alzelle in the fall, Flacius realized the practical implications of the interim; gradual reintroduction of Roman rites on the way toward full restoration. In response, he coined the phrase *casu confessionis*, which expressed the principle that if a government required the use of a rite neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture, it became a matter of confession and one was conscience-bound to defy the order for the sake of the Gospel.¹¹

In November 1548, Saxon court officials presented a list of ceremonies to be reintroduced into the Lutheran Church. They also reestablished the authority of the pope and bishops. For all intents and purposes they yielded the entire Reformation. In the end, Melanchthon finally drew the line on two matters: 1. the Mass Canon; and 2. the

¹¹ The wearing of the white surplice became the symbol of this principle. Flacius held that those who robed themselves with the white surplice under the command of the government denied the Gospel. The principle served to establish a line of demarcation; this is how far one could go and absolutely no farther. *Nihil adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandalis*. Bernard J. Verkamp, "The Limits upon Adiaphoristic Freedom: Luther and Melanchthon," *Theological Studies* 36 (March 1975), 52–76.

blowing of things (consecrating oil). By achieving these two things, he felt that he had saved the Reformation from the hands of the papacy.

Moritz's Saxon compromise was accepted Dec. 22, 1548. However, it was never effectually practiced. Though Prince George von Anhalt completed by the spring of 1549 a *Kirchen Ordnung* that reflected the essentials of the Saxon compromise, mysteriously the emperor removed pressure from the Saxons in the first half of 1548, and so the need for compromise disappeared. Further, the document itself was not published, though epitome editions of it did appear with irregularity during the autumn of 1549.

The document itself is very complex and confusing. It reflects Melancthon's theology and some have claimed that it may be an accurate portrayal of his true positions, which he had kept hidden for so long. In it, he puts forth the positions in which he would correct some of the more dangerous ideas of Luther (e.g., justification by faith alone). At the same time, pressed into this Melancthonian work were certain propositions of Julius Pflug, the most famous of which is his statement concerning the freedom of the will, namely, that God does not draw man to salvation as a block or a stone.¹² Still, the Flacians immediately saw the dangers of the positions put forth at the preliminary meetings to Leipzig. It now remained for them to combat the prevailing view of Melancthon and his followers (appropriately called Philippists), much to the Princes' chagrin.¹³

The Magdeburg Confession

Flacius realized that he could not function most effectively while under the direct gaze of Melancthon and thus left Wittenberg in 1549. He eventually came to Magdeburg, where the last vestige of political and military resistance against the efforts of Charles V and Moritz was to be

found. In Magdeburg were Lutherans who held that they were truly committed to the doctrine which Luther himself had taught and which Melancthon and Wittenberg had surrendered.¹⁴ From this small pocket of resistance was soon to come forth one of the most pronounced of Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century.

Due to the continued military resistance on the part of the city of Magdeburg, Moritz was required, following the instigation of the imperial ban against the city, to put an end to the uprising. This Moritz did in earnest, though the city, militarily outnumbered six-to-one, "sang about themselves as the last remnant of Luther's cause — modern Maccabees."¹⁵

That the city was willing to resist the efforts of the Elector proceeds from their understanding of Luther's doctrine of resistance. Luther's early writings against the Peasant's Revolt and his clear separation of the temporal and spiritual realms gave way over time to a doctrine of resistance to the secular government, when it became manifest that authority would not permit the free proclamation of the Gospel. Manfred Hoffman summarizes Luther's later thought in the following manner:

In order to preserve external life in this world God has instituted three orders, the political, economic and the ecclesiastical, which one and all are endorsed and sustained by God's authority in the first table. In other words, Christ did not abrogate political and natural law but authenticated and confirmed it. The private citizen's right to self-defense is therewith affirmed. On this basis Luther develops now the argument that the pope, and the emperor as his henchman, must be resisted by everyone because the pontiff belongs to none of the three orders and therefore possesses public authority in neither. Yet since he interferes destructively in all of them he is the "apocalyptic beast

¹² "Although God does not justify man by the merit of his own works which man does, but out of mercy, freely, without our merit, that the glory may not be ours, but Christ's, through whose merit alone we are redeemed from sins and justified, yet the merciful God does not work with man as with a block, but draws him, so that his will also co-operates if he be of understanding years." *Leipzig Interim*, "How Man is Justified before God," in Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord; or the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. With Historical Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Indexes* (Philadelphia: G. W. Frederick, 1893), 2:262.

¹³ One effort in which Flacius was fully victorious dealt with the compromise document itself. In a brilliant propaganda move, Flacius immediately dubbed the compromise document the "Leipzig Interim," thus attaching it inseparably in the minds of those who heard the title to the document it sought to replace, namely the hated "Augsburg Interim." The work never lost the stigma attached to this epithet, though the original formulators never intended such a title for it.

¹⁴ Robert Kolb describes the two opposing parties ("Parties, Princes, Pastors, and Peace," *Academy* 34 [1977], 4): "Politically, both parties welcomed the assistance of the prince, but the Philippists were more ready to compromise their own positions to avoid tensions with their government. In contrast, Gnesio-Lutherans vociferously objected to governmental interference in the affairs of the church, and a number of them were sent into exile — a several more than once — for resisting the encroachment of the powers of the prince of the city council in the domain of the church. Ecclesiastically the Philippists often favored continuing medieval usages (such as liturgical practices) while the Gnesio-Lutherans were generally more anxious to cleanse remnants of 'papism' from ecclesiastical usages."

¹⁵ Olson, "Flacius," 4. For a brief description of the siege see Ronald Ernst Diener, "The Magdeburg Centuries: A Bibliothecal and Historiographical Analysis," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1978, 31–36.

from the abyss” Daniel prophesied (11:36), or, in Paul’s words (II. Thess.2:3), the “adversary of God,” the “man of sin,” the “son of perdition.” This rabid animal must be promptly slain by anyone coming upon it. And the emperor, making common cause with it, must be resisted by anyone being coerced into false worship. Such is the unavoidable necessity in this time of extreme calamity.¹⁶

The Magdeburgers professed that they were following the tradition of thought first established by Luther, and as such, were not the ones who had transgressed the law of God. In actuality, they themselves were the remnant of God who alone confessed him truly in the present age. As such, they made arrangements to make their confession known throughout the land that others might behold the truth of the Gospel as it was still confessed at Magdeburg.¹⁷

The document that came forth, signed by the pastors and other ministers of the Magdeburg Church, set forth the doctrine of the “inferior magistrates.” Hildebrandt writes:

The main argument in this document was that the Gospel permits all natural protection authorized by natural laws, even where the emperor was concerned, and also that princes had an absolute

duty to defend the true Christian religion and their subjects against threats or attacks from fellow princes, or indeed the emperor. They were entitled, and obliged, to resist the Pope’s attempts to re-establish idolatry in their territories, just as if the Turks were trying to introduce the Islamic religion into Germany.¹⁸

Further, this doctrine which the Magdeburgers professed was not “fanatical,” that is to say, unknown in the history of the empire.

But it is of crucial significance that the Magdeburg pastors avoided the notion of the “radical reformation” that each human being had some inherent right to resist. The distinction from the “radical reformers” or the *Schwärmer*, as they once were called, is that the Magdeburg pastors specified that the obligatory resistance was to be carried out through the structures of concrete Christian vocations (*Ämter*) ... It was that combination, the doctrine of obligatory resistance (approved by the Formula of Concord) and the related doctrine of vocation, which made up the historically successful doctrine of the “Lesser Magistrates.”¹⁹

The Magdeburg confessors did not seek the designation of “radicals” for themselves, nor did they seek political anarchy. Their actions arose from a responsible conviction that they held to the true teaching of Luther and that it was their God-given responsibility to ensure that they maintained the evangelical principle, even if it meant that they had to face persecution because of it.

Yet a crucial question remains: How can one reconcile the doctrine of resistance in the face of Luther’s earlier advice to serve God by serving one’s neighbor with the Magdeburg Confession’s doctrine of the

16 Manfred Hoffman, “Martin Luther: Resistance to Secular Authority,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 12 (1984–85), 47. See also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 199–202. Skinner here concludes on the basis of a passage from Luther’s table Talks (202): “The implication is that if he (the emperor) fails to perform the duties for the sake of which he has been constituted a public person, it is lawful to resist him in the same way that we are permitted to resist any other private individual who offers us unjust violence.” See also Thomas A. Brady, Jr., “Luther and the State: The Reformer’s Teaching in its Social Setting,” in *Luther and the State in Modern Germany*, edited by James D. Tracy, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies; v. 7 (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1986), 40: “Luther’s fear of disorder and mistrust of the Common Man endured through his career. They were not touched by volte-face after the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, when he reversed his condemnation of resistance to the emperor. At most this decision, which smoothed his prince’s path into the Schmalkaldic League, represents a shift in his location of true authority (Obrigkeit) from the emperor to the princes. Nor did the famous affirmation of resistance by Lutheran pastors at Magdeburg in 1550 contradict this picture, for the principle involved there — the duty of inferior magistrates to resist under certain circumstances — derived from Martin Bucer and Landgrave Philip of Hesse, not from Luther and Saxony.”

17 Esther Hildebrandt (“The Magdeburg Bekenntnis as a Possible Link Between German and English Resistance Theories in the Sixteenth Century,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 71 [1980], 234) writes: The confession “was therefore never intended to be of interest simply to the Magdeburgers themselves, and this was made quite clear near the beginning of the treatise where it was stated that it was hoped that what was said would encourage Protestants everywhere.”

18 Hildebrandt, 230; Oliver K. Olson, “Theology of Revolution: Magdeburg, 1550–1551,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (April 1972), 67: “It is quite clear, then, that in Magdeburg ‘religious impulse and political tradition’ conspired together, so that their ‘effects were mutually increased.’ Magdeburg’s political power came directly from God himself and that should the situation demand it her [sic] might be directed against an erring emperor himself.”

19 Oliver K. Olson, “Politics, Liturgics, and Integritas Sacramenti,” in *Discord, Dialogue and Concord: Studies in the Lutheran Reformation’s Formula of Concord*, edited by Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 78. Hildebrandt also writes (231): “This idea that the princes and inferior magistrates held their power direct from God in their own right contributed to a notion of corporate responsibility toward the empire which could, if necessary, bypass the emperor himself. The emphasis on the electors as a collegial body, ruling with the emperor, and possessing the power to depose him, was traditional, as was the concept of the integral role which all the princes played in the government of the empire.”

“Lesser Magistrate?”

In the 19th century, Heinrich Heppé wrote, “In the Magdeburg Confession for the first time the statement that Luther was the prophet sent from God, whose voice is the only valid one in the church, is a dogmatic statement.”²⁰ This is certainly a provocative statement, and in a certain sense, an accurate one. For in the Magdeburg Confession²¹ one finds the first occurrence of Luther’s writings acting as a normative principle for the Lutheran Church. But though this may seem too dogmatic and a rejection of the protestant principle, in fact it is not. The Magdeburgers confess that their theology is in accord with Luther’s, who in turn gave form to the Augsburg Confession, which itself is a catholic document proceeding from the Scriptures themselves.²² The work is

²⁰ Heinrich Heppé, *Die Entstehung und Fortbildung des Luthertums* (Cassel: J. C. Kreiger’schen Buchhandlung, 1863), 213. Heppé’s thought has recently been characterized with the label “melanchthonian.” If this is truly the case, and the author who made this representation builds a good case, then Heppé’s remarks in this regard become more understandable. Lowell H. Zuck, “Heinrich Heppé: A Melanchthonian Liberal in the Nineteenth Century German-Reformed Church,” *Church History* 51 (December 1982), 419–433. Zuck asserts (424–26) that Heppé “believed that evangelical Protestantism entered history as a longing for personal redemption, not as a dogma and a doctrine.” Not surprisingly he found fault with the “Genuine Lutheran” (Flacian) party which appealed to “an excessively literal understanding of Luther’s teachings” and “was no longer content with grounding its Protestant tenets on scripture but constructed a system in which every proposition had its unalterable dogmatic background.” See also Lowell H. Zuck, “Melanchthonianism and Reformed Theology in the Late Sixteenth Century” in *Controversy and Conciliation: The Reformation and the Palatinate*, edited by Derk Visser (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986).

²¹ The German title is *Bekennntnis Unterrichts und Vermanung der Pfarrhern und der Prediger der Christlichen Kirchen zu Magdeburg* (Magdeburg: 1550). The confession will hereafter be abbreviated MC. The text of the confession incorporated in this paper is from a translation by Oliver K. Olson, formerly of Marquette University. A recent translation appeared just after this essay was prepared. See *The Magdeburg Confession: 13th of April 1550 AD*, Matthew Colvin, trans., George Grant, intro (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012). See also David M. Whitford, *Tyranny and Resistance: The Magdeburg Confession and the Lutheran Tradition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001).

²² Heppé’s criticism is inaccurate in that it sees Luther as the only voice that has normative value for the church. In fact the Magdeburger’s use Luther as a norm only in so far as he agrees with the principle of justification by faith as held by the church catholic throughout the ages. The progression is as follows (MC, preface): “First, then, in this text we simply repeat in brief, and will not now dispute, the chief articles of doctrine brought to light by Luther and presented at Augsburg as Christian, orthodox and catholic, and until now unconquered, as those which agree with the prophetic and apostolic doctrine, with the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian creed, together with the purer church of all times.” Again the author writes (MC, Chief Articles of Christian Doctrine): “We refer the reader to the many writing of the man of God, Martin Luther, and of those like him, for a more complete treatment and for solid foundations. And as often as necessary we

characterized throughout by a firm upholding of the doctrine of justification by faith.

Still the formal principle is very prominent in the preface where Luther is mentioned no less than nine times. The writer here does not invoke Luther simply as an authority in his own right, but because Luther is a sure and certain place to find the evangelical principle explicated. Luther, in the organic tradition of the Scripture, the ecumenical creeds and the Augsburg Confession, has professed the concept of justification by faith and therefore is a trustworthy authority on this matter. Not that Luther or the creeds take precedence over the Scriptures, for the Word of God alone is the basis on which the Magdeburgers build. “The Major premise we shall prove in the second part of our book with solid arguments from the Word of God.”²³ Like both the Augsburg Confession and Smalcald Articles, Scripture is not referred to in a mere formal sense, as a disjointed reservoir of texts that can be dipped into simply to prove a point, rather the Scripture is solicited as evidence of the parity between the Gospel which they proclaim and which is likewise incorporated into the Magdeburg text.²⁴

Still Luther and his doctrine as expressed in the Augsburg Confession remain the gauge by which doctrine is judged. Why such a strong emphasis on Luther? The Smalcald League had been recently defeated, and the Interim imposed by the emperor, but far worse, the evangelicals themselves had capitulated the center of the Reformation and the confession of Luther to the Romanists by giving up the *sola gratia* in the Leipzig Interim. The historical situation of the Magdeburgers forced them to include, as strongly as they did, the subscription to the writings of Luther. They felt that unless they confessed the work of this man of God, it would be lost forever.²⁵

ourselves are ready to demonstrate the sources and true foundations of all this doctrine and of our confession from the prophetic scriptures, the apostles and the consensus of the purer church of all ages.” This citation marks the only mention of Luther in the doctrinal section of the Magdeburg Confession apart from the epilogue. Still, though Heppé wrote in a negative sense, it is likely the Magdeburgers would have taken it as the highest honor.

²³ MC, Syllogism.

²⁴ See above notes 9 and 24.

²⁵ Heppé fails to take into account the historical circumstances which led to the Magdeburger’s motives in producing the Confession. As a result his criticism mentioned above is too strong. The Magdeburg Confession appeals to Luther because he agrees with the purer church of all ages and because his confession is in danger of disappearing.

Nevertheless, the confession of Luther's, which is the doctrine of Christ himself, was first made at Augsburg, out of the deep faith and to the glory of the confessors, not, once again in Augsburg, has been cast aside through a horrible crime against the conscience by many German princes and estates, subdued only the fortune of the recent war.²⁶

So we find in the Magdeburg Confession that Luther is appealed to as a formal principle, derived from and standing in the stream of the church catholic. As such, he is depicted in both prophetic and Pauline terms. The first sentence of the preface reads: "By his immense favor, God raised up Dr. Martin Luther, without doubt, the third Elijah,"²⁷ who proved this status "with many signal testimonies and successes."²⁸ Further, he "delivered to us" the "articles of doctrine" which enable us "to confess Christ as did the thief on the cross."²⁹ Additionally, by bringing these doctrines to light, Luther inspired the German princes to present before Caesar and the whole Roman Empire the truth of the Gospel so that "the poor sheep with only this confession of truth immediately stopped the mouths and jaws of the hostile wolves."³⁰

However, all talk of a formal principle in this document presupposes a material principle that guides and governs the whole piece. The first section of the document is divided into seven sections: 1. God and the distinction of persons; 2. Creation, the cause of sin and the chief kinds of sin; 3. Law; 4. the Gospel and Justification; 5. the Sacraments; 6. the Church, its ministers and their powers; 7. the political and domestic orders and the powers of each. This arrangement proceeds from the Confessors purpose of explicating the Christian faith according to Luther's, as expressed in the Augsburg Confession and the

church catholic, as it finds application in the doctrine of resistance.

The reason for this division: All knowledge of God is knowledge whether of his nature or of his will; disclosed whether in creation or in his revealed Word, so that by the ministry of law, Gospel and sacraments through men called to this ministry a church may be brought forth, and that the domestic and the political orders should serve primarily the growth of the church, or, when they do not pursue the latter goal, that they serve at least civil society.³¹

These articles are arranged in such a manner as to present the chief articles of faith as confessed by the evangelical party in the church with the result that the reader will see that the application of the evangelical principle in the Magdeburger's context was the doctrine of resistance. As in the cases of both the Augsburg Confession and the Smalcald Articles, the chief unifying thought of the Magdeburg Confession is its insistence on the doctrine of justification by faith. In this sense the Magdeburg Confession is truly a Lutheran confession. In like manner to its predecessor, the Augsburg Confession, the article on God contains the Nicene reference to the Trinity and the Chalcedonian formulation concerning the person of Christ and breaches the article of *sola fide*:

He will render to each one according to his deeds, that is, to those who have repented and believed in Him, He will grant possession of the divine inheritance in eternal life; the others (who are) impenitent and unbelieving He will subject together with the devils to the punishment of damnation and eternal death.³²

In the article on the law, one finds a positive statement of the evangelical principle.

For God does not want to show His own will in the law, that men by performing the law can attain justice and life though its works, or that they ought to strive to attain (these), but that despairing and frightened by their sins and the wrath of God against their sins, they, mortified by the law, seek and receive in the Gospel liberation obtained through Christ, from sin, from the wrath of God and death and have righteousness through faith

²⁶ MC, Preface.

²⁷ The referent here is Mal. 4:5-6: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." This coming was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist (see Luke 1:17). The first to call Luther the "third Elijah" was Zwingli, who did so in 1519.

²⁸ The language here invokes the biblical picture portrayed in Joshua 1:6-9.

²⁹ See 1 Cor. 15:3 where Paul tells of how he "delivered over to you as of first importance" the doctrine of Christ's atonement and the Sacrament of the Altar.

³⁰ The imagery here conjures up the impression of Paul appealing to Caesar and testifying before him, as well as the early Christian accounts of the martyrs (see "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas," chapter 6, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, edited by Herbert Musurillo [Oxford University Press, 1972]).

³¹ MC, The Chief Articles of Doctrine.

³² MC, Chief Articles, Chapter 1.

in Him.³³

The article on justification, Chapter 4 in the Confession, forms the heart and center of the document. It is the longest article in the Confession and presents the Reformation teachings of *Solus Christus*,³⁴ forensic application of Christ's righteousness,³⁵ *sola fidei*,³⁶ alien righteousness³⁷ and others. The evangelical principle is explicated with all force as the nucleus of the Christian faith and the means by which all doctrine is to be judged. Article after article is determined by the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei* as explicated in Chapter 4.

So, when the Confession rejects the views of the other parties, it also does so solely on the basis of the article of justification. The adiaphorists, including Philip Melancthon especially, are rejected because they 1) do not offer a distinction between inherent righteousness and the alien righteousness of Christ; 2) they reject the *exclusivum*, namely, that man is justified *sola fidei* and say that good works are necessary to salvation; and 3) they hold to the freedom of the will before the coming of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ The case with the Papists and other sects is similar. The affinity that the Magdeburg Confession displays to Luther's language concerning the papacy in the Smalcald Articles is striking:

They give him (the pope) power not only over the living but also over the dead and over the angels themselves. By these things it comes to pass that instead of the Vicar of Christ, he is truly the Vicar of the devil, and Antichrist, ruling in the temple of God, as prophesied by Daniel, Christ and Paul.³⁹

Thus, when we come to the seventh chapter, which acts as a springboard into section two on the doctrine of the lesser magistrates, we find the necessary application of the evangelical principle.

In these things, just as the subjects of necessity owe

obedience to their magistrates, the children and the rest of the family to their parents and to the Lord, for the sake of God, so also by contrast, when magistrates and parents, themselves seduce their (charges) from true piety and decency, they are not owed obedience from the Word of God; for when they make a practice of persecuting true piety and decency, then they empty themselves of the honor of the magistrate and parents in God's sight, and the consciences of their charges and from the ordination of God are now made the ordination of the devil, against whose order their can and ought to be resistance.⁴⁰

Thus, when the Magdeburg Confession appealed to the writings of Luther for the justification of its position, it did so not simply in a formal sense, but rather invoked the evangelical principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*, which were embodied in the writings of Luther.⁴¹ Like the Augsburg Confession and Luther in the Smalcald Articles, the Magdeburg Confession is a document centered on the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei* as a type of all-Christian confession. The Confession is a pastoral document that rehearses the evangelical faith in such a manner as to show its application in the life of the Christian, when he must obey God rather than men. This principle proceeds from the articles of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei* as their natural outgrowth, just as the confessors entered their protest at Speyer in 1529 and assembled before the Empire at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. This same principle moved Luther to compose his Smalcald Articles as both his testament of faith and for presentation to the proposed council at Mantua, and now it finds expression in the persecution that has come upon the city of Magdeburg, on account of its refusal to concede to the papistic Interims. The confessors of Magdeburg do not simply dogmatize the evangelical principle on the basis

³³ MC, Chief Article, Chapter 3.

³⁴ "by him and on account of him alone he freely wills to recover those who repent and believe in the name of his Son."

³⁵ "When God remits or does not impute sin to a man, to whoever he wills, when together with that remission is conjoined absolution from the punishment of eternal death, as is a courtroom remission of the guilt has added remission of the civil penalty."

³⁶ "The application (of Christ's righteousness) is made by faith alone in adults who repent in this manner."

³⁷ "God at the same time also imputes the total righteousness of the Son, that is, he pronounces that they have all the virtues of his Son, and so in his sight they are just with an alien, or (Christ's) own righteousness."

³⁸ MC, Chief Articles, Chapter 6, 10.

³⁹ MC, Chief Articles, Chapter 6.

⁴⁰ MC, Chief Articles, Chapter 7.

⁴¹ The Formula of Concord followed the Magdeburg Confession in this point. Seebass writes (78): "only those writings were included in the Formula of Concord 'in which Luther reinterpreted the confessional and catechetical tradition of the church. The choice thus decided was not only historic but was, in a deeper sense, also substantially motivated.'" And again (79): "It could seem that the Formula of Concord had elevated Luther and his writings to the canon of the confessions of faith. This, however, did not happen. The formula intended to accept Luther only 'in wisdom and measure, as Doctor Luther . . . expressly asserts by way of distinction that the Word of God is and remains the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no one's writings dare to be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it.' Luther's writings are indirectly subordinated to confessional writings, and these themselves are considered the key to the Scripture and guide to its use."

of Luther's writings as a formal principle; they were faced with a life and death battle for the very survival of Luther's confession. Melancthon and the Philippists had betrayed the doctrine of the Lutheran Church as embodied in the Augsburg Confession and Smalcald Articles. At the risk of their goods, fame children and wives, the pastors and other ministers of the Magdeburg Church confessed the truth of the Gospel as it had been handed over to them by their spiritual father, Martin Luther. They were ready to face martyrdom and the cross. And they did.

Examples of Martyrdom: Antonius Corvinus and Baldo Lupetino

Luther's followers, like Luther himself, lived under the threat of martyrdom. In some cases, they were imprisoned and deprived of their livelihoods. In others, they offered their very lives as a confession of their faith. Two examples follow:

Antonio Corvinus was born Feb. 27, 1501.⁴² Given his uncertain parentage (he may have been a bastard), it is not surprising to find that he entered the Cistercian monastery in Loccum, Lower Saxony, in 1519. Shortly thereafter, he became a supporter of Luther and was driven out. He used the opportunity to study at Wittenberg under Luther and Melancthon, and later served pastorates in Goslar and Witzenhausen. He advised Philip of Hesse, drafted a church order, and led the reformation in northern areas of Germany.

In 1548, the Roman Catholic ruler Erich II (of Braunschweig-Calenberg-Göttingen) accepted the Augsburg Interim. Corvinus, along with other Lutheran pastors, protested vigorously against the Interim, which led to his arrest and jailing, Nov. 2, 1549.

Shortly before his incarceration, he wrote to Melancthon and encouraged him to reject the Interim, also encouraging him to "return to his pristine candor, his pristine sincerity and his pristine constancy," and "to think, say, write and do what is becoming to Philip, the Christian teacher, not the court philosopher." Peace, indeed, was desirable, but it must not be obtained by distracting the churches. Christ had also declared that He did not come to bring peace, but the sword. Even the pagan Horace has said: "Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum

ferient ruinae." How much more should Christians avoid cowardice! One must not court the cross wantonly, but it must be borne courageously when for the sake of truth it cannot be avoided, etc.⁴³

Of course, Corvinus did not persuade Melancthon. Happily for Corvinus, his conditions were relatively comfortable, perhaps defeating the purpose of trying to force his acceptance of the Interim. He was released, Oct. 1, 1552. He re-entered active ministry in Hannover and died shortly thereafter, April 11, 1553. Bente claims that it was his incarceration that led to his death.

Baldo Lupetino was born into Venetian nobility, though his birth date is uncertain (either 1492 or 1502). In the mid-1530s, he entered a Franciscan monastery in Lower Labin. During Lent in 1541, he openly advocated Lutheran ideas, denying the freedom of the will and arguing that Christ had fully atoned for human sin. He also reportedly addressed the doctrine of predestination. He was arrested in December 1542 and tried in 1543, 1547 and 1556, where he was sentenced to life in prison and then death.⁴⁴

Oliver Olson argues, "As long as the Smalcald League remained in power, Venice was reluctant to offend the evangelical princes. But on the very day of the League's defeat, April 24, 1547, Doge Francesco Dona opened his city to the Sant' Uffizio and appointed three lay representatives of the Council of Ten, Nicola Tiepolo, Francesco Contarmi and Antonio Venier, to cooperate with the clerical members, the Patriarch, the Father Inquisitor and Della Casa as Sages on Heresy — *Savii sulv eresi*."⁴⁵

⁴³ F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 101.

⁴⁴ Luther himself wrote regarding Lupetino: "We have found out that your country Italy is the location of pious and honest men in sad trouble, the devotees of pure Christian faith. It is said that they are going through hard persecutions only because they embraced the Gospel and because they want to glorify it and spread it everywhere. Therefore we, who carefully try to follow the letter of the Holy Gospel and uphold it in all churches, are overwhelmed with deep and honest sympathy toward those God-loving men; because our Christian hearts understand the great suffering and bitter tears of those who suffer for the evangelical truth. As we have been notified that, by the order of the Roman Pope, among other men Baldo Lupetino has also been charged, a man with noteworthy virtues and profound knowledge, and that he is locked up in prison with his life in danger, we felt that it is our duty to intervene on his behalf and on the behalf of others." Martin Luther's Briefwechsel, Vol. 10, Briefe 1542–1544, Nr. 3884 (pp. 327–328); See also Mirko Breyer, "About the man from Istria, friar Baldo Lupetino (1502–1556)," *Istra* 14/2 (1976): 38, http://www.flacius.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=110%3Aluthero-vo-pismo&catid=57%3Abaldo-lupetino&Itemid=64&lang=en, accessed August 4, 2013.

⁴⁵ Olson, "Baldo Lupetino: Venetian Martyr," *Lutheran Quarterly*: 11.

⁴² Nanne van der Zijpp, "Corvinus, Antonius (1501–1553)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, [http://www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Corvinus,_Antonius_\(1501-1553\)](http://www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Corvinus,_Antonius_(1501-1553)), accessed August 4, 2013.

Following the last trial, he was officially degraded and executed, likely during the night of Sept. 17–18, 1556. Olson describes the execution as follows:

At the dead hour of midnight, the prisoner was taken from his cell and put into a gondola or Venetian boat, attended only, besides the sailors, by a single priest, to act as confessor. He was rowed out into the sea beyond the Two Castles, where another boat was waiting. A plank was then laid across the two gondolas, upon which the prisoner, having his body chained, and a heavy stone affixed to his feet, was placed; and, on a signal given, the gondolas retiring from one another, he was precipitated into the deep.

While there were not a large number of Lutheran martyrs, their presence is irrefutable. Confessing the faith once delivered to the saints in accordance with the Augsburg Confession placed one in a dangerous situation.

Conclusion — Peace, the Cross and The Formula of Concord

By 1555, the political and military situation had calmed. In fact, with the Religious Peace of Augsburg of that year, the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* became the law of the Holy Roman Empire. Under it, Lutherans enjoyed legal recognition as a confession and the immediate threat of martyrdom was removed.

The Peace itself stated the following:

§ 15. [Protection of the Adherents of the Confession of Augsburg] And in order that such peace is respected and maintained despite the religious chasm, as is necessary in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation and between his Roman Imperial Majesty and Us, on the one hand, and the electors, princes, and estates of the Holy Empire of the German nation, on the other, therefore His Imperial Majesty, and We, and the electors, princes, and estates of the Holy Empire will not make war upon any estate of the empire on account of the Augsburg Confession and the doctrine, religion, and faith of the same, nor injure nor do violence to those estates that hold it, nor force them, against their conscience, knowledge, and will, to abandon the religion, faith, church usages, ordinances, and ceremonies of the Augsburg Confession, where these have been established, or may hereafter be established, in their principalities, lands, and dominions. Nor shall We, through mandate or in

any other way, trouble or disparage them, but shall let them quietly and peacefully enjoy their religion, faith, church usages, ordinances, and ceremonies, as well as their possessions, real and personal property, lands, people, dominions, governments, honors, and rights. Further, a complete peace within the disputed Christian religion shall be attained only by Christian, friendly, and peaceful means through his Imperial and Royal Majesties, the honorable princes, and by threat of punishment for breach of the Public Peace.

For Roman Catholics it stated:

§ 16. [Protection of the Adherents of the Catholic Faith] On the other hand, the estates that have accepted the Augsburg Confession shall suffer His Imperial Majesty, Us, and the electors, princes, and other estates of the Holy Empire, who adhere to the old religion, to abide in like manner by their religion, faith, church usages, ordinances, and ceremonies. They shall also leave undisturbed their possessions, real and personal property, lands, people, dominions, government, honors, and rights, rents, interest, and tithes ⁴⁶

Though the Religious Peace of Augsburg was viewed by all involved in the Empire as being provisional in nature, it proved to be solid enough to last over the following century, even through the Thirty Years War. During the remainder of the 16th century, the Roman Catholics (The Council of Trent), the Reformed Tradition (with its many local confessions), and the Lutheran Confession (the Formula of Concord), further refined their theological positions and established them confessionally for their future followers.

Perhaps because the threat of martyrdom at the hands of the state had largely been removed, martyrdom and the cross were largely translated into the arena of the individual Christian. Further, in the Formula of Concord (1577), persecution and the cross appear, notably, in the article on the election of grace, FC XI.

Paragraph 20: 6. That He also will protect them in

⁴⁶ Emil Reich, trans., *Select Documents Illustrating Mediaeval and Modern History* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1905), 226–32, revised and with additional articles by Thomas A. Brady Jr., http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Doc.67-ENG-ReligPeace1555_en.pdf, accessed August 4, 2013. For those who held to other confessions, the Peace stated: “§ 17. [Exclusion of Adherents of Other Confessions] All others, however, who are not adherents of either of the aforementioned religions are not included in this peace, but shall be altogether excluded from it.”

their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and rule and lead them in His ways, raise them again [place His hand beneath them], when they stumble, comfort them under the cross and in temptation, and preserve them [for life eternal].

Paragraph 30: For this reason the elect are described thus: *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life* (John 10:27–28); *In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will* (Eph. 1:11); and, *Although all this is very weak in them, yet they hunger and thirst after righteousness* (Matt. 5:6).

Paragraph 48: Moreover, this doctrine affords glorious consolation under the cross and amid temptations, namely that God in His counsel, before the time of the world, determined and decreed that He would assist us in all distresses [anxieties and perplexities], grant patience [under the cross], give consolation, excite [nourish and encourage] hope, and produce such an outcome as would contribute to our salvation. Also, as Paul in a very consolatory way treats this (Rom. 8:28–29, 35, 38–39) that God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of His Son, and that to everyone, His cross shall and must work together for good, because they are called according to the purpose, whence Paul has concluded that it is certain and indubitable that neither tribulation, nor distress, nor death, nor life, etc., shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

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