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# Luther's Contribution to the Augsburg Confession

Eugene F. Klug

Why could Luther claim, "The Augsburg Confession is mine"? It was, after all, Melanchthon's scholarly, literary hand that had given final shape and form to this great document, one of history's noblest and most influential writings. Melanchthon's role is beyond dispute, of course. It was Luther, however, whose work and writings had supplied the doctrinal grist and content. All the evidence points this way, a proposition which is neither difficult to assert or demonstrate. The roots definitely run back into Luther's work during the previous dozen years before 1530.

But the mammoth size of Luther's production is enough to drive even the most daring soul away from the task of trying to uncover all the leads. The difficulty is not in uncovering this or that statement by Luther that connects up somehow with a given part of the Augsburg Confession, but of adequate coverage of all the sources out of which the various articles flowed.

Augsburg in many ways was simply the finest distillation in a very positive, objective way, of the totality of Luther's theological thought, the sum total of the Lutheran position in the Reformation. It expressed what the Lutheran confessors wanted the emperor and the world to know about their faith and their concern for purity of teaching, especially the precious Gospel drawn from the Word of God. For this stance there was precedent throughout Luther's work, voiced publicly in his treatises, sermons, letters, and classroom lecture.

## **The Schwabach, Marburg, and Torgau Articles**

The point is that the subject is more complicated than merely citing the immediate documents that preceded the writing of the Augsburg Confession. Usually mentioned are the fifteen Marburg Articles in which Luther had a leading hand, with others (Melanchthon, Jonas, Brenz, Agricola, Osiander), composed at the colloquium of October 2-4, 1529, with the Zwingli party (Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Bucer, Hedio).<sup>1</sup> These theses, prompted especially by pressure from Philip of Hesse, were designed to stress the points of agreement between the two Protestant factions. In this they seemed to succeed fairly well, with the notable exception of the fifteenth article, on the Lord's Supper. In actual fact, however, it is erroneous to conclude that this was the only point of variance because of the attention given to that article.

There were other differences; and this fact becomes clear in the so-called Schwabach Articles, which Luther, along with his colleagues (chiefly Melanchthon), had prepared even earlier, during August of the summer of 1529 in preparation for a joint meeting of the Protestant princes and other leaders. They took their name from the place where they were first publicly released or made known. Undoubtedly Luther would have had a copy of them with him at the time of the Marburg Colloquy. At the prompting of the Lutheran princes they were presented at the Smalcald conclave of November 29, 1529, but met with little approval from the princes of the mediating, somewhat pro-Zwinglian side. Zwingli himself was not present.

The Schwabach Articles thus antedated the Marburg theses and were written by the Wittenberg theologians because they anticipated pressure from some of the Protestant princes, like Philip of Hesse, to compromise on articles of difference between the Lutheran and Zwinglian parties. Political considerations were thus of no small moment. Early in 1529 the Catholic side had succeeded in reversing the Diet of Speyer's ruling concerning *cuius regio eius religio*, which had granted a measure of toleration and religious freedom to the Protestants. The latter feared imperial pressure, and some stood for bolstering their union even if it meant compromise.

A comparison of the two sets of theses will demonstrate not only that the Schwabach Articles constituted the shape and frame of the Marburg Articles, but also that the former were somewhat more pointed in showing the differences existing between the Lutherans, on one side, and the Zwinglians and the sectarians, on the other. Luther, opposed, as always, to compromise at the expense of the truth, was chiefly responsible for their content.

Meanwhile, on January 21, 1530, came Emperor Charles V's summons of the Protestant princes to an imperial diet. The directive arrived at the Saxon court on March 11, 1530. Elector John Frederick immediately instructed his Wittenberg theologians to prepare a document that would explain the Lutheran stance on the controverted issues. The Torgau Articles were hurriedly composed for this purpose. Luther and company were to be at the Elector's residence by March 20 with said document in hand. Actually there was some delay; the Wittenberg theologians did not get on their way until April 3. At Torgau they met with the Elector and the theses were discussed.

The Elector's party, princely retinue, and theologians next proceeded to Coburg for a strategy session and rest that lasted from April 15 to 24. Thence they traveled on to Augsburg, arriving

May 2. For safe-keeping, and by the Elector's orders, Luther stayed in his "kingdom of the birds," as he called the Coburg castle, along with Veit Dietrich, his amanuensis.<sup>2</sup>

The Torgau Articles were directed against the abuses in the Roman system.<sup>3</sup> These articles clearly played a significant role in the shaping of the last part of the Augsburg Confession, Articles 22-28, which dealt with particular abuses. The Schwabach Articles, in turn, were significant for the articles with a pronouncedly doctrinal content, Articles 1-21. Altogether, when completed, the Augsburg Confession became famous for its positive, moderate tone. It is "defensive throughout," but "not aggressive," states Philip Schaff in a brief characterization of the whole Augsburg document.<sup>4</sup> In general one can agree with this assessment. Moreover, virtually every topic broached by the Schwabach and Torgau theses appears to be covered by the final document that was read on June 25, 1530, at Augsburg.

#### Luther at Coburg

Luther's voluminous correspondence during this time<sup>5</sup> is noteworthy. Very often historians refer only to his impatience evinced in letter after letter to Melancthon and the other colleagues concerning their failure to keep him informed. Yet Luther was hardly at leisure, with nothing but letters to write, during this enforced "exile."<sup>6</sup> By April 29 he already had his *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg* under way; he completed it by May 12. It was sent off to Wittenberg for printing, and by June 7 the five hundred copies that arrived in Augsburg were promptly sold out.<sup>7</sup>

The emperor, who had announced the convening of the Diet for April 8, finally arrived in mid-June. Immediately he sought to impress his imperial presence upon the gathered notables, forbidding any preaching by the evangelical side. To this order the Lutherans acceded on advice from Luther, who in a letter to Elector John Frederick (May 15, 1530), had reasoned that it was, after all, not a crucial issue and that "the city belongs to him"; so that the better part of wisdom in this case would be to "let force prevail over right."<sup>8</sup> When the issue, however, came to be a threat to their faith, then, true to Luther's example, the Lutheran princes demonstrated heroic resistance to any compromise of their consciences. They stood bolt upright and refused to bow or doff the hat to the papal legate, Cardinal Campeggio, as he blessed the crowd hailing the emperor's entrance into Augsburg. Charles V tried to force their participation in the Corpus Christi procession. Again they refused. To the order that they forbid the preaching of the Gospel by their theologians, Margrave George of

Brandenburg hurled back at the emperor this reply: "Before I would deny my God and His Gospel, I would rather kneel down here before Your Imperial Majesty and let you cut off my head."<sup>9</sup> In the end, however, the evangelical party abode by Luther's advice not to exacerbate the situation by insisting upon certain rights, including public preaching.

For Luther the key issue was "keeping your heart strong and reliant on His Word and faith," as he wrote in a very beautiful letter to his father, Hans, on February 15, 1530. Luther received word of his beloved parent's death on June 5. To Melanchthon he wrote that day, from the Coburg: "I am too sad to write more today, and it is only right to mourn such a father, who by the sweat of his brow made me what I am."<sup>10</sup> It was a statement typical of this dutiful servant of God. He knew the Fourth Commandment and he respected authority, wherever he saw it, at home or in the state. If there was one hand that steadied the tremulous Lutheran participants in the Augsburg Diet and kept them from rash decisions, it was Luther. At the same time he pressed a leader like Philip of Hesse to stand firm and avoid compromise on the meaning of the Lord's Supper, lest it throw the Lutheran cause into reverse gear.<sup>11</sup> On May 20, 1530, Luther wrote to his Elector, John Frederick, urging patience and firm strength in the midst of what must be "a tiresome situation."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed it must have been an often irksome situation; on the one hand, the theologians, led by Melanchthon, were forever changing the wording of the *Apologia*, as the Augsburg Confession at first was called; and, on the other hand, they all had to wait patiently for the emperor's arrival as he dallied in Italy and then in Innsbruck. Earlier, in another letter to his Elector (May 15), Luther had high praise for Melanchthon's work on the proposed confession as then worded. He stated: "I have read through Master Philip's *Apologia*, which pleases me very much; I know nothing to improve or change it."<sup>13</sup>

Clearly it represented the consensus which long before had been attained through the joint efforts of Luther and Melanchthon, most recently in the Torgau and Schwabach Articles — as well as all of Luther's theological expression in the years before, something which Melanchthon, better than any other, knew and respected very much. Only in matters of style and wording did Luther admit that it would be more "appropriate" for Melanchthon to do the final writing, as was the case at Augsburg, for "I cannot step so softly and quietly."<sup>14</sup> In part, this remark reflected Luther's sincere admiration for Melanchthon's literary bent and skill; in part, it probably also was a gentle gibe at Melanchthon's

perpetual worrying over wording, an endless fiddling with the text, and a persisting Erasmian streak which was always on the alert for a compromise posture or phrase. Justus Jonas, in fact, in a letter dated June 12, 1530, asked Luther that he keep the letters coming to Melanchthon because of the latter's continuing anxiety and the effect that this might have on the eventual outcome of the presentation before the emperor.<sup>15</sup> Luther knew his colleague only too well; his letters continued to flow, virtually daily; he prodded Melanchthon constantly to keep him informed, undoubtedly aware of the good psychological effect that would accrue if he could convince Melanchthon to get things off his chest by unloading his worries on his esteemed mentor and friend.

### June 25, 1530

June 25, 1530, came and went, one of the greatest days in human history, when the Augsburg Confession was first publicly read before the emperor. He had asked for the Latin version, but at the solemn urging of Elector John Frederick permission was granted for the reading of the German version on the grounds that the diet was meeting on German soil. As a result of this concession both versions have equal standing. The German version, which was read by Dr. Christian Beyer, chancellor of Electoral Saxony, was then given to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz; the Latin copy was entrusted to the emperor and his advisers. Neither of these copies has survived. But the Lutherans had carefully seen to it that identical copies were kept.

There is no need to elaborate on the generally positive reception of the Augsburg Confession by the audience of some two hundred people in the hall; an eager crowd gathered outside, straining to hear Beyer intone each article.<sup>16</sup> Luther took note of this fact that the document made a good impression, according to the information he had received in reports from Augsburg; and he was also impressed with the courage of the evangelical princes who freely put their signatures to the document.<sup>17</sup> Melanchthon, on the other hand, greeted the next morning, June 26, with gloomy mien, and wrote to Luther that "we are in deepest trouble here and are forced to many tears."<sup>18</sup> He advocated further concessions and modifications.<sup>19</sup> Luther was understandably and mightily exasperated by his fretful colleague. In effect, he said, "Over my dead body!" On June 29, with a copy of the Augsburg Confession in hand, as it has been read at the diet, Luther wrote to Melanchthon in stern terms:

I have received your *Apologia*, and I wonder what it is you want when you ask what and how much is to be conceded to the papists. For me personally more than enough has been

conceded. Day and night I am occupied with this matter, considering it, turning it around, debating it, and searching the whole Scripture because of it; certainty grows continuously in me about this, our teaching, and I am more and more sure that now (God willing) I shall not permit anything further to be taken away from me, come what may.<sup>20</sup>

In the same letter, Luther, impressed with the princes' courage, summoned Melanchthon to come out from hiding behind Luther's mantle and make this cause his own personal battle:

I don't like that you write in your letter that you have followed my authority in this cause. I don't wish to be, or be called, the originator of this cause for you people; even though this might be properly interpreted, yet I don't want this term. If this is not simultaneously and in the same way your cause, then I don't want it to be called mine and imposed upon you. If it is my cause alone, then I will handle it by myself.<sup>21</sup>

### **Luther and Melanchthon**

Basically, as Luther discerned, the doubt in Melanchthon's mind stemmed from his uncertainty on the doctrine of the church, in this struggle against the monolithic papal organization. "If Christ is not with us," Luther asked in the same letter, "where, I earnestly wish to know, is He then in the whole world?" In fact, the issue could be put more pointedly still: "If we are not the church, or a part of the church, where is the church? Are the dukes of Bavaria [Eck's lord], Ferdinand [King of Bavaria and brother of Charles V], the Pope, the Turk, and those like them, the church?" Luther shoved Melanchthon's nose into the pages of Holy Writ, stating: "If we don't have God's Word, who are the people who have it?" Luther closed with the wish — almost a threat — that he might come personally to Augsburg in spite of the imperial ban, all because Melanchthon had become "so distressed and weak" under Satan's taunts.<sup>22</sup>

Luther assessed Melanchthon well, as also himself, when he wrote in a letter to his beloved colleague on June 30: "In my personal affairs I am less resolute in battle, while you are more stout-hearted. In matters of the common weal you are the way I am in my personal affairs. You esteem yourself but lightly, yet in the common cause you are afraid. I, on the other hand, am of good and quiet courage in the common cause because I know with certainty that this cause is just and right, yes, that it is Christ's and God's cause, which need not blanch because of its sin, as a little saint like me must pale because of myself. Therefore, I am nothing but an unworried observer and do not fret in the least about

these menacing and threatening papists. Thus I beg you in the name of Christ not to despise those promises and consolations of God."<sup>23</sup> Melanchthon had simply forgotten Luther's eloquent message to the congregation of notables that had gathered at Coburg shortly before departing for Augsburg. There Luther had appealed to them to be ready for whatever cross or suffering God purposed to send their way. He stated:

If you give yourself to Scripture, you will feel comfort and all your concerns will be better, which otherwise you cannot control by any act or means of your own.<sup>24</sup>

In that same sermon Luther pleaded that they all be ready to risk much more for the Word of God than "merchants, knights, papists, and such riffraff" dare to risk for the sake of "filthy lucre." This course of conduct should be evident to every faithful Christian, he says, "because He [God] will defend His Word simply because it is His Word."<sup>25</sup>

One might conclude that Luther was unfeeling towards Melanchthon and the pressures he was facing as leader of the Lutheran party. That was hardly the case. The very next day after he had excoriated Melanchthon, Luther admitted in a letter to Spalatin on June 30, that he had been a bit too "angry and full of fear" because of "Philip's worries."<sup>26</sup> After all, "we are to be men and not God," he said, and anxieties and afflictions are naturally quite human. Luther had nothing but praise for the Confession and for those who had bravely presented and defended it at Augsburg. "Yesterday I carefully reread your whole *Apologia*, and I am tremendously pleased with it," wrote Luther in a letter to Melanchthon on July 3, 1530. In this same letter Luther reminded Melanchthon that it is sin to doubt God's support.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Nicholas Hausmann on July 6, 1530, Luther spoke of the Augsburg Confession as "our confession (which Philip prepared)" and of how "one bishop stated in a private conversation: 'This is the pure truth, we cannot deny it.'"<sup>28</sup> "I am tremendously pleased to have lived to this moment when Christ, by his staunch confessors, has publicly been proclaimed in such a great assembly by means of this really most beautiful confession," said Luther in a letter to Conrad Cordatus on July 7, 1530.<sup>29</sup> To Justus Jonas on July 9, 1530, Luther wrote: "I only envy you this opportunity, for I could not be present at this, the beautiful confession. . . Yet I am pleased and comforted that in the meantime this, my Vienna, has been defended by others." (Luther was referring to Vienna's successful warding off of the Turk in 1529).<sup>30</sup> "Do not hope for unity or concession," Luther advised in a letter to his several colleagues at Augsburg on July 15. The emperor's party would not grant any.



“Our case has been made, and beyond this you will not accomplish anything better.” So, come “home! home!”<sup>31</sup>

But the haggling went on, not least over the division of power between the secular and ecclesiastical realms. On this point Luther wrote to Melanchthon (in full accord with what had been stated in the Augsburg Confession, especially Article XXVIII): “God’s Word is the authority, and it commands that the two governments be preserved separate and unmixed.”<sup>32</sup> In the meantime the papal theologians (Eck, *et al.*) scrambled to complete the confutation by Charles V’s orders. It was miserably written and miserably supported from Scripture. Still it was being held threateningly over the heads of the Lutherans as an “official answer to the heretics.” Luther, aware of the impact this pressure was bound to have, wrote to Elector John Frederick on August 26, 1530, with urgency: “Your Electoral Grace certainly knows that one of our principal tenets is that nothing is to be taught or done unless it is firmly based on God’s Word.” Thus, no concession could be made as regards “one kind” in the Sacrament of the Altar, for that was “a purely human invention, and was in no way confirmed by God’s Word.”<sup>33</sup> The same held true for the Mass as a sacrifice offered to God! In evident weariness Luther wrote September 8, 1530, to Katie, waiting patiently back in Wittenberg: “If only there will finally be an end to the diet. We have done and offered enough. The papists do not want to give a hair’s breadth.”<sup>34</sup>

On September 22, 1530, the emperor finally declared a recess, declaring that the Lutheran party had been given a fair hearing and that by April 15 of the next year (1531) they show cause why they should not be condemned in accordance with the so-called proof of their errors provided by the Confutation. The Elector of Saxony left with his party on the next day, September 23. Though they had not even been given a copy of the Confutation, Melanchthon and others had made ample notes, and had, moreover, obtained a copy through friendly sources in Nuernberg. Melanchthon’s efforts to respond to this document led eventually to his Apology of the Augsburg Confession, in time for the April 15, 1531, deadline. It is now the companion document to the Augustana.

### Luther’s “Exhortation”

Luther’s *Exhortation to All Clergy at Augsburg* has somewhat euphemistically been called Luther’s “Augsburg Confession.”<sup>35</sup> There is no doubt about its influence upon the Lutheran representatives. It was eagerly received, and still more eagerly read, as indicated above. It is tempered with genuine concern for “peace

and unity.”<sup>36</sup> In a fatherly tone Luther urges less dependence upon human wisdom and clever maneuvers, and greater reliance upon God, who alone is truly wise. He defends the Lutheran side against the false charges of insidious and rebellious activities, like those of the sectarian and the *Schwaermer* spirits. Peace has been our goal, he asserts, along with the pure preaching of the Gospel, as God Himself commands in His Word. After clearly disproving the idea that the Lutherans could be dealt with as heretics, Luther cites in detail the abuses in Romanist teaching and practice that militate against the Gospel. First among these is the indulgence matter, a “shameful outrage and idolatry,” in view of the fact that “the Gospel after all is the only true indulgence.”<sup>37</sup> Once again he cites the gross distortions that came into the church as a result of the confession in the so-called Sacrament of Penance being used to control and manipulate souls. None values confession and absolution more than Luther, if it is left as the voluntary privilege of the sinner; but “that we should by our own works make satisfaction for sin, even against God,” this, thunders Luther, “is the very worst and hell itself.”<sup>38</sup> His criticism of the distortions of the Mass is equally as sharp; he rehearses the procedure by which God’s sacramental gift to the communicants was turned into a sacrifice by men to God; and he wonders “that God could tolerate it so long.”<sup>39</sup> Monkery has become so important in Romanist practice “that to become a monk is as good as to be baptized,” Luther laments.<sup>40</sup> Ignorance of simple Biblical truth is so great that even the learned clergy do not really know the basics — the Decalog, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and their meaning. Luther thinks back to his ordination and exclaims in retrospect:

My suffragan bishop, when he made me a priest and put the cup in my hand, spoke these very words, “Receive power to sacrifice for the living and the dead.” That the earth did not then swallow us both was unjust and due to God’s all too great patience!<sup>41</sup>

The process of the excommunication of a manifest sinner, Luther further states, has been turned from its proper function of seeking to call the manifest sinner to repentance into a wanton, greedy mechanism for gaining a poor man’s property.<sup>42</sup> Luther, in the *Exhortation*, again cites the Scriptural evidence against withholding the cup from the laity and forbidding the clergy to marry. As regards the latter, Luther challenges: “Now if it were true, as the dear canons blasphemously declare, that a pastor with a wife of his own cannot serve God, then this sixth commandment would really have to be repealed.”<sup>43</sup> Luther does not oppose the idea of ecclesiastical machinery built on the bishops’ administra-

tion of the church as such, but he reiterates a well-founded Scriptural principle that "there must be pastors, even if there were no longer bishops, canons, or monks."<sup>44</sup> Personally he has often found the demands of the pastoral office wearisome of the ingratitude of the people deplorable. He sighs: "I am so very tired of it."<sup>45</sup> But pastors for parishes there must be, by God's ordering of things. So, "if they do not want to be bishops in God's name [and provide pastors for the churches, in other words], let them be bathhouse keepers in the devil's name," he states in virtual exasperation over existing conditions in the church.<sup>46</sup>

In closing his *Exhortation* Luther drew up a list of some thirty points which closely parallel the articles treated by the Augsburg Confession, as also the Catechisms which had appeared in the previous year, 1529. Luther also sounded the cry for a proper hymnody for the people's worship. Luther's own "Ein Feste Burg" had appeared in that same year, 1529, in October. The last word added to the *Exhortation* was a reminder to the Catholic party, emperor and ecclesiastical prelate alike, that if force were to be used in the settlement of these religious issues, it would not be from the Lutheran side; and therefore it would be a burden which the consciences of the Romanists would have to bear.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Luther — Primary Author**

Philip Schaff is undoubtedly correct when he assesses the respective roles of Luther and Melanchthon in the production of the Augsburg Confession as follows:

Luther thus produced the doctrinal matter of the Confession, while Melanchthon's scholarly and methodical mind freely reproduced and elaborated it into its final shape and form, and his gentle, peaceful, compromising spirit breathed into it a moderate, conservative tone. In other words, Luther was the primary, Melanchthon the secondary author, of the contents, and the sole author of the style and temper of the Confession.<sup>48</sup>

One may wish to debate whether such a clean division could actually be claimed between these two great spirits that loom behind the final product at Augsburg. Close examination of Luther's writings will demonstrate that much of the wording, if not the style, was as much his as Melanchthon's. Who, for example, will ever challenge the incredible excellence of Luther's Small Catechism, as to both content and phrasing? Time has proven this to be one of the most precious literary gems of all times from every point of view. The Large Catechism is not far behind, on both counts, content and phrasing. These books, in turn, have to be seen and assessed in the context of the works that

preceded them, straight from the mind and pen of Luther himself, like the rightly famous *Ten Sermons on the Catechism*, of 1528. In turn, these were the third in the series of catechism sermons preached that year! And the story of Luther's sermonizing on the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer traces back all the way to the time when he became *Hilfspastor* at the *Stadtkirche* in Wittenberg. Nor may his sermon books, the *Postillen*, so extremely rich in pastoral and theological application, be discounted — nor his very influential personal prayer-book of 1522. One need only read to be convinced.

Then, when it comes to tracing the source of utterances concerning the abuses in the church in matters like indulgences; confessional practices; the so-called sacrament of penance; the Roman Mass, which to Luther was the greatest monstrosity and abomination; monastic orders; enforced celibacy; and the mixing of ecclesiastical power and secular power; one need only read through the treatises, sermons, lecture notes, and letters of Luther to find that every single complaint voiced publicly in the document of Augsburg had seen the light of day previously in one of Luther's works. He so lived out of the content of God's Holy Word, the Sacred Scriptures, that in everything that pertained to faith and life Luther had brought into the proper and true focus. For example, there is nothing said in the Augsburg Confession concerning ecclesiastical authority in relation to the secular realm which had not first been duly treated in Luther's numerous treatises on the Christian, or the church, in society.<sup>49</sup>

### Luther's "Great Confession"

When all has been considered, however, Luther's greatest single contribution to the final shape of the Augsburg Confession, both in content and phrasing, must be sought in the closing part, the third section, of his "Great Confession," or *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, of 1528. The document as a whole must rank as one of Luther's most profound theological pieces, side by side with the *De Servo Arbitrio* of 1525, written in answer to Erasmus. The "Great Confession" actually takes its name from its third section, in which Luther, item for item confesses his faith in simple, uncomplicated manner. In the first two parts his reasoning is highly polemical, often highly intricate, in defense of the real presence of Christ's true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. He thought of it as his final answer to the Sacramentarians, though it was destined to be followed by a number of others as the years rolled by. However, it remained his definitive effort on the subject.

At the same time, because he detected how closely a correct understanding of the Sacrament is interwoven with a correct view of the person and nature of Christ, the "Great Confession" is also one of the finest Christological pieces ever written. Little wonder that it is this document which is most often quoted, among all of Luther's works, by the framers of the Formula of Concord in 1577, especially in Articles VII and VIII on the Lord's Supper and Christ's person. Luther sensed how errors in doctrine tend to intersect, one with the other, as in the case of these two articles.

For that reason he felt the need, in the third and last part of his treatise, to make a brief summation of the articles of faith, because he saw how "schisms and errors are increasing proportionately with the passage of time."<sup>50</sup> This was his resolve:

I desire with this treatise to confess my faith before God and all the world, point by point. I am determined to abide by it until my death and (so help me God!) in this faith to depart from this world and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup>

By that time he had already on numerous occasions experienced the galling and distasteful effect of people putting things in his mouth which in no way represented his true feelings and convictions. Therefore, he felt it was now time for him to state the articles of faith, as taught in Scripture and as held in his heart. This was his preamble:

Hence if any one shall say after my death, "If Luther were living now, he would teach and hold this or that article differently, for he did not consider it sufficiently," etc., let me say once and for all that by the grace of God I have most diligently traced all these articles through the Scriptures, have examined them again and again in the light thereof, and have wanted to defend all of them as certainly as I have now defended the sacrament of the altar. I am not drunk or irresponsible. I know what I am saying, and I well realize what this will mean for me before the Last Judgment at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Since Luther alluded to his defense of the Lord's Supper, which covers some two hundred pages in the main body of the treatise, it would be interesting and pertinent to set his short statement of faith concerning the sacrament side by side with that which, by Melancthon's hand, finally appeared in the Augsburg Confession:

### Great Confession

In the same way I also say and confess that in the sacrament of the altar the true body and blood of Christ are orally eaten and drunk in the bread and wine, even if the priests who distribute them or those who receive them do not believe or otherwise misuse the sacrament. It does not rest on man's belief or unbelief but on the Word and ordinance of God — unless they first change God's Word and ordinance and misinterpret them, as the enemies of the sacrament do at the present time. They, indeed, have only bread and wine, for they do not also have the words and instituted ordinance of God but have perverted and changed it according to their own imagination.<sup>53</sup>

### Augsburg Confession

X. Of the Lord's Supper they [the Lutheran Confessors] 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.

XIII. Of the Use of the Sacraments they teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments.

They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and who do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required.<sup>54</sup>

A comparison of these two statements will show evident similarities — also the obvious fact that the Confessors at Augsburg had to speak to the subject of the Lord's Supper with the Roman Catholic aberrations in mind, especially the *ex opere operato* theory of the sacrament; while in Luther's 1528 statement the concern is more for the Sacramentarians with their denial of the real presence of Christ's true body and blood. The brevity of Augustana X itself reminds one naturally of Luther's succinct, remarkably apt explanation of the nature and meaning of the Lord's Supper in the Small Catechism: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us

Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.”

In similar way one can compare the statements on Christ's person:

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I believe and know that Scripture teaches us that the second person in the Godhead, viz., the Son, alone became true man, conceived by the Holy Spirit without the co-operation of man, and was born of the pure, holy Virgin Mary as of a real natural mother, all of which St. Luke clearly describes and the prophets foretold; so that neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit became man, as certain heretics have taught.

Also that God the Son assumed not a body without a soul, as certain heretics have taught, but also the soul, i.e., full, complete humanity, and was born the promised true seed or child of Abraham and of David and the son of Mary by nature, in every way and form a true man, as I am myself and every other man, except that he came without sin, by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary alone.

And that this man became true God, as one eternal, indivisible person, of God and man, so that Mary the holy Virgin is a real, true mother not only of the man Christ, as the Nestorians teach, but also of the Son of God, as Luke says, “The child to be born of you will be called the Son of

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III. Also they teach that *the Word*, that is, *the Son of God*, did assume *the human nature* in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into heaven that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort, and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin.

The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.<sup>56</sup>

God," i.e., my Lord and the Lord of all, Jesus Christ, the only, true Son by nature of God and of Mary, true God and true man.

I believe also that this Son of God and of Mary, our Lord Jesus Christ, suffered for us poor sinners, was crucified, dead, and buried, in order that he might redeem us from sin, death, and the eternal wrath of God by His innocent blood; and that on the third day he arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, Lord over all lords, King over all kings and over all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, over death and life, over sin and righteousness.<sup>55</sup>

Every article of the Augsburg Confession can in this way be traced to statements in Luther's "Great Confession," sometimes virtually identical in length, often very close in wording. The content is all there, if the phrasing is not identical. One would have to be wearing blinders not to see the similarities and the dependence of the later confession on the earlier. Of course, as already stated, this one document was not the only source. However, it may rightly be termed *one* of the most significant, if not *the* most significant, antecedent of the final draft of the Augsburg Confession.

### Conclusion

Luther's famous *Table Talk* has not really come into its own until recent times, as scholars, like Heiko Obermann, and others, give it more and more credibility and weight. Moreover, it was not really until after Augsburg that these intimate tidbits began to be gathered. Veit Dietrich, who weathered the ordeal with Luther at Coburg during those wearisome months of the Diet in 1530, was one of the first to make notes of Luther's comments, sermons, etc. He noted a comparison, for example, which Luther drew between Melancthon's work on the Confession and all other theological writings, stating that "Philip's *Apologia* is superior to all the



doctors of the church, even to Augustine himself, [and also] Hilary, Theophylact, and Ambrose.”<sup>57</sup> That, to say the least, is quite an accolade. For Luther what happened at Augsburg was like a miracle. Sometime around the second anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, in June of 1532, Veit Dietrich recorded the following remarks of Luther:

Our faith is an odd thing — that I should believe that that man who was hanged is the Son of God, although I have never seen him, known him, or met him. He is to be like a stone placed in the middle of the sea, a stone about which I know nothing except what the gospel says: I am the Lord. Well, then, if He says so, so be it! He has also demonstrated it at the diet in Augsburg, where the fury of all the kings and princes was arrayed against Him . . . Two whole years have now passed since one was compelled to say, “He is Christ!” And He will remain Christ a good deal longer. That great miracle at the diet is almost forgotten, as if it had never happened.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, this Luther never believed, that it would ever actually be forgotten. To him what God had accomplished there was “truly the last trump before the day of judgment.”<sup>59</sup> God’s Word had done it! The emperor and the pope “wanted to extinguish it, but the blaze grew and spread.”<sup>60</sup> So it did, indeed. And it was to the Augustana that the Confessors in 1577-1580 turned in defense of their faith. We can state our need in no better, nor stronger, nor truer words:

Herewith we again whole-heartedly subscribe this Christian and thoroughly Scriptural Augsburg Confession, and we abide by the plain, clear, and pure meaning of its words. We consider this Confession a genuinely Christian symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God . . . Similarly we are determined by the grace of the Almighty to abide until our end by this repeatedly cited Christian Confession as it was delivered to Emperor Charles in 1530. And we do not intend, either in this or in subsequent doctrinal statements, to depart from the aforementioned Confession or to set up a different and new confession.<sup>61</sup>

#### Footnotes

1. Martin Luther, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Johann Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1901), 17, pp. 1138 f.. Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1912), pp. 69 ff.
2. The “winged jackdaws,” or blackbirds, were both amusement and distraction to him while sequestered in safe-keeping, because of the imperial ban. at Coburg Castle. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and

- Fortress Press, 1955-1972), 49, pp. 287-295, for letters written to Melancthon and Spalatin on April 24, 1530.
3. For an English translation see H. E. Jacobs, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-98.
  4. Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), I, pp. 233 f.
  5. He was at Coburg until October 13.
  6. Notable among Luther's productions during these months were his expositions of certain Psalms, especially his beautiful Commentary on Psalm 118, his favorite; translations of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets; and his treatise *On the Keys*; yet he complains that his time at Coburg was "a waste."
  7. Cf. the letter from Justus Jonas to Luther, June 13, 1530. *St. L.* 21a, 1477.
  8. *LW* 49, 298.
  9. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider, ed., *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halis: A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1835), II, p. 115. Also quoted in E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 725. Margrave George's retort so shocked the emperor, in turn, that he exclaimed in his halting German, "Not cut off head! Not cut off head!"
  10. Margaret A. Currie, tr., *Letters of Martin Luther* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), p. 217.
  11. *LW* 49, 299. Letter of May 20, 1530.
  12. *LW* 49, 306.
  13. *LW* 49, 297.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. *St. L.* 21a, 1471.
  16. In a letter to Luther, June 27, 1530, Justus Jonas reported that Charles V appeared to be very gracious, interested, and friendly at the time of the reading, that he listened attentively, and that several of the Catholic leaders nodded their approval; another report, however, speaks of the emperor nodding in slumber for a time — little wonder in a two-hour ordeal! *St. L.* 16, 883 f.
  17. *St. L.* 16, 882.
  18. *St. L.* 16, 896.
  19. See also his letter of June 26 to Camerarius, *St. L.* 16, 897.
  20. *LW* 49, 328.
  21. *Ibid.*, 330.
  22. *Ibid.*, 331 f.
  23. *St. L.* 16, 906, Comparing their different temperaments Luther states of Melancthon in his *Table talk*: "Out of love Philip wants to be of service to everybody. If the papists came to me this way, I'd send them packing . . . Philip lets himself be devoured. I devour everything and spare no one. So God accomplishes the same thing in two different persons." *LW* 54, 355.
  24. *LW* 51, 204.
  25. *LW* 51, 205.
  26. *LW* 49, 336.
  27. *LW* 49, 343.
  28. *LW* 49, 348 ff.
  29. *LW* 49, 354.
  30. *LW* 49, 368 f.
  31. *LW* 49, 377.
  32. *LW* 49, 383.
  33. *LW* 49, 407.
  34. *LW* 49, 416 f.
  35. Cf. the editor's introduction to the treatise, *LW* 34, 7.

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36. *Ibid.*, 10.
  37. *Ibid.*, 16.
  38. *Ibid.*, 19.
  39. *Ibid.*, 22 ff. Luther later in his *Table Talk*, sometime in early 1532, comments concerning the Mass as sacrifice: "At the diet [Augsburg] the papists tried to frighten and threaten us. They wished us to agree that the mass is a sacrifice of praise merely to provide themselves with a subterfuge in the term 'sacrifice,' I'm ready to concede to them that the mass is a sacrifice of praise, provided they on their part concede that it's not only the priest at the altar but every communicant who sacrifices." *LW* 54, 139.
  40. *Ibid.*, 28.
  41. *Ibid.*, 30.
  42. *Ibid.*, 33.
  43. *Ibid.*, 42.
  44. *Ibid.*, 44.
  45. *Ibid.*, 50.
  46. *Ibid.*, 52.
  47. *Ibid.*, 60 f.
  48. *Op. cit.*, 229.
  49. A partial list here would include *Against Insurrection and Rebellion*, 1522; *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, 1523; *Admonition to Peace*, 1525; *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, 1525; *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants*, 1525; *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, 1526; *On War Against the Turk*, 1529; Commentary on Psalm 82, 1530, produced while Luther was at the Coburg. To this list would have to be added those equally significant works which Luther produced on marriage, economics, education, and other matters relevant to the Christian citizen's daily life in the sixteenth century.
  50. *LW* 37, 360.
  51. *Ibid.*
  52. *Ibid.*
  53. *LW* 37, 367.
  54. AC X and XIII; *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 47, 49. All references to the Lutheran Confessions are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.
  55. *LW* 37, 362.
  56. AC III; *Triglotta*, p. 45.
  57. *LW* 54, 34.
  58. *LW* 54, 39 f.
  59. *LW* 54, 186.
  60. *Ibid.*
  61. FC Preface 4-5; Theodore G. Tappert, tr. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 502.