

Formula of Concord: Article VII – Of the Holy Supper

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To get right to the point, we quote the *Status Controversiae* of the *Epitome*:

Whether in the Holy Supper the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present, are distributed with the bread and wine, and received with the mouth by all those who use this Sacrament, whether they be worthy or unworthy, godly or ungodly, believing or unbelieving; by the believing for consolation and life, by the unbelieving for judgment? The Sacramentarians say, No; we say, Yes.

For our historical background, we will take a closer look at some of the characters who constitute the “we” and the “they.” “They,” as is stated, are the Sacramentarians, also known as Philippists, Melanchthonians, Calvinists, Crypto-Calvinists (masked Calvinists) and, in a sense, Zwinglians. Two warm bodies, in particular, that we could attach to those titles are John Calvin and Philip Melanchthon. The “we” are the Lutherans, and would include Martin Luther (by celestial absentia) and the six original signers of the *Formula of Concord* on May 28, 1577 – Chemnitz, Andrae, Selnecker, Chytraeus, Koerner and Musculus. Obviously, more will be said of the “they” than the “we” since the aberrant views of the “they” led to the writing of Article VII and the entire *Formula of Concord*.

Our first character study will be of Philip Melanchthon. A contemporary and friend of Martin Luther, the two worked side by side on many theological issues. Luther admired and appreciated Melanchthon’s unusual gifts. But Luther was totally aware of Melanchthon’s serious shortcomings, one of which was a natural bent toward philosophy and rationalism. That these two influences caused serious problems for the church of the Reformer goes without saying. Luther once stated, “To Philip I leave the sciences and philosophy and nothing else.” This was possibly a veiled commendation. The veiled condemnation came when he immediately added, “But I shall be compelled to chop off the head of philosophy, too.”ⁱ The arena of the Lord’s Supper supplied Melanchthon with ample opportunity to exercise his twin traits of philosophy and rationalism.

While the Church recognizes these traits as maladies, Melanchthon did not. He fancied himself more of a conciliatory than a confessor, as stated in his Preface to the *Apology*: “It has always been my custom in these controversies to retain, as far as I was at all able, the form of the customarily received doctrines, in order that at some time concord might the more readily be effected.” His indefinite and wavering attitude, leaning more toward rationalism than revealed divine truth, resulted, on one occasion, in a not-so-subtle change in the 1530 version of the *Augsburg Confession* and Melanchthon’s subversion of 1540. Compare the two and figure out which is which:

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

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

The truly amazing part of this subterfuge was that it went undetected by the Lutherans until it was brought to their humbling attention, not by the Calvinists or their Crypto-companions, but by the Romish rascal, Dr. Eck. He rubbed it under their Lutheran noses, suggesting mutiny in their own ranks and ignorance as to what was their authentic and original confession.

This “gobbeldy-gook” style of Melanchthon accounts for the comment of C.P. Krauth: “We have twenty-eight large volumes of Melanchthon’s writings and, at this hour, impartial and learned men are not agreed as to what were his views on some of the profoundest questions of church doctrine, on which Melanchthon was writing all his life!”ⁱⁱ It also helps explain the wording of the *Formula of Concord Epitome*....

Others however are subtle Sacramentarians and the most injurious of all, who partly speak very speciously in our own words, and pretend that they also believe a true presence of the true, essential, living body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, however, that this occurs spiritually through faith.

and the *Thorough Declaration*:

Although some Sacramentarians strive to employ words that come as close as possible to the Augsburg Confession and the form and mode of speech in its churches, and confess that in the Holy Supper the body of Christ is truly received by believers, still when we insist that they state their meaning properly, sincerely, and clearly, they all declare themselves unanimously thus: that the true essential body and blood of Christ is absent from the consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Supper as far as the highest heaven is from the earth.

Things were a lot better theologically for Melanchthon when he had his stalwart friend, Martin Luther, at his side supporting him. Among other teachings, Melanchthon fully agreed with Luther and Scripture on the teachings of the Lord’s Supper. At Marburg in 1529, Melanchthon was violently opposed to the Zwinglians and their profane teaching about the sacrament. Following are several quotes from letters he wrote refuting the errors of the Zwinglians and supporting the teachings of the Lutherans:

Know that Luther’s teaching (concerning the Lord’s Supper) is very old in the Church.... I am satisfied that I shall not agree with the Strassburgers all my life, and I know that Zwingli and his compeers write falsely concerning the Sacrament. I would rather die than see our people become contaminated by the society of the Zwinglian cause.... I admonish you most earnestly to avoide the Zwinglian dogmas.ⁱⁱⁱ

In a separate publication, Melanchthon endeavored to show from quotations of various church fathers tha the Zwinglian interpretation of the words of institution does not agree with that of the ancient church.

His outward concurrence with the biblical stand of the Lord’s Supper continued when in 1536, he signed the *Wittenberg Concord* which plainly taught that the body and blood of Christ are received by all, including unworthy guests. In 1537, he signed the *Smalcald Articles* in which Luther stated in no uncertain terms that the bread and wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and are given and received not only by the godly, but also by the ungodly. In March 1558, Melanchthon declared that in the Holy Supper “the Son of God is truly and substantially present in such a manner that when we use it, He gives us with the bread and wine his body and blood.”^{iv} He also stated that Zwingli was wrong when he declared that it is a mere outward sign and that Christ is not essentially present in it and that it is a mere sign by which Christians know each other. In fact, several months before his death, Melanchthon wrote that “in the Lord’s Supper Christ is truly and substantially present and truly administered to those who take the bread and wine and that in it He gives his body and blood to him who eats and drinks.”^v Even to the point of death Melanchthon maintained that he had not abandoned the scriptural and Lutheran understanding and teachings of the Lord’s Supper as presented in the *Augsburg Confession*.

Yet, by the time of his death, he had clearly demonstrated to the theological world his true belief regarding this sacrament, whether he knew it or not. He openly chided all who faithfully adhered to and

defended Luther's phraseology concerning the Lord's Supper. He rejected the teaching that the bread is properly called the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ. He called this doctrine "bread worship." He directly attacked the Lutheran teaching of the omnipresence of Christ according to his human nature as a new and foolish doctrine. In a letter written in 1560, he characterized the real presence as well as the omnipresence of Christ also according to his human nature "as absurd and insipid teaching."^{vi} In his *Corpus Misnicum*, a collection of symbolical book published by his son-in-law, Casper Peucer, Melanchthon laid claim "to the steadfast and unanimous confession of the true and Christian doctrine in which the schools and churches of these electoral Saxon and Meissen territories have remained and persevered in all points according to the Augsburg Confession for now almost thirty years against the unfounded false charges and accusations of all lying spirits."^{vii}

What could possibly account for such confusion on Melanchthon's part? For such a change in his theological stance? Was it deliberate duplicity or just naïvete? Could we ever be sure? We dare not discount Melanchthon's love for rationalism and philosophy, nor his desire to placate everyone and to squelch any type of controversy. Going out on a limb, Allbeck says, "Melanchthon and his followers were hiding Calvinistic interpretations in their wordings of the doctrine of the Person of Christ and of the Lord's Supper so that secretly Calvinistic phrases in distinction to such as are truly Lutheran were being employed."^{viii}

It is readily apparent that a shift in Melanchthon's thinking about the Lord's Supper was already taking place between 1530 and 1540. His changes in the *Augsburg Confession's* Article X have already been cited. In defense of Martin Bucer's opinion that Christ's body and blood are truly and substantially received in the Sacrament but are not really connected with the bread and wine, Melanchthon stated in 1535, "The only remaining question therefore is the one concerning the physical union of the bread and body... and of what need is this question?"^{ix} In another letter of the same year, he wrote, "Bucer confesses that, when these things, bread and wine, are given, Christ is truly and substantially present. As for me, I would not demand anything further."^x At the risk of nourishing nausea, here is a quote from Melanchthon's letter of 1538 to Veit Dietrich:

In order not to deviate too far from the ancients, I have maintained a sacramental presence in the use, and said that, when these things are given, Christ is truly present and efficacious. That is certainly enough. I have not added an inclusion or a connection by which the body is affixed to, concatenated or mixed with, the bread. What more do you desire?.... And this will have to be resorted to lest you defend what some even now are saying, that the body and blood are tendered separately. This too is new and will not even please the Papists.... That physical connection breeds many questions: Whether the parts are separate; whether included; when they are present; whether they are present apart from the use. Of this nothing is read among the ancients.... I have spoken so sparingly on this matter in order to lead the youth away from these matters.... I wish that the two most cruel tyrants, animosity and sophistry, would be removed for a while, and a just deliberation held concerning the entire matter.^{xi}

Typically Melanchthonian.... Let's not fight! Let's agree to disagree! Let's leave well enough alone! A close association with a staunch confessor is not enough to insure a staunch confession.

That his association with Luther did not keep Melanchthon faithful to the Scripture is evident. Even before Luther was gone, Melanchthon had started to stray. In defense of his Jekyll and Hyde maneuvering, on one occasion, Melanchthon explained that he "had been the messenger, not of his own, but of a foreign opinion."^{xii} Obviously afraid of Luther's uncompromising spirit and of open conflict with Luther on theological issues which would result in humiliating personal defeat, Melanchthon admitted that under Luther he had suffered a "most shameful servitude." Without a doubt, Melanchthon leads the voting for "the father of the Crypto-Calvinistic controversy."

Melanchthon's early relationship with Luther was seriously offset by a later close relationship with John Calvin. Calvin often expressed an unbounded admiration for Martin Luther as a pre-eminent servant of Christ.

Even after Luther published his *Brief Confession* in which he vehemently chastised Calvin and his Sacramentarian friends and severed all connections with them, Calvin responded, “I am frequently accustomed to say, that even if he should call me a devil, I would accord him (Luther) the honor of acknowledging him to be an eminent servant of God.”^{xiii}

However, Calvin revealed a theological spirit altogether different from Luther’s. He was pointedly opposed to Luther’s doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper and of the majesty of the human nature of Christ. In 1556, in a posthumous, left-handed compliment to Luther and a powerful right-handed jab to the Lutheran theologians, Calvin wrote, “O Luther, how few imitators of your excellences, but how many apes of your pious ostentation have you left behind.”^{xiv}

Calvin’s theological stand on the Lord’s Supper, according to Schaff, “took a middle course, retaining, on the basis of Zwingli’s exegesis, the religious substance of Luther’s faith, and giving it a more intellectual and spiritual form, triumphed in Switzerland, gained much favor in Germany, and opened a fair prospect for union.”^{xv} This seems to be a very charitable evaluation. In his *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549), Calvin stated:

In as far as Christ is a man, he is to be sought nowhere else than in heaven and in no other manner than with the mind and the understanding of faith. Therefore it is a perverse and impious superstition to include him under elements of this world. . . . We repudiate those who urge the literal interpretation of the words of institution as preposterous interpreters. For beyond controversy they are to be taken figuratively. . . . Nor do we regard it as less absurd to place Christ under, and to unite him with, the bread than to change the bread into his body. . . . When we say that Christ is to be sought in heaven, this mode of speech expresses a distance of place. . . . because the body of Christ. . . . being finite and contained in heaven, as in a place, must of necessity be removed from us by as great a distance as the heaven is removed from the earth.^{xvi}

In his battle with Joachim Westphal, Calvin stated, “This is the summary of our doctrine, that the flesh of Christ is a vivifying bread because it truly nourishes and feeds our souls when by faith we coalesce with it.”^{xvii} In reality Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper was nothing but a very crude kind of Zwinglianism disguised in Lutheran phrases and terminology.

Yet, this man had signed the *Augsburg Confession* of 1540 (in so far as the author meant it, i.e. Melanchthon’s *Variata*). He was considered by some to be a Lutheran. he boasted of complete agreement between himself and Melanchthon in regard to the Lord’s Supper: “I confirm that in this cause (the Lord’s Supper), Philip can no more be torn from me than from his own bowels.”^{xviii} And all the while, until the day he died, Melanchthon considered himself to be in complete agreement with the Lutherans and the original teaching of the *Augsburg Confession* on the Lord’s Supper.

Calvin’s closeness to Melanchthon and, especially, Melanchthon’s early partnership with Luther, gave a credible assist to the Crypto-Calvin emphasis which blossomed after the death of Melanchthon in 1560 and Calvin in 1564. In 1570 a new catechism published by the Philippists rejected the omnipresence of Christ according to his human nature and sanctioned Calvin’s teaching concerning the local inclusion of Christ in heaven. It declared: “The ascension was visible and corporeal; the entire Antiquity has always written that Christ’s body is restricted to a certain place, wherever he wishes it to be; and a bodily ascension was made upwards.”^{xix} The Crypto-Calvinists were progressively exposing themselves as Clear-Calvinists. Their theology penetrated Lutheran schools and communities to an unbelievable degree: “Thus Wittenberg, during Luther’s days the fountainhead of the pure Gospel and the stronghold of uncompromising fidelity to the truth, had become a veritable nest of fanatical Crypto-Calvinistic schemers and dishonest anti-Lutheran plotters.”^{xx}

Their apparent overwhelming success bred in them an overwhelming, overabundant sense of self-assuredness that resulted in the *Exegesis Perspicua* (1574), a work published secretly by the Philippists and designed to deal a final blow to Lutheranism in order to banish it forever from Saxony. In clear and unmistakable language, the sacramental union, oral eating and drinking and the eating and drinking of the

wicked, which before were basically ignored, were dealt with openly and in the same way, were openly rejected. The *Exegesis* taught:

The body of Christ is enclosed in heaven; in the Holy Supper it is present only according to its efficacy; there is no union of the body of Christ with the bread and wine; hence, there neither is nor can be such a thing as oral eating and drinking or eating and drinking of unbelievers. . . . In the use of the bread and wine the believers by faith become true and living members of the body of Christ, who is present and efficacious through these symbols, as through a ministry inflaming and renewing our hearts by his Holy Spirit. The unbelieving, however, do not become partakers, but because of their contempt are guilty of the body of Christ.^{xxi}

Further, it suggested that all should follow the men whom God had placed at the side of Luther and who had spoken more correctly than Luther; that all churches be in accord with one another; that all leaders suppress disputation concerning this subject (Lord's Supper) and those who don't should be disposed and replaced with more modest men. No gobbledy-gook here!

This seems to have been the straw which broke the camel's back. Those who had been fooled by masked Calvinism were now enlightened and enraged. One of these was Jacob Andreae. A loyal Lutheran who had been duped "big time" by the Philippists, he now took a strong hand in pushing for a confession dealing with them and their false teachings. The sermons he preached on those subjects were put into a confessional structure and became known as the *Swabian Concordia*. Revisions to this document, previously made by Martin Chemnitz, were eventually known as the *Swabian-Saxon Concordia* (1574). Here the article on the Lord's Supper underwent extensive alterations. Unfortunately, it contained numerous quotes of Melancthon which, some feared, would lead to too much discussion and delay the adoption of a much-needed confession. The *Maulbronn Formula* followed in 1576. A combination of this document and the *Swabian-Saxon Formula* resulted in the *Torgau Book*. The lengthy original version became known as the *Formula of Concord – Thorough Declaration*. A shortened version, prepared by Andreae, was tabbed the *Epitome*.

The Contents of Article VII

According to Bente, "the Seventh Article teaches the real and substantial presence of the true body and blood of Christ; their sacramental union in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine; the oral manducation, or eating and drinking of both substances by unbelieving as well as believing communicants. It maintains that this presence of the body and blood of Christ, though real, is neither an impanation nor a companation, neither a local inclusion nor a mixture of the two substances, but illocal and transcendent. It holds that the eating of the body and the drinking of the blood of Christ, though truly done with the mouth of the body, is not Capernaitic, or natural, but supernatural. It affirms that this real presence is effected, not by any human power, but by the omnipotent power of Christ in accordance with the words of the institution of the Sacrament."^{xxii} The *Epitome* covers the question with ten *Affirmativa* and twenty-one *Negativa*. The *Affirmativa* are presented with the heading, "Confession of the Pure Doctrine Concerning the Holy Supper Against the Sacramentarians." In ten crisp, concise statements they restate and reformulate the historic position of loyal Lutherans. This was a purposeful demonstration that the stance taken was and always had been the unanimous opinion of loyal Lutherans, contrary to what the Sacramentarians had claimed. The *Solid Declaration* launches into an extensive quotation of previous confessions and the writings of Luther himself. The questions of what is present in the Sacrament, what is the role of consecration, how and by whom the elements are received, and what that reception entails for worthy and unworthy communicants are all covered positively.

The *Solid Declaration* then sets out to prove that the contention of Luther and the Confessions are scriptural. They attest that the words of institution indicate a literal understanding. They also argue that hermeneutical principles do not permit Jesus' words to be interpreted "as allegorical, figurative, tropical

expressions, according as it seems agreeable to our reason, but with simple faith and due obedience to receive the words as they read, in their proper and plain sense. . . not to be diverted therefrom by objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to reason.”^{xxiii} The example of God’s words to Abraham regarding Isaac’s birth and his sacrifice are used to indicate that Christ’s words of institution are to be regarded as clear and possible just like Abraham believed the words of God regarding his son. In addition, 1 Corinthians 10:16 is quoted to indicate that Paul cannot be speaking of a spiritual, but of a sacramental or oral participation of the body of Christ by believers and unbelievers.

The twenty-one *Negativa* of the *Epitome* begin with the rebuttals of papal transubstantiation, the sacrament of the mass, communion under one kind, and the adoration of the host. The condemnations dealing with the Sacramentarians are, as listed by Allbeck:

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

The *Solid Declaration* undertakes, as part of its refutation of Sacramentarian heresies, several related issues, the first being the difference between spiritual and sacramental eating of the body of Christ. The spiritual eating is that of John 6, that which is done by faith in Jesus when the Gospel is presented. This spiritual eating does happen, in fact, must happen for beneficial participation in the Lord’s Supper. The sacramental eating is done only in the Lord’s Supper. Where the sacramental eating is done without the spiritual eating, the result is judgment for the unbelieving recipient. Here also the writers take time to designate an unworthy communicant as one who lacks faith in Jesus, not one whose saving faith is weak.

Another related issue is the question of what brings about the Real Presence, i.e., only the Word with its inherent power and efficacy. The point is made that, just as God’s one command to Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and multiply” was and always will be efficacious throughout time. Care is taken that the consecration, distribution, reception, or anything done or not done by the ministrant or the recipient, including the presence of saving faith or lack of it, are not made the cause of the Real Presence, only the Word of Christ.

Thus the discussion of Article VII – Of the Holy Supper. The fathers certainly did justice to the tile.... Thorough Declaration.

Outline

Article VII – Thorough Declaration

Introduction (1)

Status Controversiae (2-8)

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- III. Refutation of Arguments (91-106)
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ⁱ F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, Concordia Triglotta*, p. 105.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid* p. 105.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid* p. 175.

^{iv} *Ibid* p. 176.

^v *Ibid*.

^{vi} *Ibid* p. 179.

^{vii} *Ibid* p. 186.

^{viii} W.D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 243.

^{ix} F. Bente, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 177.

^x *Ibid* p. 177.

^{xi} *Ibid* p. 178.

^{xii} *Ibid*.

^{xiii} *Ibid* p. 174.

^{xiv} *Ibid*.

^{xv} *Ibid*.

^{xvi} *Ibid*. p. 175.

^{xvii} *Ibid*. p. 182.

^{xviii} *Ibid*. p. 179.

^{xix} *Ibid*. p. 187.

^{xx} *Ibid*. p. 186.

^{xxi} *Ibid*. p. 189.

^{xxii} *Ibid*. p. 173.

^{xxiii} *Formula of Concord, Thor. Dec., Concordia Triglotta*. p. 987

^{xxiv} W.D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 276.