

## XI. Controversies Following the Interim and Settled by the Formula of Concord.

### 132. Conflicts Unavoidable.

When describing the conflicts after Luther's death, historians frequently deplore "the dreadful controversies of these dark days of doctrinal extremists and the polemical spirit of rigid Lutheranism." G. J. Planck, in particular, characterized them all as useless quarrels and personal wranglings of narrow-minded, bigoted adherents of Luther, who vitiated original Lutheranism by making it essentially a matter of "pure doctrine." To the present day indifferently inclined historians are wont to mar their pages with similar views.

True, "pure doctrine," "unity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel," such was the **shibboleth of the faithful Lutherans over against the Melancthonians and other errorists. But this was neither reprehensible doctrinalism nor a corruption of original Lutheranism, but the very principle from which it was born and for which Luther contended throughout his life—a principle of life or death for the Lutheran Church.** It was the *false* doctrine of justification which made Luther a most miserable man. It was the *pure* doctrine as taught by St. Paul which freed his conscience, transported him into Paradise, as he himself puts it, and made him the Reformer of the Church. Ever since, purity of doctrine was held, by Luther and all true Lutheran theologians, to be of paramount import to Christianity and the Church. Fully realizing that adulteration of any part of the Christian doctrine was bound to infect also the doctrine of faith and justification and thus endanger salvation, they earnestly warned against, and opposed, every deviation from the clear Word of God, no matter how insignificant it might appear. They loved the truth more than external peace, more even than their own lives. Hence they found it impossible to be silent, apathetic, and complacent spectators while the Philippists and others denied, attacked, and corrupted the truth taught by Luther from the Word of God.

Accordingly, since **the Leipzig Interim involved and maintained doctrines and principles subversive of genuine Lutheranism** and was prepared, introduced, and defended by the very men who were regarded as pillars of the Lutheran Church, it was evident from the outset that this document must of necessity precipitate most serious internal troubles. **From the moment the Wittenbergers cast the Interim as a firebrand into the Church, a domestic warfare was unavoidable,—if indeed any true disciples of Luther still remained in the Church of which he, and not Melancthon, was the founder. While the Augsburg Interim resulted in an external theological warfare of the Lutherans against the Romanists, the Leipzig Interim added a most serious domestic conflict, which conscientious Lutherans could not evade, though it well-nigh brought our Church to the brink of destruction. For now the issue was not merely how to resist the Pope and the Romanists, but, how to purge our own Church from the Interimists and their pernicious principles. And as long as the advocates of the Interim or of other aberrations from the old Lutheran moorings refused to abandon their errors, and nevertheless insisted on remaining in the Church, there was no real unity in the truth. Hence there could also be no true peace and brotherly harmony among the Lutherans. And the way to settle these differences was not indifferently to ignore them, nor unionistically to compromise them by adopting ambiguous formulas, but patiently to discuss the doctrines at issue until an agreement in the truth was reached, which finally was done by means of the *Formula of Concord*.**

True, these controversies endangered the very existence of our Church. But the real cause of this was not the resistance which the loyal Lutherans offered to the errorists, nor even the unseemly severity by which the prosecution of these controversies was frequently marred, but the un-Lutheran spirit and the false principles and doctrines manifested and defended by the opponents. In so far as divine truth was defended and error opposed, these controversies were truly wars to end war, and to establish real peace and true unity within our Church. A cowardly surrender to the indifferentistic spirit, the unionistic policy, the false principles, and the erroneous doctrines of the Interimists would have been tantamount to a complete transformation of our Church and a total annihilation of genuine Lutheranism.

**The manner in which these controversies were conducted, it is true, was frequently such as to obstruct, rather than further, mutual understanding and peace.** As a rule, it is assumed that only the genuine Lutherans indulged in unseemly polemical invective, and spoke and wrote in a bitter and spiteful tone. But the Melanchthonians were to say the least, equally guilty. And when censuring this spirit of combativeness, one must not overlook that the ultimate cause of the most violent of these controversies was the betrayal of the Lutheran Church by the Interimists; and that the severity of the polemics of the loyal Lutherans did not, at least not as a rule, emanate from any personal malice toward Melanchthon, but rather from a burning zeal to maintain sound Lutheranism, and from the fear that by the scheming and the indifference of the Philippists the fruits of Luther's blessed work might be altogether lost to the coming generations. The "peace-loving" Melanchthon started a conflagration within his own church in order to obtain a temporal and temporary peace with the Romanists; while the loyal Lutherans, inasmuch as they fought for the preservation of genuine Lutheranism, stood for, and promoted, a truly honorable, godly, and lasting peace on the basis of eternal truth. And while the latter fought honestly and in the open, the Philippists have never fully cleared themselves from the charges of duplicity, dishonesty, and dissimulation.

### 133. Melanchthon Prime Mover of Conflicts.

The Leipzig Interim was the signal for a general and prolonged warfare within the Lutheran Church. It contained the germs of various doctrinal errors, and produced a spirit of general distrust and suspicion, which tended to exaggerate and multiply the real differences. Schmauk says: "**The seeds of the subsequent controversies are all to be found in the Leipzig Interim.**" (595.) At any rate, most of the controversies after Luther's death flowed from, or were in some way or other connected with, this unfortunate document. Such is the view also of the *Formula of Concord*, which declares that the thirty years' controversies which it settled originated especially in the Interim. (857, 19; 947, 29.)

**Yet the Interim was rather the occasion than the ultimate cause of these conflicts.** Long before the flames of open discord burst forth, the embers of secret doctrinal dissension had been glowing under the surface. Even during the life of Luther much powder had been secretly stored up for which the Interim furnished the spark. This is proved, among other things, by Luther's predictions (referred to in the preceding chapter) concerning his own colleagues. **And above all it was the "peace-loving" Philip who first and most successfully sowed the dragon's teeth of discord. Melanchthon's doctrinal deviations from the teachings of Luther and from his own former position must be regarded as the last cause of both the Leipzig Interim and the lamentable controversies that followed in its wake.** Indeed, a tragic sight to behold: The co-laborer of Luther, the servant of the Reformation second only to Luther, the Praeceptor Germaniae, the ardent and anxious lover of peace, etc.—untrue to his confiding friend, disloyal

to the cause of the Reformation, and the chief cause of strife and dissension in the Lutheran Church! And withal, Melanchthon, mistaking external union for real unity and temporal peace with men for true peace with God, felt satisfied that he had spent the efforts of his entire life in the interest of the true welfare of the Church! Shortly before his death (April 19, 1560) he expressed his joy that now he would be delivered from the “fury of the theologians.” On a sheet of paper found on his table were written a number of reasons why he feared death less. One of them was: “*Liberaberis ab aerumnis et a rabie teologorum*. You will be delivered from toils and from the fury of the theologians.” (C. R. 9, 1098.) Thus even in the face of death he did not realize that he himself was the chief cause of the conflicts that had embittered his declining years!

### 134. Melanchthon’s Humanistic and Unionistic Tendencies.

**Till about 1530 Melanchthon seems to have been in complete harmony with Luther, and to have followed him enthusiastically. To propagate, coin, and bring into scholastic form the Christian truths once more brought to light by the Reformer he considered to be his peculiar mission. But his secret letters and, with gradually increasing clearness and boldness, also his publications show that later on he began to strike out on paths of his own, and to cultivate and disseminate doctrines incompatible with the Lutheranism of Luther.** In a measure, these deviations were known also to the Wittenberg students and theologians, to Cordatus, Stifel, Amsdorf, the Elector John Frederick, Brueck, and Luther, who also called him to account whenever sufficient evidence warranted his doing so. (*Lehre und Wehre* 1908, 61ff.)

In a letter to Cordatus, dated April 15, 1537, Melanchthon was bold enough to state that **he had made many corrections in his writings and was glad of the fact: “*Multa ultro correxi in libellis meis et correxisse me gaudeo.*”** (C. R. 3, 342.) In discussing the squabble between Cordatus and Melanchthon whether good works are necessary for salvation, Luther is reported by the former to have said, in 1536: “To Philip I leave the sciences and philosophy and nothing else. But I shall be compelled to chop off the head of philosophy, too.” (Kolde, *Analecta*, 266.) Melanchthon, as Luther put it, was always troubled by his philosophy; that is to say, instead of subjecting his reason to the Word of God, he was inclined to balance the former against the latter. **The truth is that Melanchthon never fully succeeded in freeing himself from his original humanistic tendencies, a fact which gave his mind a moralistic rather than a truly religious and Scriptural bent.** Even during the early years of the Reformation when he was carried away with admiration for Luther and his work, the humanistic undercurrent did not disappear altogether. January 22, 1525, he wrote to Camerarius: “*Ego mihi conscius sum, non ullam ob causam unquam teqeologhkevnai, nisi at mores meos emendarem*. I am conscious of the fact that I have never theologized for any other reason than to improve my morals.” (C. R. 1, 722.)

### 131. Various Theological Controversies.

Following is a synopsis and summary of the main controversies within the Lutheran Church after the death of Luther, which were settled in the first eleven articles of the *Formula of Concord*. The sequence of these articles, however, is not strictly historical and chronological, but dogmatic. In the main, the arrangement of the Augsburg Confession is observed.

**The first** of these controversies was the so-called **Adiaphoristic Controversy, from 1548 to 1555, in which the Wittenberg and Leipzig theologians (Melanchthon, Eber, Pfeffinger,**

etc.) defended the **Leipzig Interim and the reintroduction of Romish ceremonies into the Lutheran Church**. They were opposed by the champions of a consistent and determined Lutheranism, led by Flacius, who declared: “*Nihil est adiaphoron in statu confessionis et scandalii*. Nothing is an adiaphoron in case of confession and offense.” The controversy was decided by Article X.

**The second** is the **Majoristic Controversy, from 1551 to 1562, in which George Major and Justus Menius defended the phrase of Melanchthon that good works are necessary to salvation**. They were opposed by the loyal Lutherans, of whom Amsdorf, however, lapsed into the opposite error: Good works are detrimental to salvation. This controversy was settled by Article IV.

**The third** is the **Synergistic Controversy, from 1555 to 1560, in which Pfeffinger, Eber, Major, Crell, Pezel, Strigel, and Stoessel held with Melanchthon that man by his own natural powers cooperates in his conversion**. Their opponents (Amsdorf, Flacius, Hesshusius, Wigand, Gallus, Musaeus, and Judex) taught, as formulated by Flacius: “*Solus Deus convertit hominem ... Non excludit voluntatem, sed omnem efficaciam et operationem eius....* God alone converts man ... He does not exclude the will, but all efficaciousness and operation of the same.” This controversy was decided and settled by Article II.

**The fourth** is the **Flacian Controversy, from 1560 to 1575, in which Flacius, supported by Cyriacus Spangenberg, Christian Irenaeus, Matthias Wolf, I. F. Coelestinus, Schneider, and others, maintained that original sin is not an accident, but the very substance of fallen man**. The Lutherans, including the Philippists, were practically unanimous in opposing this error. It was decided by Article I.

**The fifth** was the **Osiandristic and the Stancaric Controversy, from 1549 to 1566, in which Andrew Osiander denied the forensic character of justification, and taught that Christ is our righteousness only according to His divine nature, while Stancarus contended that Christ is our righteousness according to His human nature only**. Both, Osiander as well as Stancarus, were opposed by Melanchthon, Flacius, and practically all other Lutherans, the Philippists included. This controversy was settled by Article III.

**The sixth** was the **Antinomistic Controversy, from 1527 to 1556, in which various false views concerning the Law and the Gospel were defended, especially by John Agricola who maintained that repentance (contrition) is not wrought by the Law, but by the Gospel (a view which, in a modified form was later on defended also by Wittenberg Philippists), and, after Luther’s death, by Poach and Otto, who rejected the so-called Third Use of the Law**. The questions involved in these Antinomian controversies were decided by Articles V and VI.

**The seventh** was the **Crypto-Calvinistic Controversy, from 1560 to 1574, in which the Philippists in Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Dresden (Peucer, Cracow, Stoessel, etc.) endeavored gradually to supplant Luther’s doctrines concerning the Lord’s Supper and the majesty of the human nature of Christ by the Calvinistic teachings on these points**. These secret and dishonest enemies of Lutheranism were opposed by true Lutherans everywhere, notably by the theologians of Ducal Saxony. In 1574 they were publicly unmasked as deceivers and Calvinistic schemers. The controversy was settled by Articles VII and VIII.

**The two last controversies** were of a local nature. The first was chiefly confined to Hamburg, the second to Strassburg. In the former city **John Aepinus taught that Christ’s descent into hell was a part of His suffering and humiliation**. He was opposed by his colleagues in Hamburg. In Strassburg John Marbach publicly denounced **Zanchi, a Crypto-Calvinist, for**

**teaching that faith, once engendered in a man, cannot be lost.** The questions involved in these two articles are dealt with in Articles IX and XI, respectively.

### 130. Three Theological Parties.

In the theological conflicts after Luther's death three parties may be distinguished.

**The first party** embraced chiefly **the Interimists, the Synergists, and the Crypto-Calvinists. They were adherents of Philip Melanchthon, hence called Melanchthonians or, more commonly, Philippists, and were led by the theologians of Electoral Saxony.** Their object was to supplant the authority and theology of Luther by the unionistic and liberal views of Melanchthon. Their headquarters were the universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig. Some of their chief representatives were: Joachim Camerarius (born 1500, professor of Greek in Leipzig, a close friend of Melanchthon, died 1574); Paul Eber (born 1511, professor in Wittenberg, died 1568); Caspar Cruciger, Jr. (born 1525, professor in Wittenberg, died at Cassel 1597); Christopher Pezel (born 1539, professor in Wittenberg, died 1600 or 1604); George Major (Meier; born 1502, professor in Wittenberg, died 1574); Caspar Peucer (doctor of medicine, son-in-law of Melanchthon; born 1525, imprisoned from 1574 till 1586 died 1602); Paul Crell (born 1531, professor in Wittenberg, died 1579); John Pfefflnger (born 1493, professor in Leipzig, died 1573); Victorin Strigel (born 1524, 1548 professor in Jena, died in Heidelberg 1569); John Stoessel (born 1524, died in prison 1576); George Cracow (born 1525, professor of jurisprudence in Wittenberg, privy counselor in Dresden, died in prison 1575).

**The second party**, the so-called **Gnesio-Lutherans (genuine Lutherans)**, was represented chiefly by the theologians of Ducal Saxony and embraced such staunch and loyal men as Amsdorf, Flacius, Wigand, Gallus, Matthias Judex, Moerlin, Tileman Hesshusius, Timann, Westphal, and Simon Musaeus. Though some of these leaders were later discredited by falling into extreme positions themselves, **they all proved to be valiant champions of Luther and most determined opponents of the Philippists.** The strongholds of this party were Magdeburg and the University of Jena, founded by the sons of John Frederick in 1547. Led by Flacius, this university unflinchingly opposed the modified and unionistic Lutheranism advocated by the Philippists at Wittenberg and Leipzig. Seeberg says, in substance: **The Gnesio-Lutherans were opposed to the philosophy of the Philippists and stood for "the simple Biblical truth as Luther had understood it." Even when opposed by the government, they defended the truth, and were willing to suffer the consequences. Strict doctrinal discipline was exercised by them.** They opposed with equal determination the errors also of their fellow-combatants: Amsdorf, Flacius, Poach, and others. Intellectually they were superior to the Philippists. Seeberg concludes: "In the forms of their time (which were not outgrown by any one of the Philippists either) they preserved to the Church genuine Luther-treasures—*echtes Luthergut*." (*Dogmengeschichte* 4, 2, 482.)

**The third, or center-party**, was composed of **the loyal Lutherans who took no conspicuous part in the controversies, but came to the front when the work of pacification began.** They were of special service in settling the controversies, framing the *Formula of Concord*, and restoring a true and godly peace to our Church. Prominent among them were Brenz, Andreae, Chemnitz, Selnecker, Chytraeus, Cornerus, Moerlin, and others. These theologians were, on the one hand, opposed to all unnecessary logomachies *i.e.*, controversies involving no doctrinal differences, and, at the same time, were most careful not to fall into any extreme position

themselves. On the other hand, however, they approved of all controversies really necessary in the interest of truth, rejected and condemned all forms of indifferentism and unionism, and strenuously opposed every effort at sacrificing, veiling, or compromising any doctrine by ambiguous formulas for the sake of external peace or any other policy whatsoever. (CONC. TRIGL., 855f.)