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Quentin Stewart

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_stewartq@csl.edu

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CATHOLICITY OR CONSENSUS?
THE ROLE OF THE CONSENSUS PATRUM AND THE VINCENTIAN CANON
IN LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY: FROM CHEMNITZ TO QUENSTEDT

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Church History
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Quentin Stewart
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Approved by

Dr. Robert Rosin Advisor

Dr. Robert Kolb Reader

Dr. Paul Robinson Reader

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABBREVIATIONS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE FIRST LUTHERANS AND ROME’S CHARGE OF THEOLOGICAL NOVELTY	39
3. RESPONDING TO TRENT’S CLAIM TO THE <i>CONSENSUS PATRUM</i> : MARTIN CHEMNITZ, CONSENSUS, AND CATHOLICITY	85
4. RESPONDING TO THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION’S REASSERTION OF CONSENSUS AND THE CHALLENGERS OF SYNCRETISM. CONSENSUS AND CATHOLICITY AFTER CHEMNITZ	199
Aegidius Hunnius	205
Johann Gerhard	214
Georg Calixt	232
Abraham Calov	264
Johann Conrad Dannhauer	276
Johann Andreas Quenstedt	285
5. CONCLUSION	297
BIBLIOGRAPHY	321
VITA	344

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I am indebted to Dr. Thomas C. Oden for introducing me to the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus patrum* while he was serving as a guest lecturer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1998. His irenic ecumenism challenged me to investigate the Canon further. I am equally indebted to Dr. Sigurd Grindheim for introducing me to the works of Martin Chemnitz at the same time. Chemnitz's continual appeal to the consensus of the fathers provided an alternative to the Anglican, Roman and Eastern Orthodox appeals to the *consensus patrum* and opened up new theological horizons for me. I would like to thank Dr. Paul Robinson for his time and consideration and his keen insights regarding Scripture and tradition in the late Middle Ages. Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Kolb for his kindness to me and his expertise in the Lutheran Late-Reformation and Chemnitziana. This dissertation would not have been complete without his sage advice. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Rosin for his extreme patience and kindness shown to me over the past six years. His indefatigable labors on behalf of my doctoral studies and this dissertation leave me humbled and grateful. I count myself fortunate to have had such a dedicated *Doktorvater*.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CR *Philippi Melancthonis Opera quae Supersunt Omnia*. Ed. C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil (Halle and Brunswick 1834ss) (*Corpus Reformatorum*, vols. 1–28).
- LW *Luther's Works*, American ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986.
- KuD *Kirche und Dogma*
- MWA *Melancthon's Werke in Auswahl*, Ed. R. Stupperich (Gütersloh, 1951–1975)
- StA *Melancthon's Werke in Auswahl*, Ed. R. Stupperich (Gütersloh, 1951–1975) (Studien Ausgabe)
- SVRG *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* (Halle, 1883 ff)
- WA Luther, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 65 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993.

ABSTRACT

Stewart, Quentin D. "Catholicity or Consensus? The Role of the *Consensus Patrum* and the Vincentian Canon in Lutheran Orthodoxy: From Chemnitz to Quenstedt." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2006. 340 pp.

This dissertation traces the role played by the Vincentian Canon and its theological corollary, the *consensus patrum*, within the parameters of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Though Luther had no use for the *consensus patrum*, his chief colleague Philip Melanchthon had a high view of the consensus of the ancient church, especially whenever it could be applied to evangelical Lutheran theology. As a humanist, Melanchthon maintained a critical reverence for the ancient church throughout his life, and the *consensus ecclesiae* is reflected prominently in his theological works. Matthias Flacius Illyricus, one of Melanchthon's former students and most bitter opponent, also sought to catalogue evangelical witnesses to the Gospel throughout the centuries in the *Magdeburg Centuries*. Flacius and his colleagues never maintained that there was a consensus of the fathers, but they did argue that there was a chain of witnesses to the truth throughout the centuries. Martin Chemnitz in his *Examination of the Council of Trent* applies the Vincentian Canon with its triple criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent to the decrees of Trent. The result of such an analysis reveals that Trent's official decrees fail to meet Vincent's criteria and therefore are not catholic in the true sense of the word. The *consensus patrum* was part and parcel of Chemnitz's theology and methodology as he consistently appealed to the consensus of the fathers in his major theological works. The Canon thus becomes a polemical device for Chemnitz, but not an operative principle for his own dogmatic constructs. Chemnitz is the centerpiece of this dissertation for two reasons: (1) Chemnitz may be considered the father of Lutheran Orthodoxy, (2) Chemnitz argues for the consensus of the ancient church more fervently and consistently than any other Lutheran theologian before or after him. The advent of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine's *Controversies* reasserted Rome's claim to the consensus of the fathers and forced the generation after Chemnitz to reevaluate its stance on the *consensus patrum*. In the writings of Aegidius Hunnius, the chief representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy after Chemnitz, the notion of a *consensus patrum* was discarded. Hunnius argued that such a consensus never existed and that the fathers contradicted one another. Lutheran Orthodoxy shifted its emphasis from Melanchthon's and Chemnitz's stress on consensus to that of catholicity. Johann Gerhard, the most significant representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy, followed Flacius and Hunnius and appears to discard the *consensus patrum* in the polemical work of his last years—the *Confessio catholica*. Georg Calixt, a non-confessional Lutheran, sought to unify a divided Christendom via the Vincentian Canon and the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis*. Calixt's unionist efforts sparked the Syncretistic debate and called forth a bitter opponent in the person of Abraham Calov, the most influential orthodox Lutheran since Gerhard. Calov wrote twenty-six anti-Syncretistic works that refuted Calixt, the Vincentian Canon and demolished any notion that there ever was a consensus of the fathers. Ironically, Calixt's efforts to rehabilitate the Vincentian Canon ultimately shattered the validity of its criteria for Lutheranism. Catholicity, based on Scripture and the ecumenical creeds, and not the consensus of the ancient church became the definitive norm for Lutheran Orthodoxy by the middle of the seventeenth century.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Topic and Primary Question

The genesis of this study lies in the renewed interest in the Vincentian Canon seen in ecumenical studies and dialogues. For example, Thomas Oden's most recent work, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, appeals once again to the Vincentian Canon as an ecumenical norm. As editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary Series* he has become a leading spokesman for a broad-based ecumenical movement that is orthodox, trans-denominational and strongly dependent on the *consensus patrum*. Oden remains convinced that the classic formula of the Vincentian Canon—"that which has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone," emphasizing antiquity, universality and consent—is still the determinative guide for catholicity and orthodoxy.

Oden is only one of many in a long line of ecumenists who has appealed to the Canon since the Reformation era. Yet while invoking the Canon, he has made no effort to address the theological, historical and socio-contextual problems that attend the concrete application of the Canon.¹ Absent such a consideration, the Canon has been pulled in different directions. The historical vagaries accompanying the Canon are

¹The problematic nature of applying the Vincentian Canon is all the more pronounced in Oden's work, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Oden basically argues that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the consensual understanding of the ancient church. The positive contribution of the book is the valuable number of fathers cited concerning justification, unfortunately, however, the reader is left without a theological/historical context by which to judge what the fathers actually meant by such statements.

reinforced if one considers that John Henry Newman appealed to the Canon after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, whereas Anglican divines since the Reformation considered it the basis for Anglo-Catholicism in contradistinction to Roman particularism. The Canon suffered the same fate on the continent during the Reformation and confessional eras as both Roman Catholics and Lutherans appealed to it. Conversely, irenic ecumenists in the seventeenth century, such as Georg Calixt, appealed to the Canon for the sake of reunification at the cost of the confessionalism established in the previous century.

In light of so much discussion about the Vincentian Canon it is striking that the orthodox theologians of Lutheranism who also appealed to or addressed the Vincentian Canon have been ignored for the most part in these ecumenical discussions. This is regrettable since almost all significant Lutheran theologians from Melanchthon to Quenstedt have either addressed, appealed to, or refuted the Vincentian Canon. Furthermore, both scholars and modern ecumenists make reference to this Canon, yet there are but two or three monographs dedicated exclusively to it in the twentieth century.² Therefore, a brief discussion of the Vincentian Canon must be the starting point of this dissertation.

Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard and Abraham Calov are excellent case studies on using the Canon since their theological works were accepted as the systematized orthodox interpretation of Lutheran doctrine for their respective generations, and for the most part they considered their theology to stand in continuity with the ancient church. The Reformation for Melanchthon, Flacius, Chemnitz, Gerhard and Calov was precisely

²Hermann J. Sieben has noted the paucity of research on the Vincentian Canon. Cf. *Die Konzilsidee der Alten Kirche* (Paderborn: Schönigh, 1979), 149.

that: a re-formation and a reassertion of the purer doctrines of the ancient church for their sixteenth-century day and age, and not a revolution. This reform was not mere repristination of the ancient church but an addressing of issues of contemporary significance. The theology of the ancient church received unprecedented attention in the sixteenth century thanks both to the revival of humanistic studies concerned with all things ancient and to the theological chimera of novelty that concerned all parties involved in the Reformation debate.

The primary question of this study is this: How did the chief representatives of Lutheran Orthodoxy respond to the Vincentian Canon, with its criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent, and the Canon's theological corollary, the ancient consensus of the fathers, i.e., the *consensus patrum*? In their theological works, Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard and Abraham Calov³ all addressed the Vincentian Canon and its theological corollary: the *consensus patrum*. It should be noted at the start, however, that the *consensus patrum* and the Vincentian Canon are not synonymous. Those who appeal to the Vincentian Canon presuppose a consensus of the fathers of the first five or six hundred years, but not all theologians who maintain the *consensus patrum* necessarily adhere to the criteria of the Vincentian Canon in an absolute sense. The situation is further complicated when modern writers speak of the Vincentian Canon, yet actually

³Johann Andreas Quenstedt, Calov's contemporary, produced an equally significant piece of dogmatics in the form of his *Systema Theologiae* (1685). However, despite its cogency and "succinctness," when compared to Calov's dogmatics, one must concede that Calov was the true pioneer of High Orthodoxy. Calov was also more influential in expounding and promoting Lutheran dogma. August Tholuck termed Quenstedt the "bookkeeper" (*Buchhalter*) of orthodoxy since he succeeded in categorizing and summarizing with great clarity the theology of his age. Concerning Calov's great influence during his lifetime see Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 158; and Jörg Baur, *Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie Johann Andreas Quenstedts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 18.

mean the so-called “second rule” of Vincent of Lerins⁴ that speaks of doctrinal progress. Modern scholars also tend to speak of Vincent’s *Commonitory* in general when they are actually referring to the Canon or the second rule of Vincent. The waters are further muddied because the Canon is often referred to in passing without theologians taking the time to explain the precise implications of the Canon’s significance in a given context. Very often the Canon will make an appearance and then disappear just as quickly even though its presence lingers in the background in an undefined way.

Chemnitz repeatedly affirms both the “purer and more ancient church” as a reliable witness, as well as the *consensus patrum*. On virtually every page of his major works, be they polemical such as the *Examen concilii tridentini*, or didactic such as the *Loci theologici*, Chemnitz continually refers to the church fathers and quite often appeals to the consensus of the ancient church. Chemnitz also applies Vincent’s criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent to the decrees of the Council of Trent, and thereby seeks to prove that the Council is not truly catholic since it fails to meet Vincent’s criteria. Conversely, Chemnitz does not apply the criteria of the Canon as rigidly to his own doctrinal formulations since, as will be seen in more detail, his notion of the *consensus patrum* is qualified by Scripture and “a true and purer antiquity.” The Canon thus serves as a weapon against “papal” innovations, but not as a heuristic device in his

⁴“But some will say perhaps, Shall there, then, be no progress in Christ’s Church? Certainly; all possible progress. For what being is there, so envious of men, so full of hatred to God, who would seek to forbid it? Yet on condition that it be real progress, not alteration of the faith. For progress requires that the subject be enlarged in itself, alteration, that it be transformed into something else. The intelligence, then, the knowledge, the wisdom as well of individuals as of all, as well as one man as of the whole church, ought, in the course of ages and centuries to increase and make much vigorous progress; *but yet only in its own kind*; that is to say, *in the same doctrine, in the same sense, and in the same meaning* (italics mine).” Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitory* 147–48, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11. eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 147–48. The “second rule” refers to the last phrase: “but yet only in its own kind; that is to say, in the same doctrine, in the same sense, and in the same meaning” (sed in suo dumtaxat genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia).

own doctrinal formulations. Arthur Carl Piepkorn states, “In his masterful use of patristic evidence in support of his polemics he stands squarely in the Lutheran tradition of the 16th and 17th centuries exemplified before him by his mentor Melanchthon and by Matthias Vlacio (Flacius) (1520–1575) and by John Gerhard and George Calixtus and Abraham Calovius after him.”⁵ Thus, Chemnitz functions as a nexus between the two earlier and most significant Lutheran theologians, apart from Luther himself, and the two most significant theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

It is beyond the scope of this study to determine the precise significance of the use of specific fathers⁶ in the works of Melanchthon,⁷ Chemnitz, and the fathers of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Throughout the early years of the Reformation statements were made concerning the faith and life of the fathers that are, given our current state of historical knowledge, untenable. Were Melanchthon and Chemnitz misled by their sources, did they spin certain statements of the fathers, did they use the fathers for rhetorical effect, or did they genuinely believe that their patristic citations were fully in accord with Lutheran doctrine? The answer is probably yes to all of the above questions concerning the use of the fathers. Furthermore, what was the material impact of the plethora of patristic citations found in the works of Chemnitz? Did patristic testimonies simply function as

⁵ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “Martin Chemnitz’ Views on Trent: The Genesis and the Genius of the *Examen Concilii Tridentini*,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 37 (1966): 29.

⁶For detailed discussions of how the fathers were used in the sixteenth century see Eds. Leif Grane, Albert Schindler and Markus Wriedt, *Auctoritas Patrum. Zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter Im 15. and 16. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 1993) and Eds. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt, *Auctoritas Patrum II. Neue Beiträge zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 1998).

⁷For the most detailed discussion on Melanchthon’s use of the fathers see Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum. The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon*. *Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1961).

witnesses to the truths of the Lutheran Reformation, or did they have a material impact on the Reformer's understanding of biblical doctrine?

Paul Strawn, for instance, notes that Chemnitz quotes Cyril of Alexandria 279 times in *The Two Natures in Christ*, yet he is not able to determine whether Chemnitz's extensive use of Cyril was merely formal or material. That is to say, did Cyril merely function as a witness to Chemnitz's christology or was the Reformer's christology actually shaped by the Alexandrian? Chemnitz found his ground-breaking distinction of the three genera of the communication of attributes in Cyril's writings, yet Strawn still remains uncertain regarding the material impact of Cyril's christology.⁸ Robert A. Kelly analyzes Chemnitz's use of the Antiochene theologian, Theodoret of Cyrus, in *The Two Natures in Christ* and concludes that Chemnitz's use of Theodoret validates Richard Muller's assessment⁹ that Chemnitz was able to "move beyond the dichotomy between Alexandria and Antioch" in his own christology.¹⁰

Peter Fraenkel considers Chemnitz's extensive use of the church fathers as "part and parcel of his whole theological method."¹¹ On the other hand, Fred Kramer considers Chemnitz's use of the fathers to be merely formal, i.e., testimonies to the truths of Scripture.¹² J. A. O. Preus claims that Chemnitz's citations of the fathers, which number

⁸Cf. Paul Strawn, "Cyril of Alexandria as a Source for Martin Chemnitz," in *Die Patristik in der Bibellexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. David C. Steinmetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 205–30.

⁹Richard Muller, "communication idiomatum/communication proprietatum," in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Terms. Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 73.

¹⁰Robert A. Kelly, "Tradition and Innovation: The Use of Theodoret's Eranistes in Martin Chemnitz' *De Duabis Naturis in Christo*." in *Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett. Perspectives on Christology*. Eds. Marguerite Shuster and Richard Muller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 105.

¹¹Cf. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 267.

¹²Cf. Fred Kramer, "Biographical Sketch of Martin Chemnitz," in Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 22.

in the thousands, “give a total picture of the church fathers.”¹³ Preus, like Kramer, argues that the fathers only functioned as witnesses to Scripture in Chemnitz’s writings. Preus points out that Chemnitz is selective in his use of the church fathers and feels free to critique them when they were found wanting in his preface to his *Loci theologici*. Although Chemnitz was limited in his understanding of the fathers due to the scholarly limitations of his age, he was not unaware of the major controversies of the early church that shaped many of the fathers’ statements and decisions. Arthur L. Olsen and Bengt Hägglund enlarge our perspective as they describe what they observed in Chemnitz’s writings as “the teaching church.” Chemnitz considers many of the ancient doctors of the church to have had the gift of interpretation; thus their reliability as Scriptural expositors. “The *consensus patrum*, a concept clearly apparent in Chemnitz’s writings, has as its defining characteristics on the one hand, that there have always been those within the church that have interpreted Scripture properly, and on the other hand, that ‘nullum dogma in Ecclesia novum.’”¹⁴ Thus, Chemnitz’s application of the fathers is not as facile as it first might appear. Furthermore, the preferences and presuppositions of a given scholar often lead him or her to contend that Chemnitz was a “biblicist,” who remained faithful to Luther by upholding the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and therefore only used the fathers as witnesses,¹⁵ or a “Melanchthonian traditionalist” whose use of the fathers

¹³J. A. O. Preus, “The Use of the Church Fathers in the Formula of Concord,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (1984), 99.

¹⁴Strawn, “Cyril of Alexandria,” 210. Cf. Arthur L. Olsen, *Scripture and Tradition in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* Ph.D dissertation (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), and Bengt Hägglund, “Verständnis und Autorität der altkirchlichen Tradition in der lutherischen Theologie der Reformationszeit bis zum Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts,” in *Tradition im Luthertum und Anglikanismus*. Oecumenica. Eds. Gunther Gassmann and Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 51.

¹⁵Torbjörn Johansson observes that Chemnitz found Augustine to be a suitable witness to his position on free will and justification by faith. Nevertheless, there are points of difference between the two, and when necessary Augustine is corrected so that his teaching might fall in line with Reformation dogma. See

impacted his theology materially. The final word on the subject has yet to be said. On the other hand, once we reach the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy it becomes clearer that their lengthy patristic citations are formal in nature and serve primarily as witnesses to the truths of Scripture.

The driving force behind this thesis is the question of the catholicity of the Lutheran Reformation. Did the original form and substance of Lutheranism as crystallized in the works of Chemnitz, Gerhard and Calov maintain a true sense of catholicity? Catholicity here is defined as a sense of universality, continuity with the past, and general agreement with the doctrinal and exegetical tradition of the ancient and medieval church expressed by its foremost interpreters and doctors. Was Chemnitz justified in his appeal to the *consensus patrum* or did he overstate his case as he amassed an impressive amount of patristic quotations and data chronicling the development of early and medieval doctrines and practices? How consistently did he apply his appeal to the ancient consensus alongside his clear conviction of the formal and material principles of the Reformation—*sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*?

The *Magdeburg Centuries* already had sent shock waves throughout Roman Catholicism as the Flacius circle laid claim to catholicity and called for a speedy response. Chemnitz's *Examen* presumably was even more effective as it went through some twenty-five editions whereas the *Centuries* only went through three. When Gerhard, the quintessential representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy, sought to refute Bellarmine's *Controversies* he relied on Chemnitz's *Examen* and Flacius' *Magdeburg*

Reformationens Huvudfrågor och Arvet från Augustinus: En Studie i Martin Chemnitz' Augustinusreception (Göteborg: Församlingsförlaget, 1999), 293–96.

Centuries. Thus the concept of catholicity within Lutheran Orthodoxy forms a continuum as Chemnitz followed Melanchthon's thought and method, and as Gerhard relied upon both of them and Flacius for his defense of Lutheran Catholicity in his *Confessio catholica*. Lutheran catholicity, however, was put to the ultimate test as the syncretistic debate broke out. As Calixt sought to realize his ecumenical program based on the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the ancient church of the first five hundred years, the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis*, he was able to quote Luther, Melanchthon, Chemnitz, and Gerhard. Abraham Calov, the most significant representative of orthodoxy after Gerhard, and an able patrologist, sought to denounce Calixt with a new Lutheran confession, the *Consensus repetitus fidei*, which roundly condemned Calixt, the Reformed and the Roman Catholic confessions. Lutheran Orthodoxy was being defined in ever narrower terms—to the point that catholicity and true consensus was now becoming consensus with the Lutheran Confessions.

Was something of the “catholic substance” in the form of its appeal to and kinship with antiquity lost in the works of Gerhard and Calov due to changing historical circumstances? Is it a matter of historical distance from Melanchthon, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, and Martin Chemnitz? Can we detect a diminution of at least part of the catholicity of Lutheranism at an earlier date than previously believed? Peter Fraenkel, in fact, notes that after the mid-seventeenth century there was a diminution in the number of Lutheran patrologies. This in turn leads one to ask if much of the patristic heritage was lost to later generations as soon as the need to polemicize against Roman Catholic adversaries had past. As Lutheranism became a distinct and even self-sufficient confessional religion able to define itself on the basis of Luther's writings, the

confessions, and its own orthodox theologians did the need to define itself without recourse to antiquity diminish? If so this may be considered a partial loss of catholicity in Lutheranism.¹⁶

Methodology and the Sequence of *Dramatis personae*

Primary sources are of chief importance in this dissertation, although secondary literature will play an essential role since the historical context and exigencies of the times forced the theologians in question to alter their method and form of argumentation. Much secondary literature has been dedicated to Melanchthon and Flacius, but as stated above, they are not the focus of this dissertation. Nevertheless, failure to discuss Melanchthon's methodology and patristic argument would leave one with the mistaken impression that Chemnitz developed his theology *ex nihilo*. Whereas Chemnitz appears not to have relied on Flacius or the *Magdeburg Centuries* for his patristic citations and theological application of the church fathers,¹⁷ Gerhard's use of Flacius and the *Magdeburg Centuries* is evident in the introduction to his *Confessio catholica*. Thus to

¹⁶It would be interesting to chart the divergent courses of Lutheranism and Anglicanism. Arguably the Book of Concord solidified Lutheran theology and provided the trajectory for the development of Lutheran Orthodoxy from 1580 to 1715. On the other hand, the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer did not hold the same sway over Anglicanism as it ramified in the forms of Anglo-Catholicism, Puritanism and Evangelicalism. Moreover, Anglo-Catholicism continually returned to the Vincentian Canon and the idealization of the first five hundred years in opposition to Roman Catholicism. For a detailed discussion of the role of the church fathers and the *consensus patrum* in Anglicanism see Arthur Middleton, *Fathers and Anglicans. The Limits of Orthodoxy* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001).

¹⁷Melanchthon's influence on Chemnitz is quite clear, yet it would be interesting to discover the degree to which Chemnitz was familiar with the Flacius circle's *Magdeburg Centuries*. Chemnitz protested that he was not dependent on others' catenae of patristic quotations, and that his knowledge of the fathers was independently obtained. Nevertheless, he must have been at least somewhat familiar with the *Centuries*. Although Flacius may be considered the polar opposite of Melanchthon in many respects, he too shared the conviction that the Reformation stood in continuity with the ancient Church. Werner Elert observes, "That the verdict of the Centuries concerning dogmatic development after the fifth century is predominantly pessimistic will easily be understood from their own position amid the doctrinal controversies of this century. They stood against three fronts. It is all the more remarkable that they did not let this keep them from holding firmly to the thesis of continuity." *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 487.

understand Chemnitz in context it is necessary to assess Luther's and Melancthon's understanding of the *consensus patrum*. If we are to appreciate Gerhard and later orthodoxy we must also take into account the Flacius circle's treatment.

To understand Gerhard's treatment of the *consensus patrum* and the Vincentian Canon we must also discuss briefly the interlude between him and Chemnitz, i.e., Aegidius Hunnius—one of the foremost representatives of orthodoxy after Chemnitz. His reaction to the *Controversies*—the monumental work of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine laid the foundation for Gerhard's own assault on Tridentine Catholicism. Compared with Melancthon and Chemnitz, the systematic thoroughness of Gerhard's determination to destroy the validity of the *consensus patrum* in the *Confessio catholica* comes as a surprise if one is not familiar with the earlier polemics of Hunnius. Thus his reaction to Bellarmine must also be discussed, however briefly.

Abraham Calov's role in this story becomes more obvious for two reasons. First, he is the last most significant proponent of Lutheran Orthodoxy, and second he is an anti-syncretistic champion who attacked Georg Calixt's desire for an inter-confessional reunification via the Vincentian Canon. Calov produced twenty-six anti-syncretistic works and urged his colleagues at the orthodox universities of Wittenberg, Leipzig, Strassburg, and Jena to accept his *Consensus repetitus fidei*, a point by point refutation of Calixt, as the confession of their day. Johann Conrad Dannhauer, Calov's unwilling ally, will also be discussed since his *Mysterium syncretismi detecti* of 1648 is one of the most penetrating analyses of Calixt's syncretism and the Vincentian Canon.

A separate chapter will be dedicated to the irenic and non-confessional Lutheran, Georg Calixt, since his efforts to reunify Christendom were based on the criteria of the

Vincentian Canon. Calixt even wrote an introduction and a commentary on Vincent of Lerins' *Commonitory*. Ironically, Calixt's elevation of the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the first five hundred years was the final undoing of the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus patrum* for later Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Finally, for the sake of completeness Johann Andreas Quenstedt will be discussed. Arguably Quenstedt is the second most significant figure of High Orthodoxy, but Calov is linked more directly to the patristic methodology of Chemnitz and Gerhard. Thus, Quenstedt will be discussed, but not as thoroughly since his discussion of the Vincentian Canon is very similar to that of Calov.¹⁸

Focus

This dissertation will revolve ultimately around Chemnitz and his works, using him as the touchstone by which the others are to be considered. There are four reasons for this decision. First, enough work has already been done on Melanchthon and Flacius, and apart from the confessions of Melanchthon neither he nor Flacius has been considered an authoritative source of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Second, Chemnitz, if not the founder of Lutheran Orthodoxy, was certainly the most significant second-generation Lutheran theologian, and his works have enjoyed considerable authority throughout the ages by orthodox and confessional Lutherans. Furthermore, Chemnitz's methodology is extremely dependent on Melanchthon for his understanding and application of the *consensus patrum*, and yet his major works are not so vast in number as to make it

¹⁸One should remember that Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) lived after the age of High Orthodoxy yet had many works of Lutheran Orthodoxy in his library. Nevertheless, even he began to feel that his music and theology were becoming outdated towards the end of his life. Orthodoxy was never quite extinguished. It lingered on in and along with the transitional theology (*Übergangstheologie*) of the eighteenth century and the confessional revival of the nineteenth century came not long after the very last proponents of Orthodoxy had passed from the scene.

impossible to check the consistency of his methodological application of the *consensus patrum*. Third, Chemnitz never explicitly concedes that there is no *consensus patrum*. Like Melancthon he bends the appeal to the *consensus antiquitatis* by qualifying it with the notion of a purer and truer antiquity (*purior et verior antiquitas*). Fourth, Gerhard and Calov followed Flacius and Chemnitz closely as they developed their own particular arguments for the catholicity of their theology, but were unable to argue that their theology was in perfect harmony with the *consensus patrum*.

Chemnitz's application of the *consensus patrum* in his theology along with all claims to the ancient consensus, the Vincentian Canon, and "the true and purer antiquity" in his major works will be categorized systematically. For instance, there are only two passages in the *Examen* that demonstrate Chemnitz's understanding and proper application of the famous Canon.¹⁹ These two passages alone do not do justice to Chemnitz's understanding of the ancient consensus, for there are repeated references to the "consensus of the ancient church" in his works. Therefore the numerous references to the consensus of the ancient church found in Chemnitz's writings will be categorized in order to discover the frequency and consistency with which he appealed to such a consensus. This should reveal what Chemnitz means by such terms and how they affect the tenor of his theological arguments and assertions. The numerous references to the consensus of the ancient church found in Chemnitz's writings should also demonstrate how consistently he was able to appeal to it. And it is worth noting whether there is a discrepancy between his polemical and didactic writings as he appeals to the *consensus patrum*. Augustine and Bernard are called upon as witnesses to justification by faith in

¹⁹Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2. trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 29; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 3, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 466–67.

the *Examen*, yet in his *Loci theologici* Chemnitz concedes that even they spoke improperly on this topic. Torbjörn Johansson's recent dissertation *Reformationens huvudfrågor och arvet från Augustinus: En Studie i Martin Chemnitz' Augustinusreception* notes that Augustine was useful to Chemnitz up to a point, but that even the anti-Pelagian Augustine had to be superseded when it came to the doctrines of free will and justification by faith. Furthermore, only Chemnitz's sixth type of tradition, the consensus of the fathers, will be discussed since it directly touches upon the ancient consensus of the church. The focus of the dissertation is specifically on the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus patrum* and not tradition in general even though these concepts overlap at times.²⁰

Sources

There are certainly secondary sources that address Chemnitz's theology but the number is small in comparison with other Reformation figures, and most of the works dedicated exclusively to him are either journal articles or unpublished dissertations. Furthermore, there is a degree of redundancy in the articles that treat the theology of Chemnitz and the quality also varies. In a word, the definitive scholarly work on Chemnitz has yet to be written. There are far fewer secondary sources for Gerhard and there is next to nothing that exclusively treats the theology of Calov.

In looking at the primary sources, the method applied to Chemnitz's works is not quite applicable to Gerhard and Calov since they react quite differently to the Vincentian Canon and the claim of an ancient consensus, i.e., the *consensus antiquitatis*.

²⁰For detailed discussions of Chemnitz's famous analysis of the eight types of tradition see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (Yale University, 1969); Arthur Lloyd Olsen, "Scripture and Tradition in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1965); Eugene F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz. On Scripture and the Word* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kok and N. V. Kampen, 1971).

Furthermore, their writings are so vast as to make it impossible to assemble all of their references to consensus or catholicity. Nevertheless, it is possible to check a significant polemical work and compare it with their dogmatics. In this way the polemical treatises, written to defend and define what catholicity signified, will be compared with their systematic theologies where their theology is usually more constructive and less polemical. The purpose is to see if the appeals to catholicity in their polemical writings are congruent with their explications of contested doctrines in their systematic theologies.

In the case of Gerhard the choices are obvious. Gerhard's systematic *Loci theologici* set the standard for all subsequent works in Lutheran dogmatics in the seventeenth century. Thanks to Bellarmine's mammoth *Controversies*, Gerhard produced his *Confessio catholica* that sought to refute Roman ideas with the very words of Bellarmine, other Jesuits, the Tridentine fathers, and other adherents to Rome—a tome with very few references to Lutheran and other Protestant theologians.

Calov's *Systema* was one of the next most significant contributions to Lutheran dogmatics in the seventeenth century. Of the twenty-six anti-syncretistic books and treatises his *Digressio* and his would-be confession, the *Consensus repetitus fidei*, have been chosen. The *Digressio* was selected since Calov considered it worthy of including it in the first volume of his *Systema*, and the *Consensus repetitus fidei* is of value for its open condemnation of Calixt and all other confessions as well as its historical significance as the confession that might have been.

State of Melancthon Research on the *consensus ecclesiae*

Otto Ritschl's thesis of Melancthonian "traditionalism" is a kind of neck-on-the-hourglass starting point that has to be addressed, though Ritschl has been refuted by later

generations of scholars who have worked carefully with the reformer's writings. Furthermore, they were not hindered by the earlier Protestant embarrassment of the use of tradition, as were Harnack and Ritschl, who considered almost all vestiges of the ancient church to be a hindrance to the alleged purity of Luther's reformation. Friedrich Kantzenbach, Adolph Sperl, Wilhelm Neuser and Klaus Haendler offer valuable insights into Melancthon's understanding of the *consensus ecclesiae*, whereas E. P. Meijering's assesment in the end appears simplistic in light of present-day scholarship. In contrast, Peter Fraenkel's *Testimonia Patrum* is still the touchstone by which all other patristic analyses of Melancthon are to be judged. Nevertheless, Lowell Green's and especially Michael Becht's contributions, both dependent on Fraenkel's work, are helpful since they have sought to tease out the meaning of a highly significant concept in Melancthon's thought.

State of Chemnitz Research

Some early twentieth century Protestant scholars felt uncomfortable with Chemnitz's strong appeal to tradition, especially because it is an integral part of his theological method. Therefore some dubbed him a traitor to the Reformation, and others such as Otto Ritschl accused him of succumbing to Melancthonian traditionalism. Ritschl reproduced the convictions of his mentor Adolph von Harnack who went so far as to blame both Luther and Melancthon for the traditionalism that bound Protestant theology to medievalism for another two hundred years. Peter Fraenkel demonstrated how influential Ritschl's estimate of Melancthon's "traditionalism" remained in even the most recent studies. Gottfried Noth, in one of the last comprehensive analyses of Chemnitz' theology defended him as a "biblicist" in line with Luther, who only suffered

from occasional lapses into traditionalism. Arthur L. Olsen in his dissertation on Chemnitz and tradition, written during Vatican II and the Roman Catholic reinterpretation of tradition by scholars such as Josef Rupert Geiselman,²¹ has noted that this is a false dichotomy. Chemnitz should not be considered either a traditionalist or a biblicalist, for these concepts were alien to the sixteenth century. Olsen concludes that Chemnitz was faithful to both Luther and Melancthon in upholding Scripture and the rightful use of tradition in his theology. Thus there is no need for the false dichotomy between Scripture and tradition, or Luther and Melancthon. Melancthon stands in continuity with Luther, and Chemnitz with both of them. All that is grist for the Chemnitz mill, the Chemnitz chapter.

State of Research on the *Consensus Patrum* in the Sixteenth Century

The importance of the concept of consensus (*Konsensbegriff*) for the Reformation is slowly attracting scholarly concern. Lowell Green's article "Erasmus, Luther, and Melancthon on the Magnus Consensus: The Problem of the Old and the New in the Reformation and Today" appeared in 1975. Christoph Böttigheimer's *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik: Die Theologie der einen Kirche bei Georg Calixt* of 1996 offers a thorough treatment of Calixt's use and understanding of the *consensus antiquitatis* as it functioned as a governing principle of his theology, as well as a comprehensive review of Calixt research. Irene Dingel's article "Das Streben nach einem 'consensus orthodoxus' mit den Vätern in der Abendmahlsdiskussion des späten 16. Jahrhunderts" came out in 1999. Michael Becht in 2000 published *Pium Consensum Tueri. Studien zum Begriff consensus*

²¹Cf. Josef Rupert Geiselman, *Die lebendige Ueberlieferung als Norm des christlichen Glaubens. Das Formalprinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Traditionslehre von J. E. Kuhn* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959).

im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melancthon und Johannes Calvin. Becht summarizes the current state of Melancthon research concerning his notion of consensus. Becht's work confirms the growing interest in the *Konsensbegriff* of the sixteenth century.

Chemnitz has also attracted some attention in Eastern Orthodox circles. G. L. C. Frank's article "A Lutheran Turned Eastward: The Use of the Greek Fathers in the Eucharistic Theology of Martin Chemnitz" appeared in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* in 1982, with Frank arguing that one finds significant connections between the eucharistic theology of Chemnitz and the Eastern fathers. J. Francis Watson makes a similar argument for Chemnitz' christology in his article "Martin Chemnitz and the Eastern Church: A Christology of the Catholic Consensus of the Fathers," also in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* in 1994.²²

State of Research on Lutheran Orthodoxy

There are very few works that treat the theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy. August Tholuck's version of an ever more stagnating Orthodoxy juxtaposed with life-giving Pietism dominated the landscape for almost seventy-five years.²³ Wilhelm Gass's and Gustav Frank's *Dogmengeschichte* were primarily descriptive, and Ernst Troeltsch's *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melancthon* of 1891 ushered in renewed interest in the otherwise neglected subject of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Hans Leube's and Hans Emil Weber's works made significant corrections to the prevailing

²²Cf. G. L. C. Frank, "A Lutheran Turned Eastward: The Use of the Greek Fathers in the Eucharistic Theology of Martin Chemnitz," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 26 (1982), 155–71. J. Francis Watson, "Martin Chemnitz and the Eastern Church: A Christology of the Catholic Consensus of the Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 38 (1994), 73–86.

²³August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1852).

view established by August Tholuck. For example, Leube in *Die Reformidee* shattered the myth of a Protestant malaise and “dead” orthodoxy, and Weber’s works also made significant corrections to the prevailing view established by Tholuck. Nevertheless the prevailing view of Lutheran Orthodoxy as spiritually stagnant—“dead Orthodoxy”—has been difficult to eradicate completely.²⁴

Gerhard has slowly received increasing attention in scholarly quarters, though no full-scale analysis exists concerning his patristic methodology or his concept of catholicity. Only two monographs have appeared in recent years concerning the theology of Calov, and Jörg Baur’s 1962 monograph on Quenstedt, *Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie Johann Andreas Quenstedts*, remains an isolated work. The catholicity of Lutheran Orthodoxy has only been addressed in passing in several works such as Otto Ritschl’s *Dogmengeschichte*, Werner Elert’s *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Friedrich Kantzenbach’s *Das Ringen um die Einheit der Kirche im Jahrhundert der Reformation*, Robert D. Preus’s *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* and Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Obedient Rebels, The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, and *A History of The Development of Doctrine*.

Georg Calixt, however, has received ample attention in recent years thanks to his ecumenical efforts in the mid-seventeenth century. His works have been collected, edited and placed in four volumes by Inge Mager. This stands in stark contrast to the effort on the part of scholars to categorize the works of Lutheran Orthodox theologians.²⁵

²⁴Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) established the notion of dead orthodoxy in his *Unparteiische Kirchenhistorie* of 1699/1700.

²⁵Johann Anselm Steiger of the University of Hamburg appears to be the exception to the rule due to his compilation of Gerhard’s devotional literature in recent years.

Lutheran Orthodoxy as a whole has been grossly neglected in the last forty years. The amount of works cited in the third edition of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1957 to 1961) has barely increased in the still emerging fourth edition (1998 to the present). As Volker Jung notes in his recent work on Calov, “There are not gaps in the research of Lutheran Orthodoxy, it is a virtual no man’s land.”²⁶ Therefore any serious discussion of Gerhard and Calov can only help fill a vast gulf in Lutheran orthodox studies, especially in the English-speaking world.

Possible Implications and Relevance of Research

Roman Catholics as well as Protestants have largely ignored Chemnitz in their ecumenical endeavors. This is probably due to the enduring popularity in Confessional Lutheran circles of his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, but the stigma of Chemnitz as a polemicist does not do justice to Chemnitz’s positive contribution as an “ecumenical” theologian²⁷ who consistently availed himself of the tradition of the ancient church, to which all the major confessional churches of Christendom lay claim. The majority of books, monographs and articles that discuss Chemnitz only recognize in passing his appeal to the ancient consensus. Chemnitz is usually discussed as the father of Lutheran Orthodoxy, the great writer of the *Examen* that refuted the Council of Trent “once and for all,” his contribution to the Lutheran development of Christology, or his efforts in unifying Lutheranism through the Formula of Concord. His famous analysis of

²⁶Volker Jung is citing Johannes Wallmann’s work “Lutherische Konfessionalisierung—ein Überblick,” in *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*. Ed. Hans-Christoph Rublack (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1992), 47–48. Cf. Volker Jung, *Das Ganze der Heiligen Schrift. Hermeneutik und Schriftauslegung bei Abraham Calov* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1999), 1.

²⁷I risk using this term since Chemnitz is “ecumenical” in so far as he developed his theology by employing the rich traditions of both the eastern and western church.

traditions has received ample attention throughout the centuries, but his patristic methodology as a whole has been neglected. None of the numerous sources seen in preparation for this study discuss in depth how Chemnitz's view of ancient consensus permeates every aspect of his theology. Whereas Ritschl's thesis of Chemnitz as a "Melanchthonian traditionalist" has given way in recent years to a more sophisticated appreciation of the use of the church fathers in the sixteenth century, no one has made a serious attempt to recognize Chemnitz as an "ecumenical theologian"—ecumenical in the sense that he developed his theology by availing himself of what he considered the best of both ancient Western and Eastern as well as medieval theology.

The catholicity of Lutheranism is of value in this ecumenical age. Although we live in a time that would have us blur the sharp distinctions that separated the Reformers from their Roman Catholic contemporaries, the purpose of this study is not to argue that Chemnitz is an exemplary model of ecumenism in the modern sense of the word. That would be unfair to Chemnitz and to present discussions as well. Nevertheless, his desire to have the testimony of the ancient consensus in favor of the Lutheran position is incontestable and worth keeping in reserve in modern discussions. Equally strong was his desire that the fractured Lutheran churches achieve a consensus in his lifetime. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to execute a thorough analysis of Chemnitz's methodology for the sake of its historical importance. Chemnitz deserves the attention in his own right. Only secondarily will it challenge modern-day Lutherans and other Protestants to reevaluate their ecumenical endeavors and the manner in which they seek to incorporate the fathers of the ancient church into their theology. If this study helps in that area, all the better.

The Vincentian Canon

The idea of a consensus is as early as the Church itself. Irenaeus, Tertullian, the council fathers and Augustine all believed in such a consensus. The work, however, that crystallized the belief that such a consensus did in fact exist and that it was possible to judge doctrine accordingly was Vincent of Lerins' *Commonitory*. His famous dictum: "everywhere, always and by everyone" has become the hallmark of catholicity, and is based on the three pillars of antiquity, universality, and consent. Regrettably while many scholars make reference to this work but there are but several monographs dedicated exclusively to the Vincentian Canon in this century.²⁸ Thus a brief discussion of the Vincentian Canon will be the starting point of this dissertation.

Despite the great controversies and schisms of the fourth and early fifth centuries, Vincent of Lerins, who participated at the council of Ephesus in 431 and saw controversies first-hand,²⁹ affirmed that orthodoxy had been maintained and that it was recognizable. The Christian has Scripture and tradition at his disposal, yet the plethora of opinions and heresies make it necessary to interpret Scripture through the lens of tradition. Vincent's axiom has become the hallmark of catholicity: "Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has

²⁸The exceptions that have come to my attention are the works of P. Jose Madoz, *El Concepto de la Tradicion en S. Vincente de Lerins*. Estudio Historico-Critico del "Commonitorio." *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 5 (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1933), and Hubert Kremser, "Die Bedeutung des Vinzenz von Lerinum für die römisch-katholische Wertung der Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., Hamburg, 1959).

²⁹Vincent was a monk on the island of Lerins off the south of France. The monks there were known for their semi-Pelagian sympathies. After the council of Ephesus, Vincent wrote his famous *Commonitory*, or *Recollection*, to safeguard the church from heresy. The second part of the work apparently was stolen, but Vincent only added a short addendum instead of the lengthier section that was part of the original work.

been believed everywhere, always, and by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense “Catholic.”³⁰

Thus Vincent proposes universality, antiquity and consent as the three criteria that will preserve orthodoxy and prevent heretical innovation. Antiquity is the most important of the three criteria, but he is farsighted enough to realize that not all doctrinal issues had been settled. Therefore he allows for organic growth and also for new terminology for the sake of precision—“so that though you speak after a new fashion, what you speak may not be new” (cum dicas nove, non dicas novum).³¹ Doctrine is not meant to become fossilized or stagnant despite the priority given to antiquity and tradition. His second principle, or “rule,” of doctrinal progress allows for continued organic development and doctrinal growth as long as the meaning and sense of the dogma remains the same.

This progress truly constitutes a progress and not an alteration of the faith, for it is characteristic of progress that a thing grows while remaining the same thing, and characteristic of alteration that one thing is changed into another. Therefore intelligence, knowledge and wisdom grow and increase considerably both of the individual as of all, of the single man as well as of the entire church, according to ages and times. The particular nature of each is to be respected, however; that is, *it remains exactly the same dogma, has the same meaning and expresses the same thought* (italics mine).³²

The church is called upon to fulfill a three-fold task due to the exigencies of the day and its need to recast continually apostolic teaching in relevant and intelligible ways that

³⁰Vincent of Lerins, *A Commonitory in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11. Ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 132. “In ipsa item catholica ecclesia magnopere curandum est, ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est. Hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum.” Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium in Johannes Quasten, Patrology*, vol. 4. trans. Placid Solari (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1977), 547.

³¹Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium in Quasten, Patrology*, vol. 4, 548. Cf. Vincent of Lerins, *A Commonitory in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 147.

³²Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium in Quasten, Patrology*, vol. 4, 548. Cf. Vincent of Lerins. *A Commonitory in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 148.

retain the integrity of the primitive message. “To perfect and polish that which received its first form and outline in antiquity; to consolidate and strengthen that which has already obtained its profile and clarity; preserve that which has been confirmed and has received its definition.”³³ Johannes Quasten interprets this method accordingly:

There is thus a three-fold progress: a progress in formulation which the church, having been challenged by the heretics, accomplishes by means of conciliar decrees to enlighten the understanding with new and appropriate terms and transmit them to those who will come later; progress in the organic life which takes place in dogmatic truths and always exceeds the language which expresses it, much in the same way that a human life grows from infancy to old age while always remaining the same person; progress is the final acquisition of truth without alteration or mutilation.³⁴

Quasten’s final interpretation of progress—“progress is the final acquisition of truth without alteration or mutilation”—demonstrates that even Vincent’s second rule is conservative in nature. As we shall see modern post-Newman readings of Vincent’s second rule probably go beyond Vincent’s original intentions.³⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that Vincent’s *Commonitory* even dared to speak of doctrinal progress in any sense at all made it unique to the West. The East never formulated a similar approach to tradition.³⁶

³³Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* in Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 548. Cf. Vincent of Lerins, *A Commonitory* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 148.

³⁴Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 548.

³⁵ Cf. Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957). Chadwick analyzes this ironic turn of events within the forms of Catholic argumentation. Bossuet saw the Canon as being static and timeless, whereas Newman argued for genuine theological progress and development. Newman’s arguments presaged Vatican I’s application of the second rule of Vincent.

³⁶Concerning the conciliar decrees of the ancient church Adolph von Harnack notes, “In spite of all novelties, it was thus contended that novelties were not forthcoming in the Church. Nay, even the power of the Councils to *unfold* doctrines authoritatively was not plainly asserted in the East; on the other hand, a Western, Vincentius of Lerinum, did maintain it, and essayed to furnish a theory on the subject. After the uncertainties of the Greeks over the conception of tradition, we really breathe freely when we study the attempt of this man to introduce light and certainty into the question. However, even in the East, the younger generation now and then gave the older Fathers the benefit of looking at their words as having been uttered at a time when dogma was not yet explained, or sharply formulated. Strictly speaking, this expedient was not tenable on Greek ground. Only very sparing use therefore was made of it there, while the

Vincent anticipates four crises of confidence. First, what happens if a part rejects the whole, as in the case of such sects as the Montanists, Donatists and Novatianists? They should be cast out for no one man or faction contains the truth, which resides rather in the church universal. Second, what if a “false gospel” should appear, such as Arianism, and virtually convince the whole world of its heresy? Since Arianism did not accord with antiquity it was to be condemned. Third, what if a new question or heresy arises? One must appeal to ecumenical consent or conciliar processes. Fourth, what if there is no conciliar precedent? Then one should consult the most reliable doctors of the church worldwide, from Syria to North Africa.

The Historical Applicability of the Vincentian Canon

Vincent built his conception of doctrinal validity upon the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cassian and Augustine, all of whom frequently appealed to tradition. The Canon enjoyed great popularity in the sixteenth century, and was used as a means of ecumenical dialogue between moderate Catholics and Protestants. The work had been lost during the Middle Ages but resurfaced during the Renaissance and was first published in 1528. It fell into disfavor in the nineteenth century, as will be explained, but has recently been revived due to modern ecumenical concerns. Quasten observes that the criteria appear adequate at first, but church history has shown how difficult it actually is to apply. “J. B. Franzelin maintained that the theory remains valid, but in *sensu affirmante* not in *sensu excludente*.”³⁷

Catholic West employs it to a great extent up to the present day.” Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 3, trans. James Millar (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 229–30.

³⁷Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 550–1.

The Vincentian Canon is compelling for several reasons. The work is remarkable for its clarity, cogent argumentation, anticipation of problematic issues, and wealth of illustrations. Quasten notes the significant contribution that Vincent has made to Western tradition despite the difficulty in applying his criteria:

The West has drawn inspiration from his teaching on the progress of dogma developed in several chapters of the *Commonitorium* (c. 23-24). He recognized this development both in the understanding and in the formulation of dogmatic truth. Without changing the deposit of faith in any way, the church explores its richness more deeply and expresses its content more clearly.³⁸

Quasten is certainly correct in affirming that the West has drawn inspiration from the *Commonitory* since the times of the Reformation, but his interpretation of Vincent's second rule is probably more modern than Vincent of Lerins intended it to be.

Bishop Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704), for instance, was thoroughly familiar with every line of Vincent's *Commonitory* yet he considered all novelty to be heresy.³⁹ Bossuet would have understood “progress” as expansion of the Gospel and not doctrinal innovation. If push came to shove Bossuet would have argued that the Church had understood all along what she meant, and that it was the only the rise of heresies that caused her to clarify herself. “In no sense would Bossuet have said that the Church needed to ‘make up her mind’. She never makes ‘new’ articles of faith. She only declares what she has always believed—explicitly, consciously, and continuously

³⁸Ibid., vol. 4, 549.

³⁹Bossuet writes, “The Church’s doctrine is always the same. . . . The Gospel is never different from what it was before. Hence, if at any time someone says that the faith includes something which yesterday was not said to be of the faith, it is always heterodoxy, which is any doctrine different from orthodoxy. There is no difficulty about recognizing false doctrine: there is no argument about it: it is recognized at once, whenever it appears, merely because it is new . . .” *Premiere Instruction Pastorale sur les Promesses e l’Eglise*, 28 (*Works*, vol. 22, 418–19). Quoted in Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman. The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 17.

believed.”⁴⁰ Put differently, “She knew the truth all the time, but she had not always found the most appropriate words to communicate and expound that knowledge.”⁴¹ Bossuet’s interpretation of progress may strike us as stagnant and archconservative but the tension between the conservatism of the Canon and the supposed progressiveness of the second rule continue to perplex scholars. P. Jose Madoz, for example, wonders if there really is room for doctrinal progress in the midst of such a rigid exclusivism, or is there an inherent contradiction in the *Commonitory* itself?⁴² Of course when one actually wades into the middle of medieval considerations on tradition and sees things up close, there are bound to be many nuances, and given the importance of tradition, it would not even be surprising to find a lively discussion on just how tradition might ebb and flow, might grow and change. But by the time of the Orthodox Lutheran fathers and, it also seems, by the time of Bossuet, the viewpoint has changed. No matter how lively the medieval discussion may have been, the perception was—and how much is not built on perceptions rather than on hard reality?—that tradition was rather firm and surely justified the positions of Bossuet and others.⁴³

The potential contradiction inherent within the *Commonitory*: between its conservatism—“everywhere, always, by everyone”—and its allowance for organic

⁴⁰Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman*, 19.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²P. Jose Madoz, *El Concepto de la Tradición en S. Vincente de Lerins*. Estudio Histórico-Crítico del “Comonitorio.” *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 5 (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1933), 98.

⁴³Jaroslav Pelikan is just one of many scholars to note that there was a plurality of traditions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, yet the belief in a universal consensus of the fathers persisted despite such great diversity. Cf. *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*. The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine. vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 10–110. For other discussions on the nature of tradition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries see George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church. The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1959), 3–79, and Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*. Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 269–96.

development really depends on how one interprets Vincent's second rule. Jan Hendrik Walgrave, despite Vincent's eloquent discussion of organic development, contends that Vincent is conservative and adverse to the idea of development.

It gives a chance to his adversary, Augustine. But in view of its universal admission by the Church he cannot give it up. If one takes account of his own rigorism in interpreting his canon, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the principle of development does not fit in with it. There is a contradiction between the canon as he understands it and the idea of development. This latent contradiction will work itself out in later history. The *Commonitorium* will meet with a great and lasting approval and will be the refuge of both conservatives and progressives. 'Therefore two of the great Catholic apologists, Bossuet and Newman, could defend the Church with arguments that seem contradictory. Bossuet says to Protestantism: "You change; therefore you are not in the truth." And Newman to Anglicanism: "You don't develop; therefore there is no life in you." The contradiction is not merely apparent."⁴⁴

This is precisely what happened. From the Reformation until the Roman Catholic decree of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the conservative aspect of the *Commonitory*, i.e., the Vincentian Canon, was applied against Protestantism.⁴⁵ With the "new doctrines" of Mary and papal infallibility, Roman Catholics began to argue from the progressive aspect of the *Commonitory* (the second rule) in a modern sense of doctrinal development in order to justify such recent doctrinal decrees.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 89.

⁴⁵Lucas F. Mateo Seco observes that once the Tridentine decrees appeared the Protestants likewise applied the criteria of the Vincentian Canon to Trent's "novel" doctrinal proclamations. Cf. Lucas F. Mateo Seco, *San Vincente de Lerins. Tratado en Defensa de la Antigüedad y Universidad de la Fe Católica. Commonitorio* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1977), 43.

⁴⁶Thomas Guarino observes, "By citing Vincent's second rule, Vatican I officially admits that dogmatic progress occurs, even though it demands that this progress be homogeneous and genetic, i.e., there must be a fundamental continuity of meaning with what has previously been defined. For Franzelin and Vatican I, the concern was to speak out against an understanding of doctrinal development which would allow changes substantially and or essentially discontinuous (*sensus alienus*) with former conciliar and dogmatic definitions. . . . Consequently, a limited but certain understanding of development is introduced. Pottmeyer accurately sums up the teaching of Vatican I when he says: 'A true development of the understanding of the faith is accepted by the Council with the citation of Vincent of Lerins. This development is carried out in continuity with the unchangeable *depositum fidei, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia.*' " Thomas Guarino, "Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question. Historical and Theological Reflections," *Gregorianum*, 75 (1994), 509.

Karl F. Morrison notes two potential defects inherent in the Vincentian Canon. First, there is the problem of how one understands tradition itself. Since the Reformation it has vexed the Tridentine formulators, the post-Reformation Protestant apologists, Vatican II,⁴⁷ and the World Council of Churches. “Beyond a general agreement with Vincent of Lerins about function, enquirers have never reached any common understanding about the degree of correspondence between Scriptures and tradition, about the content of tradition, or about the manner in which tradition is conveyed. Tradition is thus a kind of authority which men understand in clear, but widely different, ways.”⁴⁸

The second defect is that the argument itself is tautological. “Vincent of Lerins showed the flaw in his all too clear definition when he said that universality could deceive if the whole church fell into heresy. His ultimate canon was universal consensus; his argument was in fact tautological.”⁴⁹ Also, “the appeal to tradition was not, as medieval thinkers believed, an appeal to a timeless, abstract standard, but to various

⁴⁷Thomas Guarino points out that J. A. Möhler (1796-1838) makes ample use of Vincent’s second rule in a modern sense of doctrinal development in his *Symbolik* of 1832. Thus Möhler presaged Newman’s concept of doctrinal development. Guarino observes, “It is also the case inasmuch as Vatican II is considered, perhaps facilely but not without some truth, as the council of Newman and Möhler.” Guarino, “Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question,” 511. In addition to this, Guarino notes that Trent and Vatican I both canonized Vincent of Lerins’ text but that it was not explicitly mentioned in Vatican II. “It is true, of course, that the text of VL was sanctioned by Vatican I. It is equally true that VL’s *semper* may have seemed an inappropriate way of engaging the problem of development which concerned Vatican II. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the *modus* submitted by the Fathers referred not to the *ubique, semper et ab omnibus* from chapter II of the Commonitorium (a phrase cited neither by Trent nor Vatican I) but to the *eodem sensu eademque sententia* of chapter XXIII. It should be noted as well that the dialectical juxtaposition in chapter eight [of *Dei Verbum*] of the phrases *traditio proficit* and *crescit perceptio* (raised by Ratzinger) are, very nearly, the exact words of Vincent himself.” Guarino, “Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question,” 517.

⁴⁸Karl F. Morrison, *Tradition and Authority in the Western Church: 300–1140* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 5.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

modes of thought formed by particular circumstances of time and place.”⁵⁰ That approach fails to take into account the varying social, temporal, political and personal aspects that affect how any given individual or school, e.g., Antioch or Alexandria, might interpret Scripture.

Vincent, however, did not live in an age of heightened historical consciousness and cultural relativity. Furthermore, for Vincent, as for most of the fathers, tradition and Scripture were complementary. The former served to preserve the true meaning of the latter. To pit one against the other would have been unthinkable at that time, and those who try to pry the two apart within the patristic and early medieval period do so anachronistically. Morrison has a point as a modern observation, but Vincent finally has to be understood on his terms.

The Vincentian Canon during the Reformation and Beyond⁵¹

Both Catholics and Protestants appealed to the Vincentian Canon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵² The Tridentine discussion of justification by faith was also

⁵⁰Ibid., 6.

⁵¹John Headley notes that the Vincentian Canon barely survived the Middle Ages thanks to four manuscript versions found at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and a fifth manuscript used by the Basel printer Jean Sichard for the editio princeps of 1528. “Neither in antiquity nor in the Middle Ages did Vincent enjoy anything like the reception which the work attained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. P. Jose Madoz, S.J.: *El concepto de la tradicion en S. Vincente de Lerins*, in *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 5. (Rome, 1933), p. 55; cf. Pontien Polman: *L’element historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI siecle* (Gembloux, 1932), p. 399. Joseph De Ghellinck bears out this contrasting reception of the *Commonotoria* in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period; while there is no evidence that it was read in the Middle Ages, Baronius can refer to it enthusiastically at the end of the sixteenth century as an *opus certe aureum*. “Patrisque et argument de tradition au bas moyen age,” *Aus der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters: Studie und Texte Martin Grabmann gewidmet* (Münster i.W., 1935), p. 404. In trying to account for the earlier, limited reception of this apparently appealing and clarifying Canon, some scholars have pointed to its rigidity and exclusiveness—an exclusiveness which Vincent directed against St. Augustine (Madoz, pp. 73-111-2). Yet in fairness to Vincent it should be emphasized that he actually poses the question as to whether there can be progress in religion, which he in fact affirms within prescribed limits (MPL 50 : 668-69).” John M. Headley, “The Reformation as Crisis in the Understanding of Tradition,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 78 (1987), 9–10, n. 11.

burdened by the weight of antiquity and thus Trent's theologians felt compelled to commence with an appeal to antiquity, the Vincentian Canon⁵³ and the *lex orandi* in particular, before a formal dogma could be established that would claim universal consensus.

Although there had not been, strictly speaking, a conciliar dogma of justification, that did not preclude an appeal to "the perpetual consensus of the Catholic Church."... The canon of Vincent of Lerins ("a golden book") ... was the norm. ... Alongside the Vincentian canon stood the other ancient principle, that "the rule of prayer should lay down the rule of faith."... In those prayers it was not through works but through the righteousness of Christ that believers sought liberation; therefore Seripando urged, the council should put itself on the side of the patristic—that is, the Augustinian—tradition, and he warned that failure to do so would bring upon it the "ignominy" of using the absence of an explicit dogma as an excuse for silence on the question of justification.⁵⁴

The Reformation struggles gave an early warning to later generations that expressions of doctrine might be historically relative after all. The authoritative status that tradition enjoyed was coming to an end. Benedict Aretius, in the sixteenth century, considered it madness to expect complete unanimity "even in the minutiae" of church doctrine. "For

⁵²In the sixteenth century there were 35 editions and 22 translations of Vincent's *Commonitory*. Hubert Filser grants that there might not have been much influence on dogma in the first two decades of the sixteenth century, but that after its appearance it made significant inroads affecting the concept of dogma. Filser concludes, "steht die Tatsache gegenüber, daß das Commonitorium des Vinzenz von Lerins und seine Begriffsbestimmungen von Dogma und Tradition in der vor- und nachtridentischen Theologie, wie im weiteren Verlauf der Untersuchung deutlich werden wird, oft rezipiert wurden." Hubert Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik. Eine Untersuchung zur Begründung und zur Entstehungsgeschichte einer theologischen Disziplin von der Reformation bis zur Spätaufklärung* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2001), 119.

⁵³Hubert Filser notes how decisive the Vincentian Canon was for Trent. "In der vortridentinischen Theologie wurde, wie aufgezeigt, unter Dogma häufig eine geschriebene und ungeschriebene Ueberlieferung verstanden und für die Annahme schriftergänzender Glaubenswahrheiten plädiert. Diese Entwicklung fand auf dem Konzil von Trient ihre lehramtliche Festlegung. Mit der Rezeption des Dogmenbegriffes des Vinzenz von Lerins wurde eine neue Entwicklung und eine breite Wirkungsgeschichte eingeleitet." Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 127. Yet despite the significant role of the Vincentian Canon at the Council of Trent, "The Council of Trent did not cite Vincent of Lerins specifically in its final documents. A perusal of the Acta reveals only two specific citations in the conciliar discussions: (1) R. D. Asculanus, discussing the *Decretum de justificatione* in October 1546, invoked the Vincentian Canon of *antiquitas, universalitas, and consensus* (cf. *Concilium Tridentinum* t. V, p. 464); and (2) in the discussion of the *Decretum de sacramento matrimonii* there was a call for the revival of Vincent's notion of the *communis sensus patrum* (cf. CT, t. IX, 28 July 1563, p. 665)." Guarino, "Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question," 493 n. 4.

⁵⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, 281–82.

anyone who examined ‘the history both of the church and philosophy’ would discover that there had never been a time when such unanimity and conformity to a single standard of doctrine had prevailed among ‘the teachings of all the doctors.’”⁵⁵ Georg Calixt sought to rescue the Vincentian Canon from historical relativism and obsolescence in his *Preface to Vincent of Lerins’ “Commonitory”* of 1629. Calixt, however, was condemned as a syncretist by the Orthodox Lutherans of his day. One of their chief objections to his unionistic attempts via the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis* (the consensus of the first five hundred years of the ancient church) was its historical relativity.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were still several Protestants, such as Georg Cassander, Hugo Grotius and Georg Calixt, who were prepared to accept the criterion of the *consensus quinquesaecularis* as a means of ecumenical dialogue. The Tridentine position firmly established tradition on an equal par with Scripture by teaching “that Scripture does not furnish us with the complete and authentic meaning of the text.”⁵⁶ Therefore the church as the repository of tradition and its magisterium were essential to the correct interpretation of Scripture. This flatly contradicted the Protestant assertion of the perspicuity of Scripture and only served to exacerbate Protestant-Catholic tensions.

Looking back from today, Yves M.-J. Congar claims that Johann Gerhard and Abraham Calov, two archrepresentatives of Lutheran Orthodoxy, radicalized the Scripture principle by eliminating the role of tradition and the witness of the Spirit. This,

⁵⁵Benedictus Aretius, *Loci* (Geneva, 1617), 58: 319. Quoted in Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, 373.

⁵⁶Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby (New York: Macmillan Co. 1966), 154.

in turn, made Scripture its own independent self-interpreting authority.⁵⁷ This is not quite correct, but it is true that the fathers and ancient tradition gradually came to be considered part of the Roman Catholic heritage, whereas both sides had previously claimed them as their own. The opposing sides were ultimately polarized by the bitter conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in the process both parties lost a significant part of *the* Christian heritage.

Gallicans and Anglicans⁵⁸ of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a great appreciation for the Vincentian Canon, and John Wesley thanked providence that it had been brought to his attention.⁵⁹ Both groups considered doctrinal development to be mere formulations of static timeless truths and therefore refused to submit unconditionally to Roman authority. Congar notes, “It was on the basis of just such a notion of tradition that scholars like Jean Launoy and Muratori opposed the possible definition of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”⁶⁰ Or when Bossuet was interested in the prospect of union in the early eighteenth century, he corresponded with Leibniz and appealed to the *consensus quinquesaecularis* as the logical basis for ecumenical dialogue.

In the wake of historical relativism and further Protestant fragmentation, Philip Schaff, writing in the nineteenth century, called for a “Protestant Catholicism,” as “the

⁵⁷Congar ignores the fact that both Gerhard and Calov were noted patrologists, extremely well versed in the tradition of the ancient and medieval church.

⁵⁸For a detailed discussion of how Anglicanism appealed to the Vincentian Canon and the antiquity of the first five hundred years in the seventeenth-century see Henry R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism. A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965), 316–55.

⁵⁹John Wesley, *Journal I*, in *John Wesley*. Ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 46.

⁶⁰Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 185.

true standpoint, all necessary for the wants of the time.”⁶¹ He was one of four significant theologians at the time to recognize the need to analyze doctrinal development in light of authoritative tradition.⁶² Johann Sebastian Drey and John Henry Newman⁶³ found it

⁶¹Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*. trans. John W. Nevin [1845] (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964), 230.

⁶²Wilhelm Loehe also felt compelled to address the Vincentian Canon. “Our opponents like to strengthen their claim by quoting *a favorite passage from Vincent of Lerins* . . . This is no help to them, and they have chosen a path that will not bring them to a happy end.

If we take their *distinctive doctrines and search for them in the writings of antiquity we will find that these things are not taught everywhere, always, and by all. It can be shown that every distinctive doctrine of the Romans originated at a particular point in time. It can be shown that earlier Roman bishops taught something different* from what the present Roman bishops teach and confess. It can be shown that in no diocese, least of all in Rome, has one and the same doctrine been taught and confessed in unaltered antiquity. And it can be shown that the present Roman doctrine cannot be a development of the earlier teachings, *for it contradicts what was taught earlier, and contradictions cannot be stages of development of the one truth*. Then perhaps the appeal to antiquity will serve us better than the Romans, or else it will not help anyone. As it stands, the statement of *Vincent of Lerins can be of no more use to us than to the Romans*. It makes no sense if it is not subjected to the Scriptures. According to its wording there would be no true church anywhere. If we interpret it as being said in opposition to heretics there could be no ‘always,’ no ‘everywhere,’ and no ‘all’ unless we understand ‘all’ as meaning all those who took their faith from the clear Word of God or amended it to conform to that Word. In this sense, however, we would have nothing to fear from this statement—if such a human decree is even to be taken that seriously.

Far though any distinctive doctrines of the Romans can be traced back into antiquity, we can trace our distinctive doctrines as far and even farther. It cannot be denied that here and there in the fathers can be found things that are Romanizing, but contradictions of these things can also be found there, *and we would have the same luck as the Romans have in proving doctrines on the basis of the fathers*. Yet one may still argue about these points . . . There is a method of coming to a decision, however, which will satisfy both educated and uneducated men.

Let us divide antiquity into an earlier and a later period. Which of these two will be decisive if there is a conflict between them? Which doctrine will be the older, one which is found in A.D. 40 or in A.D. 400? Obviously, the former. Good! Then it is not just an easy way out but an indispensable demand to let the Holy Scriptures, which are older than the oldest father, have the last word when it comes to a question of antiquity. . . . for here we have a valid norm for distinguishing between the contradictory teachings of the fathers as well as between the contradictory confessions of our day. Whatever is scriptural is oldest and also the most correct, and the church which has the Holy Scriptures on its side also has the purest and oldest antiquity in its favor. In every age the church with the Holy Scriptures on its side has some witnesses to the truth (*italics mine*.)” Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*. trans. and ed. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

⁶³ Before John Henry Newman converted to Roman Catholicism he “cites the Vincenian canon with some frequency, at first taking the position that the triple criteria of universality, antiquity and consensus open a patristic assault against Protestantism even as they serve as a bulwark against Roman innovations.” Guarino, “Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question,” 496. Cf. John Henry Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), 54–58. Newman modifies his approach to the Vincentian Canon after his conversion to Roman Catholicism. See Newman, *An Essay on Doctrinal Development* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 10–11.

imperative to accept Roman Catholicism on the basis of doctrinal development.⁶⁴ Philip Schaff and John Williamson Nevin, conversely, considered a “Protestant Catholicism” that continued within the tradition of the Reformation to be “genuine historical progress.”⁶⁵

The second major crisis in the realm of doctrinal criticism after the Reformation was the declaration of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council. This “new dogma” appeared to contradict the historical evidence that a heretical pope such as Honorius I had been condemned by synods. Roman Catholics had consistently maintained that Protestantism’s conception of justification was a Lutheran innovation devoid of patristic precedent—a point which they partially conceded, but now both Protestants and Eastern Orthodox felt that Roman Catholics were the latest innovators of doctrines that held no precedent. The Vincentian Canon had previously been used against the Reformers, but it was now the Protestants’ turn to apply it to Catholic “innovation.” Thus the Vincentian Canon disclosed a “defect in its serviceableness”⁶⁶ according to Newman and a gordian knot according to Schaff “which the church of Rome is not able to unloose, but only to cut in a violent way.”⁶⁷ “The Vincentian Canon seemed to be raising the chimera of

⁶⁴Newman believed that the ancient Roman church played a significant role in the ultimate triumph of trinitarian and christological orthodoxy in the East. The early Roman church of the first five centuries never fell into any of the heresies of the East, and consistently enforced orthodoxy throughout the conciliar age.

⁶⁵Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)*. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Dogma*. vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 274.

⁶⁶Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 12.

⁶⁷Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, 102. Schaff then critiques Rome’s appeal to the Vincentian Canon: “The universality in time and space, which is called for by the criterion now mentioned, cannot be shown in favor of a single one of all her traditions as different from the Bible. This point has been largely handled by Chemnitz, with great learning. Very many dogmas and usages rose clearly in the Middle Ages, or at least after the time of Augustine; and in the best cases, the alleged universality reduces itself to a relative majority of voices merely, which was often very small, and not unfrequently besides the result of outside influences entirely. In the discussion on tradition itself, in the fourth session of the Council of Trent, nothing like absolute unanimity was to be found. (italics mine).” *Ibid.*, 102–3.

‘unanimous consensus’ in the Christian tradition; otherwise it had to be taken to mean no more than ‘what has been believed in most places, at most times, and by most teachers.’”⁶⁸

Pope Gregory XVI declared that the presence of a few historical exceptions would not negate the consensus of the entire tradition. This was not acceptable to the heightened sense of historical consciousness of the late nineteenth century. The notion of a universal consensus had to be reworked if it were to remain a viable criterion. This meant that the temporal aspect of consensus had to be taken into account. Newman concluded that despite all its language about everywhere, everyone and always, “‘the rule of Vincent is not of a mathematical or demonstrative character, but moral’ and ultimately historical as well.”⁶⁹

Newman recognized the difficulties posed by the application of the Canon when he stated, “and true as the dictum of Vincentius must be considered in the abstract, and possible as its application might be in his own age, when he might almost ask the primitive centuries for their testimony, it is hardly available now, or effective of any satisfactory result. The solution it offers is as difficult as the original problem.”⁷⁰ The Canon, however, was not simply dismissed despite its difficulties, for it continued to serve as an abstract criterion even if it was difficult to apply concretely. This in turn led to emphasis on the second rule of Vincent’s *Commonitory*: doctrinal development. In this way the Roman church was able to argue that its development was in harmony with

⁶⁸Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture. (Since 1700)*, 259.

⁶⁹Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 12. Newman further states that the Vincentian Canon “requires practical judgment and good sense to apply it. ... How many Fathers, how many places, how many instances, constitute a fulfillment of the test proposed?” Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 27.

“what had been believed everywhere, always and by everyone.” Newman thus became the chief architect of a theological system of organic development that contributed decisively to the problem of how the magisterium related to history in tradition. This in turn became an inner dimension of the modern Roman Catholic tradition.⁷¹

Possibly the most remarkable aspect of this discussion is that the Vincentian Canon encapsulates the view of tradition which has been adhered to by the Roman Catholic Church in one form or another since the Reformation. It considers itself to be a living breathing body of truth that continues to develop and grow organically with time. Unlike the alleged fossilization of the East with its seven councils, or the thousand “sects” of Protestantism, the Roman Church claims that it continues to grow and expand harmoniously as its branches spread ever wider over the horizon.

Within Roman Church circles, the Vincentian Canon was enlisted as an ally, support, Rome claimed, for its view that tradition pointed to it as the holder of the truth. The early, the Tridentine, and more modern examples cited generally support that view. At the same time, there are cracks in the façade as some within the ranks have made unwelcome observations that this use of the traditional Canon to support tradition can be self-referential and thus a rather hollow support. Still on balance, the Roman Church has seen the Canon as backing, if not proof, of its claim to being the seat of right teaching—no need to look elsewhere.

But Rome does not have a corner on the interest in history and tradition. The Lutheran Reformation also saw not only the value but the need to show its roots lest it be dismissed as an interloper. The issue behind the Augsburg Confession of 1530 was

⁷¹Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture. (Since 1700)*, 275.

whether or not the Lutherans were church. How they related to the Canon could help there as well. It is to this Lutheran use that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO
THE FIRST LUTHERANS AND ROME'S CHARGE OF
THEOLOGICAL NOVELTY

Luther: Catholicity not Consensus

The focus now shifts to the Reformation via the Lutherans, though ironically the namesake of the movement never bothered much with the kind of argument others made using the Canon. So Luther will only be discussed briefly, for he never considered the criteria of a universal consensus a viable theological principle for the correct interpretation of Scripture. He did occasionally argue in his early works that the consensus of the church was on his side. More importantly, however, he did maintain a qualified notion of continuity and catholicity in his theology throughout his life, though this was hardly an operative principle guiding his theology.

In Luther's early years Augustine was the most eminent theologian (*summus theologus*) due to his reliable exposition of St. Paul. In Luther's opinion Augustine was at his best in his anti-Pelagian writings. Augustine was responsible for the reappropriation of Pauline doctrine in the early church. Luther, however, felt free to criticize him if his doctrines deviated from Scripture. He had a lower view of the earlier fathers and was not sure when the church lost the true faith, though it was probably after the papacy of Gregory the Great and as time went by Luther's opinion of Augustine

lessened as well.¹ Early on Luther repeatedly stated that he wished to be and remain Roman Catholic, yet as the years wore on even this protestation became tiresome.

John Headley notes that Luther never sought to reconstitute the early church in his age in contradistinction to what one finds said about Luther in many textbooks.

Nevertheless, Luther did arrive at a concept of tradition that was similar to that of the early church: “scripture as the Word of God began to assume the essential features of *traditio* in its original sense and to resume the unity of the apostolic testimony.”²

Moreover, Henry VIII’s response to Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity, Assertio septem sacramentorum*, echoed the Vincentian Canon as he appealed to a larger consensus and unanimous agreement of authorities. Luther, in his *Against King Henry* of 1522, immediately recognized that the appeal to a universal consensus would leave him and the doctrine of justification by faith stranded and alone, so Luther responds that length of time and the custom of many men (*nisi longitudinem temporum et multorum hominum usum*, WA 10/2:193) are equally applicable to the rules of the Turks and Jews. In fact, although Luther does not seem to have ever read the Vincentian Canon, which was not published until 1528, he nevertheless detected the underlying assertion of universality, antiquity and consent. “Luther insists that since the devil works so splendidly in the world, one must show another basis of authority than long time and majority opinion

¹For a detailed discussion of Luther’s relation to Augustine see Wolfgang Bienert, “Im Zweifel näher bei Augustin?—Zum patristischen Hintergrund der Theologie Luthers,” in *Oecumenica et Patristica, Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag*, Damaskinos Papandreou, Eds. Wolfgang A. Bienert, and Kurt Schafterdie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989).

²John M. Headley, “The Reformation as Crisis in the Understanding of Tradition,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 78 (1987), 8.

(WA 10/2:238–39).”³ As far as Luther was concerned the great majority could and did err many times in church history.

Luther insisted on the primacy of *sola Scriptura* but was mindful of the exegetical insights of the fathers and ecumenical councils, and he valued the continuity of the one apostolic and Catholic Church. Thus in a letter to the Margrave of Brandenburg and the Duke of Prussia, Luther can still be heard saying this in 1532, long after his Scripture principle had been firmly established: “It is dangerous and terrible to hear or believe anything against the unanimous testimony of the entire holy Christian Church as held from the beginning for now over fifteen hundred years in all the world.”⁴ Against the Anabaptists Luther exclaimed that true Christianity still existed under the papacy with many pious and great saints.”⁵

Ultimately Luther considered the early church and its councils to be a tentative norm for his era.⁶ A treatise representative of the mature Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the first four ecumenical councils established no new doctrines, yet their canons had been consistently disregarded. Thus the canons were relative to their age, and even the most apostolic of them—those of the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15—were ignored by all Roman Catholics by the eating of meats, etc. Thus *a fortiori*, if that most apostolic of all councils was not adhered to, nor those of Nicaea, why should any of the later councils require our obedience?

³Ibid., 12.

⁴*Briefe*, De Wett’s ed. 4. 354; Quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (Hendrickson, 1996), 456.

⁵*Luther’s Werke*, vol. 26 (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1830), 257. Quoted in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, 456–57.

⁶Cf. John Headley, *Luther’s View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 78–92.

Luther refused to recognize a more-than-earthly authority of the ecumenical councils, and only granted them authority insofar as they agreed with Scripture. Reinhold Seeberg summarizes Luther's criteria of religious dogma accordingly: "A thing is true, if it is attested by faith, by his own experience, and by the Scriptures. The outward and legalistic testing of religious views by the standard of the ancient dogmas has been abolished; the ancient canon of Vincent of Lerins shattered."⁷

So Luther does not dismiss tradition out of hand, but it is clear he does not hold it in the same esteem or lift it to the same heights as did Rome. Thus his connection to the Vincentian Canon is distant at best. The same will not be true of other Lutherans to come.

Melanchthon and the Lutheran Confessions

While Luther held history in high regard,⁸ co-worker Philipp Melanchthon showed even more heightened interest in the subject, no surprise given his Renaissance humanist ties and the place history had in the core curriculum of the "new learning."⁹ Melanchthon's general interest proved useful when the Roman Church tried to portray Lutherans as innovators, interlopers, sectarian if not heretical. Called to capitulate at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg, the Lutherans—really Melanchthon as the final author—put forth their position in the Augsburg Confession. The flow of the early articles, starting with the Triune God, was intended to show the Lutherans did indeed uphold what was essential to be Christian, to be catholic. In the course of arguing catholicity with roots to

⁷Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, vol. 2. trans. Charles Hay. (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock), 304.

⁸Cf. LW 34, *Preface to Galeatius Capella's History*, 1538. WA 50:383–85.

⁹For a detailed discussion of Renaissance humanism see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

the first days of the church coming out of the New Testament, it was worth showing, especially to Rome, that there was also a tie to the church fathers.

Melanchthon appealed to the *consensus patrum* in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and this appeal was echoed in the Formula of Concord by his disciple Chemnitz. The Conclusion of Part 1 of the Augsburg Confession states that “this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and is, moreover, *neither against nor contrary to the universal Christian church—or even the Roman church—so far as can be observed in the writings of the Fathers* (italics mine).”¹⁰ Melanchthon thus argues that the entire corpus of Reformation teaching embodied in the Augsburg Confession is in accord with the ancient church and is free from the charge of novelty.

The Apology also repeatedly argues that the Lutherans’ teachings are in accordance with those of the fathers: “We have support for our position not only from the Scriptures but also from the Fathers. Augustine argues at length against the Pelagians that grace is not given on account of our merits.”¹¹ Melanchthon appeals to Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Bernard, and even the schoolmen to demonstrate the validity of the claim that justification was always understood to be by grace through faith. He exclaims, “It is truly amazing that the opponents remain unmoved by so many passages from Scripture that

¹⁰Eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 58. [Hereafter cited as *The Book of Concord*] Cf. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 12th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998), 83c. [Hereafter cited as BSLK] Oddly, justification by faith is passed over quickly without an appeal to the ancient fathers, but Article 6 states, “The Fathers also teach the same thing. For Ambrose says: ‘It is determined by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved and have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.’” In Article 20 Melanchthon avers that there was an astonishing silence concerning faith, and a profound silence concerning the righteousness of faith. But the Augsburg Confession claims that it has not “contrived a new interpretation of Paul, this entire approach is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers.” *The Book of Concord*, 55. Cf. BSLK, 77. Thus, Augustine, Ambrose, Prosper and Ambrosiaster are quoted to prove that the fathers taught correctly concerning faith.

¹¹*The Book of Concord*, 125. Cf. BSLK, 165. The clarity of this doctrine for the Reformers, as well as the perspicuity of Scripture, may have played a significant part in their chief reliance on Scripture for the defense of this doctrine, as opposed to patristic support.

clearly attribute justification to faith and moreover deny it to works.”¹² Yet there is a subtle shift in Melanchthon’s argument, which moves from patristic citations to an appeal to the “consensus” of Scripture, and the *lex orandi* of the church.

Concerning Peter’s statement in Acts 10:43, Melanchthon writes, “In addition, he [Peter] cites *the consensus of all the prophets*—which is really to cite the authority of the church (italics mine).”¹³ Thus, true consensus is to be in agreement with Scripture and endorsed by its authority. So Luther’s attitude or approach is echoed, though Melanchthon is more interested and takes the time and effort to show the relationship of the fathers to the biblical message.

Second, Melanchthon argues that the great saints of the church believed that they were justified by faith and not by works, for their pious meditations reveal that they relied on the mercy of God alone for salvation.

Anthony, Bernard, Dominic, Francis, and other holy Fathers chose a certain kind of life, either for the sake of study or for the sake of other useful exercises. At the same time, *they maintained that they were declared righteous and had a gracious God by faith on account of Christ* and not on account of those exercises. But ever since then, a multitude of people have imitated not the faith of the Fathers, but their examples without their faith, in order that through works they might merit the forgiveness of sins (italics mine).¹⁴

Therefore, many of the faithful have deceived themselves by placing their faith in ascetic practices, whereas the true saints of the church never ceased to rely solely on the grace of God. Melanchthon, on the basis of the *lex orandi*, goes so far as to say: “Thus the entire church confesses that we are righteous and saved through mercy. As we cited above

¹²*The Book of Concord*, 138. Cf. BSLK, 192.

¹³*Ibid.*, 134. Cf. BSLK, 177.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 152–53. Cf. BSLK, 200–01. In other words, the saints believed better than they spoke. Cf. Martin Chemnitz’s similar argument in the *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 505–13.

from Jerome.”¹⁵ These arguments in and of themselves are not necessarily striking, but the frequency and consistency with which various Lutheran fathers use them is.

Melanchthon’s line of argument and his view of patristic history and theology was carried on by his student Martin Chemnitz—certainly a thinker in his own right but here satisfied to agree with and to continue Melanchthon’s approach. The connection and continuation is seen in the Formula of Concord, heavily influenced by Chemnitz. While the Formula, the last document in the *Book of Concord*, was a different kind of document than the Augsburg Confession, as the Formula tackled internal Lutheran problems. But in sorting through the in-house theological issues, Chemnitz was keen on showing that the Formula’s positions were consistent with the Augsburg Confession which itself, the Lutherans had argued, was catholic. In so doing, he carries forward the importance Melanchthon placed on the church fathers.

The Preface to the Formula of Concord, and the *Book of Concord*, boldly states that the teaching of the Augsburg Confession “was recognized as that ancient, united consensus believed in by the universal, orthodox churches of Christ.”¹⁶ The Introduction to the Formula’s extensive Solid Declaration section upholds the Word of God, the ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and the Apology. Furthermore, the Formula of Concord rejects and condemns “all heresy and error that was rejected and condemned in the first, ancient, orthodox church on the true and firm foundation of holy, divine Scripture.”¹⁷

Articles 1, 5, 7, 8, and 9 all appeal to the testimonies of the fathers to

¹⁵Ibid., 165. BSLK, 217.

¹⁶Ibid., 5. Cf. BSLK, 3.

¹⁷Ibid., 530. Cf. BSLK, 840.

demonstrate that their teaching is in accord with the ancient church: “We are not inventing anything new out of our ideas, but we are simply accepting and repeating the explanations that the ancient, orthodox church has given . . . For these and similar erroneous teachings have been properly rejected and condemned . . . in the ancient councils that have stood the test of time.”¹⁸ Article 10 makes the most pronounced statement regarding the formulators’ concern to remain within the boundaries of orthodoxy: “*To dissent from the consensus of so many nations and peoples and to promote such a peculiar doctrine is a grave matter* (italics mine).”¹⁹ As noted, Chemnitz is the main author, but Melanchthon’s influence is clearly evident.

Views of Melanchthon’s Concept of Consensus

Melanchthon’s role as drafter of the final version of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology certainly have made him the subject of later historians’ interest. His view of history, the fathers, and doctrinal confession understandably are part of that interest. What others thought of Melanchthon is worth noting and helps sharpen the focus on Melanchthon himself. The observations of several modern historians will be highlighted with comment on each deferred to a summary at the end of this run-down. There put side-by-side the nuanced position of Melanchthon is underscored.

Ritschl

Otto Ritschl is well known for his four-volume opus on the doctrinal history of Protestantism, a study significant due to its length, detail, and influence. Subsequent

¹⁸Ibid., 627. Cf. BSLK, 1036.

¹⁹Ibid., 639. Cf. BSLK, 1061.

scholars have interacted with Ritschl even though many of his guiding presuppositions have been shown to be flawed.

Ritschl contends that Melanchthon's "traditionalism," which noticeably appears to be a return to scholasticism, is close to the Roman Catholic position on tradition.²⁰

Therefore, according to Ritschl, the only difference between Melanchthon and Trent is that the former restricts himself to the first several centuries of Christendom. Ritschl then argues that Melanchthon elevated the perpetual consensus of the church to the status of an independent theological principle alongside Scripture. Thus, Melanchthon's "traditionalism" was alien to Luther's "biblicism."²¹

Kantzenbach

According to Friedrich Kantzenbach Melanchthon's belief in a spiritual unity of "one holy church" (*una sancta ecclesia*) had consequences for his evaluation of the ancient church, which for him as a community of external signs (*societas externorum signorum*) was broken apart in her external unity. The church of the Gospel is catholic and stands in continuity with the ancient church in so far as the Gospel is the same in all ages and therefore predicates the existence of a church in the past. Luther's teachings, which are those of the Word, have had their witnesses in every century.²²

²⁰“Es besteht nur ein gradueller, aber kein spezifischer Unterschied zwischen dem Traditionalismus Melanchthons und dem, zu dem sich um dieselbe Zeit die tridentische Synode bekannte. Für die durch diese begründete Auffassung deckte allerdings der Begriff der normativen Tradition das gesamte im Laufe der Jahrhunderte angesammelte Inventar der römischen Kirche., Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, vol 1, *Prolegomena. Biblicismus und Traditionalismus in der Altprotestantischen Theologie* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), 358f.

²¹Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 112 and 118 for Melanchthon's development; 200–3 for his so-called traditionalism; 276–340 for a thorough examination of his traditionalism.

²²“Et fere nullo non seculo fuere, quos hic sua doctrinae testes citare possit. Ne quis putet, primum haec a Luthero conficta esse.” Melanchthon, CR 1, 658. Quoted in Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit der Kirche im Jahrhundert der Reformation* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1957), 101–2, n. 24.

The three ecumenical symbols are of inestimable value since they contain the Christian message in a wonderfully compact yet clear form, and wherever they are believed—there is the catholic church.²³ Melanchthon was convinced that next to the prophets and apostles, the symbols contained true and godly teaching, through which God has always gathered an eternal church that grants spiritual blessedness.²⁴ Thus, God has many preachers in Melanchthon’s time who rightly preach the Gospel and hold fast to the “true catholic church of God” (*wahrhaftigen Catholischen Kirchen Gottes*). The teaching of these preachers, as it is formulated in the Augsburg Confession, completely agrees with the ecumenical symbols.²⁵

There is a significant difference, however, between the Roman theologians’ appeal to the tradition and Melanchthon’s. For Melanchthon, one ought solely to rely upon the Scriptures and the ecumenical Symbols as an immutable norm when contradictions in the exposition of Scripture arise, and not on the consensus of the church fathers.²⁶

²³“Et ne sit ambiguitas de genere doctrinae, certissimum est Ecclesiam oportere amplecti scripta prophetica et apostolica et in his sententiam retinere, quam expriment Symbola Apostolicum et Nicenum. Eius doctrinae summa cum comprehensa sit in ea confessione, quam Ecclesiae nostrae exhibuere Augustae, Anno 1530. Hanc confessionem amplecti me quoque profiteor.” Melanchthon, CR 12, 568. Quoted in Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 104, n. 1.

²⁴“ . . . gewißlich wahrhaftige göttliche leer sey, dadurch Gott ime eine ewige Kirche samlet und seligkeit gibt.“ Melanchthon, *Ursach, Warumb die Stende, so der Augspurgischen Confession anhangen, Christliche Leer erstlich angenommen und endlich auch dabey zu verharren gedenken . . .* in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, Ed. R. Stupperich, (Gütersloh, 1951 ff.) vol. 1, 415. [Hereafter cited as StA] Quoted in Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 106.

²⁵Cf. StA, vol. 1, 431. Kantzenbach notes that Melanchthon appeals twice to the symbols here alone.

²⁶“Man darf also nur auf die Heilige Schrift und die Symbole selbst zurückgreifen, nicht aber den Konsens der Kirchenschriftsteller als unveränderliche Norm bezeichnen, wenn Widersprüche in der Schriftauslegung besthen.” Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 107. Melanchthon comments on the position of the opponents, “Deinde dicunt, non ex solis scriptis prophetis et apostolicis, et Symbolis pronuntiandum esse, sed etiam ex consensu, qui in praecipuis Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis extat, ut cum plerique omnes nominant Coenam Domini sacrificium, aut plerique omnes nominant satisfactiones, aut mentionem faciunt invocationis mortuorum, hunc consensum aiunt sequendum esse sine contradictione. Et hunc consensum dicunt Groperus, Vuicelius, et multi alii, normam immotam esse in Ecclesia. Singulos homines errare posse ac potuisse, sed communem vocem Catholicae Ecclesiae non posse errare (italics mine).” CR 23, 204. Quoted in Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 107, n. 18.

Nevertheless Melanchthon is able to establish a positive assessment of the extant consensus of the fathers that often prevails on account of his fundamental position.²⁷

Melanchthon knows that his opponents can also argue against him from patristic citations, and that they defy his right to appeal to the catholic tradition. Nevertheless he does not lean upon an amorphous and undifferentiated tradition but rather the more reliable synods and the most erudite fathers (*saniore*s Synodi et eruditiores Patres). He is convinced that he and his friends know the true sense of Scripture and have the consensus of the catholic church of Christ.²⁸ The body of doctrine of the Lutheran churches (*Corpus doctrinae ecclesiarum nostrarum*) fully agrees with the true catholic church and with the best and most learned fathers. Melanchthon considers his own writings to belong to this corpus of evangelical teachings, especially his *Loci*. The writings of the Wittenberg school, and Luther's in particular are also part of this corpus. The evangelical churches are true members of the catholic church. The Roman Church also has true members of the church within her since a glimmer of the truth shines in her as well.

Sperl

Melanchthon's thought develops in historically conditioned stages, as Adolf Sperrl assesses the Reformer's career: his earliest stage before 1520, his later position of the 1520s, and then his mature position reached by 1540. Sperrl concurs with Ritschl's

²⁷“Auf dieser grundsätzlichen Stellungnahme kann sich aber eine positive Würdigung des unter den Vätern oft tatsächlich vorhandenen Konsensus erheben.” Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 107. “*Certe de fundamentis in Ecclesia inter saniores consensum esse necesse est, etiamsi alii magis alii minus proprie locuti sunt, hoc est de articulis fidei, et praecipuis locis doctrinae Evangelii. Et si quis prudenter considerat omnium temporum scripta, animadvertet subinde fuisse aliquos, qui purius docuerunt (italics mine).*” He mentions Basil, Ambrose and Bernard as examples of those who “de praecipuis materiis consentiunt.” Melanchthon, CR 23, 207. Quoted in Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 107, n. 19.

²⁸After Melanchthon has shown the Nicene symbol to be the refutation of all heresies, he states: “In nostris vero ecclesiis decantantur publice, ut haec ipsa repetitio testetur *de consensu nostro in vera doctrina cum vera ecclesia Catholica Dei, et ut animi de huius doctrinae certitudine confirmentur (italics mine).*” CR 23, 349f. (Explicatio). Quoted in Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um Die Einheit*, 108, n. 24.

judgment that the church was the “church of instruction” (*ecclesia doctrix*) for Melanchthon, but Sperl recognizes the many flaws in Ritschl’s oversimplified thesis of Melanchthonian “traditionalism.” In a disputation thesis of 1531 Melanchthon wrote that he believed in the church as the only and most certain witness to the Gospel just as he believed in the doctors of the church.²⁹ The Reformer then gives a detailed analysis of the relationship between Scripture and tradition in his 1529 treatise “De ecclesia et de autoritate verbi dei.”³⁰ The authority of the church lies solely in its power to witness to the truth of the Word. The church per se has no authority itself to change doctrine or arbitrarily assert itself in matters of faith; it can only witness to the truth found in Scripture. Thus, the Word alone remains the “rule of doctrine” (*regula doctrinae*). Yet within this function to attest to the truth, lies also the function to teach that truth. Melanchthon states that nothing is questionable about the type of doctrine which he confesses since it is the true consensus of the catholic church of Christ that is in accord with the ecumenical symbols, the most reliable councils, and the most erudite fathers.³¹ Melanchthon acknowledged the unity of the ecumenical symbols, as well as the clarity of Scripture concerning soteriology and justification. For him there was unity between the two in the ancient symbols that Luther did not find, since Melanchthon’s christology was more tightly bound to his soteriology.³² In this sense Melanchthon recognized that the

²⁹“Ita ecclesiae credimus tanquam unico aut testi evangelii aut certe sicut Doctori credimus.” Melanchthon, CR 12, 482. Quoted in Adolf Sperl, *Melanchthon. Zwischen Humanismus und Reformation* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959), 192.

³⁰Cf. StA 1, 323ff. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 192.

³¹“Nihil enim dubium est, hoc doctrinae genus, quod profiteamur, *vere esse ipsum consensum Catholicae Ecclesiae Christi*, ut ostendunt Symbola, saniores Synodi et eruditiores Patres (italics mine).” Melanchthon, StA 1, 376, 37ff. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 194.

³²Cf. Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 186–89. Melanchthon primarily valued the “method” by which the ecumenical councils reached their sound conclusions concerning christology and the trinity. He also recognized simultaneously that “Scriptura sui ipsius interpres” (CR 25, 226) as late as 1549.

trinitarian and christological struggles of the ancient church were so earnest since their salvation depended upon proper definitions of who Christ was. Athanasius reportedly said concerning the doctrine of the trinity: “this is our all.”

Who could understand the meaning of Scripture better than those who were closest to the time of its writing? This principle, in turn, leads him to conclude that there have always been some who have understood and held onto the truth, even if the doctrine of some was purer than that of others.³³ To this historical principle of the “purer and truer antiquity” is added another internal regulating critique: the most learned fathers (*eruditiores Patres*). It was not enough simply for the fathers to be nearest in time to the Scriptures, since they might have not have been as competent as later ones who benefited from a bit of distance and built on the efforts of the earlier ones. Thus he adds the principle of “nearness in time *and* erudition.” Therefore Melanchthon is not the originator of the concept of a consensus of the first five hundred years, the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis*. This is so because Melanchthon’s schema only takes into consideration the historical nearness in time of certain fathers.³⁴

Sperl adds an additional component to Melanchthon’s notion of the consensus of the catholic church (*consensus Catholicae Ecclesiae*), namely that of the teaching ministry (*Lehramt*) of the present church. The consensus of all ages is not to be found in books alone but in the living witness and proclamation of the church to the truth. The doctrinal problems of his day should be settled by an assembly of the learned of the

³³“alias purius, alias impurius.” Melanchthon, StA 1, 337, 29ff. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 193.

³⁴“Melanchthon ist also nicht der Urheber der Idee von ‘consensus quinquesaecularis,’ denn in dieser Formel ist allein der Gesichtspunkt der zeitlichen Nähe berücksichtigt (italics mine).” Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 194.

church (*conventus docentium in ecclesiis*)³⁵ that would be comprised of sound and skilled men (*homines sani et periti*).³⁶ This commission should be done under the auspices of the princes and Kaiser. Since they, however, did not have the necessary knowledge and insight, the dispute should be adjudicated by neutral parties.

Melanchthon shares Plato's ideal that state authority and power should be combined with the wisdom of good men.³⁷ Sperl also notes that the purpose of such sound and skilled men is to give expression to the consensus of the church, and this is also the task of the teaching ministry of the church. Melanchthon clearly expresses the connection he envisions between the doctrine of the ancient church and the teaching office of the present church in his *Loci communes* of 1543. The Word of God is to be the judge of doctrine even as it adds to itself the confession of pure antiquity, for God desires the church to be a ministry whereby it should be heeded as a teacher.³⁸ Nevertheless, Melanchthon sees that synods recognized by the emperor himself have still erred. Thus he does not have a purely formal principle of legitimization concerning the teaching ministry of the church, for there is also an internal criterion. The normative consensus of the church can never be established merely by a majority of votes in a council or synod. Rather it must be critically chosen, for "the consensus of the church is that of the skilled

³⁵Melanchthon, CR 1, 876. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 195.

³⁶CR 1, 877. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 195.

³⁷"Verissimum est, quod Plato scribit: nihil optabilius, nihil melius, nihil divinus accidere hominibus posse quam si sit in imperio cum potentia coniuncta sapientia." Melanchthon, CR 2, 169. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 195.

³⁸"Ita iudex est verbum dei, et accedit purae antiquitatis confessio. Vult enim Deus in Ecclesia esse ministerium vocis. Quare audienda est Ecclesia ut doctrix." Melanchthon, StA 2, 2 482, 28f. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 195–6.

and pious.”³⁹ It is a lofty idea, though concrete implementation is sometimes difficult as various parties lay claim to support of the fathers.

Fraenkel

Although Melanchthon gradually developed his particular view of church history, he remained consistent on many points and even early on tacitly assumed the congruity of the Lutheran position with that of the ancient church. Peter Fraenkel observes,

Thus the history of the Commonplaces—and indeed the history of Melanchthon’s activities as a patrologist, historian, and controversialist—seems to have two sides. On the one hand there is the growth of the patristic argument: a steady growth of material at Melanchthon’s disposal, a movement towards the centre of attention of what had in his early years either been more peripheral or interested him only intermittently. . . . On the other hand there is a basic attitude to the value of the ancient Church, to its relation with the aims and purposes of the Reformation and to its place in a Biblical theology, to which Melanchthon held fast all his life. *Expansion, rather than fundamental change, seems to be the key word for the history of Melanchthon’s use of the patristic argument (italics mine).*”⁴⁰

Fraenkel concurs with Gunther Wolf’s judgment concerning Melanchthon’s patristic development: “Originally Melanchthon had presupposed and assumed his agreement with the ancient Church as a matter of course and had not expounded upon it in detail. Later on the appearance of more radical reforming tendencies caused him to lay increasing stress on this agreement. These tendencies also helped him to become more clearly aware of his consensus with the tradition of the ancient Church.”⁴¹

Melanchthon’s consensus with the ancient church, however, is a qualified one, for he does not approve of all the practices and customs of the ancient church. The

³⁹“Der normative Konsensus der Kirche kann nie durch ein nur summierendes Verfahren gewonnen werden, sondern bei seiner Feststellung muß auch kritisch gewählt werden: ‘*Consensus Ecclesiae, id est, peritorum et piorum* (italics mine).’” Melanchthon, *StA* 2, 2 371, 3f. Quoted in Sperl, *Melanchthon*, 197.

⁴⁰Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum. The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon*. *Travaux d’humanisme et renaissance*, 46, (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1961), 44.

⁴¹Gunther Wolf, *Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 2:1 (Gotha 1912—1922), 58. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 50–51.

invocation of the saints is a good example. Jerome, for instance, speaks carelessly concerning the invocation of the saints, but Melanchthon argues that he was grossly misunderstood in later generations. Basil and Chrysostom also err concerning this doctrine, yet Melanchthon holds that such errors were still peripheral at that time. Only at a later date did the church make them central and thereby fall into error. Melanchthon evinces a certain ambivalence towards the patristic age, however, as he seeks to categorize the fathers positively and negatively. As Franekel notes, even when the fathers are placed in the positive group they are still subjected to an internal critique of their own theological shortcomings.

Basil, Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzen, Theodoret, Jerome and Martin of Tours come down on the positive side of the balance, the Popes Ciricius and Gregory on the negative side. Thus there is an age of the Fathers, a significance in its teaching, *but no theory of a consensus quinquesaecularis* as a block represented by a block of men. Melanchthon is neither Franck nor Witzel (italics mine).⁴²

In fact, says Fraenkel, Melanchthon considers the “Augustinian Reformation” to be a dress rehearsal for the Lutheran one. Augustine is a proto-Reformer and a positive corrective to the rampant semi-Pelagianism of his day, but the picture changes drastically as soon as Gregory the Great enters the scene. Melanchthon considers him the source of most errors that crept into the medieval church. In contrast, Luther in “Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil,”⁴³ had called Gregory the last great bishop. So the Gospel was obscured and required men in various ages to bring forth the truth again. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was a critic of his own age, was such a light, and Lombard was by far much better than the schoolmen who came after him were. This

⁴²Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 93. Franck rejected all the fathers and even considered Augustine to be an antichrist. Georg Witzel, on the other hand, idealized the first eight centuries and the four ecumenical councils. “Note that both these views are ‘impartial’ and as critical of Wittenberg as of Rome.” Ibid.

⁴³LW 41:257–376. Cf. WA 54:195–299. Luther wrote *Wider das Papsttum zu Rom* in 1545.

view of history leads Melanchthon to develop a “remnant theory” of the true church that has existed throughout all the ages. This is a key distinction between Melanchthon and Luther who was not interested in finding a thread back to the early church. In typical Luther fashion he thought, rather like Ezekiel and the dry bones, that the church could—not was or would but could—be dead, and yet the Spirit and the Word could breath new life again. So there was no point looking for a continual line.⁴⁴

Melanchthon’s method of assessing the true church involves a qualifying principle of antiquity and pure doctrine:

Thus the appeal to the catholic consensus of all times makes sense for Melanchthon as an appeal to the old faith. Antiquity becomes a qualifying principle of catholicity. . . . On the one hand Melanchthon supports his claim to the catholicity of his own teaching by equating it with that of the ancient Church. He uses the antiquity, i.e., the truth of the ancient Church’s teaching as a foil for all innovation, primarily the Roman . . . But on the other hand, . . . purior antiquitas is not simply identifiable with the first four, five, or six centuries of Church history. The truth and doctrine that are to be found there, are in their turn dependent upon the absolute that lies not only embedded in this period, but is also beyond it. Thus pure antiquity becomes a critical principle that Melanchthon also applies to the ancient Church itself, in order to find there what is primary and true and to distinguish it from the “later” error that he found in those early times (italics mine).⁴⁵

Thus antiquity is not a virtue in and of itself. In reality the “purer antiquity” (*purior antiquitas*) of Melanchthon functions as an internal and regulating critique of all doctrines throughout the centuries. The “more pure and ancient church” was that which had maintained the purity of the teachings of the apostles and Christ. It was certainly encouraging to see one’s teaching in antiquity, yet the theological position, not simply age or numbers, finally mattered. And Melanchthon thought he could find those true teachings in the fathers and the ages that followed.

⁴⁴For Luther’s view of church history see John Headley, *Luther’s View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

⁴⁵Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 170–72.

Trent's position on the authority of Scripture and tradition was based on a two-source understanding of "tradition," which argued that Scripture alone was insufficient and needed the exegetical aid of the fathers and medievals. Furthermore, ecclesiastical authority established the authority of Scripture and vice versa. "Finally there is the hermeneutical rule, which says that it is the Church's understanding of Scripture which is, and always has been, the true one."⁴⁶ According to Melancthon, the church's sound understanding of Scripture is to be accepted since it is guaranteed by the spirit of truth that Christ promises and gives to the church.⁴⁷

Melancthon's reply to the decrees issued at Trent on April 8, 1546, embody and reiterate the mature reformer's stance on Scripture, tradition and consensus. "According to Melancthon, there is no doubt that the Wittenbergers base their teaching both on the Scriptures as the only source of the faith, and on the *catholic consensus* regarding these—*but since there can be no catholicity without antiquity, this consensus of all ages is nothing else than a prolongation of the consensus of pure, Biblical antiquity* (italics mine)."⁴⁸ Melancthon argues that his doctrine comes from the pure sources of Scripture and all the writings of antiquity. The perpetual consensus of the catholic church of God is that of all the learned and pious men who have lived in every age of the church. This consensus is briefly explicated in the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian symbols, and has the witness of the most esteemed writings that came after the time of the apostles.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 204.

⁴⁷"Sanam scripturae intelligendam ab ecclesia, cui spiritum veritatis promisit et dedit Christus, accipiendam." Cochlaeus, *Philippica Quarta*. Quoted in Laemmer, *Die Vortridentinisch-katholische Theologie des Reformationszeitalters, aus den Quellen Dargestellt* (Berlin, 1858), 94. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 204.

⁴⁸Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁴⁹"Quare diu disputata re et deliberata cum eruditis et piis, hoc doctrinae genus, quod unum diligenter consideratis fontibus, id est, scriptis Prophetis et Apostolicis, et collata omni antiquitate, *videmus esse*

Thus, the consensus is that which agrees with Scripture, the three ecumenical symbols, and the most erudite and pious saints of all ages.

Furthermore, Melanchthon rejects all accusations of novelty and denies that Lutherans are inventing new opinions about God. Rather the church of the Augsburg Confession reverently maintains the only doctrines that God himself has disclosed to us through illustrious witnesses. Therefore no theological novelties are tolerated in Lutheran churches.⁵⁰ Melanchthon is here prepared to oppose the majority of his contemporaries' opinions since theirs is far outweighed "by the fact that the Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation."⁵¹ The teachings of the Reformers and not that of their opponents is the tradition that must be handed down. Conversely, the traditions defined at Trent do not lead to apostolic antiquity, but rather they leave one at the mercy of false innovations.⁵²

perpetuum consensum catholicae Ecclesiae Dei, hoc est, omnium eruditorum et piorum, qui fuerunt omnibus seculis in Ecclesia Dei: quod quidem in Symbolis, Apostolico Niceno Athanasio breviter comprehensum est, et probatissimorum scriptorum post Apostolos testimonia habet, propter gloriam Dei et salutem nostram amplexi sumus (italics mine)." Melanchthon, *Recusatio Synodi Tridentinae*, 1546, in *Philippi Melanchthonis Epistolae, Iudicia, Consilia, Testimonia, Aliorumque ad eum Epistolae quae in Corpore Reformatorum desiderantur*, Ed. H. E. Bindseil (Halle, 1874), 252. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁵⁰"Scimus non esse gignendas novas opiniones de Deo, ut audacissime fecerunt cultores idolorum, et Philosophi, et multi fanatici homines: sed reverenter tuenda est unica doctrina, in qua Deus ipse illustribus testimoniis se patefecit. Ideo nullam novam opinionem proponi in Ecclesiis nostris passi sumus . . ."

Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 252. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁵¹Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206. Furthermore, "Sentimus veram esse de Deo doctrinam in libris prophetiis et apostolicis traditam, et filium Dei iudicatum esse omnes homines, et daturum aeternam salutem iis qui Evangelio obediunt et abiectum in aeternas poenas illos qui contemnunt, aut oderunt Evangelium. Sentimus praecipue Deo hoc officium . . . deberi, ut hanc ipsam doctrinam per Prophetas, Christum, et Apostolos traditam serveri et illustrari curent, et propagationem adiuvent . . ."

Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 252. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁵²"Imo vero in tertia sessione synodi Tridentinae decretum est, non dissentendum esse ab iis traditionibus et interpretationibus, quae sunt ipsis usitatae. Haec si erit norma iudicii, quid pronuntiaturi sint de nostris sententiis iam liquet." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 252. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

Trent's opposition to the doctrine of justification by faith and the Lutheran understanding of the eucharist conflicts with Melanchthon's appeal to antiquity because the decrees of Trent are recent and therefore novel opinions. The council of Trent has accomplished nothing but produce theological novelties that are rejected by the Lutherans because they deviate from apostolic doctrine. Therefore, in opposition to Trent, it was necessary to call the minds of men back to the purity of apostolic teaching.⁵³ Nor is Trent's appeal to the majority of any real importance, since Wittenberg's position is that of the ancients. Melanchthon argues that not all things in the divine Word and symbols are obscure as the Roman theologians would have us believe. Therefore no interpretation that is contrary to the divine sources is received by Lutheran theologians. Nor does the church of the Augsburg Confession produce novelties concerning the doctrine of God, but it can demonstrate that many interpretations of its Tridentine opponents are contrary to the divine sources, that their type of doctrine is new, and that it has not been handed down to them by God.⁵⁴

Fraenkel considers this last statement to be of decisive importance, "for the appeal to antiquity leads to the prophets' and apostles' teaching as the ultimate source, whereas the theologians of Trent appeal to recent representatives of 'tradition' who cannot lead to the *primum et verum*, since they are themselves out of touch with it."⁵⁵ Melanchthon contends that the consensus of the adversaries is recent and deviates from the old writings

⁵³"Si ex his recentibus opinionibus pugnantis cum Apostolica doctrina pronuntiabitur, nihil opus est synodo. Nota enim sunt haec recentia, et ob hanc ipsam causam a nostris reprehensa, quia cum ab Apostolica doctrina dissentiant . . . necesse fuit ad apostolicam doctrinam mentes hominum revocari . . ." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 255. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁵⁴"Primum, non sunt omnia obscura in sermone divino et in symbolis. Nulla igitur interpretatio cum fontibus pugnans, recipienda est. Non enim gignenda est nova de Deo doctrina, ut fecerunt ethnici . . . Ostendimus autem multas adversariorum interpretationes pugnare cum fontibus, et genus doctrinae novum esse, non traditum a Deo." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 255. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 206.

⁵⁵Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207.

of the soundest meaning. Therefore it must be decided whether the Reformation interpretation or that of the adversaries is contrary to the prophetic writings, apostolic symbols, and the certain testimonies of the Apostles' judgments, and it is these sources that ought to be the norm that decides the controversy between Rome and Wittenberg.⁵⁶ Thus "Wittenberg argues through the Fathers to the original meaning of Scripture; the theologians of Trent allow their innovating notion of tradition to lead them away from it."⁵⁷

Fraenkel considers this to be Melanchthon's consistent attitude from a much earlier date concerning the fathers, Scripture, and consensus,⁵⁸ and his last word on the subject. "Even at the Colloquy of Worms in 1557, . . . the Lutherans—at least as far as Melanchthon could see—still shared this point of view:

And it is the beginning of a learned dispute concerning the norm of judging [controversies] in the church. The Papists set up the perpetual consensus [as a] norm. But in this way they named their customs that [lack such a] perpetual consensus. For many recent opinions of monks and many pontifical decrees clearly disagree with the prophetic and apostolic writings and with the purer antiquity, and many impious rites crept in that were unknown to the ancient church. We therefore

⁵⁶"Deinde constat et hoc, recentia secula, *quorum consensum sequuntur adversarii, discessisse a veterum scriptorum saniorum interpretatione*. Videndum est igitur, utra interpretatio, nostra an contraria, pugnet cum fontibus, hoc est, cum scriptis propheticis et apostolicis symbolis, et certis testimoniis Apostolicae sententiae. Hanc esse normam iudicii oportebat (italics mine)." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 255. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207. "Wittenberg argues through the Fathers to the original meaning of Scripture; the theologians of Trent allow their innovating notion of tradition to lead them away from it: Nec nos ignoramus, multos praetigiatores, ut stabiliant idola et pravas opiniones, praetexere antiquitatem, et inflectere integras conciones Christi et Apostolorum ad humanas opiniones contra nativam sententiam et illustria primae Ecclesiae testimonia." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 259. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207.

⁵⁷"Nec nos ignoramus, multos praetigiatores, ut stabiliant idola et pravas opiniones, praetexere antiquitatem, et inflectere integras conciones Christi et Apostolorum ad humanas opiniones contra nativam sententiam et illustria primae Ecclesiae testimonia." Melanchthon, *Recusatio*, 259. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207.

⁵⁸Camerarius, ch. 36, concerning the Diet of Speyer in 1529 states: "Fontem autem doctrinae integrae et sincerae in Ecclesia, unde ea hauriretur universa, praeter sacras literas nullum aperiendum admittendumque, cum et sciret et inprimis defenderet, doctrinam nihilominus quasi deduci, ut liquido flumine et sine ambagibus manaret, *per consentientem antiquitatis piae atque religiosae explanationem*, tanquam alveum, debere statuebat. . . ." Cf. Joachim Camerarius, *De Vita Philippi Melanchthonis Narratio*, Ed. A. F. Neander in *Quatuor Reformatorum* (Berlin, 1841.) Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207.

affirm the prophetic and apostolic writings and symbols to be the norm of judging [controversies]. We also said we add [to this] the writings of the church of ancient testimony concerning doctrines, but [we are] to be discerning concerning writers, [for] some [were] more, [and] some [were] less pure, and gradually the seed of error spread [in the ancient church].⁵⁹

Neuser

Wilhelm Neuser notes that the eucharistic debates of the 1520s forced Melanchthon to reevaluate his position on the *consensus ecclesiae*. In 1527 he writes to Lazarus Spengler, “I will not disagree with the consensus of the church.”⁶⁰ To Agricola he writes that he believes that the opinion of the entire church of that time was represented by Cyril’s and Hilary’s writings, among others, and that he has no intention of casually dissenting with the entire ancient church.⁶¹

In 1529, however, a change occurs in Melanchthon’s thinking. He is no longer able to assert that the *consensus ecclesiae* is as clear as he previously thought. Melanchthon’s debate with Oecolampadius and Zwingli forced him to concede at Marburg that the majority of Augustine’s quotations appear to support the Zwinglian position, but that the

⁵⁹“Estque initio erudite disputatum de norma iudicii in Ecclesia. *Constituebant Pontificii normam perpetuum consensum. Sic autem nominabant suam consuetudinem, quae non est perpetuus consensus. Multa enim recentes opiniones monachorum et multa decreta pontificia manifeste pugnant cum scriptis prophetis et apostolicis et cum puriore vetustate et multi impii ritus irrepserunt ignoti veteri Ecclesiae. Nos igitur normam iudicii esse adfirmamus prophetica et apostolica scripta et symbola. Diximus etiam scriptorum Ecclesiae veterum testimonia de dogmatibus nos adiungere, sed discernendos esse scriptores; alios magis, alios minus puros esse et paulatim sparsa esse errorum semina (italics mine).*., Melanchthon, *Album Academiae Vitebergensis ab a. Ch. 1502 usque ad A. 1560*, vol. 1, Ed. Foerstemann (Leipzig, 1841), 328. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 207.

⁶⁰“nolo ego ab ipso ecclesiae consensu dissentire.” CR 1, 901. Quoted in Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Die Abendmahllehre Melanchthons in ihrer Geschichtlichen Entwicklung (1519–1530)* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 399, n. 472.

⁶¹“Ego veteres aliud non sensisse puto, quam quod sit verum corpus in Eucharistia. . . . Ego autem arbitror totius ecclesiae sententiam tum fuisse eam, quam isti scripserint. Nolim igitur temere dissentire a tota veteri ecclesia.” O. Clemen, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel, Suppl. Melanchthoniana* (Leipzig, 1926), vol. 6:1, 404. Quoted in Neuser, *Die Abendmahllehre Melanchthons*, 399, n. 473.

vast majority of the other fathers' quotations clearly supported Luther's stance.⁶²

Melanchthon was no longer able to assert a homogeneous *consensus patrum*, but the humanist still contended that the older, and therefore the better fathers, were still in accord with the Lutheran position.

Haendler

Klaus Haendler maintains that Melanchthon's concept of the pure doctrine of the Gospel (*pura doctrina evangelii*), as it is further developed in the Augsburg Confession, is to be understood in connection with the correlate term—the consensus of the doctrine of the Gospel (*consensus de doctrina evangelii*).⁶³ Haendler notes that the concept of the *consensus de doctrina evangelii* appears programmatically and within the context of an ecclesiological horizon for the first time in the preliminary work of the Augsburg Confession and in the Augsburg Confession itself.⁶⁴

The concept of the *consensus de doctrina evangelii* especially concerns the problem of doctrinal unity (*Lehreinheit*), but it also deals with the possible quantitative understanding of doctrine as it relates to the consensus of doctrine (*consensus de doctrina*), as well as the potential requirement to submit to such a consensus. Thus the clarification of consensus in Melanchthon's thought is also the key to understanding his belief system and ecclesiology. Haendler asserts that the answer to the question of what

⁶²“Philippus: Pleraeque sententiae, quae ex Augustino citantur, plus videntur patrocinari Zuinglio, sed alii fere omnes ex veteribus manifeste suffragantur sententiae Luteri.” W. Köhler, *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529*, SVRG 148 (Leipzig, 1929), 42. Quoted in Neuser, 405, n. 506.

⁶³Klaus Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon. Eine Untersuchung über die Voraussetzungen und Grundlagen des melanchthonischen Kirchenbegriffes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968), 262.

⁶⁴“daß man des Evangeliums und der Sakrament halben ubereinkomm' (CA [Na] 7, BS 61, 23ff.). . . . consensus de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum' (CA 7, 2, BS 61, 7ff).“ Quoted in Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon*, 262, n. 193.

is the essence of the *consensus de doctrina evangelii* renders the concept of a “foundation,, (*fundamentum*). This foundation is the key concept for the issues at hand though it is problematic in nature, for the *consensus de doctrina* signifies the consensus in foundational doctrine (*consensus in doctrina fundamenti*).⁶⁵ Haendler further explains that the foundation is Christ. The stipulations of such a consensus for Melanchthon are given at the onset. “This consensus refers to the foundational doctrine (*doctrina fundamentalis*). It is consensus in foundational doctrine (*doctrina fundamenti*). On the basis of the soteriological-christological structure of this foundational doctrine it is to be determined as the consensus with regard to the soteriologically expounded and applied proclamation of Christ.”⁶⁶ For Melanchthon it has nothing to do with anything other than the consensus of Christ (*consensus de Christo*), that is, the consensus in Christ (*consensus in Christo*).

Haendler associates the *consensus in Christo* with the clear proclamation and teaching of the doctrine and work of Christ. “The required consensus in doctrine and proclamation of the Gospel signifies concord, unanimity, and above all, clarity in the ecclesiastical proclamation with regard to its actual theme: God’s salvation in Christ.”⁶⁷ For Melanchthon “it has to do with the clarity and constancy, the continuity in the

⁶⁵“Die Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Wesen des consensus de doctrina evangelii gibt der Begriff des ‘fundamentum,’ der der eigentliche Schlüsselbegriff für diesen Sachverhalt und seine Problematik ist. Denn der consensus de doctrina meint den ‘consensus in doctrina fundamenti.’” Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon*, 262. Cf. Pro. 80, CR 12, 433; Resp. ad art. Inqu., StA 6, 291, 26.f.

⁶⁶“Dieser consensus bezieht sich auf die doctrina fundamentalis. Er ist consensus in doctrina fundamenti. Aufgrund der soteriologisch-christologischen Struktur dieser doctrina fundamentalis ist er als consensus im Hinblick auf die soteriologisch ausgelegte und applizierte Christusverkündigung zu bestimmen. Es geht in ihm um nichts anderes als um den consensus de Christo, ja um den “consensus in Christo.” Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon*, 269. Cf. Resp. ad Staph., StA 6, 470, 4.

⁶⁷Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon*, 269.

identity of a divine salvific will and action and thereby with the once and for all time reality that has become the salvation of God for all men.”⁶⁸

Haendler concludes that the *consensus de doctrina evangelii*, quantitatively understood, signifies a consensus, as it relates to the Scriptures, and the ancient and reformation church’s doctrine, as scriptural exposition. This is so because these three factors, qualitatively understood, correctly explicate, transmit and proclaim the Christ-event. The *consensus de doctrina evangelii* therefore signifies consensus as found in the scriptural teaching and proclamation of Christ by the church of all times.

Wiedenhofer

The notion of the church in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology appears to be little more than the assembled church (*ecclesia congregata*) or the assembly of saints (*congregatio sanctorum*) in the view of Siegfried Wiedenhofer. This ecclesiology developed from the extreme emphasis on justification, which has made the holiness of the church contingent on an individualistic basis for understanding its nature. Melancthon seeks to compensate for this notion of the church in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, by adding the dual conceptions of the mixed church (*ecclesia mixta*) and the objective efficacy of Word and sacrament in Article 8. The concept of the assembly of saints (*congregatio sanctorum*) (Article 7) is elevated to the personal character of ecclesiastical fellowship that manifests itself in the reception of Word and sacraments by

⁶⁸“Der geforderte Lehr- und Verkündigungskonsens meint die Einmütigkeit, Einhelligkeit und vor allem Eindeutigkeit der kirchlichen Verkündigung in bezug auf ihr eigentliches Thema: Gottes Heil in Christus. Es geht in ihm um die Eindeutigkeit und Ständigkeit, um die Kontinuität in der Identität des *einen* göttlichen Heilswillens und -handelns und damit um das ein für alle Mal Wirklichkeit gewordene Heil Gottes für *alle* Menschen.” Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melancthon*, 269.

believers.⁶⁹ This emphasis on the church's dependence on the Word for its validity is quite different from the Old Catholic, pre-Gratian, sacramental understanding of the church, as well as the neo-Catholic, post-Gratian conception.⁷⁰ Thus, the Roman Church's sacramental, sociological-organic understanding of the church⁷¹ is opposed by the Melanctonian position of "a personal, dynamic, and in the realm of faith, an abiding understanding of the church."⁷²

These fundamentally different conceptions of the church cause Melancthon to turn to church history in order to bolster his ideas. The primary goals of the church are concord (*concordia*) and truth (*veritas*). These terms in turn are subsections of the concept of edification (*aedificatio*): the church is to function through truth and thereby maintain its unity. As Wiedenhofer notes, the impending dissolution of Christendom was no small affair for the Reformer, and he suffered tremendously from the thought of the disintegration of a united Western Europe. Nevertheless, a schism may be excused as a necessity (*necessitas*) if obedience to the truth predicates obedience to God rather than to men.

In light of the impending ecclesiastical schism, Melancthon in the 1520s, now operates with the idea of a consensus of the catholic church of Christ (*consensus Ecclesiae Catholicae Christi*). This signifies that the traditional concept of church unity,

⁶⁹Siegfried Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen humanistischer und reformatorischer Theologie bei Philipp Melancthon*, vol.1 (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1976), 265.

⁷⁰"das altkatholisch-vorgratianische, sakramentale, wie auch das neukatholisch-nach-gratianische, korporationsrechtliche Kirchenverständnis." Klaus Haendler, "Ecclesia consociata verbo Dei," In *Zur Struktur der Kirche bei Melancthon*, KuD 8 (1962), 176. Quoted in Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, 265.

⁷¹"sakramentales, korporationsrechtliches bzw. soziologisch-organologisches Kirchenverständnis" Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, 265.

⁷²"personales, dynamisches und im Bereich des Glaubens bleibendes Kirchenverständnis." Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, 265.

which in turn has come to signify an expression for ecclesial autocracy and papal politics, is replaced with a narrower conception of unity. This combination of unity and catholicity transcends the boundaries of the empirical church and encompasses all true believers of all times and becomes a consensus in the sense of a consensus of confession in relation to right teaching that is thoroughly tangible historically.⁷³ The church, for Melanchthon, has also existed under the papacy but the concrete expression of his concept of consensus refers one back to the ancient church and its confessions of faith and the fathers. Since the second half of the 1520s this appeal to the fathers and the ecumenical symbols increases noticeably in Melanchthon's writings.⁷⁴

Alongside this new definition of consensus in the church, however, Melanchthon does not immediately eradicate the older conception of unity (AC 28). He is willing to recognize the jurisdiction of catholic bishops, the preservation of the canonical polity (*canonica politia*) of the church and even the power of the papacy. This, however, is contingent on the allowance of evangelical preaching and freedom from human traditions being imposed upon the church, traditions that are against the Word of God.

Wiedenhofer considers this concession to be formal, rather than material, since Melanchthon considers the contemporary Roman conception of the church to be the absolute rule or the kingdom of the papacy (*monarchia oder das regnum pontificia*), i.e., the authoritative human polity established in the church (*politia humana autoritata in*

⁷³“Verbindung von Einheit und Katholizität, die die Grenzen der empirischen Kirchentümer überschreitet und alle Rechtgläubigen aller Zeiten umfaßt, wobei dieser consensus als Konsens des Bekenntnisses bzw. der rechten Lehre durchaus historisch greifbar ist.” Ibid., 266.

⁷⁴“den konkreten Ausdruck dieser consensus-Idee, der die Entwicklung der Theologie Melanchthons mitgestaltet hat, bildet die Berufung auf die alte Kirche, die Glaubensbekenntnisse und die Väter, die seit der zweiten Hälfte der zwanzigen Jahre im verstärkten Maße erfolgt.” Ibid., 266–67.

Ecclesia constituta),⁷⁵ and this hierarchichal schema of the Roman Church is not found in Scripture.

Green

Lowell C. Green addresses how Erasmus, Luther and Melanchthon understood the concept of consensus in an article exclusively dedicated to this question. The Reformation era was caught between the tension of maintaining continuity with the past, i.e, a time of diastasis, while striving to discard scholastic accretions and unnecessary abuses of the medieval Roman Church, i.e., a time of synthesis.⁷⁶ Melanchthon was one of the chief followers and admirers of Erasmus, yet he was also the closest disciple of Luther. Although Erasmus later charged Luther with innovation,⁷⁷ all three were raised in an age that considered ancient doctrines to be the authentic ones and novelty to be a likely heresy. Furthermore, “recent studies have traced back the consensus idea all the way to pre-Socratic Greece, with contributions by such men as Aristotle, Cicero and

⁷⁵Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, 267. Cf. Apology 7. BSLK 239, 33ff.

⁷⁶Lowell C. Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon on the Magnus Consensus: The Problem of the Old and the New in the Reformation and Today” *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 27 (1975): 364. Cf. Werner Elert, *Der Kampf um das Christentum* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1921), 3ff.

⁷⁷Green notes that although Erasmus disliked Luther’s vitriolic treatises of 1520, he also disliked the cruelty of the papal bull condemning him. After Luther’s excommunication Erasmus paid more attention to the *magnus consensus* of the Roman Catholic church. Initially he limited consensus to agreement with the Apostles Creed, and found Luther to be non-heretical. The break came with their disagreement over the freedom of the will. Erasmus accused Luther of forsaking the consensus of the ages, yet agreed with him that Scripture was the chief authority in doctrinal questions. “Erasmus’ view of the *magnus consensus* reached its culmination in the *Hyperaspistes* of August 1527, his response to Luther’s ‘Bondage of the Will.’ Gebhardt finds here a threefold consent: the opinion of the church fathers, the decrees of the church councils, and the agreement of Christian people (*consensus populi Christiani*). The first two forms of consensus were also conceded by Luther; they represented the idea of a transcendent authority . . . The third form presented several problems, however.” Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon,” 367–68. Cf. Gebhardt, *Die Stellung Erasmus von Rotterdam zur Römischen Kirche* (Marburg: Oekumenischer Verlag Dr. R. F. Edel, 1966), 54–57.

Augustus Caesar. Ancient rulers found it expedient to claim that they ruled by consent of their subjects, *per consensium omnium*.”⁷⁸

Green asks what is the meaning of the famous introductory phrase of the Augsburg Confession—“*Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent . . .*”⁷⁹ The first option is the unanimity of the Lutheran princes and theologians, and thus emphasizes *apud nos* (“among us”). Green, however, opts for the second possibility, that the subject—the *magnus consensus* (“the great consensus”)—refers to the catholic consensus of all ages. Therefore Green considers this reference not to be a “horizontal” one, i.e., a consensus amongst the Lutherans, but a “vertical” consent, i.e., a catholic consensus of all ages that bears witness to the truth. Thus the Lutherans are asserting in the Augsburg Confession that their doctrine is in agreement with the great consensus of the true catholic church. In the next section, “Consensus in the Augustana and the Apology,” we shall discuss more fully the consequences of such an interpretation of the *magnus consensus*.

Becht

Michael Becht’s published dissertation is the most significant work produced dedicated exclusively to the concept of consensus in the works of Erasmus, Melancthon and Calvin.⁸⁰ Becht notes Melancthon uses the term *consensus* 401 times in the *Corpus Reformatorum* alone. Becht summarizes his study this way: The concept of consensus in the sense of agreement or consent permeates Melancthon’s entire work and is not

⁷⁸Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melancthon,” 365. Cf. Klaus Oehler, “Der Consensus omnium als Kriterium der Wahrheit in der antiken Philosophie und der Patristik,” in *Antike und Abendland*, vol. 10 (1961), especially pp. 103–17.

⁷⁹Cf. BSLK, 50. Quoted in Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melancthon,” 365.

⁸⁰Becht discusses the classical and rhetorical origins of the *Konsensbegriff* in his introduction. Cf. Michael Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri. Studien zum Begriff consensus im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melancthon und Johannes Calvin* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2000), 1–22.

limited to the realm of ecclesiastical life. Despite the seemingly formal nature in his manner of speaking about consensus, the consensus-formulations in Melanchthons work demonstrate a surprising diversity in meaning upon closer scrutiny.⁸¹

The learned humanist sees harmony and consensus in the wonderfully designed ordering and structure of nature itself, which further attests to the divine order. Consensus in the human community and society, as well as the church is desired by God and important to maintain, although the depravity of the human heart (*humani cordis pravitas*) threatens their order. Consensus in the church is accorded special significance by Melanchthon. The church of Christ as the catholic church united by the sure Word of God (*ecclesia catholica, consociata certo verbo Dei*) has its basis in the believers' agreement in their fundamental understanding of the Word of God that alone can nurture the church. The true church of the Gospel, whose teaching is found in Scripture and the ecumenical symbols, must protect its purity, and Melanchthon requires all christians to "think with the catholic church."⁸²

One often finds the expression "the consensus of the church" (*consensus ecclesiae*) in connection with important theological questions and ruminations, although this is not presented as a key concept (*Schlüsselbegriff*) in Melanchthon's works. The *consensus ecclesiae* appears at times to represent the unanimously represented status of a theological position throughout the ages, and at other times the prevailing unanimity and concord of the Lutheran position over against the alleged consensus of the Roman

⁸¹"Der Begriff des *consensus* im Sinne eines Übereinkommens oder einer Zustimmung durchzieht Melanchthons ganzes Werk und ist keinesfalls nur auf den Bereich kirchlichen Lebens beschränkt. Trotz des auf den ersten Blick formelhaften Charakters seiner 'Konsenssprache' zeigen die consensus-Formulierungen in Melanchthons Werk bei genauerer Betrachtung ein überraschende Vielfärbigkeit." Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 361.

⁸²"cum Ecclesia Catholica sentire." StA 1, 375, 38. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 361.

Catholic church. Furthermore, Melanchthon is convinced that consensus prevails because the individual members and different parts of the church agree with one another and with the internally consistent history of revelation (*Offenbarungsgeschichte*) that culminated at the Christ event. The church as a witnessing community to this salvific event (*Heilsgeschehen*) must be in agreement with this proclamation. In the form of the *consensus ecclesiae* the unanimous witness of the church preserves, articulates, and testifies in historically changing forms for every age the saving message of the Gospel and thus ensures dogmatic continuity with its biblical beginnings.⁸³

The background for Melanchthon's understanding of the *consensus ecclesiae* is built upon a qualitative concept of tradition in which the church, despite all the flawed doctrinal developments of her past, adheres to her doctrinal continuity with the apostolic proclamation. The *consensus ecclesiae* expresses the claimed catholicity of the Lutheran churches in the sense of a historical continuity that allows them to overrule the doctrinal decisions of the fathers when necessary.

The consensus of the church in Melanchthon's thought is analogous to concentric circles, whose center is the doctrine of the Gospel (*doctrina evangelii*). From this initial circle emanate the historical development of ecclesiastical exegesis and the proclamation of the Word. These are best represented by the Old and New Testaments, the ecumenical symbols, the writings of the fathers and finally the *Confessio Augustana*: the "symbol for our times" (*nostri temporis Symbolum*). All these witnesses bear the mark of learning, which plays a definitive role for the *consensus ecclesiae*. If asked where the consensus of

⁸³"In der Form des *consensus ecclesiae* als dem einhellige Zeugnis der Kirche bewahrt, artikuliert und bezeugt sie *in geschichtlich wechselhafter Gestalt für jede Zeit* die Heilsbotschaft des Evangeliums und *sichert so den dogmatischen Zusammenhang mit dem biblischen Ursprungsgeschehen* (italics mine)." Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 361–62.

the church is to be found, Melancthon directs the interrogator to the learned teachers of every age. "All named bearers and figures of the *consensus ecclesiae* stand in dogmatic continuity with their historical predecessors and continually bring the core of ecclesiastical doctrine to expression: the foundational consensus (*consensus fundamento*) as the soteriological center of biblical teaching."⁸⁴ From the horizontal perspective of the continually changing historical situation of the church, the *consensus ecclesiae* bears a changing shape, but it always proclaims the same message: "a perpetual and unanimous voice . . . of the fathers, the prophets, Christ, and the apostles."⁸⁵

The Concept of Consensus (*Konsensbegriff*) Historiography in Review

Despite his reputation and the scholarly shadow he cast over the interpretation of the Reformation, Ritschl's thesis of Melancthonian "traditionalism" has been refuted by later generations of scholars who have worked carefully with the reformer's writings. They were not hindered by the earlier Protestant distaste for the use of tradition, as were Harnack and Ritschl, who considered almost all vestiges of the ancient church to be a hindrance to the alleged purity of Luther's reformation. Kantzenbach, Sperl, Neuser and Haendler offer valuable insights into Melancthon's understanding of the *consensus ecclesiae*. Fraenkel's magisterial work remains the touchstone by which all other patristic analyses of Melancthon are to be judged. Nevertheless, Green's and especially Becht's contributions, both dependent on Fraenkel's work, are helpful since they have

⁸⁴"Alle diese Zeugnisse tragen das Wasserzeichen der Bildung, die auch für den *consensus ecclesiae* eine tragende Rolle spielt: Wer nach dem Konsens der Kirche fragt, ist Melancthon zufolge immer auch auf die Gebildeten der Kirche jeder Zeit verwiesen. Alle genannten Träger und Gestalten des *consensus ecclesiae* stehen in dogmatischer Kontinuität zu ihren geschichtlichen Vorgängern und bringen stets den Kern der kirchlichen Lehre zum Ausdruck: den *consensus fundamento* als das soteriologische Zentrum der biblischen Lehre." Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 362.

⁸⁵"una perpetua et consentiens vox . . . Patrum, Propphetarum, Christi et Apostolorum." CR 15, 888. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 362.

sought to tease out the meaning of a highly significant concept in Melanchthon's thought, and as we shall see in the thought of Chemnitz as well. The concept of consensus clearly is crucial to the understanding of church and theology. A sample of historians have had their say, but *consensus* is still worth a closer look in a bit more detail.

Consensus in the Augustana and the Apology

“George Coelestin wrote in his history of the Augsburg Confession (1577): ‘The Lutherans did not criticize or oppose the Catholic Church, but only the abuses.’”⁸⁶ Was this the real intention of the confessors at Augsburg? What did Melanchthon have in mind as he began the Augsburg Confession with the strong appeal to consensus: “Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent . . .”? He even repeated this assertion at the start of each subsequent article: “Likewise they teach . . .”⁸⁷ “According to John Sleidanus, the first major historian of the Reformation, the Diet of Augsburg deliberated over what was pious in it [the church], and what differed from the consensus of the church (*quid pie sit in ea, quid aliene dictum ab ecclesiae consensu*).”⁸⁸

Green asserts that the great consensus (*magnus consensus*) of the church refers to the catholic church of all ages and not to the internal concord of the Lutherans.⁸⁹ He

⁸⁶Georg Coelestin, *Historia Comitiorum Anno M.D.XXX. Augustae celebratorum . . .*, (Frankfurt an der Oder: Johannes Eichorn, 1577), vol. 3, fol.25.b.26. Quoted in Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon,” 376.

⁸⁷“Item docent . . .”

⁸⁸Johann Sleidanus, *Commentariorum de Statu Religionis & Reipublicae, Carolo Quinto Caesare, Libri 26* (Strassburg: Theodosius Rihel, 1555 [2nd ed., 1558]), 187. Quoted in Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon,” 376.

⁸⁹“Some scholars have placed the primary emphasis upon the words *apud nos*, ‘among us.’ They point to the remarkable results when the questionnaires were sent out to the territorial churches of Nurnberg and Brandenburg-Ansbach, asking them what they taught regarding the major points of theology; the responses had indicated that a surprisingly great consensus existed upon the basis of evangelical teaching. . . . Nevertheless, this position lacks adequate support. There is simply no material in the biblicistic declarations from Franconia, at least in the form in which they have been published by Schmidt and

maintains that the problem of catholic tradition had been thoroughly discussed by the Wittenberg reformers, and that the Torgau Articles formed the basis for Articles 22 to 28 of the Augsburg Confession. The Torgau articles were also concerned with the problem of consent. “However, it was not the Torgau articles of March 1530 but the Schwabach Articles from the preceding summer which had laid the foundation for Articles 1-21 of the German text of the Augsburg Confession.”⁹⁰ Green then describes how the *magnus consensus* was placed in the Augustana:

The first of the Schwabach Articles had begun: ‘It is firmly and unitedly held and taught . . .’ followed by a traditional statement about the Trinity. The same wording appeared in the German version of Article I of the Augsburg Confession, but with the important change that that with which they agreed was no longer merely one another or the Bible but the Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopol-itanum (‘Nicene Creed’): ‘It is unitedly taught and held in conformity with the decree of Nicaea . . .’ But when this was rendered in Latin, Melanchthon slipped in the terminology of the *magnus consensus*: ‘The churches among us teach, with the *magnus consensus*, the decree of the Council of Nicaea . . .’⁹¹

Green interprets this to be a “vertical consent” that runs back through history and points to the truth found in the Nicene creed. Although both interpretations concerning the *magnus consensus* are grammatically valid, there are significant reasons that lend credence to Green’s interpretation. Melanchthon was making an appeal to Roman Catholics at an imperial diet, his extremely high estimation of the ecumenical symbols as a norm of doctrine (*Lehrnorm*), the need to refute any accusation of novelty, the need to legitimize the catholicity and legality of the reformation, and his own concept of consensus that saw internal consistency between the ecumenical symbols and Scripture.

Schorfbaum, to justify the claim that they were the source of the statement in *Confessio Augustana I: Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent.*” Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon,” 377.

⁹⁰Green, “Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon,” 377.

⁹¹Ibid., 377–78.

Kantzenbach essentially agrees with Green's interpretation. He observes that the assumption that the Augsburg Confession contains the entirety of catholic truth played a very special role for Melanchthon. The Augustana is in the first place a testimony to the living faith of the Reformation churches, and it is at the same time a norm of doctrine. A pledge to the Augsburg Confession that assumed its agreement with the ecumenical symbols and Holy Scripture is found in the statutes of the theological faculty of Wittenberg, and later in other faculties as well.⁹²

Becht notes that Melanchthon believed that the church didactically formulates the *consensus ecclesiae* for every age, yet does so in various ways and expressions. Nevertheless, her material content remains the same. In this way Melanchthon considers the ecclesiastical consensus of doctrine (*Lehrconsensus*) of the present time to be encapsulated in the Augustana. In 1530 the Wittenberg reformer had brought together and delineated the beliefs of the Lutheran princes, people and territories in the Confession, and thereby had established the catholicity of the Reformation. In this way confessors understood their Confession ultimately as a contemporary expression and realization of the teaching of the ancient church. This core idea of the Confession is revealed in the first article as it confesses the Nicene understanding of the trinity. Accordingly, Melanchthon's view of the Middle Ages as a time of doctrinal obscurity and a falling away from the Gospel elevates the Lutheran efforts to the status of a repristination of the authentic teachings of the ancient church, a true reformation.

⁹²“Eine ganz besondere Rolle spielt bei Melanchthon der Hinweis auf die *Confessio Augustana*, die beweist, daß die reformatorischen Kirchen die volle katholische Wahrheit für sich haben. Die Augustana ist zunächst Zeugnis des in den Gemeinden lebendigen Glaubens. In der innerreformatorischen Situation ist sie zugleich Lehrnorm. *Eine Verpflichtung auf die Confessio Augustana als übereinnehmend mit den ökumenischen Symbolen und der Heiligen Schrift findet sich in den Statuten der theologischen Fakultät von Wittenberg, später auch in anderen Fakultäten (italics mine).*” Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um die Einheit*, 109.

Melanchthon has no doubt that the Augustana is in complete agreement with the *consensus ecclesiae*. The consensus of the catholic church is clearly expressed and contained in the Augsburg Confession. Twenty years after the writing of the Augustana he calls upon and defends anew the publicly confessed Confession, fully convinced that “the single, eternal consensus is divine Scripture, and the true catholic church of Christ.”⁹³ Therefore all should remain united in their profession of it (eintrechtiglich bleiben). The theological preoccupation with the whole of antiquity (*universa antiquitas*) according to Melanchthon evinces an unbroken line of continuity in the teaching of the church. This continuity emanates from the witnesses of Holy Scripture through the ecumenical symbols to the teaching of the Augsburg Confession, whereby temporal discontinuity is bridged by the material agreement of the respectively later and earlier symbols. Furthermore, the principle of continuity also applies to the other confessions and doctrinal writings of the Evangelicals due to their agreement with the doctrinal purity of the early church.⁹⁴

Becht concurs with Kantzenbach as he notes how the concept of consensus became a determinative factor for Wittenberg’s later theology as students were obliged to pledge adherence to the Augsburg Confession as the doctrinal expression of the *consensus*

⁹³“dieses der einige, ewige Consensus ist göttlicher Schrift, und der rechten katholischen Kirchen Christi [ist].” Melanchthon, CR 8, 284. See also CR 3, 999; CR 4, 109. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 305, n. 1687.

⁹⁴“So versichert die Unterzeichner der *Confessio Saxonica* (1551), sie wollten nur die ‘Lehre jener Augsburger Konfession und den gemeinen Konsens dieser Kirchen rezitieren (MWA 6, 167,1f.)’ Besonders deutlich findet sich dieser Gedanke im *Examen Ordinandorum* (1552): ‘Es ist auch durch diese Schrift nicht anders gemeint, denn das die einige, ewige, wahrhaftige Lere des Evangelii rein gepredigt sol werden, die Gott gnediglich durch seinen Son Jhesum Christum geoffenbart hat, und die in der Propheten und Aposteln schrift gefasset ist Und in dem verstand, der in den Symbolis, Apostolico, Niceno und Athanasii ausgedruckt ist. Mit welchen gleich stimmen Lutheri Cathecismus und Confessio (scil. Gemeint sind die Schmalkaldischen Artikel) Und die Confessio, die der Keiserlichen Maiestet im Reichstag zu Augsburg Anno 1530. uberantwort ist und wie diese Lere durch Gottes gnade eintrechtiglich in den Kirchen dieser Sechsischen Lande als zu Lubeck, Hamburg, Luneburg und andern der gleichen gepredigt wird’ (MWA 6, 171, 7–18) (italics mine).” Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 305, n. 1690.

ecclesiae.⁹⁵ Thus the consensus of the ancient church as well as the confession of the present time, in which one ought to remain united (*eintrechtiglich bleiben*), should radiate its testimony continually into the extended future.

Becht claims that Melanchthon considers consensus as a synonym for the teaching of the church. In Melanchthon's letter to the kings of the Smalcald league concerning the rejection of Trent's initial decrees, he maintains that the teaching of the Augsburg Confession is that of the Gospel and "without doubt the consensus of the church of Christ."⁹⁶ The contents of church doctrine are contained in the Augsburg Confession and accord with the consensus of the church. In preparation for the Religious colloquy of Regensburg in 1541 Melanchthon's draft restates the Evangelical position to the Kaiser, whereby the Protestants reaffirm the doctrines of the Augustana and the Apology, and both confessions are once again equated with the consensus of the church of Christ.⁹⁷ Becht also notes that the Latin words: *vere esse consensum Catholicae Ecclesiae Christi* (truly to be the consensus of the catholic church of Christ) are translated into German with, "die einhellige Meinung und Lehr der heiligen katholischen Kirchen Gottes" (the

⁹⁵“Seinen quasi normativ-disziplinären Niederschlag hat dieser Grundsatz in den von Melanchthon erarbeiteten Statuten für die theologische Fakultät der Universität Wittenberg gefunden, wo der dogmatische Lehrbetrieb auf die den *consensus ecclesiae* aussprechende Lehre des *Augsburger Bekenntnisses* verpflichtet wird.” Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri*, 305. Becht further observes, “In den Statuten von 1546 heißt es demgemäß: ‘Praecipua autem cura sit huius Collegii, *docere et tueri puram Evangelii doctrinam traditam in libris Prophetis et Apostolicis, cum quibus congruunt Symbola, Apostolicum, Nicenum, et Athanasianum, hoc unum genus doctrinae verum et immotum, quod quidem est perpetuus Catholicus Ecclesiae Dei consensus, doceri et defendi volumus, quod et Ecclesiae nostrae in confessione exhibita Imperatori Augusto Carlo V. in conventu Augustano, Anno M.D.XXX. complexae sunt*’ (CR 10, 1002f.). Vgl. auch die Statuten von 1533: Friedensburg, Urkundenbuch I, 154. (italics mine)” Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 305, n. 1691.

⁹⁶“ohne Zweifel der Konsens der Kirche Christi.” Melanchthon, CR 3, 317; Cf. CR 3, 1144. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 307.

⁹⁷“In dem ebenfalls von Melanchthon entworfenen Schreiben der evangelischen Stände an den Kaiser anlässlich der Regensburger Religionsverhandlungen (1541) bekennen sich die Protestanten zur Lehre ihrer *Confessio* und der *Apologie*, die beide wiederum von ihnen mit dem Konsens der Kirche Christi gleichgesetzt werden.” Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 307.

unanimous opinion and doctrine of the holy catholic church of God).⁹⁸ The *consensus ecclesiae* is not translated as consensus, concord, or agreement but rather as *Meinung* (opinion), which is closer to *Lehre* (doctrine) in meaning. The correlation between consensus and doctrine (*Lehre*) becomes even clearer in his *Recusatio Synodi Tridentini* (1546). In this work Apology 10, 43 is mentioned where Peter declares that the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ is called the “consensus of the universal church.” Later, in Melanchthon’s *Römerbriefkommentar* of 1556, he states that the doctrine of faith (*Lehre von Glauben*) that has been renewed through the voice of the Gospel is not new. Rather it has the eternal agreement and consensus of the church.⁹⁹

Becht notes that the original understanding of the Lutherans’ confession, which assumed consensus with Scripture and the early church, became a consensus of its own in later Lutheran thought. The internal equating of consensus and doctrine is not unique to the theology of Melanchthon. In the course of the 1540s the concept of consensus becomes a technical term for the Evangelical Confessions. This is the case, for example, with the *Consensus Tigrinus* of 1549. In 1530 the fundamental doctrinal confession of the Protestants bore the name *Confession*, and this confession certainly rested upon a consensus. Yet by the 1540s the confessional writings themselves began to be given the title *consensus*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸CR 4, 483, 494. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 307.

⁹⁹“nun durch die Stimme des Evangeliums erneuert wurde, nicht neu, sondern die ewige Übereinstimmung consensus der wahren Kirche sei.“ Melanchthon, CR 15, 807. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 308.

¹⁰⁰“Die inhaltliche Gleichsetzung von ‚Konsens‘ und ‚Lehre‘ ist kein Spezifikum der Theologie Melanchthons. Wird doch im Verlauf der 40er Jahre des 16 Jhdts. der Begriff *consensus* zum Terminus technicus für evangelische Bekenntnisschriften wie etwa den *Consensus Tigrinus* (1549). Trug im Jahr 1530 das fundamentale Lehrbekenntnis der Protestanten noch den Namen *Confessio*, die freilich auch auf einem consensus beruht, so werden nun künftig diese Bekenntnisschriften auch als *Consensus* betitelt.“ Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 308.

The Crux of the Matter: Justification and Consensus

The final edition of Melanchthon's *Commonplaces* "in one way or another became the basic text of practically all Lutheran theological teaching until the end of the scholastic era, . . . the few indications of the value of the early Church's teaching have been developed into a veritable system of patristic argument."¹⁰¹ Melanchthon makes the most extensive references to patristic argumentation concerning the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation. In the later editions of the *Commonplaces* Melanchthon began to add a catalogue of testimonies to confirm and augment his discussion of the locus in question. He could almost interchangeably appeal to Scripture and the dogma of antiquity as a good and adequate exposition of a scriptural topic. For Melanchthon there was no problem of principle involved in such a methodology.

The soteriology of the ancient church, however, poses difficulties for him, and his view of the church with regard to this locus is noticeably different. Even the appeal to Augustine's view of original sin forces Melanchthon "to explain away St. Augustine's application of the idea that sin is always a matter of the will."¹⁰²

The locus of justification, "which for Melanchthon as for the entire Lutheran Reformation is the *summa evangelii* or paradigm of all theology," creates a serious difficulty for his manner of patristic argumentation.¹⁰³ The sinful tendency of humanity, which leans towards works-righteousness, continues to pervert the truth of the Gospel. Thus the theology of the ancient church, which otherwise provided a reliable explication of key dogmas, fails to do justice to this locus. This in turn calls for critical judgment of

¹⁰¹Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 36.

¹⁰²Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 38.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 39.

the otherwise reliable testimonies of antiquity. The catalogue of testimonies must be seriously limited and even then critically analyzed since many fathers taught this doctrine incorrectly.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, Melanchthon affirms that some of the more erudite and pious of the fathers agreed with the Reformation position even though some of the fathers spoke better than others.¹⁰⁵ Augustine is the most significant of the fathers in this respect, “particularly his *De Spiritu et Littera*, which Melanchthon proceeds to quote, followed by Bernard of Clairvaux and Basil.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, he considers Augustine’s theology to be identical with that of the Lutheran position since Augustine understood faith (*fides*) in terms of trust (*fiducia*).¹⁰⁷ In 1540 writing from Worms, he even went so far as to say concerning justification and good works, “Therefore we do not doubt that in this locus we follow and profess the true consensus of the catholic church of Christ, the fathers, prophets, apostles, and other saints.”¹⁰⁸

Fraenkel considers the selective choice of orthodox fathers to be primarily symbolic since the above-mentioned definition of faith and its corollary doctrine of justification are much more than the Augustinian passage reveals. Nevertheless, Melanchthon insists that such fathers represent the catholic faith of all times and asserts that their judgments are the very voice of the Gospel and the most certain perpetual consensus of the true church.

¹⁰⁴We shall see that Chemnitz follows Melanchthon closely here and faces the same difficulties.

¹⁰⁵“sed aliqui eruditiores nobiscum revera sentiunt, etsi et hi quoque alias commodius, alias incommodius loquuntur.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷“Hic certe Augustinus fidem intellegit fiduciam, quae accipit remissionem peccatorum, et dictum in Genesi ac Paulo prorsus intellegit sicut nos enarramus.” Melanchthon, CR 21, 748. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 39.

¹⁰⁸“Ideo non dubitamus, nos in hoc loco vere consensum Catholicae Ecclesiae Christi, patrum, prophetarum, Apostolorum, et aliorum sanctorum sequi et profiteri.” Melanchthon, CR 3, 433. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 304, n. 1682.

In fact, good and pious men recognize this explication of the Gospel to be the doctrine of Paul. Above all things Melanchthon appeals to the consensus of the church, that is, to skilled and pious men whose weighty testimony is the judge of doctrinal disputes.¹⁰⁹

Thus despite the formidable evidence to the contrary, Melanchthon asserts that justification has the testimony of the early fathers and consensus, even if they failed to speak correctly at times. This must be so for Melanchthon because justification is scriptural and the hallmark of all true Christians. Therefore his pessimistic view that humanity's corruption makes every witness other than the apostles' and the prophets' uncertain, is qualified by an appeal to catholicity, which in turn is qualified by the idea that true believers have always existed in the church.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

In the Apology Melanchthon appeals to the consensus of the church or to the prophets when he writes the articles concerning original sin, justification, the Lord's Supper,¹¹¹ and repentance. These appeals may be understood as part of the *consensus evangelii* and the *consensus ecclesiae*. Melanchthon was able to break away from the alleged Roman Catholic consensus since it was something new and alien to the Scriptures. The humanistic ideal of the purer and truer antiquity (*purior et verior*

¹⁰⁹“Has autem sententias esse ipsam Evangelii vocem *et perpetuum verae Ecclesiae consensum certissimum est. Nec dubito bonos et pios agnoscere hanc explicationem vere esse Pauli doctrinam eamque grate amplecti. Ac de tota re provoco ad consensum Ecclesiae, id est, peritorum et piorum: Eius Ecclesiae testimonium gravissimum esse iudicio (italics mine).*” Melanchthon, CR 21, 750. Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 39.

¹¹⁰Cf. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 40.

¹¹¹The Lord's Supper was an essential aspect of ecclesiastical consensus for Melanchthon since the writing of the Augsburg Confession, if not earlier. “Die Einmütigkeit in der Sakramentenverwaltung hat Melanchthon neben der Eintracht in der kirchlichen Lehre schon in der *Confessio Augustana* als eine für die kircheneinheit konstitutive Größe genannt. Diese Ansicht wiederholt er in der 1541 erschienenen Neuausgabe der *Loci communes*: ‘Consensus esse debet doctrinae Evangelii et usus sacramentorum, qui ordinatus est in scriptis.’” CR 21, 510. Quoted in Becht, *Pium Consensum tueri*, 324.

antiquitas) had led the reformer to the original sources of Scripture, to pauline doctrine, the fathers, and the ecumenical symbols. Therefore whenever the *consensus patrum* was deficient, as it was in the case of justification, Melanchthon was able in good conscience to compensate by appealing directly to Scripture itself.

Thus a true consensus was built upon the consensus of the prophets and apostles, i.e., the consensus of Scripture with itself.¹¹² The creeds were reliable since they were excellent explications of christology, and the writings of the fathers were always subjected to the utmost scrutiny. Melanchthon, however, salvaged much of the fathers' writings by recognizing that many of them had received the gift of interpretation (*donum interpretationis*) and were invaluable for scriptural exposition. They were church in their time, seeking to understand, explain, and apply the revealed Word, even as Melanchthon and the Reformers sought to do the same in their era. Thus a historical trail—sometimes well trod, sometimes faint—emerges from biblical roots.

The doctrines of the Augustana agreed with the great consensus (*magnus consensus*) of the church of all times. The Augsburg Confession reflected the truths of the Nicene creed, and therefore evinced true catholicity. This creedal consensus subsequently predicated the proclamation of the entire Gospel and the message of salvation for all through Jesus Christ.

In the Apology Melanchthon boldly reaffirmed that Lutheran doctrine represented the consensus of the prophets and the church. Such an unequivocal statement could be made since Paul's doctrine of justification was so clearly taught in the Scriptures. The "papists" were not true catholics, and were guilty of scholastic innovation and rejection

¹¹²"First of all when the authority of the church is appealed to, one must ask whether it was the consensus of the true church, agreeing with the Word of God (italics mine)." Philip Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans* trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 244–45.

of the Gospel. The Lutheran church was the true catholic church since it was “in agreement with the consensus of a purer, older church”¹¹³ Later when asked what the signs of the true church were, Melanchthon asserted that the *consensus doctrinae* was the first.¹¹⁴

Postscript to Melanchthon: The Flacius Circle and the *Consensus Veritatis*

Matthias Flacius may be considered the polar opposite of Melanchthon in many respects, and the friction between the two and their supporters and allies is well known. Yet when it came to the issue of consensus and the tie to the ancient church, the two had no quarrel. Flacius shared the conviction that the Reformation stood in continuity with the ancient church. His *Catalogus Testium, Clavis Scripturae, De Sectis, Dissensionibus, Glossa ad Neum Testamenti*, and the *Magdeburg Centuries* form an organic unity in which exegesis, the question of authority, and church history are brought into harmony with one another.¹¹⁵

The driving force behind the *Magdeburg Centuries*¹¹⁶ is the conviction that there is true continuity throughout the centuries because God through his grace and power

¹¹³“gemäß dem Konsens einer reineren, älteren Kirche.” CR 24, 398.

¹¹⁴CR 24, 401f.

¹¹⁵Joachim Massner states, “Bezeichnend für diese Einheit ist etwa die Beobachtung, daß Flacius verschiedene Partien der Zenturien einfach in die Clavis eingearbeitet hat.” *Kirchliche Überlieferung und Autorität im Flaciuskreis* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1964), 36.

¹¹⁶Many scholars now consider Johann Wigand and Mattheus Judex to be the actual writers of most of the *Centuries*. Otto Ritschl noticed this when he discovered that two chapters on doctrine from the first volume were identical to parts of the *Syntagma* of Judex and Wigand.” Scheible contends that Flacius’s name is rightly connected to the *Centuries* since he planned them, not because he was their author. Ronald Diener considers Wigand’s request that Flacius write the preface nothing more than a courtesy.

Oliver Olson concludes, “Flacius cannot be assumed to be the author of the text of the *Centuries* themselves.” Oliver Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther’s Reform* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2002), 279. Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience we shall consider the *Centuries* part of the Flacius circle and the ideas represented there in agreement with his.

maintains the church through the preaching of the Word.¹¹⁷ Scripture is the overarching principle by which all the teachers of the church are to be measured. Scripture alone is normative and determinative of true continuity. Thus Flacius can state, “We have the catholic consensus of the doctrine of God that is approved of by the entire earthly and heavenly church. [Even] so the Pharisees and monks on the other hand wish to boast of the consensus of the fathers and their catholicity.”¹¹⁸

Thus Flacius’s sense of continuity and catholicity is a qualified one that appears to be very much in a line begun with Luther’s view of catholicity. He clearly states in his *Clavis Scriptura* that the fathers not only contradict one another but themselves in their writings and that it is madness to seek to extract a clear interpretation of Scripture from so many varied and competing interpretations.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the attempt to gather a unified sense of the fathers requires nothing less than herculean labors, and ultimately relying on them for religious controversies would inevitably send one over the edge of an abyss.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷The General Preface to the *Centuries* states, “monstrat (historia) perpetuum consensum in doctrina singulorum articulorum fidei, omnibus aetatibus....Nequaquam igitur articuli coelestis doctrinae variant...” Quoted in Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 273. Thus, “They are as Tertullian says, identical with the first and true.” Ibid.

¹¹⁸“Wir haben den *katholischen Konsensus der Lehre Gottes*, der von der ganzen irdischen und himmlischen Kirche gebilligt wird. So mögen sich auf der anderen Seite der Pharisäer und Mönche des Konsensus ihrer Väter und ihres Katholizismus rühmen (italics mine).” Flacius, *Glossa ad Apoc.* 7, 11, 1338 b. Quoted in Massner, *Flaciuskreis*, 42.

¹¹⁹“Ingentem plane dissonantiam sensuum & interpretationum Scripturae reperias, non tantum in diversis patribus, sed etiam in uno eodemque. Nunc enim hoc, nunc alio modo ac sensu eadem dicta explicant. Et prout sese illis materiae ac controversie vel confirmandae vel refutandae offerunt, illique suo quodam zelo incalescunt: ita omnia eo rapiunt, prorsus non aliter quam in subitis seditionibus, aut aliquando etiam . . . Quem ergo tu certum Scripture sensum ex tanta interpretationum varietate, licentia & violenta contorsione haurire possis?” Matthias Flacius, *Clavis scripturae, seu de sermone sacrarum literarum* (Basel, 1609), 700.

¹²⁰“Quanto magis erit inexhaustus labor, & infinitum tempus ad eum perficiendum requiretur, si omnia Theologorum volumina (quae praeter tot dudum excusa adhuc quotidie nova reperiuntur & eduntur) erunt pervestiganda, eorumque sententiae (ut ita dicamus) distillandae, eliquandae, & tandem ad aliquam indubitam summam in omnibus controversis dogmatibus reducendae? Quare si veritatem reperire &

Flacius contends that the Lutheran tradition is in accordance with the consensus of the fathers, but there are three qualifications or limitations to that consensus. First, true consensus is accomplished through the Word and the Spirit, and not through the external word of men. Second, true consensus demonstrates the inner connection between the true doctrine of all times and the respective acceptance of it by the doctors of the church. Flacius himself maintains that he does not teach anything that is not in agreement with Scripture, the three ecumenical symbols, the Augsburg Confession or the teaching of Luther. In fact he refuses to be called a Lutheran since he belongs to the universal church and not a particular one. Third, true consensus must be grounded in the Word.¹²¹

Werner Elert observes, “That the verdict of the Centuries concerning dogmatic development after the fifth century is predominantly pessimistic will easily be understood from their own position amid the doctrinal controversies of this century. They stood against three fronts. It is all the more remarkable that they did not let this keep them from holding firmly to the thesis of continuity.”¹²² Furthermore, this sense of continuity with the past generated the search for “testimonies” to the truth concerning the key article of the Reformation: justification by faith. This overriding conviction that there was a continual witness to the truth led the Flacius circle to adduce patristic testimonies for justification from the fourth and fifth centuries.¹²³ In so doing the Flacius circle shows itself as part of the larger circle that runs through Luther and Melancthon as well.

retinere volumus, consistamus in ista finita norma sacrarum Literarum aut verbi Dei: & non ea deserta, nos, Religionisque controversias in abyssum Patrum praecipitemus.”¹²⁰ Flacius, *Clavis scripturae*, 701.

¹²¹Massner, *Flaciuskreis*, 41.

¹²²Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 487.

¹²³Cf. *Ecclesiastica historia integram ecclesiae christi ideam ... secundum singulas historias, perspicuo ordine complectens ... congesta: per aliquot studiosos et pios viros in urbe Magdeburgica.* (Basel, 1560–74). (*Magdeburg Centuries*) Cf. 4th century, 225–27, and 5th century 303–32.

How wide and in what way does the circle stretch? That takes us into the later part of the sixteenth century, to the generation marked by Chemnitz and the early theologians of the age of Orthodoxy.

CHAPTER THREE

RESPONDING TO TRENT'S CLAIM TO THE *CONSENSUS PATRUM*. MARTIN CHEMNITZ, CONSENSUS, AND CATHOLICITY

The Tension between Scripture and Tradition in Confessional Lutheranism

In a series of sermons he delivered in 1830, Friedrich Schleiermacher expressed his contempt for the Augsburg Confession three hundred years after its writing. It was too traditional, uncritically catholic, particular, and exclusive. Jaroslav Pelikan, on the other hand, focused on the confession as representative of the “fundamental paradox between Catholic substance and Protestant principle in the Reformation as Luther carried it out and as it was codified in the confessions.”¹ Pelikan was referring to Melancthon and the works of Martin Chemnitz.

The Augsburg Confession explicitly affirms the ancient ecumenical creeds and its loyalty to ancient tradition. This was in part a political gesture, but more importantly an attempt to demonstrate that the reformers were in agreement with the true and ancient catholic faith, and that it was the “Papalists”—Chemnitz’s term—who had betrayed that tradition. This affirmation of tradition was also an attempt on the part of the reformers to maintain the ideal of religious unity within one state. Thus the doctrinal conflicts were interpreted as disagreements between two parties in the one church and not a dispute

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 42.

between two competing faiths. One should remember that there had been no formal break with Rome at this time, and the Reformers still considered themselves nothing less than devout Catholics.

In keeping with this desire to ‘embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church,’ they saw the tradition both a symbol of the existing unity and a means for restoring the lost unity. What they designated by the pejorative *treditio*, then, was not the creedal and liturgical substance of Catholic Christendom, especially of ancient Christendom, but ‘the opinion which holds that they justify,’ that is, the use of traditions as human law rather than as testimony to the divine gospel.²

Thus the Augsburg Confession contains a positive and negative evaluation of tradition. The creedal formulas were to be revered, but the traditions of men (*Menschensatzungen*) were to be rejected as “popish.” The affirmation of tradition in the Augsburg Confession, however, was not enough to maintain the unity of the church. The ideal of religious unity in the Germanies was destroyed after the Smalcaldic War and confirmed the reality of religious pluralism within the empire.

Lutheranism saw that other Protestant movements had also come to stay, and that it had to define its view of doctrine and tradition in relation to these, not merely Rome. And Rome itself took actions at Trent that compelled some reappraisal of a position which had been taken when the Roman tradition was undefined. The task of restating the attitude of Luther’s Reformation toward tradition in the face of these developments fell to Martin Chemnitz. Three works come into consideration here: above all, his great *Examen* of the Council of Trent, published from 1565 to 1573; his treatise on the two natures in Christ, published in 1571; and his contribution to the Formula of Concord of 1577, especially the ‘Catalogue of Testimonies’ appended to it.³

Eugene F. Klug points out that it was Chemnitz more than anyone who recognized the need to refute the “canonization” of traditions that further bolstered the Roman claims

²Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 44.

³Ibid., 49.

of papal supremacy. Furthermore, Trent enjoyed conciliar prestige whereas Protestantism was divided. Luther was dead, and Calvin had responded ably but not exhaustively to the decrees of Trent.

Klug possibly overstates his case since Reinhard Mumm in *Die Polemik des Martin Chemnitz gegen das Konzil von Trient*⁴ was able to list eighty-seven works written between 1546 and 1564 that attacked the Council of Trent. Forty-one of these titles come from Peter Paul Vergerio (1497? –1565), who faced Luther in 1535 as papal nuncio and later converted to Lutheranism. From 1564 to 1760 at least another thirty-nine critical works were written after Chemnitz's *Examen*. The Servite friar Paulo Sarpi (1522-1623), who wrote under the pseudonym Pietro Soave, produced a critical historical study of Trent, the only critique of the council to have been published in more editions than Chemnitz's *Examen*.⁵

In light of all the other works that have been written on Trent Piepkorn concludes, "Yet, though the *Examen* is neither the first nor the last work of its kind on the subject, from its first appearance it asserted itself as the standard by which others were measured, and (with the possible exception of Sarpi's quite different *Istoria*) it has shown a capacity to survive the passage of time shared by none of its rivals."⁶

Chemnitz set out to analyze with utmost detail the notion of tradition in the church.

Klug states:

He carried it out with consummate skill and objectivity to which history has borne witness. The fact that this part of his work, the first two loci or chapters on

⁴Reinhard Mumm, *Die Polemik des Martin Chemnitz gegen das Konzil von Trient* (Naumberg: Lippert and Co., 1905).

⁵Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Martin Chemnitz' Views on Trent: The Genesis and Genius of the Examen Concilii Tridentini" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 37 (1966), 5–6.

⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

Scripture and traditions, has never been successfully rebutted, is sufficient evidence both of the excellence of his work, and, above all, of the validity of the Reformation stance on *sola Scriptura*.⁷

Whether or not Chemnitz's arguments concerning traditions are irrefutable, they certainly do evince an unusual cogency and lucidity. Furthermore, by exposing the fact that there were various types of traditions in the church and not simply one, he dealt a blow to the Roman posturing that they alone represented the true apostolic tradition. The reality was that the catholic tradition was multiform, therefore Scripture alone had to be the final arbiter between which tradition of the traditions was the most reliable and apostolic. This was certainly the case with justification by faith, where the Apology of the Augsburg Confession exploited the fact that there had been various traditional views concerning justification.

The Reformers certainly claimed the Augustinian model as their own, and proceeded to accuse Trent of closing the door to the various co-existing traditions. In fact, Chemnitz contended that Trent had chosen the view diametrically opposed to the Augustinian concept of justification—the Pelagian, or at least the semi-Pelagian.⁸ Thus Rome appeared to be condemning much of her own tradition by condemning justification by faith alone. Even the *lex orandi*, the worship of the common people, demonstrated that they ultimately put their trust in a merciful God for their salvation, and not in their own works.

Precisely because the Catholic tradition was as multiform as Chemnitz' polemics demonstrated it to be, it was necessary to reconsider any attestation to loyalty to that tradition which moved, as Chemnitz' systematic theology did, in the direction of uniformity. It was one thing to conduct the discussion when the 'usual form of

⁷Eugene F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kok and N. V. Kampen, 1971), 190.

⁸Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 52.

doctrinal expression' was so much a given fact that tradition could be used in the narrow and pejorative sense in which the Augsburg Confession and the Apology used it. The broadening of the concept by Chemnitz is itself a testimony to the loss of that given fact. Once it had been lost, what was needed was a new sense of history, in which both Catholic substance and Protestant principle could be interpreted more profoundly.⁹

Pelikan argues here that Chemnitz paradoxically invalidates the argument for uniformity of tradition and ancient consensus by so effectively exposing the reality of various and potentially competing traditions. Thus the very reverence which Chemnitz has for tradition and the fathers is ironically undone for later generations by his utterly precise delineation of their varying degrees of value for the church.

Pelikan notes that Chemnitz remained somewhat unique in his stress on the uniformity of the tradition, and yet he more than anyone in his age demonstrated the plurality of traditions so clearly. Chemnitz thus inadvertently relativized the value of tradition for subsequent generations of Protestants. Chemnitz himself, however, is a remarkable example of how one's systematic theology combines Protestant principle and catholic substance, although his famous analysis of traditions ironically contributed to the demise of catholic substance within Protestantism as a whole.¹⁰

The ultimate triumph of the Reformation, however, and its self-conscious definition of itself over against Roman Catholicism also led to the demise of its sense of continuity with the ancient church. Johannes Kunze does not consider Chemnitz to be a creative spirit, but a man perfectly suited for a time that required theological consolidation,

⁹Ibid., 53.

¹⁰Numerous Protestants have called for a reclaiming of the Reformation's Catholic Substance: Philip Schaff's *Principle of Protestantism*, Gustav Aulen in *Reformation and Catholicity*, Paul Tillich's *A History of Christian Thought*, and Jaroslav Pelikan's *Obedient Rebels* are but several examples.

conservation, and reevaluation.¹¹ The rushing waters of the Reformation needed to be channeled constructively into a reservoir of coherent stability, and Chemnitz did precisely that. As a second generation Reformer and superintendent of Braunschweig he did not lead a dramatic life, but he succeeded in systematizing Luther's thought via Melancthon's methodology—channeling the torrent—in such a way as to make him indispensable for later generations of confessional Lutherans. Though Chemnitz had Gnesio-Lutheran sympathies and concerns, he lacked their bitter anti-Phillipist polemics, and it is impossible not to recognize the indelible stamp of his mentor's thought and methodology upon his own works.

Chemnitz was a remarkable churchman, theologian and arguably, a synthetic genius. His theology has been ignored for the most part outside of Lutheran circles, but the chief concern here is not Chemnitz as the architect of the Formula of Concord or his success at unifying Lutheranism; it is Chemnitz, as a theologian, who with striking consistency and clarity produced a biblical, patristic and systematic theology that was faithful to the principles of the Reformation. Chemnitz provides an excellent case study for how one can consistently apply the principles of the Reformation—*sola fide, sola gratia, and sola Scriptura* and still maintain its catholic substance.¹²

¹¹“Chemnitz war kein schoepferischer Geist, aber ein Mann wie geschaffen für eine Zeit, die auf eine produktive folgte und nun die Aufgabe hatte, zu bewahren und zu verarbeiten.” Johannes Kunze, “Chemnitz, Martin,” in *Realencyklopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Herzog). vol. 3. Ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchandlung, 1897), 803. Quoted in Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz*, 115–16.

¹²Paul Tillich calls for the need to maintain catholic substance and the Protestant principle in his *Systematics*: “‘The Catholic substance’; this is the concrete embodiment of Christ, mediated by the living institutional and sacramental realities of the church in history. Protestant principle without its catholic substance would be ‘empty’; Catholic substance without the Protestant principle would be ‘blind.’” Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 224.

Chemnitz and Melanchthon

Melanchthon's influence will continue to be debated by church historians, but he was clearly a pivotal figure whose influence was great, despite his failure to unify Lutheranism. Chemnitz as the chief architect of the Formula of Concord is to be credited with that accomplishment, but while bringing unity eluded Melanchthon himself, it should be noted that Melanchthon had a role of sorts, recognized as Chemnitz's mentor. In the eyes of many Lutherans, Melanchthon failed to assert himself during the Interim crisis that began in 1548. This in turn sparked a bitter controversy between Melanchthon and the Gnesio-Lutherans that was to last for decades. Thus Chemnitz became the leading theologian of the latter half of the sixteenth century. This was a decisive factor for the future shape of Lutheranism, for Chemnitz ultimately played a mediating role by incorporating Luther's substance and Melanchthon's methodological structure in his own system.¹³

Piepkorn maintains that there were three types of "Melancthonianism" in the latter half of the 1500s. First there were the "Cryptocalvinists," many of whom joined the Reformed churches after the victory of the Formula of Concord. The second group may be considered the "Calixtines," although such theological tendencies that typified Calixt

¹³Cf. Bengt Hägglund's *History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968). Hägglund's perspective is moderate compared with some very conservative Lutherans who consider Melanchthon a traitor due to his role in the infamous Augsburg and Leipzig Interims. Ambiguous language concerning justification by faith was purposely used so that Protestants and Catholics could interpret it either way. Chemnitz, on the other hand, remained faithful to Luther by adhering to "alien righteousness" and what Luther called "domestic righteousness." Thus he preserved Luther's distinction between forensic righteousness and the righteousness which comes about through self-mortification, renewal, sanctification and good works. Cf. E. F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz* (Amsterdam: J.H. Kok and N.V. Kampen, 1971), 118–19. Although many scholars have treated Melanchthon somewhat unfairly, Melanchthon's 1543 edition of his *Loci Communes* contained passages that sounded "synergistic" to his Gnesio-Lutheran opponents. Furthermore, such passages were not present in the 1521 edition. Likewise, his 1532 edition of his *Commentary on Romans* also had controversial statements that were omitted in the 1540 edition. These statements sparked the synergistic controversy that was to plague Lutheranism for over forty years.

both preceded and succeeded him within Lutheranism. The third group was the “Chemnitzians.” They strongly asserted the Lutheran position over against the Reformed “without the bitter anti-‘Phillipist’ polemics of the ‘Gnesio-Lutherans.’”¹⁴ Selnecker and Chytraeus would fall into this last category.

Robert Kolb points out that Chemnitz agreed with the Gnesio-Lutherans on all of their major points.¹⁵ Chemnitz was somewhat uniquely situated, however, between close friends who were Gnesio-Lutherans, such as Mörlin, Hesshus and Wigand, friends of his mature years, and Melanchthon with that influence during his formative years. Kolb observes that labels are not always helpful in the complex years of the late Reformation period since there were significant overlaps between the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans and the “Melanchthonians.” This was especially the case since many of the Gnesio-Lutherans, such as Flacius, were former students of Melanchthon and were indelibly stamped by his methodology despite their divergent opinions.¹⁶

Piepkorn asserts that Chemnitz was simultaneously a disciple of Luther and Melanchthon. “Put differently, Chemnitz reproduces the theological concerns of Luther with the careful precision that the Brunswick superintendent had learned from his mentor

¹⁴Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “Martin Chemnitz’ Views on Trent: The Genesis and the Genius of the *Examen Concilii Tridentini*,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 37 (1966), 23–24.

¹⁵“Ob er es nun verdient, als Gnesio-Lutheraner eingestuft zu werden, oder nicht: Martin Chemnitz unterstuetzte selbstverstaendlich eine Regelung, die den Gnesio-lutherischen Standpunkt bestaetigte.” Robert Kolb, “Martin Chemnitz, Gnesio-Lutheraner,” in *Der Zweite Martin der Lutherischen Kirche: Festschrift zum 400. Todestag von Martin Chemnitz*, Ed. Wolfgang A. Junke (Braunschweig: Ev. - luth. Stadtkirchenverband und Propstei Braunschweig, 1986), 127.

¹⁶“Obgleich die Ereignisse in den 1550er Jahren Melanchthon und Chemnitz voneinander trennten, ist es doch wahr, daß Chemnitz stark von der Lehrart Melanchthons beeinflusst blieb. Jedoch kamen die Elemente Luthers und Melanchthons Gedanken, die ihre Schuler und Erben beeinflussten, in so vielen Vermischungen auf, wie sie Schuler und Erben hatten. Keiner der Führer der zweiten Generation der lutherischen Theologen stimmte völlig mit irgendeinem anderen überein; Vereinfachung verdunkelt nur die Realität komplexer Entwicklungen, die den Übergang von der Reformation zur Orthodoxie bildete.“ Ibid.

Melanchthon, for whom he always maintained dutiful respect, even when circumstances required him to dissent from some of Melanchthon's positions."¹⁷ One has only to look at Melanchthon's *Commentary on Romans*, published in 1532 and again in 1540, to observe the striking similarities between Chemnitz and Melanchthon.

Melanchthon's "Excursus on the Authority of Scripture and the Fallibility of the Church Fathers" clearly demonstrates that Chemnitz was extremely dependent on Melanchthon for his patristic methodology and many of his opinions concerning the fathers. For example, Chemnitz echoes such ideas as these: the consensus of the ancient church is appealed to against Servetus, the fathers were "negligent and improper in their form of speaking" at times, a clear distinction is made between dogma and ancient customs and rites, and church history takes a turn at Gregory the Great who was responsible for introducing many errors into the church of his time.

Although the true church, which is small, retains the articles of faith, that true church can hold errors which obscure the articles of faith. Moreover, many fall in such a way that they completely approve of wicked errors against the articles of faith, although some do perhaps return to their senses. First of all when the authority of the church is appealed to, one must ask whether it was *the consensus of the true church, agreeing with the Word of God* (italics mine).¹⁸

Although Chemnitz was no epigone, it is clear that his own qualified notion of ancient consensus is remarkably similar to Melanchthon's.

Fraenkel clearly demonstrates Chemnitz's direct dependence on Melanchthon in his own works. This should come as no surprise given Chemnitz's personal contact with the reformer. He was a table guest of Melanchthon during his student days in Wittenberg,

¹⁷Piepkorn, "Martin Chemnitz' Views on Trent: The Genesis and the Genius of the *Examen Concilii Tridentini*," 23. Piepkorn states that Gottfried Noth explores the tension between the Lutheran and Melancthonian elements in the theology of Chemnitz in his *Grundzuege der Theologie des Martin Chemnitz*.

¹⁸Philip Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 244–45.

and lectured at Melanchthon's request on the *Loci Communes*. Fraenkel notes several of the similarities between them:

But this is not the only point at which Chemnitz is in his turn obviously dependent upon Melanchthon. Both his *Oratio* and his *Commonplaces* as a whole are largely a product of his association with the Reformer, and bear the stamp of Melanchthon's approval. . . . Like the *Loci*, the *Oratio* forms a part of a series of lectures given at Melanchthon's personal request.¹⁹

Chemnitz's dependence on Melanchthon is virtually explicit at times:

A comparison of the Oration with the writings of Melanchthon, especially with the latter's patrology *De Ecclesia et Autoritate Verbi Dei* shows that Chemnitz depended on his master both for the choice of his subject-matter and for quite a number of details in his treatment of certain Church Fathers. This dependence becomes more striking still, if we remember that the idea of a group of Fathers, roughly corresponding to the list given in the Gelasian Decree, was normally accepted in the 16th century, and that Chemnitz need not have turned in this matter to Melanchthon at all. Furthermore, Chemnitz' knowledge of the texts was due to his own reading and he was capable of independent judgment. Nor does this exhaust the connection between the two theologians at this point; Chemnitz also echoes some other patrological ideas and judgments that were characteristic of Melanchthon.²⁰

The Lutheran scholastic and patrologist Johann Gerhard was also directly dependent on the works of Melanchthon and Chemnitz.

From time to time Gerhard based the judgments of his Patrology on Chemnitz' *Examen Concilii Tridentini*. It is worth noting for Chemnitz, as we have done for Flacius, that this later and greater work, which exerted so great an influence on the following generations, is an important connection between Melanchthon and Gerhard because of its use of the Fathers and its well-known doctrine of "tradition." Moreover, numerous parallels to both Melanchthon and Gerhard can be found on many pages of the *Examen*; they range from the view of Adam as the first Bishop of the Church and the application of Tertullian's Rule, to the use of the Fathers' witness in order to confirm the faithful in certitude.²¹

¹⁹Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 267–68.

²⁰Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 268. He also stresses that Flacius, Melanchthon's former student and enemy, also produced influential works in Patristics and church history, e.g., *The Magdeburg Centuries*. Despite his aversion to his erstwhile master, he nevertheless reflected many of Melanchthon's views concerning church history.

²¹*Ibid.*, 266.

In the early 1600s Gerhard wrote an apologetic patrology, his *Confessio Catholica*, that was directly dependent on Chemnitz and Flacius. Thus Chemnitz's patristic method is part of a continuum within early Lutheranism. "In his masterful use of patristic evidence in support of his polemics he stands squarely in the Lutheran tradition of the 16th and 17th centuries exemplified before him by his mentor Melanchthon and by Matthias Vlacio (Flacius) (1520–1575) and by John Gerhard and George Calixtus and Abraham Calovius after him."²² Patristic argumentation in defense of the Reformation, and the stress on continuity with the ancient church finally began to diminish by the end of the seventeenth century when Lutheranism became a firmly established religion within its own right.²³

Chemnitz's Methodology

Fraenkel notes that Chemnitz's program of critical patristics was developed in his *Oratio*, his "Treatise on reading the Fathers or Doctors of the Church":

For it is useful, even necessary, that one who is about to read them [the Church Fathers] has in advance a method worked out in his mind and knows what is especially important in the individual fathers and what stands out, where dangers need to be avoided, and in which areas they speak correctly and usefully. This kind of comparison will be profitable in order to see the occasions when they spoke somewhat improperly, when something should be eliminated as less than helpful, and how a later age might correct something which has arisen in time of controversy.²⁴

As we shall see, Chemnitz carried out this program in detail in all of his major works.

"Furthermore, exactly as for Gerhard, the critical study and use of the Fathers is not restricted to the special field of Patrology as a distinct discipline within theology, but *it is part and parcel of the author's whole theological method* (italics mine)."²⁵ In this sense

²²Piepkorn, "The Genesis and Genius of the *Examen*," 29.

²³Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 263.

²⁴Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, vol. 1, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), 27.

²⁵Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 267.

it may be possible to speak of Chemnitz going beyond Melanchthon, although his master laid the foundation for him. And this was perfectly fine with Chemnitz who had no need to be on his own or to carve out his position for the sake of notoriety. The understanding and tie to the church's consensus was more important.

After the *Oratio*, but before his commentary on Melanchthon's *Commonplaces*, Chemnitz gives a clear explanation of his methodological concerns in a short preface entitled "Special Cautions or Reminders." Chemnitz is particularly concerned that theological terms and definitions used by the fathers and later theologians be clearly understood within their context, the cause for their historical development, the broadening of the term's meaning, and a comparison of how such terms were used by various writers in earlier terms. As one reads Chemnitz's various works it is amazing to see how consistently and thoroughly he applies this methodology of clarification, contrast and comparison.

His sixth (of nine) methodological concerns merits citation:

We must gather the pertinent testimonies regarding the individual articles or topics from the ancient church. For, because *the church is universal*, God has always raised up in various places those who have given a confession which is in agreement with the sound understanding of *the true doctrine* in order to strengthen coming generations. Good minds are greatly strengthened when they see that the same expression of doctrine has sounded forth in the church *in all ages*, especially because the adversaries complain loudly that our teaching does not have *the witness of the ancient church* but is a recent fabrication. At this point it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate wisdom as to which writers are more correct, in which articles and books they most carefully deal with the subject, and how *on some occasions they spoke rather carelessly* (as Augustine says), that is, somewhat incautiously and improperly, and how *these statements are to be most correctly interpreted according to the analogy of faith* (italics mine).²⁶

²⁶Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 47.

This paragraph clearly echoes Melancthon's view of the universal church, the fact that true doctrine existed in all ages, that God has repeatedly raised up reformers, and that the fathers sometimes spoke carelessly concerning matters of doctrine. Thus Chemnitz's view of the fathers, his methodological considerations, and the reason for his patristic critique are very melancthonian. True doctrine has existed in various places throughout the ages, and the Reformation, therefore, is no recent fabrication by Luther.

Chemnitz turns the patristic argument of Rome on its head, so to speak, by stating that it is the Lutheran faith that is in accordance with the true testimony of the ancient church. Chemnitz argues that his adversaries have failed to understand the true meaning and significance of the fathers for two reasons. First, they carelessly amass a great amount of testimonies that appear to support their case but fail to recognize that the fathers spoke "incautiously and improperly" at times and require careful examination as to what their intended meaning was. Second, not all of the fathers may be used indiscriminately. Some statements are to be preferred above others, for it is certain that they too were prone to error. Therefore the fathers themselves must be judged according "to the analogy of faith."

Chemnitz's Advice concerning the Use of the Fathers in his *Oratio*

Chemnitz's approach concerning the use of the fathers in the preface to his *Loci theologici* is one of selectivity.²⁷ The comparatively limited knowledge of church history in the sixteenth-century makes several of his comments appear almost naïve at times.

However, his contemporaries suffered from the same limitations. Of prime concern was

²⁷Fraenkel notes how dependent Chemnitz was on Melancthon for his "Oratio." Irenaeus is treated favorably due to his correct understanding of justification. Cyril's christology is criticized. Cyprian and Basil are both positive and negative. Augustine is comparable to Luther as a Reformer, and "serves as an internal critical standard of judgment within the group of the Fathers." Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 267.

the doctrine of justification, one of his criteria in evaluating the fathers. “Papist” tendencies can be detected in some, e.g., Montanus, and others such as Origen who contains dangerous teachings. Augustine, of course, is the father most worthy of being read since his doctrine of justification and grace are essentially the same as the Lutheran position. Augustine on justification is said to be in basic agreement with the Lutheran position, even though his terminology was not as precise. Chemnitz commends Augustine also for his observation that the fathers must be read critically and tested by the rule of faith and the Scriptures. To be sure, the fathers can be read profitably but with care, for they were not immune to error.

Robert D. Preus comments on Chemnitz’s practical concern for the use of the fathers in his contemporary setting: “By studying the controversies in which they were engaged, we may be helped to settle similar controversies of our own day. Moreover, we learn from such reading the form of doctrine that was present in the church of all ages.”²⁸ Preus goes on to stress the unique significance of Chemnitz’s *Loci Theologici*:

The attention given by Chemnitz to the fathers is carried on by John Gerhard and Abraham Calov in their dogmatic works, and to a lesser degree by all later Lutherans. But never again in a dogmatics was there a special section like this one on the importance of reading the church fathers. *This innovation of Chemnitz* is not insignificant: Chemnitz is the first to bring the systematic study of church history and the history of doctrine into a book dealing specifically with Christian doctrine (italics mine).²⁹

Preus seems to be unaware that “this innovation of Chemnitz” was a clear result of his dependence on Melancthon, and furthermore Fraenkel points out that “Gerhard’s

²⁸Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 92.

²⁹Ibid., 93.

Patrology contains almost all of Chemnitz' *Oratio de Lecture Patrum*."³⁰ Preus, however, may be correct in asserting Chemnitz was unique in the way he consistently brought historical, patristic and biblical doctrines into a single and coherent system. Thus Chemnitz succeeds remarkably well in synthesizing Luther's thought with Melancthonian method and patristic data.

Chemnitz's View of Early Catholic Consensus

Fred Kramer states, "He believed that there was a consensus in doctrine within the ancient church, though he was not unaware of the aberrations which had occurred in every period of the church. He believed that Luther and the adherents of the Augsburg Confession had returned to this consensus in their theology, and he labored ceaselessly both as churchman and as theologian to keep the church with this consensus."³¹

Chemnitz reveals a firm belief and deep-seated reverence for the consensus of the ancient church, and he repeatedly affirms the reliability and trustworthiness of this consensus. Unlike Roman Catholics, however, he did not embrace this universal consensus without the critique of Scripture, though he nevertheless lent great weight to the conciliar achievements of the first five centuries. Unlike his Tridentine opponents, Chemnitz asserted the priority of Scripture over against the tradition of antiquity (*traditio antiquitatis*). The *consensus patrum*, therefore, was an invaluable but tentative norm for the church that must be checked by the clear testimony of Scripture.

This is also certain, that no one should rely on his own wisdom in the interpretation of the Scripture, not even in the clear passages, for it is clearly written in 2 Peter 1:20: "The Scripture is not a matter of one's own private interpretation." And

³⁰Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 263

³¹Fred Kramer, "Biographical Sketch of Martin Chemnitz" in *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 23-24.

whoever twists the Holy Scripture so that it is understood according to his preconceived opinions does this to his own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The best reader of the Scripture, according to Hilary, is one who does not carry the understanding of what is said to the Scripture but who carries it away from the Scripture.³²

Chemnitz clearly exhibits his disdain for exegetical novelty, and therefore deems it necessary to rely on the exegetical consensus of the early church.

We also gratefully and reverently use *the labors of the fathers who by their commentaries have profitably clarified many passages of the Scripture*. And we confess that *we are greatly confirmed by the testimonies of the ancient church in the true and sound understanding of the Scripture*. Nor do we approve of it if someone invents for himself a meaning which conflicts with all antiquity, and for which there are clearly no testimonies of the church (italics mine).³³

Since Chemnitz claims conformity with the exegetical consensus of the ancient church, why is there still a dispute between Lutherans and the fathers of Trent? There are four reasons why Protestants dispute the Tridentine interpretation of Scripture. First, Rome's theologians have arrogated to themselves the right to authoritative interpretation by virtue of apostolic succession, so that "whenever anyone is brought to that throne, all his interpretations must at once be received as legitimate, true, sound and as having authority because of the privileged place which they occupy."³⁴

Second, "out of the gift of interpretation they make a kind of dictatorial authority, so that it is not necessary for them to prove the interpretation by showing sure and firm reasons and principles of interpretation, but without examination, without investigation and judgment, they want us to swear to that sense which those thrust on us who arrogate

³²Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 208.

³³*Examination*, vol. 1, 208–9.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 209

to themselves the right of interpretation without a sign of the Spirit.”³⁵ Third, the papal side transform the correct meaning of the Scriptures to conform to their desired interpretation and then seek to justify it with patristic authority. Very often the Roman Catholics quote the fathers out of context, and do further harm to their integrity since the fathers did not intend their writings to be understood authoritatively.³⁶

Fourth, “the papalists arrogate to themselves also this right, that they are able even in the clearest passages of Scripture freely to depart from the simple and true meaning.”³⁷ In this way the Roman theologians are able “*to escape the clearest passages concerning justifying faith, . . . concerning the imperfection of good works in this life, free will, the intercession of Christ, etc. (italics mine).*”³⁸ Thus Chemnitz argues that the fathers, unlike the papal supporters, sought to lead the people to a knowledge of the Bible, and not into the web of “implicit faith” that the Roman Church demanded. The testimonies of Augustine and Chrysostom demonstrate that “the fathers trusted the judgment of the common people for whom they interpreted the Scriptures in their sermons.”³⁹

Chemnitz and the Vincentian Canon

Chemnitz's Methodological Application of the *consensus patrum*

³⁵Ibid., 209–10.

³⁶“And such interpretations of the ancients, no matter on what occasion or in what way they were given, they contend, must simply be accepted without judgment and examination, regardless whether they agree with the words of Scripture or disagree with them, although the fathers themselves do not want the reader so bound to themselves that they believe it necessary for him to believe something just because it is said by the fathers, but because they will be able to persuade them either through the canonical Scriptures or through other credible reasons that their statements do not depart from the truth.” Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 212.

³⁷Ibid., 213.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 216.

Before the prolonged discussion of justification at Trent began, the Tridentine fathers felt compelled to commence with an appeal to antiquity, to the Vincentian Canon and the *lex orandi* in particular, before formal dogma could be established that could claim universal consensus. Chemnitz also made use of the Vincentian Canon several times as he sought to refute the Council of Trent. In the first instance he argues that the Eucharist may not be preserved for later times rather than be eaten right away.

*Vincent of Lerins has rightly defined that that is catholic which has always, everywhere, and by all alike been observed. Therefore whatever has been declared catholic [universal] for the whole church of Christ...must absolutely have either a word or an example of Christ and the apostles. When we speak about the catholic or universal church of Christ, we ought not to cut off the Head from its members, that is, Christ from the church...but that is truly catholic for the universal church which can be shown and proved to have been taught or commanded by Christ the Head and observed by the apostles. But when this basis is lacking, not even the consensus of the whole world is sufficient to prove that something is catholic for the church of Christ (italics mine).*⁴⁰

Chemnitz accepts Vincent's criteria, but he notes that such marks of "true catholicity" must have their basis in Scripture. In this case, ecclesiastical observances may be recognized the world over, but if clear scriptural attestation is lacking, then they are not truly catholic. True catholicity, for Chemnitz, can not be divorced from the apostolic tradition. One might well ask if this is really a consensual view, and if the answer were contingent on the unanimity of the masses the answer would be no. The universal church, which is truly catholic, however, does have Christ as her head and the Scriptures as her guide. Thus universal consensus does not mean the assent of the masses, but rather the assent of the church to the Word of God.

In the second place Chemnitz mentions the Vincentian Canon with regard to the invocation of saints.

⁴⁰Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 296.

Since, however, *that is catholic, as Vincent of Lerins not improperly defines it, which always and everywhere has constantly been accepted by all believers on the basis of Scripture*, also this observation must be added, that there was in those times not only doubt about the invocation of the saints, when it had begun to be introduced into the church from private devotions of the common people and of women, but that it was also clearly and with great zeal rebuked and placed into the catalogue of heresies by Epiphanius, who lived at almost the same time. *However, as the history of all times shows, when errors, clothed with some plausible show in persons who were either many or great, as Augustine says, could not be freely and usefully rebuked in the church without offense, these same errors in other persons, because they were either smaller or fewer, or when the excesses committed were crasser, were freely criticized.* (For in this way Augustine condemned in the Pelagians things which in the writings of many of the ancients are read in almost the same words.) Thus Epiphanius seizes upon the gross excess of certain Thracian women . . . who set out a loaf or cake on a square chair covered with a cloth, and offered it in the name of Mary. On that occasion he rebuked and repressed with great vehemence many and varied seeds of the invocation of the saints, which had begun to break out in various places and to be favored by certain great men (*italics mine*).⁴¹

In the context in the wake of that quote, Chemnitz goes on to adduce further patristic support from Epiphanius who actually equates the worship of saints and Mary with the idolatrous practices of Israel.

Epiphanius calls this whole discussion back from the reasonings of human emotions to the norm of Scripture, and guardedly and obliquely refutes the arguments of Basil and Gregory, as can easily be seen from a comparison. ‘What Scripture,’ says he, ‘has told this? Which prophet has commanded to adore man? . . . Yet Elijah is not to be adored, although he is among the living, nor is John to be worshiped, . . . For that ancient error shall not govern us, that we should leave the Living One and adore the creatures made by Him, . . . For if God does not want the angels to be worshiped, how much less the daughter of Anna? . . . Let Mary be in honor. . . . Let the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be worshiped; let no one adore Mary (*italics mine*).’⁴²

Two things, however, should be noted. First, Chemnitz again qualifies the Vincentian Canon with the words—“on the basis of Scripture.” Second, he then mentions there was not universal consensus concerning the invocation of saints because Epiphanius, among

⁴¹Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 3, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 466–67.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 468.

others, condemned it. Building on that, Chemnitz observes that errors and heresies were able to foist themselves upon the church in the guise of truth as long as they were espoused by great men or by a great many. This citation from Chemnitz reveals his qualified view of consensus. It was not blind acceptance of the beliefs and opinions of the masses, for history shows that many corruptions crept into the church. Nor was it true simply because it was ancient. This is confirmed by the doubt about such practices as the invocation of the saints by the early fathers themselves. In this case Chemnitz does not need to appeal to Scripture alone, for history itself testifies that there was no ancient consensus concerning this practice.

Chemnitz clearly has to walk a fine line. Werner Elert concludes that Chemnitz applied the Vincentian Canon in his methodology at the risk of reverting to “the purely formalistic principle of tradition.” Elert then points out how Chemnitz sought to avoid this: “But it is significant to observe how Chemnitz seeks to meet this danger. The words of Vincent—‘which has been believed always, everywhere, and by all’ (quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est)—he varies as follows: ‘*which has been received consistently from Scripture, always, everywhere, and by all believers* (italics mine).”⁴³ Thus Chemnitz applies the Protestant Scripture principle to one of the most significant claims of Roman Catholicism: universality. He thereby retains a qualified concept of catholicity that rejects the notion that catholicity entails unanimity at the cost of biblical truths such as justification by faith or extra-Scriptural practices such as the invocation of saints.

⁴³Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 288.

Chemnitz clearly saw this as the proper stance on consensus and catholicity. But it admittedly is not all that Rome wanted. That shortfall was seen by Rome as a fundamental and fatal flaw, and it sought to exploit that at Trent. Because consensus and catholicity played such a large role in Rome's claims for authority and possession of the truth, and because Rome condemned the Lutheran differences at length while at Trent, Chemnitz found it necessary to answer in kind and at length. It is to that rebuttal that we now turn.

The Examination of the Council of Trent—Volume I (1566)

Chemnitz had first countered Roman Catholic theology in his *Theologiae jesuitarum praecipua capita* in 1562.⁴⁴ The work was received by both Lutherans and Reformed with great enthusiasm. James Payva de Andrada (1528–1576?) seems to have chanced upon the book at the Council of Trent. Andrada had been sent as part of a four-man team to the Council by the king of Portugal. The lengthy duration of the council afforded Andrada with the necessary leisure time to write a point by point refutation of Chemnitz's work. The *Orthodoxarum explicationum libri decem* was a ten-book work that appeared in Venice in 1564. Nine of the ten books are dedicated to the issues Chemnitz had raised in his attack upon the Jesuits.⁴⁵ Andrada had thrown down the gauntlet and Chemnitz met the challenge with an equally extensive reply. Since Andrada had been a participant at the Council Chemnitz assumed that Andrada's polemic had the sanction of Trent itself. Thus he analyzed the decrees of Trent in light of the commentary

⁴⁴Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Theologiae Jesuitarum brevis ac nervosa Descriptio et Delineatio: ex Praecipuis Captitibus* (Frankfurt: D. Tobiae Maevii and Elerdi Schumacheri, 1653) in *Lutheran Heritage Foundation facsimile edition* (Chelsea, Michigan: Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2000).

⁴⁵"The viewpoint is the rigidly authoritarian one which the Iberian bishops represented at Trent." Piepkorn, "The Genesis and the Genius of the Examen," 17.

that Andrada's work provided him. "By letting d'Andrada's work serve as a commentary on the Tridentine decrees, Chemnitz canonized for his readers as the authentic understanding of the Tridentine position the partisan interpretation of the Latin theologians of the extreme right."⁴⁶ Piepkorn argues that this "hermeneutical skew" prevented Trent's decrees from being interpreted in a more favorable and "evangelical" light. "Indeed, one of the first major Roman Catholic attempts at refuting the *Examen*, that of Jodoc Ravesteyn, strongly criticizes Chemnitz for having at times confused the opinion of the theologians of d'Andrada's type with the real content of the decrees."⁴⁷ Nevertheless Andrada's work has never been officially disavowed by the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, Chemnitz goes directly to the appeals of the "unanimous consensus of the fathers" found in the Tridentine decrees to analyze whether such a consensus did in fact uphold Trent's doctrinal formulations. Andrada's interpretation of Trent does not alter the role that the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus patrum* played

⁴⁶Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷Ibid., 18–19. Hanns Rückert and Hans Küng argue "that the Tridentine fathers were far from unanimous in their doctrine of justification and that some of this diversity finds expression in the language of Trent." Ibid., 18 n. 34. Cf. Hanns Rückert, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre auf dem Tridentinische Konzil* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber's Verlag, 1925), and Hans Küng, *Rechtfertigung: Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1957). Similarly, post-Vatican II interpretations of Scripture and tradition argue that the Protestants misunderstood the *partim-partim* phraseology of Trent. Cf. Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition: A Survey of the Controversy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963). There are problems with such reinterpretations of Trent. First, there is no doubt that the Tridentine bishops and theologians were not united in their understanding of *what* justification was, but they were united in their understanding of what justification was not. Second, all major post-Tridentine theologians, Bellarmine included, understood Trent's position on Scripture and tradition to be that of a two-source theory. Jaroslav Pelikan notes the problems attending such revisionism. "Revisionists have attempted to show that on the doctrine of justification and on the authority of Scripture the formulations of Trent are actually a compromise between the Reformation extreme and the opposite extreme of certain fifteenth century theologians. Only when they are read in the light of both extremes, rather than merely in the light of the reformers, are these formulations said to come to proper perspective. There is undoubtedly something to be said for this interpretation, and it deserves more careful attention than Protestant theologians have been willing to give it. But it does not appear to have demonstrated its fundamental contention; for the explicit target of Trent's anathema is consistently the Reformation position—or 'extreme'—while some fairly subtle and sophisticated historical scholarship is often necessary to unearth the opposite 'extreme' also included in the condemnations." *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 52–53.

in the dogmatic formulations of the Council of Trent. Thus for our purposes Chemnitz's reliance upon Andrada for the correct interpretation of Trent does not interfere with our discussion of consensus.

Preparation for the *Examen* required nine years of Chemnitz's spare time.⁴⁸ The first volume appeared in 1566 and the second part appeared in the same year.⁴⁹ The third and fourth volumes appeared in 1573. Pelikan observes, "Chemnitz' critique of the Council of Trent was based on a depth of patristic scholarship difficult to match. He went through the patristic evidence with care and discrimination, sorting out the relevant from the irrelevant and demonstrating that Trent had done violence to the tradition, while the Reformation had been faithful to the best in the tradition by being faithful to the Scriptures."⁵⁰ Thus the effects of the *Examen* were earthshaking for both Protestants and Roman Catholics. Ammunition had been provided for the Protestant side that argued that the consensus of the fathers was against the innovations of Medieval scholasticism. If Vincent's criteria of universality, antiquity and consent were to be applied rigidly to the formulations of Trent then the Roman church indeed was not catholic. The Lutherans, following the precedent of the Flacius circle, were breaking new ground and had once again claimed the high ground of patristic consensus and authority. Yet one should note that Chemnitz's appeal to consensus in the *Examen* is no continual drumbeat that sounds

⁴⁸Piepkorn, "The Genesis and Genius of the Examen," 19.

⁴⁹Fred Kramer, the translator of the *Examen*, and other scholars mistakenly consider 1565 to be the date of the first volume of the *Examen*. Cf. Eduard Preuss, "Historia libri impressi," in his edition of the *Examen*, 959–64.

⁵⁰Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 82.

continually. It appears periodically, and with a measured selectivity that demonstrates thoughtfulness on the part of the writer.⁵¹

The first mention of consensus in the *Examen* comes from the decrees of the Council of Trent regarding the method of scriptural interpretation.

Furthermore, in order to restrain willful spirits, the synod decrees that no one, relying on his own wisdom in matters of faith and morals that pertain to the upholding of Christian doctrine, may twist the Holy Scripture according to his own opinions or presume to interpret Holy Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church has held and holds, whose right is to judge concerning the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, or contrary to *the unanimous consensus of the fathers*, even though such interpretations should at no time be intended for publication. Those acting contrary to this shall be reported by the ordinaries and be punished with the penalties appointed by law (italics mine).⁵²

Of significance for our discussion is the fact that the Roman Catholic church alone, according to Trent, has the correct interpretation of Scripture, and this church alone has the subsequent right to interpret Scripture in further controversies. Moreover, to this correct interpretation which the church holds is paired the “unanimous consensus of the fathers,” a double barrel blast aimed at the Lutherans. In invoking the “unanimous consensus of the fathers” Trent felt compelled to resort to the Vincentian canon even as it appealed to it in conjunction with the church’s rightful understanding of Scripture. Thus,

⁵¹Chemnitz’s appeals to the consensus of the fathers in all four volumes have been catalogued and reflect the same consistency and method of argument established in the first volume. For Chemnitz’s appeals to the *consensus patrum* or the universal church, and his refutation of the alleged consensus of Rome in the second volume see *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 23, 35, 127, 164, 223, 258, 266, 268, 270, 274, 275, 285, 297, 301, 309, 332, 349, 356, 357, 365, 395, 413, 419, 423, 429, 441, 442, 479, 480, 481, 483, 538, 544, 545, 547, 548, 565, 574, 600, 605, 609, 612, 613, 728, and 729. Note these references exclude Chemnitz’s repeated appeals to “the true and purer antiquity.” For appeals to the “whole world” and the consensus of the fathers in the third part of the *Examen* see *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 3, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 15, 118, 121, 135, 153, 161, 166, 167, 209, 218, 304, 408, 448, 453, 466, 476, 477. For appeals to universality or consensus in the fourth part of the *Examen* see *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 4, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 43, 104, 105, 116, 120, 122, 123, 177, 179, 215, 233, 253, 254, 330, 380, 418, 424, 428.

⁵²Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 38.

the true sense of Scripture as guarded by the church is tantamount to the *consensus patrum*.

This sentiment is echoed by Roman polemicist Albert Pighius,⁵³ who observes that tradition is clearer, more open, and more inflexible than the Scriptures that may be twisted by individuals with preconceived notions or by those who are determined to circumvent Scripture. “Therefore it follows that the inflexible measuring instrument by which the Scriptures, too, are measured is *the consensus of ecclesiastical tradition* (italics mine).”⁵⁴ Pighius then asserts that heretics, such as Luther, are not to be informed by Scripture but by the authority of the magisterial church. In contrast, Chemnitz notes that Scripture for the papal party does not function as the rule of faith that settles all disputes concerning matters of faith and doctrine. There are two reasons for this. First, in Rome’s view Scripture is insufficient, not containing all that is necessary concerning matters of faith and doctrine. Second, Scripture is said to be obscure and ambiguous and thus not conducive to settling theological disputes. This is nothing new. That was the same argument voiced by Erasmus in his exchange with Luther over the will as Erasmus decried Luther’s plunge into the Scripture while he, Erasmus, said he preferred to play the skeptic and rest instead in the arms of the church.

Even as Scripture alone is found to be inadequate by the papal side and the Council of Trent, a corollary understanding of the church itself arises. Since the church is the guarantor of the canonical scriptures even as it was the church that recognized the canonicity of the scriptures, its interpretation of the Scriptures through the ages has

⁵³Albert Pighius (circa 1490 to 1542) was a Roman Catholic polemicist (*Kontroverstheologe*) who participated in the religious colloquies of Worms and Regensburg (1540/41). In his major work, the *Hierarchiae ecclesiae assertio* (1538), he argues that papal infallibility is the most certain basis for the church’s doctrine. Cf. *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th ed., vol. 6, 1354.

⁵⁴Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 1, 46.

therefore been perfect. In contradistinction to this claim Chemnitz states, “As a result of these things the divinely revealed doctrine does not remain pure and unadulterated *always and everywhere* in this world but is often falsified and corrupted, either by spurious things, which are altogether false, or by the mixing of a leaven, which Paul calls *kapaleu>ein* (“peddling for gain”), as innkeepers adulterate wine by adding water, for so the Greek translators use this word in Is. 1:22 (*italics mine*).”⁵⁵ For Chemnitz three things detract from the reliability of the ecclesiastical tradition’s interpretation of the Word of God: (1) the world, whose judgment in matters of faith is diametrically opposed to Scripture; (2) fallen reason that finds the things of God to be folly; (3) the devil, who is the father of lies and the spirit of error. These three evils have plagued the church since the beginning of time, and the patristic age was not immune to them. Chemnitz therefore argues that the ecclesiastical tradition has at times been wholly corrupted or its purity has been diluted by the mixing in of unsound doctrines. That Chemnitz is echoing the Vincentian canon seems reasonably certain when he states this in “always and everywhere.” Chemnitz may not be reacting against the Vincentian Canon itself as much as the Tridentine appeal to the Canon, but the bottom line and his view of the Canon is the same in either case.

Consensus concerning the authority of Scripture

But we shall also add *the consensus of the ancient church* concerning the authority, perfection, and sufficiency of the Scripture. For we love and venerate the testimonies of the *ancient and purer church*, by whose *agreement* we are both aided and confirmed; but our faith must rest on the word of God, not on human authority. Therefore we do not set the testimonies of the fathers over the Scripture, but subordinate them to it (*italics mine*).”⁵⁶

⁵⁵Ibid., 47.

⁵⁶Ibid., 150.

Consensus does not hang in thin air for Chemnitz but has roots firmly in the Scriptures. His approach is first to have Scripture state what it declares about itself. Only then are the testimonies of the ancients to be added. One sees several things here. First, there is a *consensus patrum* regarding the authority of Scripture. On this basis and on this account, according to Chemnitz, the fathers were of one accord. Second, the fathers are in agreement not with the Council of Trent but with the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*. The fathers also judge Scripture to be authoritative, perfect and sufficient concerning matters of doctrine. Third, the testimonies of the ancient and purer church—purer than the late medieval version—aid and confirm the Lutheran faith, but they do not establish it. Testimonies of the ancient and purer church are subordinate to Scripture even though their existence is helpful in confirming what Scripture already teaches about itself and other doctrines.

Chemnitz then cites Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Athanasius, Jerome, Basil, Origen, Gerson, Epiphanius, Cyril and others to confirm the authority, perfection, and sufficiency of the Scriptures. Chemnitz concludes this section by stating:

We have therefore *the testimony also of the ancient church* concerning the perfection and sufficiency of the Scripture, namely, that it contains all things which are necessary for faith and morals for living, so that it is the rule, canon, and norm by which all things which are to be received as the Word of God in matters of religion must be proved and confirmed. And by the light of this most evident truth the eyes of our opponents are so touched that they are compelled to confess in so many words that the Holy Scripture is the most certain rule of faith (italics mine).⁵⁷

This conclusion further establishes Scripture as the all-sufficient rule of faith, which is corroborated by the testimony and consensus of the ancient church. The ancient church, in a circular argument, is made the reliable witness of the sufficiency of Scripture as long

⁵⁷Ibid., 161.

as the ancient church itself remained true to this maxim—hence the qualification by Chemnitz that the testimonies of the “ancient and purer church” have value, the “ancient and purer church” being the one that remained true to the affirmation that Scripture alone is authoritative.

Chemnitz is reacting against the Council of Trent’s rejection of the sole authority of Scripture. He points out that the Council of Basel recognized Scripture “as the truest judge in this council,” but that this affirmation was found to be excessive by the Tridentine theologians. In contradistinction to the Council of Basel, Trent decreed, “And expressly, that matters of controversy be dealt with in the Council of Trent according to the Holy Scripture, the traditions of the apostles, the approved councils, the consensus of the Catholic Church, and the authority of the holy fathers.”⁵⁸ Trent explicitly relies on the traditions, councils, and the so-called consensus of the Catholic church in addition to the authority of Scripture. Chemnitz’s lengthy patristic citations undermine the Tridentine decree by showing that the tradition was more multiform than Trent realizes and that the bold claim to the “consensus of the Catholic Church” is vacuous. It is vacuous because extensive statements of the ancient church may be shown to be in agreement with the Lutheran position and not that of Trent.

Chemnitz’s adversary, Jacobus Payva Andrada, argues “not the Scripture but the understanding of the church is the most exact norm according to which our faith must be directed and formed.”⁵⁹ Chemnitz notes that this “demonstration” drives Scripture from its rightful place as the rule of faith even as tradition becomes Scripture’s adjunct authority. Furthermore, such an appeal to the authority of tradition in its many forms

⁵⁸Ibid., 162.

⁵⁹Ibid., 163.

(fathers, councils, consensus, etc.) might as well condemn Christ and the apostles.

Chemnitz states, “This single demonstration could have condemned even Christ and all the apostles, because they fought with the testimonies of Scripture against *the consensus of the pharisaic church* (italics mine).”⁶⁰ Thus, Andrada is shown to condemn Christ himself along with the witness of the apostles, support that he purports to uphold in maintaining the necessity of apostolic witness to the Scriptures. Furthermore, Chemnitz is aware of the pitfalls of consensus. First, he is keen to show that a true consensus must remain true to the Word of God. Second, even where a consensus does exist, it may be one that is diametrically opposed to the Word of God and the person of Christ himself. In this case, Jesus and the apostles are shown to be at odds with the existing consensus of the Pharisees and their followers. Chemnitz then argues that the true church is established by the Word of God, but that the Word of God is not established by the church, as Rome’s supporters order things. Chemnitz states, “Therefore the truth of the Word of God does not depend on the church, as Andrada would have it, but on the contrary, the truth of the church depends on and is judged by the truth of the Word of God, which it holds and confesses.”⁶¹

The question of Scriptural authority and the nature of the church are relevant to our discussion of consensus. Chemnitz recognizes that “hay, wood, and stubble are often built on the foundation” of the true church according to 1 Corinthians 3:12. Furthermore, the true church may be overshadowed by a false church. Chemnitz states,

At times the true church, because another false assembly has prevailed over her and become preeminent, lies so hidden, as it were, that Elias says: “I alone am left.” And “when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” If anyone therefore

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

had judged concerning the truth of doctrine at the time of Elias from *the consensus of the visible congregation*, he would have been completely in error (italics mine).⁶²

The humanistically trained Chemnitz does not refer to the dark period of the Middle Ages when the doctrine of justification seemed most overshadowed, but to the Scriptures where the example of Elijah is found. Elijah, bearer of the true doctrine of Scripture, was overshadowed by the apostate church of Israel. Thus a visible consensus for the sake of consensus itself is not necessarily desirable and may only lead one deeper into error. Chemnitz, in his exposition of the eight types of tradition, shows that the Catholic tradition is more multiform than Andrada and his other Roman opponents imagine. Here he shows that even when a consensus is reached the result may not satisfactorily reflect the truth of God's Word. Moreover, this analysis shows that Chemnitz's caveat regarding consensus does not place him in the camp of "traditionalism," as opposed to the "biblicism" of Luther and Flacius to which Otto Ritschl subscribes. Thus the boasting on the part of the Council of Trent concerning the consensus of the Catholic tradition is a pretentious claim based on a hasty regard for a consensus that may in fact not be genuine.

Trent's claim concerning the interpretation of Scripture as not being "contrary to the unanimous consensus of the fathers"⁶³ is reiterated. Chemnitz thus quotes the Tridentine passage where the right sense of Scripture and the unanimous consensus of the fathers are considered to be tantamount to one another. Chemnitz notes that the Roman church arrogates dictatorial authority to itself concerning the rightful interpretation of the scriptures. On the other hand, private interpretations of the individual should be

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., 207.

eschewed as well. Hilary is quoted saying that the individual must come away with an interpretation of the Scripture and not bring an understanding to the text that is alien to the native sense of Scripture. Chemnitz then states,

We also gratefully and reverently use the labors of the fathers who by their commentaries have profitably clarified many passages of the Scripture. And we confess that we are greatly confirmed by the testimonies of the ancient church in the true and sound understanding of the Scripture. Nor do we approve of it if someone invents for himself a meaning which conflicts *with all antiquity*, and for which there are clearly no testimonies of the church (italics mine).⁶⁴

The gift of interpretation has been given to many of the fathers of the church. Therefore their writings are to be read with great profit inasmuch as they illumine the Scriptures. Neither is there a lack of ample witnesses to the truth throughout the history of the church, especially during the patristic age. Chemnitz does not make the claim idly that no private interpretation should conflict “with all antiquity.” Scripture is clear enough that the fathers were able to interpret the clear passages in harmony with one another. In this sense testimonies of the ancient church bolster and solidify a proper interpretation of Scripture.

On the other hand, Chemnitz has a low regard for the Roman arrogation of the church fathers in conjunction with scriptural interpretation.

When the papalists have transformed any statement of Scripture so that it agrees with their own corruptions, they search diligently in the writings of the fathers that they may scrape together from them a few statements which in some way defend their purpose. And such interpretations of the ancients, no matter on what occasion or in what way they were given, they contend, must simply be accepted without judgment and examination, regardless whether they agree with the words of Scripture or disagree with them, although the fathers themselves do not want the reader so bound to themselves . . .⁶⁵

⁶⁴Ibid., 208–09.

⁶⁵Ibid., 212.

Statements such as this reveal Chemnitz's confidence in the church fathers. His adversaries may be able to cite randomly several church fathers for their position, but they do so, according to Chemnitz, by taking them out of context. The church fathers, if studied in context, most often reflect the Reformation's understanding of Scripture. This in turn leads Chemnitz often to claim with confidence that the *consensus patrum* favors the Lutheran position in matters of dogma. As he writes, "And the desire of *all fathers* was not to lead the people away from the Scripture to the implicit faith of human persuasion but to lead them to a knowledge of the Scripture (italics mine)."⁶⁶

Chemnitz again claims the *consensus patrum* using the synonymous phrase "all fathers" to call men and women back to the scriptures and away from an implicit faith in the authority of the Roman church that demands assent to its doctrinal formulations at the peril of ignoring the clear words of Scripture. For Chemnitz there is a beautiful consensus of the fathers regarding the authority of Scripture.

Concerning Traditions (From the First Decree of the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent)

Chemnitz here must contend with the Tridentine affirmation that unwritten traditions have been successfully passed down from Christ to the apostles and then to the bishops of the Roman church. These traditions are set on an equal par with Scripture since Christ, and the apostles are the author of said traditions. Chemnitz asks, "What error shall we refute if the *antiquity of error and the multitude of the erring* can lend protection to error?"⁶⁷ Chemnitz's concern here is with the unwarranted sanction of unwritten traditions that supposedly emanate from Christ and the apostles. He notes that

⁶⁶Ibid., 215–16.

⁶⁷Ibid., 219.

such is not necessarily the case and that the Vincentian Canon's criteria of antiquity and consent can be misleading in many instances.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

On the basis of a quote from Tertullian concerning the need to refute heretics with extra-scriptural arguments Roman Catholic theologians reasoned that the Scriptures were insufficient. Against such a claim Chemnitz argues, "That this is altogether wrong has been shown above from *the consensus of all the fathers*, and Tertullian never meant this (italics mine)."⁶⁸ Chemnitz seeks to place Tertullian's statement in context by pointing out that the Scriptures were found to be inadequate weapons against the Gnostics. In this case Tertullian resorts to the traditions of the church and the apostolically founded churches wherein agreement is found concerning the interpretation of Scripture. The papal party uses this passage to justify the superiority of the church over against a direct appeal to Scripture. Chemnitz, on the other hand, points out that such an appeal to tradition was only useful in dealing with those who did not recognize the Scriptures. Thus, the *consensus patrum* affirms the efficacy of Scripture in settling theological disputes inside the church itself.

Chemnitz notes the unanimity that persisted in the second century in the apostolically founded churches that were scattered throughout the world.

When the church has accepted this preaching and this faith, though she is scattered throughout the whole world, . . . and she preaches these things harmoniously and transmits them as if she possessed only one mouth. For although there are different languages in the world, nevertheless, the import of the tradition is one and the same. And the churches which were founded in Germany do not believe or teach differently than those which are among the Iberians or those which are among the Celts or those which are in the Orient or those which are in Egypt or those which

⁶⁸Ibid., 235.

are in Libya or those which are situated in the middle of the world. But as the sun is one and the same in the whole universe, so the light and preaching of the truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men who want to come to the knowledge of the truth, etc.⁶⁹

This lengthy quote of Irenaeus explains how the apostolically founded churches are of one accord. The church throughout the whole world confesses the same creed, enjoys purity of doctrine and lives in ecclesiastical fellowship. To this Chemnitz concludes,

This, therefore, is the apostolic tradition, this *the true antiquity of the church*, this *the universal consensus*. And all the things which we accept and confess are in agreement with the Holy Scriptures. Therefore we have the true and ancient traditions of the apostles. But the Papalists prate about other trifles when they dispute about traditions (italics mine).⁷⁰

Chemnitz's point here, echoed by Irenaeus, is that the substance of the apostolic symbol embodies the traditions of the apostles. That which is most ancient is the scriptures and the Apostles' Creed. Furthermore, the universal consensus embodied in the Creed and the Scripture was affirmed worldwide by all the true and ancient churches in the time of Irenaeus and Tertullian. That the Lutheran Reformation also maintains the Apostles' Creed and the apostolic Scriptures ensures that the Lutheran church too enjoys the legacy of the apostles and universal consensus. In other words, Scripture ensures apostolicity, antiquity and universality. The criteria of the Vincentian Canon are affirmed by the upholding of the Scripture principle.

Implicit Doctrines found in the Scriptures

Chemnitz quotes Augustine to justify the baptism of infants though this teaching is not found explicitly in the Scriptures: "What the whole church holds, and what has not been instituted by councils but has always been observed, we believe most correctly to

⁶⁹Ibid., 241–42.

⁷⁰Ibid., 242.

have been transmitted in no other way than by apostolic authority.”⁷¹ Chemnitz is here discussing the fifth kind of traditions: dogmas or traditions that Scripture does not explicitly state, but that can be ascertained nevertheless by applying sure reasoning to clear passages of Scripture. In this case Chemnitz quotes Origen and Augustine concerning infant baptism. Chemnitz concedes that such a statement: “Infants are to be baptized; the apostles baptized infants”⁷² is nowhere to be found in Scripture. Nevertheless, Origen and Augustine point to the universal custom of this practice and argue that it has been handed down by the apostles themselves. One of Chemnitz’s opponents, Lindanus, uses such proof texts to underscore the point that Protestants too baptize infants and therefore succumb to traditions that are not in Scripture. Chemnitz counters this charge, stating that many passages of the fathers could be cited showing that they appealed not only to universal custom and apostolic precedent but to the Scriptures themselves to justify infant baptism. Augustine is then quoted: “And if anyone seeks divine authority in this matter, although we rightly believe that what the universal church holds was handed down in no other way than by apostolic authority, nevertheless, we can truthfully conclude from the circumcision of the flesh what benefit the Sacrament of Baptism has for infants, etc.”⁷³ Chemnitz’s point is to show that authentic apostolic traditions, though they may enjoy universal custom and the *consensus patrum*, as is the case with infant baptism, are nevertheless based on Scripture. Augustine is cited again to reinforce this claim: “ ‘What the custom of the church has always held and what a plenary council has confirmed, that we follow. Add to this that when we have carefully

⁷¹Ibid., 249.

⁷²Ibid., 250.

⁷³Ibid.

examined the reasons of both sides of the disputation and the testimonies of Scripture, it can also be said: ‘We follow that which the truth has declared.’”⁷⁴ Thus universal custom enforced by plenary or universal councils is still dependent on the witness of Scripture for Augustine.

This is also the case with various doctrines that are not explicitly mentioned in Scripture such as the *homoousion*, the personal union, the two natures in Christ, and the deity of the Holy Spirit. Chemnitz notes, “There are many such examples of ways of speaking received from the fathers, where the matters themselves are most firmly grounded in Scripture.”⁷⁵ In fact, “Basil proves the Godhead of the Holy Spirit from the testimonies of Holy Scripture and adds also *the consensus of antiquity* (italics mine).”⁷⁶ In this way “the traditions are shaped according to the Scripture and give way to the Scripture.”⁷⁷

The Sixth Kind of Traditions: Consensus

The sixth kind of tradition is the very consensus of the church.

As the sixth kind of traditions we set down what is said of *the catholic consensus of the fathers*. For it is a common form of speech to say: ‘The fathers handed it down this way.’ But Andrada wrongs us in that he claims we disregard the testimony of antiquity altogether, that we count the authority of the fathers as nothing, that we overthrow the approbation, faith, and majesty of the church. For we can affirm with a good conscience that we have, after reading the Holy Scripture, applied ourselves and yet daily apply ourselves . . . to inquiry into and investigation of *the consensus of the true and purer antiquity* (italics mine).⁷⁸

⁷⁴Ibid., 253.

⁷⁵Ibid., 255.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 256.

Chemnitz claims that he assigns the fathers “their proper and honorable place” as fine expositors of Scripture and defenders of the ancient faith against heretics. They have done all this on the basis of Scripture and are therefore true members of the catholic church. Chemnitz’s reverence for the fathers is movingly expressed as he states, “And we long for this, that in the life to come we may see what we believe and hope concerning the grace of God on account of His Son, the Redeemer, *as members of the true catholic church*; that we may see (I say) the Son of God Himself, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and fathers, who held to the true foundation, and may enjoy intimate fellowship with them to all eternity (italics mine).”⁷⁹ Chemnitz then repeats his reverence for the consensus of the fathers that is based on the Word of God, “Therefore we examine with considerable diligence *the consensus of the true, learned, and purer antiquity*, and we love and praise the testimonies of the fathers which agree with Scripture (italics mine).”

Here again Chemnitz qualifies the notion of the *consensus patrum* with that of the “true, learned, and purer antiquity.” This is the learned consensus that agrees with and is based on Scripture and not mere opinions of men. For Chemnitz the witness of Scripture comes first and only then is the testimony of the orthodox church added to strengthen one’s convictions. Chemnitz observes, “That teaching, therefore, has standing in the church which agrees with the Word of God and the confession of the godly, regardless whether they are more or fewer than the ungodly.”⁸⁰ This is the case with infant baptism. Scripture teaches there is no salvation outside of the church, and this doctrine is

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.,257.

supported by the ancient church. “Thus the judge is the Word of God and to this is added the confession of the pure antiquity.”⁸¹

This same principle held true as the church disputed with Paul of Samosata and Arius. The Word of God was the judge by which these men were condemned. Likewise “the weak were aided in their judgment by the confession of the stronger.”⁸² Thus earlier men such as Polycarp, Irenaeus and Gregory of Neocaesarea strengthened the convictions of later generations and taught properly concerning the person of Christ. Chemnitz then states, “These things are copied from the *Loci communes* of Philip Melanchthon, my teacher; I wanted to add them in this place in order that I might place opposite the clamors of Andrada the public testimony of our churches, how reverently we think about *the consensus of antiquity*, about the testimonies of the ancients, and about the confession and examples of the ancient church (italics mine).”⁸³

After quoting Basil and Athanasius, who both rely on Scripture and the fathers, Chemnitz expresses disdain for exegetical and theological novelty:

We confess also that we disagree with those who invent opinions which have no testimony from any period in the church, as Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists, and others have done in our time. We also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and *in conflict with all of antiquity* should be accepted. What could be more honorably said concerning *the consensus and the testimonies of antiquity*?⁸⁴

This statement reveals that Chemnitz’s appeal to the consensus of the fathers is not merely window dressing but a genuine conviction that the Lutheran reformation is in harmony with the ancient church. This statement is all the more remarkable since Chemnitz conceded in the *Loci theologici* that even Augustine did not speak properly

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., 258.

concerning the doctrine of justification by faith. Nevertheless, Chemnitz sees the Lutheran reformation in harmony with and as a continuation of the teachings of Augustine. Just as the Lutherans are charged with novelty concerning the doctrine of justification, so Augustine was charged with theological novelty concerning the doctrine of original sin. Augustine is then quoted as saying that he too can produce the testimonies of the fathers for his doctrine of original sin from the earliest of times, but “the clearest and fullest authority for this statement lives in the sacred canonical books.”⁸⁵ Augustine notes that the fathers’ writings should not be equated with canonical writings “but in order that those who believe that the holy fathers say a certain thing may be reminded how the catholic teachers followed the divine oracles concerning these matters before the new and idle talk of the heretics; and that they may know that *the true and anciently founded catholic faith is being defended by us against the recent audacity and destruction of the Pelagians* (italics mine).”⁸⁶ Thus Augustine’s struggle with the Pelagians is much like the Lutherans’ struggle with the “Papalists” of their day, and both Augustine and Lutherans use the authority of the fathers as a confirmation of Scripture to defend the contested articles of faith.

Original Sin

Concerning the doctrine of original sin—The First Decree of the Fifth Session of the Council of Trent, June 17, 1546—Trent claims “the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures and of the holy fathers and of the most approved councils and the judgment and *consensus of the church* itself (italics mine).”⁸⁷ To this decree of Trent Chemnitz

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 259.

⁸⁷Ibid., 311.

agrees stating, “Most of the words of this decree have been taken from the writings of the purer antiquity, and are in agreement with the Scripture.”⁸⁸ Thus the consensus of Trent concerning original sin and the need for infant baptism in this decree is not disputed by Chemnitz. Later on, however, Chemnitz disputes the Roman understanding of the remnants of original sin after baptism. The Romanists assert that after baptism concupiscence remains, the will inclines to sin, but it is not properly called sin in the regenerate. To which Chemnitz responds, “The fathers certainly clearly say the opposite; and yet the men of Trent are not afraid to boast about *the consensus of the Catholic Church* (italics mine).”⁸⁹ Chemnitz quotes Augustine at length to prove that sin remains in the regenerate after baptism and then states, “Now that the true understanding has been confirmed on the basis of Scripture, *to which also the consensus of antiquity* is added, it remains that we say something about the arguments of the papalists (italics mine).”⁹⁰

Justification by faith

Concerning justification by faith Trent claims, “When the apostle says that a man is justified by faith and gratis, these words are to be understood in that sense which *the perpetual consensus of the Catholic Church* has held and expressed (italics mine).”⁹¹ After Chemnitz sets about to explicate the doctrine of justification by faith correctly with the aid of the fathers he states, “Other and more testimonies could indeed be adduced from the prophetic books, but we follow Paul, who in this manner examines and shows *the testimony and consensus of the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets* in Rom. 4 (italics

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., 351.

⁹⁰Ibid., 356.

⁹¹Ibid., 459.

mine).”⁹² Though Chemnitz has dealt with Augustine at length, he feels compelled to resort to the consensus of Scripture concerning this most essential and disputed article. As he proceeds to argue from the New Testament he states, “we shall search out *the consensus of Christ, of the apostles and of the apostolic churches.*”⁹³ After producing such testimonies from Christ, the apostles and the apostolic churches Chemnitz concludes, “And surely nothing can or should be required beyond this for ‘complete proof.’”⁹⁴ Note the shift here from the consensus of the ancient church and the witness of the true and purer antiquity to that of the consensus found in Scripture alone. Yet witnesses from the ancient church are not lacking for Chemnitz then argues,

However, there would be no end if I were to quote every instance of this kind which is found in the writings of the fathers. I have noted down these few in order to show that *our teaching concerning justification has the testimony of all pious men of all times*, and that not in rhetorical declamations nor in idle disputations but in the serious exercises of repentance and faith, when the conscience wrestles in trials with its own unworthiness, either before the judgment of God or in the agony of death. For in this manner alone can the doctrine of justification be correctly understood as it is taught in Scripture (italics mine).⁹⁵

Chemnitz makes an interesting turn in the form of his argumentation concerning justification. He must concede that the fathers did not speak well on the subject but that the true Christian church has at all times rightly understood this doctrine existentially. Therefore the prattling of the scholastics and the semi-Pelagian comments of many fathers must be balanced by the fact that the true church has always existed, and that that church has at least intuitively understood justification when she placed herself before the judgment seat of God.

⁹²Ibid., 485.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., 488.

⁹⁵Ibid., 512.

Concerning Faith

Chapter 8 of the Decrees of the sixth session of the Council of Trent states, “When the apostle says that a man is justified by faith and gratis, these words are to be understood in that sense which *the perpetual consensus of the Catholic Church* has held and expressed, namely, that we are said to be justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation. (italics mine).”⁹⁶ Again Trent makes the claim to consensus for a Semi-Pelagian view of justification. Chemnitz makes a detailed analysis of what he argues is a proper understanding of this doctrine and then comes to a discussion of the particle *sola*. This exclusive particle according to Chemnitz, contrary to Trent, actually has the consensus of the church.

Concerning the use of the exclusive particle *sola*: “And because this particle *has at all times always* been employed in the church in the article of justification, as can be shown by testimonies from the writings *of almost all the fathers*, it has become the custom in our churches when we want to embrace briefly all the exclusives of Paul, that we say: We are justified solely by the grace of God, solely by faith, solely by the imputation of the righteousness of the only Mediator Christ.”⁹⁷

Here Chemnitz is echoing the Vincentian Canon, and boldly declaring that the majority view of the ancients upholds the Reformation stance on justification by faith alone.

It is a careful line that Chemnitz has to walk. Rome’s claims for consensus and tradition clearly are not nuanced enough. Yet Chemnitz also does not want to go to the other extreme and give the tradition of the fathers no credence at all. His solution saves a place for the consensus of the fathers, albeit in an evangelical Reformation way, by maintaining Melancthon’s qualifying principle of a “true, purer and learned antiquity.”

⁹⁶Ibid., 549.

⁹⁷Ibid., 584.

In this way the Scriptures remain the touchstone or norm for all doctrines, yet the consensus of a true and purer antiquity acts as a witness to the self-evident truths of Scripture.

The Two Natures in Christ (1578)
The Eucharistic and Christological Debates

The Lutheran struggles with the Reformed revolved around the doctrines of the Lord's Supper and christology. The two doctrines became intertwined as the Reformed argued that it was impossible for Christ to be physically present in the eucharist since he was seated at the right hand of God. The Lutherans countered by asserting that the omnipresence of Christ's physical body made a physical eating in the eucharist possible.

Chemnitz contributed to the development of the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper and christology as he produced his *Repetitio sanae doctrinae de vera praesentia corporis et sanguinis Domini in coena* in 1560.⁹⁸ In fact, Chemnitz makes a distinction of the various types or genera of the *communicatio idiomatum* for the first time in the *Repetitio*. In 1566 Chemnitz observed that the controversy over the Lord's Supper had become a debate over the nature of the union of the two natures in Christ, namely, the communion of their properties, i.e., the *communicatio idiomatum*.⁹⁹ As the eucharistic controversies with the Reformed and the "Philippists" continued throughout the 1560s Chemnitz corrected and refined his thoughts in a revised version of the *Repetitio*. The end result was his *Fundamenta sanae doctrinae de vera et substantiali*

⁹⁸Theodor Mahlmann details the correlation between Chemnitz's eucharistic theology and his christology in *Das Neue Dogma der Lutherischen Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1969).

⁹⁹Theodor Mahlmann, "Martin Chemnitz," in *Reformationszeit II. Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 6, Ed. Martin Greschat (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1981), 320.

praesentia, exhibitione et sumptione corporis et sanguinis Domini in coena repetita that appeared in 1570.¹⁰⁰

It should also be noted that both sides of the debate produced lengthy patristic citations in favor of their position since the 1520s. Irene Dingel points out that the role of the fathers in the eucharistic debate between Luther and Zwingli was of secondary importance when compared with Scripture. The situation intensifies, however, with the confessionalization of the respective parties. The importance of patristic support for the Philippist and Calvinist denial of the real presence in the Lord's Supper becomes critical, and the need to stand in continuity with the "right teaching" of the ancient church becomes decisive for their argument. Therefore Christoph Herdesian (1523-1585), a former student of Melanchthon, anonymously published a *Consensus Orthodoxus* in 1574. The work contained an exegesis of the words of Institution and an impressive array of patristic support for the Reformed position on the Lord's Supper. The work was favorably received by Philippists and Reformed alike, and still warranted the attention of Johann Gerhard in his *Loci theologici*.¹⁰¹ Chemnitz, on the other hand, had already appealed repeatedly to the consensus of the fathers in the *Fundamenta sanae doctrinae* of 1570.¹⁰² Augustine appears to be the one tricky exception for Chemnitz at times, but even he can be explained better if all his statements concerning the eucharist are gathered

¹⁰⁰For a detailed discussion of Chemnitz's eucharistic theology see Brynjulf Hoass, "*The Bestowal of the Benefits of the Real Presence: The Early Eucharistic Works of Martin Chemnitz as a Contribution toward the Formula of Concord Article VII*" Ph.D. Dissertation. (Concordia Seminary, 1990), and Scott Bruzek, "*A Five-Word Faith: The Eucharistic Theology of Martin Chemnitz' Fundamenta Sanae Doctrinae*" Ph.D. Dissertation. (Princeton, 1995).

¹⁰¹Cf. Irene Dingel, "Das Streben nach einem 'consensus orthodoxus' mit den Vätern in der Abendmahlsdiskussion des späten 16. Jahrhunderts" in *Die Patristik in der Bibelexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. David C. Steinmetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 182–83.

¹⁰²Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 50, 55, 56, 149, 150, 151, 153, 161, 170, 176, 221, and 242.

together and read in context.¹⁰³ Thus, in the case of the Lord's Supper both sides were equally vested with an interest in the *consensus patrum*.

Chemnitz contributed directly to the development of Lutheran christology as he produced his *De duabis naturis in Christo. De hypostatica earum unione. De communicatione idiomatum* in 1570. The revised version of *De Duabis naturis in Christo* appeared in 1578 and became the standard work on Lutheran christology until the end of the age of Orthodoxy. Jaroslav Pelikan notes, "It was above all in its elaboration of the communication of properties that Lutheran Christology broke new ground, going far beyond the original eucharistic context of Luther's christological speculations but endeavoring to keep the soteriological emphasis on the continuing presence of Jesus Christ 'also according to that nature by which he is our brother and we are flesh of his flesh.'" ¹⁰⁴ According to Werner Elert, Chemnitz had erected a delicate structure based upon the "personal representations" (*propositiones personales*), "uniting" (*unitio*), "union" (*unio*), "participation" (*communio*), "communication of attributes" (*communicatio idiomatum*), and the three "kinds" (*genera*) that soared upon the base of the ancient doctrine of the two natures. "This structure is the most splendid memorial to the architectonics of the generation that brought the Formula of Concord into being. Even the work in the field of the history of dogma—the work that was done by drawing on and interpreting the ancient church doctrine—is astounding."¹⁰⁵

Preliminary Observations

¹⁰³Ibid., 261.

¹⁰⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 353. Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, ch. 3.

¹⁰⁵Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 229.

Chemnitz appeals to the Scriptures in *The Two Natures in Christ*, but he makes great use of the fathers for the correct explication of them. Scripture is treated as the only authority, yet its faithful interpretation is found in the fathers and ecumenical councils, especially Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, Luther and the council of Chalcedon.¹⁰⁶ Chemnitz's evaluation of the ancient church varies, but for the most part he treats the ancient church as a firm and reliable witness to the truth concerning its christology. Chemnitz cites the fathers continuously, often bolstering his arguments with their authority and explicating the texts with their analogies and terms. Nor does Chemnitz seem to be aware of the differences in time and circumstances between himself and the fathers of the ancient church. The fathers, it was said, spoke accurately as they formulated timeless truths that were codified by John of Damascus in the eighth century. Likewise Chemnitz's struggles with the Sacramentarians reflect Cyril's contentions with Nestorius.¹⁰⁷

The Two Natures in Christ is somewhat different from the *Examen* where we detect a falling away of the Church at an unspecified time. At times the "true and purer antiquity" is not always consonant with the church of the first five hundred years. It is as if the "true and purer antiquity" lay somewhere within that time frame but not necessarily corresponding to all that occurred therein—not even by the most orthodox of fathers. Nevertheless, Chemnitz is confident that the Lutheran Reformation stands in continuity

¹⁰⁶For a detailed discussion of Chemnitz's christological development based on Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus and Luther see Theodor Mahlmann, *Das Neue Dogma der Lutherischen Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1969).

¹⁰⁷Cf. Paul Strawn, "Cyril of Alexandria as a Source for Martin Chemnitz" in *Die Patristik in der Bibelexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. David C. Steinmetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999). Chemnitz cites Augustine 135 times, John of Damascus 151 times, Athanasius 161 times, and Cyril of Alexandria 279 times. Of the 1280 patristic quotations in the *De duabus naturis in Christo* of 1578 Cyril is by far the most prominent of the fathers to be cited.

with the ancient and even the medieval church in the final analysis. The argument for consensus, however, is further lessened in argumentative force in his *Loci* as compared with the *Examen* where Lutheran truths are being exposted for the benefit of Lutherans. Here one notes more candor concerning an actual lessening of the reliability of the ancient church, and also a severer critique of Augustine.

Yet in *The Two Natures in Christ* Chemnitz relies so heavily on the Eastern fathers that he appears fully at home in the Eastern Orthodox world. It appears there is not a falling away on the part of the Eastern Church concerning the doctrines of Christ but rather faithful retention under the auspices of John of Damascus who reliably codified Eastern orthodox thought in the eighth century. The Eastern fathers are not only conducive to Chemnitz's christological argument in *The Two Natures in Christ* but also serve him well in *The Lord's Supper* and the *Catalog of Testimonies* appended to the Formula of Concord. It is in the area of christology that Chemnitz's mastery of the fathers and appeal to the consensus of the ancient orthodox church appears most impressive.

It is worth examining the explicit appeals that Chemnitz makes to the consensus of the ancient church, looking at them in their context. This exercise will not only demonstrate that the alleged consensus of the ancient church was part and parcel of Chemnitz's methodology, but that it informed his own understanding of the hypostatic union and the communication of attributes. Thus part of Chemnitz's methodology, i.e., the appeal to the consensus of the ancient church and doctrinal substance, especially the argument for the hypostatic union and the *genus maiestaticum*, form a nexus in Chemnitz's thought.

Christological Consensus in *The Two Natures in Christ*

In the dedicatory epistle Chemnitz gives the reason for his reliance on the ancient orthodox church regarding its doctrine of Christ: “God-pleasing humility requires that we do not trust in our own reason in this serious discussion but rather that we take into our counsel the thinking of the *ancient orthodox church*, in accord with the *Scripture and the analogy of faith* (italics mine).”¹⁰⁸ Thus Chemnitz’s methodology consistently avails itself of the best of the fathers’ teachings in accordance with Scripture and the analogy of faith. He repeatedly states this in his *Examen* as well. Chemnitz then adds that the cause of this analysis is due to the Sacramentarian controversy. The dispute entailed the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, and the communication of attributes. He writes,

Danger signals were becoming evident on both sides, . . . I decided that the safest way to educate and remedy my own simplicity would be to consult the fathers of the church, who, in the times of pristine purity and learning directly after the apostles, were active in expounding this subject publicly and with characteristic diligence, and to hear them as they conferred among themselves and shared their well-considered opinions on the basis of God’s Word. For in this way, . . . we can more easily and correctly form a judgment on the basis of God’s Word concerning this difficult question.¹⁰⁹

Thus lengthy citations of the fathers will be set alongside Scripture to show the fathers’ reliability in their exposition of the doctrine of Christ. Furthermore, Chemnitz opts to employ the terminology of the ancient church, “I have explained the points which I believe to be true not so much in my own words and phrases as in the language of the ancient church which is now used and accepted in the churches that embrace and hold

¹⁰⁸Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 19.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 19.

fast the doctrines of Luther as in agreement with the Word of God.”¹¹⁰ This, too, is essential, for by retaining the terminology of the ancient church Chemnitz does not deviate from its substance.

In chapter 2, “The Divine Nature in Christ,” Chemnitz states,

And thus the church *has always said* that the divine nature of the Logos became incarnate, as we have shown above in the statements of Dionysius, Athanasius, Cyril, and Damascenus. And Lombard [*Sententiarum*], Bk. 3, Dist. 5, shows from the doctrine of the ancient church that both these statements are correct, namely, that the person of the Son of God assumed the human nature and that the divine in the person of the Son of God assumed the human nature and that the divine nature in the person of the Son has been personally united with the assumed nature (italics mine).¹¹¹

Chemnitz is confident as he asserts that the two natures in Christ have been united and that this has the witness of all antiquity, for he then states,

But what need is there here to adduce further testimonies from the Fathers? For the *entire ancient church with one voice* affirms that in the incarnate Christ the two natures, the divine and the human, have been united, and that the person of Christ consists of two natures, the divine and the human, which are united with each other (italics mine).¹¹²

Chemnitz is reacting against the assertion that the divine nature in the person of the Son of God is not united with the assumed human nature. To which Chemnitz responds,

In opposition to *this unanimous agreement* these disputations suggest that not the divine nature of the Son of God but only His person has been united with the human nature, as if the person of the Son of God were something apart from His deity or subsisted outside of or beyond the deity. For the divine nature, as the Scholastics correctly say, is in the person and is predicated of the person, and the person subsists in the divine nature (italics mine).¹¹³

Again Chemnitz sees consensus here. Not only the ancient church but even the medieval scholastics have spoken well on this issue.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 21.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., 41–42.

In chapter 3, “The Human Nature in Christ,” Chemnitz asserts the necessity of acknowledging the humanity of Christ.

Furthermore, the true teaching of Scripture is that the Son of God has assumed a true, complete, and total human nature which is of the same substance with us and possesses all the conditions, powers, and desires of our nature as its own normal properties, yet is not wicked, but is without sin, uncorrupted, and holy, but in which are the infirmities that have entered into our nature as the penalties of sin. He has willingly assumed this for us in order that He might be made the victim for us.¹¹⁴

This teaching for Chemnitz is both “orthodox and catholic,” and in accord with Athanasius. It is necessary for our salvation that we acknowledge both the divine and human natures in Christ. Note that Chemnitz uses the terms orthodox and catholic as synonyms. Concerning the humanity of Christ, there is no point of contention on the part of the adversaries as Chemnitz makes claim to the consensus of antiquity: “Therefore the Son of God assumed flesh of the same substance as ours (*as all antiquity says*) and in all respects like ours, with the exception of sin, in the womb of the Virgin Mary and indeed from Mary herself (*italics mine*).”¹¹⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus is another witness concerning the humanity of Christ that all antiquity affirmed: “Moreover, the statement of Nazianzus is most significant, a statement *which all antiquity accepted*, namely, that that part of human nature ‘which was not assumed by Christ was not healed (*italics mine*)’”¹¹⁶

In chapter 9, “Light Shed by Main Words Used by Scripture and Ancient Church,” Chemnitz defends the words and terminology of the ancient church concerning the mystery of the incarnation and the hypostatic union of the two natures. Chemnitz states

¹¹⁴Ibid., 49.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 56–57.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 60.

Therefore, the Word was made flesh, not by conversion or commingling but, in accord with the interpretation of Scripture, by assumption. *Nearly all the ancients*, as Theodoret tells us, took their explanation of the term $\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$ from these proof passages: “Christ is made ($\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$) sin” and a “curse” in that He carried our sin and took the curse upon Himself (*italics mine*).¹¹⁷

Later in the same chapter Chemnitz again defends the incarnation with the aid of Irenaeus and Theodoret.

Furthermore, Irenaeus was the first, to my knowledge, to use the term “the Logos was made flesh” ($\text{Lo}\>\text{gov sarkw}\>\text{qeiv}$). He calls the union a $\text{sarkw}\>\text{siv}$. These statements are cited in Dialogus I of Theodoret. It is the term “incarnation” ($\text{sarkw}\>\text{siv}$ and $\epsilon\gamma\text{nsarkw}\>\text{siv}$) which *the entire ancient church* afterwards used most eagerly (*italics mine*).¹¹⁸

This understanding of Christ’s coming in the flesh has the witness of the most ancient authors and the seal of the consensus of the ancient church.

Chemnitz then discusses the interpenetration ($\text{pericwrh}\>\text{siv}$) of the two natures of Christ as explicated by Irenaeus, Origen, Theodoret and John of Damascus. Origen’s famous simile of burning iron is mentioned to demonstrate that there is no mixture, confusion or commingling of the two natures. The simile is adopted by Basil in his *De Nativitate Christi*. Chemnitz then states

And it is useful to know that this is not something thought up recently by Damascenus, but it has been *used from the time of Irenaeus* and explained by Cyril. These are the Greek words used *by the most ancient Greek writers* (*italics mine*).¹¹⁹

Chemnitz is concerned to show the use of such terminology has the stamp of antiquity. The terms are tried and true. Note also that Chemnitz is aware of the problems associated with quoting John of Damascus as a source, i.e., whether or not he was the author of a certain doctrine or merely a witness to earlier doctrinal developments. Nevertheless,

¹¹⁷Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 125.

Chemnitz values John highly as a reliable synthesizer of the ancient church's doctrine and defender of the hypostatic union.

After these times, about the year of our Lord 700, came John of Damascus whose writings brought great light to this subject, not because of the authority of Damascenus himself, but because *he gathered the disputations and statements of all antiquity from the writings of all the Greek fathers*, especially on those points which were defined in the four General Councils which dealt with the controversies pertaining to this doctrine (italics mine).¹²⁰

John of Damascus is a valuable witness, for like Chemnitz, he has compiled testimonies from the entire ancient church.

In chapter 12, "What Results from the Hypostatic Union," Chemnitz again expresses his desire to remain in harmony with the teachings and terms of the ancient church as he states, "And pious, learned men must use great care that they speak *in harmony with the church* on these matters, in order that their words *may be consonant with the faith* and that they may explain these matters as they are revealed and taught in Scripture (italics mine)."¹²¹ For Chemnitz, remaining in harmony with the ancient church is not a far cry from remaining faithful to the consensus of the ancient church.

In chapter 16, "The Use of the Doctrine of the First 'Genus,'" Chemnitz desires to refute the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches.

Now it is certain that the divine nature of Christ did not take its origin from the substance of Mary, for from eternity the Son of God according to the divine nature was begotten of the substance of the Father. And yet it is neither false nor vain to call Mary the mother of the Lord, for men contended with great seriousness against Nestorius, that we must call Mary the God-bearer (*θεοτοκον*), and *all antiquity concurred* (italics mine).¹²²

¹²⁰Ibid., 136.

¹²¹Ibid., 157.

¹²²Ibid., 209.

The judgment of antiquity stands for Chemnitz that Mary is $\rho\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\nu$ and thereby the hypostatic union is preserved. Nevertheless, even the orthodox were afraid to use certain terms lest they fall into the traps set by Nestorius and Eutyches. Chemnitz notes how consensus was reestablished.

John of Antioch feared that Cyril was confusing the two natures, and Cyril in turn was afraid that the Orientals were dividing the person of Christ. Because of this a most serious *dissension arose*. But when both sides declared that the words of the evangelists and apostles concerning the Lord apply to the one person and that the division lay in the matter of natures, for some were referring to the deity of Christ and others to His humanity, then *concord was reestablished*. John of Antioch writes: ‘When this was accomplished, we were well pleased at the lessening of all contention, so that *throughout the whole world peace was established* for the holy churches of God, and all the repulsive offenses were removed from among them (italics mine).¹²³

This passage serves as an ideal model for Chemnitz’s own time. Confusion over terminology and or refusal to follow the consensus of the ancient church has led to strife between the Reformed and the Lutherans and between Lutherans themselves. Thus by providing extensive testimonies from the ancient church Chemnitz hopes to reestablish concord in his own day and age.

In chapter 20, “Gifts Conferred on Christ’s Human Nature,” Chemnitz asserts that the gifts conferred upon Christ’s human nature were intact during his humiliation due to the hypostatic union. Chemnitz then cites the scholastics, John of Damascus, and Luther as witnesses to this fact. He concludes his argument accordingly,

All agree that when the humiliation was finished and the infirmities had been laid aside in the glorification, these gifts which had been infused or given to the human nature of Christ because of the hypostatic union were now made the highest, the greatest, . . . that is, in itself and according to itself the humanity of Christ was augmented and adorned formally and habitually above all other creatures (italics mine).¹²⁴

¹²³Ibid., 212–13.

¹²⁴Ibid., 251.

Chemnitz desires to prove that the flesh of Christ due to the hypostatic union “receives innumerable supernatural, spiritual, heavenly, and divine gifts by which it is so formed”¹²⁵ and so is prepared that it can be a useful instrument of the divine Logos while still possessing its own activity and efficacy. Concerning the union of the flesh of Christ with the Logos he continues

I am not referring here to the kind of instrument which Nestorius created, . . . *But with the whole ancient church* I understand and am speaking of the human nature of Christ which does not subsist in or by itself but in the person of the Logos through the hypostatic union as the instrument of the divine Logos, . . . so that through this human nature and in common with it the divine nature of the Logos exercises and carries out its activities of its own free pleasure (italics mine).¹²⁶

Thus the bestowal of divine gifts upon the human nature of Christ is in accord with the consensus of the entire ancient church.

In chapter 21, “Communion of Christ’s Human Nature with the Divine,” Chemnitz charges the scholastics with novelty and innovation, and thus a departure from the consensus of the ancient church: “But by this line of reasoning and philosophizing concerning inherent and infused characteristics, the Scholastic doctors have departed not only from Scripture but also from the ancient church both in language and in thought.”¹²⁷ For Chemnitz, citations from the early church will make this fact apparent. The delicate balance of how the divine nature dwells in the human nature through the personal union must not be disturbed. Chemnitz states, “As we shall indicate later, we must not disturb or overturn *this teaching of the ancient church* by untimely philosophizing on the part of

¹²⁵Ibid., 253.

¹²⁶Ibid., 254.

¹²⁷Ibid., 263.

the learned doctors over the question of the abstract characteristics which formally dwell in Christ (*italics mine*).”¹²⁸

Furthermore, the scholastics have erred concerning the *genus maiestaticum* and thus departed from the consensus of the ancient church. Thus Chemnitz says, “Later let us summon our teaching concerning the highest *genus* of communication (*koinwnia*) away from the toying philosophy of the Scholastics and back to the confessions of the *ancient orthodox church* (*italics mine*).”¹²⁹ The pivotal point of this controversy revolves around the communication of the majesty, i.e., the highest *genus*. The scholastics of the medieval church have departed from the terminology of the ancient church at times and have thereby deviated from the consensus of the ancient church. Therefore, much medieval scholasticism contains novelty and innovation. On the other hand, Cyril of Alexandria and other fathers represent the consensus reached at Chalcedon, the same consensus that was later codified by John of Damascus.

In chapter 22, “No Commingling, Conversion, Abolition or Equating of Natures,” Chemnitz appeals to Scripture as a sure witness and to the analogy of faith and then states

Thus, because we have shown from clear Scriptural proofs and from *the uninterrupted consensus of the orthodox church*, and have confirmed by definitions of *approved councils* that the substantial differences of the natures and essential attributes of each nature in the person of Christ remains unimpaired in the hypostatic union itself, we must continue to safeguard this teaching and in no case allow a commingling, conversion, or equation either of the natures or of the essential attributes of each nature in Christ (*italics mine*).¹³⁰

Thus not only Scripture but “the uninterrupted consensus of the orthodox church” and “approved councils” have safeguarded the doctrine that there has been no commingling,

¹²⁸Ibid., 264.

¹²⁹Ibid., 265.

¹³⁰Ibid., 267.

conversion, abolition or equating of natures in the two natures of Christ. Chemnitz desires to maintain the delicate balance achieved at Chalcedon, but he does not want the controversialists to draw false conclusions from this truth, namely, that there can be no communication of the majesty if one were to remain faithful to the Chalcedonian definition. Thus: “But because both the Scriptures and *the entire ancient church* describe these attributes as given, bestowed upon, or communicated to the assumed nature, therefore they have to be communicated in some other way than through a commingling in a way which is distinct from all confusion, as we shall soon indicate (*italics mine*).”¹³¹ Therefore the communication of attributes must occur “in a way distinct from all confusion.”¹³² Chemnitz continues to voice his concern since it was one of the early church’s concern.

For when men read in Scripture regarding the attributes which were peculiar to the divine nature as being communicated to the assumed nature by the union, they imagined a commingling, conversion, or equating of the natures and the essential attributes had taken place. . . . This study will also be a valuable warning that we should not create new problems, but rather should dutifully embrace and hold fast the godly consensus of the *ancient orthodox church* and earnestly avoid all the monstrous notions which were condemned by antiquity (*italics mine*).¹³³

Again Chemnitz notes how the communication of attributes caused confusion in the ancient church as men misunderstood the communication of attributes to be a commingling of the two natures. Thus he relies on the analogy of faith and “the godly consensus of the ancient orthodox church” to avoid one of the many christological heresies that plagued the ancient church. What are the errors? There is the Nestorian controversy that incorrectly separated the two natures of Christ and the Eutychian

¹³¹Ibid., 268.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid., 271.

controversy that confused the two natures of Christ by inadvertently allowing some form of commingling, conversion, or abolition of the two natures. Regarding such errors Chemnitz notes, “But *in all ages* there have been those who have spread the seeds of such notions. For *almost all the ancients* mention and refute these ideas even before the Nestorian and Eutychian controversies (italics mine).”¹³⁴

Chemnitz further contends that the communication of attributes were given to Christ as he sojourned in the flesh. Chemnitz writes, “And *all orthodox antiquity with one voice and one confession* understood that the attributes mentioned were given or bestowed on Christ in time according to His assumed nature (italics mine).”¹³⁵ Chemnitz recognizes that the consensus of antiquity wrestled with heretics in order to maintain the communication of attributes. “For *all antiquity* fought bitterly against the Arians, the Eunomians, and others who perverted the Scripture teachings pertaining to the attributes which were given to or bestowed on Christ in time, as if they applied to the divine nature alone.”¹³⁶ Again the ancient church bears witness to this truth,

The *entire ancient orthodox church* understood that a bestowal was not made on the divine but on the assumed human nature. The humiliation was not the absence, deprivation, loss, lack, despoliation, . . . or laying down of the divine attributes in the divine nature of the Logos, as if it did not then possess them or did not in itself use them, so that they had to be given back or returned to the deity (italics mine).¹³⁷

Chemnitz explains that Christ enjoyed the attributes of deity both during and after his humiliation, even if these attributes were not in full view. Nevertheless, these same attributes of the deity shone forth in splendor during Christ’s exaltation “in, with, and through the assumed flesh.” With testimonies from John of Damascus and Gregory of

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid., 280.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid., 281.

Nazianzus Chemnitz asserts, “Thus *the entire ancient church* affirms that these attributes have been given to Christ in time according to His assumed nature, that is, they have been given to Christ’s human nature (italics mine).”¹³⁸ Likewise, concerning the Arian controversy the witness of antiquity remains the same: “Thus *the entire orthodox church always* fiercely contended against the Arians that those qualities which Scripture teaches are given to Christ in time must be understood not of His divine but of His human nature (italics mine).”¹³⁹

In chapter 23, “The True Mode of the Communication of the Majesty,” Chemnitz seeks to show that the divine attributes have been communicated to Christ’s person according to his assumed human nature. The fifth reason that affirms the veracity of this claim is the consensus of the ancient church: “Because *the whole ancient church with unanimous consent believed and confessed* (according to Scripture) that the things having been given to Christ in time must be understood [as given] according to His human nature (italics mine).”¹⁴⁰ There is no commingling or confusion of the two natures even though there is a communication of attributes, for nature itself shows how two substances may be conjoined but still remain separate entities. Chemnitz appeals to Origen’s famous simile: “In the case of heated iron (for this example *the entire ancient church* has used to describe the personal union of the two natures in the person of Christ) the intimate union of the two natures of the fire and the iron takes place through interpenetration

¹³⁸Ibid., 283.

¹³⁹Ibid., 284.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 287.

(pericwrh>siv) (italics mine).”¹⁴¹ Thus the fire does not take on the attributes of the iron, nor does the iron assume the properties of the fire.¹⁴²

Chemnitz seeks to prove that the consensus of antiquity is his witness and that the Lutheran affirmation of the communication of attributes is no novel idea. Thus

I have cited a good many statements from the ancients on this subject. First, that there might be public testimony that in our churches when we explain this doctrine we have not given birth to any new ideas, nor have we introduced into the church any strange, monstrous . . . expressions or forms of speech; but rather we are simply imitating *the thinking and language of the ancient orthodox church* in a reverent and devout way (italics mine).¹⁴³

Furthermore, the witness of antiquity is helpful in explicating the true mode of the communication of the majesty.

Second, I have quoted these statements of the Fathers at this point in order that good minds can be instructed and strengthened by seeing the judgment of *a true and pure antiquity* as to how the ancient church, which was involved in this controversy with various heretics, understood the meaning of Scripture regarding the mode and method of the communication of those attributes which have been given and added to Christ’s human nature because of the personal union with the deity (italics mine).¹⁴⁴

As far as Chemnitz is concerned “a true and pure antiquity” has rightly taught the communication of attributes. Nevertheless, Scripture must have the final say on this doctrine no matter how reliable the ancient church has been.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 289.

¹⁴²Chemnitz assigns great value to this simile. “Since in the case of the union of the fire and iron we are able to see and understand that this kind of communication of the properties of the iron takes place without commingling or equating, how does the conscience or the godly mind dare to say in the presence of God that this cannot take place in the case of that high and ineffable personal union of the divine and human natures in Christ without commingling or equating, since we have the Scripture as our authority and *all antiquity as our witness* that such attributes as are neither created gifts nor finite qualities but attributes and characteristics of the divine nature itself were given to Christ in time according to His assumed human nature . . . ? *All antiquity* has used the simile of hot iron to explain and illustrate this mystery, and the Scripture itself points us to it when the Son of God shows Himself to Moses in the burning bush in Ex. 3:2 and to John in the glowing brass in Rev. 1:15 (italics mine).” Ibid., 291.

¹⁴³Ibid., 302–3.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 303.

But after we have done this and *when our faith no longer rests on the authority and definitions of Fathers or councils but is built, as it ought to be, wholly on the foundations of the prophets and apostles* (Eph. 2:20), then we shall be able to understand what Scripture actually teaches regarding Christ's incarnation and how it speaks of the attributes which have been given to Him in time according to His human nature."¹⁴⁵

Chemnitz makes clear that fathers and councils only serve as witnesses to the truth of Scripture, not that the definitions and terms of the fathers are not helpful, but they, too, must be tested according to the analogy of faith. This sentiment will be echoed by Gerhard, Calov and other Lutheran theologians. On the other hand, Chemnitz often speaks as if there must be agreement with the ancient church concerning its christology. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the ancient church was in fact correct in its explication of christological dogma and was therefore a reliable interpreter of Scripture. Furthermore, Chemnitz exhibits disdain of exegetical novelty concerning this deeply contested doctrine.

In chapter 24, "Scripture Passages on Communication of the Majesty," Chemnitz argues that Matthew 28:18 refers to all the power given to Christ in time. Thus "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth" refers to "'all power or authority' which is given Christ in time also according to His human nature, which He had possessed from eternity according to His divine nature."¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, "*all antiquity has always understood and interpreted this statement of Matthew (italics mine).*"¹⁴⁷ Chemnitz then states a bit later, "In the following chapter we shall show that the *ancient orthodox church unanimously* taught that the flesh of Christ has been glorified with divine majesty

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 313.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 317.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

(italics mine).”¹⁴⁸ The following chapter contains extensive quotations from all the fathers concerning the communication of majesty.

Concerning Philippians 2:6—9 Chemnitz argues,

The “form of God” by *the unanimous testimony of the ancients* is the divine nature or essence itself, according to which Christ by nature is equal with God . . . Furthermore, the term “form” (μορφή) is used to designate a nature or essence endowed with particular attributes and conditions, divine or human, which is covered and ornamented with them, so to speak, as Augustine says . . . *ad Petrum*, “You must understand ‘the form of God’ as the natural fullness of God (italics mine).”¹⁴⁹

Concerning the exaltation of Christ in this passage he states, “*All antiquity* understood this of Christ, not with reference to His divine nature, which in itself as the highest could not be exalted any higher, but we understand it with reference to His human nature, according to which He was humbled and died (italics mine).”¹⁵⁰

In chapter 25, “Testimonies of the Ancient Orthodox Church,” Chemnitz seeks to demonstrate that the communication of majesty not only has the support of Scripture, as shown in the previous chapter, but of all antiquity.

But at this point we will gather and cite a number of chief, clear, and notable statements of the *ancient orthodox church*, which will show that it was *the unanimous confession and conviction of faithful antiquity* that to the human nature in Christ, beside, above, and beyond His abiding natural and essential properties, as a result of the personal union with the divine nature of the Logos, there have been given in time certain supernatural (υπερφυσικά) gifts and gifts which are above nature (παρὰφυσικά), which are neither created gifts nor formally and subjectively inherent finite qualities, but are and remain properties of His divine nature (italics mine).¹⁵¹

Chemnitz argues here that Lutheran christology is no recent fabrication, and that it

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 326.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 327.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 341.

has retained the terminology of the ancient church. Thus

This is a clear and public testimony that in this aspect of the doctrine our churches have not given birth to new dogmas and are not introducing strange and reprehensible terminology or dangerous modes of speaking which are harmful to the church, but rather that we have reverently embraced, carefully imitated, and diligently retained the teaching, confession, and language of *the true and orthodox ancient church* (italics mine).¹⁵²

Hereafter begins a plethora of patristic citations, beginning with Justin Martyr and ending with Luther. Chemnitz seeks to demonstrate that all the fathers, from the first to the last, have spoken of the communication of majesty, for this is the crux of the matter.

After having amassed a great deal of witnesses for the communication of majesty Chemnitz reiterates his contention that the unanimous consensus of antiquity affirms his position.

But in this chapter we have gathered testimonies of the ancient church regarding the majesty of the assumed nature, the majesty communicated to the human nature through the personal union, testimonies which show we are not spreading in our churches some recent innovation dealing with this doctrine, but rather we have continued the *unanimous voice and teaching of the true and orthodox ancient church* regarding this subject, repeating and defending the same words and phrases that antiquity used in explaining this mystery (italics mine).¹⁵³

Since the testimonies of antiquity are so overwhelming on this point, he is certain that careful readers will be convinced and “helpfully instructed and informed by the *unanimous confession (συνομιαν) of the entire ancient orthodox church* in this aspect of doctrine (italics mine).”¹⁵⁴

Chemnitz tirelessly and emphatically reiterates his claim that the communication of majesty has the witness of all antiquity and is contrary to the contention of heretics that troubled the church. “Thus the true teaching may by this study be strengthened against

¹⁵²Ibid., 342.

¹⁵³Ibid., 387.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 387–88.

different arguments and fortified by *the unanimous opinion of all antiquity, which always recognized*, professed, and fiercely defended this *genus* of the communication of the majesty against various heretics and the enemies of the church (italics mine).¹⁵⁵ Later Chemnitz explains why he has compiled this chapter: “Furthermore, I have wanted this collection of testimonies from antiquity together with the matters discussed in the preceding chapters to be a kind of public record in which the reader himself can seek and find the thinking of *the entire ancient orthodox church* in regard to the matters which are under dispute in this aspect of doctrine (italics mine).¹⁵⁶ This reasoning sounds very much like that given for the Catalog of Testimonies appended to the Formula of Concord. Chemnitz concludes the chapter this way:

But we have shown by the testimonies of Scripture and *of all the ancient church* that these attributes can also be said to have been given, handed over, bestowed upon, and communicated, in time, not to the divine but to the assumed human nature in Christ; not only *in concreto*, that is, with reference to the person only by the use of concrete terms, but also these attributes can rightly be said to be given to the Son of Man, using the terms which denote the human nature of Christ as it is personally united with the Logos (italics mine).¹⁵⁷

Now that the crux of the matter has been resolved for Chemnitz, he goes on in later chapters to discuss the ramifications of the communication of majesty. In chapter 29 he defends the worship of the two natures of Christ. Concerning 1 Corinthians 15:25, “It is necessary that He rule until He places all His enemies under His feet,” Chemnitz affirms that “*the entire ancient church* understood and interpreted this passage as applying to the person of Christ according to His human nature (italics mine).¹⁵⁸”

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 388.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 389.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 416.

Chemnitz appeals to the ecumenical councils in chapter 30, “Christ Present in the Church according to Both Natures,” by affirming that Christ may be present in heaven and simultaneously in the eucharist. Against the Sacramentarians he observes, “Quite properly the pious are disturbed when they hear that the actual substance of the human nature in Christ is denied and that contrary to Scripture and the *opinion of the approved councils of all antiquity*, the abolition of His essential attributes has been proposed (italics mine).”¹⁵⁹ Thus, contra the Sacramentarians, Christ’s body, unlike ordinary human bodies, may be present in multiple places at the same time.

Nevertheless, the Sacramentarians also make use of the fathers and quote Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, Fulgentius, and Vigilius to deny the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. To such use of the fathers Chemnitz responds

I can reply to all these statements of the Fathers with one statement, using the very words of Augustine himself, namely, that we do not regard the writings of the Fathers as canonical Scriptures, but consider them on the basis of the canonical writings, and whatever within them agrees with the authority of the divine Scriptures we accept with their praise; whatever does not agree, we do not accept but set aside with peace toward them and with their honor undimmed. This we owe to these men in the liberty to which God has called us. But because there seems to be a serious prejudice in embracing an opinion which many claim has no witnesses in *the ancient orthodox church of any period*, or even conflicts with *the entire ancient church*, we will turn our attention to these statements of some of the ancients (who elsewhere certainly do confess and defend the true presence of Christ’s body in the Supper) (italics mine).¹⁶⁰

According to Chemnitz, the Sacramentarians have misunderstood the fathers and taken their statements out of context.

Nowhere among the Fathers does there exist a statement, nor do we find anything attributed to them, which teaches in regard to the absence of the bodily or fleshly Christ that in the Lord’s Supper only His divine nature or His spirit is present, while

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 436.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 455.

His body and blood are not. Rather, *all the Fathers* expressly and constantly teach, confess and defend the presence of Christ's body and blood in the church (italics mine).¹⁶¹

Thus the consensus of antiquity not only affirms the communication of majesty but the practical outworking of that doctrine in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist.

Concluding Evaluation of *The Two Natures in Christ*

G. L. C. Frank has noted the similarities between the Eastern orthodox understanding of the eucharist and Chemnitz's own understanding as he extensively makes use of the Eastern fathers to substantiate the Lutheran understanding of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. J. Francis Watson concurs with the evaluation of G. L. C. Frank and argues that the same links between Chemnitz and Eastern Orthodoxy should be maintained for his christology as well. Watson calls Chemnitz's use of the Eastern patristic tradition in the development of this particular aspect of his theology "a christology of the catholic consensus of the Eastern church."¹⁶² Watson holds that in Chemnitz's eyes the error of the Roman church's interpretation of Scripture in the dictatorial fashion of the Roman bishops led away from the recognition that the entire church had the "right" and "privilege" to "determine" the correct interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶³ This in turn led to Chemnitz's desire to achieve a truly catholic consensus for his christology and thus led to a greater emphasis on the Eastern fathers. "Thus the

¹⁶¹Ibid., 457. Chemnitz also rejects Calvin's allegedly novel view of the corporeal limitations of the resurrected Christ. "Thus in the story of Christ's coming to His disciples when the doors were shut these people seek various subterfuges. . . . This idea is contrary to the careful details of the story and entirely at variance with all the testimonies of all antiquity (italics mine)." Ibid., 477

¹⁶²J. Francis Watson, "Martin Chemnitz and the Eastern Church: A Christology of the Catholic Consensus of the Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 38 (1994), 74.

¹⁶³Ibid., 76. Cf. Chemnitz, *Examenis Concilii Tridentini* (1578 edition), De Interpretatione Scriptura, p. 63.

catholic consensus of the fathers of all antiquity is a determinative factor in the understanding of both Scripture and doctrine.”¹⁶⁴ Watson, however, overstates his case, for Chemnitz’s appeal to the catholic consensus is not as simple as it first might appear. Watson’s own discussion of the intricacies of why Chemnitz employs John of Damascus to such a great degree bears witness to this fact.

Watson considers Chemnitz’s christology to be an “intentional movement beyond the Western christological tradition which is evident in Chemnitz’s system is seen not only in the fathers whom he cites as witnesses, most of whom are from the Eastern tradition, but in his very approach to the question of christology.”¹⁶⁵ His regard for and use of the church fathers, and the Eastern fathers in particular, is paralleled by John of Damascus and his “movement beyond the confines of the Western christological tradition and towards the Eastern church is seen in his upholding up of the concept of the real interpenetration of the two natures in Christ, a teaching based on John of Damascus.”¹⁶⁶

It is highly unlikely, however, that Chemnitz made an intentional shift towards Eastern Christology in order to free himself of the confines of Western christology. Nowhere in Chemnitz’s writings does he make a distinction between Eastern and Western fathers. Chemnitz’s shift towards the East took place because the christology of

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 77. Yet Chemnitz’s appeal to the catholic consensus is not as simple as it first might appear. Watson’s own discussion of the intricacies of why Chemnitz employs John of Damascus to such a great degree bears witness to this fact.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 85. It might be an oversimplification to state that Chemnitz deliberately moves away from the Western theological tradition due to his preponderant dependence on the Eastern fathers. One has to recognize as well that the Eastern fathers were not as available to the medieval and scholastic theologians as they were to theologians who lived during and after the humanist revival of antiquity when many of the Eastern fathers’ works were translated. Lombard and Aquinas certainly valued the Eastern fathers at their disposal. Watson does observe, however, that Chemnitz employed John of Damascus to such a great degree precisely because his methodological results were conducive to his own explanation of how the two natures in Christ interacted with one another and confirmed his eucharistic theology.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus was conducive to the development of his own christology. Thus his Eastern orientation was inadvertent and not an intentional reaction against Western christology. Yet that does not mean that Chemnitz and other Lutherans were unaware of the significance of the Eastern fathers for their christology. Paul Strawn observes that the Lutherans were aware of their Eastern orientation and that it was reflected in the “well-known discussions between the Tübingen theologians, led by Andreae (co-author of the *Catalogus testimoniorum*), with Jeremias II, Patriarch of Constantinople.”¹⁶⁷

It cannot be a coincidence that the key elements of this event—the publication of the Greek translation of the Augsburg Confession (1559) and the major exchange between the two parties (1573 – 81)—occurred during a time in which the Eastern church fathers, such as Cyril of Alexandria, had been and were continuing to be employed in theological discourse especially among Protestant theologians. Merely the attempt to establish contact with the East suggests that the Protestant interests in patristic sources had been much more than just an exercise in the construction of *cantenaes*.¹⁶⁸

Watson’s notion that Chemnitz’s “movement beyond the Western christological tradition” was intentional is qualified by the recognition that John of Damascus served Chemnitz’s purpose well.

For Chemnitz, John is significant not because of any authority inherent in his persona, but because of that very reason which Chemnitz utilizes the fathers at all—to shed light on, and to act as a witness to, the Scripturally- based doctrine of the hypostatic union and communication of attributes. That is, John fits Chemnitz’ purposes quite well precisely because of John’s christological approach—of gathering and citing the early fathers. Chemnitz recognized the value of the theological approach utilized by John. . . . John’s task, as Chemnitz saw it, of preserving the Patristic witness of the early church, was one that was similar to his own.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Paul Strawn, “Cyril of Alexandria as a Source for Martin Chemnitz,” 230.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹J. Francis Watson, “Martin Chemnitz and the Eastern Church: A Christology of the Catholic Consensus of the Fathers,” 81.

Thus John's significance as a witness to the hypostatic union and the communication of attributes is the key to his prominence in Chemnitz's *Duabis Naturis in Christo*.

Therefore "as Chemnitz' christology of the catholic consensus of the fathers was accepted by Lutheranism, Lutheran christology took on a distinctive Eastern flavor."¹⁷⁰

The Formula of Concord

The Formula of Concord was drafted over a period of years running from 1568 to 1580 with Jakob Andreae, David Chytraeus, Nikolaus Selnecker and Martin Chemnitz as its chief formulators. Andreae reworked and summarized the Swabian-Saxon Concord and the Torgau Book, writing what became the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. In 1577 Chemnitz, Andreae, and Selnecker met at Bergen with Chytraeus, Musculus and Corner to draft what became the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.¹⁷¹ Thus the Formula of Concord overall was the product of a joint effort by at least six major Lutheran theologians. Nevertheless, Chemnitz's influence was very strong in certain sections of the work and the appeals to the consensus of the ancient church are virtually identical to those found in his *The Two Natures in Christ*. Yet Chemnitz did not foist his view of the ancient church upon the other formulators. Rather the use of consensual language demonstrates that the other formulators shared Chemnitz's view that their understanding of the Lord's Supper and the two natures of Christ were in accord with the *consensus patrum*.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 86.

¹⁷¹For a more detailed discussion of the history of the formulation of the Formula of Concord see Robert Kolb, "Historical Background of the Formula of Concord" in *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord*, Eds. Robert D. Preus and Wilbert H. Rosin (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 12-87.

The Epitome of the Formula of Concord begins by asserting that Scripture alone is “the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teaching and teachers are to be evaluated and judged.”¹⁷² Concerning all other non-canonical writings the formulators state, “Other writings of ancient and contemporary teachers, whatever their names may be, shall not be regarded as equal to Holy Scripture, but all of them together shall be subjected to it, and not be accepted in any other way, or with any further authority, than as witnesses of how and where the teaching of the prophets and apostles was preserved after the time of the apostles.”¹⁷³ Thus, the church fathers, Luther, and other theologians of the Lutheran church serve as witnesses to the truths already found in Scripture. In other writings Chemnitz affirms the role that the doctors of the church had, not only as witnesses to Scripture but also as those who were granted the gift of interpretation of Scripture and thereby illuminate the doctrines held within Scripture itself. Moreover, the Formula of Concord’s affirmation of *sola Scriptura* is immediately followed by an affirmation of the consensus established by the ecumenical creeds due to the rise of heretics in the early church.

Immediately after the time of the apostles—in fact, while they were still alive—false teachers and heretics invaded the church. Against them the early church prepared *symbola*, that is, short, explicit confessions, which were regarded as the *unanimous, universal, Christian creed and confession of the orthodox and true church* of Christ, namely, the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We pledge ourselves to these and thereby reject all heresies and teachings that have been introduced into the church of God contrary to them (italics mine).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷²Eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 486. Cf. BSLK, 767.

¹⁷³Ibid. Cf. BSLK, 767.

¹⁷⁴Ibid. The Latin emphasizes consensus more strongly, “contra quos in primitiva ecclesia symbola sunt composita, id est breves et categoricae confessiones, quae *unanimem catholicam Christianae fidei consensum* et confessionem orthodoxorum et verae ecclesiae complectebantur (ut sunt Symbolum Apostolicum, Nicaenum et Athanasianum) (italics mine).” BSLK, 768.

This statement is stronger in Latin than in the English translation as it insists that the “unanimous consensus of the catholic and Christian faith” (*unanimem catholicae Christianae fidei consensum*) is that of the orthodox and true church of Christ. Thus the force of the universal consensus accorded to the creeds by the ancient church has likewise been accepted by the Lutheran church of the Augsburg confession. As the ancient church condemned the heresies of old, so, too, does the Lutheran church of the present continue to condemn the self-same heresies of those times. Furthermore, there is creedal consensus among Lutherans in the present day as the formulators stress.

Concerning the division in matters of faith that has occurred in our times, we regard as *the universal consensus* and explanation of our Christian faith and confession, . . . the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession, . . . along with the Apology of this confession and the Articles that were presented at Smalcald in 1537 (italics mine).¹⁷⁵

This statement speaks of the unanimous consensus (*unanimem consensum*) and declaration of Christian faith of the churches of the Augsburg Confession. This consensus is the consensus of the Lutheran church and not the church universal of which the Lutherans would agree they are only a part. But the context demonstrates that the consensus of confessional Lutherans follows the consensus of the ancient church. Even as the ancient church achieved creedal consensus, so, too, does the Lutheran church enjoy a confessional consensus based on the Augsburg confession, the Apology and the Smalcald Articles. In this way one sees a threefold emphasis in the Formula of Concord: first, Scripture as the final authority in all matters of doctrine; then the consensus of the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church; and finally the confessions of present day Lutheranism.

¹⁷⁵*The Book of Concord*, 486–87. Cf. BSLK, 768.

In Article 7, “Concerning the Holy Supper of Christ,” the formulators affirm that “the body and blood of Christ are received not only spiritually through faith but also orally with the bread and wine” due to “the sacramental union of the elements.”¹⁷⁶ This doctrine was contested by the Sacramentarians, but the Formula of Concord argues that the physical eating of Christ’s body and blood is affirmed by the consensus of antiquity. Thus “the leading teachers of the ancient church—Chrysostom, Cyprian, Leo, Gregory I, Ambrose, Augustine, and others—*unanimously testify* to this (italics mine).¹⁷⁷ The Latin is more forceful in affirming the consensus of the ancient doctors of the church as it states, “*Idem magno consensu praecipui ex antiquissimis ecclesiae doctoribus* Chrysostomus, Cyprianus, Leo Primus, Gregorianus, Ambrosius, Augustinus testantur (italics mine).”¹⁷⁸ So it is that the formulators claim the great consensus of the foremost doctors of the church for the physical presence of Christ’s body and blood and the *manducatio oralis*.

In the Solid Declaration, Article 1, “Original Sin,” the formulators affirm that Christ “assumed our human nature without sin.”¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, Christ’s human nature is backed by the consensus of antiquity.

Hence, on this basis *all the ancient orthodox teachers* held that Christ, according to his humanity he assumed, is of one essence with us, his siblings. For he took upon himself his human nature, which is in every way identical with our human nature in its essence and in all essential characteristics (with the exception of sin). These ancient teachers condemned contrary teaching as manifest heresy (italics mine).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶*The Book of Concord*, 506. Cf. BSLK, 799.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.* Cf. BSLK, 799.

¹⁷⁸BSLK, 799.

¹⁷⁹*The Book of Concord*, 539. Cf. BSLK, 857.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.* “Unde *omnes veteris orthodoxi* dixerunt Christum secundum assumptam humanam naturam nobis, fratribus suis, consubstantialem esse, quia naturam, quae (excepto peccato) eiusdem generis, speciei et substantiae cum nostra est, assumpsit. Et contrariam sententiam ut haeresin manifeste damnarunt (italics mine).” BSLK, 857–58.

Thus the human nature of Christ is affirmed by both the consensus of the ancient church and the present-day Lutheran church of the Augsburg Confession. One notes in their teaching on the sacraments and on the two natures of Christ that the formulators are careful to assure their readers that there is no hint of novelty in their teachings, but that they are fully in accord with the consensus of the ancient church.

In the Solid Declaration, Article 7, “Holy Supper,” the formulators once again affirm the *manducatio oralis* of both the worthy and unworthy recipients of the Lord’s Supper. The basis for this teaching is found in 1 Corinthians 11:27 and affirmed by the ancient church. Thus “the ancient Christian Fathers and teachers of the church *unanimously understood* and explained this passage in this way (italics mine).”¹⁸¹ Again the force of the consensus of antiquity comes across more clearly in the Latin, “Sic enim antiquissimi, pii et eruditi doctores ecclesiae hoc Pauli dictum intellexerunt et *magno consensu* in hanc sententiam sunt interpretati (italics mine).”¹⁸² So the Lutheran teaching of the *manducatio impiorum* is backed by both Scripture and the consensus of the ancient church. Therefore the ungodly, the unworthy, and the hypocrites “who go to the table of the Lord without true repentance and conversion to God, also receive the true body and blood of Christ orally in the sacrament. Thus, they sin grievously by eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ unworthily.”¹⁸³

The formulators then affirm that “there is a twofold eating of Christ flesh.”¹⁸⁴ First, there is a spiritual eating based on John 6 in which the believer partakes of Christ’s flesh

¹⁸¹*The Book of Concord*, 603. Cf. BSLK, 992–93.

¹⁸²BSLK, 992–93.

¹⁸³*The Book of Concord*, 603. Cf. BSLK, 993. “At Torgau the concordists inserted, and then at Bergen excised, quotations from Basil, Chrysostom, Pseudo-Augustine, and Augustine.” *Ibid.*, 603–4, n. 200.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 604. Cf. BSLK, 993.

by faith not only in the sacrament but “in the proclamation of and meditation on the gospel.”¹⁸⁵ The second kind of eating “is oral or sacramental, when all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine in the Supper receive and partake of the true, essential body and blood of Christ orally. Believers receive it as a certain pledge and assurance that their sins are truly forgiven and that Christ dwells in them with his power.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, this is not a crass or crude Capernaitic eating of the flesh of Christ as the Sacramentarians allege, but this sacramental eating takes place in a supernatural and incomprehensible manner. The formulators then affirm this teaching on the basis of Scripture and the consensus of the ancient church: “For this reason, in harmony with these words of Christ’s institution and St. Paul’s explanation, *all the ancient Christian teachers* teach expressly, with one accord, and *with the entire holy Christian church*, that the body of Christ is not only received spiritually through faith, which takes place also apart from the sacrament, but also orally (italics mine).”¹⁸⁷ Again the Latin translation is more pointed in explicitly affirming that this teaching is based on the consensus of the entire ancient church: “*Quare tota erudita et pia antiquitas (secundum haec verba institutionis Christi et explicationem Pauli) expresse et cum tota catholica ecclesia magno consensu docuit, quod corpus Christi non tantum spiritualiter fide . . . verum etiam ore non modo a credentibus, sed et ab indignis, . . . Quae antiquitatis testimonia recitare hoc loco nimis esset prolixum.*”¹⁸⁸

In the Solid Declaration, Article 8, “Person of Christ,” the formulators echo Vincent of Lerins as they argue for the two natures in Christ.

¹⁸⁵Ibid. Cf. BSLK, 993.

¹⁸⁶Ibid. Cf. BSLK, 993–94.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 604–5. Cf. BSLK, 995.

¹⁸⁸BSLK, 995.

Against this condemned heresy, the Christian church *has always simply believed* and held that the divine and the human natures in the person of Christ are so united that they have a genuine communion with each other, . . . Similarly, because of the personal union and communion, the ancient teachers of the church many times, before and after the Council of Chalcedon, used the word *mixtio* (mixture) in a good sense and with proper distinction (*italics mine*).¹⁸⁹

Thus the formulators claim here that “the Christian church has always simply believed and held that the divine and the human natures in the person of Christ are so united that they have a genuine communion with each other.”¹⁹⁰ This is a favorite theme of Chemnitz and he relates it here to Chalcedonian christology: “Likewise, there are many testimonies of the Fathers, which might be cited if necessary, that may be found throughout our writings and that explain the personal union and communion with the metaphor *animae et corporis* and *ferri cadentis* (that is, of the body and soul or of glowing iron).”¹⁹¹

Not only is there a personal union and communion of the two natures in Christ, but there is also a communication of the divine attributes to the human nature in Christ due to the *communicatio idiomatum*. The formulators argue that the consensus of the ancient church backs this teaching,

For the Holy Scripture *and the ancient Fathers* (on the basis of Scripture) testify powerfully to the following. Based upon the personal union of the human nature in Christ with the divine nature, the human nature . . . also received, alongside of and in addition to its natural, essential characteristics (which always remain), special, high, great, supernatural, incomprehensible, indescribable heavenly prerogatives

¹⁸⁹*The Book of Concord*, 619. “Contra hanc damnatam haeresin catholica Christi ecclesia *semper omnibusque temporibus simplicissime credit et sensit*, . . . veteres orthodoxi ecclesiae doctores saepe admodum non modo ante, verum etiam post Chalcedonense concilium, . . . Eius rei confirmandae gratia multa patrum testimonia in medium adferri possunt, . . . Et quidem erudita antiquitas unionem hypostaticam et naturarum communicationem.” BSLK, 1022–23.

¹⁹⁰Ibid. Cf. BSLK, 1022.

¹⁹¹Ibid. Cf. BSLK, 1023.

and privileges in majesty, glory, power, and might over all things that can be named (italics mine).”¹⁹²

The Sacramentarians argued that the finite body of Christ was not capable of receiving infinite qualities and thus contended that the Lutheran affirmation of the *genus maiestaticum* would destroy the human nature in Christ. In turn, the formulators argued that the communication of divine attributes should pertain not only to “the person simply according to the divine nature—but also according to the assumed human nature.”¹⁹³ In fact, “it is a clear rule shared by *the entire ancient, orthodox church* that whatever Christ received in time according to the testimony of Holy Scripture he received not according to the divine nature (according to which he had all things from eternity), but that the person received it in time *ratione et respectu humanae naturae* (that is, according to the assumed human nature) (italics mine).”¹⁹⁴ In effect, the consensus of the entire ancient and orthodox church is called upon to substantiate the doctrine of the *genus maiestaticum*. The formulators protest that their understanding of the communication of the divine attributes to Christ’s human nature is no recent fabrication: “We are not inventing anything new out of our ideas, but we are simply accepting and repeating the explanations that the ancient, orthodox church has given us on the basis of the solid foundation of the Holy Scriptures, namely, that such divine power, life, might, majesty, and glory have not been given to the assumed human nature in Christ in the same way in

¹⁹²Ibid., 625. “Sacrae enim litterae et *orthodoxi patres*, scripturae verbis edocti, praeclare testantur, quod humana natura in Christo eam ob causam et inde adeo, quod cum divina natura personaliter unita est . . . praeter et supra naturales essentiales atque in ipsa permanentes humanas proprietates etiam singulares, excellentissimas, maximas, supernaturales, impervestigabiles, . . . atque coelestes praeogativas maiestatis.” BSLK, 1032–33.

¹⁹³Ibid., 626. Cf. BSLK, 1034–35.

¹⁹⁴Ibid. “Primo, exstat regula communissima, *maximo totius ecclesiae orthodoxae consensu approbata*, videlicet, quae scriptura Christum in tempore accepisse affirmat, ea non secundum divinitatem accepisse (secundum quam omnia ab aeterno possidet), sed quod persona Christi ratione et respectu humanae naturae ea in tempore acceperit (italics mine).” BSLK, 1035.

which the Father has eternally imparted his essence and all divine characteristics to the Son according to the divine nature (*italics mine*).”¹⁹⁵

The formulators conclude this discussion of the *genus maiestaticum* with a strong statement on continuity and catholicity.

So we hold and teach *with the ancient, orthodox church*, as it explained this teaching on the basis of Scripture, that the human nature in Christ has received this majesty according to the mode of the personal union, . . . This fullness, with all its majesty, . . . spontaneously shines forth in the assumed human nature when and how Christ wishes. In, with, and through this nature he demonstrates, . . . exercises the same divine power, glory, and efficacy as the soul does the body and fire in a glowing iron (for the entire ancient church explained this teaching through such analogies, as discussed above) (*italics mine*).¹⁹⁶

Thus the formulators continue to call upon the consensus of the ancient church to affirm that the human nature in Christ has received the divine attributes of his majesty due to the personal union of the two natures.

In Solid Declaration, Article 10, “Ecclesiastical Practices,” the formulators quote Melancthon’s “Treatise on the Power and Authority of the Pope” as they continue to reject any notion of submission to papal authority. Nevertheless, they recognize that this is a grave matter not to be taken lightly, for they write, “To dissent *from the consensus* of so many nations and peoples and to promote such a peculiar doctrine is a grave matter (*italics mine*).”¹⁹⁷ Clearly dissent from the established consensus of the late medieval

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 627. “In hoc autem negotio *nihil novi de ingenio fingimus*, sed amplectimur et repetimus declarationem, quam *vetus et orthodoxa ecclesia*, e sacrae scripturae fundamentis desumptam ad nos incorruptam transmisit (*italics mine*).” BSLK, 1036.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 628. “Sentimus itaque et docemus *cum veteri orthodoxa ecclesia*, quemadmodum illa hanc doctrinam ex scriptura sacra declaravit, . . . et ignis in ferro candente agit. Hac enim similitudine (ut supra monuimus) *tota erudita et pia antiquitas* doctrinam hanc declaravit (*italics mine*).” BSLK, 1038.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 639. “Grave id quidem videri potest sese a tot regnis et populis seiungere et separare et peculiarem quandam doctrinam profiteri. Sed clarum est Dei mandatum, quod praecepit nobis, ut omnes caveamus *a consensu cum iis*, qui vel falsa docent, vel faslram doctrinam immani crudelitate tueri conantur (*italics mine*).” BSLK, 1061.

church was never taken lightly by the reformers of the first and second generations in the Lutheran Reformation.

Chemnitz, writing with his fellow theologians, has a consistent approach. We see that the Formula of Concord is very similar indeed to the works of Chemnitz concerning the doctrines of the Lord's Supper and the communication of attributes as explicated in his *The Two Natures in Christ*. Once again the consensus of the ancient church is often appealed to in virtually the same context concerning the *manducatio impiorum* and the *genus maiestaticum*.

The Catalogue of Testimonies, Both of Scripture and Orthodox Antiquity

Since the doctrines of Christ and the real presence in the Lord's Supper were still hotly contested by dissenting Lutherans who had been influenced by Melancthon and Reformed theologians, Chemnitz and Andreae found it necessary to append a Catalogue of Testimonies concerning the doctrine of Christ to the Book of Concord in 1580.

“Chemnitz and Andreae worked together on the assembling of these citations, based on a similar list that Andreae had compiled for his own use and on Chemnitz's wide-ranging study of the ancient patristic texts, particularly his *On the Two Natures in Christ* (2nd ed., 1578). Chemnitz himself expressed the hope that this catalog might be included as an appendix in the Book of Concord.”¹⁹⁸ In the end, the Catalogue never became part of the authoritative text of the Book of Concord, but it was included as an Appendix in many editions that appeared.

¹⁹⁸Eds. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 220.

In the preface to the reader Chemnitz gives the reason for the composition of this work.

Since, especially in the article of Christ, some have without reason asserted that in the Book of Concord there is a deviation from *phrasibus* and *modus loquendi*, that is, the received phrases and modes of speech [received and approved by] the ancient pure Church and fathers, and that, on the contrary, new, strange, self-devised, unusual and unheard of expressions are introduced; and since the testimonies of the ancient Church and fathers to which this book appeals proved somewhat too extended to be incorporated in it, and, having been carefully excerpted, were afterwards delivered to several electors and princes, -- [Therefore], they are printed in goodly number as an appendix at the end of this book (italics mine).¹⁹⁹

Chemnitz is concerned to retain the terminology of the ancient church and thereby retain the substance of the ancient church's understanding of Christ. This retention of the terminology and substance of the person of Christ also demonstrates that Chemnitz wishes to remain within the boundaries of the consensus established by the ancient church in the first four ecumenical councils.

Chemnitz affirms that “nothing new has been introduced either in *rebus* (matter) or in *phrasibus* (expressions)”²⁰⁰ concerning the doctrine of Christ, but that the Book of Concord is in agreement with Holy Scripture and the ancient pure church. “Thus in the first place, concerning the unity of the person and the distinction of the two natures in Christ, and their essential properties, the Book of Concord writes just as the ancient pure Church, its fathers and councils have spoken—namely, that there are not two persons, but one Christ, and in this person two distinct natures, . . . This is borne out by the following testimonies of the ancient pure councils.”²⁰¹ Chemnitz then quotes sections of the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and the Tenth Synodical Epistle of Leo to

¹⁹⁹*Triglöt Concordia. The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 1107.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

substantiate the two natures in Christ. He concludes his introduction to the topic by stating, “So far the words of the two councils, of Ephesus and of Chalcedon, with which also *all the other holy fathers agree* (italics mine).”²⁰² Thus Chemnitz takes for granted the christological consensus established at Ephesus and Chalcedon.

Still in the introduction, Chemnitz once again affirms that the Book of Concord has not introduced any “new, strange, self-devised, unheard-of *paradoxa* and expressions into the Church of God.”²⁰³ Rather he relies on Scripture “and then also of *the ancient pure teachers of the Church*, especially, however, of those fathers who were most eminent and leaders in the first four ecumenical councils (italics mine).”²⁰⁴ These citations are intended to demonstrate exactly how the fathers of the first four ecumenical councils have spoken concerning the person of Christ, and that there has been no deviation whatsoever on the part of the Book of Concord concerning such doctrines. The Catalogue of Testimonies is then divided into ten sections in which Chemnitz emphasizes the communication of majesty which the human nature in Christ receives. These sections are substantiated by Scripture and quotations from the ancient fathers.

In section 9 Chemnitz rejects the notion “that the humanity of Christ has been locally expanded into all places, or that, by the personal union, the human nature in Christ has been transformed into an infinite essence.”²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, because the human and divine natures in Christ are inseparably united Christ “is everywhere present in a way and measure which is known to God.”²⁰⁶ Chemnitz thus argues for the omnipresence of

²⁰²Ibid., 1111.

²⁰³Ibid., 1113.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 1145.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

Christ's body in a way that is incomprehensible to us but is in accord with Scripture (Ephesians 4:10) and the ancient church. Chemnitz writes, "But since in this article such teaching is especially directed to the end that we may know where we should seek and may apprehend the entire person of the Mediator, God and man, the Book of Concord, as also *all other holy fathers*, directs us not to wood or stone or anything else, but to that to which Christ has pointed and directed us in and with His word (*italics mine*)."²⁰⁷

Chemnitz argues that "all other holy fathers" acknowledge the ubiquity of Christ's body and where it is to be sought. Cyril, Theophylact, and Chrysostom are then cited as witnesses to the ubiquity of Christ's flesh.

Chemnitz concludes the "Catalogue of Testimonies" by reasserting that "these testimonies of the ancient teachers of the Church" have not been set forth because "our Christian faith is founded upon the authority of men," but because "fanatical spirits wish to lead men from the Holy Scriptures."²⁰⁸ The Sacramentarians have twisted Scripture and misused the writings of the fathers and have thereby invented a new false doctrine, whereby they deny the *genus maiestaticum* and the omnipresence of Christ's body. Their "new false doctrine has as little foundation in the ancient pure church-teachers as in the Holy Scriptures" and the testimonies that they quote from the fathers are "contrary to the will of the fathers."²⁰⁹ The consensus of the fathers is tacitly assumed by Chemnitz and Andreae in this work as they compile an extensive list of patristic citations, 125 quotations in all,²¹⁰ but they conclude the "Catalogue of Testimonies" by directing the

²⁰⁷Ibid., 1147.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 1149.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

reader to Scripture and the Catechism rather than to the witnesses of the ancient church. Thus Chemnitz and Andreae are careful to use the fathers as witnesses to truths that are self-evident in Scripture itself. Scripture and not the fathers are the final authority for Chemnitz and Andreae even in a work primarily comprised of patristic citations.

The Crux of the Matter: Justification and Ancient Consensus

Chemnitz faces the same difficulties as his one-time teacher Melancthon when confronted with the consensus of antiquity concerning justification. In most points of contention between the Lutheran position and the Roman, Chemnitz is able to muster an impressive amount of testimonies from the fathers in order to buttress his position. His catalogue of testimonies concerning justification, however, is one of the shortest in the entire *Examen* relative to the amount of pages dedicated to it. Chemnitz does cite Hilary, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Anselm of Canterbury, and Bernard of Clairvaux as witnesses to the Lutheran position on justification, but their number is quite limited when compared with the amount of patristic support in favor of other disputed issues.²¹¹

Chemnitz claims to have gone directly to the sources for his material, and this is probably the case. Albrecht Beutel, however, does not exclude the possibility that Chemnitz made use of patristic florilegia even though he concedes that Chemnitz did not

²¹⁰Theodore J. Hartwig, "The Continuity of the Formula of Concord with the Ancient Church" in *No Other Gospel*. Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord. 1580–1980. Ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1980), 294.

²¹¹For the most recent discussion of Chemnitz and justification see Albrecht Beutel, "Gewissensnot und Glaubenstrost. Der locus 'De justificatione' in Martin Chemnitz' 'Examen Concilii Tridentini'" in *Zur Rechtfertigungslehre in der Lutherischen Orthodoxie*. Beiträge des Sechsten Wittenberger Symposiums zur Lutherischen Orthodoxie. Ed. Udo Sträter (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt), 9–26.

make use of Calvin's well known *Acta Synodi Tridentinae*.²¹² Anthony N. S. Lane similarly observes that Calvin's patristic testimonies drop off dramatically when he begins to discuss justification by faith. Lane has discovered twenty-three patristic anthologies that appeared by 1566 that contain citations in favor of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith.²¹³ It is unlikely, however, that Chemnitz made use of any of them. As we shall see Chemnitz's use of the fathers concerning justification by faith is very cautious indeed.

Concerning this point of contention, Chemnitz makes several qualifications to show how the fathers' use of the word "justify" should be understood.

For although the fathers mostly take the word "justify" for the renewal, by which the works of righteousness are wrought in us through the Spirit, we do not start a quarrel with them where they according to the Scripture rightly and appropriately teach the doctrine how and why a person is reconciled to God, receives the remission of sins and the adoption, and is accepted to life eternal. This difference in meaning can be rightly, piously, and *skillfully understood* and admitted *according to the analogy of faith and the perpetual sense of Scripture* if it is accepted with the fathers according to the manner of the Latin composition (*italics mine*).²¹⁴

Chemnitz also concedes: "I am not ignorant of the fact that the fathers often employ the word 'justify' in this sense, but the question is concerning the idiom of languages."²¹⁵

This refers to using the word "justify" to signify *sanctificare* and or *vivificare*. Here Chemnitz demands that such *modus loquendi*, i.e., manner of speech, of *iustificare* be

²¹²Ibid., 22.

²¹³Cf. Anthony N. S. Lane, "Justification in Sixteenth-Century Patristic Anthologies" in *Auctoritas Patrum*. Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century. Eds. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt (Mainz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 1993), 69–96.

²¹⁴Martin Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 1, 468. Cf. Martinum Chemnicium, *Examen concilii tridentini*. Ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1861), 148. [Hereafter cited as Preuss.] Notice again the similarity between Chemnitz's and Melancthon's choice of words and concerns.

²¹⁵Ibid., 470. Cf. Preuss, 149.

produced from “approved Latin writers” in which *iustificare* signifies to “imbue someone with the condition of righteousness or to infuse the quality of righteousness.”²¹⁶

Furthermore, “although the fathers usually follow the analogy of the Latin composition in the word ‘justify,’ they are nevertheless often compelled by the evidence of the pauline argumentation to acknowledge this proper and genuine meaning which we have shown.”²¹⁷ The outcome of this exegesis of the fathers enables Chemnitz to conclude, “Thus Augustine, because he sees that in Rom. 5 ‘to be justified’ is explained by ‘to be reconciled,’ acknowledges and *approves our interpretation* (italics mine).”²¹⁸ Therefore Augustine, the most important of the fathers, is on the reformers’ side after all.

After quoting Augustine, Ambrose, Hilary, Cyril, and Oecumenius²¹⁹ concerning the doctrine of justification, Chemnitz explains that the real purpose is not to understand the fathers’ manner of speaking but that of Scripture: “However, now we are not asking chiefly how the fathers used the term ‘to justify,’ but our question is in what sense the Holy Spirit employs the word ‘justify’ in those passages of Scripture.”²²⁰ Patristic citation is a testimony that encourages believers, especially the weak, but the testimony of Scripture is of primary importance for Chemnitz. Scripture is the final court of appeal

²¹⁶Ibid. Cf. Preuss, 149.

²¹⁷Ibid., 475. Cf. Preuss, 151.

²¹⁸Ibid., 475. Cf. Preuss, 151.

²¹⁹ “And on Ps. 31 he [Augustine] comments: ‘If the ungodly is justified, then an unjust man becomes a just one. But how? You done nothing good, yet forgiveness of sins is given you, etc.’ In *Contra Julianum*, Bk. 2, he quotes the statement of Ambrose, that ‘he is justified from sin to whom all sins are remitted through Baptism. Hilary, commenting on Matt. 9, says: ‘It disturbs the scribes that sin, which the Law could not remit, is forgiven by man, for only faith justifies.’ Cyril, on John 6, says: ‘Grace justifies, but the commandments of the Law condemn the more.’ Oecumenius, citing explanations of the ancients on Rom. 3, says: ‘The righteousness of God is justification from God, absolution and liberation from sins from which the Law could not absolve.’ Again: ‘How does justification take place? Through the remission of sins, which we obtain in Christ Jesus.’” Ibid. Cf. Preuss, 151.

²²⁰Ibid., 475–76. Cf. Preuss, 151.

when the fathers do or do not fully support the Lutheran position on justification or any other article of faith.

Yet the import of the word “justify” is a judicial one and “it must be diligently considered why the Holy Spirit wanted to set forth the doctrine of justification by means of judicial terms.”²²¹ A judicial sense destroys pharisaical pride and Epicurean security as the conscience is laid bare before the judgment seat of God and forces the sinner to contemplate the seriousness of one’s actions. Says Chemnitz, “And the entire doctrine of justification cannot be understood more simply, correctly, and appropriately, and applied to serious use in the exercises of penitence and faith, than through a true consideration of the judicial meaning of the word ‘justify,’ as the examples of many fathers show, who often preach grandly concerning works and merits; but in their meditations, when, as we have said, they set forth this picture of the divine judgment and this court trial, then they explain the teaching of this article in the most comforting statements.”²²² This is the key to understanding Chemnitz’s penchant for arguing that the fathers believed better than they spoke in many instances. This does not detract from their correct and better sayings, nor from the witness of Scripture and its sufficiency for this article, but it does demonstrate that the fathers understood justification best when they, like Luther, had thrown themselves before the judgment seat of God. Bernard of Clairvaux, in particular, is a prime example of how one learns the mercy of God in moments of sober reflection: “Bernard is more successful than others because he considers the doctrine and testimonies of Paul concerning justification not in idle speculations but in serious

²²¹Ibid., 476. Cf. Preuss, 151.

²²²Ibid., 477. Cf. Preuss, 151.

exercises, with the picture of the divine judgment set before him, and placing himself, as it were, before the tribunal of God.”²²³

As noted above, although Chemnitz does confirm justification directly from the better statements of the fathers, he prefers to appeal to “their meditations.” However, when they examine the emphasis of the words in the statements of Scripture closely, and especially when in trials and meditations they place themselves,

. . . as it were, before the tribunal of God, then they approve this our understanding, or rather the teaching of Scripture, in the most comforting statements, namely, that we are reconciled to God, receive forgiveness of sins, . . . not on account of our virtues or our good works, even when we are regenerated, but by the gratuitous mercy of God, on account of the satisfaction, merit, obedience, or righteousness of the Son of God, the Mediator, when we lay hold of the promise of the Gospel by faith.²²⁴

This statement is the first part of section two where Chemnitz provides “The Testimonies of the Ancients Concerning Justification.” Immediately before this he concedes, “In the writings of the fathers there are indeed, found many dissimilar statements, because they use the word justify in a different sense.”²²⁵ Nevertheless, Chemnitz proceeds to cite patristic quotations that favor justification in the Lutheran sense when the fathers were not confusing justification with sanctification or renewal. Even here the fathers appear to be on Chemnitz’s side and spoke incorrectly only when they confused their terminology. Thus Basil speaks of being “justified solely by faith in Christ,” and is quoted once more, along with Origen, Hilary, Augustine nine times, Ambrose twice, Jerome, Gregory, and then Bernard six times. Chemnitz exclaims, “How many most comforting statements of this kind I could adduce from the meditations of Augustine, Bernard, Anselm,

²²³Ibid. Cf. Preuss, 151.

²²⁴Ibid., 505. Cf. Preuss, 162.

²²⁵Ibid. Cf. Preuss, 162.

Bonaventura, Gerson, from the *Contemplations of the Layman*, as they are called, if the nature of our undertaking would bear it!”²²⁶ In the end, there is no lack of patristic evidence for the correct understanding of justification were Chemnitz to set forth the evidence.

Chemnitz provides several more examples and then states that

there would be no end if I were to quote every instance of this kind which is found in the writings of the fathers. I have noted down these few in order to show that *our teaching concerning justification has the testimony of all pious men of all times*, and that not in rhetorical declamations nor in idle disputations but in the serious exercises of repentance and faith, when the conscience wrestles in trials with its own unworthiness, either before the judgment of God or in the agony of death. For in this manner alone can the doctrine of justification be correctly understood as it is taught in Scripture (*italics mine*).²²⁷

He concludes accordingly that justification “has the testimony of all pious men of all times” since “serious exercises of repentance and faith, when the conscience wrestles in trials with its own unworthiness, either before the judgment of God or in the agony of death. For in this manner alone can the doctrine of justification be correctly understood as it is taught in Scripture.”²²⁸ So justification by faith does indeed have the consensus of all ages, for there is no other way for men to become approved in the sight of God.

This final statement reminds one of Luther’s *Anfechtungen*, and Chemnitz makes a very Luther-like argument that the fathers and other pious men understood justification best when their consciences were subjected to the judgment seat of God. Chemnitz, the so-called “traditionalist” argues more forcefully from Luther’s experience and that of St. Paul’s in Romans 7 than from a large array of patristic citations for this article of faith.

²²⁶Ibid., 510. Cf. Preuss, 164.

²²⁷Ibid., 512. Cf. Preuss, 165.

²²⁸Ibid., 512–13. Cf. Preuss, 165.

Thus he chose to rely on the *lex orandi* that demonstrated that pious men believed in *sola fide* in *praxis* even if they spoke otherwise theologically. At first glance one might get the impression this is the weak link in Chemnitz's argument for the *consensus patrum* since Chemnitz produces less patristic quotations and more arguments from the "pious meditations" of the fathers.²²⁹ Yet this is not the case, for Chemnitz chose to sweep the board clean with an argument from the "pious meditations" of the fathers and other pious men since such examples would be more difficult to refute. The church for Roman Catholics had always been guided by the *lex orandi* as well as by the doctors of the church who had the gift of interpretation of Scripture. Therefore it must have appeared more expeditious to Chemnitz in this instance of the most contested article of faith on which all stands or falls to make this his strongest argument rather than cite the fathers *ad infinitum*—something which he and his opponents both could do.

Furthermore, the true church is the church of those who have been justified by faith in all ages. Chemnitz chooses to concede, though he did not have to, that the fathers did not speak well on this article, and yet the true Christian church has at all times rightly understood this doctrine experientially if not theologically. Therefore the "idle disputations" of the scholastics and the semi-Pelagian comments of many fathers must be

²²⁹Piepkorn notes, "Chemnitz' impressive scholarship reflects the best learning of the times, and he prides himself on the fact that he used original sources which he himself verified and did not—as his opponents at times were wont to do—acquire his wisdom only from commentaries and florilegia. Yet his learning was that of his times and must be gauged by that criterion. (By the same token, in spite of the stimulation that his compendious work gave to theological inquiry . . . it cannot simply be invoked in the 20th century in the way it could be in the 16th." Piepkorn, 29. Piepkorn concurs with Reinhard Mumm that "neither Chemnitz' concern for the truth nor his erudition always preserved him from exaggerating the congruity of the Lutheran position and that of certain of the fathers whom he adduces or of minimizing the differences between them. On p. 39, n. 4, Mumm catalogs a few examples." Ibid. Cf. Reinhard Mumm, *Die Polemik des Martin Chemnitz gegen das Konzil von Trient* (Naumberg: Lippert and Co., 1905). That Chemnitz was eager to amass testimonies for the Lutheran position is unquestionable, but that he did so as carefully as possible in most instances is also important to recognize. Furthermore, the Reformed and the Roman Catholics were no less cautious than Chemnitz in their zeal for patristic citation when it favored their cause.

balanced with the biblical and spiritual reality that the true church has always existed, and the church has always understood justification by faith, on an intuitive level at least, when she placed herself before the judgment seat of God. Chemnitz's logic is based on the premise that all have been justified by faith under both covenants, therefore all men and women have been justified by faith "everywhere, always and by everyone" who are part of the true church. This must be the case, for the true church is that of the justified.

Finally, neither are the pious and sober meditations of the fathers the final court of appeal. Rather it is the consensus of Scripture just as it was for the Augustana. Thus Chemnitz writes, "Other and more testimonies could indeed be adduced from the prophetic books, but we follow Paul, who in this manner examines and shows the *testimony and consensus of the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets* in Rom. 4. . . . according to the example of Paul in Rom. 4, we shall search *out the consensus of Christ, of the apostles and of the apostolic churches* (italics mine)."²³⁰ Note the shift here from the consensus of the ancient church, the witness of the true and purer antiquity, and the "pious meditations" of the ancients to the consensus of "Christ, the apostles and of the apostolic churches." In fact, this is the only true and most reliable consensus, i.e., that of Scripture.

The *Loci theologici*

In the *Loci theologici* Chemnitz analyses justification even more extensively than in his *Examen*, and he does so with the methodical precision that lectures on the topics afforded. Thus, Scripture, careful analysis of the terminology, its doctrinal development throughout church history, and testimonies from the fathers and medievals are provided.

²³⁰Ibid., 485. Cf. Preuss, 154.

Chemnitz is both sanguine yet cautious as he approaches this topic with regard to the *consensus patrum*. One finds him saying already in the topic on the Law, “*At all times, both in antiquity and now, the doctrine of perfect obedience which the law of God requires has been corrupted by various errors and this corruption has always brought with it great harm to the article of justification (italics mine).*”²³¹ Here we see that Chemnitz considered the doctrine of justification to be part of an organic unity, and not an isolated doctrine that remained intact regardless of other doctrinal formulations.²³² This point is important since an incorrect understanding of the law could bleed over into an improper understanding of justification. Second, one notices that Chemnitz uses the words “at all times” and “always” in this sentence and throughout his *Loci* on many subjects. There are two reasons for this. First, he hopes his readers might be vigilant concerning the doctrine of justification and not take the purity of this article for granted. Second, Chemnitz applies what might be called the antitype to the Vincentian canon. Therefore when he chooses to underscore the unfounded nature of the claims of Trent regarding a particular doctrine he will then use words such as “nowhere,” “never,” “by no one” and “at no time.”

In the beginning of the locus on justification Chemnitz states, “For it was a labor far greater than those of Hercules to rescue the true light from the unspeakably dense darkness and the putrid filth and cesspools of the Antichrist and to restore the apostolic

²³¹Martin Chemnitz, *Loci theologici*, vol. 2, trans. J. A. O. Preus. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), 336.

²³²Many historians of dogma have claimed that justification became nothing more than a subsidiary article, detached from others, as it faded into the background of orthodox Lutheran dogmatics. This is hardly the case with Chemnitz as he states, “Indeed, this locus is the pinnacle and chief bulwark of all teaching and of the Christian religion itself; if this is obscured, adulterated, or subverted, it is impossible to retain purity of doctrine in other loci.” *Ibid.*, 443. Cf. Martini Chemnitii, *Locorum theologicorum*. part 2. (Frankfurt and Wittenberg: D. Tobiae Mevii and Elerdi Schumacheri, 1653) in the Lutheran Heritage Foundation Facsimile Edition. (Chelsea, MI.: Sheridan Books, 2000), 201. [Hereafter known as *Loci*.]

purity to the foundations of Israel. Nor could it have been done if the Holy Spirit had not led the way in kindling the light of the Word.”²³³ Chemnitz speaks here in typical Lutheran fashion as if justification were indeed covered under papal darkness for a great long time, and only with the greatest difficulty wrested from the kingdom of the antichrist and the powers of Satan. But does not such a statement betray novelty and or lack of antiquity on behalf of this doctrine if it has only recently been recovered from the “papal darkness” of the “kingdom of the antichrist”?

It would seem that this is the case—that justification is a recent doctrine or one that has fallen into disuse after the time of the apostles, for Chemnitz repeats his concern: “It is worthwhile to consider what pernicious hallucinations regarding *the article of justification* have occurred *at all periods* because it was not correctly established, on the basis of true foundations, . . .(italics mine)”²³⁴ Nor is it a recent fabrication of late scholasticism for “the scholastics did not set these traps all by themselves, *but even Augustine himself, who in other respects sheds light beyond all others in defining the Gospel, was in error on this point, and thus also on the doctrine of justification he was not in agreement with Scripture* nor consistent with himself (italics mine).”²³⁵ Augustine is then quoted twice where he considers good works to be a part of keeping the Gospel.

Where then is continuity? If Augustine “was not in agreement with Scripture” on this point and “this locus is the pinnacle and chief bulwark of all teaching and of the Christian religion itself,”²³⁶ how is the Lutheran Reformation to be in continuity with the ancient church if the chief locus was not properly understood by Augustine himself?

²³³Ibid., 443. Cf. *Loci*, 201.

²³⁴Ibid., 448. Cf. *Loci*, 205.

²³⁵Ibid., 448. Cf. *Loci*, 205–6.

²³⁶Ibid., 443. Cf. *Loci*, 201.

After quoting Eusebius and Jerome and their confusion of the works of the Law and the Gospel Chemnitz observes, “These men and others could not correctly teach the doctrine of justification; or even if they had some light, they could not be consistent with one another.”²³⁷ Thus Chemnitz begins his discussion of the proper distinction of the Gospel without much sympathy even for the “better fathers.”

When Chemnitz reaches his second chapter the tone is set by the title “All the Saints in all Ages . . . Have Been Saved by One and the Same Gospel.”²³⁸ Chemnitz appears inconsistent here. He has stated that Augustine did not understand the doctrine of justification by faith, yet in contrast to Pelagius²³⁹ and later scholastic writers, the doctrine of grace alone now appears to be the equivalent of the Gospel, and this while conceding that grace alone is not quite the same as justification by grace through faith alone. In this case the scholastics again obscured the Gospel by resorting to a Pelagian view of the merit of works. Yet novelty was not leveled against Augustine and Luther, the apostles themselves struggled with the charge of novelty

. . . as they spread the doctrine of the Gospel throughout the world. . . . The apostles therefore gathered passages . . . *to show that the doctrine of the Gospel was not something new, . . . but that it is one and the same Gospel by which all the saints in all ages, from the beginning of the world, have been justified and saved (italics mine).*²⁴⁰

Chemnitz bases this line of reasoning on Luke 24:27, Acts 7:2ff, Rom. 4:1ff and Hebrews

²³⁷Ibid., 448. Cf. *Loci*, 206.

²³⁸Ibid., 456. Cf. *Loci*, 212.

²³⁹“We have spoken previously about the statement used by many writers, that some people are justified before God and saved only by the observance of the natural law and others by the law of Moses without any knowledge of or faith in the Gospel. Pelagius even used this statement as *the consensus of all antiquity* in order to prejudice people *against the doctrine of grace*. But Augustine rejected, refuted, and condemned this notion as Pelagian by citing by name writers who had spoken previously and by showing that it was in conflict with many *clear and firm testimonies of Scripture concerning the grace of God* (italics mine).” Ibid., 456. Cf. *Loci*, 212.

²⁴⁰Ibid., 456. Cf. *Loci*, 212.

11:3ff. He then states,

If we follow this rationale, we will be able, . . . to examine and observe in the history of *all periods* from the beginning of the world these two points: (1) *The same teaching* and belief concerning righteousness before God and eternal life *has always been in the church* among the saints. (2) In succeeding ages, by the repetition of this same doctrine, the Gospel has little by little been more clearly revealed (italics mine).²⁴¹

Chemnitz then traces the Gospel or the doctrine of justification from Abel to the Flood, from the Flood to Moses, from Moses to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to Christ. In this sense the Gospel “has been little by little more clearly revealed,” i.e., the coming of Christ. And then he concludes, “It is clear that there is one and the same voice and doctrine of the Gospel; by knowledge of it and faith in it the saints *of all ages* have been justified and saved.”²⁴² Yet the question arises: But how has the same teaching always been in the church when Augustine himself did not understand justification? The answer to this question will become clearer as Chemnitz explains how the doctrine of justification was obscured and then retrieved.

Chemnitz comments that those who have written catalogs of heresies are of little help concerning the doctrine of justification “for in their time they adhered to the great darkness which shrouded the doctrine of justification.” Furthermore this is the case for all of church history “if we consider the history of the church *of all ages* from the beginning down to the present (italics mine).”²⁴³ Chemnitz seems to show no regard for the Vincentian Canon here, for the church apparently has never understood this doctrine, although it became clearer and clearer in the periods leading up to the coming of the Christ.

²⁴¹Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 212.

²⁴²Ibid., 459. Cf. *Loci*, 215.

²⁴³Ibid., 462. Cf. *Loci*, 217.

The doctrine of justification, which is tantamount to the light of the Gospel, has always been under attack by Satan. Thus when he “could not extinguish the light of the true teaching on justification through the controversies aroused by heretics, he spread in the church the examples or traditions or unauthentic scriptures under the name of prophets, apostles, or those who had heard the apostles speak, so that corruptions, in conflict with the genuine prophetic and apostolic writings, were thrust upon the churches by false pretenses.”²⁴⁴ Yet Satan alone is not the sole culprit for the obfuscation of the Gospel: the human limitations of the fathers and the controversies of their day also led to them away from the purity of the article.

We must also add this point, that often *even great saints*, disturbed by judgments of human reason and the Law, had wild notions on this article. Particularly the ecclesiastical writers, since they were occupied with controversies concerning other articles of faith, *did not always use the proper care and circumspection in their handling of the doctrine of justification*. On some occasions some very unfortunate statements concerning this article were made, which later on were the cause of the long and gradual process of departing from the purity of this doctrine (italics mine).²⁴⁵

This is Chemnitz’s typical explanation: human reason and the co-mingling of Law and Gospel obscure justification, the writers were involved in other controversies, and spoke improperly and set the stage for the corruption of this doctrine entirely. Yet not all was completely lost from a historical perspective, for Chemnitz notes “when, through whom, and how God corrected the corruptions in this article and for a time rekindled the light of true purity.”²⁴⁶ Thus like Melancthon and Flacius, Chemnitz sees sporadic episodes when the Gospel shone more brilliantly throughout the ages and at

²⁴⁴Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 217. Chemnitz explains why spurious writings were foisted upon the church and the doctrine of justification thereby obscured. This argument will be echoed with greater vehemence by Gerhard and Calov.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 462. *Loci*, 217.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 462. *Loci*, 217.

other times dimmed. This statement demonstrates how similar Chemnitz and Flacius were to Melancthon in that God restored the doctrine of justification to the church periodically before Luther.

Chemnitz spends considerable time discussing controversies regarding justification; recounting the aberrations of the Ebionites, Gnostics, Marcionites and Manicheans. Irenaeus and Tertullian refuted the Gnostics by pointing out the apostolicity, i.e., veracity, of the apostolically founded churches and their agreement with Scripture. Likewise they all rejected the spurious and apocryphal works that would later be foisted upon the church.²⁴⁷ Chemnitz then cites many examples from *The Shepherd of Hermas* and Pseudo-Clement, as well as Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* to demonstrate clear statements from such writings that militate against justification by faith by emphasizing the Law and the fulfillment of good works as being necessary for salvation. In so doing, Chemnitz manifests his critical reverence with a telling statement regarding both his esteem and reason for using the fathers in his own works.

*But it is not our purpose to be like Ham, who uncovered his father's shame. Thus we shall not deal with the lapses of those by whose labors we have been aided and whose gray hairs we ought to honor, but we will refer to them only as warnings so that we may be cautioned by their examples to be more careful and diligent in preserving the purity of this doctrine, so that we never give occasion to anyone to follow in these footsteps. Therefore we shall only call attention to the chief reasons for these *unfelicitous statements among the ancient writers regarding the doctrine of justification* (italics mine).²⁴⁸*

Thus Chemnitz exhibits critical reverence here, not desiring to expose the fathers in a shameful way but still recognizing that even the fathers due to their times, limitations, and controversies did not speak properly on this article. This should serve as an example

²⁴⁷In this, too, there is consensus for "the judgment of the earlier and purer and true church, these writings had always been rejected and placed among the apocrypha." *Ibid.*, 468. *Loci*, 223.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 470. *Loci*, 224.

to others that they might speak more properly on this doctrine to preserve its purity and protect it from misrepresentation.

Chemnitz has another purpose in discussing the “infelicitous” statements of the fathers: to wrest them from the grasp of his opponents who would argue that justification has always been taught in their favor. Does Chemnitz, however, fall into a trap here? On the one hand he states this article has never been understood in the church, even by Augustine. And on the other he would have us understand here that the fathers spoke improperly due to their context but not intent, as if they were in material agreement with the reformers and only in formal agreement with Roman opponents.²⁴⁹ Chemnitz then outlines seven ways by which the fathers misrepresented the doctrine of justification and which the Romanists now misrepresent the article by quoting the fathers out of context. (1) “They departed from the proper, evangelical, and apostolic (as I may say) meaning of the terms through which the Holy Spirit revealed the doctrine of this locus in Scripture, terms such as ‘to justify,’ ‘righteousness,’ ‘righteous,’ and ‘grace,’ etc.”²⁵⁰ (2) “They very often understood the term ‘faith’ as only historical knowledge and assent to what was contained in sacred Scripture.”²⁵¹ (3) The confusion of Law and Gospel was widespread in the church, and even if we speak charitably, the statements are very unfortunate. They did not distinguish accurately enough as to what kind of righteousness the Law was describing, . . . or what the righteousness of faith before God is, and why we

²⁴⁹ “This will serve as a warning to us and will be beneficial for the easier and more correct demonstration of the sources of the explanations of those statements which the papists, citing the ancients, are accustomed to use against the doctrine of our churches.” *Ibid.*, 470. Cf. *Loci*, 224.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 470; Cf. *Loci*, 224.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* Cf. *Loci*, 225.

must have another kind of righteousness than that of the Law.”²⁵² (4) They did not place the doctrine of good works in its place in the category of the fruits of faith, but often mixed it in with the article of justification itself. . . . [T]herefore, in order to repress this sense of security and to arouse and encourage more ardent and effective zeal for good works (so it seemed to them), they often bent the article of justification in the direction of works and merits—burying Christ and His benefits.”²⁵³ (5) “They made public spectacles out of satisfaction for sins, which were performed with great severity in the church in order to arouse a true recognition of sin and hatred for it . . . These promoted and confirmed the idea of merit and righteousness by works.”²⁵⁴ (6) “When they were first disputing with the gentiles, lest the doctrine of the church seem even more unpalatable to them, they bent it in the direction of philosophical disputations.”²⁵⁵ (7) “An excessive amount of admiration for outward discipline and for natural human powers in the unregenerate brought great darkness over this article.”²⁵⁶ Chemnitz then quotes the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria: “We are saved by grace, but not without good works. For we cannot achieve the perfection of good without the free choice of our mind. For it is necessary, since we are prone toward this by nature, to demonstrate a zeal for the good.”²⁵⁷

²⁵²Ibid., 470. Cf. *Loci*, 225.

²⁵³Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 225.

²⁵⁴Ibid., 471. Cf. *Loci*, 225.

²⁵⁵Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 225.

²⁵⁶Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 226.

²⁵⁷Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 226.

From this Chemnitz concludes, “In short, Pelagianism was built out of many unfortunate statements of this kind.”²⁵⁸ Furthermore, “To these categories, I believe, can be referred all the statements the papists are accustomed to cite from the fathers in opposition to justification by grace. And the explanations can easily be taken from these reminders.”²⁵⁹ Thus Chemnitz contextualizes and disproves “papalist” claims for the consensus of the fathers on this chief article for the Pelagian-sounding statements of the fathers must be understood in their context. Moreover, even when the fathers did speak excessively of the merit of works, in this the fathers are not to be emulated but rather ignored respectfully in the same way Shem covered his father’s shame.

Having described the long descent down into the depths of Pelagianism, Chemnitz reminds his readers that “God *in all periods* has raised up witnesses who testified against these errors and led the church away from the pharisaic and philosophical swamps to the fountains of Israel, so that to the doctrine of this locus, based on prophetic and apostolic foundations, its purity has been restored uncorrupted, as it has been divinely revealed (*italics mine*).”²⁶⁰ Just as the light of the Gospel was all but extinct, enter Pelagius. God allowed this arch-heretic to appear “to open the sleepy eyes of the doctors of the church” so that they might look more carefully into the writings of Paul. Thus Augustine, Ambrose, and even Jerome taught more correctly concerning this locus and even retracted many incorrect sayings they had previously made. “Thus in an indirect way God again restored some light to the doctrine of the free remission of sins and other

²⁵⁸Ibid., 471. Cf. *Loci*, 226.

²⁵⁹Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 226.

²⁶⁰Ibid., 471–72. Cf. *Loci*, 226.

articles which otherwise would have been completely lost in the progress of time.”²⁶¹

Although Chemnitz conflates the lives of Origen and Ambrose with those of Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom, he nevertheless is correct in recognizing the turmoil Pelagius and later Julian of Eclanum caused in the West. Furthermore, in considering the Pelagian controversy a dress rehearsal for the Reformation Chemnitz remains true to Melancthon’s view of church history. That he does not consider Augustine to be the only father who spoke “better” after Pelagius reflects the view that God has continually raised up voices to the truth throughout church history and not solely Luther and Augustine before him.

Yet Chemnitz considers it even more “noteworthy” how the monks of the Middle Ages learned about justifying grace.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that sometimes even monks who had preached at great length on merits and the righteousness of works *learned the correct understanding of the article of justification*, not in their idle contemplations, their sharp disputations, or their rhetorical declamations, but in serious trials, *when the conscience was pressed down by a true sense of sin and the wrath of God*, as if it had been dragged before His tribunal. For there, as the conscience worriedly looks around and wonders how it can escape the judgment of damnation and stand in the sight of God, it learns to understand Paul’s statement in Rom. 3:28 (italics mine).²⁶²

Chemnitz here speaks as he does in the *Examen*: the monks learned best as they laid their consciences bare before the throne of God.

Thus *Anselm and Bonaventura speak entirely differently regarding the article of justification in their disputations than they do in their meditations*. There are some lovely statements in the meditations of Augustine and Anselm and in the *Soliloquy* of Bonaventura. Bernard also speaks far more fittingly than the others about the article of *justification*, because he is not carrying some idle debate but is presenting his conscience before the judgment of God as if it were to state its case, and *from this come the most beautiful thoughts in Bernard’s writings*. There is also in

²⁶¹Ibid., 472. Cf. *Loci*, 227.

²⁶²Ibid., 473. Cf. *Loci*, 227.

existence a little book which sometimes goes under the title of *Contemplations of an Uneducated Man*, . . .²⁶³

Chemnitz makes an experiential argument for the Medievals: they believed better than they spoke. Whereas there was some light amongst the church fathers during the Pelagian dispute, Chemnitz appears to lend greater weight to the pious meditations of Bernard and other medieval fathers of the church. Yet Bernard of Clairvaux lived almost five hundred years before Luther, although they share considerable similarities. Thus the light of the Gospel was again obscured as “Christ and His benefits had been quite buried, the impudent trafficking in Masses, indulgences,” and other abuses were rampant until Luther “uncovered these impostures and showed the true fountains of comfort.”²⁶⁴

At first sight it appears as if Luther is the first to present justification correctly, since Chemnitz has already said that none of the fathers spoke correctly about the article of justification. Yet the purpose of Chemnitz’s discussion of the historical vicissitudes of this locus is to counteract the Roman claim that all the fathers are on their side. Therefore Chemnitz expends a good deal of effort placing the “infelicitous” and exaggerated statements of the fathers in their context in order to demonstrate that what the papal supporters claim as their own is often the Pelagian standpoint, and that after Pelagius appeared the fathers spoke more carefully and in accordance with Pauline, i.e., Lutheran doctrine. The same is true for the Medievals. Although their words and works were buried under academic disputations and the reign of the Papacy with its “trafficking in indulgences,” even then there were those such as Anselm, Bonaventura and Bernard who spoke beautifully concerning the free gift of grace when these same men underwent

²⁶³Ibid., 473. Cf. *Loci*, 227.

²⁶⁴Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 227.

pangs of conscience similar to those of Luther. Thus Chemnitz is able to claim continuity for the article of justification based on the “better writings” of the fathers and the “pious meditations” of the Medievals. In this way justification does not claim the consensus of “everyone, always, and everywhere” in a formal sense, but it does have the material consensus of every true saint in all places and times since all have been saved and justified in the same way in both the Old and New Covenants.

Nevertheless, it is still of note that Chemnitz does not attempt at this stage to present a greater amount of evidence for justification by faith from the anti-Pelagian works of Augustine and other fathers such as Ambrose who certainly spoke strongly concerning the free gift of grace in many of their writings and retractions. Chemnitz is content to make note of this fact without bothering to cite many examples or to cite them extensively. This should seem odd since even the Augsburg Confession and the Apology quote the most favorable statements of the fathers. The key here is probably the *Oratio* at the beginning of the *Loci theologici* that warns the reader to read the fathers carefully even as it points out that most have made mistakes and some are more profitably read than others.

The third chapter, “The Vocabulary of Justification,” turns out to be one of the most interesting for our purposes. Chemnitz first asserts the church has produced no exegetical novelty concerning this doctrine but “has scrutinized, learned, and accepted the things taught and revealed by the divine voice.”²⁶⁵ Second, Chemnitz attributes much to the grammatical-historical meaning of the text: “For when the correct terminology was lost, immediately the light of the purer teaching was also extinguished; and when in our time

²⁶⁵Ibid., 475. Cf. *Loci*, 229.

the correct grammatical meaning of the words in this locus was restored, the purity of the doctrine was also restored.”²⁶⁶ Chemnitz then cites several reasons. First, “*In the entire history of the church* it can be observed how much damage the contempt for and ignorance of the correct terminology has done to the church in the case of this article. *In all periods* the light of sound doctrine concerning justification has first been weakened, later increasingly obscured, and finally almost lost and extinguished—chiefly because there was a departure from the genuine meaning of the words of this locus.”²⁶⁷

Augustine, for instance, was “often convinced by the testimony of Paul that the term ‘to justify’ is interpreted with reference to the remission of sins. But later in his life, deceived by the similarity of the words ‘to sanctify’ and ‘to justify,’ he shifted the emphasis in the direction of sanctification”²⁶⁸ since it fit his purposes well in his dispute with the Pelagians. Therefore in his *De spiritu et littera* where Paul states in Romans 3:24, “Being justified freely by His grace,” he argues that “grace may restore the will, and the will having been restored, may fulfill the Law.” Augustine further confuses the matter by speaking of faith enabling one to receive the Holy Spirit and thereby love in conjunction with faith works in such a way that those who are indeed righteous act with such a love that works itself out through faith. Peter Lombard, following Augustine, states, “Therefore the death of Christ justifies us in the sense that through it love is aroused in our hearts.”²⁶⁹ Aquinas is then cited and Chemnitz shows how much further removed he is from the pauline meaning of justification.

²⁶⁶Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 229.

²⁶⁷Ibid., 475.

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹Ibid.

When it comes to a clear definition of terms, Chemnitz is certain *dikaioo* is a forensic term and concludes, “Therefore it is clear among the Greeks this was simply a forensic or legal term.”²⁷⁰ Linguistically the Roman theologians are incorrect to argue that *dikaioo* signifies an infusion of righteousness, for Cicero and other Latin writers never used the word *justificare* in the sense given it by the scholastics, and “in the time of Augustine it seems” they understood the word also in accordance with its biblical meaning.

After discussing at length the ramifications of the term, he then repeats “how the fathers in disputing this matter often spoke inadequately about justification.”²⁷¹ Then Chemnitz once again affirms, “But in their devotional writings, when they were looking at the picture of the divine judgment or the divine judicial process, *they handled the doctrine of this article very well* (italics mine).”²⁷² Chemnitz then cites Bernard of Clairvaux and Jean de Gerson as good examples of how justification should be understood. The key is to place oneself before the tribunal of God, but there is another key for Chemnitz: “All these points so beautifully illustrating the doctrine of justification come from the correct linguistic understanding of the word ‘justification.’”²⁷³ The correct linguistic understanding, however, eliminates any scholastic notion of an infused righteousness, and herein lies the felicitous inconsistency for Chemnitz that absolves the fathers and allows him to see them as speaking correctly of justification. He says, “Having established the foundations on the basis of Scripture, it is useful for us now to add this observation, that the ancient writers, although they often used the word

²⁷⁰Ibid., 477. Cf. *Loci*, 230.

²⁷¹Ibid., 482. Cf. *Loci*, 235.

²⁷²Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 235.

²⁷³Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 235.

‘justification’ in the way we have said above [as an infusion of good qualities], yet, convinced by the clear testimonies of Paul, they understood and knew this true and genuine meaning of the word which we have shown thus far.”²⁷⁴ Chemnitz then quotes Ambrose, Augustine, Hilary, Cyril, Oecumenius, the Gloss, and Gregory the Great to demonstrate that the fathers when they paid closer attention to the Pauline terms spoke of being justified freely by faith alone.²⁷⁵

In the next section Chemnitz treats the word “faith,” yet the reader notices that this part was probably constructed separately since there is considerable repetition of what has been said before, although he adds new material concerning the fathers. Chemnitz continues following the corruptions of the early church by discussing *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement of Alexandria, and Thomas Aquinas. He then reviews how the word “faith” was misused even by Augustine thus causing confusion for later generations.

To put this matter in a nutshell, there are numerous errors regarding the word “faith.” . . . Some look only at the quality of the faith and how strong it is, and because it is imperfect and weak, they think something must be added to faith, . . . From this comes the notion of *fides informis* [faith without love; dead faith] and the *fides formata* [faith with love and works]. Others err in regard to the object of faith, because they make as the object of justifying faith the whole of Scripture including the precepts of the promises and threats of the Law. Some rave in that they confuse the effects or activities of faith, by which it is shown to be true and living, with the object or formal cause because of which faith justifies. Thus Augustine says that to believe in God is to love by believing, and to go to God by loving. He has many statements like this.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 235.

²⁷⁵“To summarize, when we are criticized for saying in this dogma that a person is *justified by faith*, we are only being criticized for saying that we receive reconciliation for the sake of the Son of God and not because of our worthiness. . . . It is absolutely certain that these statements are the very voice of the Gospel and the perpetual consensus of the true church. . . . Concerning this entire matter I appeal to the consensus of the church, that is, of the skilled and pious. I judge that the testimony of that church carries the greatest weight (italics mine).” This is Melancthon’s text—his understanding of consensus is explained by himself—the true equals the pure equals the skilled and pious. Ibid., 489. Cf. *Loci*, 241.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 491. Cf. *Loci*, 241.

Chemnitz then emphasizes how important it is to maintain a correct notion of justifying faith as one of trust and assent. Thus after a lengthy discussion of this matter he desires to “confirm the true and correct meaning of justifying faith” by having “before us some of the *testimonies from antiquity as supporting statements*, both in order that our consciences may be strengthened by their agreement with the correct meaning as well as that the clamors of the papists may be put to silence, when they say that *this is a new understanding of faith*, a special teaching (as they call it) *without any corroboration from antiquity* (italics mine).”²⁷⁷ Therefore the ancients do not establish an article of faith. They confirm it and strengthen our consciences. Second, the “papists do cite many differing statements from the ancients” and thereby present an imposing array of contrary testimonies, but they fail to distinguish properly what the fathers meant in context and thus their imposing array of citations are but a mirage. Chemnitz, however, does place the fathers’ statements about justification in context:

But the clear and simple determination of *the position of the ancients* can be seen from this distinction: *at times they speak concerning general historical knowledge and assent* such as is found even in the ungodly; *at times they speak about the external profession of faith* which can also be found in hypocrites; at times they describe faith by the fruits or consequent effects by which it is proved to be true and living. For often the topic under discussion is the point that the *Spirit of renewal is received*, and from Him arise truly good works. Therefore a diversity of ideas regarding the purpose of faith is not surprising. *The fathers spoke differently in different situations in regard to faith* (italics mine).²⁷⁸

Chemnitz cites three different types of faith as well as when the “Spirit of renewal is received,” so one should not be surprised by “a diversity of ideas regarding the purpose of faith.” He thus places the fathers’ comments in context, something the papists fail to do. “These points which we have cited should be discussed in their *proper context*, but

²⁷⁷Ibid., 498. Cf. *Loci*, 248.

²⁷⁸Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 248–49.

they do not properly pertain to the genuine teaching regarding justifying faith (italics mine).”²⁷⁹ As stated, one might be surprised that Chemnitz does not seek to present more statements concerning justification from the fathers since they are indeed to be found. Yet he chooses caution in discussing this locus by noting the different types of faith and the distinctions the fathers used rather than by blurring the issue with an impressive array of citations that may appear to support the Lutheran position but fail to do so upon closer inspection. Chemnitz says, “Therefore we must be selective in citing statements from the ancients, so that those statements are used which properly pertain to the subject at hand. That is to say, (1) Are they clearly describing that object which in true contrition faith lays hold on and looks to, by which it governs and sustains itself? (2) How does faith lay hold on this objective and apply it to itself, so that it thereby receives remission of sins and life eternal? From the many statements I shall cite only a few.”²⁸⁰ This last statement explains why Chemnitz is highly selective of the passages he chooses to cite to strengthen his readers’ consciences.

Chemnitz then cites passages from Cyprian, Origen, Ambrose, Augustine, and Hesychius where they speak clearly concerning a “freely” justifying faith without regard to works of any kind. Yet after these passages that vindicate the Lutheran understanding of justifying faith, Chemnitz again resorts to his favored position regarding the fathers and justification. “In the sixth place, this warning should be added: The true meaning of justifying faith is understood best of all in serious exertions of repentance, as the meditations of the ancients show.”²⁸¹ Why does Chemnitz maintain this claim? “The

²⁷⁹Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 249.

²⁸⁰Ibid., 498–99. Cf. *Loci*, 249.

²⁸¹Ibid., 499. Cf. *Loci*, 249.

diversity of opinions arises mostly from this, that *without the struggle of temptation, idle and secure disputations*, joined with the *philosophical opinions of human reason*, have disturbed the minds of men. But this exertion, illustrating the doctrine of faith more than all commentaries, is undertaken chiefly in two ways—either the conscience places itself before the tribunal of God . . . or it finds itself under cross and temptation, in petition and expectation, both spiritual and corporeal. . . . (italics mine)²⁸²

Thus although there are many “beautiful statements” of the fathers concerning justifying faith in their commentaries they pale in comparison to their most sober thoughts on the subject as they undergo tribulations afflicting the conscience. This viewpoint would seem to reflect well Chemnitz’s estimate of Luther’s *Anfechtungen*, although Luther is never mentioned in these passages. Chemnitz would have been aware of Luther’s breakthrough and insight into justifying faith as he underwent pangs of conscience before the tribunal of God. This also explains Chemnitz’s partial disdain for many of the fathers’ statements concerning justification: human reason, idle disputations, and philosophical opinions obscure what the naked conscience perceives clearly, that one is justified by faith alone before a righteous God.

Chemnitz then discusses the definition of justifying faith, faith as a “sure confidence,” the word “grace,” the term “freely,” the word “imputation,” and the works of the Law. Of particular interest, however, is his discussion of the *particulae exclusivae*. Chemnitz begins the chapter on the term *sola* with the lapidary statement:

We find that these exclusive particles clearly have their place in Scripture. Thereafter *all antiquity* used the expression, ‘*We are justified by faith alone*,’ and it has been received by frequent use in our churches. It has also been viciously

²⁸²Ibid., 499. Cf. *Loci*, 249.

attacked by our adversaries on the pretext that Scripture does not have in so many letters and syllables the word *sola*, ‘alone.’²⁸³

This appears to be a surprising comment considering how often Chemnitz criticizes the fathers’ poor understanding of the doctrine of justification in many instances, yet in the preceding introductory chapter Augustine accordingly understood “that the particle ‘except through faith’ is exclusive. And Augustine clearly has borrowed this expression when he says, ‘No matter how great the righteousness of the saints was, yet it did not save them, but only the blood of the Mediator.’”²⁸⁴

In the same chapter Chemnitz makes another astonishing claim:

If we are asked why we fight so hard over the word *sola* and are not content rather with those exclusive terms found in Scripture, we reply that we have true and important reasons. *The church in all ages* has freely used its own modes of speaking, so that the substance of the matter can be clearly set forth, explained, defended, and retained in the face of the various traps of the adversaries. So also in the article of justification we give first place to the exclusive particles of Paul (italics mine).²⁸⁵

Here Chemnitz argues that the church has spoken differently throughout her history to convey biblical truths in a manner that will be understood by her adherents. Thus in these times of the Lutheran reformation there is no cause for Roman adversaries to accuse the Lutherans of novelty concerning the word *sola* since Paul himself expressly emphasizes the sense of this word in the many expressions he uses. Chemnitz notes how the Roman Church during the Interim avoided the words “faith alone” at all costs “as if it were a dangerous reef” though it felt comfortable using such expressions as by “grace alone.” This it is able to do since the word “grace” is laden with so much scholastic theology that works-righteousness might creep in through the back door. Chemnitz then states

²⁸³Ibid., 540. Cf. *Loci*, 283.

²⁸⁴Ibid., 539. Cf. *Loci*, 283.

²⁸⁵Ibid., 540. Cf. *Loci*, 283–84.

. . . the point at issue . . . can best be understood by means of the question: Are we justified by faith alone? In this way the traps of the adversaries can be detected, and Paul's statement, in opposition to all the tricks and corruptions, can be clearly and meaningfully set forth. Therefore it is right and necessary that our churches use, defend, and retain this exclusionary expression.²⁸⁶

Chemnitz sees this as following in the footsteps of the ancient church: "In doing so, they are acting in accordance with the example of the ancient church, which in a similar situation, against the traps and corruptions of the adversaries, always used its liberty in modes of speaking, to the edification of the people."²⁸⁷ Furthermore, "The expression 'by faith alone' in the article of justification was not dreamed up as something new and for the first time by our theologians, but *it was always used in the complete consensus of all antiquity* in connection with this article, as examples from the fathers testify (italics mine)."²⁸⁸ How does Chemnitz justify this claim? From his sources: "These statements have been gathered from the writings of Robert Barnes, Aepinus, Bullinger, and Otto Corber."²⁸⁹

In fact, "Ambrose repeats this exclusion 15 times" as he discusses Romans and "Origen on Romans 3, in one place repeats it seven times."²⁹⁰ Basil states one is justified "only by faith in Christ" while Hilary says "faith alone justifies," and Chrysostom: "faith

²⁸⁶Ibid., 541. Cf. *Loci*, 284.

²⁸⁷Ibid., 541. Cf. *Loci*, 284.

²⁸⁸Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 284. Chemnitz makes a similar claim in the *Examen* concerning the use of the exclusive particle *sola*: "And because this particle *has at all times always* been employed in the church in the article of justification, as can be shown by testimonies from the writings *of almost all the fathers*, it has become the custom in our churches when we want to embrace briefly all the exclusives of Paul, that we say: We are justified solely by the grace of God, solely by faith, solely by the imputation of the righteousness of the only Mediator Christ." *Examination*, vol. 1, 584. Cf. Preuss, 189. Here Chemnitz is parroting the Vincentian canon, and boldly declaring that the majority view of the ancients upholds the Reformation stance on justification by faith alone.

²⁸⁹Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 284.

²⁹⁰Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 285.

alone saved him.”²⁹¹ Gennadius, Bernard, Haymo, Bonaventura, Lyra, and the Ordinary gloss all make similar statements that one is justified by faith alone. In light of so much evidence, “we can correctly say with Erasmus: ‘This word *sola*, which has been attacked with so much noise in the era of Luther, *was reverently heard and read among the fathers* (italics mine).” The papal party complains that Augustine does not use this expression, yet Chemnitz finds three instances where he uses the expression “by faith alone,” and Irenaeus and Cyril use expressions to the same effect. Chemnitz thus concludes:

But even though we have omitted a rather long list of such passages, it is useful to show that *the ancients definitely used the particle sola in the same way we do in our churches*. The papists, who in the early stages of the controversy clamored that this statement, ‘*We are justified by faith alone,*’ *was a new and entirely unheard-of voice in the church, now*, because they see that *in all periods* this statement has sounded forth in the church, seek all kinds of sophistic escape hatches whereby they may elude the statements of the ancients and snatch away the correct meaning from the church. They are asserting that the ancients did indeed use the term *sola*, yet it was in a far different way and with a different meaning than we do (italics mine).²⁹²

Nevertheless, Chemnitz must contend with arguments from Rome’s side concerning how the fathers actually intended the exclusive particle *sola* to be understood.

Afterwards he concedes this: “It obviously cannot be denied that there are different meanings among the ancient fathers. But yet I shall demonstrate, in opposition to these sophistries, that the ancients clearly did teach the position of our churches regarding the particle *sola*.”²⁹³

Chemnitz remains undeterred as he refutes the rebuttals of the adversaries concerning the vital exclusive particle *sola* and then produces four quotes from Ambrose,

²⁹¹Ibid. Cf. *Loci*, 285.

²⁹²Ibid., 542. Cf. *Loci*, 285–86.

²⁹³Ibid., 543. Cf. *Loci*, 286. The Latin has “consensus” where J. A. O. Preus has “agreement.” “*Habemus igitur consensum veteris Ecclesiae, non tantum quod ad verba, sed quod in eandem plane sententiam intellexerint, et explicarint particulam (Sola) sicut in nostris Ecclesiis fit* (italics mine).” *Loci*, 286.

one from Hesychius, and Chrysostom, then five quotes from Origen, and a final quote from Ambrose. Chemnitz then concludes, “So *we have agreement with the ancient church*, not only with regard to the words but also in the fact that they understood and explained the word in quite the same way that we do in our churches (italics mine).”²⁹⁴

Chemnitz then turns to the testimonies of Scripture to settle the debate once and for all. After producing sufficient proof from Scripture he concludes:

Never at any period did Scripture teach, nor did *the true church* use any other method of justification before God unto life everlasting . . . but from the beginning (after the Fall) in the Old Testament, and up to the end of the world in the New Testament, there *has always been one and the same way of justification* before God unto life eternal—the one we have set forth. It is a clear confirmation of the doctrine of justification that it has *the testimony of all the books of Holy Scripture and the consensus of all the saints from the beginning of the world*. It is truly, rightly, and properly called a catholic or universal doctrine (italics mine).²⁹⁵

Here Chemnitz after elaborating on the scriptural testimony and the misunderstanding of Rome, and after providing sufficient quotes from the fathers and Scripture concerning the exclusive particle, asserts that all saints of all times were justified in the same manner and that this doctrine has “the consensus of all saints from the beginning of the world.” Furthermore, it is a “catholic and universal doctrine,” for there is no other means by which one is justified before God. Thus, in the end, Chemnitz’s notion of consensus is consensus with Scripture as the final court of appeal. The fathers in their better moments

²⁹⁴Ibid., 544. Cf. *Loci*, 286

²⁹⁵Ibid., 556. Cf. *Loci*, 297–98. Chemnitz states a bit later, “This confirmation, which he has established from *the consensus of all of Scripture*, Stephen uses in his counterargument to the Jews in Acts 7 (italics mine).” Note here how consensus of Scripture is a determinative guide to right doctrine in all *sedes doctrinae*, and not just justification. True consensus is consensus with Scripture ultimately.

and writings recognized how one is truly justified before God and this makes them the better doctors of the church.

This is how Chemnitz is able to make critical use of the fathers, acknowledge their poor understanding of justification at times, frankly admit that Augustine erred in many of his dogmatic writings, and then delineate the various ways in which the fathers understood justification. At first sight it appears that Chemnitz is unable and certainly unwilling to claim victory for the Reformation stance. Yet after clarifying how Rome misuses the fathers, he places them in context and ultimately appeals to the consensus of Scripture. Thus Chemnitz may indeed claim that this doctrine has been believed “always, everywhere, and by everyone” if they were members of the true church that bears witness to the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Chemnitz’s appeal to the consensus of the ancient church is a decisive aspect of his theological argumentation. It is most effective in his polemical *Examination of the Council of Trent* as he repeatedly points out that the Tridentine position smacks of medieval scholastic innovation. By applying the criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent to the doctrinal decrees of Trent he succeeds in placing Rome on the defensive as he asks, for instance, where in antiquity is the doctrine of transubstantiation to be found? Chemnitz also forcefully argues for the christological consensus of the ancient church in *The Two Natures in Christ*. While constructing a positive theology based on the hypostatic union and the three genera of the communication of attributes, Chemnitz confidently claims to have the witness of all antiquity on his side. Chemnitz appears to have no doubt that the ecumenical councils, Nicea and Chalcedon in particular, and the

vast majority of orthodox fathers such as Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus are on his side of the christological debate. The situation changes, however, as Chemnitz discusses the locus of justification by faith in the *Loci theologici*. Though Chemnitz does cite fathers in favor of the Lutheran position he is cautious in his selection of patristic testimonies. Chemnitz concedes that even Augustine did not speak properly on this subject, and bases his chief argument for a consensual understanding of justification by faith on the pious meditations of the ancient and medieval church. Thus there is no formal consensus, but of necessity there must still be a material consensus since the church is solely comprised of those who are justified by faith. This argument seems to beg the question and would hardly convince his papal adversaries, yet it demonstrates how earnestly Chemnitz desired to maintain the consensus of the ancient church. Consensus is further weakened in the *Loci theologici* as Chemnitz concedes that the fathers spoke very poorly at times and that they were awakened from their slumber by the advent of Pelagius. The *consensus patrum* and the criteria of the Vincentian Canon are not strictly applied to Chemnitz's own theology, the exceptions being his christology and understanding of the Lord's Supper.

The degree to which Chemnitz's argument for consensus affected his theology materially is difficult to ascertain. It was not mere window dressing or rhetoric, but it certainly falls short of the rigid implementation of Vincent's criteria and the *consensus quinquesaecularis* by such men as Johannes Gropper, Georg Cassander, and Georg Calixt. Seeking to be true to the Lutheran Reformation and desiring to maintain the consensus of the ancient church Chemnitz sought a middle way by qualifying the ancient consensus with Melancthon's notion of a "true and purer antiquity." This allowed

Chemnitz to continue to argue for the *consensus patrum* while filtering the writings of the fathers through the lens of Holy Scripture. Chemnitz was not a “traditionalist” in the strict sense of the word because the Scripture principle always functioned as the ultimate norm in Chemnitz’s writings.

Melanchthon and Chemnitz were not alone in their concern to remain within the consensus of the ancient church. This desire and compulsion was shared by their Lutheran Orthodox successors in the following century. Innovation and novelty still smacked of heresy, and was to be avoided at all costs. Thus orthodox Lutheran theologians still felt compelled to claim that their doctrine was in agreement with the ancient church as they compiled extensive patristic quotations to justify their positions. As we shall see they did this even after they had dismissed Vincent’s criteria as untenable, and had shattered any possibility that the consensus of the first five hundred years might operate as a theological principle.

Kenneth Appold notes that as orthodox Lutheran theologians frequently called upon consensus in their Wittenberg disputations, they inadvertently touched upon such fundamental theological concepts of Roman Catholicism as the *consensus patrum* and the *consensus theologicorum*. The formal difference between Roman Catholics and Lutheran Orthodoxy lies in the latter’s epistemological estimation of the consensus. The material difference shows itself in the selection of the authorities chosen. Considered dogmatically the consensus of the ancient church could never function as an independent theological source apart from or next to Scripture. Consensus plays a secondary role as it confirms Scriptural truths. In this sense it is not far removed from the role of the ecumenical creeds in Lutheran Orthodoxy. Yet unlike the ecumenical creeds the

orthodox Lutherans had fewer detailed thoughts about the exact epistemological and theoretical role of consensus in their dogmatic theology. Therefore it is easy for one to get the impression that the theologians of Wittenberg in the seventeenth century lackadaisically applied such concepts as the *consensus doctorum* in their writings and theological disputations.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶Cf. Kenneth Appold, *Orthodoxie und Konsensbildung. Das theologische Disputationswesen an der Universität Wittenberg zwischen 1570 und 1710* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 134.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESPONDING TO THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION'S REASSERTION OF CONSENSUS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SYNCRETISM: CONSENSUS AND CATHOLICITY AFTER CHEMNITZ

At Augsburg in 1530 those supporting Luther's reforms argued strongly that they were still very much in the church catholic. Their Augsburg Confession, they said, represented teachings that were biblical and that also fell within the consensus of the church. Luther, as we have seen, was not convinced of this and did not feel compelled to dwell overly much on the issue of consensus. Others in that first wave or generation, notably Philipp Melancthon, focused more on the past, mindful of the ecclesiastical importance of their place within the church yet not under Rome—at least not Rome given its argument for and use of tradition and its claim for authority. Had they been able to have Vincent of Lerins there at Augsburg and looking on as the Reformation unfolded, the Reformers would not necessarily have had an ally, but then neither would Rome. But they did have a qualified version of the consensus of antiquity on their side. As it was, the Vincentian Canon would not do as a primary building block and certainly not as the cornerstone, but rather was at times a buttress supporting the evangelical Reformation's use of Scripture for their theology, a theology that was catholic as the fathers would attest.

As the Lutherans moved away from that first generation, the issue of catholicity and consensus did not go away. In fact, in some respects the importance intensified. The

1555 Peace of Augsburg may have given the Lutherans legal standing within the Holy Roman Empire, but it hardly settled the theological battling. The Roman Church, before and after that political peace, was busy at the Council of Trent, intent on claiming the theological and historical high ground—and the two really merged on the matters of consensus and catholicity. So Rome continued its arguments that had been made for several decades, and even redoubled its efforts at Trent to lay claim to the unanimous consensus of the fathers. The Vincentian Canon was foremost in the minds of the Tridentine theologians as they sought to refute Lutheran “innovations” with the timeless criteria of universality, antiquity and consent. Lacking a heightened sense of history and a modern view of doctrinal development, the theologians of Trent confidently proclaimed that their decrees maintained the unanimous consensus of the fathers. The claim to the consensus of the fathers demanded a response, and the counter argument came in both depth and detail from the pen of Martin Chemnitz. Rome’s arguments forced Chemnitz to argue even more strongly than his predecessors that the consensus of the fathers did in fact favor the Lutheran position, and not that of Trent. In fact, Chemnitz demonstrated how recent many of the Roman doctrines were, and thereby showed that the decrees of the Council of Trent did not meet the Vincentian Canon’s criterion of antiquity.

Despite Chemnitz’s exhaustive handling of consensus and catholicity, the issues remained on the table. Others in his wake continued to write on those concepts and their relationship to evangelical theology. This was due in large part to the efforts of post-Tridentine theologians such as Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, who vigorously insisted that the decrees of Trent did indeed have the unanimous consensus of the fathers. Lutheran theologians after Chemnitz were forced to contend not only with Trent but with

Bellarmino's able attack on Chemnitz's analysis of consensus and tradition. Thus Aegidius Hunnius and Johann Gerhard, significant representatives of Lutheran Orthodoxy, were compelled to address Bellarmine's famous *Controversies*.

A further challenge to Lutheran Orthodoxy came from within as the non-confessional Lutheran and irenic ecumenist Georg Calixt sought to reunify Christendom on the basis of the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the first five hundred years. Calixt's ecumenical efforts threatened confessional Lutheran identity and the distinctives of Lutheran theology that had been forged over the past one hundred years. This called for a further evaluation of the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the fathers on the part of leading orthodox Lutheran theologians such as Abraham Calov, Johann Conrad Dannhauer and Johann Andreas Quenstedt. Thus the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus patrum* remained issues of central importance until the end of the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy. It is to these representative theologians that we now turn.

The *dramatis personae* of Lutheran Orthodoxy

Robert D. Preus divides Lutheran Orthodoxy into three periods. First comes "the golden age of orthodoxy" that began with the acceptance of the Formula of Concord in 1580 and which stretched into the second decade of the 1600s. "The period is marked by a confident, aggressive spirit and a creative approach to theological issues. Dogmatics—if one can speak of dogmatics at this early date—was constructed according to the pattern of Melancthon's *Loci Communes* and was in only a rudimentary phase of development."¹ "High orthodoxy" then begins in the second decade of the 1600s and

¹Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism. A Study of Theological Prolegomena*. vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 45.

lasts until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648. In this period, “polemics is more dispassionate and ordered and possibly more effective. The Lutheran doctrinal position is increasingly clarified relative to Romanism, Calvinism, and other antitheses, and a more noticeable unity of doctrine is apparent.”² Neo-Scholasticism also begins to take root in Lutheran dogmatics at this time. Third, “the Silver age of orthodoxy,” this began at the end of the Thirty Years War and lasted until the decline of Orthodoxy at the beginning of the 1700s. This period “is not wanting in originality or energy and is marked by an immense amount of theological activity in every area of theology, much of which is very positive. The most noteworthy advance in dogmatics is the introduction of the so-called analytic method, which seeks to treat theology inductively, proceeding from effect to cause, viewing theology in the light of its ultimate goal, man’s blessedness and salvation.”³ Nevertheless, this period is marred by the syncretistic debate and the theologians of this period have been characterized as men who lusted to debate over minutiae.⁴

Markus Matthias also divides Lutheran Orthodoxy into three periods.⁵ The first period is that of “Early Orthodoxy” dating from 1555–1600. Accordingly this period begins with the religious peace of Augsburg that prepared the way for the ecclesiastical consolidation and confessionalization of Lutheranism. In this schema the Formula of Concord does not play as decisive a role in the formation of Orthodoxy as it does for Preus. The advantage of this schema, however, is that it takes into account such an

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Cf. August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1852).

⁵Markus Matthias, “Orthodoxie I” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 12, Eds. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Muller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 464–85.

important “proto-Orthodox” theologian as Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586). Jacob Heerbrand (1521–1600), Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603), Leonhard Hutter (1563–1616), and Matthias Haffenreffer (1561–1619) are some of the most significant representatives of this period. The second period, “High Orthodoxy,” begins in 1600 and ends in 1675. The beginning of High Orthodoxy is marked by the incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy into Lutheran dogmatics. This was first accomplished by Johann Gerhard (1582–1637). The second phase of High Orthodoxy is marked by an all-encompassing systematization of dogmatic theology by such leading theologians as Abraham Calov (1612–1686) and Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617–1688). Other notable theologians of this time who participated in the syncretistic debate were Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1603–1666), Johann Huelsemann (1602–1661) and Johann Georg Dorsch (1597–1659). Matthias terms the third and final period of Orthodoxy, “Late Orthodoxy.” This phase begins in 1675 and lasts until 1740. The period is marked by prolonged struggles with Pietism and Enlightenment rationalism. The authority of Scripture was being undermined and the use of Aristotelianism as the unifying theoretical principle of theology and philosophy was becoming outdated as Enlightenment philosophy took over. Friedemann Bechmann (1628–1703), Johann Wilhelm Baier (1647–1695), and David Hollaz (1648–1713) would be the most significant representatives of the early phase of “Late Orthodoxy.” Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673–1749), the last significant champion of Lutheran Orthodoxy, fought a losing battle against Enlightenment rationalism and a thriving Pietism.

Matthias’s schema betrays less preferential treatment of the respective periods of Lutheran Orthodoxy than Preus’s, but for the purpose of this dissertation it is probably

most helpful to divide Orthodoxy into five parts. First, “Proto-Orthodoxy” represented by Martin Chemnitz was the most authoritative source for all subsequent periods of Orthodoxy. Then an “Early Orthodoxy” came after the Formula of Concord and was best represented by Hunnius and Hutter. Third would be the “Orthodoxy Proper” of the middle decades of the 1600s, with Johann Gerhard as its foremost representative. Fourth would be the “High Orthodoxy” of Calov and Quenstedt, and finally the “Late Orthodoxy” of David Hollaz and Valentin Ernst Loescher. Chapter 3 discussed at length how the “Proto-Orthodoxy” of Martin Chemnitz contended with Trent’s claim to the unanimous consensus of the fathers. This chapter will discuss how leading Lutheran theologians of “Early Orthodoxy,” such as Aegidius Hunnius, and “Orthodoxy Proper,” such as Johann Gerhard dealt with Rome’s continued claim to possess the consensus of the fathers. Finally, the reaction of “High Orthodoxy” to Georg Calixt’s appeals to the Vincentian Canon and the *consensus quinquesaecularis* as an ecumenical norm will be detailed. The syncretistic debate died with Abraham Calov in 1686. Thus by the time “Late Orthodoxy” appeared, the challenge of the Vincentian Canon and the unanimous consensus of the fathers had been dealt with to such an extent that the question had become an academic one and not a serious issue that threatened Lutheran Orthodoxy from within or without. David Hollaz is able merely to note in passing in his dogmatics of 1707 that the consensus of the fathers is not to be considered a secondary theological principle. Nothing more needed to be said.

Aegidius Hunnius: Catholicity not Consensus

Aegidius Hunnius was born in Winnenden in the province of Württemberg in 1550.⁶ Being a precocious student he obtained his masters at the age of 17. From 1565 to 1574 he studied under leading orthodox theologians such as Jacob Andrea, Jacob Heerbrand, and Johann Brenz the younger, and by 1576 he received his doctorate. He then spent the next 16 years of his life in Hessen—from 1576 to 1592—at the University of Marburg. He was involved in religious colloquies as well as discussions with the Reformed. In 1592 the new duke of Saxony, Friedrich Wilhelm, wanted to rid his land of Calvinism and saw fit to call many Württembergers to his realm. Hunnius came in 1592, given leave by the Landgrave of Hessen to move from Marburg and become administrator of the visitation committee for ducal Saxony. Hunnius was instrumental in purging other lands of Calvinism such as Schleswig, and accompanied Friedrich Wilhelm to the Reichstag in Regensburg in 1594.

Hunnius' literary activity was polemical to a large degree since he was confronted with Calvinism for the greater part of his career. He also engaged in anti-Roman polemics as he wrote against the papacy and indulgences. In 1601 he took part in the religious colloquy at Regensburg, where he acted as the "Disputer" against the Jesuits Jakob Gretser and Adam Tanner. The debate at Regensburg focused on the formal principle of the Reformation: whether Holy Scripture, according to Protestant teaching, was the only norm for doctrines and the sole judge of theological controversies (*norma doctrinae et controversiam iudex*), or did it require additional traditions, ecclesiastical

⁶For more biographical information, see Johannes Kunze's article „Hunnius, Aegidius“ in the *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 6, Ed. Albert Hauck (Lepzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1899). For the most recent study on Hunnius see Markus Matthias, *Theologie und Konfession. Der Beitrag von Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603) zur Entstehung einer lutherischen Religionskultur* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004).

definitions, and the consensus of the orthodox doctors of the church.⁷ Nothing was resolved at this colloquy, but Hunnius continued the debate with Tanner in a literary capacity, and recorded his activities in Regensburg in his *Relatio historica de habito nuper Ratisbonae colloquio 1602*. Hunnius also wrote numerous dogmatic treatises and monographs, enough so that if considered as a whole, they would form an entire work of dogmatics. He is also well known for his commentaries on Matthew, John, 1 John and the entire Pauline corpus. When asked how he became such a great theologian he responded, “from the Pauline epistles.”⁸ Hunnius died on April 4, 1603, at the age of fifty-two.

Hunnius was admired for his learning and orthodoxy in his own lifetime and was considered by Johann Gerhard to be the most outstanding of the recent theologians.⁹ Johann Schmidt in Strassburg stated that it was the consensus of everyone that he merited the honor of being considered the third greatest theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.¹⁰ And Leonhard Hutter in his *Compendium* paid Hunnius the honor of citing his works where the Lutheran Confessions were silent.

Hunnius’ Nemesis: Bellarmine

Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) became the chief spokesman for Tridentine Catholicism in the last decade of the sixteenth century, recognized by friends and foes alike. His *Disputationes de Controversiis*, published in three stages between

⁷Irene Dingel, „Religionsgespräche IV“ in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 28, Ed. Gerhard Muller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 664.

⁸“ex epistolis Paulinis.” Johannes Kunze, “Hunnius, Aegidius” in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 6, Ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung 1899.), 459.

⁹“consensu omnium merito tertium a Luthero locum obtinuit.” *Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

1586 and 1593 with the official version coming out in 1596, became for Roman Catholics what Chemnitz's *Examination of the Council of Trent* was for Lutherans and other Protestants. Both works were read and appealed to for the next three centuries, if not longer. The purpose of the *Controversies* like that of Trent was nothing less than a thorough refutation of all types of Protestantism. Bellarmine's range and erudition are impressive as he makes 7,135 citations of Protestant opponents by name. The six most-quoted theologians are Calvin (1,647 times), Chemnitz (1,258 times), Luther (860 times), Flacius (487 times), Vermigli (476 times), and Melancthon (428 times). Bellarmine considered Calvin "the one whom I oppose above all in my writings"¹¹ yet Chemnitz received more quotations than any other Lutheran theologian and is the one most often cited in the section concerning the six controversies on Scripture and tradition, the various sacraments and good works.¹²

In fact, Bellarmine's work called forth almost two hundred full-scale replies by Protestants in the century or so after its first publication.¹³ Thus, in the wake of such a Leviathan as Bellarmine, the next major proponents of Orthodoxy after Chemnitz, Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603) and Leonhard Hutter (1563–1616), were forced to respond to Bellarmine and readjust earlier Lutheran contentions that their faith was in accord with the *consensus patrum*. Otto Ritschl observes that Hunnius was not dependent upon Flacius and was free of "Melancthonian traditionalism." Moreover, his

¹¹Robert Bellarmine, *Recognitio librorum omnium*, In *Opera* 1, 9. Quoted in Robert W. Richgels, "The Pattern of Controversy in a Counter-Reformation Classic: The *Controversies* of Robert Bellarmine," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 11 (1980), 11.

¹²Cf. Richgels, "The Pattern of Controversy," 6–10.

¹³Cf. James Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), 75. Quoted in Richgels, "The Pattern of Controversy," 4.

encounter with and refutation of Bellarmine in his *Examen*¹⁴ dealing with Bellarmine's *Controversies* probably did much to change his position on the church and tradition. Ritschl contends that Hunnius, like Flacius, could reach new perspectives in contradistinction to the "traditionalism" of Trent or Melanchthon's understanding of the church with its ecumenical symbols and its patristic consensus.¹⁵ Hunnius was the first significant orthodox Lutheran theologian to break away from the *consensus patrum* and "Melanchthonian traditionalism."

Hunnius' Catholicity

Hunnius spoke no less critically than Flacius about the church fathers and stated that they were useful to read,¹⁶ but one required good judgment to discern what was useful and what was useless—one had to be able to understand how to separate the straw from the gold and silver. Whoever does not have such understanding could easily fall into the same errors as the fathers, errors so apparent that even the Jesuits cannot deny their existence. Moreover, the one fares best who relies not on the authority of the church fathers but on Scripture alone,¹⁷ for pious meditation of Scripture is the most effective means of protecting oneself from error. Before the reception of the Holy Spirit at

¹⁴Aegidius Hunnius, *Articulis de ecclesia vera et hujus capite Christo: itemque de ecclesia Romana et hujus capite pontifice Romano* (1591) *Opera latina* 1, 1244. Cf. Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, vol.1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), 392.

¹⁵„So aber konnte er, ähnlich wie schon Flacius, im Gegensatz zu dem römischen Traditionalismus zu Ansichten gelangen, durch die zugleich auch Melanchthons Auffassungen von der Kirche, ihren Symbolen und ihrem *patristischen consensus* grundsätzlich ausgeschlossen waren.“ Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 392.

¹⁶„Lectio Patrum prodesse sane potest. » „Recissime autem faciunt, qui non ab auctoritate Patrum, sed solius Scripturae pendent arbitrio: cuius pio meditatio contra errores omnes praesentissimum & saluberimum „alexipharmakon“ , & pendum ae semitarum nostrarum lucerna, veritatisque lumen est, in omnibus articulis, quos scire necessum est.“ Aegidius Hunnius, *Prima Controversia generalis, Roberti Bellarmini, pontificae ecclesiae cardinalis, de verbo dei scripto, examinata & refutata per Aegidius Hunnium*, . . . *Operum Latinorum* 2, 226.

¹⁷Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 392–93.

Pentecost, the apostles themselves erred concerning the sufferings, resurrection and kingdom of Christ.¹⁸ Beyond them, how much more so could the fathers of the church err, whether it be Jerome, Augustine, or Ambrose. In fact, their position regarding the truth was no greater than that of the present doctors and servants of the church. The fathers could err, not only in matters where they disagreed with each other, but even in matters of faith where they were in agreement with one another. Hunnius based this on the apostles' consensual misunderstanding of the mission, nature and kingdom of Christ.

Hunnus even dismisses the notion that all the fathers could not err if they agreed on the same point, for all the fathers erred at Nicea as they sought to impose celibacy on the clergy, a thing which St. Paul had called a doctrine of demons. Jerome erred as he forbade second marriages, something which Scripture clearly teaches in Romans 7:1, 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5.¹⁹ Cyprian erred, along with an African council of fathers and bishops, as they sanctioned the rebaptism of heretically baptized persons. Ambrose erred when he wrote that the shed blood of martyrs was for our salvation.²⁰ The fathers of the Roman church erred, according to Augustine, as they administered the eucharist not only to adults but to infants as well. Furthermore, he will not even mention ("I remain silent") the infinite errors that derive from the fathers or bishops of the Roman

¹⁸ Aegidius Hunnius, *Opera latina* 5, 456. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 393.

¹⁹ Hunnius first asks, "An instutum tuum probare potes etiam Patrum exemplis?" The following is his response, "Quid ni? *Errabant Patres omnes Nicenae Synodi*, consentiendo in coelibatum seu prohibitionem Coniungii Sacerdotum, quam Paulus Apostolus daemioniorum doctrinam dicere non veretur, nisi unius Paphnutii sententia fuisset a terrima haeresi in viam veritatis reducti. Erravit Divus Hieronymus, damnans secundas nuptias, contra clarissimam Scripturam (Rom.7.1. Corinth.7. & 1 Tim.5.) easq, scortationi exaequans." Aegidius Hunnius, *De Ecclesia Vera, et Huius Capite Christo: Itemque De Ecclesia Romana, Et Huius capite Pontifice Romano*. *Operum Latinorum* 1, 1282–83.

²⁰ "Erravit Cyprianus, quando una cum caeteris Africani Concilii Patribus & Episcopii sanxit; ab haereticus baptizatos esse rebaptizandos. Erravit Ambrosius, qui Martyres sui sanguinis profusione salutem nobis peperisse scribit, qui tam sacrata hostia pro nostra propitiatione Domini sint oblati." *Ibid.*, 1283.

Church.²¹ The fathers do not even agree with themselves in their own writings, let alone with other fathers. Augustine disagreed with Jerome, and this one with that one, and Augustine with Cyprian, and Cyprian with another father. Moreover, Augustine disagreed in matters of faith with others, and Irenaeus disagreed with the Roman bishop Victor, as did other fathers disagree with one another.²²

Concerning the Vincentian Canon Hunnius argues this:

The passage in the Commonitory of Vincent of Lerins desires nothing else than that Scripture needs interpretation so that its true sense is brought out. He calls that interpretation Prophetic and Apostolic to show that it must be sought from the writings themselves of the Prophets and Apostles, and according to the norm of the Ecclesiastical and Catholic sense. That is, when interpretation is established in such a way that it does not turn aside from the unanimous judgment of the true Church or give occasion to errors. It is not possible to guard this more correctly than if the written Word of God is established as the only norm and lamp of all interpretation. Therefore (which is memorable), Vincent calls the canon of Scripture PERFECT, namely in which nothing pertaining to the Christian faith is lacking. Interpretation

²¹“Taceo hic errores infinitos, quos Romanae Ecclesiae Patres seu Episcopi rapidissimi torrentis instar in orbem Christianum effulsissime derivarunt.” Ibid.

²² “Quid, quod Patres ipsi sibi non constant, nec ipsi secum, nec cum aliis per omnia consentientes? Nam & Augustinus ab Hieronymo, & hic ab illo, & a Cypriano Augustinus, & ab hoc Cyprianus, quin Augustinus ab Augustino in dogmatibus alibi dissentit, ut & Irenaeus a Romano Episcopo Victore, & alii item ab aliis.” Ibid. Hunnius continues his argument, „Neque inficiantur Patres, se errandi infirmitati esse obnoxios; quin potius aperte fatentur (contra Pontificiorum affirmatum) posse se errare, & nota est Divi Augustini vox: Errare possum, haereticus non ero. Qui rursus solis Scripturis Canonicis hanc autoritatem & reverentiam debere perhibet, ut quae in iis continentur, absque contradictione, fidei mente suscipiantur. De suis vero scriptis ait Epist. 7. Vos autem si me talem asseritis, ut me nusquam Scriptorum meorum errasse dicatis, frustra laboratis, non bonam causam suscepitis, facile in ea meipso iudice superamini. Idem sentit & scribit de aliis Patribus, Epist. 111. & Epist. 112.” Ibid. Hunnius then mentions further arguments of the adversaries concerning consensus. “Haec quoniam Adversariis ignota esse nequeunt, restrictiuncula quadam conantur elabi, obmurmurantes, in iis non errare sanctos Patres, quae CONSENTIENTER tradant ac doceant?” To which he answers, “Hac ipsa restrictione largiuntur ex opposito, Patres in nonnullis scripsisse dissentienter, ubi (quod in dissentaneis & contrariis sententiis altera necessario falsa sit) error & falsitas admissa sit, oportet. Porro si ea fuerint indubie recipienda, quae illi docent consentienter: tum in lectione Patrum tantisper suspendendus erit assensus noster circa Religionis capita ab ipsis pertractata, donec illorum Scriptis simul omnibus perlectis & evolutis, iudicium fiat, in quibus consentiant, in quibus vero dissentiant. Sic nunquam ad certitudinis portum ex illis dubitationum fluctibus appellere, nunquam certi quid in rebus animarum nostrarum salutem spectantibus apud nos statuere licebit. Et vero quibus argumentis restrictioni suae fidem conciliabunt Adversarii? Nos enim iudicamus, fieri posse, ut non in iis duntaxat, quae dissentienter, verum etiam, quae consentienter a Patribus seu Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis prodita sunt, error insit & falsitas. Quod exemplis in omnem aeternitatem irrefutabilibus obtinemus.” Ibid., 1283.

is required, not adding new dogmas but bringing some light to those which are contained in Scripture.²³

Thus Hunnius applies the Scripture principle to the Vincentian Canon in a more radical way than did Chemnitz and Melanchthon. There is no talk of fathers or church councils. Scripture interprets itself according to the analogy of faith, and new dogmas are refuted on the basis of Scripture alone and not the consensus of the ancient church. Catholicity is now defined as consensus with Scripture and its truths. This is a highly significant shift. Hunnius then asks, “Therefore, on what basis do you think it [the church] is called Catholic?” He answers,

Because the doctrine is Catholic, which it embraces and professes. *It is witnessed to by the unanimous reckoning and assent of all the Prophets and Apostles.* Therefore, by the name of its doctrine, the church also bears this august name, that it is called Catholic. So whatever group guards that universal consensus of the faith in good condition, that group is truly Catholic, especially if it is a very small collection of people (italics mine).²⁴

²³“Vincentinii Lirinensis locus in commonitorio nihil quicquam aliud vult, quam Scripturam indigere interpretatione, ut verus illius sensus eruatur. Eam vero nominat interpretationem Prophetica & Apostolicam, ut ostendat, ex ipsismet Scripturis Prophetarum & Apostolarum esse petendam, & quidem iuxta normam Ecclesiastici & Catholici sensus: Is est, quando interpretatio sic instituitur, ut ab unanimi sententia verae Ecclesiae non deflectat, aut erroribus ansam praebet: quod non potest rectius caveri, quam si Verbum Dei Scriptum pro unica Norma & Lucerna omnis interpretationis constituatur. Ideo (quod memorabilite est) Vincentius nominat Canonem Scripturae PERFECTUM, cui videlicet nihil desit ad fidem Christianam pertinens, licet interpretatio requiratur, non nova dogmata adiiciens, sed iis, quae in Scriptura continentur quandam lucem afferens.” Aegidius Hunnius, *Prima Controversia Generalis, Roberti Bellarmini, Pontificae Ecclesiae cardinalis, de Verbo Dei Scripto, Examinata & Refutata, Per Aegidius Hunnium, etc.* Operum Latinorum 2, 281.

²⁴“Quia doctrina est Catholica, quam amplectitur ac profitetur: quippe *unanimi Prophetarum & Apostolorum omnium calculo & assensione contestata.* A doctrinae igitur Appelatione augustum hoc nomen fortitur etiam Ecclesia, ut Catholica dicitur. Quare qui coetus *consensum illum universale fidei* sartum rectum custodit, is vere Catholicus est, si maxime ex paucissimis personis sit collectus (italics mine).” Aegidius Hunnius, *De ecclesia vera, et Huius Capite Christo: Itemque De Ecclesia Romana, Et Huius capite Pontifice Romano, etc.* Operum Latinorum 1, 1262. Hunnius answers that the church under the Old Testament and the Patriarchs was catholic. But it is not necessary that the visible church be spread throughout the whole world for it to be catholic (Ibid., 1264). He then states, “Plane igitur existimas, ad Ecclesiae Catholicae definitionem non requiri necessario omnium gentium ac populorum assensum, & amplitudinem eam, qua se nunquam non visibiliter in omnes provincias orbis terrarum diffundat?” Ibid., 1266. The Roman Catholic church is not spread all over the world, neither was the primitive church, yet it was still catholic. Moreover, the true church cannot err, for then there would be no church, but it can err on non-essential matters. Cf. Ibid., 1273.

Accordingly Hunnius veers away from the concept of consensus and catholicity as Melancthon understood it.²⁵ Catholicity signifies the universal church, for the teaching which it confesses and accepts is catholic.²⁶ This teaching, however, is that which is in agreement with the prophets, apostles and other men inspired of God. Catholic was the church of the New Testament, and while that church was not yet spread all over the world after Christ's ascension into heaven, it was nevertheless still catholic. Thus the catholic church in this sense is much more encompassing than the papal one, and in a broader sense signifies the church universal in contradistinction to the particular churches, including the Roman one already and even at the time of the apostle Paul. Therefore Rome is not the mother of all churches as it claims, rather the catholic church is the mother of all the particular churches combined together,²⁷ including the old Roman church.

Hunnius' understanding of catholicity deeply influenced the subsequent theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy. All major aspects of his views (*Anschauungen*) were represented

²⁵Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 393.

²⁶Aegidius Hunnius, *Opera latina* 5, 481ff; Cf. 1, 1264, 1268. Ritschl observes that Hutter's understanding of the catholicity of the church was similar to Hunnius'. Cf. Leonhard Hutter, *Loci Communes*, p. 555s. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 396. Concerning Lutheran catholicity Werner Elert observes, "After all, the purely spiritual aspect of the idea of universality prevented Lutheranism from confining membership in the 'catholic church' (ecclesia catholica) to its own confessional church. Luther, too, knew that, just as always, there have been 'holy people' even under the papacy—'holy people' who were saved solely by the grace of Christ (WA 50, 563, 17). And even Aegidius Hunnius declared that 'the church was in the midst of the papacy, even though the papacy itself was not the church' (in medio Papatu fuisse Ecclesiam etiamsi Papatus ipse non esset Ecclesia)." Cf. Aegidius Hunnius, *Articulis de ecclesia*. . . . (Frankfurt am Main, 1592), 36. Quoted in Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 277.

²⁷According to Werner Elert the supraconfessional unity of all true Christians who were divided by particular confessional churches caused early Lutheranism to look continually to the Eastern church as an example of a particular church that was not under the papacy. "Hunnius, too, cites the 'indisputable example of the Eastern Church' (irrefragibile exemplum Orientalis Ecclesiae) to show that a particular church (Partikularkirche) can be catholic even without affiliation with Rome." Cf. Aegidius Hunnius, *Articulis de ecclesia*. (Frankfurt am Main, 1592), 34. Quoted in Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 291.

by Matthias Hafenreffer,²⁸ Leonhard Hutter,²⁹ Nicholas Hunnius,³⁰ Caspar Brochmand³¹ and especially Johann Gerhard. Ritschl goes so far as to claim that the Melanchthonian reverence for the ancient church and its theology had become meaningless for Lutheran Orthodoxy after the Formula of Concord. Orthodox theologians at the end of the sixteenth century, such as Hunnius and Hutter, had become “biblicists” in the spirit of Luther and Flacius. According to Ritschl, if they were to be accused of anything it was their extreme confessionalism (*Symbolgläubigkeit*) that undermined the sole sufficiency and authority of Scripture.³² Ritschl overstates his case, for both Gerhard and Calov were renowned patrologists in their era. In contradistinction to Ritschl, the Lutheran fathers after the Formula of Concord still found great value in the writings of the ancient church. Ritschl, however, rightly notes that a paradigm shift occurred with the confessionalization of Lutheranism.

This is the start of a move away from the balance Chemnitz had wanted to strike. Hunnius, of course, would not have gone in this direction had he thought he was abandoning a Reformation position. He would expect to be in that line, perhaps dealing with new problems not faced in the same way by Luther, Melanchthon, or even Chemnitz, yet retaining the essence of the original position. With historical distance and hindsight, however, that does not seem to be the case.

²⁸ Matth. Hafenreffer, *Loci theologici*. (1601) ed. 4. 1609. p. 421ff. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte* vol. 1, 396.

²⁹ Leonhard Hutter, *Compendium locorum theologicorum* (1610) ed. Joh. Meisner. 1677. 276 ff. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, 396.

³⁰ Nicholas Hunnius, *Epitome credendorum oder Kurtzer Inhalt christlicher Lehre* (1625). 1675. 519 ff. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, 396.

³¹ Casp. Erasm. Brochmand, *Systema universae theologiae*, vol. 2. 1538. 667 ff. Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 396.

³² Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, 400–01.

Johann Gerhard: Qualified Use of Consensus and Catholicity

With the passing of the first major proponents of early Lutheran Orthodoxy, Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603) and Leonhard Hutter (1563–1616), Lutheran Orthodoxy entered into its golden age with the advent of Johann Gerhard (1582–1637). According to August Tholuck, Johann Gerhard was the most learned and famous of the “Old-Protestant” dogmaticians,³³ and Bossuet in 1688 called him “the third man of the Reformation after Luther and Chemnitz.”³⁴ Gerhard was born in Quedlinburg in 1582. He came under the influence of Johann Arndt who was a clergyman in Quedlinburg during Gerhard’s early years. Gerhard first enrolled at the University of Wittenberg in 1599 where he studied philosophy and some theology. He later changed to the University of Jena where he focused on theology but without making use of the professors at Jena, relying more on his personal study of the Scriptures, the church fathers, and Hebrew. He received his Master’s degree in philosophy in 1603. Gerhard then matriculated at the University of Marburg where he began for the first time to benefit from the tutelage of the finest theologians of the time, Johann Winkelmann and Balthasar Mentzer. In 1605, however, after the university had become Reformed, Gerhard returned to Jena where at the age of twenty-four Gerhard received his doctorate.

Gerhard was called into the service of his duke, Casimir of Gotha, and became involved in ecclesiastical work rather than his preferred academic vocation. The duke finally released Gerhard to teach at the University of Jena in 1615 and Gerhard began the

³³Johannes Kunze, “Gerhard, Johann” in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 6, Ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung 1899), 554.

³⁴Cf. Jörg Baur, „Johann Gerhard“ in *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte. Orthodoxie und Pietismus*. vol. 7, Ed. Martin Greschat (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1982), 99.

following year. It was not an easy time. During the Thirty Years War Jena was among the cities sacked and pillaged. Gerhard was involved in various ecclesiastical discussions during his tenure at Jena, as well as some political consultation. His fame spread far and wide during his own lifetime due to his piety and scholarly erudition. But his service was cut short, dying relatively early at the age of 54.

Gerhard began his most important work, the *Loci theologici*, at the age of twenty-seven in 1610 and finished it in 1622. The *Loci* appeared in nine quarto volumes released over a period of twelve years, and became an instant classic of orthodox Lutheran dogmatics.³⁵ The thirty-one *loci* were “treated in a relatively rigid fashion according to Aristotelian factors (*causa efficiens, causa formalis, causa materialis, and causa finalis*)” and “are models of clarity.”³⁶ The work was unique for introducing Aristotelian categories into Lutheran dogmatics, setting the stage for the theological architectonics of “High Orthodoxy.”

Although Gerhard only maintained a tentative consensus of the fathers in the *Loci theologici*, there is no lack of patristic citations. In fact, there are more citations from the fathers than from Luther. Bengt Hägglund, for example, has noted the plethora of patristic citations just in the first two *loci* of the Cotta edition: Augustine 105 times, Jerome 38, Bellarmine 35, Irenaeus 21, Chrysostom 20, Basil 12, Origen 12, and Tertullian 12 times.³⁷ Gerhard observes that the use of the fathers continued unabated in

³⁵Martin Honecker, “Gerhard, Johann” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 12, Eds. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin; Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 449.

³⁶Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, 53.

³⁷Bengt Hägglund, “Verständnis und Autorität der altkirchlichen Tradition in der lutherischen Theologie der Reformationszeit bis zum Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts“ in *Tradition in Lutheranism and Anglicanism*. Oecumenica. Eds. Gunther Gassmann and Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 57.

the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy after Melancthon and Chemnitz, and in some ways their use was intensified. The noticeably rich use of the ancient tradition, even after the syncretistic debate, cannot be a mere coincidence or a matter of learned style. The *testimonia patrum* played a greater role in post-Reformation theology than it did in the Middle Ages according to Hägglund who notes that the polemics with Roman Catholic theology had a dual effect upon Lutheran Orthodoxy. On one hand, Trent's posturing sharpened an already critical attitude toward the fathers. Yet this was not the central point of the controversy, for Chemnitz had already made a distinction between what Trent understood by tradition and the patristic writings. On the other hand, the controversy with Rome intensified the impulse within Lutheranism to portray its theology not as the innovation, but as the legitimate continuation of the ancient tradition. In light of this concern, the testimonies of the fathers naturally maintain great importance. Even when the witness of Scripture is the most decisive factor, agreement with the fathers must be portrayed clearly and unequivocally, for a theology that contradicts the consensus of the fathers must necessarily be considered erroneous—even in the age of Orthodoxy.³⁸

In Gerhard's *Patrologia* he follows in the footsteps of Melancthon and Chemnitz, and provides even greater detail concerning the life and major doctrines of the church fathers in a comprehensive portrait.³⁹ In Gerhard's *Methodus studii theologici* of 1623, he gives detailed instructions concerning how one should read the fathers. The fathers' writings are not a norm of the truth (*norma veritatis*), but they can still be read profitably.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Hägglund, "Verständnis und Autorität der altkirchlichen Tradition," 58. Cf. Johann Gerhard, *Patrologia* (Jena, 1653). See also Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 260.

Despite the many flaws they are still invaluable exegetical aids, witnesses to the common Christian teachings, and examples of how one should live the Christian life.⁴⁰

“Bellarmine’s *Disputationes* gained a unique significance as a source for Roman Catholic theology in its opposition to the evangelical. Thereafter, Protestant handbooks in dogmatics dealt mainly with Bellarmine when they wanted to reproduce and refute the Roman point of view.”⁴¹ Already in the first *Loci* of 1610 Gerhard had polemicized against Bellarmine, and he engages Bellarmine more thoroughly in his *Bellarminus orthodoxias testis* of 1631–33. Gerhard then wrote his monumental polemics, the *Confessio catholica*, between 1634 and 1637. The *Confessio catholica* was a massive and dispassionate work of Protestant polemics. “His earlier works were said to have outdone others, but in the *Confessio*, he was said to have outdone himself. The several editions of the *Confessio* during the seventeenth century attest to the importance of the book at that time, but later it fell into disuse, like so many other outstanding theological works of the period.”⁴²

Gerhard’s approach in the *Confessio catholica* is quite unique, for he assembles a massive array of Roman Catholic theologians from the Medieval, Scholastic, and Tridentine eras to stand as witnesses to the “catholic religion.” The “catholic religion” (*religio vere catholica*) is the evangelical position of the Lutheran church of the Augsburg Confession and stands in contrast to the “Papist or Roman Catholic religion” (*religio Pontifica sive Romano-catholica*). In every locus Gerhard posits a thesis and then assembles Roman Catholic theologians to testify to the verity of the proposition. Thus

⁴⁰Ibid. Cf. Johann Gerhard, *Methodus studii theologici* (Jena, 1623), 244ff.

⁴¹Bengt Hagglund, “Polemics and Dialogue in John Gerhard’s *Confessio catholica*,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, 14 (2000), 160.

⁴²Ibid., 161.

Roman Catholics of all eras serve as witnesses to such “evangelical catholic” assertions as the sufficiency of Scripture, the errors of councils, and papal infallibility. Ironically, the quintessential representative of Tridentine Catholicism, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, is often cited as a major witness to the truth of the evangelical catholic faith. Gerhard assumed that the light of the Gospel shone so brilliantly that even those most submerged in the darkness of the papacy could still bear witness to the truths of Scripture.

The Ancient Church and the Vincentian Canon in the *Loci theologici*

In the fifth volume of the *Loci Theologici* Gerhard treats the doctrine of the church and acknowledges that the church of the first five hundred years was the true church. He writes, “Indeed it is certain that the ancient church in the first 500 years was the true church and held to apostolic doctrine; however, no one can deny that [the church] began to mix the stipulations of human traditions and opinions with apostolic doctrine, as can be shown from the writings of the fathers. . . .”⁴³ That corruptions, however, set in and diluted the purity of the apostolic doctrine is also a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the ancient church. Such corruptions had been adequately documented by the *Magdeburg Centuries*. Thus one sees that Gerhard relies not only on Chemnitz’s works but also those of the Flacius circle for his view of antiquity.

Gerhard then contends with Bellarmine’s argument that antiquity is a mark of the church. He responds, “If the assertion is made that a church must be founded by the

⁴³“Certum quidem est, *antiquam ecclesiam primis quingentis annis veram ecclesiam fuisse et apostolicam doctrinam tenuisse*, negari interim nequit, apostolicae doctrinae admisceri coepisse stipulas humanarum traditionum et opinionum, ut ex scriptis patrum ostendi potest, qua de re videantur *Centuriae hist. Magdeburgensis* in c. de inclinatione doctrinae. Hegessipus apud Eusebium lib.3 c.29 dicit, . . . (*italics mine*).” Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, vol. 5, Ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1867), 454.

apostles in order for a certain church to be true, apostolic, and most ancient, then also the Greek church, which has been founded by the apostles themselves will be a true, apostolic and most ancient church. But Bellarmine denies the consequent. Therefore, he ought to deny the antecedent too.”⁴⁴ Thus Gerhard, like Hunnius before him, appeals to the antiquity and apostolicity of the Eastern Orthodox Church to refute the claim that the Roman Church alone bears the marks of antiquity and apostolicity. Gerhard then observes that the “Papalists urge a passage from Vincent of Lerins (*Against heresies*, ch. 25)⁴⁵ where he defines Catholic: ‘whatever antiquity recognized that the catholic church held universally, it decrees that only that must be believed and held.’”⁴⁶ Gerhard responds to this claim that antiquity and universality are the criteria by which catholic dogma is determined with a qualification:⁴⁷ “We freely embrace this, if by antiquity and consensus [it] is understood [to mean] that antiquity and that consensus which agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures.”⁴⁸ To be consistent, Gerhard argues, such antiquity and consensus must not make way for new dogmas that cannot be demonstrated

⁴⁴“Si Plantatio ab apostolis facta efficit, ut ecclesia quaedam sit vera, apostolica et antiquissima, utique etiam ecclesia Graecae, quarum quaedam ab ipsis apostolis fundatae sunt, erunt verae, apostolicae et antiquissimae ecclesiae. Sed consequens negat Bellarminus. Ergo et antecedens negare debet. Quod subjungit Bellarminus ex Tertulliano in apolog. c. 19. et 20. Augustino lib.18 de civ. Dei c. 37. et 38. *ecclesiam christianam esse antiquiorem omnibus paganorum conventiculis et Scripturam sacram esse antiquiorem ipsis diis gentilium*; id nondum probat quamvis antiquitatem esse verae ecclesiae notam, sed eam tantum, quae revocari potest ad divinam originem ac doctrinae coelestis veritatem habet conjunctam, de ea enim Tertullianum et Augustinum loqui ostendit ipse verborum sonus.” Ibid.

⁴⁵This an abbreviated form of the complete title of the *Commonitory: Tractatus pro catholicae fidei antiquitate et universitate adversus profanas omnium haereticorum novitates*.

⁴⁶“Pontificii urgent locum ex Vincentio Lerinensi contra haereses cap. 25. ubi Catholicum definit, *qui quidquid universaliter antiquitas ecclesiam catholicam tenuisse cognoverit, id solum sibi tenendum credendumque decernit*.” Ibid.

⁴⁷Concerning the sufficiency of Scripture Gerhard quotes Vincent of Lerins: “The canon of Scripture is enough for everything and more.” *Loci theologici*, vol. 1, Ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863), 165.

⁴⁸“Respondemus: id libenter amplectimur, *si per antiquitatem et consensum intelligatur ea antiquitas et is consensus, qui cum prophetis et apostolicis scriptis concordat*, . . . (italics mine)” *Loci theologici*, vol. 5, 404–05.

from Scripture. This is the case even if such doctrines have lain for some time under the shadow of the papacy. Furthermore, antiquity really must be understood as that which was antiquity at the time of Vincent of Lerins.⁴⁹ “He lived about the year 440. Therefore, that which was ancient to him is that which was received in the church at the time of the apostles and the century after the apostles. For he did not consider ancient what was either about a hundred years [old] or [something that appeared several] decades before he was born, much less what was thought up in religion after his age.”⁵⁰ Thus Gerhard, like Chemnitz before him, applies the Scripture principle to the Vincentian Canon’s criteria of universality and antiquity. In Gerhard’s view this strategy thwarts Roman efforts to foist medieval doctrines upon the church since they are not to be found in Scripture—the purest antiquity—or in the first two centuries of Christendom, which would qualify as antiquity for Vincent of Lerins. Furthermore, if the Roman appeal to the Vincentian Canon is to remain consistent, then all doctrinal developments that occurred after the time of Vincent are to be disqualified as non-catholic dogma since they lack the very criteria of universality and antiquity.⁵¹ Gerhard, therefore, does not dismiss

⁴⁹ . . . nec pro novo dogmate iudicetur, quod ex sacris bibliis demonstrari potest, etiamsi sub tenebris Pontificiis aliquamdiu latuerit, et si ea intelligatur antiquitas, quae Vincentio Lerinensi antiquitas fuit.” Ibid., 405.

⁵⁰ Vixit is circa annum 440. id proinde ei antiquum, quod tempore apostolorum et proximo post apostolos seculo in ecclesia receptum fuit, neque enim antiquum putavit, quod suo tempore aut centum circiter annis ante eum annis natum est, multo vero minus, quod post suum seculum in religione excogitatum etc.” Ibid., 405.

⁵¹ In the *Confessio catholica* Gerhard argues that “custom or age of the church is not able to introduce new articles of faith.” He then cites Vincent: “Vincent of Lerins (*adv. profanas*) recognized this beautifully. *Someone will say, therefore will no progress in religion be had in the church of Christ? It is necessary that the intelligence, knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as well as all, of one man as well as of the whole church grow and progress much with respect to age and age in degrees. But in this kind of thing, namely in dogma itself, the statement [is] the same in the same sense. Religion imitates the way of the souls of bodies, which by the progression of years evolves and unfolds its numbers), nevertheless, it remains what it was.*” Johann Gerhard, *Confessio catholica, in qua doctrina catholica et evangelica, quam ecclesiae augustanae confessioni addictae profitentur, ex romano catholicorum scriptorum susfragiis confirmatur* (Jena, 1634), 193. [Hereafter cited as *Confessio catholica*]

the Canon outright. Instead he applies the Canon's criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent to Tridentine dogma and thereby concludes that the Roman Church cannot possibly be the Catholic Church.

Consensus Shattered: The *Confessio catholica*

Gerhard allows for a general consensus of the fathers in the *Loci theologici*, and he even argues that Lutheran dogma has the backing of this consensus. In the *Confessio catholica*, a polemical work of his last years, Gerhard proceeds to demolish the notion that a consensus of the fathers ever existed. Within the *Confessio catholica* his most exhaustive treatment of the *consensus patrum* is found in the thirteenth chapter titled "De Patribus." A caveat, however, should be issued here since Gerhard's form of argumentation is dialectical. That is to say that he posits a thesis and then proceeds to substantiate his thesis with various proofs. In this case he questions the veracity of a *consensus patrum* and then argues that such a consensus never existed. Since the methodology in the *Confessio catholica* is Neo-Scholastic and dialectical it would have been just as easy for Gerhard to argue the contrary: that a consensus of the fathers did indeed exist. Thus it is unclear if Gerhard has actually abandoned his position concerning the *consensus patrum* found in the *Loci theologici*. In light of Bellarmine's elevation of the *consensus patrum* he could simply be demonstrating that such a consensus of the fathers was not as solid and absolute as Bellarmine would have us believe. This in turn would leave Gerhard with his original position concerning the consensus of the fathers.

Gerhard's first thesis of his chapter "De Patribus" tries to strike a balance. On one hand he states that the writings of the fathers are not a rule of faith but are to be judged by

Scripture. Whatever agrees with Scripture is to be accepted just as whatever disagrees with it is to be rejected. Nevertheless, on the one hand the fathers ought to be granted their due honor.⁵² As Gerhard puts it in his subsidiary thesis or “enthesis,” “Neither do we reject nor esteem little the fathers’ writings, rather we gratefully acknowledge them as a salutary organ by which God taught and continues to teach his church.”⁵³ Luther is also quoted as saying he was accused of rejecting almost all of the fathers, to which he responds that they, too, were men and therefore capable of erring, and furthermore St. Paul commands us to test all things.⁵⁴ After praising their labors, biblical commentaries, refutation of heresies and ecclesiastical histories⁵⁵ Gerhard commends the consensus of the fathers: “Therefore, from the writings of the Fathers, there can be sought certainty of the Christian religion, *confirmed by such a consensus*, a learned collection of interpretations, and exploration and refutation of heresies, and a most useful selection of things and statements, etc (italics mine).”⁵⁶ Yet no matter how useful a general *consensus patrum* is for the refutation of various heresies, the writing of the fathers are

⁵²“Thesis. Patrum scripta non sunt fidei regula, sed de illis ex Scriptura judicandum, & quicquid cum illa congruit, acceptandum; quod vero ab ea dissidet, salva, quae Patribus debetur, reverentia, repudiari potest ac debet.” Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica*, 195.

⁵³“Enqesiv. Nequaquam vel rejicimus vel parvi aestimamus Patrum scripta, sed gratamente agnoscimus, ipsos fuisse salutaria organa, per quae Deus Ecclesiae suae, quam non tantum viva voce olim docuerunt, sed adhuc scriptis docent, salutaria commoda praestitit.” Ibid., 195.

⁵⁴“Lutherus in assert. vernacula articularum in Bulla Pontificis damnatorum tom. I. Jenens. Germ. f. 402. *Hoc ipso responsum esto & iis, qui me accusant, quasi omnes Patres & Doctores Ecclesiae rejiciam. Non eos rejicio, sed quia nemini obscurum est, quod nonnunquam erraverint, homines enim fuerunt, ideo non prius ipsis fidem habebō, quam cum sententiarum suarum rationem mihi ex Scriptura reddiderint, quae hactenus nondum erravit. Et hoc docuit me Paulus 1Thess. 5.v.21. Omnia probate.*” Ibid., 195.

⁵⁵ Nec destituitur studium illud, quod lectioni Patrum impenditur, suo commo. Testantur enim Patres de origine & autoritate Scripturae Canonicae, utiles librorum sacrorum commentarios scripserunt, haereses suorum temporum strenue profligarunt, Historiam de Ecclesia aliquot seculorum ab ascensu Christi usque ad sua tempora laudabili diligentia consignarunt, nervosis sententiis studium pietatis inflammant &c. » Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Proinde ex Patrum scriptis peti potest Christianae religionis tanto consensu firmata certitudo, interpretationum erudita collatio, haereson exploratio & confutatio, rerum ac sententiarum delectus utilissimus &c.” Ibid.

not to be regarded as equal with those of Holy Scripture. That is Gerhard's fourth point. There is no denying that the testimony of the fathers might be great but it is still always human.⁵⁷

The antithesis to Gerhard's thesis comes from Melchior Cano⁵⁸ who writes, "We defend the concord of the ancient fathers' consensus if we desire to be catholic."⁵⁹

Gerhard, however, foresees syncretism as he parenthetically quotes Stapletonus,⁶⁰ who argues that if the writings of the fathers are able to overcome heresies, then they will certainly become a rule of faith.⁶¹

Salmeron⁶² describes the catholic faith in Vincentian terms as he argues that dogma is Catholic which has universal consensus, whether it has been passed down with great consistency by all or almost all the fathers. The sayings of the ancient fathers are reliable when all or almost all agree with one judgment on a certain point.⁶³ Gregory of Valencia considers the unanimous consensus which has been passed down to be an infallible truth.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Patrum testimonium, sive *distributive*, sive *collective* sumtum in fidei mysteriis est quidem *magnum*, sed tamen *humanum*. . . . Singulorum autem testimonia *collective* sumta non possunt esse alterius generis, quam cujus singula sunt *distributive* et per se. Etsi enim multitudine testium autoritatis crescat gradus, non tamen mutatur autoritas species." Ibid.

⁵⁸Melchior Cano was a Dominican theologian who lived between 1509 and 1560.

⁵⁹"*Defendamus concordem antiquorum Patrum consensum, si volumus esse Catholici.*" Ibid.

⁶⁰Presumably the English theologian Thomas Stapleton (1533–1598).

⁶¹"(Si autoritate Ecclesiastica in Patrum scriptis proposita haereses expugnari possunt ac debent, utique illa erunt fidei regula.)" Ibid., 196–97.

⁶²Alfonso Salmeron (1515–1585) was a Roman Catholic theologian and co-founder of the Jesuits.

⁶³"Illud dogma a Doctoribus expressum Catholicam fidem in Ecclesia Catholica facit, quod universali consensu vel ab omnibus, vel fere ab omnibus magna constantia traditum est. . . . Non sunt probanda (examinanda) veterum Patrum dicta & testimonia, quando omnes, vel fere omnes in unam sententiam conveniunt, vel in uno aliquo Scipturae loco interpretando concordant, quia tum Patres certissimum & inevitabile argumentum reddunt Catholicae veritatis ac certa & legitimae interpretationis." Ibid., 197.

⁶⁴"*quia quod illi unanimi consensu circa religionem tradunt, infallibiliter verum est.*" Ibid.

The above statements of Roman Catholics such as Melchior Cano, Salmeron, and Gregory of Valencia demonstrate, according to Gerhard, two false conclusions drawn from the *consensus patrum* according to Gerhard. First, this consensus actually becomes as infallible as Scripture itself. Second and related to this, the *consensus patrum* will thereby become a rule of faith.

Gerhard thus sets out to demonstrate that the fathers are not a rule of faith. Only the canonical Scriptures merit such dignity. Eight points support this position. First, Holy Scripture points us to Christ, not to the fathers as an infallible rule of faith. Second, the fathers themselves deny that their writings should be considered equal to Scripture as a rule of faith (*exaequanda*). Rather they submit their writings to the judgment of Scripture. Third, the rule of faith must be invariable and consistent, but the fathers and others often disagree with each other and even with themselves.⁶⁵ Fourth, the rule of faith must be publicly received and confirmed by the highest authority, but the church has not publicly commended the writings of the fathers as a rule of faith. And fifth, the rule of faith always had to exist in the church, but not only did the writings of the fathers not always exist, but many of the fathers' writings also have perished. The rule of faith and norm of truth in the church has to be certain and finite, but this can not be said of the writings of the fathers.⁶⁶ Sixth, the rule of faith should be sufficient for all controversies, but the fathers wrote only for the controversies of their times. Moreover, the source of their doctrine came from Holy Scripture—the only and highest principle. Seventh, there are many spurious additions to the writings of the fathers, and their writings have also

⁶⁵“at Patres et alii & a seipsis saepius dissident.” Ibid.

⁶⁶“vel potius paucis quibusdam scriptis esse comprehensam, & certis sigillis confirmatam, ut omnes juxta eam de doctrina possint judicare. Sed patrum scripta in magnam excrevere multitudinem, nec possunt ab unoquoque Christiano omnia evolvi.” Ibid., 197.

been corrupted by heretics. Eighth, the fathers did not always speak appropriately in the heat of battle, evidenced by the fact that they later corrected their remarks according to the rule of faith.

Clearly for Gerhard the fathers are not an infallible rule of interpretation. Gerhard notes, as when the fathers interpreted Scripture, they sometimes contradicted themselves. Jerome and Augustine, for instance, disagree on the meaning of 1 Timothy 3:2. More, the fathers not only contradict other fathers but themselves in the interpretation of Holy Scripture.⁶⁷ The writings of the fathers did not always exist in the church, but Scripture did. More, the fathers wanted their writings to be judged by Scripture. They accepted what agreed with Holy Scripture and rejected what differed from it. That was a wise position since many of the fathers' knowledge of language was deficient, both rhetorically and grammatically. Better to listen simply to the biblical message. On the other hand, many of the fathers did not retain the literal sense of Scripture but often resorted to allegory as a means of expositing Scripture.

Given all this Gerhard observes that the Roman Church's attempts to force upon others a unanimous consensus of the fathers—which does not exist anyway—is in vain. Yet they are busy forcing it upon others as if it were a rule of faith necessary for the interpretation of Scripture. The following arguments make this clear.⁶⁸ First, that kind of a consensus of the fathers simply does not exist, for they neither consent among themselves in all points of doctrine, nor in their Scriptural expositions.⁶⁹ Second, the

⁶⁷“ac diversis temporibus aliter Scripturam exposuerunt.” Ibid.

⁶⁸“Tertio, quod Pontificii frustra unanimem Patrum consensum urgeant, eumque pro fidei & interpretationis Scripturae regula nobis obtrudere satagant patet ex sequentibus argumentis, . . .” Ibid.

⁶⁹“1. Consensus ille Patrum in dogmatibus fidei tradendis & Scripturis exponendis, verbis potius jactatur, quam reipsa ostenditur, cum constet, nec in dogmatibus, nec in Scripturae expositione eos invicem omnes consentire.” Ibid., 197–98.

consensus patrum was not always a rule of faith or a guide to the interpretation of Scripture, nor did it always have the authority of authentic judgment, as if it were an absolute and infallible rule. For a rule to be considered valid it must be certain, firm, and invariable, yet historically speaking, the consensus of the fathers was not always a rule of faith nor a guide to the interpretation of Scripture. Their writings did not always exist. Also, few in the first centuries of the church wrote, and those who did, did not write commentaries on all the books of Scripture.⁷⁰ Third, for a universal consensus of the fathers it is required that all the bishops of their time be in agreement. But how are we able to know this is true? There were many bishops of that time who did not write, and those who did write, did not write on all points of doctrine. Moreover, not all of their writings are now extant.⁷¹ Though Gerhard does not say this explicitly, in effect he is saying that asserting the kind of argument needed for universal consensus would thus be an argument from silence. Fourth, the fathers were not infallible individually or collectively because they were not like the apostles or prophets who had the immediate assistance of the Holy Spirit.⁷² Fifth, Scripture alone has the privilege of not erring.⁷³

⁷⁰“2. Quod ita comparatum est, ut non semper fuerit fidei confirmandae & Scripturae interpretandae regula, quodque non semper habuit auctoritatem authentici iudicii, illud ne nunc quidem absolutae & infallibilis regulae vim habere potest. Requiritur enim, ut regula semper sit una, eademque certa, firma ac invariabilis. Atqui unanimis ille Patrum consensus non semper fuit fidei & interpretationis Scripturae regula, quia aliquando nulla fuerunt Patrum scripta, pauci primis Ecclesiae seculis scripserunt, & qui scripserunt, non in omnes Scripturae libros commentarios scripserunt.” Ibid., 198.

⁷¹“3. Ad unanimem consensum Patrum requiritur, ut cum temporum suorum Episcopis omnibus consenserint. At unde hoc scire possumus? multi alii illorum temporum Episcopi fuere, qui nihil quicquam scripsere, & eorum, qui scripserunt, monumenta omnia non amplius extant, & quorum monumenta extant, illi non de omnibus fidei articulis scripsere, multo minus in universam Scripturam commentarios reliquere.” Ibid.

⁷²“4. Non minus omnes, quam singuli, vel aliqui errare possunt, quia nullus eorum habuit immediatam Spiritus S. assistentiam, nullus eorum fuit Propheta, vel Apostolus, immediate a Spiritus S. illiminatus. Solis autem Prophetis & Apostolis hoc competit, quod post acceptum Spiritum S. nec omnes, nec singuli errent, vel errare potuerint.” Ibid.

⁷³“5. Patres vel omnes simul sumti, vel singuli seorsim considerati non errant, quatenus Scripturam ducem & lucem sequuntur, quae sola non errandi privilegium habet.” Ibid.

Sixth, how many attempts have there been to establish their unanimous consensus, whether it be in matters of faith, or in Scriptural exposition?⁷⁴ Seventh, but if all the apostles were able to err before they obtained the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit himself—the sort of confusion and mistaken ideas we see Jesus correcting in the Gospels—certainly the rest of the later doctors of the church, those to whom the direct assistance of the Holy Spirit has not been promised or given, are able to err.⁷⁵

Another test concerning the validity of the *consensus patrum* is the disagreement that exists between the very authors themselves. One has only to read their books to see how much disagreement there is in the sayings of the saints apart from the consensus seen when they use and reflect the canonical writings. Augustine, for instance, disagrees with other fathers concerning the creation of the world in six days. The other fathers believed God created the world in a temporal succession of six days, while Augustine believed God created the world in a temporal succession of six days, while Augustine believed the cosmos was created all at once. Similarly Jerome and Augustine disagreed concerning the authorship of the Psalms. Augustine believed David wrote all of them, but Jerome recognized several authors.⁷⁶ Those are simple examples, but it is precisely

⁷⁴“6. Quanti laboris foret, universa omnium Patrum scripta percurrere, ut de eorum unanimi consensu in fidei dogmatibus, tum in Scripturae expositione constare possit? aliorum fidem hic sequi periculosum foret, nec conscientiae satisfaceret. At normam iudicii ac veritatis Ecclesia oportet esse ita comparatam, ut quivis Christianus ad eam quovis tempore possit recurrere.” Ibid.

⁷⁵“7. Apostoli, ante Spiritum sanctum in die Pentecostes acceptum, omnes haeserunt in errore de regno Messiae corporali, omnes laborabant ignorantia veri sensus praedictionum de resurrectione Christi ante Christi resurrectionem; omnes statuebant, *Eliam in propria persona rediturum*. At si Apostoli omnes errare potuerunt, antequam infallibilis Spiritus sancti assistentia ipsis obtingeret, utique etiam reliqui Ecclesiae Doctores, quibus immediata illa Spiritus sancti assistentia non competit, omnes errare possunt.” Ibid., 198.

⁷⁶“Secunda probatio sumitur a discordia, quae est inter ipsos autores. Discordia enim in Scriptoribus testimonium est falsitatis, cum sit necesse, quod saltem unus discordantium falsum dicat, quia necessario altera pars contradictionis est falsa &c. Quanta autem sit discordia in dictis Sanctorum extra Canonicas Scripturas, nemo non novit, nisi qui illorum libros non legit. Discordat Augustinus a caeteris sanctis Doctoribus circa intelligentiam operum sex dierum, quia alii pronuntiant, quod Deus fecit illa sex dierum opera secundum sucessionem temporis dierum a quibus discordat Augustinus, qui ponit omnia simul facta, juxta illud, Qui vivit in aeternum, creavit omnia simul. . . . Similiter discordant Hieronymus & Augustinus, quia Augustinus omnium Psalmorum autorem facit David, quod negat Hieronymus.” Ibid., 199.

such simple examples that make plain, in Gerhard's view, that the fathers are not in simplistic lock-step unanimity, let alone consensus.

Gerhard proceeds to give a long paragraph of instances where the fathers disagree with each other over the interpretation of various Scripture passages, producing no less than forty-three examples of how Rome itself disagrees with the fathers or how the fathers erred. He concludes this section by stating that these examples clearly confirm that Rome ignores the uncomfortable witness of the chief fathers and historians when it suits their purposes, just as they disregard the statements of the fathers that are more favorable to the Lutheran position.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the papal supporters acknowledge not only private and peculiar errors in individual fathers occurred, but also many fathers in one and the same point simultaneously and conjointly erred. They incessantly repeat, "One does not deny that the fathers individually had their private errors," but that all simultaneously and conjointly erred, *that* they deny in making their appeal to a supposed universal consensus of the fathers.⁷⁸

Gregory of Valencia recognizes that heretics are fond of pointing out that the fathers erred and fought amongst themselves, yet this is not problematic for him, for the authority of the fathers is not invested in them individually but collectively, i.e., in all of them as a group. Furthermore, he notes that the Council of Trent deemed the consensus

⁷⁷“(Ex his liquido constat, praecipuorum Patrum & Historicorum autoritatem a Pontificiis elevari; quando testimonia sententiae eorum adversa ex illis producimus. Eisdem tamen tanquam probatae fidei autores, imo eadem istorum scripta contra nos producunt, quando sententiae ipsorum videntur favere.)” Ibid., 208.

⁷⁸“5. Quod agnoscere coguntur, non solum *privatos & peculiare* quosdam errores in singulis fere Patribus occurrere, sed etiam multos in uno eodemque puncto *simul & conjunctim* errare. (Perpetuo ingeminant Pontificii, *se non negare, quod Patres suos quosdam privatos errores habeant singuli, sed quod omnes simul & conjunctim sumti errent, hoc demum esse, quod negent, unde ad unanimum Patrum consensum* provocare non verentur.” Ibid., 199.

of the fathers true and infallible.⁷⁹ (Does that really solve anything or is that not an obvious apodictic assertion?) Bellarmine, in the same vein, argues that the fathers did not all err at the same time, and that they are not to be followed when they argued for their own personal or particular opinions.⁸⁰

After these quotes from Gregory of Valencia and Bellarmine, Gerhard concludes that if this is what the papal side understands by a unanimous consensus of the fathers—that not even one of the fathers may disagree with the majority decision—then they will never be able to demonstrate such a consensus.⁸¹ To another quote of Gregory of Valencia Gerhard responds, “But if learned doctors of our time, to whom we are able to go to and hear, rarely agree in their decisions, how much less those of all antiquity.”⁸²

Gerhard then gives another twenty-five examples of how the fathers disagreed among themselves and with Rome⁸³—everything from the Immaculate Conception to the

⁷⁹“Gregorius de Valent. Anal. Cathol lib.8 cap.8. Quod addunt haeretici, Patres interdum erravisse, ac inter se pugnare, id nihil nobis obstat, non enim singulorum auctoritatem ut infallibilem asserimus, sed omnium. Et paulo ante dixerat, ex definitione Concilii Tridentini concordem Patrum sententiam verissimam & infallibilem semper esse habitam, cum jure vetat Scripturam exponere contra unanimum consensum Patrum, ut qui prorsus sit infallibilis.” Ibid.

⁸⁰“Bellarminus lib.2. de Christo cap.2.§. Ad secundam &c. Patres nunquam omnes simul errant, etiamsi aliquis eorum interdum erret, nos vero sequimur eos, quando simul aliquid docent, non quando proprias ac singulares sententias aliis contra dicentibus defendunt.” Ibid.

⁸¹“Sed si per unanimum Patrum consensum hoc intelligunt, quod ne uno quidem repugnante omnes in dogmate aliquo asserendo conveniant, nunquam poterit unanimes ille Patrum consensus demonstrari.” Ibid., 199.

⁸²“(At si Doctorum nostro tempore viventium, quos adire & audire possumus, concursus sententia raro potest cognosci, multo minus antiquorum omnium, qui non omnes scripsere, quorum mens amplius indagari nequit, cognosci potest.)” Gerhard continues, “Si vero hoc intelligunt, quod plures in uno aliquo dogmate asserendo consentientes pro unanimi Patrum consensu haberi debeant, dicimus, quandoque pauciorum sententiam, utpote Scripturis sacris conformem, plurimum sententiae esse praefereendam.

Inde Melchior Canus lib.7. Locorum Theologic.cap.3. ejusmodi format conclusionem: *Plurimum Sanctorum auctoritas reliquis licet paucioribus reclamantibus, firma argumenta Theologo sufficere & praestare non valet.* Probamus autem, Pontificios fateri, quod Patres multi conjunctim & simul errent.” Ibid.

⁸³Gerhard lists the following: (1) the canonical and apocryphal books of Scripture, (2) the immaculate conception of Mary, (3) giving the eucharist to infants, (4) the fall of the demons, (5) the millennium, (6) whether the souls of the faithful will see God before judgment day, (7) the nature of heaven, (8) the cause of predestination, (9) whether bishops are equal to presbyters, (10) marriage compared to virginity, (11) the

millennium, an awkward example given that the majority of the fathers before Jerome and Augustine were chiliasts. Thus in this case the unanimous consensus of the first church is in error, and even the Rome recognizes this.

Gerhard repeats two significant weaknesses in the argument for the use of the *consensus patrum* as a rule of faith and as a reliable guide to the exposition of Scripture. First, the papal supporters themselves recognize many of the ancient writings no longer exist today. Therefore, in vain do they appeal to the unanimous consensus of the fathers.⁸⁴ It is again an argument from silence, assuming consensus. Second, they recognize in the writings of the fathers and historians many things have been added and contaminated.⁸⁵ The papal theologians disagree among themselves about which patristic writings are authentic and the degree of their authority and reliability, yet some theologians do acknowledge the spurious nature of some writings.

Gerhard continues to show discrepancies between groups of what different opponents consider authentic as he lists spurious writings of Ignatius, Pseudo-Dionysius, the Apostolic canons, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom, Augustine, Theodoret, Caesarius of Arles, Fulgentius, Gregory the Great, Isidore, Leo II, John of Damascus, Anselm, and

coming of the antichrist, (12) the punishment of demons, (13) the apparition of Samuel, (14) the nature and essence of angels, (15) the effect of penance, (16) men's natural free will, (17) Christ's relationship to his brothers, (18) the genealogy of Christ, (19) satisfaction, (20) the cause of the antichrist, (21) matrimony after vows, (22) punishment of unbaptized infants, (23) the rebaptism of those who have been baptized heretically, (24) the destruction of the world, (25) the benefits of circumcision.

⁸⁴“11. Quod agnoscunt, multa veterum scripta hodie non amplius extare. (Ergo ad unanimum Patrum consensum frustra provocant, cum non constet, an illi, quorum scripta hodie non amplius extant, consenserint cum illis, quorum scripta adhuc habentur.)” Ibid., 216.

⁸⁵“12. Quod agnoscunt, in scriptis Patrum & Historicorum multa esse supposititia & adulterina. (Acriter quidem hoc nomine alios perstringunt Pontificii, quod in responsione ad dicta ex Patribus sibi objecta ad hanc assertionem confugiant.)” Ibid.

Bernard. Gerhard then spends more than twenty-seven folio pages⁸⁶ demonstrating spurious works and disagreements among the papal supporters themselves. The writings of the fathers, therefore, prove to be a most uncertain basis for a rule of faith.⁸⁷

Although Gerhard acknowledges a relative consensus of the fathers and agrees that the church of the first five hundred years was the true church despite the beginnings of decay in the same period, the Vincentian Canon was shattered. In his *Confessio catholica* he laboriously demonstrated that there was no absolute consensus of the fathers of the first five hundred years. Gerhard still maintains a critical reverence for the fathers and does not cease to quote them copiously in his works, but he follows Hunnius' lead in dismantling the notion of a perfect and absolute *consensus patrum*. There is no use speculating whether Melancthon or Chemnitz might have written in the same vein. Their circumstances had not developed to this point. But given this situation with opponents keen on passing arguments that seemed to Gerhard to rest more on trumpeting the authority of the institutional church than deal with history or obvious logical comparisons, Gerhard became more focused and limited in what he would concede to the fathers when it came to a view of catholicity that was predicated on a unanimous consensus of the fathers. Catholicity rather was to be defined on the basis of other criteria, namely Scriptural authority.

⁸⁶Cf. *Ibid.*, 219–46.

⁸⁷“Cum ergo tot ac tam varii libri sub augustis sanctorum Patrum nominibus expositi, sint quorundam ex ipsis Pontificiis suffragio suppositi, ex quibus tamen Adversarii sua confirmare, nostra vero infirmare nituntur dogmata, manifestum ex eo est, quid de hoc probationis genere statuendum sit, ac quam omnino praeposterum sit, Patrum scripta statuere infallibilem fidei regulam.” *Ibid.*, 246.

Calixt: A Significant Departure

Georg Calixt was born in 1586 in the region of Schleswig. His father had been a student of Melancthon and instilled in his son a disdain for Gnesio-Lutherans, the Formula of Concord and the “new” Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. Thus an inclination towards a Melancthonian version of humanism was sown in Calixt at an early age. Johannes Wallmann⁸⁸ and Inge Mager⁸⁹ consider Calixt the most gifted and learned Lutheran theologian of the seventeenth century. It is highly debatable whether or not Calixt was truly more erudite than a Johann Gerhard or an Abraham Calov, but he did go on to become one of the most important doctrinal critics of Lutheran Orthodoxy. In 1603 Calixt matriculated at the Lower Saxon University of Helmstedt. Under the auspices of Duke Heinrich Julius (1589–1613) the University of Helmstedt was at its peak of learning and became a center of late German humanism, with such learned men as Johannes Caselius (1533–1613), the last German humanist, and Cornelius Martini (1568–1621), a purveyor of Aristotelian metaphysics, on the faculty. Among German universities, Helmstedt ranked third in importance after the universities of Leipzig and Wittenberg.

After receiving his master’s degree in 1605 Calixt studied medicine while receiving private instructions in theology from Martini. Calixt’s later opponents contemptuously dubbed him an autodidact since he never studied theology formally. He undertook two journeys after his time at Helmstedt, visiting universities and libraries in Germany, and traveling as far as the Netherlands, Paris, and England where he met Isaac Casobanus, a

⁸⁸Johannes Wallmann, “Calixt, Georg (1586–1656)” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 7, Eds. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Muller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 552–59.

⁸⁹Inge Mager, “Georg Calixt” in *Orthodoxie und Pietismus*. Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte, vol. 7, Ed. Martin Greschat (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1982), 137–48.

major proponent of Erasmian reform. After his travels Calixt returned to Helmstedt and began a series of lectures that refuted Ramism. In 1611 he published *De praecipuis christianae religionis capitibus disputationes XV*. With logical precision, metaphysical abstraction, and historical evidence from church history, Calixt outlined a moderate Lutheran Orthodoxy that condemned the confessional differences of Roman Catholics, the Reformed, and the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. In 1614 Duke Friedrich Ulrich called Calixt to be professor of “controversial theology” (*Kontroverstheologie*) at the University of Helmstedt, a position he would hold for forty-two years. Calixt went from being a polemicist to an irenic ecumenist during the Thirty Years War and was active in various religious colloquies and discussions with Roman Catholics throughout his life. Without a doubt it is impossible to understand Calixt apart from the devastating effects of the Thirty Years War.⁹⁰

When the plague and the Thirty Years War interfered with the University of Helmstedt, Calixt was often one of the few professors to remain in the city with the result that his influence continued unbroken in that academic circle. In 1628 Conrad Horneius, a devoted disciple of Martini, joined the faculty, and as time wore on the older professors were replaced with Calixt’s students who were sympathetic to his moderate Orthodoxy and ecumenism. They would stand by him during the Syncretistic Controversy. In fact, it was his students who published his second dogmatic work in 1619, the *Epitome theologiae*.⁹¹ Ritschl observes that in the decades following the *Epitome theologiae*

⁹⁰Cf. Christoph Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik. Die Theologie der einen Kirche bei Georg Calixt* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1996).

⁹¹Calixt’s most significant works are: the *Epitome theologiae* of 1619, the *Apparatus theologicus* of 1628, the *Prooemium* of 1629, the *Discurs von der wahren christlichen Religion und Kirchen* of 1633. (Here Calixt recognizes Roman Catholics as brothers and hopes for reunification through the first five hundred years, but he also recognizes abuses within the Roman church.) The *Digressio de arte nova* of

Calixt would develop a more traditionalistic theology. Calixt would begin to evince a high view of the ancient church that was tightly bound to his dogmatics. This in turn laid the foundation for his entire theology and served as the basis for his syncretistic endeavors.⁹² If one asks who pointed Calixt in this traditionalistic direction, Ritschl opines that it was the influence of the work of Marcus Antonius de Dominis, *De republica ecclesiastica*, published in three parts between 1617 and 1622. Calixt seems to have adopted these views with great enthusiasm, and Ritschl contends that Calixt developed his own traditionalism first towards the end of the 1620s. Erich Seeberg places great emphasis on Calixt's connection with humanism and its direct influence on his traditionalism. This doesn't exclude Ritschl's conclusion since Georg Cassander had been influenced by humanism as well, but it does put a positive spin on Calixt, making him a man of his times rather than a mere antiquarian who had lost touch with present realities.

Through Dominis Calixt would be directed to their likeminded predecessor Cassander. Calixt took these thoughts to heart and made it the cause of his life's work to

1634, the *De autoritate antiquitatis ecclesiae* of 1639, the *Oratio de Causis calamitatum quae Ecclesiam Occidentis post coeptam reformationem afflixerunt* of 1643. Calixt here discusses the false developments in Lutheran theology and church since the Reformation that were based on philosophical and philological ignorance, a lack of scientific education, and the contempt for the ancient church. He warns that the reformers should not be valued too highly. The *Gründliche Widerlegung eines unwahrhafften Gedichts unterm Titul, Crypto-Papismus novae theologiae Helmstadiensis* of 1641. Here he defends Aristotelian philosophy, i.e., the use of reason in theology, his teaching from original sin, justification, good works and his understanding of tradition. Calixt's *Responsum maledicis theologorum Moguntinorum* (1644/45) contains a broad depiction of his plans for confessional reunion. Calixt tries to convince the Roman Catholic theologians of Germany of the necessity to return to the foundations of the ancient church. His son Friedrich Ulrich Calixt continued his father's ecumenical endeavors as he wrote *De veritate unicae religionis christianae et autoritate antiquitatis ecclesiasticae dissertationes. Accessit alia posteriori affinis recentiores quasdam contra Ecclesiae illius primitivae auctoritatem intortas objectiones excutiens* in 1658.

⁹²“Die aufs höchste gesteigerte Schätzung des kirchlichen Altertums und die enge Bindung an dessen Dogmatik, die fuer Calixts gesamte Theologie und fuer seine synkretistischen Bestrebungen grundlegend geworden ist, hat sich erst gegen Ende des auf sein *Epitome theologiae* folgenden Jahrzehnts herausgebildet.” Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 398.

promulgate these ideas; above all through his clerical ecclesiastical ideal. He seized these thoughts like no other older or contemporary Lutheran, and the irenic theology of both of them, Dominis and Cassander, echoed in his own. But he himself became a romantic of ecclesiastical antiquity as he idealized the first five hundred years of Christendom, believing that he had found the ecumenical key in this time period that was capable of resolving contemporary confessional disputes.⁹³ Ritschl further claims Melanchthon had very similar ideas concerning the norming at the hands of the ancient church's dogma, though with increasing narrowness in the last two decades of his life. Of course Melanchthon also worked in different times, still trying to persuade Rome while maintaining that the Lutherans were church. One wonders if Calixt could or should hold out the same olive branch in the wake of Trent where Rome clearly rejected Melanchthon's hopes and arguments and went in a different direction. Other Lutherans around Calixt seemed to acknowledge this, but Calixt clung to his ecumenical dreams. Nevertheless the *consensus antiquitatis* was hardly new to Lutheranism, for Gerhard considered the church of the first five centuries to be the true one, and contended that Lutherans had demonstrated that their dogma upheld the consensus of the ancient church. Calixt took the *consensus antiquitatis* to another level as he made it a secondary principle of faith (*a principium cognoscendi*) alongside Scripture in order to resolve the doctrinal controversies of the competing confessions.⁹⁴

⁹³“indem er darauf ausging, die Kirche auf das dogmatische Niveau einer seit mehr als einem Jahrtausend abgelaufenen Kulturepoche von rund fünf Jahrhunderten zurückzuschrauben, um auf dieser vermeintlich unüberbietbaren theologischen Basis einer künftigen Verständigung der streitenden Konfessionen vorzuarbeiten.” Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 399. Calixt appears to be much less of a romantic if one compares his idealization of the church of the first five hundred years with such Anglican divines as Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, and William Laud.

⁹⁴Ritschl is rather critical of Calixt's reliance on the church of the first five hundred years. “. . . jedoch ignorierte solchen Züge der altkirchlichen Lehrentwicklung, die bei schärfem Aufmerken auch ihm nicht hätte entgehen können. Indem er jedoch das kirchliche Altertum kritiklos idealisierte, sah er an dessen

Calixt first wrote of the significance of the ancient church of the first five centuries in 1628 in his *Apparatus theologicus*. The church reached its apogee in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁹⁵ After the fifth century decay begins to set in and the purity of the ancient church gradually fades away until the Reformation reclaims the pristine glory of antiquity.⁹⁶ Scripture takes pride of place in Calixt's theology and is the primary norm of truth. The achievements of the first four centuries must take second place to the canon of the New Testament even though the legitimate tradition or the witness of antiquity and the consensus of the ancient orthodox church lead one back to the fundamental truths of Scripture.⁹⁷ Calixt went even further and deeper concerning the same teaching about Christian antiquity in 1629 in his *Prooemium* to Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* and the *Commonitorium* of Vincent of Lerins.⁹⁸ Interestingly, Calixt's high view of the church of the first five hundred years was dubbed the *consensus quinquesaecularis* by Calixt's opponent, Johann Georg Dorsch of Strassburg.⁹⁹

Dogmatik vor allem nur das, worin er sie als normativ und vorbildlich hinstellen konnte, nicht aber auch anderes, wodurch auch er zu einer Revision ihrer Ergebnisse hätte herausgefordert werden können." Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 400.

⁹⁵Cf. *Apparatus theologicus sive introductio in stadium et disciplinam Sanctae Theologiae* (1628), 125.

⁹⁶"Darauf jedoch ist sie immer greisenhafter geworden und allmählich ganz erschläfft, bis die Reformation wieder auf ihre mustergültigen Anfänge zurückgegriffen hat." Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 400.

⁹⁷"Daher ist denn auch der Beweis für deren Wahrheit in erster Linie aus der Schrift, dann aber auch durch die legitime Tradition oder das Zeugnis des verehrungswürdigen Altertums und den Konsensus der alten unfraglich orthodoxen Kirche und ihrer Lehre zu führen." *Ibid.*, 400–01. Cf. *Apparatus theologicus*, 169.

⁹⁸Ritschl discusses Calixt's application of the Vincentian Canon further on page 401.

⁹⁹Calixt's son Friedrich spoke contemptuously of the term: "Nihil itaque moramur eos, qui ut venerandi priscae ecclesiae consensus vim enervent, in opprobium aliorum, qui magni faciunt et tuentur, ineptum quinquesaecularium vocabulum commenti sunt." Friedrich Ulrich Calixtus, *De universalis primaevae ecclesiae auctoritate. Acc. Ad G. Calixti diss. De veritate unice religionis christianae* (Helmstedt, 1658), 102. Quoted in Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 401.

Calixt's elevation of the ancient tradition of the church and his ecumenical endeavors to unite Roman Catholics, the Reformed, and Lutherans within Germany during the Thirty Years War invoked the wrath of the orthodox Lutheran theologians of the universities of Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Strassburg. The issue of *sola Scriptura* was raised as Calixt made tradition a secondary principle of faith, but Calixt countered that the *consensus antiquitatis* actually protected Scripture from doctrinal additions and innovation. What infuriated his opponents even more was his outright disregard, if not rejection, for the Lutheran Confessions. Calixt maintained that it would have been better if the Lutherans at the Augsburg *Reichstag* of 1530 had called upon the confessions of the ancient church instead of producing a new one. Thus the dispute between Calixt and his orthodox adversaries was not only over the sufficiency of tradition and the Apostles' Creed, but over the value of the Lutheran Confessions for their day. Nevertheless Calixt's opponents were quick to point out that the Apostles' Creed lacked the key article of the Reformation: justification by faith.

The clash between Calixt and his critics erupted into what became known as the Syncretistic Controversy, triggered when Statius Buscher, an orthodox preacher, published his *Crypto-Papismus novae theologiae Helmstadiensis* in 1640. Buscher attacked Calixt's doctrine of the *consensus antiquitatis* and his departure from the Lutheran Confessions. Calixt responded with his *Grundliche Widerlegung eines unwarhafften Gedichts* in 1641. The controversy spread beyond Lower Saxony after the religious colloquy of Thorn in 1645. Calixt had been invited to Thorn by the Polish king Wladislaus IV in hopes of resolving the confessional differences between the Roman Catholics, Reformed, and Lutherans of his land. But the orthodox Lutherans, and

Abraham Calov in particular, isolated Calixt from the other Lutherans during the colloquy, leaving Calixt to function as a mere advisor to the Reformed party. The dissolution of the religious colloquy of Thorn was a severe blow to Calixt's ecumenical aspirations.

The Syncretistic Controversy broke out in earnest as orthodox Lutherans of Königsberg formed a coalition with theological faculties in 1648 to produce the *Censurae theologorum orthodoxum* that attacked the tolerant Johann Latermann of Königsberg and claimed that the seed of this "syncretism" was to be found at the University of Helmstedt. Calixt's colleague, Conrad Horneius, exacerbated matters as he defended the necessity of good works. This in turn caused the Dresden preacher Jacob Weller and Johann Huelsemann, a professor at the University of Leipzig, to respond in kind. The debate was now in the open and not merely limited to private letters.

The controversy shook Lutheranism to its very core, from Königsberg to Strassburg. Both parties produced an endless amount of controversial writings. Calixt's chief opponents were Johann Conrad Dannhauer (*Syncretismus detectus*, 1648), Jacob Weller (*Erste Prob Calixtinischer Unchristlicher Verantwortung und Unwahrheiten*, 1650), Johann Huelsemann (*Iudicium de Calixtino desiderio et studio sarciendae concordiae ecclesiasticae*, 1651, and *Calixtinischer Gewissens-Wurm*, 1653), and above all Abraham Calov with his twenty-six anti-syncretistic writings. Between 1649 and 1651 Calixt responded to these attacks, with *Widerlegung Wellers* (1651) being the most detailed and penetrating of his responses in the German language.

Christoph Böttigheimer claims that Calov alone went beyond the singular points of attack to the background and underlying basis of Calixt's theology. He recognized the

connection between Calixt and Cassander and Marcus Antonius de Dominis. In the *Historia Syncretista* Calov indicates the authority that the Calixtine party would falsely concede to Vincent of Lerins¹⁰⁰: “If Dr. Calixt had not allowed himself to be deceived by this monk then many debates and novelties from Holy Scripture [such as] original sin and the freedom of the will, etc. without doubt would have been left alone.”¹⁰¹ Calixt’s use of Vincent apparently was the root of all sorts of theological problems.

One of the struggles of the Syncretistic debate was over Lutheran identity itself. Böttigheimer notes that Calixt saw the Reformation as the restoration of the purity of the ancient church and not like his Lutheran Orthodox contemporaries as something new.¹⁰² The orthodox party did not consider the Reformation as a mere repristination of the ancient church and herein lay one of their chief differences. Calixt’s extremely high view of the ancient church and the virtual infallibility he granted its most important decisions and declarations along with the unity that he believed the ancient church possessed separated him from his orthodox contemporaries. According to Böttigheimer the orthodox had little interest in the dogmatic tradition of the church. The catholicity of the church was not linked to the supposed *consensus antiquitatis*, but rather to their own consensus—the established doctrines of the Lutheran Confessions. For this reason the orthodox were unwilling to make doctrinal consensus a condition of ecclesiastical reunion based solely on the Apostles’ Creed or the consensus of antiquity. The orthodox

¹⁰⁰“Hier weist Calov auch auf die Autorität hin, welche die Calixtianer fälschlicherweise Vincentius von Lerinum einräumen würden.” Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 296, n. 36.

¹⁰¹„Hätte Doct. Calixt sich nicht von diesem Münche verführen lassen / so wären vielen Streitigkeiten und Neuerungen / von der Heil. Schrift / de peccato originali, und de viribus liberi arbitrii etc. ohne Zweifel nach geblieben.“ Calov, *Historia Syncretista*, 1115. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 296.

¹⁰²Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 300.

demanded an undivided unity that was grounded in the Lutheran Confessions. This in turn was based on the legitimacy of the Reformation and their exclusive confessional understanding of the church. It becomes quite apparent that the debate between the Calixtine party and Lutheran Orthodoxy revolved around the proper understanding of pure doctrine and its correct explication. This issue became inseparably linked with the question of Lutheran identity and ecumenicity.¹⁰³

The time was not ripe for a Calixt to appear on the scene. Confessional Orthodoxy was at its height at this time. Furthermore, Lutheran Orthodoxy was not ready to surrender its identity: the value of the ecumenical creeds and the church fathers went only so far. Calixt's major Lutheran opponents, Dannhauer, Hülsemann, and Calov, were clear in their protestations that neither did the church fathers all agree in their teachings, nor was the Apostolic Symbol sufficient as a standard formulation of doctrines necessary for salvation since it had been misused by heretics in the first centuries of Christendom and had constantly been changed. Furthermore, even where there was an actual consensus of the fathers, one could not exclude the possibility that there was a consensual misunderstanding of Holy Scripture. For that reason Scripture was the only faithful

¹⁰³“Indem er sich vorwiegend auf die Alte Kirche besann und in bezug auf ihre wichtigsten Entscheidungen und Äußerungen eine gewisse Irrtumslosigkeit und Einheit voraussetzte, grenzte er sich von den orthodoxen Lutheranern ab, die an der dogmatischen Tradition der Kirche ihrerseits nur wenig Interesse zeigten, da für sie die Katholizität der Kirche nicht an einen consensus antiquitatis gebunden war, sondern allein an ihre eigene, in den Bekenntnisschriften fixierte Lehre. Darum waren sie auch keineswegs gewillt, den Lehrkonsens als Bedingung einer kirchlichen Wiedervereinigung allein im Apostolicum bzw. im consensus antiquitatis zu erblicken, sondern forderten statt dessen schon wegen der Legitimität der Reformation und ihres exklusiv-konfessionalistischen Kirchenverständnisses eine ungeteilte Gemeinschaft in den reformatorischen Bekenntnissen. Damit wird deutlich, daß es in der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Calixtinismus und Luthertum im Grunde um die rechte Lehre und deren Explikation ging, womit zugleich untrennbar die Frage nach dem Selbstverständnis und der Ökumenizität des Luthertums verknüpft war.“ Ibid., 302.

interpreter of Scripture.¹⁰⁴ Concerning Calov's estimation of the writings of the fathers one can speak of them as witnesses to the truth (*testimonium*), but not as a principle of divine faith (*principium fidei divinae*) as Calixt argued.¹⁰⁵ Therefore Calov contests Calixt's assertion that the preserved writings of the fathers circumscribe or limit what is to be believed. It is one thing to concede that the doctors of the church were in consensual agreement and succeeded in faithfully passing down the primary articles of the faith through their extant writings, something which Gnesio-Lutherans doubt, and quite a different matter to believe that one is able to bring forth the fathers' meaning and a consensus in *all* articles of faith necessary for salvation.¹⁰⁶

After 1651 Calixt abstained from polemicizing any further against his orthodox adversaries, but he did allow his students to continue the debate. The last years of Calixt's life were dedicated to writing learned works and the continued pursuit of his plans for ecumenical union. Calixt remained undaunted despite the failure of so many religious colloquies and the wrath of his orthodox opponents. He died in 1656. Upon his death, his likeminded son, Friedrich Ulrich Calixt (1622-1701), assumed a position at the University of Helmstedt, and after a short pause renewed the Syncretistic Controversy in 1662, with Abraham Calov as his most determined foe.

¹⁰⁴“Doch selbst dort, wo ein consensus patrum vorliege, sei nicht auszuschließen, daß nicht auch hier eine Fehldeutung der Heiligen Schrift im Hintergrund stehe. Darum gilt für Calov “certissimo, quod Scriptus S. sit unicus Scripturae fidus interpres” (A. Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum*, Tom. I, p. 415).“ Ibid., 305, n. 63.

¹⁰⁵“Aus diesem Grunde kann es sich somit nach dem Traditionsverständnis Calovs und mithin dem der lutherischen Orthodoxie bei den Schriften der Väter lediglich um ein “testimonium”, nicht aber um ein “principium fidei divinae” handeln (vgl. ebd., p. 422).“ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶“Darum bestreitet Calov, daß das aus den erhaltenen Schriften Gewonnene als Begrenzung der credenda anzusehen sei: “Quanquam certum sit, consensisse Doctores in tradendis primariis fidei articulis, gnesios orthodoxos, dubium tamen, e Scriptis, quae adhuc superant, de OMNIBUS fidei articulis creditu necessariis, sensum illum et consensum eruendum esse” (ders., *Consideratio novae theologiae Helmstadio-Regiomontanorum Syncretistarum*, p. 910).“ Ibid.

Calixt's Theological Predecessors

Georg Calixt's stance on the consensus of the first five hundred years, catholicity, and the place of the Vincentian Canon is best understood against the backdrop of several Roman Catholic theologians who inspired Calixt's own "ecumenism." Johannes Driedo, Johannes Gropper, and Georg Cassander were instrumental in fusing the principle of the tradition of the ancient church with the concept of dogma in the sixteenth century. The theological foundations they laid set a precedent for Calixt to follow as he, too, made the tradition of the ancient church a secondary principle of faith, a *principium cognoscendi*, by which one could determine what truly catholic dogma was. Friedrich Kantzenbach also notes that Calixt was an irenic ecumenist who followed in the footsteps of Erasmus, Melancthon, Johannes Gropper, Georg Witzel, and Georg Cassander.¹⁰⁷ By following these men Calixt departed from the narrower theological confines of the orthodox Lutherans of his day. We turn to Calixt's "tutors" and then to his own theological vision of a united Christendom. It will become apparent that unlike the concept of consensus of Hunnius and Gerhard, Calixt's view of the *consensus antiquitatis* marks a significant departure from the general direction traced until now.

Johannes Driedo (1480-1535)

Johannes Driedo, a Louvain theologian, was regarded as one of the most learned men of his time. His most important work *De ecclesiasticis scripturis et dogmatibus libri quattuor* appeared in 1533. His greatest contribution was to make the conjoining of the concept of tradition (*Traditionsbegriff*) and the formulation of the principle of tradition

¹⁰⁷Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um die Einheit der Kirche im Jahrhundert der Reformation: Vertreter, Quellen und Motive des "ökumenischen" Gedankens von Erasmus von Rotterdam bis Georg Calixt* (Stuttgart: E. G. Seeger, 1957).

(*Traditionsprinzip*) the most important task of a theological methodology.¹⁰⁸ On the one hand, Driedo defined “tradition” in the singular as an objective, passive tradition in the sense of “*id quod traditum est*,” i.e., that which has been handed down to us by the apostles. On the other hand, he considered the subjective and active tradition a mode (*Akt*) of retrieving (*Weiterreichen*) the apostolic tradition (*ex Apostolorum actu traditione*). These forms of tradition were described with various adjectives: Apostolic tradition (*traditio Apostolorum*), the tradition of the church (*traditio ecclesiae*), and the traditions of the ancient fathers (*traditiones antiquorum patrum*).¹⁰⁹ Tradition in the plural (*traditiones*) signified the apostolic or ecclesiastical truths, practices, customs, and ceremonies that were handed down to us from the apostles. Apostolic traditions, therefore, signified not only dogmatic truths, but disciplinary and liturgical rules. The dogmatic truths were not alterable though ecclesiastical practices were. Driedo spoke interchangeably about tradition and traditions, placing the authority of the church fathers alongside that of Scripture. He relied on Basil’s famous mention of unwritten traditions (*De spirit. Sancti*. 27, 66) to grant authority to such traditions, and he described “dogma” in a broader sense than was usual for the time. The Vincentian Canon was not mentioned explicitly, but it certainly looms in the background, making Driedo one of Calixt’s earliest forerunners.

¹⁰⁸“Sein Verdienst bestand darin, dass er der theologischen Methodologie als wichtigste Aufgabe die Fassung des Traditionsbegriffs und die Formulierung des Traditionsprinzips zuwies.” Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 123.

¹⁰⁹Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 122–23.

Johannes Gropper (1503-1559)

Johannes Gropper was dependent on Driedo for many of his theological ideas as he integrated them, and thoroughly treated the question of tradition. His ideas surfaced in lucid fashion in his *Worms-Regensburger Buch* of 1541. He countered Bucer and other Protestants (*Gegenberichtung*, 1 r (*Antididagma*, 1 r), arguing for an overarching agreement and witness of the fathers, and that an oral tradition both existed and exists.¹¹⁰ Gropper did not appeal to Vincent of Lerins in his *Enchiridion* or his *Regensburger Buch*.¹¹¹ The work appears first in his *Capita institutionis*, and then in the *Wahrhaftigen Antwort*, the *Institutio Catholica*, and the *Eucharist-Monograph*. In his *Eucharist-Monograph* Gropper cites long passages from the *Commonitory*, whereby he makes it clear that in the Church, next to the canonical writings another authority is still necessary, for the Scripture is not clear, and in history there have been different and competing interpretations so that falsifications have arisen. Therefore tradition is that which has been handed down to us (*Ueberlieferung*) and the proper explication of Scripture. The three criteria of the Canon were combined together with the context, and Vincent's question as to who was a true and orthodox Christian was addressed.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid., 127.

¹¹¹Concerning Gropper's *Enchiridion* of 1538 Friedrich Kantzenbach observes: "Hier ist die katholische Lehre kraftvoll entfaltet, ohne dass die Einzelpolemik eine Rolle spielt. Das Werk ist vielmehr ,ein einziges grosses Gespräch mit den Anschauungen Luthers.'" Kantzenbach, *Das Ringen um die Einheit*, 171. Gropper's *Enchiridion* played a significant role in the formulation of the theological results of the religious colloquy of Regensburg in 1541. The *Enchiridion* served as the basis for the *Denkschrift* at Worms. The *Denkschrift*, in turn, served as the basis for Gropper's so-called *Regensburger Buch*. This colloquy was the last attempt on the part of the Kaiser to achieve a religious rapprochement between the opposing sides of the Reformation. Contarini, Johannes Gropper, Johann Eck and Julius Pflug represented the Roman side, while Melancthon, Martin Bucer and Johann Pistorius represented the Protestants. During the Regensburg negotiations Gropper showed himself to be a mediating force, although he fell squarely in the Roman camp. Nevertheless, such concessions as dual-justification demonstrated that he was inclined to an Erasmian type of reform.

¹¹²Cf. Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 126–28.

Georg Cassander (1513-1566)

Georg Cassander also adopted Vincent's concept of dogma (*Dogmenbegriff*).

Cassander was part of the Erasmian tradition as a mediating theologian (*Vermittlungstheologe*). He considered the Apostles' Creed with its fundamental articles as a way to formulate the bond of unity between Eastern and Western Christendom. Vincent of Lerins's dictum, "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone," was the starting point for a universal consensus of antiquity (*universalis antiquitatis consensus*) of the first six hundred years. Cassander commonly used the terms "Catholic truth" (*Catholica veritas*) and "Catholic doctrine" (*doctrina Catholica*) in his writings as a manner of explicating his concept of dogma. Filser concludes that in pre-Tridentine theology it was commonly understood that there was a written and unwritten transmission of doctrinal truths that amplified the truths of Scripture. This development was permanently established by the council of Trent. With the reception of Vincent of Lerins's concept of dogma there was a new turn in Roman Catholic theology that had long term effects.¹¹³

Calixt's Interpretation of Church History

To understand Calixt's ecumenical vision of a united Christendom it is necessary to discuss his understanding of church history. In fact, part of Calixt's argument that all confessions contained part of the universal catholic truths necessary for salvation rested on his interpretation of church history. Church history was the arsenal from which all confessions borrowed apologetic material. The difference with Calixt was his use of it

¹¹³Cf. Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 127.

for more ecumenical purposes.¹¹⁴ Calixt divided the history of the church into three epochs. The first manifested the realization of the true and pure church built upon the foundation of the apostles. In the second epoch the foundation was darkened by false teaching and superstitious additions. The third epoch marks the return to the purity of the apostolic beginnings.

The first time period covers the first five hundred years of the church's history. The nearness in time of the first five hundred years to the church's apostolic origins immediately distinguishes this period from all others. Its purity and perfection is demonstrated by the martyrs who died before the rule of Constantine the Great, and the time after Constantine is crowned by the foremost doctors of the church and the ecumenical councils. Moreover, the church in this time is rescued from the most pernicious heresies and arises victorious over falsehood. Nevertheless, while much is positive, Calixt makes allowances for corruptions within the church of this period that set the stage for the impending decline. That said, the church successfully retains her truth and purity in the first five hundred years and the actual decline does not set in until the seventh century.

Calixt's interpretation of the first five hundred years is not as novel or arbitrary as it first might appear. Schüssler notes that Calixt's high view of the ancient church corresponds not only to the humanistic Old Catholic tradition, but also to the Lutheran. The idea of a pure and exemplary age of the first five hundred years of Christendom was held by Cassander, Witzel, Casaubonus and de Dominis. On the other hand, Luther believed that the age of the pure church ended with Gregory the Great. In addition,

¹¹⁴Hermann Schüssler, *Georg Calixt. Theologie und Kirchenpolitik. Eine Studie Zur Ökumenizität des Luthertums* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1961), 66.

Flacius recognized that impurities were creeping into the church as early as the third century, but the abuses were not so great by the year 600 that he could still argue that the ancient church had more in common with the Lutheran than the “papal” religion.¹¹⁵

Schüssler observes that as Calixt made a precise line of demarcation for the pure age of Christian antiquity he was responding to an open and unresolved question of Lutheran theology.¹¹⁶

The church of the most decisive church fathers and councils is over and decay sets in after the fifth century for Calixt.¹¹⁷ Thus Calixt states, “Whatever the church of the first five centuries professed is true.”¹¹⁸ Centuries later Calixt would be countered by the position of Adolph von Harnack. Harnack strives to show that the church of the first five hundred years was already fragmented so that the ancient church was already a particular church. The ancient church as an ecumenical reality is pure fiction for Harnack.¹¹⁹

Though the orthodox Lutherans surrounding Calixt could be expected to balk at other

¹¹⁵“Die Hochschätzung des ersten halben Jahrtausends der Kirchengeschichte entspricht sowohl der humanistisch-alkatholischen wie der lutherischen Tradition. Die Idee des reinen, vorbildlichen Zeitalters der ersten fünf christlichen Jahrhunderte wird u.a. von Cassander, Witzel, Casaubonus und de Dominis vertreten, auf die sich Calixt gelegentlich ausdrücklich bezieht. Andererseits findet sich auch bei Luther der Gedanke, daß die Zeit der reinen Kirche mit Gregor d. Gr. endet. . . . Flacius läßt zwar bereits im dritten Jahrhundert Mißbräuche in der Kirche um sich greifen, sieht sie aber bis etwa zum Jahre 600 nicht so anwachsen, daß er nicht der “Religion“ dieses Zeitraums mehr Ähnlichkeit mit der eigenen als mit der päpstlichen zuschreibt.“ Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 67.

¹¹⁶“Indem Calixt von seinen Kriterien aus zu einer präzisen Abgrenzung der “reinen“ Epoche des christlichen Altertums kam, beantwortete er eine in der lutherischen Theologie gestellte, aber bis dahin im Grunde offen gebliebene Frage.“ Ibid.

¹¹⁷That Calixt pictures the ancient church as being one of purity with creeping decay setting in reflects his humanistic background. See H.-G. Gadamer, „Geschichtsphilosophie,“ in *Religion Geschichte und Gegenwart* 2, 1494.

¹¹⁸“Quidquid primorum quinque seculorum ecclesia unanimiter professa fuit, est verum.” Georg Calixt, *Responsum maledicis Moguntinorum theologorum, pro Romani Pontificis infallibilitate praeceptoque sub una vindiciis oppositum*, Ed. Friedrich Ulrich Calixt (Helmstedt, 1672), thesis 138. [Hereafter cited as *Resp. Mog.*] Quoted in Bottigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 162.

¹¹⁹Adolph von Harnack, “Ueber den sogenannten consensus quinquesaecularis als Grundlage der Wiedervereinigung der Kirchen” In *Aus der Werkstatt der Vollendeten*. Ed. Axel von Harnack (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1930), 70ff.

things Harnack wrote—if we could transport them forward several centuries—at least on this point Harnack echoes their misgivings on the supposed unity Calixt thought was there in the early church.

Furthermore, Calixt is convinced that the fundamentals necessary to salvation remained intact despite all the odds during the Middle Ages and that it was possible to be saved despite the reign of the papacy. In this sense Calixt is not that far from Luther since the Reformer held that the office of the public ministry (*Predigtamt*) and the sacraments still conveyed the Spirit of Christ in the darkest times of the history of the church. Calixt, however, goes farther than Luther as he modifies these ideas and emphasizes the fundamental truths of the faith.¹²⁰

Calixt can even point to the exact point in time when the decline set in. This is based, for Calixt, on the order of rank of the respective patriarchates. As long as Rome was the capital of the empire, the bishop of Rome enjoyed primacy. When Constantinople became the new capital, its patriarch enjoyed primacy. Thus when Pope Boniface III received recognition as the ecumenical patriarch from the immoral emperor Phocas, the foundation was laid for the great perversion which followed.

Not unlike classical Lutheran Orthodoxy, the rise of the papacy stands as the centerpiece of this story. The popes' lust for power is the driving force behind the great perversion,¹²¹ and the schism of East and West in 1054 was the logical conclusion of papal machinations. This perverse ambition and overwhelming desire (*ambitio et*

¹²⁰“Nach Luther haben auch in den dunkelsten Zeiten der Kirchengeschichte die Ordnungen des Predigtamtes und der Sakramente eine Sukzession des Geistes Christi vermittelt. Calixt führt diesen Gedanken fort und modifiziert ihn zugleich, indem er ihn auf die fundamentalen Glaubenswahrheiten anwendet.“ Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 67.

¹²¹Schüssler notes that Calixt is dependent on Casaubonus for his depiction of the papacy's attempt to rule both the church and the world as the turning point in church history when its decline set in. Cf. Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 201, n. 22.

dominandi cupiditas) reaches its zenith in the person of Pope Gregory VII, and Calixt is not afraid to call the ambition of this pope to rule both the church and the world the heresy of Hildebrand (*haeresis Hildebrandiana*).¹²² Schüssler notes the litany of abuses that follow in the wake of Hildebrand: the claim to papal infallibility, the asserted lordship over worldly powers, the political misuse of excommunication, and the unlawful release of vassals from princes who had fallen out of favor with him. In the course of time the demands of the papacy were bolstered and the avarice of the clergy satisfied by the misuse of the power of the keys and penance. Then Dispensations, excommunications, interdicts, private confession, celibacy, years of jubilee, indulgences, purgatory, the denial of the cup to the laity, transubstantiation, which increased the laity's awe of the priests, and the assertion that the pope was the vicar of Christ were introduced to further support the papal and priestly lust for power.¹²³ Furthermore the Pope used the mendicant orders to establish his supremacy over the common people and persecuted the pious German Kaisers to establish his supremacy over the worldly powers. So it was the Pope who ushered in a reign of superstition, corruption, abuse and tyranny. As if this were not enough, Calixt also criticizes the Scholastics for their lack of philological training and their argumentative natures as they indulged themselves in speculative theology.

The Reformation as the third epoch in Calixt's *schema* is the work of God by which he intended to bring the church back to her roots. In the Reformation God has had mercy on his church and has used Martin Luther to expose the antichrist¹²⁴ and usher in the

¹²²Georg Calixt, *De conjugio clericorum*, 590. Quoted in Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 68.

¹²³Schüssler is referring to Calixt's *De conjugio clericorum*, 590 f. Cf. Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 68.

¹²⁴Cf. *Digressio de arte nova*, 448ff.

church's renewal. God prepared the Reformation with a revival in learning, as Schüssler observes. Calixt repeatedly emphasizes that progress in knowledge, especially the restoration of classical languages and letters due to the transplanting of Greek learning in Italy in the fifteenth century, led to the rediscovery of the ancient shape of the church (*prisca facies ecclesiae*) and the necessary renewal that followed. The rebirth of the humanities was the necessary prerequisite for the Reformation.¹²⁵

In addition Calixt sees earlier protestations as a prelude to the actual Reformation. Therefore, Berengar, Waldes, Wycliffe, Hus and Jerome of Prague are seen as pre-Reformers who did not succeed in arriving at the complete truth that Luther discovered. Calixt therefore sees Luther in the context of the renewal of knowledge and learning brought about by Renaissance humanism, and he stands in a line of succession of the earlier would-be Reformers. Furthermore, like his orthodox contemporaries, Calixt sees Luther as a unique individual and as a *Theopneustos*, and a divine instrument of the Reformation.¹²⁶ Unlike his orthodox contemporaries, however, Calixt sees the Reformation itself as nothing other than an attempt to return to the purity of the ancient church and not a singular novelty. Therefore the fruit of the Reformation is not so much the discovery of the Gospel—Calixt mentions justification by faith only in passing—but rather liberation from papal tyranny, purification of the church from superstition, the

¹²⁵“Calixt hebt immer wieder hervor, daß ohne den Fortschritt der Wissenschaft, insbesondere ohne die Restitution der linguae und litterae seit der Verpflanzung der griechischen Gelehrsamkeit nach Italien im 15. Jahrhundert die *prisca facies ecclesiae* nicht hätte wiederentdeckt und die notwendige Erneuerung nicht hätte ins Werk gesetzt werden können. Die Wiedergeburt der Wissenschaft bildet die Voraussetzung der Reformation.“ Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 69. Calixt states, “Tantae . . . molis et tam necessariae reformationis opus absque adminiculis subsidiisque in eam rem necessariis perfici non poterat.” *Apparatus theologicus*, 155. Calixt also states, “Factum itaque non sine numine et providentia Dei opt. Max.” that by the end of the Byzantine empire “in Italiam transirent viri ejus nationis eruditi, et secum Graecas Musas adducerent.” *Apparatus theologicus*, 156. Quoted in Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 202, n. 36.

¹²⁶Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 69.

proper use of the sacraments, renewal of the study and use of Scripture, and the full recognition of Christ as the sole mediator between God and man.¹²⁷

The Reformation, however, remains incomplete since the papacy did not yield to its demands. Therefore there is a reformed and a non-reformed Western church now.¹²⁸

Calixt considers the Roman Catholic the most impure of all the confessional churches due to all the superstitious accretions it has maintained and considers the church of the Augsburg confession the most pure of all churches. The stance toward tradition taken by each helps propel them in their respective directions.

The Apostles' Creed as an Ecumenical Norm

A significant aspect of Calixt's ecumenical program was his high view of the Apostles' Creed. It contained in concentrated form all that was necessary for salvation.¹²⁹ In fact, of all the ancient creeds, only the Apostolic contained everything necessary for salvation. Calixt's assertion that it was the most complete compilation of the articles of faith was so severely contested by the proponents of Lutheran Orthodoxy during the Syncretistic debate that one could rename the controversy the debate over the Apostles' Creed.¹³⁰ The doctrine of the sufficiency of the Apostolic symbol is the inner ring Calixt's "Union theology" (*Unionstheologie*). The outer ring contains the doctrine of the *consensus quinquesaecularis*, the doctrine of the consensual explication of the

¹²⁷Ibid. Cf. *Apparatus theologicus*, 151.

¹²⁸Ibid., 70.

¹²⁹Cf. Calixt, *Resp. Mog.* thesis 42, thesis 92, thesis 45, thesis 117. Cf. Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 252.

¹³⁰“Es ist die vollständige Sammlung der Glaubensartikel—dies hat dann die lutherische Orthodoxie heftig bestritten im Synkretistischen Streit, den man vom Streitgegenstand her einen—allerdings im verkehrter Schlachtordnung geführten—Apostolikumsstreit nennen könnte.” Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 252.

articles of faith by the decisions of the ecumenical councils and the theology of the church fathers of the first five hundred years.¹³¹ In the center of Calixt's unionistic theology stood justifying faith and the eternal blessedness of humankind, not the church and her sacraments.¹³² On closer inspection those weaknesses of Calixt's system become apparent. Therefore Calov was able to attack Calixt's teaching by pointing out that justification by faith, a fundamental article of Christian doctrine that was necessary for salvation (*fides salvifica*), was not dealt with in the Apostles' Creed. Therefore the Apostolic symbol could not function as an ecumenical norm—certainly not as Calixt wanted—since it did resolve the Roman Catholic-Protestant impasse.

Tradition as a Second Principle of Faith (*principium cognoscendi*)

Christoph Böttigheimer agrees with Engel, Schüssler and Ritschl, that the first epistemological principle (*Erkenntnisprinzip* or *principium cognoscendi*) is Scripture—infallible and sufficient, and that tradition is the second principle.¹³³ Calixt first expressed his views concerning tradition in his *Epitome theologiae* of 1619. Then his encyclopedic introduction to theology, the *Apparatus theologicus* of 1628, dealt even more extensively with the subject and finally his introduction (*Prooemium*) to the Vincentian Canon in 1629 expressed his fully developed view of tradition as a secondary principle after Scripture. By tradition Calixt understands the witness the church bears to the apostolically handed down doctrine.¹³⁴ Calixt, however, differentiates between the

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid., 253.

¹³³Cf. Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 71 ff; Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit in der gespaltenen Christenheit*, 127 ff; Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 393 ff.

¹³⁴“Traditionem . . . accipit Vincentius speciali significatu pro testimonio videlicet Ecclesiae, quod de doctrina ab Apostolis et primis eius praeconibus et mystis accepta perhibet.” Georg Calixt, *Prooemium ad*

witness of the apostles, the Holy Scriptures, and the witness of the church—the tradition versus traditions distinction mentioned at the start of the discussion of Calixt. Unlike that which has been passed down to the church, the apostles were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit as they bore witness to the truth, and therefore God is the actual author of the doctrine handed down to us by the Holy Scriptures.

While God through the Scriptures, has passed down to us the heavenly doctrine necessary for salvation, the church bears witness to the doctrine that has originally been passed down to us from God.¹³⁵ Since Scripture is both inspired and infallible, it is not possible for the church's tradition to be infallible though it too is contained within a limited amount of written material. Tradition has come about through the general help of God,¹³⁶ and in the final analysis these ecclesiastical ideas and practices should not be confused with Holy Scripture, whose authority remains absolute and which is itself a source for tradition. Tradition may function as a secondary principle because the church, as a universal entity, cannot err since if it were to err it would no longer be the church.¹³⁷

Augustini „De doctrina Christiana“ et Vincentii Lerinensis „Commonitorium“ (Helmstedt, 1626/1655), 28. [Hereafter cited as *Prooemium*] This work is also found in Georg Calixt, *Werke in Auswahl*, vol. 1, *Einleitung in die Theologie*, Ed. Inge Mager (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 379. [Hereafter cited in block quotes as [1, 379]]. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 156.

¹³⁵“Alias ipsa quoque divina lex sive sacra Scriptura est traditio, sed, quod observari cupimus, Deus in Scriptura, quam per Prophetas et Apostolos condi voluit, mysteria sive articulos fidei et sacramenta salutis nostrae necessaria tradit revelando et sciscendo sive instituendo et mandando; ecclesia vero eadem tradit nec revelando nec instituendo, sed de revelatis ac institutis divinitus testificando. Usus autem apud ecclesiasticos scriptores obtinuit, ut posteriore hoc sensu vox Traditionis potissimum capiatur.” Calixt, *Prooemium*, 28f, [1, 379f]. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 157.

¹³⁶“Et dicitur traditio, non quod citra omnem scripturam et literarum adminiculum conservetur, sed quod praeter et extra Scripturam canonicam libris, quales ab hominibus non per infallibilem assistentiam, sed per communem et ordinarium Dei opem confici solent, contineatur.” Calixt, *Prooemium*, 37 [1, 388]. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 157.

¹³⁷“Certum est ex praedictionibus et promissionibus divinis quas Scriptura exhibet, Ecclesiam, quam Servator noster eiusque iussu et auspiciis Apostoli et viri Apostolici fundarunt, ad finem usque mundi duraturam esse, atque adeo everti, et interire, sive, quod idem est, in doctrinam ad salutem necessaria errare non posse.” Calixt, *De auctoritate antiquitatis ecclesiasticae*, 74. Thesis 21. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 158.

But the universal entity church is not co-terminous with the institutional church—an important qualification and distinction. Furthermore, Christ has promised to be with the church until the end of the ages, and this very church also bears witness to the truth found in the Scriptures.¹³⁸

Böttigheimer notes that Calixt's understanding of tradition is not as novel as it first might appear. Melancthon, Flacius, and Gerhard had all related their concept of tradition to the notion of "witnesses to the truth" (*testes veritatis*). This notion assumed that there had been an unbroken chain of witnesses to the truth that provided evidence for the historical continuity of the correct understanding of the Gospel in diverse times and places.¹³⁹ Calixt, however, goes further than these theologians by assuming that the universal church had more than witnesses to the truth. He reasons that the universal church contained all doctrines necessary for salvation and therefore successfully conveyed the Gospel. Consequently theology now has two epistemological principles (*Erkenntnisprinzipien*) by which true doctrine may be ascertained: either through Scripture alone or with the help of tradition.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸“Monemus, nos per traditionem non velle intellectam doctrinam a Scripturis canonicis alienam, sed potius Ecclesiae prae cae catholicaeque testimonium et consensum, quo ipsa illa, quae in Scripturis proponuntur, dogmata comprobentur.” Calixt, *De universalis primaevae ecclesiae auctoritate* (1658), 101, thesis 5. Quoted in Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 158.

¹³⁹“Mit der Ausbildung seines Traditionsverständnisses steht Calixt nicht allein. Denn schon die altlutherische Theologie hatte den Begriff der Tradition auf den Gedanken der “testes veritatis” bezogen, was soviel besagt, daß es im Laufe der Kirchengeschichte immer wieder Zeiten und Orte gab, deren Zeugnisse die geschichtliche Kontinuität des wiederentdeckten rechten Verständnisses des Evangeliums belegen.” Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 158. Böttigheimer compares Calixt's view with that of Flacius' view found in the *Catalogus testium veritatis*.

¹⁴⁰“Diesen altlutherischen Traditionsgedanken greift Calixt somit auf und modifiziert ihn dahingehend, daß seiner Überzeugung nach in der universalen Kirche nicht nur testes veritatis zu finden sind, sondern die heilsnotwendige Lehre als Ganzes, so wie dies auch vom Evangelium vermittelt wird. Demnach gibt es in der Theologie zwei unabhängige Erkenntnisprinzipien, von denen aus die rechte Lehre ermittelt werden kann: entweder an Hand des Schriftprinzips oder aber mit Hilfe des Traditionsprinzips.” Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 158–59.

Universality, Antiquity and Consent: The Vincentian Canon in Calixt's Theology

With tradition functioning as an epistemological principle (*principium cognoscendi*) for Calixt, it must have criteria by which this witness of the church may be ascertained.¹⁴¹ Calixt relies on Vincent's formula, "that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone,"¹⁴² to establish two criteria by which to determine the valid content of tradition. These two marks of proper tradition (*notae legitimae traditionis*) are universality (*universitas*) and the consensus of antiquity (*consensus antiquitatis*).¹⁴³ Like Vincent of Lerins he ascribes *universitas* to the present and the *consensus antiquitatis* to the past, though the situation of a Christendom divided by confessionalization did not face Vincent as it did Calixt. Therefore *universitas* applies only potentially to the universal church (*ecclesia universalis*) of the present, while the *consensus antiquitatis* functions as an interpretation of the "always" (*semper*) and the "by everyone" (*ab omnibus*) of the ancient church as it existed in unbroken unity stretching back to the very beginning of the church.¹⁴⁴

Even as Calixt seeks to apply the principle of *universitas* to the present he looks to the past for guidance. Therefore the historical patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria still represent for Calixt the entire Christian church in

¹⁴¹For the following discussion see Peter Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit in der gespaltenen Christenheit. Untersuchungen zur Theologie Georg Calixts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 131–35. See also Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Irenik und Polemik*, 159–67.

¹⁴²"Teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est." *Migne Patrologia Latina* 50, 640. Quoted in Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 131.

¹⁴³One would expect Calixt to have antiquity and consensus functioning as two separate concepts. Their function, however, collapses into one operative concept for Calixt since antiquity is the guiding principle in his system. "Legitimae itaque traditionis tres iuxta Vincentium notae sunt: Universitas, Antiquitas et in ipsa antiquitate Consensio, quam ita aliquando effert, ut dicat tenendum esse, quod 'UNIVERSALITER ANTIQUITUS' traditum fuerit, ut cap. IV et XXV. Aliquando UNIVERSITAS ET ANTIQUITATIS CONSENSIONEM coniungit, omnes tres notas hac locutione combinando ut cap. XXXIV, antepenultimo et ultimo." *Prooemium*, 31 [1, 381–82].

¹⁴⁴Cf. Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 131.

the present.¹⁴⁵ Calixt reminds readers of Tertullian's appeal to the apostolically founded churches in supporting his own high view of the patriarchates in the present.

Nevertheless, Calixt has no illusions about the difficulties of arriving at the pure content of *universitas* in the present due to the superstitions and corruptions of the Roman Catholic church in particular, as well as the fragmented state of Christendom, both of which make the present appeal to universality extremely difficult.¹⁴⁶

The second *nota legitimae traditionis* antiquity (*antiquitas*) is easier to discern than *universitas* since its content has not been fragmented.¹⁴⁷ In antiquity the church existed in visible unity whereas the fragmentation of the present day church and pervading heresies present Calixt with very real difficulties for his theological system.¹⁴⁸ The true teachings of the church are found in the ancient church in its pristine purity, not covered over or falsified by the confessionalism of the present day situation.¹⁴⁹ Thus the source

¹⁴⁵“Universitatem spectantes considerabimus in primis sedes Patriarchales, quae praeter Romanam in Romano imperio quondam fuerunt et hodie quoque Dei singulari beneficio, quamvis sub iugum Turcicum redactae, supersunt. Sunt autem Constantinopolitana una cum tota ecclesia Graeca, Alexandria, cui Aethiopica adhaeret, Antiochena cum Syriaca et Ierosolymitana. Quae ab omnibus illis unanimi consensu traduntur, recipiuntur, probantur, ab Apostolis sine dubio profecta et accepta sunt.” *Prooemium*, 31.

¹⁴⁶“Quia tamen aliquid sine dubio abest, Romana nimirum sedes ambitione sua pacem catholicae ecclesiae turbavit et unitatem scidit, . . . superstitiones et corruptelas bene multas invexit, . . . inde fit, ut hodie ab Universitate argumentum sive commode sive expedite duci semper nequeat. Equidem nullus dubito, in quo omnes totius mundi ecclesiae unanimiter conveniant, id revera catholicum esse. Sed si de aliqua sententia quaestio oboriatur, unde ego scibo aut quomodo aliis probabo, sive ipsam sive oppositam hodie ab omnibus mundi ecclesiis unanimi consensu UBIQUE recipi? Quin agnoscit Vincentius noster fieri posse, ut magna ecclesiae pars deficiat (cap. 4 et 6). Quae cum nihilo minus ecclesiae et quidem catholicae ecclesiae titulum arrogare pergat, argumentum ab unanimi consensu petendum difficile et intricatum efficit.” *Prooemium*, 32–33.

¹⁴⁷“Hac enim niti plus habet, nisi fallor, certitudinis, et minus difficultatis.” *De veritate unice religionis christianae et autoritate antiquitatis ecclesiasticae dissertations* (Helmstedt: 1658), 31. [Hereafter cited as *De. auct. ant. eccl.* according to theses] Quoted in Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 221 n. 30.

¹⁴⁸Calixt finds his tentative solution in the universal judgment of the church. “Cum enim haeretici, qui Scripturas torquent et iuxta sensum, non quem in iis inveniunt, sed quem in eas invehunt, interpretantur, pertinaces esse soleant et in sententia, quam sibi persuaserunt et tuendam semel susceperunt, obstinati, e re fuerit ex hypothesibus, quas aut ipsi concedant aut certe sine extremae absurditatis nota negare nequeant, illos convinci. Absurdissimi merito habentur, si dicant se solos sapere, contra vero ecclesias omnes, quam late per universam orbem terrarum nomen Christianum diffusum est, errare.” *Prooemium*, 30.

¹⁴⁹Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 132.

of pure doctrine lies in the critical editions of the fathers' writings that the humanists have edited. This, however, leads to the question of the reliability of the sources available to Calixt.

Calixt deals with the issue of the remains of Christian antiquity and whether their witness to the truth adequately reflects the ancient tradition.¹⁵⁰ Calixt discusses the problem of the reception of antiquity. That includes, for instance, whether the most significant churches of that time are now unknown to us, whether the most learned doctors of antiquity are lost to us now since they did not leave any writings behind, and finally whether the most significant works of antiquity are no longer extant and we have only the remains of the less significant ones.¹⁵¹

Calixt answers the first problem with the idea that the churches founded by the apostles were the most significant and that we still have their writings today.¹⁵² Furthermore, the writings of the bishops of those churches are in agreement with the tradition of the apostles and their orthodox contemporaries, and therefore their writings meet the criterion of valid tradition.¹⁵³ Calixt, thanks to his humanist training, also

¹⁵⁰Cf. *Prooemium*, 38–40, and *De auctoritate antiquitatis ecclesiasticae*, theses 18–20.

¹⁵¹“Annon potuerunt in orbe terrarum insignes et celebres esse ecclesiae, quarum ad nos ne quidem nomen pervenerit? Annon celebrium etiam et nobis notarum ecclesiarum doctores plerique monumentorum nihil reliquerunt? Annon multa a viris praeclaris praeclare scripta iniuria aevi et neglegentia hominum intercidere potuerunt et sine dubio interciderunt? . . . superesse autem hodie deteriora et minus accurata scripta? Traditionem igitur, quae Consensione antiquitatis nititur, infirmo et labili fundamento superstrui.” *Prooemium*, 38 [1, 389].

¹⁵²“Respondeo breviter: Quomodo potuerunt insignes et celebres esse ecclesiae, si nemini innotuerunt, cum nullus sit orbis habitati et culti angulus pridem non excussus? Et quid moramur incognitas ecclesias, cum in antiquitate notissimae sint, quas Apostoli fundaverunt, . . .” *Prooemium*, 38–39 [1, 389].

¹⁵³“Harum, inquam, ecclesiarum episcoporum doctorumque scripta exstant, qui doctrinam, quam profitentur, a maioribus se accepisse et cum coetaneis orthodoxis, quos singulos fidem suam libris comprehendere et exponere nihil opus erat, communem se habere testantur, quod quare illis non credatur nulla est ratio. Esto praeterea, interciderint nonnulla scripta ex usu futura, si superessent; praestantissima tamen interciderint et deteriora servata esse pugnat cum usitata hominum diligentia et praecipue cum divina, quae ecclesiae numquam deest, providentia.” *Prooemium*, 39 [1, 389–90].

acknowledges that some of the writings of antiquity are now lost to us. Nevertheless, he reasons that it is impossible for the most important to have been lost and only the worst to have survived. Such a scenario would contradict normal human behavior which preserves the best and not the worst.¹⁵⁴ This is exemplified by the fact that the best manuscripts are of the most significant pagan authors rather than the poorest. His second argument is from divine providence, that God would not allow heretical manuscripts and those of the poorest theological quality to survive as witnesses to future generations. His theological and historical arguments complement one another, so that for Calixt the providential care of God for his church is a fact which is historically verifiable.¹⁵⁵ It is a position that rests on faith and presumption, but not historic evidence. Thus it is an argument from silence.

Antiquity as a criterion requires that it be connected to the beginning of Christendom.¹⁵⁶ Yet antiquity is a problematic criterion for Calixt as long as the current situation of a splintered Christendom continues to debate what the original and divine teaching is. In the ancient church the divine and correct teaching is united to the ancient church by way of proximity, and furthermore, the church was visibly united—or so Calixt argues, though as we have seen in the treatment of orthodox Lutherans that was not necessarily the case in the ancient church.

¹⁵⁴ “Ita enim fert ratio et natura, ut, quo quodque est elegantius et maiorem habet utilitatem, eo quoque diligentius ab hominibus, quorum interest, custodiatur; negligantur autem quae aliter sese habent. Supersunt itaque a bis mille vel paulo paucioribus annis praestantissimorum philosophorum, oratorum, poetarum opera, neglecta vero iacuerunt et tandem penitus interierunt Maevii, Bavii et scriptoris Cyclici carmina.” *Prooemium*, 39–40. [1, 390].

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 132–33, for Calixt’s discussion of ancient manuscripts.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Prooemium*, 42 [1, 392].

The *semper* in the Vincentian Canon is treated by Calixt in the sense of continuity with the beginning of the church and its teaching and thus flows back into his interpretation of *antiquitas*.¹⁵⁷ Certainly Calixt is aware of the attendant problems of describing *antiquitas* as the first five hundred years of the church's history. It is a vast period of time,¹⁵⁸ and yet the first century is the one of decisive importance, for what is not contained therein cannot have validity. With the fifth century ends the classical period of the early church, the time of the most determinative church fathers and councils, and decay then sets in. Vincent of Lerins, situated at this critical time, looks back already, according to Calixt, as if the conciliar age of Christendom has already passed as he develops his own principle of tradition.

Consensus is an important factor for Calixt's understanding of *antiquitas* and derives from the Vincentian formula. Consensus by its very nature excludes what one reads in one or two of the church fathers, excludes what are their private opinions (*privatae opinioniones*) and not public or binding opinions pertaining to matters of salvation that the wider sweep of the fathers has addressed since the beginning.¹⁵⁹ That to which all testify, that to which and in which all the fathers agree, are the original doctrines necessary for salvation, i.e., the rule of faith.¹⁶⁰ These are the focus of the church and define its position. Nevertheless, the *privatae opinioniones* of the fathers are by no means illegitimate. They only become so, argues Calixt, if they are imposed on the church, in the same way the particular doctrines of the confessional churches became invalid by

¹⁵⁷“Illud SEMPER, ut firmo stet talo, prima secula et Apostolicam aetatem proxime subsequenta comprehendat necesse est.” *Prooemium*, 42 [1, 392]. See also page 52.

¹⁵⁸Cf. *Prooemium*, 43.

¹⁵⁹*Prooemium*, 37 ff.

¹⁶⁰*Prooemium*, 82 ff; See also *Dissertatio*, thesis 69.

their imposition on particular churches in the sixteenth century. Still the private opinions of the church fathers are not part of the core teaching of the ancient church and therefore do not belong properly to *antiquitas*. It becomes apparent that *antiquitas* may be understood as continuity with the beginning of the church.¹⁶¹ Conversely, this continuity extends into the present, and therefore the same truth that the ancient church possessed exists now in the present church.

The witness of the ancient church has been passed down to us in two forms: first, as the consensus obtained in the writings of the fathers, and second, as the decrees and explanations of the symbols of the ecumenical councils.¹⁶² While there is an unbroken chain of witnesses on the part of the church fathers stretching back to the time of the apostles, such is not the case with the ecumenical symbols since the church was being persecuted for the first three hundred years. Nevertheless the apostolic symbol stands in continuity with the beginning of the church due to its content. Though not derived from the apostles, it represents their teaching in a most concise form.¹⁶³

The authority of the ecumenical symbols rests on two things: first, the ecumenical synods called upon Scripture, and second, the consensus of the church, represented by the council fathers, is manifested through them. Their function is not to define new dogmas

¹⁶¹Cf. Peter Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 134.

¹⁶²“Traditio igitur ex antiquitate derivatur per duos rivos: unum quidem symbolorum, confessionem et declarationem, ut plurimum ab Universalibus conciliis emanantium, alterum consentientium doctorum scriptorumque.” *Prooemium*, 47.

¹⁶³“Itaque consensui veterum doctorum ex scriptis ipsorum hausto iure meritoque iungitur consensus eorundem symbolis et confessionibus universalium conciliorum expressus, quorum definitiones a priore quidem Scriptura potissimum nituntur, a posteriore autem subsecuto universalis ecclesiae consensu.” *Prooemium*, 48.

for the church. Calixt invokes Melanchthon here: rather they testify to that which the Scriptures have already shown the church.¹⁶⁴

Although infallibility is promised to the universal church of the present as well as the past in the form of the revealed Scriptures, it does not pertain to the tradition of the church, which retains the quality of human certainty at best.¹⁶⁵ From this it becomes clear that tradition can only be an epistemological principle for scientific argumentation, not a source of doctrine like the Scriptures.¹⁶⁶ Peter Engel observes that some have contended that Calixt's understanding of tradition ultimately leads to a Tridentine understanding of tradition.¹⁶⁷ This is not the case, however, since tradition for Calixt is not a norm of the Christian faith. The principle of tradition (*Traditionsprinzip*) in Calixt's theology continues to function *only* as a secondary epistemological principle for theological argumentation, and was never intended to supplement a supposed lack in the Scriptures.

An Ecumenical Council

Calixt highly valued church councils as groups of men learned in Scripture—not that they have the power to create new doctrines, but they clarify that a certain teaching is scriptural, and when teachings contrary to fundamental articles of faith appear they are condemned by those assembled.¹⁶⁸ So the leadership of the church, according to Calixt's theory, was the external principle of the majority deciding in synod or council, those

¹⁶⁴*De auct. ant. eccl.*, thesis 36. Cf. Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 135.

¹⁶⁵“ . . . quae vero fuerit publica et passim recepta primorum seculorum doctrina . . . patere certitudine morali, qua in illo quidem genere non detur major.” *Prooemium*, 42.

¹⁶⁶*Prooemium*, 60. Cf. Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit*, 135.

¹⁶⁷Cf. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 404.

¹⁶⁸Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 4, 395.

assembled acting as the highest authority. Unlike Gerhard, Calixt dreamed of councils settling matters in the Germanies. First in 1619 he hoped for the realization of synods. One could still hope for such things in northern Germany since the Great War at that time was limited to Bohemia. Even the Reformed had their great council at that time in Dort. But the spread of the Thirty Years War made the possibility of such a council increasingly unlikely. Nevertheless Calixt maintained his theoretical view valuing such councils. With the spread of the Thirty Years War his focus on the value of councils no longer projected him into the future but rather into the past of the Christian church. Thus in antiquity he now found his ideal, and he saw in it a perfect realization of his own ecumenical goals and concerns.¹⁶⁹

According to Böttigheimer the orthodox Lutherans failed to refute Calixt due to their own scholasticism which led them to be distanced from the Reformation's main concern with the doctrine of sin and justification by faith. Since these doctrines had become as alien to them as to Calixt they were equally foiled. Thus they were forced to attack Calixt on the minor points of his dogma since their own scholasticism had corrupted their own doctrines. In essence they were reluctant to attack the real points of controversy between themselves and Calixt.¹⁷⁰ This is a caricature of Lutheran Orthodoxy and could hardly be the case since it was the orthodox Lutherans' concern that the formal and material principles of the Reformation were being placed in jeopardy by Calixt. On the other hand, Böttigheimer argues that Calov was the only one to understand Calixt's theology, yet Calov's *Consensus repetitus fidei* was not very

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 398.

¹⁷⁰Böttigheimer relies on Heinrich Schmid for this opinion. Cf. Heinrich Schmid, *Geschichte der synkretistischen Streitigkeiten in der Zeit des Georg Calixt* (Erlangen, 1846). Schmid's opinion, passed on to Böttigheimer, demonstrates how poorly Lutheran Orthodoxy was understood in the nineteenth century.

effective in refuting Calixt on the essentials of his theology. In fact, Hans Leube points out that by focusing on the trivial, the *Consensus repetitus fidei* failed to attack the center of Calixt's theology and what was really at stake: the formal and material principles of the Reformation.

One should not get the impression that Calixt was the victor in the Syncretistic debate. That was hardly the case. The Orthodox Lutheran universities of Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Strassburg did succeed in "containing" Calixtine theology and the influence of the University of Helmstedt during the age of Orthodoxy, but they were prevented by the moderating efforts of the University of Jena from annihilating it. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the Syncretistic debate sucked the life out of Lutheran Orthodoxy. It was the age of Enlightenment and the rise of Pietism that made Lutheran Orthodoxy obsolete, not the ecumenical endeavors of Calixt.

If this is all so, where does that leave us—or more importantly, where does it leave the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy? We have seen that Calixt was able to quote Melancthon, Chemnitz, and Gerhard as model theologians who revered the ancient church and its consensus, even as he went far beyond them in his own ecumenical endeavors. How did Lutheran Orthodoxy respond to Calixt's consensus of the first five hundred years and his argument that tradition functioned as a secondary principle? We now turn to Calixt's nemesis, Abraham Calov, to see how Orthodoxy responded to the reinvigorated appeal to the criteria of the Vincentian Canon and the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis*.

Abraham Calov's Catholicity and Refutation of Calixt

Abraham Calov¹⁷¹ was born in Mohrunen, East Prussia in 1612. Calov studied philosophy at the University of Königsberg, and received his Masters degree in 1632. His most influential professors of theology were Johannes Behm and Coelestin Myslenta. Both represented a strict and uncompromising Lutheran Orthodoxy. In fact, Myslenta was a Calov before Calov as he fought against the tolerant policies of the Reformed East Prussian court. From Myslenta Calov also learned the science of biblical philology, with which he later sought to make the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture a part of Lutheran Orthodoxy. In 1637 Calov received his doctorate in theology from the University of Rostock. Calov's *Metaphysica divina* (1636) and his *Scripta philosophica* (1651) breathe the air of Aristotelian metaphysics. Calov proffered a Lutheran metaphysics, and founded a philosophical epistemological theory (*Erkenntnistheorie*) that would lead the University of Wittenberg in a direction that would ultimately lead to Kant.¹⁷²

In 1637 Calov was back in Königsberg, but then received a call to be professor of theology at the University of Rostock in 1640. Calov, due to his erudition, was said to have lectured to as many as a thousand students at time. In 1643 Calov received a call to serve as pastor of Trinity church in Danzig, where he had to share his pulpit with a

¹⁷¹According to Johannes Wallmann, Calov, one of the most significant theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy, has been neglected by scholars due to his reputation as an excessive polemicist. Max Wundt discusses Calov's metaphysical philosophy in *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1939). Robert D. Preus discusses Calov's contributions to Lutheran dogmatics in *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970). Kenneth G. Appold analyzes Calov's doctrine of "calling" in *Abraham Calov's Doctrine of Vocatio in Its Systematic Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). Volker Jung treats Calov's exegesis in *Das Ganze der Heiligen Schrift. Hermeneutik und Schriftauslegung bei Abraham Calov* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1999). Cf. Johannes Wallmann, "Calov, Abraham (1612-1686)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 7, Eds. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Muller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 568.

¹⁷²Cf. Johannes Wallmann, "Calov, Abraham (1612-1686)," 564. See also Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1939).

Reformed preacher. Danzig, a cosmopolitan city, was filled with Reformed, Roman Catholics and Socinians. Calov's seven years in Danzig were a battle for the purity of the Lutheran character of the city. In 1645 Calov was invited to participate in the religious colloquy at Thorn where he opposed Calixt and stood behind Johann Huelsemann as the second chief speaker for the Lutheran delegation. After the dissolution of the colloquy at Thorn Calov set about with even greater determination to refute the Reformed denying that they genuinely subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. With the advent of the Syncretistic Controversy Calov wrote against Georg Calixt and his irenic colleague Johann Latermann in his *Institutionum theologicarum ta prolegomena cum examine novae theologiae Calixtinae* of 1649. In 1650 Calov became the third professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Calov taught for thirty-two years in Wittenberg, and found loyal supporters in the persons of Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688) and Johann Deutschmann (1625-1706). Quenstedt had originally been a follower of Calixt, but was converted by the Wittenberg theologian, Wilhelm Leyser. Deutschmann was of lesser significance though he became famous for his disputes with Spener over Pietism. With their help Calov succeeded in restoring the University of Wittenberg to its former glory as the seat of the Reformation.

Calov's inaugural speech at Wittenberg in 1650 dealt with the false yearning to unite the confessions despite their material differences, and thereby set in motion the universities' attack upon Calixt and syncretism. Calixt never crossed swords with Calov personally and his death in 1656 temporarily ended the Syncretistic debate. The debate flared up again at the religious colloquy of Kassel in 1661. The count (*Landgraf*) of Hessen called both the Reformed and the Lutherans together to discuss the fundamental

differences between them. The Lutherans were represented by students of Calixt, Peter Musaeus and Johannes Heinichen. The colloquy followed Calixt's teachings in making the doctrinal differences between the confessions the fundamental articles of the faith that were necessary for salvation. The religious colloquy of Berlin in 1663 only exacerbated matters. Calov then published his *Consensus repetitus fidei* in 1664. It was an eighty-eight point by point refutation of Calixt and his deviation from the Lutheran Confessions. It was undersigned by the universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig, but the moderately orthodox University of Jena, under the leadership of Johannes Musaeus, refused to grant it confessional status.

Friedrich Ulrich Calixt kept the debate warm as he defended his father's theology in a lengthy treatise, the *Demonstratio liquidissima* (1667). Calov's student, Aegidius Strauch, responded with a *Consensus repetitus vindicatus* in 1668. But by now the Syncretistic debate had become ridiculous in the eyes of many, especially as it made its way onto the stage of a theatre. Duke Ernst (the Pious) of Sachsen-Gotha sent two peace delegations to the princely courts and universities with the hope of ending the debate (1670/71 and 1671/72). But after the Duke's death in 1675 the controversy flared up again for a third time. The ban to publish controversial material was renewed so Calov was forced to publish his *Historia syncretistica* in Frankfurt am Main in 1682. The *Historia* documented the history of unionistic attempts on the part of the competing confessions, beginning with the Marburg colloquy of 1529 and ending with present-day negotiations. With Calov's death in 1686 the Syncretistic Controversy died with him.

Calov's Calling

Calov was born to polemicize. His intellect, erudition and energy astounded even his adversaries. Johannes Kunze considers his polemics so impressive as “to awake a sense of participation (*Teilnahme*) as this single man, who was threatened on all sides, continued to maintain Lutheranism as an unbending and impregnable fortress in the midst of his adversaries’ polemical attacks. Since he was consumed with a holy cause his polemics take on a sense of urgency and center on the essentials.”¹⁷³ Other historians such as August Tholuck,¹⁷⁴ Hans Leube,¹⁷⁵ and Heinrich Schmid¹⁷⁶ are less impressed and consider his polemics excessive and his energy misguided. Calov dedicated twenty-six works to the Syncretistic Controversy alone, yet his anti-Socinian polemics are of a much higher quality.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, this self-proclaimed athlete for Christ (*strenuus Christi athleta*) never reached his supreme goal of seeing his *Consensus repetitus fidei* achieve confessional status.

Calov’s most important work, according to Robert Preus, was his *Biblia Illustrata*, a massively annotated Bible produced between 1672 and 1676 as a refutation of Hugo Grotius. This chapter, however, will focus on his *Digressio de nova theologia*

¹⁷³Johannes Kunze, “Calovius, Abraham” in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1897), 654.

¹⁷⁴Cf. August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1852).

¹⁷⁵Hans Leube, *Die Reformideen in der deutschen lutherischen Kirche zur Zeit der Orthodoxie* (Leipzig, 1924).

¹⁷⁶Heinrich Schmid notes that Calov often repeats himself in his anti-Syncretistic works so that the twenty-six works are not as impressive or as well written as they first appear. Cf. Heinrich Schmid, *Geschichte der Synkretistischen Streitigkeiten in der Zeit des Georg Calixt* (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1847), 238.

¹⁷⁷Calov’s contemporaries unanimously considered his anti-Socinian works to be his finest writings. His *Socinismus profligatus* (1652) makes use of seventy Socinian writings as he systematically addresses every possible theological locus. Cf. Johannes Wallmann, “Calov, Abraham” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 567.

Helmstadio-Regiomontanorum Syncretistarum that appeared in 1651. Calov considered this anti-Syncretistic work so important that he renamed the *Digressio* of 1651 the *Consideratio novae theologiae* and placed it in 1655 after the prologomena of the first volume of his very influential dogmatics, the *Systema locorum theologicorum*. The *Systema locorum theologicorum* appeared between 1655 and 1677 in twelve volumes, and is considered to be the most significant piece of Lutheran dogmatics since Gerhard's *Loci theologici*.

Calov's other important anti-Syncretistic works are his *Synopsis controversiarum potiorum—secundum seriem articulorum Aug. Conf. mit einer praefatio apologetica adversus D. Calixtum* (Wittenberg, 1652), the *Syncretismus Calixtinus* (Wittenberg, 1653), the *Harmonia Calixtino-haeretica* (Wittenberg, 1655) and the *Historia Syncretista* (1682). Concerning Calov's view of the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the fathers these works say nothing that Calov had not already stated in his *Digressio* of 1651. Nevertheless, Calov went further and sought to condemn Calixt and his unionistic-syncretism with the *Consensus repetitus fidei* of 1664,¹⁷⁸ a point by point refutation of Calixt's syncretism.¹⁷⁹ Calov went so far as to urge that the *consensus repetitus fidei* be granted confessional Lutheran status. The goal of the *Consensus repetitus fidei* was not only to refute the syncretism of Calixt and others, but also having condemned them to deprive them of the religious protection granted by the peace of Westphalia (1648).

¹⁷⁸The date ascribed to the *Consensus repetitus fidei* is 1665. The first edition, however, appeared in 1664 as a German-Latin edition, which was followed by a special Latin edition in 1666.

¹⁷⁹Though the *Consensus repetitus fidei* is a point by point refutation of Calixt Calov makes no mention of the Vincentian Canon or the *consensus quinquesaecularis* in this document. This is rather strange since such ideas were central to Calixt's theology and may justify the charge that Calov's attack upon Calixt focused on petty details instead of the core issues.

As noted above, the Syncretistic Controversy took place in three phases: (1) from the beginning of the religious colloquy at Thorn in 1645 to 1656; (2) from the time of the colloquies at Kassel and Berlin in 1661 until the princely order for the Saxon theologians to cease their quarrels in 1669; (3) Calov's debate with Johannes Musaeus in 1675 until his death in 1686. The controversy took on a new dimension in this third phase as Johannes Musaeus (1613-1681) and other moderate representatives of Orthodoxy at the University of Jena refused to accept the *Consensus repetitus fidei* as the confession for their day. Thus Calov's goal was thwarted by the moderating efforts of the Jena theologians and the debate finally ended with Calov's death in 1686.

In the *Consensus repetitus fidei* Calov condemns Calixt for failing to recognize the confessional value of the Augustana. He is unimpressed with Calixt's version of "perspectival relativism" that claims that unity could be achieved if all four great branches of Christendom gave up their peculiar doctrines.¹⁸⁰ According to Calixt, wherever there is novelty in one branch it should be held in suspicion by the other three. Therefore according to Calixt, many papal doctrines—the Calvinist denial of the real presence, the Greek denial that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity—are all novelties not recognized by the other three confessions. The ecumenical councils, however, are the common denominators recognized by all. These offer hope for reunification. Calov responds to Calixt's unionism by repudiating all forms of syncretism, as Calov affirms the Lutheran

¹⁸⁰Abraham Calov, *Consensus repetitus fidei vere lutheranae in illis doctrinae capitibus, quae contra puram, & invariata[m] augustanam confessionem, . . . D. Georgius Calixtus, professor Helmstadiensis, . . .* (Wittenberg, 1666), 75–76.

confessions and their condemnations and considers Calixt and his teaching tantamount to those of the pope and the antichrist.¹⁸¹

The Consideratio novae theologiae of the Systema locorum theologicorum

In the *Consideratio novae theologiae* Calov is keen on refuting Calixt's claim that tradition functions as a secondary or epistemological principle next to Scripture. Calov argues that every principle of the Christian faith, whether primary or secondary, ought to be infallible. This applies to the norm of scriptural interpretation as well, since it, too, ought to be certain and infallible. Calov is concerned to maintain the perspicuity of Scripture and preserve its genuine meaning from multiple interpretations of the same text. Tradition, however, or the *consensus patrum* of the first five hundred years, is not infallible, certain, or invincible. This is so because the fathers were able to err individually and corporately, for the promise of infallibility was not given to them. If one says this promise has been given to the church, then Calov responds that the fathers alone do not make up the church. This is borne out by Ignatius who stands as a lone example from the first century. The second century offers two more in Justin and Irenaeus, and the third gives us Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian. Alongside these examples stand Tertullian and Origen who fell into heresies in the same century. From all this, writes

¹⁸¹“Profitemur & docemus, dogmata & Doctores in Augustana Confessione, ejus Apologia & Smalcaldicis Articulis damnata & damnatos, hodieque esse damnanda & damnandos, fugienda & fugiendos, & quae Majores nostri tunc temporis judicarunt, non toleranda esse, . . . fugienda & refutanda esse, propter perpetuum periculum infectionis, . . . de qua in Praefatione Principum ad librum Concordiae haec sequentia extant: Quin potius mens atque animus noster fuit, fanaticas opiniones, earumq; pervicaces Doctores & blasphemias duntaxant (quos in Ditionibus, Ecclesiis & scholis nostris nequaquam tolerandos judicamus) palam reprehendere & damnare.” Ibid., 79.

Calov, there is hardly a unified church of the first five centuries let alone a church universal in which the doctors of the church did not comprise even a thousandth.¹⁸²

Calov argues that a principle of faith should be invincible and thereby capable of convincing adversaries of the truth of one's position. But the *consensus patrum* is not certain or indubitable because we do not have consensus in even one article of faith from all that survived from the first five hundred years. For example, if, concerning the blessed trinity, which is the highest and primary mystery of the faith, the testimonies from a universal consensus are required, the doctrine will be found wanting. Any number of fathers will be found to agree with Origen, Theophilus of Antioch, Lactantius, and Eusebius, a few stand with Tertullian, and none with Justin Martyr. It is not uncommon in this catholic faith to find some who will either not quite agree with one another or completely disagree with one another. Where then is there witness to consensus in the writings of the fathers? And that in not to mention the spurious additions, mutilations, and corruptions, so much so that many articles of faith found in the fathers are uncertain. This consensus is neither bright, clear, nor perspicuous enough. First, so much remains uncertain from the writings of the fathers. Furthermore the fathers were embroiled in so many controversies and their manner of speaking was often rhetorical or their mode of writing varied so frequently as to make them less than a certain guide to Scripture. So

¹⁸² "II. Omne principium fidei Christianae, sive *primarium* id dicas, sive *secundarium*, debet esse infallibile. Alias fides Christiana eidem tuto inniti non poterit. *Norma interpretationis Scripturae* pariter certa & infallibilis esse debet, alias de sensu Scripturae indubitato certi esse non poterimus. *Medium* quo adversariis, ora obturate de sensu Scripturae genuino debemus, *invictum* esse oportet, omnique exceptione superius. At traditio, aut consensus Patrum quinque secularis *infallibilis, certus, & invictus* non est: qui uti singuli errare potuere, ita etiam universi: neq; *illis, sive singulis, sive universis* promissa uspiam infallibilitas. Si dicas, *Ecclesiae promissum esse*. Patres certe illi tota non sunt Ecclesia. *Ignatius* pene solus ex *primo* adferri potest seculo, e *secundo* forte duo, *Justinus & Ireneus*, e tertio praeter *Clementum Alex. & Cyprianum* itidem vix alius orthodoxus, cum *Tertullianus & Origines* in haereses prolapsi censeantur. Num vero illi quinque totius seculi istius universa sunt Ecclesia, aut id, quod universae promissum Ecclesiae, illis jure arrogari potest, qui ne millesima pars Doctorum Ecclesiae fuere!" Abraham Calov, *Systema locorum theologorum*, vol. 1 (Wittenberg, 1655), 422. [Hereafter cited as *Systema*]

how is one able to judge the perspicuity of the *consensus patrum* when not so much as one article can be produced as evidence for such a consensus? The sufficiency and efficacy of such a consensus proves hollow when it comes to convincing adversaries of their errors.¹⁸³

This is hardly the end of the problems for these Syncretists like Calixt with his goal of an ecumenical consensus. Calov presses his case. A principle of divine faith ought to be divine. But the testimony of the fathers, where they supposedly agree, is but a human one.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the writings of the fathers even when and where they do agree with

¹⁸³“III. Quicquid pro *fidei principio, norma interpretationis Scripturae, & medio invicto adversarios convincendi* haberi debet, hoc ante omnia oportet esse *certum* atque *indubium*, itemque *perspicuum ac luclentum*, imo certius & luclentius eo, quod inde explicandum est, ac dijudicandum, ac denique *sufficiens atq; potens* ad convincendum twv anitlegontav in conscientia. At consensus Patrum non est *certus atq; indubius*, quia ne in uno fidei capite omnes, qui e quinque seculis prioribus superant, consentientes habentur.; si de S.S. Trinitate, quod summum est, ac primarium fidei mysterium, suffragia inquirenda ex unanimi sententia, reperientur non pauca apud *Originem, Theophilum Antiochenum, Lactantium, Eusebium*, quaedam etiam apud *Tertullianum*, nonnulla apud *Justinum*, aliosque fidei Catholicae aut non satis congrua, aut adversa; qui ergo consentiens suffragium habebitur e Patrum scriptis? Et quid aliis fiet capitibus, quum in hoc summo tot reperiantur dissentanea! Ne dicam, quod *supposititia, depravata, castrata, mutilata, corrupta*; adeoque multis locis *incerta* sint Patrum scripta, aut profecto non *ita certa*, ut iis fides inniti queat ceu principio. Neque is consensus est *luculentus & perspicuus* satis, quum multa loca *perobscura* sint apud Patres, multa *controversa*, variisque disputationibus obnoxia;: saepe *non ex sua, sed aliena* loquantur sententia saepe *rhetoricis declamationibus* aliquid dent, saepe *homilitice* atque *exoterice* loquantur, non *acroamaticae*, saepe *agnostice* tantum, non *didactice*, saepe *alterum extremum urgendo in alterum prolabantur*, saepe *paulo securius* loquantur, *ante mota cumprimis certamina*, quae, & alia hujusmodi dubiam reddunt & incertam ipsorum sententiam. Et quomodo *perspicuus* judicari potest consensus, quum ne quidem hactenus talis consensus productus sit *in ullo articulo*, ut statui de ejus evidentia quiverit. *Magis* autem *perspicuum* esse Patrum consensum, quam Scripturae textum de rebus creditu ad salutem necessariis, impium est, & Scripturae S. *perspicuitati* contrarium sal. CXIX. 105. Ps. XIX, 11. 2. Petr. 1, 19. Falsum denique, *sufficientum, efficacem ac satis validum* esse illum consensum ad convincendos adversarios de Scripturae sensu contradicentes; quem plerique adversarii parum curant, utpote *Sociniani ac Remonstrantes*, alli *Papae* decisioni subjiciunt, aut ut *probabile solum ac topicum* argumentum admittunt. Et num credemus, *divina virtute instructum* esse Patrum consensum, quae certe requiritur ad convincendos in conscientia adversarios? Num majorem ipsi, quam Scripturae *efficiam* adscribemus, ut *potentior* sit ad to disisomizein.” Calov, *Systema*, 422–24.

¹⁸⁴“IV. Principium fidei divinae *divinum* esse debet. At Patrum testimonium, utut illi consentire supponantur, *divinum* non est, sed *humanum*; quum humano tantum Spiritu scripserint. Porro: Nullum testimonium *humanum* fidem in rebus divinis facere potest *indubitam*. At consensus Patrum est testimonium *humanum*. Nam uniuscujusque Patris testimonium *humanum* esse, nemo diffitebitur. At *singularum* testimonia in *unum collata* non possunt esse alterius generis, quam cujus sunt *singula per se considerata*. Etsi enim fortassis crescat *autoritas gradus* propter multitudinem, non tamen mutatur *autoritatis species*. Si dicatur, *directos Patres fuisse, ita ut in iis, in quibus consentienter aliquid tradunt, non errarent*, mera petitio principii erit, quum ea directio Spiritus S. probari nequeat.” Calov, *Systema*, 424.

each other in doctrine or the explication of Scripture, are still at times guilty of errors and false interpretations.¹⁸⁵ And this unanimity is no foregone conclusion, for the fathers often, in fact, disagree with themselves or with others as they interpreted Scripture. Taking that all into account the fathers therefore fail to meet the appropriate requirement of an interpretative rule of Scripture.¹⁸⁶

Moreover, the fathers often were lacking in the necessary means of interpreting the Scriptures. They did not have the necessary knowledge of languages required to interpret the original text. For instance, Jerome and Origen had knowledge of Hebrew.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, apart from the original language deficiencies, the fathers exaggerated in their rhetorical declamations and disputations, and they often deviated from the literal meaning of the text as they used allegorical and figurative interpretations.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵“V. Quaecunque scripta erroribus obnoxia sunt, & variis scitent erroneis interpretationibus, ea non sunt certum fidei principium, aut regula interpretationis Scripturae, vel medium convincendi erronea dogmata. At Patrum scripta etiam ubi consentiunt inter se in dogmatibus, vel explicatione Scripturae, erroribus obnoxia sunt & scitent falsis interpretationibus, ut praecedente controversia ostensum, & res ipsa luculenter docet.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁶“VI. Cui nullo modo conveniunt *requisita regula interpretationis* Scripturae, id pro regula interpretationis suscipi non debet. At Patrum consensu i nullo modo conveniunt illa requisita regulae: quia ad regulam requiritur, ut sit non solum *infallibilis*, sed etiam *invariabilis*, sibi que constans maxime, ut sit *perfecta* undiquaeq; nullam additionem, vel detractorem admittens, juxta *Varini* definitionem kanwn metron adiyolson mhdemian progesin h afaresin dexomon. Patrum autem scripta non constant sibi, saepe Patres a se invicem, vel ab aliis dissident in interpretatione Scripturae, nec ea gaudent perfectione, cui nihil addi, aut derogari debeat, circa interpretationem Scripturae.” Calov, *Systema*, 424–25.

¹⁸⁷“IX. Qui destituti fuere ipsis mediis interpretationis Scripturae necessariis, eorum Scripta non possunt pro regula interpretationis Scripturae suscipi. At Patres ipsi destituti fuere illis mediis, imprimis linguarum cognitione, quae ad *Originalem* textum indagandum requiritur: quum praeter *Originem & Hieronymum* vix ulli Ebraea cognoverint.” Ibid., 425.

¹⁸⁸“IX. Qui ea fini scripta sua non ediderunt, ut vel principium fidei, vel interpretationis Scripturae regula essent, imo sua scripta subjecerunt normae Scripturae, horum scripta non sunt pro regula Scripturae suscipienda. At patres ea fini non scripsere, unde etiam non tam systemata fidei tradunt, aut capita fidei prosequuntur, quam rhetoricantur potius, ac disputationes instituunt, in quibus non raro ab *akrabeia declamantionibus suis*, & *disputationis* aestu abripiuntur, saepe etiam non tam genuinum literalem sensum, quam *allegoricum & figuratum* sectantur, ac magis *homilitice* refutant pleraq;, quam secundum accuratam textus pilusin: Denique Scripturae normae sua omnia subjiciunt, uti ex *Augustino* constat Epist.IX. *ad Hieronymum*. Ego solis &c.” Ibid.

The norm of scriptural interpretation, or the rule of faith as it is sometimes called, was a publicly received authority that enjoyed prestige throughout the patristic era. The wider consensus of the first five hundred years, however, did not enjoy the same authority or recognition throughout the patristic era because it did not even exist, and therefore it was impossible for the church to be guided by it during that same period. So argues Calov, in this way Calixt and the other Novators—innovators!—are seeking to introduce a principle of antiquity that antiquity itself did not recognize.¹⁸⁹ The ancient Doctors of the church, men such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Augustine, wanted to turn men from traditions to the font of Scripture, whereas the Novators want the opposite as they seek to turn men from Scripture to tradition.¹⁹⁰

Calov further argues that Calixt’s version of tradition as a secondary principle will become coequal with the primary principle of Scripture and thereby become coequal with Scripture itself.¹⁹¹ Calov maintains that the argument for tradition is circular: that is

¹⁸⁹“XI. *Norma interpretationis Scripturae & principium, vel etiam regula fidei* ab Ecclesia publica recepta fuit autoritate, eamque dignitatem semper obtinuit in Ecclesia. At consensus ille quinque secularis non fuit ceu norma interpretationis & principium fidei receptus in Ecclesia autoritate publica: A quam enim Ecclesia receptum esse dicent? *A priorum trium, vel quatuor seculorum* Ecclesia receptus statui non potest, cum adhuc tum nondum consensus quinque seculorum extitere: si in aliis sequioribus seculis receptus fuit, edisserant Novatores, quando & qua autoritate id factum! Cur ergo novum antea non publicitus receptum fidei principium, novam interpretationis Scripturae regulam introducere satagunt?” Calov, *Systema*, 426–27.

¹⁹⁰“XII. Doctores Ecclesiae antiqui tantum abest, ut sua scripta pro tali principio, medio, aut regula venditent, ut contra etiam protestati sint disertissime. *Cyrillus Hierosol.* Catech.IV. *Augustin.* I.II.c. Faust. Manich. c.V. Et in Epist. ad Hieron. XIX. & XLII. ad Vincent. &c. & a traditionibus ad Scripturam adversarios revocarint, non vero, ut Novatores volunt, vice versa, Scripturae sensum in Patribus quaesiverint. *August . . .* Et de unit. Eccl. c.III. Auferantur illa de medio, quae adversus nos invicem non ex divinis Canonicis libris, sed ALIUNDE recitamus, & c.XVI. Remotis ergo omnibus talibus Ecclesiam suam demonstrent, si possunt, non in sermonibus & rumoribus Afrorum, non in Conciliis Episcoporum suorum, non in literis quorumlibet disputatorum, non in signis & prodigiis fallacibus factis: quia contra ista VERBO Domini praeparati, & cauti redditi sumus; sed in praescripto legis, in Prophetarum praedictis . . . h.e. in omnibus S. librorum autoritatibus.” Ibid., 427.

¹⁹¹“XIV. . . . Utique non erit ea tantum secundarium principium, parili religione cum ipsa Scriptura S. *principio summo* (imo unico) suscipienda, eritque ita *geminum principium fidei aequae primum atq; authenticum, Scriptura & traditio*. Huc etiam facit, quod ipsi Novatores *Patrum consensum*, cum suis adversari eum vident hypothesibus, flocci pendant., eosque multis modis exagitent. Sunt illis tum *nonnulli*

deemed catholic which the consensus of the fathers established, and that which is the consensus of the fathers which doctrines are agreed upon is catholic.¹⁹²

Calov finds it strange that Calixt should appeal to the five patriarchal sees as having such special privileges of scriptural interpretation that the other churches lack. As Calov points out, these five sees both individually and collectively have erred with and without the see of Rome. Much that has been taught by them has not been as catholic and apostolic as Calixt claims. And what of the entire church? Has not the entire church been given the gift of interpretation along with catholicity and apostolicity? Why should these five sees alone be given such privileges?¹⁹³ For Calov, true catholicity is consensus

eterodoxiam ab antiquo suspecti, ut Origenes, alii manifesti heterodoxi, ut Eusebius, alii subtilibus disputationibus non opus habuisse, neque vero adsuc/e/ti (?) dicuntur, & ubi ad accuratorem expositionem, & delectum Frasesw ventum, inexercitati: alii cogitationibus in gentiles, crassoq; eum quibus colluctati sunt, haereticos, conjectis minus caute loquuti sunt; alii disserendi facultate non adeo instructi: alii per ametrician thv anqolkhv, . . . Calixt . . . Drejer . . .” Ibid., 429.

¹⁹²“Si cum *Drejero regulam fidei & capita credenda aestimes e traditione Symboli* apud Patres, cum illa variet innumeris modis, semper redibit quaestio, num haec, vel illa capita in diversis notulis, aut symbolis recensita ad fidei substantiam pertineant, & cujusnam auctoritati in relatione talium notularum fides adhibenda sit? Et annon committetur ita circulus: quia *quaenam sit doctrina catholica*, e Patribus discendum erit: ac cum consensus Patrum solum infallibilis sit in iis, quae ad substantiam fidei faciunt, iterum quaenam ad *fidei substantiam* pertineant, inde petendum.: ut credam, hanc esse doctrinam Catholicam, quia Patres consentienter ita tradunt. : & rursus credam, consentienter tradere Patres illa, quia ad doctrinam Catholicam ea spectant: in aliis autem non consentire, quia eo non spectant : nec aliunde tamen sciam, quaenam eo spectent, nisi e consensu Patrum.” Calov, *Systema*, 430.

¹⁹³“Quod peculiariter ad illam hypothesi Calixtinam. : quae ab omnibus Ecclesiis Patriarchalibus traduntur, illa tanquam Catholica & Apostolica suscipienda esse, nimis ea frivola & indigna est refutatione. : si quidem Ecclesias Patriarchales, Romanam, Constantinopolitanam, Antiochenam, Alexandriam, & Hierosolymitam, sive singulas, sive conjunctas dono & privilegio infallibilitatis ditatas & dotatas esse, vanum sit commentum., nulla vel probabili nitens ratione. Quidnam istis Ecclesiis prae aliis extra *prwtoklisian* & auctoritatem, quam olim jure positivo humano, aut ex consuetudine cum florerent, obtinere, in controversiis decidendis conveniat, privilegii, tum docebitur a Calixto, cum Papistae sedis Romanae infallibilitatem demonstraturi sunt. Ne dicam, quod sedes illae etiam conspirent in erroribus quibusdam cum Romana, aut inter sese.: quodq; multa in illis doceantur, quae non pro Apostolicis & Catholicis haberi debeant, sed falsissima & Psuedo-Apostolica sint: quum Graeci, si excipias dogma de infallibilitate Papae & communitate sub una in plerisque Romanensibus consentiant, ut e scriptis Württembergensium cum Constantinopolitano Patriarcha amaebaeis notum est. Et quaenam illatio est a sedis doctrina ad doctrinam totius Ecclesiae? a sedis Apostolicae ad doctrinam Apostolicam & Catholicam? Mere Papistica.” Ibid., 431.

with Scripture as the rule and norm of faith and not consensus with some ecclesiastical see or church. Thus catholicity signifies consensus with Scripture.¹⁹⁴

As we have seen the *consensus patrum* was an integral part of Chemnitz's methodological appeal and justification of Lutheran doctrine in contradistinction to Tridentine posturing and the Sacramentarians' rejection of the real presence. The early Gerhard, too, argued that the church of the first five hundred years had maintained apostolic doctrine, and that a general consensus had succeeded in refuting individual heresies of the time. Thus a qualified notion of a *consensus antiquitatis* was not new to Lutheranism. Rather it was Calixt's elevation of tradition to the rank of a secondary epistemological principle alongside Scripture and the methodological application of the criteria of the Vincentian canon and the consensus of the first five hundred years as an ecumenical norm that took the notion of a *consensus antiquitatis* to a whole new level. Sensing that both the formal and material principles of the Reformation were endangered by such an elevated view of consensus and tradition, Calov was forced to refute the notion of a *consensus antiquitatis* once and for all. Had Calixt not appeared on the scene it is most probable that Lutheran Orthodoxy would have continued in the spirit of Chemnitz and the early Gerhard to maintain a qualified consensus of the fathers. We now turn to Calov's allies in the Syncretistic debate.

Johann Conrad Dannhauer

Johann Conrad Dannhauer was born in Köndringen, Baden, in 1603. In 1617 he began seven years of philosophy studies in Strassburg, and in 1625 he took up theology at

¹⁹⁴“*Veritas et falsitas dogmatum cum de rebus fidei agitur, non e consensu, aut dissensu sedium, aut Ecclesiarum quarundam, sed e consensu cum Scriptura S. ceu unica fidei norma, vel dissensu ab eadem aestimari debet* Deut. IV,2.c.XII, 32. Ps. XIX,5.8. (Rom.X,18.) Es.IIX,20. Luc.XVI,29.Gal VI,16.” Ibid.

the University of Marburg under the tutelage of Balthasar Mentzer. After a year at Marburg Dannhauer moved to Altdorf where he was befriended by the strict orthodox theologian Georg König (d. 1654), while in Jena Dannhauer made Johann Gerhard's acquaintance. In 1628 he was called back to Strassburg where he performed a variety of ecclesiastical functions before being named professor of theology at the university in 1633. He remained there for twenty-five years, lecturing mainly on dogmatics and ethics. His most significant work in dogmatics, the *Hodosophia Christiana sive Theologia positiva*, appeared in 1649 and enjoyed great popularity. Dannhauer also produced a significant piece on ethics, his *Liber conscientiae apertus sive theologia conscientaria* of 1662. He also wrote a popular explanation of the catechism in 1657, a work for "newborn babes" still growing in the faith titled *Katechismusmilch oder Erklärung des kirchlichen Katechismus*.¹⁹⁵ Dannhauer died a quiet death in 1666.

"Dannhauer was a man of peaceful disposition and reluctant to engage in controversy. But he despised false peace in the church; therefore, like Calov, he felt compelled to write a great number of polemical works against Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and the Lutheran Syncretists."¹⁹⁶ Preus considers Dannhauer's polemics against the Syncretists John Dury and Georg Calixt to be second in importance only to Calov's own polemical works. Dannhauer was wary of union with the Reformed despite their professed allegiance to Luther since their use of Lutheran terms was filled with Reformed theological presuppositions that were alien to the spirit of Luther. Dannhauer was energetic and invested a great deal of vigor polemicizing against the Reformed,

¹⁹⁵For more information on Dannhauer see Fr. Bosse, "Dannhauer, Johann Conrad," in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 4, Ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1898), 460–64.

¹⁹⁶Robert D. Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, 58.

Roman Catholics, and the syncretism of Georg Calixt. Dannhauer refrained, however, from attacking the individual in his polemical works, keeping his criticisms sharp yet free of venom. Far better, he thought, to keep to the high road and argue substance from a simple biblical foundation. “Dannhauer’s *Mysterium Syncretisti Detecti, Proscripti, et Symphonismo Compensati* of 1648 is probably the most penetrating book written on the subject of syncretism and church union from the Lutheran point of view; in this work Dannhauer expresses his conviction that doctrinal unity based on the Word of God forms the only legitimate basis for the reunion of Christendom.”¹⁹⁷

The *Mysterium syncretistic detecti*

In exposing syncretism, Dannhauer first addresses the inadequacy of the Apostles’ Creed as an ecumenical norm, starting where Calixt himself had begun in his efforts toward unionism. Dannhauer points out that the Apostles’ Creed may be understood in a variety of ways, even in ways that are contrary to its own determined meaning.

For if virtual faith is faith equivocally and in name only, as it is considered in Respons. Maled. Theolg. Mogunt. Vindiciis opposito. n. 119, the entirety of the Apostles’ Creed will be equivocal, by being cut off beforehand from its own determined sense! For either the words of the Apostles’ Creed are accepted in confusion without any determination of meaning and modes, or they are accepted in a definite and clear way with their own numbers and modes of sense.¹⁹⁸

This leaves the interpreter with two options.

If the former, there is indeed among all who profess faith in Christ a *symphonia* of tongues, not indeed a true consensus of statements. There remains major dissension in the meanings that lie hidden under a wrapping of words. *If the latter*, now just as

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 59.

¹⁹⁸“Nam si fides virtualis aequivoce & solo nomine fides est, ut habetur in Respons. Maled. Theolog. Mogunt. Vindiciis opposito. n.119. aequivoca erit tota symboli Apostolici generalitas, praescindendo a suo determinato sensu! Aut enim Symboli Apostolici voces confuse sine determinatie sensus ac modorum accipiuntur, aut determinatam & clare cum suis sensum numeris ac modis.” Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Mysterium syncretismi detecti, proscripti, et symphonismo compensati, in universitate argentoratensi propositum* (Strassburg: Spoor, 1664), 45

that is no religion which does not fashion the Apostles' Creed as its own and take part in it, so also the words of the Creed determine whatever concepts you wish by their own sense.¹⁹⁹

At best the Apostles' Creed establishes a false consensus since the competing confessions all have a different understanding of its meaning. Dannhauer notes that Augustine and Cassander conceded that even heretics confessed the Apostles' Creed, but the sense or meaning was different for them.²⁰⁰ Dannhauer then quotes Johann Jacob Grynaeus who notes points of convergence between Protestants and Catholics, though Dannhauer is not very optimistic about the ecumenical value of the Creed as he concludes, "The very Antichrist confesses the Symbol, to cast it aside."²⁰¹

Dannhauer critiques the Vincentian Canon and the supposed consensus of the first five centuries by pointing out the flaw in its basic assumption: a clarity of the ecumenical councils, creeds, and decrees of that era is presumed, but it simply is not there.

You will say first that it must be established by the determination of the genuine five centuries of antiquity and the rule of Vincent of Lerins. But *that* is often *indeterminate* if you take away those who explain the modes and terms and even as far as the more obscure senses are concerned (for no creed or decree of a council was so absolute that it did not admit to various senses. The confession of this matter slips out of *M. Antonius in the words* cited above on page 27, namely, that *dogmas established in councils were less well explained by Scholastics*), and by accident no less than a covering for heresies, as the Apostles' Creed. . . .²⁰²

¹⁹⁹"*Si illud*, est quidem inter omnes qui Christi fidem profitentur aliqua linguarum sumfwnia, non item verus sententiarum consensus, manet dissensio capitalis in sensibus, qui latent sub verborum involvulo, modis rerum creditu necessariis, totaque determinatione; *si hos*, jam ut nulla religio est, quae symbolorum Apostolorum non suum faciat adque partes trahat, ita suo quae libet sensu concepta verba Symboli determinat." Ibid.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 46.

²⁰¹"Ipse denique Antichristus Symbolorum profitetur, ut jacet." Ibid.

²⁰²"Dices I. Standum determinatione antiquitatis genuinae & quinque saecularis, ac regula Vincentii Lirinensis. At *illa* saepe est, si modos explicatores & terminos adimas, imo quoad sensus etiam obscuriores (nullum enim seu symbolum, seu concilii decretum ita absolutum fuit, quin in varios sensus inciderit. Excidit hujus rei confessio *M. Antonio in verbis* supra cit. p. 27. in fine, *dogmata*, inquieti [sic-inquiet] *in conciliis stabilita a Scholasticis minus commode fuisse explicata*) *indeterminata*, nec minus ex accidenti pallium haereseos, quam Symbolorum Apostolicum. . . . » Ibid., 46–47.

There is no solid base upon which to build a consensus of the first five hundred years since the true meaning of the councils' decrees admitted various interpretations. More, the Vincentian Canon is time-bound in that it cannot prescribe solutions to heresies that came after the first five hundred years. Yet in effect Vincent makes the theological status of the first five hundred years a water-tight criterion for theological disputes that have not even been anticipated by that time frame.²⁰³ Third, "it [the Vincentian Canon] is not sufficient, for the credal determination deals only with controversies of their time, whose decision it is necessary to view as for [that] time as an illustration of the truth sought [in] them; the doctrine explained by the creed at another time is wider."²⁰⁴ For instance,

In the first centuries the Photinian *theomaceia* broke out, according to *Ephiphanius haeres. 71. & now the heresy of this imposter* (Photinius), *which endured for a little while, has spread*. But where and in what council was the latter settled (not to mention the whole Sacramentarian controversy stirred up by Berengar, not to mention others) in which there is a dispute between us and the Photinian school up till now concerning the satisfaction of Christ, which after five centuries [saw] the church in the twelfth century vexed by Peter Abelard? There were some doctors who partly acknowledged the satisfaction of Christ and partly their own errors (by which I refer to that *Rainoldus* against the *Catena* of heresies ...²⁰⁵

²⁰³“Second, it is not *the last things* which he builds up against all future heresies and devices of Satan after five centuries till now, he puts an iron clamp on controversies, he arranges the church in everything.” « Non est 2. *ultima* quae omnibus haeresibus futuris et Satanae post quinque secula adhuc vivi machinationibus obstruat, fibulam imponat controversiis, in tuto Ecclesiam collocet.” Ibid., 47.

²⁰⁴“Non est 3. *Sufficiens*, nam Symbolica determinatio respicit solum controversias coetaneas, quarum decisio pro tempore ad veritatis tum quaesitae illustrationem est necessaria visa, alias doctrina symbolo explicata est latior, ut probat D. Nicol. Hunn. In Innocent. Luther. p. 625.” Ibid.

²⁰⁵“Esto fuerit primis seculis explosa *theomaceia* Photiniana, juxta illud *Epiphanius haeres. 71. & jam hujus Impostoris* (Photini) *haeresis, quae ad exiguum tempus duravit, dissipata est*: Ubi vero & in quo Concilio decisa altera (ut taceam totum Sacramentarium certamen fero a Berengario excitatum, ut taceam alia) in quam cum schola Photiniana nobis adhuc concertatio, de satisfactione Christi, quam demum post orbem quinque secularem seculo XII. Ecclesia vexata est a Petro Abailardo? Fuerint licet Doctores qui partim satisfactionem Christi agnoverint, partim errores in suis primis ovis agnoverint (quo refero illud *Rainoldi* contra *Catenam* haereswn per secula juxta feriem symbolicorum articulorum institutam disputantis in Censuris II. Apocryph. praelect. 2. p. 25.” Ibid.

In other words, the Vincentian Canon fails to safeguard against heresies that came after the first five hundred years. Furthermore,

Are they able to name any article of faith that Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Philastrius, or Augustine (when it came to heresies of his own day within plus or minus forty years) did not teach that was opposed? Nevertheless, when it comes to the rule of Lerins, many things are missing on this point, many things remained indefinite.²⁰⁶

Was there ever an absolute consensus since the teachings of the fathers were always contested in their own lifetimes? Dannhauer wonders if the Vincentian Canon actually encompasses the consensus of antiquity.

Fourth, *it is not possible easily to determine if the rule of Lerins* ought to hold, since one defines the catholic consensus not only from those things that the fathers wrote, but also what they held and taught. For how many parts of the hours are published? How many letters are written? How many anecdotes do people like Jerome, Isidore, Gennadius, Photinus, and Possevinus give? How many times does Prudentius deplore stuff?²⁰⁷

Thus, the Vincentian Canon and the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis* fail to contain all that was written or said by the ancient church fathers. Nevertheless, Dannhauer does not completely dismiss the notion that a consensus prevailed amongst the fathers of the first five centuries. He is only making the point that such a consensus is lacking for many essential articles of the faith.

Dannhauer states, “In vain will it be ruled ἔξ δότους, it is enough to be able to appraise the consensus of the ancient Church.”²⁰⁸ Dannhauer concedes that it is possible

²⁰⁶“potueruntne ullum articulum fidei nominare, quem non Ireneus, Epiphanius, Philastrius aut Augustinus de haeresibus aetate sua intra annos plus minus quadringentos oppognatum esse doceant?) tamen ad regulam Lirinensem multa adhuc desunt, multa indefinita manserunt.” Ibid.

²⁰⁷“Non 4. *facile possibilis editu, si regula Lirinensis* obtinere debet, catholicum consensum definiens non ex iis solum, quae veteres scripserunt, sed & tenuerunt & docuerunt. Quota enim horum pars edita? Quota literis exarata? Quam multa anekdola, quorum promulsidem ostendunt catalogorum descriptoribus Ecclesiasticis, concinnatores, *Hieronymus, Idodorus, Gennadius, Photinus, Possevinus*, famem non faciant. Quot illustria monimenta ad bustum quae sivit persecutio Diocletiana, quorum jacturam deplorat Prudent. in hymno, quem de Hemeterio & Cheldonio reliquit: . . .” Ibid., 47–48.

²⁰⁸“Frustra regeritur ἔξ δότους, satis aestimari posse Ecclesiae antiquae consensum.” Ibid., 48.

to determine consensus in particular cases with some probability, but such concessions do not establish tradition as a secondary principle of faith.²⁰⁹ Consensus is possible under certain conditions. “It is possible in those things in which *sumyhfismov* is clear, but not in other matters where the things themselves are in parties, or where a universal, frequent, clear, and persevering consensus is lacking.”²¹⁰ In some cases Vincent of Lerins’ criteria are met in antiquity. For instance, concerning the canon of Scripture we have a beautiful consensus of the ancient doctors of the church.²¹¹ But this is only one instance. One has only to note all the discrepancies that exist between the fathers in their writings, even on their interpretations of Scripture. Furthermore, a genuine consensus of the fathers is undermined by the gaps in time between their writings, and the absence of letters in many other places.²¹² Nor are there any “divine tablets” that ascribe to the church of the first five centuries an authoritative status or privilege. Dannhauer cannot be persuaded by any supposed promises given to him or by suitable arguments. Rather, this privileged position is refuted by “the common examples of contrary errors.”²¹³ Nor are the creeds to be given a normative status alongside Scripture though he notes that the

²⁰⁹“*Posse aestimari particulariter & probabiliter concedo, nego de fide divina.*” Ibid.

²¹⁰“*posse in iis, in quibus sumyhfismov apparet, non in aliis ubi ipsimet in parteseunt, vel ubi consensus universalis, frequentatus, clarus & perseverans deficit.*” Ibid.

²¹¹“*posse aestimari si omnes Vincentii Lirinensis conditiones conjunctim sint expletæ. h.e. si in aliquam fidei traditionem historicam canonis, aut sensum Scripturæ omnes pariter, uno eodemque consensu, aperte frequenter, perseveranter conspirarint. e.g. in canonem Scripturæ de quo pulcherrimum habere habemus consentum Doctorum veterum, si colligas omnia testimonia per quinque & plura secula, qui non perinde apparet in dogmatibus: non posse si earum aliqua deficiat.*” Ibid.

²¹²“*Jam quanta saepe in Patrum scriptis etiam de sensu Scripturæ discrepantia? quantus saepe hiatus temporum, quanta locorum vacua, ubi nihil literis proditum?*” Ibid.

²¹³“*Nedum 5. authentica, id enim privilegium quinque seculare nullis divinis tabulis consignatum, nullis promissis nobis commendatum est, nullis idoneis argumenteis persuaderi potest, sed contrariis communis erroris confutatum est exemplis, quæ proposuimus in Christeide Act. 1. theatr. 1. phoenom.8. p. 269.& seq.*” Ibid., 48–49.

consensus of the fathers was often praised as an ἀσφάλεια of the faith.²¹⁴ Yet, “The consensus of the first centuries themselves is human, not divine, because it pertains to the asfaleian of the faith.”²¹⁵ Dannhauer observes how the argument from creedal consensus to Scripture becomes circular.

Therefore the appeal is made from the creeds to the Scripture, from the interpretation of the creeds to the interpretation of the Scripture (which the Holy Spirit expounds in the Scripture), which through the contrary opinion ends in begging the question. For unless it progresses to infinity, one must stop with the interpretation of the ancient church. Nor is the Scripture which is appealed to anything else than the interpretation of the ancient church which must be accepted.²¹⁶

Even heretics can hide under the umbrella of the ecumenical councils. For example, the Antitrinitarians that Calixt and other Syncretists “cover with the authority of the Nicene and other old councils” may concede that ecclesiastical writings, the confession and the catechism “must be subjected to examination.”²¹⁷ Thus the councils fail to become a norm by which other ecclesiastical writings are to be judged. Ultimate examination must rest on the Word of God. Otherwise such examinations impinge upon

²¹⁴“*Ne dum 6. normativa (per modum principii) asfaleiav divinae in fide, norma universali proprie dicta, proximo a Scriptura loco habenda, impropriam alias normae appellationem symbolis non denegamus, in eo sensu, quo Augustanae confessiani id nominis indultum, de quo videndi Lobeck. disp.1.de A.C. th. 57. Hutterus in Irenico vere Christiano. c. 29. p. 391. Dn. D. Joh. Schmidt. In disp. De A.C. historia thes.19. alias tenendum, quod noster D. Mylius in prolegom. Aug.Conf.p.8. cuate monuit. Norma suo normato prior est & homogenea, a ei sug l... enev to metron, ait Philosophus.1.10. methaph. c.1 ad ἀσφάλεια fidei fuit ante saepe laudatum consensum.Luc.1,4.” Ibid., 49.*

²¹⁵“Eorundem primorum seculorum consensus ipse humanus est, non divinitus, quod ad adfaleian fidei attinet.” Ibid.

²¹⁶“Unde a symbolis ad Scripturam, a Symbolorum sensu ad Scripturae (quem exponit Spiritus Sanctus in Scriptura) sensum datur provocatio, quae per contrariam opinionem in petitionem principii terminatur, nam nisi in infinitum progrediare, acquiescendum est in sensu Ecclesiae antiquae, nec Scriptura ad quam provocatur, alio quam ejusdem Ecclesiae antiquae sensu accipienda est. Conf. Anticristov. sect.2.art.2.p. 491.495.” Ibid.

²¹⁷“Quid si hodie Antitrinitarius, Niceni & aliorum conciliorum veterum auctoritatem obtendentis, id reponat, quod in Synodo Dordracena Arminiani p.m.103. ipsa quoque scripta Ecclesiastica, puta Confessio et Catechismus examini subjicienda sunt, non possunt ergo norma esse ad quam exigantur reliqua?” Ibid.

the honor of the Word of God. Furthermore, “the other writings are human and therefore subject to error.”²¹⁸

Dannhauer’s analysis of Calixt’s syncretism once again highlights the inadequacies of the Apostles’ Creed as an ecumenical norm since a variety of interpretations of the same Creed have been posited throughout the ages. Tradition fails to become a secondary principle of faith because it is man-made and therefore uncertain. The Vincentian Canon is unreliable because it is time bound, being limited to the first five centuries of Christendom, and so it fails to anticipate future heresies that will plague the church. Furthermore, the criteria of the Canon demand more of antiquity than antiquity can provide. There are too many gaps in time, limited writings and opinions, and mutilations of the extant manuscripts to determine what was actually believed everywhere, always and by everyone. At best there is a limited consensus on several articles of faith, such as the inspiration of Scripture, even though the fathers contradicted themselves so often as they interpreted Scripture. The ecumenical creeds are also time bound as they sought to deal with the doctrinal issues of their own day. Nor are the conciliar decrees so clear that they do not allow for various interpretations. As a result, heretics from all ages have found refuge in the words of the creeds even as they infused them with alien meanings. Finally, the argument from consensus and the creeds is self-referential as the creeds refer to Scripture and Scripture therefore must be referred back to the creeds for its proper interpretation. In the end for Dannhauer, the Word of God is the only true norm for doctrinal questions since it alone has divine authority.

²¹⁸“Item ib.p.105. nisi hoc examen concedatur, non erit Dei verbo integer suus honor. scripta alia humana sunt ideoque & errori obnoxia; in phrasibus aliquot istorum scriptorum, inter ipsos verbi divini ministros contenditur & c.” Ibid.

Johann Andreas Quenstedt: High Orthodoxy on Consensus and Catholicity

Johann Andreas Quenstedt was born in Quedlinburg, Saxony in 1617.²¹⁹ He was the nephew of Johann Gerhard. His plans to study under his famous uncle came to naught in 1637 with Gerhard's untimely death. Despite the questionable Orthodoxy of the University of Helmstedt Quenstedt matriculated there in order to stay close to home. For six years he was a table guest of Conrad Horneius, and attended Calixt's lectures. In time he became an enthusiastic supporter of Calixt's theology. In 1643 he received his Masters of Philosophy. In 1644 he continued his studies at the University of Wittenberg where he was greeted with suspicion as a "Helmstedter." Nevertheless Wilhelm Leyser, a professor of theology, took him in and with the help of Johann Huelsemann slowly converted him to the Wittenberg point of view. In 1646 he was made adjunct professor of the philosophical faculty. At the same time he began his theological studies, and as the Syncretistic Controversy broke out the theologians of Wittenberg found his inside knowledge of Helmstedt theology indispensable. He received his doctorate in theology in 1650, and in 1662 Quenstedt became the third professor of theology at Wittenberg. He received many academic honors during his lifetime and was made *Professor primarius* the year of his death in 1688.

Quenstedt lead a relatively peaceful life despite all the theological controversies that whirled around him. "He was a man of a mild and humble disposition and, for his day, tolerant. His rather uneventful life culminated in his one great literary work, *Theologia*

²¹⁹For more information on Quenstedt see Johannes Kunze, "Quenstedt," in *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 16, Ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1905), 380–383. For the single work dedicated exclusively to Quenstedt's theology see Jörg Baur, *Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie Johann Andreas Quenstedts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1962).

Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum, which was printed just three years before his death.”²²⁰ Thus it fell to Quenstedt to systematize categorically orthodox Lutheran dogma in a brilliant fashion even as it was becoming outdated. His *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* was the fruit of thirty years of lectures, and was based on Johann Friedrich Koenig’s *Theologia positive acroamatica* (1664). Preus considers Quenstedt’s dogmatics, after Chemnitz’s and Gerhard’s *Loci theologici*, to be the greatest dogmatics book ever written by a Lutheran. Hubert Filser considers it one of the most significant works of the seventeenth century²²¹ as Quenstedt laboriously fuses one hundred years of orthodox Lutheran thought into one theological system. The work lacks original thought but compensates the reader with extensive knowledge, erudition, and stringent logical connections. Following the strictest guidelines of Lutheran Orthodoxy Quenstedt brings together the results of Lutheran dogmatics, from Leonhard Hutter to Abraham Calov, and thereby grants the reader a clear and comprehensive overview of the finest achievements of Lutheran theology.²²² “He quotes the church fathers, Luther, the Symbols, predecessors, colleagues, even scholastics and contemporary Catholic and Reformed theologians with remarkable selectivity and economy. Quenstedt never forces us to plunge into boring chains of citations.”²²³ Moreover, Quenstedt demonstrates his moderate temperament as he refers to the Calixtine school as “Novators” and not Syncretists.

²²⁰Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, 62.

²²¹Filser, *Dogma, Dogmen, Dogmatik*, 264.

²²²August Tholuck, no friend of Lutheran Orthodoxy, is less impressed with Quenstedt and refers to him as the “book keeper” (Buchhalter) of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Cf. August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1852).

²²³Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, 63.

Consensus and Catholicity Revisited

Quenstedt's *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicaum* appeared first in 1685, and was republished at least five times: 1691, 1696, 1701, 1702, and 1717.

Among other topics his approach to consensus and catholicity are worth noting, now as part of high Lutheran Orthodoxy. Quenstedt's third porism²²⁴ of the introductory section of his *Systema* states, "And the consensus of the primitive church, or of the fathers of the first centuries after Christ, is also not a source of Christian faith, either primary or secondary, nor does it produce a divine, but only a human and probable faith."²²⁵ With those comments Quenstedt clearly repeats Calov's concerns as he refutes Calixt's notion of tradition as a secondary principle. This is made clearer as he continues,

And thus this is the true point at issue: Whether the consensus of the teachers of the church of *the first five centuries* after Christ, so far as it has thus far been able to be pointed out from their writings that have come down to us today, is to be regarded as a secondary or subordinate principle of the teaching of the faith, not only with regard to man but also with regard to the matter (italics mine).²²⁶

Quenstedt further delineates his understanding of what Calixt and the other Novators meant by a *consensus antiquitatis*: "By consensus of antiquity the adversaries mean consensus not in all kinds of related questions, as they say, but in articles of faith, not of all believers, nor of all teachers of the church, but only of those who lived and wrote in the first five centuries after the birth of the Savior."²²⁷ Thus Quenstedt recognizes a significant qualification of his adversaries as consensus was understood.

²²⁴"For the Greeks, a porism was a proposition lying between a theorem and a problem and was directed to producing or finding what was proposed." Luther Poellot, *The Nature and Character of Theology. An Introduction to the Thought of J. A. Quenstedt from Theologia Didactico-Polemica Sive Systema Theologicum*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 149.

²²⁵Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 176.

²²⁶Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 176–77.

²²⁷Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 177.

Quenstedt then issues a caveat regarding a potential *consensus quinquesaecularis*: “It is one thing, that the consensus of antiquity of the first five centuries is to be praised and not to be rashly contradicted, and it is another that it is to be regarded as a secondary principle of faith.”²²⁸ Quenstedt’s concern clearly is to refute any principle being aligned with Scripture in any way, yet is Quenstedt stating that such a consensus did in fact exist and that it is praiseworthy? To answer this we must follow the nuances of his argument carefully.

Quenstedt makes a distinction between a moving principle and a principle of faith when it comes to tradition or the consensus of the first five hundred years.

Distinguish between the motive of faith or the principle of credibility, which Dorsche calls the moving principle, and the principle of faith. Among the motives of faith, or moving principles (namely those that lead people, e.g., heathen, Jews, etc., to believe), *that patristic consensus regarding divine truth can be established*, but it is by no means to be admitted to the rank and dignity of a principle even secondary, such as our faith rejects, which accedes only to divine Revelations (*italics mine*).²²⁹

Quenstedt here appears to acknowledge that a patristic consensus can in fact be established, and that is significant for our discussion. Quenstedt proceeds to explain the limitations attending the use of the *consensus patrum*.

It is one thing to use that *consensus as a testimony*, and another to use it as a principle of faith. Our teachers also use the ancient symbols, canons of the councils, and statements of the fathers in deciding theological controversies, not as a principle *but as a testimony*, not infallibly to prove articles of faith thereby, but so that they might the more severely constrain the enemies who deny them (*italics mine*).²³⁰

²²⁸Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 177. “IV. Obs. Aliud est, illum *sumptephismon* antiquitatis quinque priorum seculorum esse magnificandum, nec ei temere contradiciendum; & aliud, eundem pro principio fidei secundario esse habendum.” Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* (Wittenberg, 1691), 65. [Hereafter cited as Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691)]

²²⁹Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 178.

²³⁰Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 178. “VI. Obs. Aliud est, adhibere illum consensum ceu *testimonium*, & aliud, adhibere eundem ceu *fidei principium*; Etiam Nostri Doctores

Consensus thus functions as a witness to articles of faith in a limited capacity. The distinction is further made between “the usefulness of this consensus in the explanation of Scripture, in the confirmation of our view, and the removal of novelty” and “[its] necessity for pointing out and defending the truth of the things that are to be believed.”²³¹ Quenstedt thereby confirms a limited but significant use of the *consensus patrum* for theology.

The antithesis of the point at issue is supplied by Bellarmine, Laud, and Calixt, and the Novators. They serve as a foil to Quenstedt’s position since they either regard the “harmonious view of the fathers” to be “an infallible norm of faith” or they regard the first five hundred years as a secondary principle of the faith.²³² To these antithetical views Quenstedt quotes Johann Musaeus as saying,

If the *consensus of ecclesiastical antiquity*, as it can be had today, is called a principle according to man, or to the matter, but secondary [and] probable, and that in the matter of certainty and authority it is subordinate to Holy Scripture and dependent on it, *the term will not be unsuitable* (italics mine).²³³

Thus Musaeus also allows for a consensus so long as it remains a human testimony to Scripture.

As Quenstedt confirms the porism, and thereby refutes the antithesis, he appears to make a *volte face* concerning the verity of a *consensus quinquesaecularis*. Rather than

adhibent antiqua Symbola, Conciliorum Canones, & Patrum dicta, in decidendis Controversiis Theologicis, non ut *principium*, sed ut *testimonium*; non ut adversarios, eos negantes, fortius constringant.” Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 65.

²³¹Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 178.

²³²“III. Of the Novators, who, following the lead of Vincent of Lerins, set up two principles of theology and of statements to be believed, one primary, Holy Scripture, the other secondary and subordinate, namely the complete consensus of the primitive church, being that of the first five centuries after Christ.” Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 179.

²³³Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 179.

dissect and rework Quenstedt, it is easiest and most effective simply to let Quenstedt speak for himself from his writings. Here is where he starts with the consensus of the first five centuries:

The porism is proved I. by *the nullity of or nonexistence of the consensus*. Many writings of the ancient teachers of the church are private [writings]. Few of those that were made public have come down to us; most have perished. Many fathers also, especially of most ancient antiquity, wrote little or nothing, and the writings of the fathers that have survived till now, they are mutilated, interpolated, and wrested. And the consensus of a few fathers is not forthwith the consensus of the whole church. The adversaries point in this direction: ‘Yet the best writings of the fathers have been preserved by divine providence; only the faultier ones perished.’ But who will make anyone believe this? Who will prescribe laws to divine providence? Or who will persuade [one] to confess that in the destruction of Alexandria or that of Diocletian, only the faultier records perished [and] those worthy of immortality were snatched from destruction? In fact, blessed Luther rather ascribes it to divine providence that a considerable part of ecclesiastical writings perished, lest people find it necessary to devote to the contamination of the fathers and of the councils the time that should be devoted to reading and study of Holy Scripture. They insist that *the consensus of the church* can be sufficiently determined by the works made public (italics mine).²³⁴

This, however, is not Quenstedt’s personal view since he then states:

Reply: I grant that it can be particularly and probably determined, [but] I deny [it] regarding divine faith; *it can in the things in which consensus appears*, [but] not in others where they themselves go to pieces; *it can be determined, if with one and the same consensus they agree clearly, all together [and] persistently on some tradition of faith*. Thus, for example, regarding the canon of Scripture *we have a very beautiful consensus of ancient teachers* if you gather all testimonies through five centuries and more; *but that consensus does not appear likewise in teachings*. *How much disagreement [there] often [is] in writings of the fathers, also regarding the meaning of Scripture!* How great a gap in times [there] often [is], how great a gap between places, where nothing is transmitted by writings! *The five-century consensus would pertain only to the controversies of those times, not to heresies that arose after the fifth century* (italics mine).²³⁵

²³⁴Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 179–80.

²³⁵Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 180. “Instant: ex ekdotois, satis aestimari posse Ecclesiae antiquae consensum. “Resp. posse particulariter & probabiliter aestimari concedo, nego de fide divina; posse in iis, in quibus *sumpsephismos* apparet, non in aliis, ubi ipsimet in partes eunt; posse aestimari, si in aliquam fidei traditionem, uno eodemque consensu, aperte, universaliter, & perseveranter conspirarint. Sic v.g. de *Canone Scriptrurae*, pulcherrimum habemus concentum Doctorum veterum, si colligas omnia testimonia per quinque & plura secula; at iste consensus non perinde apparet in dogmatibus. Quanta saepe in Patrum scriptis, etiam de Sensu Scripturae, discrepantia? quantus saepe hiatus temporum, quanta locorum lacuna, ubi nihil literis proditum? Respiceret ille quinque-secularis

Quenstedt is quoting Gerhard almost verbatim at this point as he qualifies the notion of a general consensus by stressing its limitations. Like Gerhard, Quenstedt has found the lynch pin here. To argue for the first five hundred years is to argue for a limited period of time which ignores doctrinal development, something which history made Lutherans aware of. Quenstedt first makes an argument as devil's advocate and then his response shows that he allows for a limited consensus. In this way it becomes clear his statements are not contradictory.

Quenstedt's second confirmation of the porism is that the fathers can err.

II. By the weakness of error. Not only do the papists agree, but also the fathers themselves freely confess that the fathers were not free from error. There is therefore great danger that one and all who are subject to error may err unanimously. In fact and in many things the fathers have actually erred, and each one of them has his own faults. Scripture alone has the distinction that it is free of all error.²³⁶

Quenstedt's third confirmation of the porism is the multitude of spurious writings which pervade the fathers' writings.

III. By the multitude of spurious writings. There is hardly any of the ancient fathers into whose nest strange chickens, and they deformed, have not been put as substitutes. Many [writings under] a false name are among [them], so that it cannot up to this point be definitely established which, then, are genuine and unquestioned.²³⁷

The fourth confirmation of the porism deals directly with the limitations of the *consensus patrum*:

IV. By the condition and quality of that consensus. (1) A principle of knowledge, properly speaking, is contemporary at least for knowledge itself. But the consensus of the fifth-century antiquity is much later than the knowledge itself of divine

consensus solum controversias coetaneas, non ortas post quinque secula haereses. v.D. Dannhau. Msyter.Syncretismi p. 45.seq." Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 66.

²³⁶Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 180.

²³⁷Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 180.

things. (2) A principle is at least of the same authority as is the knowledge itself and the teachings to be proved therefrom. But now the consensus of antiquity is not the authority of which are articles of faith. For we believe these by divine faith, [but] that by human faith. For the fathers, either all or most of them, even though they agree on some matter, or even mutually, in testifying, defining, [or] interpreting, yet do not even engender divine faith, but only human [faith], which stands over against the fear that it rests on a false base and [is] thus probable and historical. *The consensus of antiquity is moreover confused, imperfect, comparable with difficulty, and leads us into many doubts.*²³⁸ That way of speaking, ‘The consensus of antiquity is a principle of teachings of the faith,’ is (1) new, (2) false, (3) absurd, (4) unknown to antiquity, (5) rejected by most of us, [and] (6) rests on no divine authorities (italics mine).²³⁹

Thus the consensus of antiquity, contra Calixt, cannot function as a secondary theological principle since it is fraught with so many difficulties and limitations. It may be useful for a general refutation of heresies of that specific time, but it can hardly function as a *principium cognoscendi*. Furthermore, the idea that this consensus can function as a secondary principle of faith is a novel idea that is alien to antiquity itself.

Quenstedt’s fifth confirmation continues to attack the weaknesses inherent in the ancient consensus.

V. By the denial of the requisites of a principle. The requisites of a principle properly so called do not fit that patristic consensus: (I) Not infallibility, both because the individual fathers were human beings who could deceive and be deceived and because the infallibility of things taken together cannot be shown either a priori, that is, from the nature of the matter, or a posteriori, that is, from some divine promise of God. But such a promise was not recorded [in] any divine writings. ‘If the individual fathers’ (the words are those of Dannhauer) ‘[were] born and subject to the danger of hallucination at a time when it was common to err, by what special power [would] all [be] protected [against error], especially with causes of errors posited, such as ignorance of languages, especially of Hebrew, carelessness in following [someone’s lead], commixture of profane philosophy,’ etc. *Dannhauer cites examples of universal consensus in error.* (II) Not invariability. The writings of the fathers are not self-consistent. The fathers often disagree among with each other. *They often contradict each other.* They also sometimes speak with more assurance before strife arose. (III) *Not universality, for*

²³⁸“Est praeterea Consensus antiquitatis intricatus, imperfectus, difficulter comparabilis, & in multas non ducit dubitationes.” Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 66.

²³⁹Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 180–81.

that consensus cannot be found at every time and at all places. (IV) Not priority, for it is later than the teachings of the faith themselves (italics mine).²⁴⁰

Thus the consensus of the fathers fails to meet the requisites of a divine principle. The fathers were not infallible, they were ignorant of the biblical languages, they spoke carelessly at times, and mixed biblical theology with pagan philosophy. More importantly, the fathers could be shown to err unanimously on certain points, and the consensus of antiquity lacks Vincent's own criterion of universality since consensus cannot be found "at every time and at all places" throughout antiquity. Finally, the writings of the fathers lack the criterion of antiquity since this so-called consensus came after the writing of Scripture, which is the true and purest antiquity.

Quenstedt's sixth confirmation is an argument from the absurd.

VI. By the argument of the absurd. That fifth-century consensus is a principle either because it rightly draws from the Holy Scriptures the things that are to be believed or because it faithfully and infallibly preserves the memory of the apostolic assemblies and traditions. If the latter, *the way is now open for the papists to an unwritten Word of God.* If the former, there will now be as many principles as centuries, rather as many times, in which the things to be believed were rightly drawn from Holy Scriptures; but that is incongruous and absurd (italics mine).²⁴¹

Quenstedt then offers rebuttals to possible objections to this porism. The eleventh in particular is of significance.

XI. Observe: We do not deny the proposition: *What the primitive church of the first five centuries from the birth of Christ taught, with unanimous consent proved from the most ancient ecumenical councils and the united testimonies of the ancient martyrs and fathers, it behooves us to confess today, and what it disapproved or rejected in line with Scripture it behooves us also to reject.*²⁴² But it does not follow from that proposition that that should in that sense be called a principle of

²⁴⁰Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 181–82.

²⁴¹Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 182.

²⁴²“XI. Obs. Non negamus illam propositionem: *Quod primitiva quinque a nato Christo proximorum seculorum Ecclesia docuit, unanimes consensu ex antiquissimis oecumenicis conciliis & concordibus veterum Martyrum & Patrum testimoniis demonstrato, id nos hodie admittere, & quod illa improbavit aut rejicit, juxta Scripturam, nos etiam rejicere oportet.*” Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 68.

believing; for what is not credible in itself, what needs the extension of ages, and what is not sufficient of itself, what is simply not necessary, what can be denied by some, etc. cannot properly be called a principle statement; but all these things belong to this inferior principle, as they say, or sub-principle, as the Refutation of Crypto-Papism clearly teaches (*italics mine*).²⁴³

Here we see the Scripture principle applied to the *consensus patrum*. This statement also explains the apparent discrepancy between the earlier statements affirming the *consensus antiquitatis* and the later ones claiming there was no consensus at all due to the frailties of such a consensus. Quenstedt, along with Gerhard and Calov, allows for a consensus of the first five hundred years but recognizes its limitations.

The twelfth rebuttal brings things back to Vincent of Lerins.

XII. Observe: The papists, especially the Jesuits and those who in part follow them, often have on [their] lips the rule of Vincent of Lerins, partly contemporaneous with Augustine (for the middle period of Vincent of Lerins as presbyter of a monastery falls into the last [period] of Augustine): ‘What he knew that not only one or two but all held, wrote, [and] taught equally with one and the same consensus, clearly commonly, [and] perseveringly, that, he also takes to mean, is to be believed without any doubt.’ But (1) Gerardus Joannes Vossius rightly observes that the whole *Commonitorium* of Vincent was written under the fictitious name of Peregrinus in hate and disparagement of St. Augustine; he uses the *Commonitorium* to attack his [Augustine’s] teaching of predestination and of the dispensation of divine grace under the heading of profane words and novelties and falsely sets against him the letters of popes Celestine and Sixtus written to the Gauls; but he carps at his Massilian associates and fellow countrymen, Faustus, who was abbot in the monastery of Vincent of Lerins, and Cassianus, semi-Pelagians, without evidence. *Hülsemann shows with eight reasons that Vincent of Lerins has no authority here and that his rule is foolish. And he teaches, among other things, that the older fathers not only never approved but also clearly rejected that rule of Vincent*, ‘Whatever all writers together everywhere clearly, commonly, [and] consistently wrote, that only [and] alone is to be held for an article of faith and [for] the truth’ etc., appealing to the clear and literal consensus that is among the prophets and apostles, as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Gerhard, and others have shown by introducing individual fathers.²⁴⁴

²⁴³Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 185–86.

²⁴⁴Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 186. “D. Hülsemannus . . . *Vincentii Lerinensis auctoritatem hic nullam & ejus regulam stolidam esse, octo rationibus demonstrat. Et inter alia docet; vetustiores Patres regulam illam Vincentianam: . . . non solum nusquam approbasse, sed aperte etiam rejecisse, provocantes ad consensum apertum & literalem, qui est inter Prophetas & Apostolos, uti Apologia August. Confess. Gerhardus parte general. Confess. Cathol. c. 13. aliique per introductionem*

Thus Quenstedt appears to agree with Hülsemann that the rule of Vincent of Lerins should not be taken seriously. The source that meant so much earlier has now been relatively marginalized.

Quenstedt's thirteenth and last rebuttal comes from Gregory of Valencia who finds the "harmonious belief" of the fathers to be miraculous and therefore infallible. This is all the more remarkable since so many fathers at different times and places agreed with one another. To which Quenstedt replies,

(1) *that the consensus of the fathers among themselves is here and there and often in harmony with divine truth—the reason for this agreement is not the consensus of those writers among themselves but with the whole communion of the faithful or without doubt such [who are] orthodox.*²⁴⁵ The mark of infallibility was added by Christ to that in which these agreed, not to that in which only the writers agree among themselves. (2) This begs the question, and that doubly: (a) Because it is supposed without good reason that there is to be found a common, clear, and constant consensus of individual and all writers on individual and all doctrines; (b) because it is supposed that the same ones who agree in some truths could not hold the same view in some error. Indeed, distance as to places and ages does not help the matter (italics mine).²⁴⁶

Thus, Quenstedt allows for a consensus of the fathers that calls for due reverence, yet he recognizes its limited usefulness since there is no air-tight consensus on all matters of faith. Quenstedt's dispassionate analysis of the consensus of the first five hundred years is very close to the consensual views of Chemnitz and the early Gerhard. Quenstedt's academic analysis takes into account the polemics of Gerhard's *Confessio catholica* and

singulorum Patrum ostenderunt. Conf. B. D. *Hülsemanni* Patrologiam, sive appendicem ad art. 16 de Ecclesia c. 5. p. 1073." Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 69. Note his reliance on the Apology as well as Gerhard's *Confessio catholica* and Hülsemann's patrology.

²⁴⁵"Resp. (1) Quod consensus Patrum inter se alicubi & frequenter divinae veritati congruus est, hujus congruentiae causa non est consensus Scriptorum illorum inter se, sed cum tota communiōne fidelium seu orthodoxorum ex confesso talium. In quo hi consenserint, huic nota infallibilitatis a Christo adjecta est, non in quo soli Scribae inter se consentiunt." Quenstedt, *Systema* (1691), 69.

²⁴⁶Quenstedt, *Systema*, in *The Nature and Character of Theology*, 187.

Calov's *Digressio*, yet his personality and distance in time from the Syncretistic Controversy allow him to address the issues soberly. There is a general but limited consensus of the fathers, but like Chemnitz, he applies the Scripture principle to the Vincentian Canon. Otherwise the Canon cannot be taken seriously since the consensus of the first five hundred years fail to meet Vincent's criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent. Calixt's principle of tradition as a secondary rule of faith is refuted since the authority of the fathers is human and not divine, and the *consensus patrum* is a shaky foundation at best upon which to build a principle of faith. In the end, Scripture and Scripture alone is the touchstone by which all doctrines are to be judged.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In light of contemporary efforts by such influential theologians as Thomas C. Oden to revive the Vincentian Canon as an ecumenical norm, this dissertation has sought to analyze the role of the Vincentian Canon and its theological corollary, the consensus of the fathers of the first five hundred years, in the history of Lutheran Orthodoxy. What follows will draw together and summarize the various positions that have emerged and then reflect on what that ultimately left as a part of the Reformation heritage. We have seen that the Vincentian Canon was used by irenic ecumenists such as Georg Calixt in the seventeenth century in an attempt to unify a divided Christendom. Likewise we saw that the Vincentian Canon was revived and appealed to in the nineteenth century by theologians and churchmen who felt compelled either to convert to Roman Catholicism or to call for a Protestant Catholicism even as they critiqued theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And the Vincentian Canon has been a staple of High Church Anglicanism since the sixteenth century, appealed to by such Anglican divines as Lancelot Andrewes, William Laud, Henry Hammond, and Herbert Thorndike. The Canon has also played a major role in the formulation of dogma in the Roman Catholic Church since the Council of Trent, pulled in so many directions since the time of the Reformation yet failing to unite Christendom at every turn. In fact, one may argue that the Canon has only served to justify the “orthodoxy” of a given party at the expense of

the competing “orthodox” confessions, especially Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, the two religious bodies that have most consistently appealed to the Canon.

Nevertheless, the Canon continues to exert a fascination with ecumenists in every age.

The notion that catholicity defined by “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone” continues to allure those who would find supra-confessional unity as a way out of the fractured chaos of a fragmented Christendom.

On the other hand, one may ask if there ever was a consensus of the ancient church to begin with. Could it be possible for Vincent of Lerins, towards the end of the conciliar age, to look upon the unity of the church of his age and prescribe a formula that would safeguard orthodoxy? Despite the distinct focus of the Latin speaking West and the Greek speaking East, had consensus been achieved by the end of the fifth century? Jaroslav Pelikan points out that Pelagianism was condemned at the council of Ephesus and that Chalcedon affirmed a christology that was amenable to both Eastern and Western churchmen. And a superficial glance at the conciliar age might convince one that the churches had achieved consensual unity, but this would ignore several factors. First, there was the Monophysite defection after Chalcedon. Second, the christological controversies continued to rage in the East for several more centuries, though the West enjoyed peace and stability in this regard. Third, the soteriology of the West, though strongly influenced by the Eastern concept of deification, began to diverge from the East even before the time of Augustine, and the Pelagian controversy caused Augustine and the Western church to speak in a way that was never adopted by the East. Augustine was not translated into Greek until centuries later, whereas the council of Orange in 529 authorized a modified Augustinianism. The triumph of this modified Augustinianism

sent the West on a trajectory that was wholly alien to the Eastern way of thought. With hindsight it is easy for an Adolph von Harnack to dispel the myth of a consensus of the first five hundred years, but these emerging differences were not so apparent after the council of Ephesus when Vincent wrote his *Commonitory*. Furthermore, the church itself believed it had achieved a consensus and spoke that way for centuries to come. The belief in a consensus of the fathers was firmly implanted in both the Latin West and the Greek East, and the belief had as much an impact on the way the church did theology even if there never was an actual consensus. As is often seen in history, people act on perceptions of reality rather than what reality actually turns out to be as realized with the benefit of historical distance and hindsight.

Thus, despite all the theological diversity of the late-Middle Ages in the Latin West, the Lutheran Reformation came as a shock to many and a defection from the perception of a consensus of the fathers. Martin Luther himself did not feel compelled to speak in accordance with the alleged consensus of the fathers. He pointed out that the fathers disagreed among themselves and that councils not only could err but that their canons often contradicted one another. Scripture was the final court of appeal for Luther, regardless of how well or poorly the fathers and the councils spoke. Even the anti-Pelagian Augustine, the most reliable of the fathers, had to be surpassed if one were to speak correctly about justification by faith. This stance isolated Luther from much of the tradition of the church throughout the ages, yet he took his stance based on his interpretation of the Word of God and was convinced that the Gospel had been preserved throughout all the ages as he calmly recited the words of the creed to himself, "I believe in one holy and catholic apostolic church." The very existence of the church ensured that

the Gospel too had always been present, even if it had been obscured under the darkness of the papacy. Nevertheless, this same Luther could argue for infant baptism against the Anabaptists, and for the physical presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper against the Reformed on the basis of the consensus of the church. He was shocked to see so many deviate from what the church had always held, yet this appeal to consensus was never a formative part of his theology or methodology.

Philip Melanchthon, Luther's chief colleague and collaborator in the formation of Lutheran doctrine, held a highly nuanced view of early church consensus. The concept of consensus permeates Melanchthon's works and is not limited to the ecclesiastical life of the church. At first glance Melanchthon's appeal to consensus appears to be rhetorical and formal in nature, but upon further inspection it demonstrates a surprising variety. The learned Humanist sees harmony and consensus in the ordering and structure of nature itself, which further attests to the divine order. So it is that consensus in the human community and society as well as in the church is desired by God and important to maintain, while the depravity of the human heart (*humani cordis pravitas*) threatens their order.

Consensus in the church is accorded special significance by Melanchthon. The church of Christ as the catholic church joined together by the firm Word of God (*ecclesia catholica, consociata certo verbo Dei*) has its basis in the believers' agreement in their fundamental understanding of the Word of God that alone can nurture the church. The true church of the Gospel, whose teaching is found in Scripture and the ecumenical symbols, must protect its purity, and Melanchthon requires all Christians to feel or hold to that line—to agree with the catholic church (*cum Ecclesia Catholica sentire*).

One often finds the expression consensus of the church (*consensus ecclesiae*), although this is not present as a key concept in Melanchthon's works. The *consensus ecclesiae* appears at times to represent a theological position held throughout the ages, and at other times the prevailing unanimity and concord of the Lutheran's against the alleged consensus of the Rome. Melanchthon is convinced that consensus prevails because the individual members and different parts of the church agree with one another and with the internally consistent history of revelation that culminated in the Christ event. As the church witnesses to this salvific event it must be in agreement with this proclamation. In the form of the *consensus ecclesiae* the church guards, articulates and witnesses to the saving message of the Gospel that occurs in historically changing forms in each age, and thereby ensures the dogmatic connection with its biblical beginnings.

The background for Melanchthon's understanding of the *consensus ecclesiae* is built upon a qualified concept of tradition, in which the church, despite all the flaws of her past, adheres to doctrinal continuity with the apostolic proclamation. The *consensus ecclesiae* expresses the claimed catholicity of the Lutheran churches in the sense of a historical continuity that allows them to overrule the doctrinal decisions of the fathers when necessary.

Consensus in Melanchthon's thought appears as concentric circles, centered on the doctrine of the Gospel (*doctrina evangelii*). From this "doctrine of the Gospel" ripple out the historical development of ecclesiastical exegesis and the proclamation of the Word. These are best represented by the Old and New Testaments, the ecumenical creeds, the fathers and finally the Augsburg Confession. From the horizontal perspective of the continually changing historical situation of the church, consensus also changes shape, but

it always proclaims the same message: “a perpetual and consensual voice . . . of the fathers, prophets, Christ and the apostles.”

Melanchthon’s highly nuanced concept of consensus found its way into the Lutheran Confessions. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession appeals to consensus in the articles concerning original sin, justification, the Lord’s Supper, and repentance. These appeals may be understood as part of the *doctrina evangelii* and the *consensus ecclesiae*. Melanchthon was able to break away from the alleged Roman Catholic consensus since that was something new and alien to the Scriptures. The humanistic ideal of the “purer and truer antiquity” led the reformer to the original sources of Scripture, to the fathers, and to the ecumenical symbols. Therefore whenever the consensus of the fathers was deficient, as it was in the case of justification, Melanchthon was able in good conscience to compensate by appealing directly to Scripture itself.

So the Reformation built what it saw as resting on the Scriptural truths of the prophets and apostles, i.e., the consensus of Scripture with itself. The creeds were reliable since they were excellent explications of christology, while the writings of the fathers were also most useful, though always subjected to the utmost scrutiny. Melanchthon, however, salvaged much of the fathers’ writings by recognizing that many of them had received the gift of interpretation and were invaluable for scriptural exposition.

The doctrines of the Augustana agreed with the great consensus (*magnus consensus*) of the church of all times. The Augsburg Confession reflected the truths of the Nicene creed, and therefore evinced true catholicity. That was the spirit in which the Augustana was written. This creedal consensus subsequently predicated the

proclamation of the entire Gospel and the message of salvation for all through Jesus Christ.

In the Apology Melancthon boldly reaffirmed that Lutheran doctrine represented the consensus of the prophets and the church. Such an unequivocal statement could be made since Pauline justification was so clearly taught in the Scriptures. The “Papists” were not true Catholics, but innovators who rejected the Gospel. The Lutheran church was Catholic since it was in accordance with the consensus of a purer and more ancient church. Later when asked what the signs of the true church were, Melancthon called the consensus of doctrine (*consensus doctrinae*) the first sign.

So Melancthon’s *consensus ecclesiae* was qualified by the idea of a “purer and true antiquity.” The regulating critique of a “purer and true antiquity” shattered any notion of a consensus of the first five hundred years, since even the best fathers were subjected to the Word. This same position made it impossible for Melancthon to appeal to the Vincentian Canon since the *doctrina evangelii* of the prophets and apostles had not been proclaimed “everywhere, always and by everyone.” Melancthon’s reverence for the ancient church was very real, but a unanimous consensus of the fathers was an impossibility. Ultimately Melancthon’s *consensus ecclesiae* is not as “traditionalistic” as it first appears, nor is it materially that far removed from the Flacius circle’s notion of a consensus of truth (*consensus veritatis*).

Although Melancthon’s gifted student Matthias Flacius may be considered the polar opposite of Melancthon in many respects, he, too, shared the conviction that the Reformation stood in continuity with the ancient church. His *Catalogus testium veritatis*, along with his *Clavis scripturae*, *De sectis, dissensionibus*, *Glossa ad Neum Testamenti*,

and the *Magdeburg Centuries* form an organic unity in which exegesis, the question of authority, and church history are brought into harmony with one another.

The driving force behind the composition of the *Magdeburg Centuries* is the conviction that there is true continuity throughout the centuries because God maintains the church through the preaching of the Word. Scripture is the overarching principle by which all the teachers of the church are to be measured. Scripture alone is normative and determinative of true continuity. Yet even while championing this, Flacius will still write, “We have the catholic consensus of the doctrine of God that is confirmed by the entire earthly and heavenly church. So let the Pharisees and monks on the other side boast of the consensus of their fathers and their Catholicism.”¹ Thus Flacius’ sense of continuity and catholicity is a qualified one that appears to be in line with Luther’s. In his *Clavis scripturae* Flacius notes that the fathers not only contradict one another but themselves and it is madness to seek to extract a clear interpretation of Scripture from so many varied and competing interpretations. Moreover, the attempt to gather a unified and harmonious sense of what the fathers meant requires nothing less than herculean labors. But can one succeed? Ultimately relying on the fathers to settle religious controversies would send one over the edge of an abyss.

While Lutheran tradition is in accordance with the consensus of the fathers, Flacius offers three qualifications. First, true consensus comes through the Word and the Spirit, and not through the external word of men. Second, true consensus demonstrates the inner continuity between the true doctrine of all times and its acceptance by the doctors of the church. Flacius argues that he does not teach anything that is not in agreement with Scripture, the creeds, the Augsburg Confession, or the teaching of Luther. In fact, he

¹Flacius, *Glossa ad Apoc.* 7, 11, 1338b. Quoted in Massner, *Flaciuskreis*, 42.

refuses to be called a Lutheran since he belongs to the universal church. Third, true consensus must be grounded in the Word of God. Thus, Flacius maintains a qualified notion of consensus resting on a chain of witnesses to the Gospel that are found in all ages of the church. This notion is very much in accord with Melanchthon and his qualification of a “true and purer antiquity.” Furthermore, since the fathers contradict themselves and the effort to harmonize them is futile, there is no consensus of the first five hundred years, and the viability of the Vincentian Canon as an ecumenical norm is defunct since the Gospel has not been rightly understood “everywhere, always, and by everyone.” There have always been witnesses to the truth, and it is their unanimous testimony to the Gospel that qualifies their witness as being one of a consensus that bears witness to the truth, a *consensus veritatis*. But that is not this sweeping unanimity some claimed was always present in and from the church. Thus we see that the Gnesio-Lutheran Flacius, former student and bitter opponent of Melanchthon, still shares a great degree of material agreement with his former mentor despite difference in terminology and the different emphases found in their writings. Nevertheless, the *consensus patrum*, the consensus of the first five hundred years, and the Vincentian Canon had no part to play in the theology of the Flacius circle.

Martin Chemnitz’s notion of the *consensus patrum* is almost as complex as that of Melanchthon. Chemnitz does not reject outright the claims of the Vincentian Canon, but bends the canon to conform to the Scripture principle. Thus true catholicity is defined by “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone” according to the Word of God rather than by patristic traditions and ecumenical councils. This qualified retention of the Vincentian Canon has rhetorical and polemical significance. First,

Chemnitz is not willing to jettison the Canon and thereby surrender claims of catholicity to his papal adversaries. To do so would suggest that the Church of the Augsburg Confession is less than catholic. Yet Chemnitz never seeks to apply the Canon's criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent to his dogmatic formulations in a rigid or mechanical way. Chemnitz's appeals to the consensus of the fathers are often qualified by Melancthon's notion of a "true and purer antiquity." Second, by infusing the Canon with the Scripture principle he thereby demonstrates that true catholicity is based on the Word of God and not the traditions of men.

It fell to Chemnitz to give the authoritative Protestant response to the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent felt compelled to address the Vincentian Canon and was not shy in proclaiming that its theology was that of the unanimous consensus of the fathers. Responding to Trent Chemnitz often pointed out that its claims to the consensus of the fathers were historically unfounded since many of the doctrinal decisions upheld by Trent were recent innovations of the medieval church and alien to the consensus of antiquity. Furthermore, Chemnitz was not hindered from claiming that the true consensus of the fathers actually favored the Lutheran position, repeatedly asserting in his famous *Examen* that the consensus of the fathers is on the side of the Lutheran reformation, whereas the Tridentine decrees smack of medieval novelty and scholastic innovation. Reading the *Examen* gives one the impression that Chemnitz does in fact believe that there was a consensus of the fathers and that it is in agreement with the Lutheran position. This is also the case with *The Two Natures in Christ* where Chemnitz painstakingly argues that Lutheran christology and the *genus maiestaticum* in particular is not a Lutheran fabrication but the teaching of the ancient church. Chemnitz

appears so at home in the world of the ancient Eastern fathers that his constant appeals to the consensus of the ancient church are less frequently qualified by the notion of a “true and purer antiquity.” Furthermore, when such a qualification appears it is in contradistinction to christological heresies that plagued the ancient church and usually not a qualified critique of the orthodox fathers as well. In *The Two Natures in Christ* one sees that Chemnitz’s systematic application of the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus affect the material content of his sacramentology and christology. These appeals to the Eastern fathers are not merely rhetorical window dressing, but they shape the very substance of Chemnitz’s theology.

A more careful reading of the *Examen* alongside Chemnitz’s other works, such as his *Loci theologici*, reveals that his notion of a *consensus patrum* is often qualified by Melancthon’s concept of the “purer and true antiquity.” In the *Loci theologici*, for instance, where Chemnitz is not polemicizing against the supposed consensus of the Council of Trent, one finds greater candor regarding the flaws of the church fathers and warnings to read them carefully. In this didactic setting Chemnitz appeals less to the consensus of the fathers and is more apt to critique even the anti-Pelagian Augustine. Strangely enough, Chemnitz does not even bother to assert that the doctrine of justification by faith is backed by the consensus of the fathers. In the *Examen* Chemnitz does not even bother to appeal to any father but makes an existential argument that the fathers believed better than they spoke concerning justification in their prayers and pious meditations. In the *Loci* Chemnitz could have appealed to Ambrose, Augustine, and Ambrosiaster among others in favor of the doctrine of *sola gratia*, yet he is content to say that none of the fathers understood the doctrine of justification by faith alone. For such a

learned patrologist who makes such incessant appeals to the *consensus patrum* in all his works the surrender of justification by faith appears to be an anomaly on the part of Chemnitz. But it also forces readers to pay close attention when Chemnitz does assert a consensus. Clearly consensus and catholicity were not used by Chemnitz in an unthinking, routine way.

Thus the consensus of antiquity in Chemnitz's works veers between an apparently literal acceptance of a *consensus patrum*, especially in *The Two Natures in Christ* and *The Lord's Supper*, and a more qualified notion of a "true and purer antiquity" where the best fathers spoke rightly and in accordance with Scripture. Furthermore, Chemnitz appeals so often to the consensus of the fathers that it is difficult in light of his qualified notion of a "true and purer antiquity" to determine to what extent the consensus of the ancient church affected the material content of his theology. It would seem that the fathers penetrated his understanding of the eucharist and his doctrines of Christ much more deeply than the Lutheran doctrines he defended in the *Examen*. Chemnitz even surpasses Melancthon in the number of appeals to the *consensus patrum* in his writings and thereby becomes something of a novelty within the continuum of Lutheran theology that stretches from Luther to Quenstedt.

In the last decades of the sixteenth century Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was recognized by friends and foes alike as the chief spokesman for Tridentine Catholicism. His *Disputationes de Controversiis*, released in three stages between 1586 and 1593 with the official version done in 1596, became for Roman Catholics what Chemnitz's *Examination of the Council of Trent* was for Lutherans and other Protestants. Both works were read and appealed to for at least the next three centuries. The purpose of

the *Controversies*, like that of Trent, was nothing less than a thorough refutation of all types of Protestantism. Bellarmine's work includes over 7,000 citations of Protestant opponents by name, an impressive array, with Chemnitz named more than any other Lutheran theologian. Consensus and catholicity clearly were still very contentious issues.

Bellarmino's work called forth almost two hundred full-scale replies by Protestants in the century after its publication. Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603), a leading representative of early Lutheran Orthodoxy, was forced to respond to Bellarmine, readjusting and reworking the earlier Lutheran view that they were in accord with the *consensus patrum*. In so doing Hunnius neither relied upon Flacius, nor did he invoke the *consensus ecclesiae* of Melancthon or the *consensus patrum* of Chemnitz. In fact, his encounter with and refutation of Bellarmine seems to have done much to change his position on the church and tradition. Ritschl would later hold that Hunnius, like Flacius, would reach new perspectives in contrast not only to the "traditionalism" of Trent but to Melancthon's understanding of the church with its ecumenical symbols and its patristic consensus. In so doing, Hunnius began to part company with Melancthon and Chemnitz, becoming the first significant orthodox Lutheran theologian to put some distance between Lutheranism and the argument for consensus.

This abandoning of the *consensus patrum* in the tug of war with Roman Catholicism was a significant shift for Lutheran orthodoxy. Whereas Rome continued to assert that its teachings were in accord with the ancient church despite efforts by Melancthon, Flacius, and Chemnitz to prove the contrary, the early theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy abandoned previous qualified appeals to a consensus and sought in turn to demolish the notion that such a consensus of the fathers ever existed. For

Hunnius catholicity and not consensus became the key concept that required Lutheran affirmation and defense. Concerning the Vincentian Canon Hunnius like Chemnitz applies the Scripture principle to it and thereby strips the Canon of its traditionalism and appeal to ecumenical councils. Hunnius relies on the Scripture principle more radically than Chemnitz and Melancthon, with no talk of fathers or church councils, but rather Scripture interprets Scripture in line with the analogy of faith. New dogmas are rejected on the basis of Scripture alone, not because of consensus. And catholicity is now defined as consensus with Scripture and its truths.

With this approach, Hunnius has struck off in a different direction from the concept of consensus and catholicity as Melancthon understood it. Catholicity is still the universal church, with teachings that it confesses to be catholic. But the teaching really counts because it is said to be in agreement with the prophets and apostles inspired by God. Catholic referred to the church of the New Testament, a church not yet spread all over the world after Christ's ascension but catholic nonetheless. The catholic church in this sense is broader than the papal version and in a wider sense represents the church universal in contrast to the particular churches seen through history, Rome included. Hunnius' understanding of consensus and catholicity would be reflected by significant Lutheran orthodox theologians that would come after him.

But not all simply reflected Hunnius. Johann Gerhard was the most influential representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy and probably the most significant theologian in Lutheranism since the time of Luther, Melancthon and Chemnitz. In the *Loci theologici* the early Gerhard still maintains that the church of the first five hundred years was the true church despite incipient decay in matters of doctrine and practice. Gerhard also

acknowledges a general consensus of the fathers that is useful in refuting particular controversies that arose during that period, but the service this consensus may offer is of limited use since it was not absolute and did not resolve religious controversies that would appear later. In this sense, Gerhard's qualified notion of a *consensus patrum* is in line with Chemnitz's view of consensus though one searches in vain in his writings for appeals to the *consensus patrum* in support of Lutheran doctrine. And this is a significant departure from Melancthon and Chemnitz. Yet does this signify a diminution of catholicity in a material sense in the writings of Gerhard? This does not appear to be the case, for though Gerhard does not make rhetorical appeals to the *consensus patrum*, his appeal to individual church fathers is at least as numerous as Chemnitz's. Therefore the material substance of Lutheran Orthodoxy still prized a consensus with antiquity by demonstrating the startling array of church fathers that it could amass to bear witness to its doctrine. The appeal to consensus proper may have been discarded by Gerhard, but the compulsion to cite as many fathers as possible in favor of any given locus bears witness to the high regard that the ancient church still had in the eyes of orthodox Lutherans.

Gerhard's mode of argumentation, however, was certainly affected by Bellarmine's response to Chemnitz's *Examen*, and it is well known that he had a copy of Bellarmine's *Disputationes de Controversiis* in front of him as he composed his *Confessio Catholica* in the last years of his life. Gerhard, following the lead of Hunnius, appears to abandon the *consensus patrum* altogether in this polemical work, and argues instead for Lutheran catholicity on other grounds.

In Gerhard's *Confessio catholica* he argues that attempts to force a unanimous consensus of the fathers are in vain, forcing consensus as if it were some a priori rule of faith necessary for the interpretation of Scripture rather than the product of the Spirit working through the Word. Gerhard argues that a consensus of the fathers does not exist either among themselves in doctrine or in their exegesis of Scripture. The fathers did not begin with some rule of faith to guide the interpretation of Scripture as if consensus were absolute or infallible. Not only did the fathers' writings develop, but they did not deal with all of doctrine as a whole from the start. There is no "finished product" of consensus from the beginning. More, there was no way to know what all the bishops thought or that they even all always agreed. And the fathers could not claim the same inspiration—authenticity and reliability and authority—as those who penned the Scriptures as moved by the Holy Spirit. That meant only the biblical texts would have the highest norming authority. Since even the biblical writers could err when not involved in this Spirit-moved writing, then how could later generations of fathers, absent that inspiration, be put on an even plane?

For Gerhard, refuting Rome's claims of consensus should be simple enough. As soon as one reads their books it is clear there is no lack of disagreement when the authors write their own material apart from citing or restating the canonical Scriptures. Gerhard gives many examples where the fathers disagree with each other over interpreting various Scripture passages. There are more instances showing where Rome parts ways with the fathers, cases when both have erred. At least in this sense Rome carries on the line of the fathers, for, as Gerhard notes, the fathers not only differ among themselves, but in their interpretations of Scripture. No matter how one tries, neither the fathers nor

Rome since can be made to sing with one voice. Only a *sola Scriptura* approach can bring that kind of consensus when and as the church echoes that revelation from God through his prophets and apostles.

Such strong language shatters any notion of a *consensus patrum*, and is striking when compared to the insistent yet qualified appeals of Melanchthon and Chemnitz and even the early Gerhard. When Gerhard discussed the doctrine of church in his *Loci theologici*, he argued repeatedly that there was not a single article of faith that was not in accord with the consensus of the ancient Catholic church and the apostolic Scriptures. Above all, the doctrine of justification by faith is no new doctrine. Flacius in the *Magdeburg Centuries* had already shown that true doctrine had endured throughout all the centuries. At the same time, this same Gerhard who denies the *consensus patrum* in the *Confessio catholica* nevertheless refuses to surrender catholicity since Lutheran doctrine is in accord with the catholic Scriptures and maintains catholic teachings starting with such fundamental issues as the doctrine of the trinity. Relying on the tradition of Scripture that has been handed down to us, the *tradux Scripturae*, (even by those who do not get everything right in all points and may have disagreed with Luther and Lutherans), Gerhard, like Flacius before him, viewed the catholic consensus as a prolongation of the biblical faith. A consensus with antiquity is only necessary in so far as it is a consensus with Scripture. Nevertheless, Gerhard values highly the writings of the fathers, especially the ones closest to the time of the apostles, as well as Augustine and Bernard. It could be that he understands that they, like those in his own time, are simply trying to be faithful in their witness and reflection of the message of the prophets and apostles.

Gerhard, like Flacius in his *Catologus testium veritatis*, believes he can find witnesses to the evangelical truth in all ages of the church. Still the record is not unbroken, and those highpoints were not when they were uttered by the fathers but rather if and when the fathers spoke what was in the Scriptures. For this reason Gerhard is able to produce patristic testimonies in favor of justification by faith in both his *Loci theologici* and his *Confessio catholica*. Thus Lutheran catholicity is still highly valued in the spirit of Hunnius, but the notion of a *consensus patrum* or a consensus of antiquity (*consensus antiquitatis*) is shattered.

If Bellarmine's *Controversies* forced Lutheran theologians to abandon the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the ancient church, the ecumenical attempts from within the wider Reformation ranks by Georg Calixt in the early part of the seventeenth century killed any thought of returning to the position of Melanchthon or Chemnitz. Those circumstances were past, so it would be impossible simply to repeat what those earlier Lutherans had said. Calixt sought to unify Christendom on the basis of the consensus of the ancient church of the first five hundred years (the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis*) and the Vincentian Canon, rehabilitating the Vincentian Canon despite its overuse in the sixteenth century. His *De autoritate antiquitatis ecclesiae* of 1639 is a running commentary on the Vincentian Canon that appeals to Melanchthon, Chemnitz and Gerhard amongst others to demonstrate the value previous Lutherans placed on the ancient church and its doctrine. Calixt argues for the authority of two voices: the divine and the consensus of antiquity, agreement not of one or two fathers but rather of the wider sweep of the most pious and learned men especially as seen in the ecumenical symbols recognized by all confessions.

Calixt also wrote an extensive introduction, a *Prooemium*, to the Vincentian Canon with the hopes of achieving concord among the rival confessions, confessions that, if left to stand alone, would be charged with novelty. Nevertheless, Calixt's efforts came to naught. His opponents exposed the weaknesses in the Vincentian Canon due to its historical limitations and arbitrary nature. For instance, why should one be bound only to the first five centuries? There were councils after that. Others, such as Johann Conrad Dannhauer, conceded that the canon may have been a useful tool in the time of Vincent, but historical developments had transcended the limitations of the issues addressed in the first five hundred years.

Calixt took the Vincentian Canon quite literally in his attempt to apply the criteria of universality, antiquity and consent. His call for the Reformed, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Lutherans to abandon their distinctive doctrines that divided Christendom awakened deep hostility on the part of Orthodox Lutheranism as it sensed that its very identity was being threatened. Calixt's unionistic attempts also sparked the Syncretistic Controversy in which the Orthodox universities of Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Strassburg vehemently and relentlessly attacked Calixt and the University of Helmstedt for their unionism.

Calixt would be hard pressed to find a more determined adversary than Abraham Calov, the most significant Orthodox theologian since Johann Gerhard. Calov issued twenty-six anti-syncretistic works in his lifetime. Quality varies and they are often repetitious, not on a par with Calov's anti-Socinian writings in terms of quality and respect for the ancient church and the achievements of the ecumenical councils. One

wonders whether Calov's reverence for the ancient church would have remained higher if he only had to contend with the Reformed and the Socinians.

Calov contested Calixt's attempt to make the consensus of the ancient church a secondary principle alongside of Scripture. He argues that a principle of faith should be invincible and thereby capable of convincing adversaries of the verity of one's position. But the *consensus quinquesaecularis* does not pass muster, because we do not have consensus in even one article of faith that survived from the first five hundred years. There is not even agreement in the writings of the fathers concerning the doctrine of the trinity, certainly a fundamental starting point. Where then is there witness to consensus from the writings of the fathers? Spurious additions, mutilations, and corruptions all complicate the picture. So much remains uncertain from the writings of the early church with the fathers embroiled in so many controversies, their approach often rhetorical, and their mode of writing so varied as to make them less than a certain guide to Scripture. So how is one able to judge the perspicuity of the *consensus patrum* given all this? Thus Calov, in effect, denies that there ever was a consensus of the ancient church.

By the time Johann Andreas Quenstedt published his *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* in 1685, the question of a consensus of the first five centuries had become an academic one. Quenstedt, like Calov, was concerned that such a consensus of the ancient church would be taken as a secondary principle alongside Scripture, a second source for teaching and authority. Nevertheless, Quenstedt, like Chemnitz and the early Gerhard, appears to admit that such a consensus may in fact have existed. Yet "may have existed" is not a solid foundation, and Quenstedt doubted there was sufficient evidence for a consensus of the fathers in an absolute sense.

So after this all, where does Lutheranism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century stand in terms of the *consensus patrum* and catholicity as epitomized in the use made of the Vincentian Canon to these ends? First, it should be noted that no Orthodox Lutheran theologian ever attempted to make the Vincentian Canon's criteria of universality, antiquity, and consent a determining factor in his formation of dogma. There is no research available that indicates that Melanchthon ever addressed the Vincentian Canon, and Chemnitz only mentions it twice in all of his major works. In these two instances Chemnitz is responding to Trent's appeal to the Canon, and is not seeking to justify his own doctrinal concerns. Notably, Chemnitz does not dismiss the Canon, but he applies the Scripture principle to it and thereby lessens the force of its potential traditionalism. The same holds true for Lutheran Orthodoxy after Chemnitz. For Hunnius, Gerhard, and Dannhauer, who are responding to the challenges of Trent, Bellarmine, and Calixt, the Canon at best is valid only in so far as it speaks of a consensus with Scripture, and not as a bulwark for an abstract traditionalism of the first five hundred years. Calov and Quenstedt appear to reject the Canon outright as being untenable for Vincent's age or any other. In short, Lutheran Orthodoxy responds to the challenge of the Vincentian Canon because outside forces have sought to apply its criteria to their own theological systems even as they critique the doctrinal developments of Lutheranism. Unlike Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and the irenic ecumenism of Calixt, Lutheran Orthodoxy has no use for the Vincentian Canon.

The consensus of the fathers is a more complicated matter. Melanchthon and Chemnitz continually make rhetorical appeals to the *consensus patrum* in defense of their doctrine. Yet are such appeals so integral to their theology that they are of material

significance? The answer is difficult to determine since their concept of consensus was so qualified at times as to make it difficult to distinguish from Flacius' concept of a *tradux Scripturae* and his outright rejection of a *consensus patrum*. Moreover, we have seen that the early Gerhard argues that Lutheran dogma is in agreement with the consensus of the fathers though he does not follow Chemnitz by following up such a claim with repeated appeals to the *consensus patrum*. Dannhauer and Quenstedt also concede that there was a general consensus of the fathers, but it is hardly a solid enough foundation to base matters of faith upon it. One searches in vain for consistent appeals to the consensus of the fathers after Chemnitz, and this makes him unique within Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Hunnius, the later Gerhard, and Calov all dismiss the notion that there ever was a *consensus patrum*, yet Gerhard's and Calov's works are still filled with a plethora of patristic citations that back up Lutheran dogma. Materially speaking there does not seem to be a significant difference between the theology of Chemnitz and later Orthodoxy. Both Chemnitz and later dogmaticians made ample use of the fathers of the church in their writings. How well these theologians understood the context and exact meaning of the church fathers is a question that goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it appears that later dogmaticians such as Hunnius, Gerhard, and Calov could claim to be catholic not only because their doctrine was in agreement with Scripture—the true and purest antiquity—but because their theology was in accord with the most visible consensus of the ancient church, namely, the doctrines of the trinity and the two natures in Christ. Thus their dogma did agree with the conciliar achievements of the ancient church as they upheld the three ecumenical creeds. Here a genuine consensus

had been established by the early church of the first five hundred years that was worthy of being called catholic.

Historically speaking, the exigencies of the times demanded that Lutheran Orthodoxy after Chemnitz abandon consistent appeals to the *consensus patrum*. On one hand there was the post-tridentine triumphalism of Bellarmine building on Trent's reassertion of a catholic consensus. On the other came the identity crisis sparked by the non-confessional Georg Calixt and his attempt at unionism via the Vincentian Canon. These two challenges led Lutheranism to jettison the notion that there was an absolutely firm consensus of the fathers with which they were in agreement. These outside forces caused Orthodox Lutheranism to recast itself in ever narrower terms. A sense of catholicity was maintained throughout this entire period, but it was a catholicity that defined itself on the basis of the truth of God's Word as it was rightly understood by some in all ages. In other words, true consensus for Lutheranism became consensus with Scripture alone and with the teachings of the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessions since they echoed Scripture. When push came to shove, the Vincentian Canon proved to be difficult to apply in concrete situations. And when that happened, the consensus of the fathers, so highly praised by Melanchthon and Chemnitz, collapsed upon further scrutiny. The Lutheranism of High Orthodoxy, relying on the extensive writings of Martin Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, and its own Orthodox theologians, became a self-reliant confessional religion that no longer found recourse to the consensus of the ancient church a necessary means of defining itself or defending its catholicity. That is not to say that Lutheranism at the end of our time-frame with Calov and Quenstedt was not interested in catholicity, consensus, or the fathers. In fact, they did not

cease to quote the fathers. But Lutheranism did not or could not argue—better: confess!—in the same way using the fathers of antiquity of the ancient church to justify a unanimous consensus of the fathers in Vincentian terms. A new day, a new approach, had arrived.

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_____. *Syntagmatis anti-syncretistici loci, et controversiae, ad elegcon (elegchon) errorum, qui hactenus a pontificis, calvinianis, socinianis, arminianis, &*

novatoribus, aliisque toiv sunkrtizwsin (synkrizosin) inde ab Aug. Conf. exhibitae tempore & hoc praecipue, quoe nunc agimus, seculo deissminati & propugnati, non ecclesiis in unitate Spiritus consociandis, sed per shismata varia turbandis, novisq; sectis procreandis apti nati sunt, disputatio colleigo exhibentur ad Abraham Calovio ua cum remissionibus ad scripta, quibus errores isti ab eodem producti, confutatique sunt & imprimis ad Syncretismum Calixtinum, & Harmoniam Calixtino. Haereticam, plerosque omnes juxta cognationem novatorum cum calvinianis, pontificis; arminianis, & socinianis methodice sistentem, ac perspicue refellentem. 1668.

Socinismus profligates, errorum socinianorum luculenta confutation, e.s. literis, propriisque ipsorum testimoniis, per universam theologiam, trecentis quaestionibus, methodo concinna, brevitate nervosa, ita institute, ut fides catholica cum in caeteris doctrinae caelestis capitibus, tum imprimis, quam ipsam fidei acropolin, satisfactionem Christi, adversus eosdem invicte asseratur; haerisque nova, & pestilentissima e scriptis autorum indubiis bona fide producta, solida reffelatur. Wittenberg, 1668.

Syntagma hoc socinismi profligate in academia Wittebergensi publice defenderunt Ann. 1651 sequ. Dn. M. Johannes Heinzemann, Vratislaviensis, primum Gymnasi Berolinensis Rector, jam ecclesia soltq vellensis pastor, & inspector Dn Christianus Weberus, Mutinensis. N.p, n.d.

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VITA

Quentin David Stewart

August 6, 1967

Staten Island, New York

Collegiate Institutions Attended

Wheaton College, Wheaton Illinois, B.A., 1990

Graduate Institutions Attended

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, M.A., 1998

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, Th.M., 2000

Previous Theses and Publications

The Triumph of the Lamb and His Followers Through “Defeat” and “Sacrifice” in St. John’s Apocalypse.