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The Augsburg Confession

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The Augsburg Confession.

After visiting Italy and savagely sacking Holy Rome, Kaiser Karl V made the Peace of Barcelona with the Holy Father on June 29, 1529. On August 3 he made peace with his chronic rival, "the Most Christian King," Francis I of France. This Peace of Cambray had an article "forbidding to print or sell any Lutheran books." Thus the noble Kaiser thanked the Lutherans for saving him in the day of distress from the Turk, the King, and the Pope.

On January 21, 1530, Karl called his *Reichstag* for April 8 to Augsburg, the burg of the great Caesar Augustus, and promised to be present in person for the second time. He also promised "to hear, understand, and consider *everybody's* view, opinion, and meaning in *love*," and so forth and so on. He cooed as gently as any sucking dove, and the simple soul of the honest German, Luther, rejoiced with great joy over these honeyed phrases of the crafty Spaniard, and he thought now all questions of resisting the Kaiser had fallen to the ground.

From November, 1529, to March, 1530, the Pope and the Kaiser lived together in the same palace at Bologna. On February 24, his birthday, the Kaiser solemnly swore to use force to combat the "pestilential disease of Lutheranism." Then the Pope put the holy oil on the Kaiser's head and breast and placed on his head the crown of the Holy Roman Empire — "neither holy nor Roman nor an empire," sneered Voltaire. The Kaiser of the Holy Roman Empire kissed the Pope's foot, held the stirrup while the Pope mounted his horse, led the horse by the bridle, went ahead afoot while the Pope was carried on a splendid chair into the church, and during Mass poured the water on the Pope's hands. What a spectacle! Not a German prince was present at the last crowning of a German Kaiser by a Roman Pope. That was the Kaiser for whom the big-hearted Luther prayed, "the pious, good Kaiser Karl, who sits as an innocent lambkin among

so many dogs, swine, and devils." Innocent Karl? Innocent Luther! Verily, verily innocent!

At last the Kaiser set out for the *Reichstag*. At Innsbruck "he made as though he would kiss the young ladies, but disengaged himself as soon as might be from those of riper years," observes the observant chronicler.

On June 15 the Kaiser came to Augsburg. Behind him rode Brother Ferdinand and the Pope's legate, Lorenzo Campeggio, who had paid 24,000 ducats for his cardinal's hat. He was a bribe-taking, gambling, drinking, dissipating cleric — Cardinal Aleander tells us. The princes, who had ridden out to meet their Kaiser, bowed the knee when the legate raised his two fingers, but the sturdy Saxon Elector merely stood bolt upright to respect the papal blessing. The Kaiser at once asked the Lutherans to march in the Corpus Christi procession next day, June 16. This they resolutely refused; it was not a matter of courtesy, but of conscience. Candle in hand, the Kaiser walked behind the Host for two hours in the blazing sun. Though the city council had appealed from house to house, not a hundred Augsburgers followed the Kaiser, as Spalatin noted.

On June 20 the *Reichstag* was opened with a Mass. Out of courtesy to the Kaiser the Lutherans attended, but they did not kneel during the adoration of the Host; Philip of Hessen would not even be present. Karl had promised in writing to settle the religious question "in a spirit of love." In the opening speech the papal legate Pompinello made such biting remarks about the Germans that even the Catholic princes were incensed. He had a lengthened contrast between the Turks and many Germans (Lutherans), and the Turks were much better than many Germans. "The truest and most revered teachings of Christ they by devilish inspiration turn into farces and shameful things. If Peter's keys will no longer open and unlock the marble hearts of the German princes, then Paul's sword must help and smite." And then he begged for help against the Turk! The nerve! No wonder even the Catholics were indignant!

The princes replied by again presenting the historic *Hundred Grievances of the German Nation against the Corruptions of the Papacy*. The speech from the throne was cold and severe. It complained that the Edict of Worms to crush Lutheranism had not been executed. The Lutherans were pretty plainly held responsible for the outrages of the Peasants' War and the fanaticism of the Anabaptists. The Kaiser had forbidden Lutheran preaching, but Lutheran preaching had gone on all along. As the Kaiser once again forbade Lutheran preaching, Margrave George of Brandenburg, grown gray in the Kaiser's service, excitedly cried out, "Before I would refrain from God's Word, I would rather kneel on this spot and let my head be chopped off." The Kaiser replied, "Dear prince,

not head off, not head off!" Later they compromised — both parties quit preaching, though the Catholics kept on with their Mass; the people went away laughing.

The Kaiser had asked for "everybody's view, opinion, and meaning," and so Melancthon drew up an apology, a defense of the Lutheran practise. But Dr. John Eck printed 404 heresies of the Lutherans, classing them with the condemned old and new heretics. This compelled Melancthon to put his work into the form of a confession. The material was ready to his hand — the Saxon Visitation Articles, the misnamed seventeen Schwabach Articles, the fifteen Marburg Articles, and the Torgau Articles. These cubs he licked into shape, as Vergil would say.

On May 11 a *draft* of some of the articles was sent to Luther on the *Feste* Coburg, and he endorsed the work. But more articles were added, and all were recast and polished time and again. Princes, councilors, and twelve theologians discussed, and passed on, the articles and braced the wobbling Melancthon. Fearing direct political consequences for the princes, Melancthon did not want them to sign. The Elector John of Saxony replied: "I, too, will confess Christ. My electoral hat and ermine have not the worth of the cross of Christ; they remain in the world, this will go with me to the stars." Taking the pen to sign, Wolfgang of Anhalt said: "I have ridden many a time into battle to please others; then why should I not, if need be to honor and obey my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, saddle my horse and, risking body and life, hasten to the cross of honor into the heavenly life?"

The confession was signed by the Elector John of Saxony, Margrave George of Brandenburg, Duke Ernest of Lueneburg, Landgrave Philip of Hessen, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt, by Nuernberg and Reutlingen, likely by *Kurprinz* John Frederick and Duke Francis of Lueneburg, by Weissenburg, Heilbronn, Kempten, and Windsheim.

The *Reichstag* usually met in the large gold room of the court-house, but on June 25 the Kaiser had it meet in the bishop's palace, in the chapter-room, holding about two hundred. At three in the afternoon the two Saxon chancellors stepped into the middle of the hall, Dr. Gregor Brueck with the Latin copy of the confession and Dr. Christian Beyer with the German. The German Kaiser did not understand German and asked for the reading of the Latin. Elector John of Saxony said, since they were on German soil, the German language ought to be used. The Kaiser gave way. Then Chancellor Beyer read, — read from four to six, — read so plainly and clearly that the throng outside could understand every word. It seemed we could yet hear every word when we stood on the historic spot after almost four hundred years. The German Kaiser did not understand German and so soon fell soundly asleep — asleep at the switch at a most critical and dramatic moment in modern history.

What a change! At Worms, in 1521, the boyish Kaiser forbade the lowly and lonely Luther to say a single word in defense of his teaching; nine years later the mighty master of Europe and America was forced to listen to the German reading of a formal confession of the Lutheran teaching of princes and lords and cities!

"I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings!" Ps. 119, 46.

Luther was jubilant; he was the first to appreciate the greatness of the historic event and to impress it on others. Spalatin exulted, "On this day was done one of the greatest works ever done on earth!" Even some Catholics were deeply impressed. Bishop Christopher von Stadion, of Augsburg, honestly confessed, "What has been read is the pure truth; we cannot deny it." When Eck said he could refute it with the Fathers, but not with the Scripture, Duke William of Bavaria retorted, "So I hear the Lutherans sit in the Scriptures and we Catholics outside." Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz said to him, "See, how fine our theologians stand by us! They, the Lutherans, have the proof for their stand in Scripture, we outside Scripture." Archbishop Matthew Lang of Salzburg himself desired the reform of many abuses, but it made him angry "that they should let themselves be reformed by one lone, measly monk." The Kaiser's confessor had an inkling of the depth of the confession when he said, "You have a theology which one can understand only when one prays much." The confounded Cochlaeus complained bitterly that it "pleased the majority even at Rome."

On June 26 the timid Melancthon sent a copy to Luther and "almost in constant tears" asked what further concessions to the Romanists could be made. Luther answered on June 29: "As far as I am concerned, more than enough has already been conceded. . . . Please God, nothing more shall be wrung from me; let matters go as they will. . . . May Christ heal you!"

The next day he wrote again: "I would rather fall with Christ than stand with the Kaiser. . . . Let us pray with the apostles, 'Lord, increase our faith,'" Luke 17, 5.

The Kaiser had asked for "*everybody's* view, opinion, and meaning"; but now the Romanists refused to give theirs. Instead, John Eck and Cochlaeus headed twenty theologians in drawing up a confutation of the Lutheran confession. On July 12 the work was done, but it was such a savage slander that even the Kaiser rejected it. It had to be shortened and somewhat disinfected before it was read on August 3. Even then it was so long and strong as to bore and disgust the saner among the hearers. The Kaiser loftily said the Lutherans had been refuted and imperiously demanded the acceptance of this confutation and the return to the Pope's rule; as protector of the Church he would tolerate no schism. When the Lutherans wished to reply, Karl refused them a copy. Think of it!

A committee of fourteen—princes, councilors, and theologians—from August 16—21 tried to concoct a compromise. Luther wrote: "I hear you have undertaken a weird work, to unite the Pope and Luther. But the Pope will not be willing, and Luther forbids it. If you bring it about, I'll reconcile Christ and Belial."

Another committee of six—Melanchthon and five Romanists, with Eck—made another effort, and the timid Melanchthon made dangerous concessions. The crooked Cardinal Campeggio even offered him four hundred scudi and two hundred a year to betray the Lutheran cause. Osiander heard Melanchthon remark it was not wrong to keep peace by wrong means. Jerome Baumgaertner, Kate von Bora's erstwhile lover, wrote home to Nuernberg that Melanchthon was "more childish than a child. . . . No man to the present day has harmed the Gospel more than Philip." Lazarus Spengler, Secretary of Nuernberg, and Landgrave Philip wrote Luther to write to Augsburg and bolster up the wobblers. Luther was roused, and he wrote. "Should you, what you, please God, will not do, make concessions that clearly oppose the Gospel and so thrust the eagle into a sack, well, then Luther will come; do not doubt it, he will come and gloriously free this eagle. As true as Christ lives, that will happen."

"All treaty about harmonizing our doctrine displeases me, for I know it is impossible to unite Luther and the Pope, unless the Pope will abolish the papacy. I am almost bursting with anger and indignation. Break off the conferences and go home!"

Luther, while at Coburg, was in constant communication with Augsburg. With God-given courage he heartened the disheartened. With God-given power he cheered and steered those helplessly and hopelessly floundering in the bog.

The Kaiser was not as mighty as he looked, and he had to follow the advice of his confessor: "Let Your Majesty be content that the heretics serve you and are loyal, even if against God they are worse than devils. Close your eyes, since you have not the power to punish them."

Karl made a virtue of necessity. On September 22 he closed the *Reichstag*, ordering the Lutherans to recant and to return to the Pope, giving them till April 15 to do so; after that their heresy was to be rooted out by force. The Lutherans protested against this for the sake of God and their conscience and stood by their protest at Speyer in 1529 against the tyranny of the majority. To prove they had not been refuted by Scripture "with good grounds," Chancellor Brueck delivered Melanchthon's Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession. Karl spurned it.

Brenz gloomily forecast "the end of Germany." Bucer wailed and whined about "the massacre of the saints worse than that of the time of Diocletian." Luther laughed at these dangers. He was

clear-eyed when others were bleary-eyed. He was willing to lose an ear and an eye if Venice, the Pope, and the Frenchman would heartily become good Kaiser men; "for they are three persons in one essence in their incomprehensible anger and hate of the Kaiser with their hypocrisy, lies, and fraud."

That man Luther had an uncanny way of being right. He was a better statesman than the professional politicians. He said there would be no war, and there was no war. The Turk was bobbing up again.

The Kaiser forbade the printing of the Augsburg Confession. Printers, however, must live, and in order to live, they must print; and so somehow the confession, in Carlylese, got itself printed. The Kaiser himself sent copies to the kings of France, England, and Portugal. Even during the *Reichstag* the confession was translated into French, Italian, English, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese—the best seller of the year.

Melanchthon sent the confession to King Henry VIII, and it formed the basis of the Episcopalian *Thirty-nine Articles* and the creed of the Methodists.

Dr. Philip Schaff, one of the leading Presbyterian theologians, thinks "the Augsburg Confession is the first and most famous of all the Evangelical confessions, . . . the most churchly, the most catholic, and the most conservative creed of Protestantism." The Reformed church historian Gieseler says: "If it be a question which of the Protestant creeds is best adapted to become a basis of union for all evangelical churches, I would pronounce unhesitatingly for the *Confessio Augustana*."

Well, you unionists, if you really want a real union, come and welcome.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. A Venetian visitor wrote that Karl and Ferdinand enjoyed themselves vastly in banqueting, dancing, and shooting; they seemed to care little who was Lutheran and who was Catholic; indeed, a great Lutheran gave a dinner party to Karl, who could see on the walls the portraits of Luther and his wife. The Kaiser and all his court were the guests of the great banker Fugger, who entertained them in more than princely style. In one pantomimic comedy there appeared Reuchlin, Erasmus, Luther, the Pope, and the Kaiser himself.

Here began the famous romance between the Archduke Ferdinand, second son of King Ferdinand and nephew of the Kaiser, and Philippine Welser, the ravishingly beautiful daughter of another Augsburg patrician. Welser made a loan to Karl. Unable to pay, the Kaiser gave him a concession in the New World. Welser sent Ambrosius Dalfinger to colonize "Welser's Land"—now Venezuela.

Milwaukee, Wis.

WILLIAM DALLMANN.