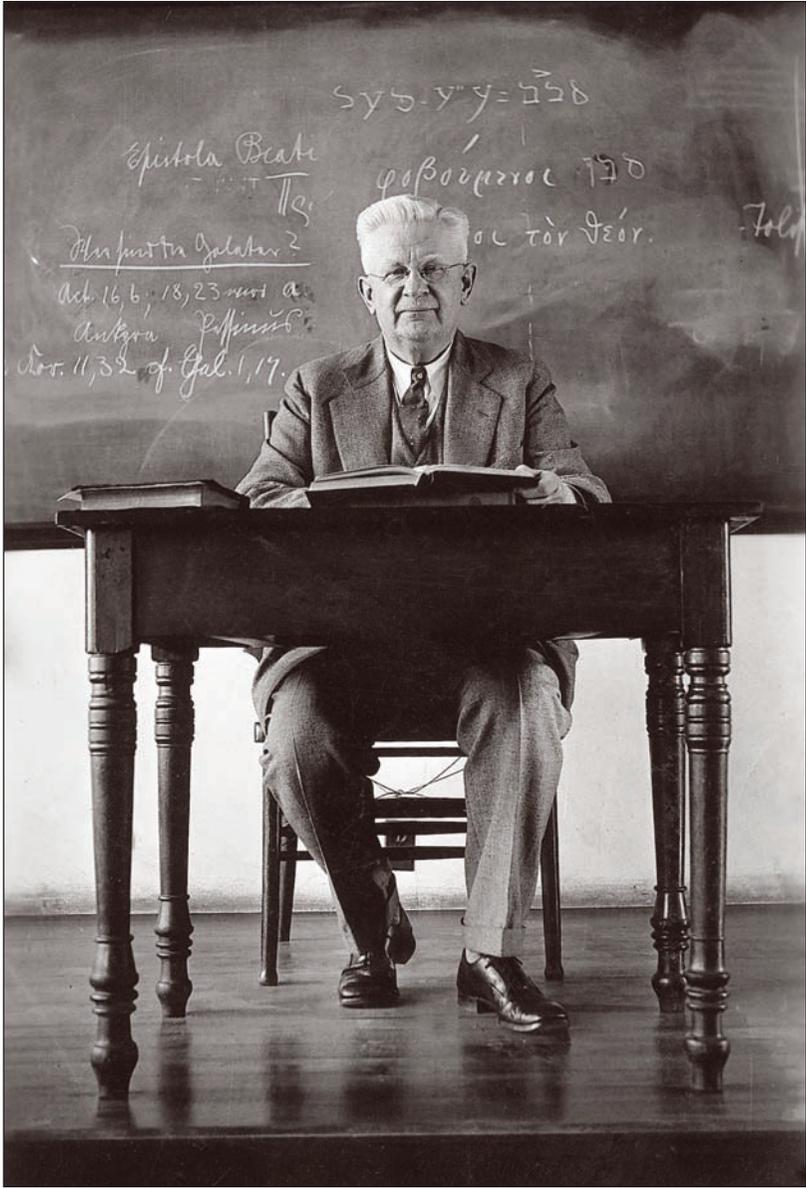


Studies in the Smalcald Articles



Professor John P. Meyer
1873–1964

Studies in the Smalcald Articles

John P. Meyer

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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Northwestern Publishing House
1250 N. 113th St., Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284
www.nph.net

© 2017 Northwestern Publishing House
Published 2017

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-8100-2802-9
ISBN 978-0-8100-2803-6 (e-book)

1500798

ISBN 978-0-8100-2802-9



9780810028029

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Preface to the 2017 Edition

Not long after the undersigned submitted the manuscript of Professor John Meyer's *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) for publication, NPH editor Curtis Jahn approached me about updating Meyer's *Studies in the Smalcald Articles*. A number of other duties and responsibilities prevented the timely completion of the project. I appreciate Reverend Jahn's patience and his continued interest in the project.

Studies in the Smalcald Articles is the fruit of Professor Meyer's long years of study and service in God's kingdom. The book is a compilation of articles that appeared in *The Northwestern Lutheran* (today's *Forward in Christ*). Pastor Stephen J. Lawrenz saw the value of the articles several decades ago and undertook the arduous task of photographically reproducing, compiling, and privately publishing them in a plastic comb-bound book. His edition included an introduction written by his father, Professor Carl J. Lawrenz (1908–1989). Professor Lawrenz had been a student of Professor Meyer and for many years served as his colleague at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Unfortunately, this comb-bound edition was printed in limited quantity and has not been available for some time.

At the request of the undersigned, Pastor Timothy Rosenow, at the time a seminarian and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library assistant, scanned the Lawrenz edition and did initial formatting. His careful work made my task much easier. Pastor Andrew Hussman, during his senior year at the seminary, was helpful in tracking down the sources of some of the undocumented quotations. We thank seminary librarian, Professor John Hartwig, for allowing his staff to assist with the project.

For this new edition, the Scripture passages have been updated from the King James Version (KJV) to the English Standard Version (ESV). Once or twice the KJV wording was retained and this is indicated by the notation KJV in parentheses. Professor Meyer included several quotations from the Council of Trent in an older translation that was not always very readable. All quotations from the Council of Trent have been changed to the translation of H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1941).

The text of the Smalcald Articles is the English translation in the *Concordia Triglotta* (1921). Since Professor Meyer was writing for *The Northwestern Lutheran* in a popular style, he did not carefully document the sources of the quotations included in his studies. We have made an attempt to identify the sources of these quotations, but not always with success. References to various confessional statements and decisions of councils are cited in parentheses after the quotations. Quotations from other sources are referenced in footnotes. We have tried to correct the few typographical errors in the original publication. Capitalization follows the current NPH Style Guide. One or two expressions were changed for the sake of clarity. Otherwise, every effort has been made to retain Professor Meyer's own style and expression.

We are pleased to present this new edition of Meyer's *Studies in the Smalcald Articles*. We pray that this book will prove as popular and useful as Meyer's *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* has been.

Professor John M. Brenner
Festival of Pentecost 2015
Mequon, Wisconsin

Preface to the 1980 Edition

The publisher came to know Professor Meyer's series of articles at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, when he had classes on the Smalcald Articles. It seemed a shame that so few of his classmates had ready access to Professor Meyer's work. While in seminary training, the publisher learned that Professor Meyer's *Studies in the Augsburg Confession*—also drawn from *The Northwestern Lutheran*—had been published. It seemed logical that Professor Meyer's work on the Smalcald Articles should be put into book form as well. The publisher decided to publish *Studies in the Smalcald Articles* as a nonprofit service to his synod brethren, particularly for the preministerial students who study the Smalcald Articles in college.

THANK YOU: Rev. Harold Wicke for his clippings of Professor Meyer's articles; Reverends Anthony E. Schultz, Scott J. Dummann, Thomas R. Zahn, and John M. Brenner for help in the initial work; Miss Lydia Meyer for the picture of her father; Professors Armin Schuetze and Martin Westerhaus for supplying needed information; Mr. Duane Weaver for technical assistance with the title captions; the Mt. Olive Ev. Lutheran Church Ruth Guild for collating a portion of the printed material; Professor Carl Lawrenz for writing the foreword; Mrs. Carl Lawrenz for various assistance; Professor Carleton Toppe for his encouragement; and especially Lori Betts Lawrenz for her help and suggestions.

Five hundred copies were printed by Clay Printing of Shakopee, Minnesota, and bound by Security Binding Co. of Minneapolis. Should someone be interested in reprinting this book, the publisher asks to be contacted. Also, please keep in mind that the text of this book was photographically reproduced from *The Northwestern Lutheran* and therefore Northwestern Publishing House of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has the rights to the material. Permission to print the text should be obtained from them.

Rev. Stephen J. Lawrenz
Publisher, May 1980

Foreword

The 400th anniversary of *The Book of Concord* is directing our attention in a special way upon the confessional writings of our Lutheran church. May it encourage many in our midst to renewed study of these confessions so that their appreciation of them as faithful expositions of the truths of Holy Scripture and their understanding of these saving truths themselves may thereby be deepened. In this interest, a reprint of Professor Johannes P. Meyer's *Northwestern Lutheran* studies on the Smalcald Articles is being offered in this modest volume.

The reprint was specifically aimed at making these helpful studies accessible to the ministerial students of our synod as they take up their course study of Luther's Smalcald Articles. At the same time it was expected that many others who know about these studies and who may even have read them with appreciation when they appeared in issues of *The Northwestern Lutheran* from April 28, 1957, to October 23, 1960, should be pleased to have them in this convenient format for rereading and handy reference. It is hoped that this book may also induce many more in our midst to acquaint themselves with the Smalcald Articles, one of the less familiar confessional writings of our Lutheran church. A very important and timely message lies in the emphasis that Luther throughout the Smalcald Articles places upon the central truth of our Christian faith. Professor Meyer's studies keep one constantly mindful of this emphasis. To this day, religious errors of every kind are still prone to appear very pious and harmless until one considers what they really do to the precious article of our justification before God.

In Hebrews 13:7 we are exhorted: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God." Professor Johannes P. Meyer was such a leader in the fellowship of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In various capacities he spoke the Word of God to every level of the membership of our synod, during an intensively active public ministry of 68 years. Fifteen days before his death on November 10, 1964, at the age of 90, he once more filled the pulpit of St. Marcus Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, where almost monthly for a period of 37 years he had served as an assistant preacher. On the previous Friday he had still delivered his regular schedule of seminary class lectures.

Professor Meyer's last 44 years of labor were spent at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where he also served as president from 1937 to 1953. Christian doctrine and New Testament introduction were his principal fields of seminary teaching. Yet during his long faculty tenure he also taught many other seminary disciplines, including courses on the Lutheran Confessions. Throughout his public ministry he served the church at large in many responsible offices and on many important committees and commissions. He was a diligent contributor to all of our church papers, particularly *The Northwestern Lutheran*. Though he was a thorough and painstaking scholar, he had the special gift of presenting profound biblical truths as well as other complex matters in a clear and simple manner so that they could be readily understood by the ordinary Christian. All of Professor Meyer's teaching and preaching was thoroughly scriptural and Christ-centered. Like Luther, he never lost sight of Scripture's central gospel message. At the same time, every word of Holy Scripture was for him God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word, somehow standing in all of its details in the service of the gospel and its purpose of bringing sinners to faith in their Savior and of making them blessed, rich, and fruitful in such faith. As Professor Meyer is being remembered through this reprint of his studies in the Smalcald Articles, he is given an opportunity to continue speaking the Word of God to others.

Professor Carl J. Lawrenz

Introduction: Historical Background

Confessions in general

Our testimony to the world

Our Lutheran church is a confessional church. In our confessions we tell the world what we believe: what we believe about God, about the way of salvation for sinners, about the authority of the Bible, about our hope in death and in the hereafter. We also tell the world in unmistakable terms what errors we reject.

Jesus expects all believers to confess him. They believe in him; they look for eternal salvation from him: they should not hide their light under a bushel, but should confess him before men. “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32,33).

Faith and confession belong together

St. Paul unites faith and confession very closely. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Ro 10:9). Faith and confession do belong together. A faith that will not confess is no real faith. Faith in our Lord Jesus is of such a nature that it impels the believer to confess. How could it be otherwise? Through faith we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins; through faith we are assured that God is our Father and that he loves us as his children. If such a faith does not make us happy and fill us with confidence over against all enemies, then there must be something wrong with that faith. And if the love of God that we experience in our faith does not warm our hearts and urge us to sing his glory, how can we say that we appreciate God’s great gift? Faith and confession belong together, so St. Paul continues in the quoted passage: “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (v. 10).

Scriptural encouragement to confess

The epistle to the Hebrews was written for the purpose of encouraging its readers to hold fast to their confession. Persecutions were threatening, and some of those Hebrews thought that it would be better for them to tone down their confession, at least for the time being. They even thought of giving up their confession and of returning to Judaism. Then the anonymous author of this epistle pointed out to them the danger of losing their heavenly inheritance; he encouraged them to hold fast their confession. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:23-25). In another place he called our confession of faith a sacrifice of praise: "Through him [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb 13:15).

Two practical uses of the confession

The beginning of confession was, as was pointed out, to give expression to the faith that fills the heart. The epistle to the Hebrews pointed its readers to another use, namely, that by our confession we offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Through our confession we let people know about our faith, and in turn, through their confession we recognize their faith. This confession had particularly two practical purposes: one in connection with Baptism and the other in the detection of heresies.

Baptismal confession and creeds

Already in apostolic times, a custom generally observed in connection with Baptism was that the applicant confessed his faith. To this day, when anyone is to be baptized, he is asked if he believes in God the Father, in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit. In the case of infant Baptism the sponsors answer in the stead of the child. In the early church similar questions were, in many places, addressed to the candidate. These questions, and the confession they evoked, followed the instruction that Jesus had given when he ascended into heaven: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Out of this custom there gradually grew, among others, the Apostles' Creed that we use to this day. The second practical use was to assist in detecting error and heresy.

Heresies disguised

When the apostle John served the congregations in and about Ephesus—this was in the eighties and nineties of the first century—there came a heretic by the name of Cerinthus who greatly troubled the congregations of Asia Minor. Cerinthus had many followers who tried to worm their way into the Christian churches. According to the manner of false prophets, they would not openly display their colors; they came in “sheep’s clothing.” How could the Christians guard themselves against this danger?

Heresies detected

St. John wrote to them: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1). But how could they test the spirits? They could not look into men’s hearts. St. John told them: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 Jn 4:2,3). That was the truth which Cerinthus refused to accept, namely, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God come into the flesh. If a man, therefore, refused to confess Jesus as the Son of God, it was a sure sign that he was a deceiver, no matter how pious he might appear otherwise. If any man confessed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, who by his innocent suffering and death had redeemed the world, then it was clear by his confession that he was not a follower of Cerinthus.

The need for new confessions

Later other errors sprang up in the church besides that of Cerinthus; but the church always recognized the error by the confession the errorist made, or refused to make. Whenever a new error arose, the church was obliged to make the confession more specific in the points that were endangered by the new error. Thus, in the early church there came into being the so-called Nicene Creed, which we use in our Communion services.

Our Lutheran creeds

When the apostles, in obedience to Christ’s command, preached the gospel in all the world and when, as a fruit of their mission work, Christian congregations sprang up in every city, it soon became necessary to state in clear and unmistakable terms: What was the religion

they practiced in distinction from, and in contrast to, the rest of the world? In what respect did their faith and life differ from those of Jew and Gentile, and why?

A convenient outline

Jesus had told his apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This brief remark provided a convenient outline for a course of instruction for people who desired to enter the fellowship of the church, as well as for a brief statement of the Christian faith. Naturally, the most emphasis was laid on and the most time was devoted to the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Savior, thus lengthening the Second Article. As a result, creeds came into use everywhere, each consisting of three articles. They all followed the same general pattern, although they were not all worded alike. Two of these early creeds are still in use in our churches, the so-called Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds

We referred to these two creeds briefly in the previous section. A few remarks may now be added about the second one of them.

In Alexandria of Egypt there lived in the beginning of the fourth century a presbyter by the name of Arius. He did not believe that Jesus Christ was true God like the Father. He believed that there was a time when the Word—of which John says in his gospel that it was in the beginning with God and was himself God—did not yet exist but that it was “made” by the Father. It was the greatest of all creatures, nevertheless, only a creature. This heresy greatly disturbed the church, and in the year 325 a council was held in Nicaea (in Asia Minor, some 50 miles southeast of Constantinople) to consider the matter. The council rejected the error of Arius and confessed of Jesus Christ that he is “eternally begotten of the Father, God of God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.”

Later, about the year 500, an unknown author composed the Athanasian Creed. This still further points up the truths regarding the three persons of the Trinity.

Ecumenical creeds

These three creeds are called ecumenical because they are confessions that were adopted at a time when the church, though plagued by errors, was still undivided throughout the world. These three ecumeni-

cal creeds also have been embodied by our Lutheran church in its book of confessions, to demonstrate our connection with the early church.

The first particular creed

In spite of these fine confessions, however, many errors and many abuses crept into the church in the course of the centuries. When Luther began to preach the gospel in its purity, he was condemned for it as a heretic, although his teaching was in complete conformity with the three ecumenical creeds. Thus, a confession of these creeds was no longer sufficient. The errors that infested the church had to be pointed out more specifically, and the statement of the gospel truths had to be formulated more precisely. This was done by the men who, with Luther, had come to a clear knowledge of the divine truth, about a thousand years after the Athanasian Creed. They did it in a document that was submitted to the Diet at Augsburg on June 25, 1530. This is the first particular confession of our Lutheran church. It is known as the Augsburg Confession.

The Apology and the catechisms

The Augsburg Confession was vehemently attacked by the Roman Catholics; and in reply to these attacks, Melancthon wrote a lengthy defense in which he stated the various doctrines more elaborately and pointed out their scriptural foundation more fully. This document is our second particular confession, known as the Apology.

Already before the Augsburg Confession was submitted, Luther had written his Large and Small Catechisms, the latter to be used as a textbook in schools and the former as a sort of manual for the teacher. These two catechisms were later raised to the level of confessions by our Lutheran church.

The Formula of Concord

After the death of Luther (February 18, 1546), dissensions arose among the Lutherans themselves concerning various doctrines. Men who were concerned about the welfare of the church studied the errors that had already made dangerous inroads and then clarified the endangered doctrines.

It was a long and tedious task, at which they worked patiently under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God blessed their efforts. At a meeting in 1576, held in Torgau, these leaders were pleasantly surprised at the unanimity that had been achieved. The confession they had drawn up was submitted for study to the theologians of the vari-

ous churches. Suggestions and criticisms were received by an editing committee, and the confession of Torgau was given its final form in the next year (1577) at Bergen. This Bergic Book, called the Formula of Concord, was published in the golden anniversary year of the Augsburg Confession, 1580. It consists of 12 articles, presented in the first part (called the Epitome) in a summary way and developed in greater detail in a second part (known as the Thorough or Solid Declaration).

So far we have not yet mentioned the Smalcald Articles, which were written by Luther about six and one-half years after the Augsburg Confession had been submitted. This is the confession we propose to study in this book, God granting us his aid.

Historical background to the Smalcald Articles

What was it that moved Luther in the latter part of the year 1536 to write the so-called Smalcald Articles? He was very willing to do so, but he did not do it on his own initiative. There were certain developments in the political and ecclesiastical situation that led him to write those articles.

A council requested by Lutherans

The Lutherans had for years already requested a general council to discuss the differences in doctrine and practice that disturbed the peace of the church. Ten years earlier, at the Diet of Speyer, the emperor had promised that he would use his influence with the pope that he should convene a general council. When submitting their confession at Augsburg (1530), the Lutherans reminded the emperor of his promise. They submitted their confession to the diet for discussion, adding: "If the outcome should be such that the differences between us and the other parties in the matter of religion should not be amicably and in charity settled, then . . . we make the offer . . . that we will appear and defend our cause in such a general, free, Christian Council" (AC, Preface, 21). The emperor did negotiate with the pope in the matter, but the pope, who did not favor the idea of a council for reasons of his own, found ways and means of procrastinating.

The papal order

Finally, in June of 1536, the pope issued a bull convoking a council to be held in Mantua. The opening date was set for May 23, 1537. The purpose of the council was to restore the peace of the church through the extinction of heresy. This was explained in a bull of September 23 to mean "the utter extirpation of the poisonous, pestilential Lutheran

heresy.” What should the Lutherans do? The first call, although it had not guaranteed a free discussion of the problems, at least left the door open for such procedure. But the second bull actually cited the Lutherans as convicted and condemned heretics to appear before the council to recant or to take their punishment. Could they accept this citation? On the other hand, what would be the effect if under these conditions they declined to attend, after they had so earnestly requested a council?

A papal legate was to deliver the call of a council officially in Germany. Elector John Frederick of Saxony then requested an opinion from the faculty of Wittenberg University, theologians and jurists, whether, in view of the fact that the pope was a party to the issues, the legate should be heard—whether hearing the legate might not in itself already imply submission to the pope.

He asked for this opinion before the second bull was issued by the pope. The answer of the Wittenberg leaders was that since it was not certain whether the legate was bringing an invitation or a citation, the Lutherans must not decline; and to hear the papal legate would not in itself spell submission to the pope. To turn down the legate unheard would expose the Protestants to the charge that they were the ones who prevented the council.

Luther commissioned to write

To be ready for a council, in case the invitation was acceptable, the elector instructed Luther privately to prepare articles that the Lutherans might submit. The elector himself was not very optimistic. He said that “whatsoever our party may propose” would “have no weight with the opposition . . . no matter how well it is founded on Holy Scripture.” The instructions he gave to Luther were that he should “prepare his foundation and opinion from the Holy Scriptures, namely, the articles as hitherto taught, preached, and written by him, and which he is determined to adhere to and abide by at the council.”¹

He made the point even stronger. Luther should draw up the articles by which he would stand also “upon his departure from this world and *before the judgment of Almighty God*.”² Luther was ready to accept the assignment in this spirit. What he wrote in the Smalcald Articles were not his personal opinions or human judgments; they

¹Bente, “Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books” in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 52.

²Quoted in Bente, “Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books,” 52.

were articles of faith, founded on the Scriptures and of deciding importance in the final judgment.

The elector asked for a comprehensive document. It should present the articles "in which we cannot yield without becoming guilty of treason against God, even though property and life, peace or war, are at stake." To this he added: "Such articles, however, as are not necessary, and in which for the sake of Christian love, yet without offense against God and His Word, something might be yielded . . . , should in this connection also be indicated separately."³

Luther's testament

Luther received this order about August 20 and started to work on it without delay. Two weeks later, September 3, the elector's chancellor, Brueck, reported that it appeared to him that Luther "already has the work well in hand." He added that the document "is to be, as it were, *his testament*." His impression was correct. Luther himself later wrote in the preface: "I have determined . . . to publish these articles in plain print, so that, should I die before there would be a council . . . those who live and remain after me may have my testimony and confession."

Toward the close of the year, Luther, at the request of the elector, discussed his draft with prominent theologians of Wittenberg and some from other places. The articles were approved by all with but few changes.

In February, about three months before the council was to convene, a large and brilliant assembly, particularly of theologians, met in Smalcald, on the elector's invitation. His plan was that Luther's articles should be presented and discussed. In this the elector failed. Luther himself could not attend the convention because of illness. In order not to offend Philip, the landgrave of Hesse, who held Zwinglian ideas concerning the Lord's Supper, Melanchthon saw to it that Luther's articles were kept off the floor of the convention. Thus they were not discussed openly. They were circulated privately and subscribed by the theologians present. Luther was not informed about this procedure. The council was not held in May. The opening day was deferred again and again, and the council did not meet till 1545, one year before Luther's death. When Luther published his articles in 1538, he was still under the impression that they had been officially adopted at Smalcald.

³Bente, 52.

When *The Book of Concord* was published in 1580, the Smalcald Articles were embodied as one of the Lutheran church's confessions.

Luther's arrangement of the material

The articles that Luther was instructed by his elector to draw up as a basis for discussion in the event that the Lutherans would be invited to present their position before an ecumenical church council were to be such upon which a Christian could stand "before the judgment of Almighty God." In this spirit Luther composed the document. He lived in constant expectation of his own death. He wrote his articles as a sort of testament to the church. He had little hope that the council would be held because, as he saw it, "the Pope would rather see all Christendom perish and all souls damned than permit either himself or his adherents to be reformed even a little" (SA, Preface, 3). Yes, he wrote, "I have determined meanwhile to publish these articles in plain print, so that, should I die before there would be a Council—as I fully expect and hope, because the knaves who flee the light and shun the day take such wretched pains to delay and hinder the Council—those who live and remain after me may have my testimony and confession to produce in addition to the Confession which I have issued previously, whereby up to this time I have abided, and by God's grace will abide" (SA, Preface, 3).

Three parts

Luther divided all articles that he incorporated in the document into three groups. *The First Part* "treats of the sublime articles concerning the divine majesty." He concludes this group with the remark, "Concerning these articles there is no contention, or, dispute, since we on both sides confess them. Therefore it is not necessary now to treat further of them."

The Second Part "treats of the articles which refer to the office and work of Jesus Christ, or our redemption." He divided this part into four articles and concluded: "In these four articles they will have enough to condemn in the council. For they cannot and will not concede us even the least point in one of these articles. Of this we should be forewarned and made firm in the hope that Christ our Lord has attacked His adversary, and he will press the attack home both by his Spirit and coming. Amen" (SA, Part 2, Art. IV, 15).

The Third Part of the articles: Luther prefaces this part with the remark, "Concerning the following articles we may treat with learned and reasonable men, or among ourselves. The Pope and his govern-

ment do not care much about these. For with them conscience is nothing, but money, honor, power are everything.”

Conclusion: The entire document Luther concluded with the remark, “These are the articles on which I must stand, and, God willing, shall stand even to my death; and I do not know how to change or to yield anything in them. If any one wishes to yield anything, let him do it at the peril of his conscience” (SA, Part 3, Art. XV, 3).

Ecclesiastical tomfoolery

Since Luther well knew the pope’s inclination for pomp and show, he added an appendix to his articles: “Lastly, there still remains the Pope’s bag of foolish and childish articles, as, the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, and the inviting of sponsors to make donations. Such baptizing is a reproach and a mockery of Holy Baptism, which should not be tolerated. Furthermore, the consecration of wax tapers, palm branches, cakes, oats, spices, etc., which are not, and cannot be called consecrations, but are simply mockery and fraud. And such deceptions there are without number, which we leave to their god and to themselves, until they weary of it. We will have nothing to do with them” (SA, Part 3, Art. XV, 4-5). This was Luther’s arrangement of the material that he discussed in the Smalcald Articles. We shall now reprint these articles with some explanatory remarks where necessary.

Part I:

Sublime Articles Concerning the Divine Majesty

1. That Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons in one divine essence and nature, are one God, who has created heaven and earth.

This is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is confessed by all denominations in the Christian church. If any group does not teach the Trinity (as is the case, for instance, with the Unitarians, Universalists, Christian Scientists), that group thereby places itself outside the bounds of the Christian church. By stating that the Roman Catholic Church teaches the Trinity, Luther is happy to know that this church body is still Christian, though the pope who tyrannizes it is the very Antichrist.

2. That the Father is begotten of no one; the Son of the Father; the Holy Ghost proceeds from Father and Son.

3. That not the Father nor the Holy Ghost, but the Son became man.

4. That the Son became man in this manner, that He was conceived, without the cooperation of man, by the Holy Ghost, and was born of the pure, holy Virgin Mary. Afterwards He suffered, died, was buried, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God, will come to judge the quick and the dead, etc., as the Creed of the Apostles, as well as that of St. Athanasius, and the Catechism in common use for children, teach.

Notes

When Luther here calls the virgin Mary “pure” and “holy,” he does not mean to say that she was without sin. The dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary had then not yet been proclaimed. That happened more than three hundred years after Luther’s death (Dec. 8, 1854). The terms “pure” and “holy” pertain merely to the fact that her virginity never was violated. The words proclaim the virgin birth of Jesus.

Today there are many who question this doctrine. They hold that Jesus was conceived and born in the common way by which all human beings are brought into existence. But the Scriptures are very clear and emphatic on this point. Hence our confession must also be unequivocal. The immaculate conception of Mary had been argued by Catholic teachers, but since it had not yet been decreed as a doctrine, and since the opposite view had not yet been condemned, Luther was happy to register agreement on this point.

Luther wrote his articles in German. After a few years they were translated into Latin by a Dane; but when *The Book of Concord* was to be published, they were translated anew by Nicholas Selnecker (who did not know about the earlier translation). At this point it is interesting to note how he reenforced the term “virgin” by translating it with *semper virgo*, which literally means “always virgin.” This can be misunderstood. Mary was a virgin till the birth of our Savior. Then she was the wife of Joseph; and the brothers and sisters of Jesus, who are mentioned on several occasions in the New Testament, may well have been her children.

The confession of St. Athanasius, which Luther mentions, is the third of the three so-called ecumenical creeds. It bears the name of the famous church father but was not written by him. The real composer is not known.

Luther did not found a new church. He was happy that he was a member of the church which Jesus had founded by his suffering and death and by his sending the Holy Spirit into the world. And he was anxious to emphasize the continuity of the church on earth of which he was a member and which he endeavored to restore to its pristine purity.