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URSINUS, THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM AND THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

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To understand the connection between Ursinus and the AC, we shall examine three things: (1) the historical situation that brought them together, (2) Melanchthon's influence on both the Palatinate Reformation and Ursinus, and (3) the relationship between Melanchthon's AC and Ursinus's HC.¹

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

When Frederick III became elector of the Palatinate in 1559, the theological and political needs of his territory coincided almost exactly with his own religious predilections. Frederick had been born and raised a Roman Catholic but had adopted the Lutheran faith of his wife during the early years of their marriage. Even before taking over the Palatinate, however, he found himself moving away from the stricter Gnesio-Lutheranism of some of his relatives and toward the more moderate expression of Lutheranism (Philippism) rooted in Philip Melanchthon. As governor, not yet elector, of both the Upper Palatinate and Simmern, Frederick became involved in several attempts to unify the Protestant territories in Germany, and for the rest of his life he would continue to manifest an irenic spirit, spurning theological labels and seeking to ground his doctrine directly in Scripture.

This approach served him well in his early years in the Palatinate, a territory that during the 1540s and 1550s had shifted its official religion from Catholicism to Lutheranism. By the time

¹ Earlier versions of parts of this lecture and full documentation of the sources can be found in Lyle D. Bierma, *The Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism: Melanchthonian, Zwinglian, or Calvinist?*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History, New Series, no. 4 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999); idem, "What Hath Wittenberg to Do with Heidelberg? Philip Melanchthon and the Heidelberg Catechism," in *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence beyond Wittenberg*, ed. Karin Maag (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); and idem, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Frederick came on the scene in 1559, most of the major Protestant parties of the day already had a foothold in the Palatinate—Gnesio-Lutherans, Philippist Lutherans, Zwinglians (sometimes today called late-Zwinglians or Bullingerians), and Calvinists. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Frederick's predecessor, Otto Henry, had invited men from all these Protestant persuasions to fill political and ecclesiastical posts during his reign from 1556 to 1559. Frederick continued this practice in the years leading up to the HC, although he soon grew disenchanted with the Gnesio-Lutheran leaders in Heidelberg and filled key positions largely with Melanchthonian and Reformed personnel.

Sensing the need for a statement of confessional harmony among the Protestants that supported his reforms, Frederick commissioned a new catechism in 1562. However, for the sake of Protestant unity in the German Empire and for his own political survival, he had to make sure that this new catechism stayed within certain bounds. According to the Peace of Augsburg (1555), all non-Catholic princes and territories of the Empire were required to subscribe to Lutheranism as defined by the AC; no other varieties of Protestantism were permitted. Violation of these provisions could result in loss of his electoral privileges and even of his territory. In designing a new catechism for the Palatinate, therefore, Frederick III found himself in a delicate position. How could he as a Lutheran elector confessionally repudiate certain Gnesio-Lutheran doctrines that he found objectionable and unify the Philippist, Calvinist, and Zwinglian factions in his realm without violating the terms of the Peace of Augsburg by straying beyond the AC? His answer was the HC. The HC and, for that matter, the whole Palatinate reformation, sought a theological consensus that would fit within the framework of the AC.

2. MELANCHTHON'S INFLUENCE ON THE PALATINATE AND URSINUS

That the Palatinate reformation might fit comfortably within the framework of Melanchthon's AC is easier to imagine when one considers Melanchthon's longstanding ties to the Palatinate. Melanchthon was actually a native of the territory, born in the little town of Bretten, not far from Heidelberg, in 1497. He received his education in Bretten, Pforzheim, Heidelberg, and Tübingen—all in

the Palatinate and the nearby duchy of Württemberg--and he was awarded the B.A. degree from Heidelberg University at the age of fourteen. When he returned to Heidelberg on a visit in 1524, the now-famous reformer was honored by the university faculty, who presented him with a silver goblet in recognition of his many achievements. A year later both the elector and the peasants of the Palatinate asked him to serve as an arbitrator in the peasant uprisings in the area, a service he performed willingly but with little success.

The Palatine electors had been soliciting advice from Melanchthon as early as the 1540s, but during the reformation under Otto Henry and Frederick III, Melanchthon became something of a long-distance chief adviser. It was he, for example, who convinced Otto Henry to appoint Tilemann Hesshus as head of the theological faculty in Heidelberg in 1557 and who assisted with the reorganization of the university a year later. As we noted earlier, even before becoming elector in 1559, Frederick had found himself moving from Gnesio-Lutheranism to a more Philippist theological stance. He had come to prefer Melanchthon's so-called "altered" version of the AC and had been a signatory to the Frankfurt Recess, a confessional consensus statement drawn up by Melanchthon in 1558. When Frederick wrote to Melanchthon for guidance during the acrimonious Lord's Supper debates in Heidelberg in 1559, he considered Melanchthon's response important enough to have it published a year later in both the original Latin and a German translation. Over the years, Melanchthon declined several invitations to join the faculty of Heidelberg University, but even from Wittenberg his influence on Otto Henry and Frederick III was of such strength that the two electors and the reforms they supervised are sometimes characterized by historians today as "Melanchthonian" or "Philippist."

Melanchthon left his mark also on Zacharias Ursinus, one of his students in Wittenberg and later most likely the major contributor to the Heidelberg Catechism. Ursinus matriculated at the University of Wittenberg at the age of fifteen, and for the next seven years he became not only Melanchthon's pupil but also a boarder at his home and a close and loyal friend. He accompanied his teacher to Torgau when the plague struck Wittenberg in 1552, to

the religious colloquy in Worms in 1557, and on a visit to Heidelberg later that same year. When Ursinus took up his first teaching post in Breslau, he used a catechism by Melanchthon as a textbook and soon felt compelled to defend in print Melanchthon's view of the Lord's Supper that it contained. These "Theses on the Doctrine of the Sacraments," composed and published by Ursinus in 1559, prompted Melanchthon to respond that he had "never seen anything so brilliant as this work." Following Melanchthon's death in April 1560 and Ursinus's departure from Breslau a short time later, the latter gradually moved more into the Reformed orbit. Nevertheless, Melanchthon's stamp on Ursinus's theology, pedagogy, and approach to reform was never fully eradicated by later Zwinglian and Calvinist influences.

In short, Melanchthon's connections to the Palatinate and his impact on Frederick III and Ursinus provided an important part of the context out of which Frederick's territorial reformation and catechism emerged. For Frederick and Ursinus to operate inside the theological fences of Melanchthon's AC, therefore, would seem to be not simply a legal obligation under the Peace of Augsburg, but a very natural inclination.

3. URSINUS'S HEIDELBERG CATECHISM AND MELANCHTHON'S AUGSBURG CONFESSION

The flagship of Frederick's reformation was the HC, which provides us with the primary test case of his faithfulness to the Augsburg tradition. Did he succeed in his goal of producing a statement of confessional unity within the framework of the AC? It is our contention that Ursinus's HC did indeed meet the criterion of compatibility with the confession of his mentor Melanchthon. We shall explore this claim in some detail by examining: (1) a couple of doctrines on which the HC is silent where the AC is silent; (2) three allegedly Reformed features of the HC that turn out to have roots in Melanchthon; and (3) two places in the HC that appear, at least, to be directly opposed to the teaching of the AC.

Doctrinal Silence

Predestination. It is often pointed out that the HC contains no doctrine of predestination. The most that one can find is two passing references to election: When Christ returns to judge the

living and the dead, he will "take me with all the elect [*auszerwehlten*] to himself in heavenly joy and glory" (HC 52), and the church is "a community elected [*auszerwelte*] to eternal life" (HC 54). There are no questions and answers devoted specifically to election and no mention whatsoever of double predestination, reprobation, or limited atonement.

How does one account for such a muted treatment of election and total silence on reprobation? One possibility is that the authors did not find the topic appropriate for the genre, purpose, and readers of the HC. Predestination is simply too abstract and difficult a subject to include in an instructional tool intended for a general audience of youth and lay adults. After all, Calvin, who wrote extensively about predestination in other works, did not devote a separate question or section to it in the popular Genevan Catechism either.

This line of argument is not wholly convincing, however, for at least two reasons. First, the HC does not shy away from other challenging theological abstractions, such as the doctrine of the Trinity (HC 24-58) or the relationship between the two natures of Christ (HC 46-49). Second, Ursinus's Smaller Catechism (SC), on which so much of the HC is based and which was also intended for a lay audience, has three complete questions and answers on election, the first of which includes a reference also to reprobation. None of these three questions was carried over into the HC.

A more likely possibility for the HC's near silence on predestination is that the authors intentionally steered clear of it for the sake of doctrinal harmony. If Frederick III had had to deal with just the Calvinists in Heidelberg, the outcome might have been different. But his consensus involved followers also of Melancthon and Bullinger, neither of whom had wished to probe the doctrine of predestination as deeply as Calvin had. It was a subject that Melancthon had not included in the AC and that soon thereafter he refused to discuss at all. Given Frederick III's own Philippist disposition, therefore, and his desire to bridge the theological divisions in his realm, it is not hard to imagine an unwillingness on his part to grant confessional status to a point of doctrine from which Melancthon, the AC, and Bullinger, had all shied away.

Covenant. By the early 1560s theological reflection on the biblical notion of covenant was becoming one of the distinguishing features of the Reformed branch of Protestantism. It may seem odd, therefore, that in the HC, which so many have considered Reformed in its orientation, covenant is a relatively minor topic; the term itself appears only five times in 129 questions and answers, two of which are found in the same answer on infant baptism and two in quotations from Jesus about the new covenant in his blood. Even more curious is the fact that Ursinus's Larger Catechism, another source document for the HC, contains no fewer than 55 references to covenant in 38 of its questions and answers, whereas his SC mentions covenant only three times. How does one account for such divergence among related documents written so close together?

Once again, some have suggested that these documents were prepared for different audiences and purposes. The HC and its earlier draft, the SC, were confessions written for a general audience, whereas the Larger Catechism was a more technical work intended for theological instruction at the university. A rather complex subject like covenant, therefore, might be appropriate study material for students of theology, but it was hardly fitting for a lay catechism.

Perhaps. As in the case of predestination, however, a larger part of the explanation may be that this doctrine was simply too new and too Reformed. Nowhere had it appeared in the Lutheran confessions, and Ursinus himself was just beginning to experiment with it in his first classroom textbook, the Larger Catechism. Moreover, to describe the sacraments as "signs of the covenant" might have sounded to Lutherans raised on the AC too much like the Zwinglian doctrine of "bare signs" or "mere signs." Showcasing such a doctrine in a consensus catechism might have provoked the defenders of Augsburg. It would be quite understandable, then, if Ursinus intentionally left out of the SC and HC all but a few references to a doctrine that he himself was only beginning to think through, that is never mentioned in the AC, and that might threaten the theological consensus Frederick was trying to achieve.

Features of the HC with Melanchthonian Roots

There are, in the second place, several features of the HC that are often alleged to be Reformed, even Calvinistic, but which turn out to have even deeper roots in the Melanchthonian tradition: the threefold structure of the catechism, the theme of gratitude in Part 3, and the treatment of the third use of the law.

Threefold Structure. One of the best known characteristics of the HC, of course, is its triadic structure, outlined in HC 2:

Q. How many things must you know to live and die happily in this comfort?

A. *Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sin and misery; and third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.*

The most likely source of this question and answer is not difficult to identify. It follows closely the wording of Ursinus's SC, the major source document for the HC. SC 3 reads as follows:

Q. What does God's word teach?

A. *First, it shows us our misery; second, how we are delivered from it; and third, what thanks must be given to God for this deliverance.*

Like HC 2, this answer serves to introduce the major divisions of the material to follow. But what, then, were the roots of the SC's tripartite structure? The most recent research on this question, by Walter Hollweg in the 1960s, concluded that these roots can be traced to two confessions by Reformed theologian Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva.² Hollweg pointed out a striking structural parallel between the threefold division of the HC and the threefold work of the Holy Spirit in Articles 17-21 of the shorter of Beza's confessions: first, the Spirit makes us aware of our sinfulness through the law; second, he comforts us with the message of salvation in the gospel; and third, he sanctifies us by mortifying the old nature and creating a new one.

² Walter Hollweg, "Die beiden Konfessionen Theodor von Bezas: Zwei bisher unbeachtete Quellen zum Heidelberger Katechismus," in *Neue Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Heidelberger Katechismus* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 86-123; idem, "Zur Quellenfrage des Heidelberger Katechismus," in *Neue Untersuchungen*, vol. 2 (1968), 38-47.

This thesis is certainly attractive. Beza had developed close ties with members of the Heidelberg community in the late 1550s and likely published his larger confession (*Confessio christianae fidei*) in 1560 in response to a request from none other than Frederick III. His shorter confession (*Altera brevis fidei confessio*) was also well known in Heidelberg, especially after its translation into German in 1562, probably by Caspar Olevianus, one the contributors to the HC. Therefore, we should not be surprised at some of the linguistic parallels that Hollweg points out between these Bezan confessions and the HC.

What Hollweg does not make clear, however, is why this is the only or even the most likely explanation for the threefold organization of the HC. He overlooks the fact that we also find this pattern in Lutheran sources nearly forty years earlier. Some have identified this structure, for example, already in Melanchthon's 1521 edition of the *Loci communes*, which itself might have been inspired by the outline of the book of Romans. Romans proceeds from a treatment of human sin (chs. 1:18-3:20) to the great drama of redemption (3:21-11:36) to the Christian life of thankfulness (12:1-16:27), and the *Loci* too treats, generally speaking, first the topic of law and sin, then the gospel and justification, and finally the life of Christian love.

This triad is found also in later works by Melanchthon—his Visitation Articles of 1528, for example, of which sorrow for sin, faith, and good works form the basic structure. Moreover, the triple work of the Holy Spirit, which caught Hollweg's eye in Beza's shorter confession, was foreshadowed in Melanchthon's AC almost thirty years before. According to Article 20 (*Editio princeps*), the Holy Spirit produces knowledge of sin, faith, and the virtues that God requires of us in the Ten Commandments. This is echoed in Melanchthon's "Apology of the AC" when he asserts that repentance consists of two parts, contrition and faith, and that he will not object if one adds a third part, namely, the fruits worthy of repentance.

There is also another way by which Melanchthon, and perhaps even his AC, might have influenced the threefold structure of the HC. In the early 1900s Johann Reu drew attention to an anonymous summary of Christian doctrine published in Regensburg

in 1547 and reprinted in Heidelberg in 1558.³ This treatise included a forward by the Gnesio-Lutheran Nicholas Gallus, a former student of Melanchthon's who had later become a strong critic of his teacher's theology. What is so remarkable about this document is not only its threefold structure but also the content of each of the three divisions. Part 1 is entitled "The Law, the Origin of Sin, and Repentance"; Part 2 "The Gospel and Faith"; and Part 3 "Good Works." Even more striking is the terminology in each section that would later appear in both the SC and the HC. It is through the law that we come to know our frailty and "misery" (*elend*), through Christ that God has "delivered" (*erlöste*) us from such misery, and through the keeping of the commandments that we show ourselves "thankful" (*danckbarlich*) to God for what he has done on our behalf. Reu concluded that if the structure of Melanchthon's *Loci* and the Book of Romans exerted any influence on Ursinus at all, it could only have been through the more developed form of this structure in the Regensburg "Summa."

It is not our intent here to choose among these various hypotheses. That task is next to impossible anyway, since by the mid-sixteenth century the triad of Law-Gospel-Good Works had become part of the common stock of Protestant theology. What is significant for our subject today is that this triad was not distinctively Reformed but found some of its earliest Reformation forms in the works of Melanchthon, including the AC.

Gratitude. Some in the past have pointed to the theme of gratitude in Part 3 as the one feature of the HC that is distinctively Reformed. Once again, however, such claims cannot be justified, for this, too, is an emphasis that one finds already earlier in the Lutheran tradition, especially in Melanchthon. As far back as the 1521 *Loci*, Melanchthon had stated that "when we have tasted the mercy of God through faith and have come to know the divine goodness through the word of the gospel . . . , the mind cannot help

³ Johann Reu, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands zwischen 1530 und 1600*, pt. 1, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Katechismus-Unterrichts*, vol. 1, *Süddeutsche Katechismen* (1904, reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1976), 198-99, 201-3. The Regensburg treatise, "Ein Kurtze Ordenliche summa der rechten Waren Lehre unsers heyligen Christlichen Glaubens," is found *ibid.*, 720-34.

loving God in return; it exults and witnesses to its own thankfulness for such great mercy by some form of reciprocated service." Luther himself taught in his Small Catechism of 1529 that one is "duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey" God for all that he has done for us. A year later in the AC Melanchthon listed thanks to God as one of the virtues required in the Ten Commandments that is reawakened in the regenerate by the Holy Spirit. And just a year after that he explicitly stated in the "Apology of the AC" that "good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving to God" and that thanksgiving is one of the good fruits of repentance that are taught us in the Commandments. This theme would appear again in Melanchthon's "Scholia" of 1534, in a doctrinal handbook by the Lutheran Urbanus Rhegius in 1536, and, of course, in the Lutheran Regensburg "Summa" of 1547. Perhaps most striking, however, in its linguistic similarities to HC 86 was a question and answer in a catechism by the Lutheran Johannes Brenz from 1535:

Q. Why ought we to do good works?

A. *Not because we pay for sin and earn eternal life with our deeds—for Christ alone has paid for sin and earned eternal life—but rather because we ought to bear witness to our faith with good works and be thankful to our Lord God for his good deeds.*⁴

By the 1540s and 1550s this theme had made its appearance also in Reformed catechisms by Leo Jud and Johannes à Lasco, in the larger confession of Theodore Beza, and in Calvin's *Institutes*. Where Ursinus first encountered it is impossible to say. But there are no grounds for maintaining that this aspect of the HC is distinctively Reformed and missing from the Melanchthonian tradition. As with the entire triadic arrangement of the HC, the connection between gratitude and good works in Part 3 made its first appearance in Lutheran literature, especially Melanchthon's writings, including the AC.

Uses of the law. Finally, it is often alleged that the HC reveals a Calvinist orientation most clearly in its treatment of the law as the norm for a life of gratitude, the so-called third use of the law. The German scholar Wilhelm Neuser did find this third use of

⁴ "Fragstücke des christlichen Glaubens," in Christoph Weismann, *Eine Kleine Biblia: Die Katechismen von Luther und Brenz* (Stuttgart: Calver, 1985), 114.

the law also in Melanchthon, but he maintained that by placing its commentary on the Ten Commandments in the section on gratitude, the HC followed Calvin in making this the principal use. For Melanchthon, the first use, the law as a teacher of sin, remained primary.

Is, then, Part 3 of the HC, where the law is introduced as a rule of gratitude, non-Melanchthonian and distinctively Calvinist? The closest the HC comes to an explanation of the functions of the law is in its treatment of the purpose of preaching the law in Q/A 115:

Q. No one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly: why then does God want them preached so pointedly?

A. *First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.*

This second reason for preaching the law, namely, so that believers will persevere in their striving to be renewed in God's image, does indeed sound Calvinian. Similar language can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* and Genevan Catechism, the latter of which possibly served as one of the sources for the HC. As Calvin puts it in one place, the law exhorts the believer "like a whip to an idle and balky mule, to arouse it to work."⁵

The first reason for preaching the law, however—so that believers may increasingly come to know their sinfulness and look to Christ for forgiveness—is missing in Calvin, at least as part of the third use of the law. Where it appears in Calvin is only in reference to unbelievers or to believers prior to conversion (the first use of the law)—and not, as in the HC, in reference to the redeemed after conversion. What previous scholarship has overlooked, however, is that this *is* identified as a third use of the law by Melanchthon, who actually introduced the concept of a third use of the law into Protestant theology in 1534. In his 1543 edition of the *Loci* Melanchthon distinguishes two aspects to this third role of the

⁵ *Institutes* 2.7.12.

law. First, the law reveals the remnants of sin in the believer's life so that he or she may grow in both knowledge of sin and repentance. Second, it teaches the particular works by which God wants us to exercise obedience. This second, or didactic, dimension to the third use of the law is found also in Calvin. But the first, or pedagogical, dimension to the third use is not; it is a uniquely Melanchthonian formulation.

Was it this Melanchthonian formulation, then, that that eventually found its way into the HC? That is a strong possibility but, once again, not the only one. What Melanchthon describes here as a dimension of the third use of the law, Luther had characterized as an application of the second use (Calvin's first use) to believers. Since the HC never actually numbers the functions of the law, it is difficult to say whether the first part of Answer 115 is a closer parallel to Luther or to Melanchthon. In any case, to identify the uses of the law in Part 3 as strictly Calvinist is hardly correct. In point of fact, the HC combines a Calvinian emphasis on the exhortation to good works with a Lutheran emphasis on the exposure of residual sin in the life of the believer—a remarkable splice of two of the traditions represented in the Heidelberg consensus.

Possible Points of Conflict with the Augsburg Confession

The ultimate test case of the HC's compatibility with the AC is two doctrines in the catechism, again commonly identified as Reformed, that appear directly to attack the Lutheran tradition: the two natures of Christ and the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. How do they measure up to the Augsburg standard? *Two Natures of Christ.* Apart from HC 80, which condemns the Catholic Mass in no uncertain terms, the most polemical material in the catechism is reserved for the Gnesio-Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity, i.e., the omnipresence of Christ's human nature. The debate over this doctrine helps to explain why, after just a single question on the resurrection of Christ (HC 45), the catechism devotes no fewer than four questions (HC 46-49) to his ascension, a doctrine that focuses on the status and whereabouts of Christ's human nature. According to HC 46, when we recite the clause in the Apostles' Creed "He ascended to heaven," we mean that Christ "was lifted up from the earth to heaven and will be there for our

good until he comes again to judge the living and the dead." But if Christ is "there" in heaven, how can he fulfill his promise to be "here" with us until the end of the world (Q 47)? At this point the catechism explicitly rejects the ubiquity doctrine by stating that "in his human nature Christ is not now on earth"; he is present with us only by his "divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit" (A 47). Q 48 then anticipates the charge that this is tantamount to the ancient Nestorian heresy, which tended to divide the two natures of Christ: "If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?" A 48 responds with the so-called *extra Calvinisticum* teaching that "Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds [cf. Latin: *extra*] of the humanity he has taken on . . ." but that "at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity." This does not present a barrier to our eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ at the Lord's Supper, for "although he is in heaven and we are on the earth," at the Supper "we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body" through the Holy Spirit (HC 76). But doesn't this explicitly Reformed and anti-Lutheran stance, then, contradict the teaching of the AC? Actually not. The doctrine of ubiquity, which Luther had employed already in the 1520s to support his belief in the real presence of Christ's humanity in the Lord's Supper, was not elevated to Lutheran confessional status until Brenz's Stuttgart Confession in Württemberg in 1559. In the AC of 1530, Melanchthon had said no more than that the two natures of Christ are "inseparably joined together in unity of person" (Art. 3). To be sure, one could read into that text the unstated suppositions of Luther's Christology which are at odds with the HC's *extra Calvinisticum*, but the affirmation in HC 48 that "his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity" is, on the surface at least, in full compliance with the wording of AC Art. 3. Indeed, when Frederick III had to defend his allegiance to the HC before the emperor at the Diet of Augsburg in 1566, one of the other electors supported him by arguing that on this point the HC had no more strayed beyond the AC than had Brenz's Gnesio-Lutheran Stuttgart Confession seven years earlier. Both could be regarded as different glosses on the same confessional text.

Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. What would seem to be one of the most obvious areas of conflict between the HC and the Lutheran tradition is the doctrine of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Melanchthon had stated in Article 10 of the AC in 1530 that "the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed/communicated [*distribuantur*] to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." The German version was even more explicit: "The true body and blood of Christ are truly present *under the form of the bread and wine* and are distributed and received there." The HC seemed to reject this in Q/A 80, which, although an overt attack on the Roman Catholic Mass, describes the Mass in language very similar to that of AC 10. It is nothing less than "a condemnable idolatry," says HC 80, to teach "that Christ is bodily present *under the form of bread and wine*."

This, however, is not the whole picture. Following a change of mind in the 1530s, Melanchthon revised Article 10 in an "altered" edition of the AC in 1540. The article now read, "With bread and wine are truly exhibited/offered [*exhibeantur*] the body and blood of Christ to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." To say that the body and blood of Christ are exhibited or offered "with" the bread and wine is much less precise than to say that they are present "under the form" of bread and wine. How exactly Christ's body and blood are offered "with" the elements is not addressed. Melanchthon later echoed this position in his "Response" to Frederick III during the eucharistic controversies in the Palatinate, when he advised the elector to be content simply with Paul's reference to the sacramental bread as "the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Frederick and Ursinus seem to have heeded Melanchthon's advice when they constructed the sacramental doctrine of the HC. For one thing, Ursinus quotes 1 Corinthians 10:16 in HC 77, in his answer to the question about where Christ promises to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat the bread and drink the cup. But more significantly, like the altered AC, nowhere does the HC state how exactly the outward physical signs of the Supper are connected to the spiritual blessings they signify.

Paul Rorem has identified two views on the relationship between sign and signified in the Lord's Supper that coexist within the Reformed confessional tradition:

Does a given Reformed statement of faith consider the Lord's Supper as a testimony, an analogy, a parallel, even a simultaneous parallel to the internal workings of God's grace in granting communion with Christ? If so, the actual ancestor may be Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich. Or does it explicitly identify the Supper as the very instrument or means through which God offers and confers the grace of full communion with Christ's body? The lineage would then go back to John Calvin (and to Martin Bucer). . . .⁶

Where does the HC fit into this paradigm? Certainly it is not distinctively Calvinian here. Calvin could say, for example in his "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," that the bread and wine "are as *instruments* by which our Lord Jesus Christ distributes" his body and blood to us. According to HC 75, however, the Lord's Supper reminds and assures the believer only that "as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, . . . so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood." Nothing is said here about when or how exactly this happens. The believer can be confident that as certainly as the physical feeding takes place, so also does the spiritual feeding, but there is no reference here to the elements as "instruments" or "means" by which this spiritual feeding occurs, even though Ursinus did not hesitate to use such language in his earlier catechisms.

Nor is the HC distinctively Zwinglian or Bullingerian on the relationship between sign and signified. One finds a parallelism between inner and outer action in the sacrament (see HC 69, 73, 75, 79), but this parallelism is as characteristic of Calvin as it is of Bullinger. What separated the two reformers was not whether the sign and signified are parallel but . . . whether they are *merely*

⁶ Paul Rorem, "The *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549): Did Calvin Compromise?" in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 90.

parallel. Are sacramental signs and actions only visual analogies to the grace that the Holy Spirit bestows apart from them (Bullinger), or are they more than analogies, namely, the very means or instruments through which that grace is communicated to believers (Calvin)? Like the altered AC, that is a question the HC does not address.

That the HC is entirely compatible with the AC on this point is underscored by the fact that in 1564, one year after the appearance of the HC, Ursinus published a defense of the catechism in a tract entitled "A Complete Statement of the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the Unanimous Teachings of the Holy Scriptures, the Ancient Orthodox Teachers of the Christian Church, and Also the Augsburg Confession." There he seeks to demonstrate how the eucharistic teaching of the HC not only is grounded in Scripture and the church fathers but also wholly agrees with the AC. What is so striking is that when he refers to the AC here, he has in mind not the altered version of 1540 but the original, unaltered version of 1530! According to Ursinus, the AC says only that the body and blood of Christ are *truly* present, not *bodily* present, in the sacrament. Moreover, anyone who thinks the AC teaches that unbelievers at the table partake of the body and blood of Christ is mistaken, since Art. 13 makes quite clear that faith is a necessary prerequisite to such spiritual feeding.

Ursinus may indeed have a point here. HC 78 and 80 deny only the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper, not the presence of Christ altogether. What is important, however, is not so much whether Ursinus correctly interpreted the unaltered version of the AC, but that he *considered* the HC fully compatible with it. Not only does the HC seem to fit here within the framework of the AC, but the author of the catechism himself *believed* that it did. That more than anything else tells us something about the relationship between Ursinus and the AC.

CONCLUSION

Surprisingly, the relationship between the Ursinian HC and Melancthonian AC is more harmonious than one might infer from the fact that each became a doctrinal standard for a different branch of Protestantism. Such harmony is less surprising, however, when one looks at the text of the HC in its historical context. First of all,

the author of the AC had a considerable influence—personally, politically, and theologically—on both the chief architect of the Palatinate reformation, Frederick III, and the chief author of the HC, Zacharias Ursinus. Second, in all his reforms Frederick was under legal mandate and constant political pressure to stay within the theological bounds of the AC. Third, Frederick, by reason of his own disposition, theological inclinations, desire for political stability, and concern for the unity of Protestantism in the face of a resurgent Catholicism, was seeking to bridge the theological gulf between the Lutheran and Reformed parties in his realm.

Is it any wonder, then, that when all was said and done, the HC was muted or silent on such controversial Reformed themes as predestination and covenant, which are never mentioned in the AC; or that some of the allegedly Reformed features of the HC—its triadic structure, the theme of gratitude in Part 3, and the emphasis on the third use of the law—actually had roots in the Lutheran tradition, sometimes the AC itself; or that even the HC's polemics against the Gnesio-Lutheran doctrines of the natures of Christ and his real presence in the Lord's Supper do not directly conflict with the text of the AC?

That does not mean that the HC should now be regarded as distinctively Melancthonian. It was, after all, a consensus document, not an apology for a particular brand of Protestantism. Furthermore, it does contain some less controversial Reformed features that are not addressed in the AC—its treatment of the descent of Christ into hell, for example, and the numbering of the Ten Commandments. If one insists on using labels, perhaps the most that should be said is that the Heidelberg is a Melancthonian-Reformed catechism that sought to respect the boundaries of the Augsburg Confession. That is only a more precise way of stating what Frederick III himself said when he was called upon to defend the HC at the Diet of Augsburg in 1566. He repeatedly affirmed his full subscription to the AC and challenged anyone to show where in the HC he had departed from it. No one was able to do so—nor, in my judgment, are we able to do so today.

A Friendly Debate on "The Open Table": I. Essay, II. Reply III. Response Gabriel Fackre & Joseph Heddon

I. The "Open Table" in Mercersburg Perspective

Gabriel Fackre, Abbot Professor Emeritus of ANTS

What might be the response of Mercersburg theology to the current proposal of "an open Table"? The new practice adopted in some congregations from traditions as different as the Episcopal Church in the United States to the United Church of Christ invites commentary from Mercersburg advocates, as it raises questions that have been central to its heritage, from the meaning of the eucharist itself, through Christology to the importance of ecumenism.

First, some definitions and general considerations: "Open table" is not the same as "open communion," though in some of the discussion the two phrases are used synonymously. "Open communion" has to do with a Table opened by one denomination or congregation to Christians of other denominations or congregations. "Open Table" refers to a communion table open to anyone, regardless of Christian identity, Christian baptism, Christian faith.

This is the way the question is put in an important article on the subject in the Episcopalian debate by James Farwell in The Anglican Review:

On any given Sunday should "seekers," those "passing through," unbaptized guests or family members of parishioners, the spiritually curious, or even people of other religions be invited and encouraged to receive the consecrated bread and wine of the eucharist?"⁷

⁷ James Farwell, "Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of 'Open Communion'", The Anglican Review, Vol. 86, No 2 (Spring 2004), p 216.