

Philip Melanchthon and the Establishment of Confessional Norms

by IRENE DINGEL

The theology of Philip Melanchthon has shaped the public teaching and confession of faith within German Protestantism from his own time into the present age. To be sure, the creation of the two evangelical confessional churches reduced the theological diversity that still existed throughout much of the sixteenth century down to the prevailing rivalry of Lutheranism and Calvinism. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the impact of Melanchthon's relatively distinctive and independent way of thinking exercised a critical role in setting the direction of public confession and teaching throughout German Protestantism and beyond. This essay will treat Melanchthon's impact particularly in the years just prior to his death.

Consideration of the establishment of norms for public confession of the faith focuses on the process that led theologians to begin to regard specific confessional and doctrinal texts as appropriate for setting those norms and exercising authority as confessions of the faith. This process led to their formal recognition as such standards. Melanchthon played a critical role in this development. That can be seen above all in the publication in 1560 of a collection of texts under the title *Corpus doctrinae Christianae*. Along with the three ancient Creeds it contained exclusively works by Melanchthon. This *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*—also called the *Corpus Doctrinae Misnicum* [for Meissen, the Saxon region around Dresden]—remained unchallenged for more than a decade as a compendium of proper teaching and a scriptural confession of the faith in electoral Saxony and beyond its borders. From 1561 it was binding on pastors and teachers in Pomerania, Anhalt, Hesse, Nuremberg, certain Silesian principalities, Schleswig-Holstein, and Denmark adhered closely to its teaching. Other territories and cities developed their own norms for teaching and confession following the model of the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*. Similar volumes in a variety of

territories clearly bore its stamp in the very way in which they were conceived.¹ In this context, therefore, “confession” and “establishment of confessional norms” do not refer to the text of a single confessional document—such as the Augsburg Confession—but rather to the standard for teaching and confession in Protestantism in general, as such a standard was framed in specific places to exercise authority in an all-embracing sense as the “*doctrina christiana*.”

The “historical necessity” for the gradual formulation of norms and guiding principles for public confession and teaching in the sixteenth century, summarized in such a *Corpus doctrinae*, arose out of a crisis of authority that developed within Protestantism. The warrant for establishing these norms was transferred from the great personal authorities of reform to confessional documents, a characteristic phenomenon in the process scholars now label “Confessionalization.” Indeed, this development did not progress in linear fashion; it was influenced by the historical constellations and theological disputes of that time. A brief overview—with a glance at the details within their historical context—can illuminate the nature of the question regarding doctrinal authority within Protestantism, so that the course and substance of the process of creating these norms can be viewed more clearly against this background.

I.

The Reformation called into question the very foundations on which the existing authorities of the medieval church rested. Early on, Martin Luther called attention to the possibility that popes and councils can err. Indeed, he could even view the papacy as one form in which the Antichrist appeared. He viewed the papacy as part of the developments which were leading to the rapidly approaching end of the world.² While the Council of Trent appealed to Scripture and Tradition as bearers of revelation,³ the Evangelicals called upon Tradition, as reflected in the writings of the Church Fathers and the decisions of councils, as a standard for Christian teaching only in a very limited fashion. Against the papal monop-

oly on biblical interpretation and the dominating place of Tradition in public teaching, the Reformation emphasized the Holy Scripture itself as the only valid norm for faith and doctrine. Scripture held exclusive claim to the central position of authority in the church. The *claritas* [clarity] that Scripture possesses and the capability ascribed to it to interpret itself could be marshaled against the authorities which traditionally had claimed the right to reform the church but had refused to do so.

That meant, however, at the same time, that in regard to uncertain matters and questions under dispute in the life of the church and in its teaching, neither popes nor councils, nor the Tradition in general, could be put to use as the final arbitrator any longer. New means of defining the orientation point for making such decisions had to be found when differences arose in the interpretation of Holy Scripture and its application in the teaching and life of the church. Alongside the primary authority of the Bible emerged certain evaluative instruments—binding summaries of the faith—that might be designated “secondary authorities.” They took on a consultative function, which could help define the proper orientation for resolving the differences.

At first these “secondary authorities” were found in the most prominent personalities of the Reformation. Above all, Martin Luther assumed such a central role. The reformer was viewed as the one whom God had sent to rediscover the gospel. His adherents saw in him the successor to John the Baptist as the Third Elijah, the Elijah of the end time. His friend and colleague in Wittenberg, Philip Melanchthon, contributed to this characterization of his senior associate.⁴ The woodcuts, engravings, and drawings of that time that depict Luther’s head surrounded by a halo under the figure of the Holy Spirit as a dove reflect to some extent this elevation of his person to a position of authority.⁵ At the same time, however, alongside the authority of Luther emerged the authority of the entire theological faculty in Wittenberg and its professors, among whom Melanchthon undoubtedly had a particular place of importance. For when an official opinion on a matter was needed, that of the Wittenberg theological faculty was sought. Many requested the opinion of Melanchthon above all when theological

disputes required resolution or when directives were needed to set the course of ecclesiastical practice. Into the middle of the sixteenth century these Wittenberg theologians served as consultants or as judges, indeed, as authoritative interpreters of God's Word.

This situation began to change in the years 1546 to 1548. A kind of vacuum of authority materialized for a time when Luther died on February 18, 1546. Initially, Luther's place could be filled by Melanchthon, who for a long time had exercised extensive influence on his countless students in Wittenberg. However, the disastrous outcome of the Smalcald War in 1547 produced a turning-point in this regard. It contributed to the sudden undermining of the established channels that had been exercising authority in deciding questions of faith and teaching. For the defeat of the Smalcald League by Emperor Charles V led to the drafting of the Augsburg Interim. The enforcement of this re-catholicizing policy sent many Evangelical clergy into exile and reversed the Reformation in a large number of localities.

In an effort to stave off an imperial invasion and at the same time to seem to accommodate Charles V's edict in the Augsburg Interim, Melanchthon and the Wittenberg faculty took part in the drafting of a special form of that imperial settlement specifically for electoral Saxony. Its opponents called this document the "Leipzig Interim"; it is more accurately described as the draft of the proposal for the electoral diet in Leipzig. In the eyes of many it engendered the opinion that Luther's closest adherents, his associates in Wittenberg who were supposed to guarantee the integrity of the Reformation, had abandoned its original fundamental principles. Some held the view that Melanchthon and his Wittenberg colleagues had to be identified as open traitors to the Evangelical cause, even if the article on justification which Melanchthon had drawn up in the "Leipzig Interim" preserved the Evangelical teaching on that topic. In fact, this document was no more than a draft proposal for the electoral diet; it never became law. But it did call for a return to medieval practice in some ceremonial practices, the so-called adiaphora or neutral matters that could be decided on without constraint of divine command. Many, above all Melanchthon's former student Matthias Flacius Illyricus, rejected such read-

iness to compromise "*in casu confessionis*," that is, when the confession of faith itself was on the line. These critics regarded Melanchthon as an ally of the despised "Judas of Meissen," Moritz of Saxony, of the Albertine branch of the Wettin family.⁶ His political policy had not only made possible the victory of the imperial forces but through that victory had also secured for himself and his family the electoral office that had lain in the hands of the Ernestine branch of the Wettin family up to that point. Melanchthon, together with some of his Wittenberg colleagues, was stamped with the reputation of a desultory and unreliable compromiser, who wantonly abandoned Luther's teaching.

The question regarding the standards and authorities which would provide orientation for the interpretation of Holy Scripture for Evangelical teaching and confession of the faith was therefore posed anew. This was due especially to the fact that over the course of the next few years this draft for the electoral diet, which Flacius labeled the "Leipzig Interim," ignited several of the most important disputes within Protestantism of the time. These disputes placed Melanchthon between the opposing fronts. Finding a norm or a standard for public teaching and confession of the faith, that is, the process of providing norms for doctrine and confession, became one of the most important tasks of the church in the second half of the sixteenth century precisely because of these developments.

This task became ever more urgent after the Religious Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which guaranteed the adherents of the Augsburg Confession legal toleration in the empire. In the course of the controversies on the Lord's Supper which had surfaced after 1552 it became clear that not only those who had a Lutheran understanding of the sacrament but also the adherents of a Calvinistic understanding of the Lord's Supper could appeal to the Augsburg Confession. This had become possible only because Melanchthon had begun to alter the Augsburg Confession at a number of points in the context of the negotiations for unity with the southern Germans gathered around Martin Bucer. This concerned above all Article X, the article on the Lord's Supper, which was so formulated after 1540 that it could take into account the consensus achieved between Luther and Martin Bucer in the Wittenberg

Concord of 1536. By 1542 there were three altered versions of the Augsburg Confession of 1531 (the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, as it was later called), those of 1533 (German), 1540 (Latin), and 1542 (Latin). After 1555 this posed the problem of which version of the Augsburg Confession was the basis of the Religious Peace of Augsburg. This also meant that the appeal to the Augsburg Confession could not by itself contribute anything to the settlement of the controversies over the Lord's Supper. Also the other disputes of the period after the Interim—for instance over the role of good works in the Christian life (Majoristic controversy), over the significance of the human will in conversion (synergistic controversy), and over the doctrine of justification held by Andreas Osiander—could not be laid to rest by simply appealing to the Augsburg Confession.⁷

The Augsburg Confession with its Apology no longer sufficed as a norm for public confession and teaching that could bring the parties to the disputes together. That became clear once again at the diet of Evangelical princes in Frankfurt in 1558, when the princes tried to find the way back to Protestant accord through a confession of the faith that would bring together the various Protestant lands and cities. This was done on the basis of a formula for consensus, the “Frankfurt Recess,” which was based upon groundwork drafted by Melanchthon.⁸ The “Recess” defined the articles of doctrine that were being debated in the controversies after the Interim and that had not been treated in sufficient detail in the articles of the Augsburg Confession to provide the degree of clarity that had become necessary because of the current disagreements. But these efforts in Frankfurt were thwarted by the opposition of the adherents of Luther in Ernestine (ducal) Saxony under Flacius's leadership. He and his associates presented instead a compendium of doctrine, the *Weimar Book of Confutation*, which immediately attained confessional standing in ducal Saxony. Its publication as an official norm for public teaching began the development of such norms within individual principalities. They took their place as necessary amplifications of the Augsburg Confession. Within the borders of these lands or cities they were able to provide a standard for public teaching and confession of the faith, even if it proved

impossible to find a general solution valid for all Protestant churches. Thus, as mentioned above, “*Corpora doctrinae*” were created that gave a firm and also a *legally binding* framework, a fixed standard, for the faith and public teaching of the Evangelical principalities and cities. The *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* of 1560 played a pioneering role in this development. It was the most influential of the collections that arose at this time.

II

By this time a certain tradition already stood behind the listing of various confessional texts and doctrinal writings to which churches ascribed confessional standing. Such lists could be found already in 1535 and 1541.⁹ This development did not reach its conclusion within the historical situation that has been described above until some three decades later. In this period the designation “*Corpus Doctrinae*” attained the definition that became characteristic for its use as a vehicle aimed at establishing norms for public confession of the faith and teaching.

In 1560 the Leipzig printer Ernst Vögelin introduced the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* to the public, printing it under the title *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae. Quae est summa orthodoxi et catholici dogmatis; complectens doctrinam puram & veram Euangelii Iesu Christi* [“Body of Christian Doctrine, which is a summary of orthodox and catholic dogma, embracing the pure and true teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ”]. Some years earlier Melanchthon himself had spoken in several contexts about this manner of defining authority through a literary form, a volume that would contain a “summary of doctrine” or would present a “form for doctrine.” The very expression that later developed into a technical term, “*corpus doctrinae*,” can be found already in the 1530s in the statutes of the University of Wittenberg, which originated out of Melanchthon’s thinking. There the “*corpus doctrinae*” is viewed as the teaching that Paul formulated in the epistle to the Romans and the statements in John’s gospel on the Trinity.¹⁰ To be sure, at this point the concept had not been specifically applied to a concrete collection of doc-

uments that was accorded the character of a “*confessio*” or a compilation of authoritative documents with the status of confession of faith.¹¹ In fact, the term was used for a long period in a manner which did not restrict its usage in this way. In a letter to Joachim Mörlin, Joachim Westphal, and the group of those who had sought to mediate between Flacius and Melanchthon in the Coswig negotiations of 1557, Melanchthon stated, for example, that Flacius had up to that point never stated so openly “*de toto corpore doctrinae quid sentiat*” [“what he thought about the entire body of teaching”].¹² In this case “*Corpus doctrinae*” quite clearly designated the entire context in which doctrine was presented or simply the totality of public teaching.

Many further examples may be found that demonstrate that this is the case.¹³ Melanchthon used the term to refer to the structure of public teaching when a bit later he reported to Albert Hardenberg of Bremen on the Coswig colloquy; he wrote that the pastors from Braunschweig, Hamburg, Lübeck, and Lüneburg not only wanted to negotiate the articles that were being disputed at the time but also wanted to draw him—Melanchthon—into a discussion of the entire body of teaching [“*ut de toto corpore Doctrinae agatur*”].¹⁴ It was in this sense that the term “*Corpus Doctrinae*” was used in the Frankfurt Recess of 1558, which Melanchthon had inspired. It made specific reference to the Augsburg Confession and its Apology as “*Summarium und Corpus Doctrinae*” [a summary and body of teaching], in which the statements of Holy Scripture and the ancient creeds of the church were summarized as a standard for public teaching.¹⁵ Here, too, as can be seen from the larger context, the term did not mean a collection of writings that established norms, but rather the foundations of correct teaching that were contained in such a “*Summarium*.”¹⁶ The designation “binding summary,” [“*Summarischer Begriff*”] is the expression that the Formula of Concord later substituted for the synonymous term “*Corpus Doctrinae*” in order to assure Melanchthon’s supporters that the Formula was not intended to compete with the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*.¹⁷

By this same time the expression “*Corpus Doctrinae*” can be found as a designation not only for the content of public teaching

but also as a concrete collection of doctrinal writings that summarize this content. There are several examples. In the formulation of the Frankfurt Recess there is an echo of the development of this aspect of the definition. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology are viewed as authoritative documents. In various contexts Melanchthon had been citing the "Saxon Confession" of 1551, which he had prepared for use by the Saxon delegation that was to be sent to the Council of Trent,¹⁸ and his way of referring to it also reveals how the two definitions of "*Corpus Doctrinae*" overlapped. The term referred both to a concise summary of public teaching and also to an authority for establishing norms for that teaching. Indeed, the very list of documents that later constituted the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* was already by and large in use among the Wittenberg theologians by 1557 when they had to invoke confessional standards. In a faculty opinion prepared by the Wittenberg theologians for the Senate of the city of Bremen, Johannes Bugenhagen offered the core of the table of contents of the later *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*: "We have the Augsburg Confession, Philip's Apology, our Confession of the Saxon Churches and Philip's Loci communes, in which are to be found the forms for speaking to which we and our churches bind ourselves."¹⁹ This reveals that among the reformers in Melanchthon's and Luther's circle a basic collection of Melanchthon's writings was crystallizing as a *Corpus* of documents that summarized the standard for public teaching. The choices for this list were in no way coincidental.

III

The fact that such a *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae* actually appeared in 1560 was due to a private initiative by the Leipzig printer Ernst Vögelin. At his urging Melanchthon undertook the task of assembling the writings for the volume.²⁰ Melanchthon also provided the prefaces first for the German edition and then for the subsequent Latin edition.²¹ In these prefaces he indicated that the compilation of the *Corpus Doctrinae* had a two-fold goal. First, it

sought to achieve a settlement of disputes and to create unanimity in public confession and teaching in the midst of a period of internal strife among the Protestants. In accordance with this goal the *Corpus Doctrinae* contained only documents in which Melancthon himself had set down the “*summa doctrinae*” or those which he regarded as a “form for speaking” that reproduced the content of Holy Scripture and the ancient creeds of the church. Therefore, they could be put to use as a standard for public confession and teaching in different contexts, in church and school. In fact, the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* became a standard for doctrine in instruction in the schools and for university level study.²² But it was certainly not intended to be restricted to this function of setting such standards. For at the same time (the second goal), Melancthon regarded it as important to give public expression to his final position in the controversies that continued to smolder, in which he had been publicly attacked or had chanced into the line of fire.

The documents assembled in the *Corpus Doctrinae* that followed the Augsburg Confession and its Apology were chosen against this background, documents that for the most part could be used to address the points under theological dispute at the time. Melancthon had revised or expanded some of them precisely for this purpose. Both goals—first, setting the standard for public confession and teaching, and second, the demonstration of the continuity of Melancthon’s adherence to correct teaching through a defense of his positions that had occasioned differences between him and his opponents within the ranks of the Wittenberg theologians—were coordinated in the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*. Indeed, they were mutually supportive. The *Corpus Doctrinae* therefore represented not only a collection of various basic theological texts; it also provided a much needed interpretation of the Augsburg Confession, making that document’s teaching more precise in regard to controverted issues, without jeopardizing its claim to authority.²³ At the same time the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* developed into an expression of the identity of the Philippist movement, which played a not inconsiderable role in the later “Crypto-Calvinistic” turmoil in electoral Saxony. What follows here assesses the close

connection between these two lines of thought, setting standards for confession of the faith and an apologetic that safeguards the continuity of public teaching.

The function of setting standards for public doctrine was inherent in the way in which the *Corpus Doctrinae* was conceived, in the selection of its texts and in the fact that they were assembled as a group. Along with the three ancient creeds of the church the German edition contained the 1533 version of the Augsburg Confession, the so-called “*prima variata*.” The first Latin edition of the work contained the Augsburg Confession of 1542, the “*tertia variata*.” Subsequent Latin editions printed both the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1531 and the Altered Augsburg Confession of 1542 alongside each other.²⁴ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession came next. Then came the *Saxon Confession* of 1551, the *Loci Theologici* of 1556, the *Examination of Candidates for Ordination*, which Melanchthon had prepared for the churches of Mecklenburg in 1554, and finally the *Response to the Articles of the Bavarian Inquisition*, which Melanchthon had composed in 1559 as a critique of the thirty-one articles of the Inquisition that had been compiled for use in the Counter-Reformation in Bavaria. In the Latin edition of the *Corpus Doctrinae*, Melanchthon’s *Response to the Controversy with Stancarus* was also printed.²⁵

The very fact that these particular documents were brought together in the collection tells a great deal. The three creeds of the ancient church and the Augsburg Confession, with its Apology, the foundational confessional texts for the Wittenberg theologians,²⁶ were supplemented in the *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae* by one more “confession,” the *Saxon Confession* prepared for presentation in Trent. Melanchthon, however, emphasized explicitly that in this document he had not composed a new confession. He pointed out that it agreed with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, so that he designated it in the prefaces to the *Corpus Doctrinae* as a “Repetition of the Augsburg Confession.”²⁷ Melanchthon regarded the *Saxon Confession*, like the Augsburg Confession, as an expression of the “summary of public teaching” [*summa doctrinae*],²⁸ as an authoritative digest of the content of the Evangelical faith and doctrine. But alongside the texts of confessions, the *Corpus*

Doctrinae Philippicum also contained doctrinal treatises and polemical writings. To be sure, these were all publications to which Melanchthon expressly ascribed the function of providing orientation for public confession and teaching. He considered his *Loci communes*, for example, as a catechism for young people. He made that clear in the preface of his own German translation, published in 1558, dedicated to Anna Camerarius.²⁹ He had designed his *Loci* as a presentation of the “summary of Christian teaching”;³⁰ its goal was to serve the spread and maintenance of true teaching and thereby to promote unity and peace in the church. In characterizing these documents in this way Melanchthon himself had drawn the analogy to the genre of the confession of faith since he was ascribing to the *Loci* and the other documents the same function that was being attributed the entire *Corpus Doctrinae*. Their purpose was to serve as a summary and standard, a paradigm for public confession and teaching.³¹ In a similar way the *Examination of Candidates for Ordination* found its place in the nexus of the *Corpus Doctrinae*. As a “textbook of basic theological knowledge”³² it offered, as Melanchthon wrote, a “form for speaking” [*forma verborum*],³³ that is, a condensation of the Word of God extracted from the Holy Scripture.

Only his *Response to the Articles of the Bavarian Inquisition* seems at first glance to lie outside the conception of the *Corpus Doctrinae* as a collection of confessions of faith or instructional works since it is clearly rooted in the theological controversies of the period. However, Melanchthon did explicitly regard it as his own personal confession of faith. The document not only expressed the author’s antagonism toward the activities of the Jesuits. Its comments on free will also criticized Flacius’s position on that topic.³⁴ The *Responsio* illustrated the link between the establishment of doctrinal standards represented by the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* and Melanchthon’s apologetic interest in fighting for the continuity of proper teaching. That was also his concern in the *Refutation of the Errors of Servetus and the Anabaptists*, which he had composed as an appendix to and amplification of his *Response to the Articles of the Bavarian Inquisition* when its second edition appeared. His *Response to the Controversy over Stancarus*, which he had originally appended

to the 1559 version of *Examination of Candidates for Ordination*,³⁵ found its way into the second edition of the Latin edition of the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*. Thus, alongside the confessional and instructional works, with the standards for public confession and teaching they expressed, Melanchthon placed articulations of his positions that ruled out recently advanced variations of doctrine that he regarded as false. With these three works of the *Corpus Doctrinae*—his *Response to the Articles of the Bavarian Inquisition*, the *Refutation of the Errors of Servetus and the Anabaptists*, and his *Response to the Controversy over Stancarus*—Melanchthon drew the line that definitively divided his own person from those who opposed his theology within his own ranks. At the same time inclusion of these documents in the *Corpus Doctrinae* connected his theology to the lineage of correct teaching and correct confession of the faith that stretched from the ancient creeds of the church into his own time. Whether this was the intention of the printer and publisher Vögelin or not, the conception of the book made clear that the process of setting the standard for public confession blended together with Melanchthon's apologetic argument that he had preserved the continuity of correct teaching in the midst of the various theological fronts.

The necessity of taking such a position in regard to the theological disputes of the time appears to have been more clearly in view as the more extensive Latin edition was prepared than was the case for the German edition. This is clear not only in view of the number of documents in each but also in the prefaces of each edition. The German clearly stated that it is above all a "summary of Christian teaching" (while admitting that all controversial exchange must have a standard) and rather incidentally mentioned the goal of ending the existing controversies. The Latin edition, however, made special reference to Melanchthon's own theological position in his *Response to the Articles of the Bavarian Inquisition*. This reference pointed particularly to the appendices against Servetus and Stancarus.³⁶ But also in the German versions of the *Corpus Doctrinae* the context of the disputes of the time came under discussion, for example in the "Address to the Reader" which was probably composed by Melanchthon's son-in-law, Caspar Peucer, and was added to the German as well as the Latin edition.³⁷ Peucer

characterized the *Corpus Doctrinae* as a necessary reaction to the slanders stemming from the Flacian party against the church of Saxony and Meissen. He referred to the *Corpus Doctrinae* as a counter-proposal which had a rightful claim to doctrinal authority.³⁸

In Ernestine or ducal Saxony, the theologians with a Gnesio-Lutheran mindset, under Flacius's leadership, had rejected Melanchthon's efforts at restoring unity when they issued the Weimar *Book of Confutation*. Duke Johann Friedrich the Middler had made that work binding as a symbolical book, as an expression of public confession of the faith, even if he did so against the objections of prominent theologians in Jena.³⁹ In reaction to the Frankfurt Recess, to which Melanchthon had contributed a great deal by preparing the earlier drafts of the document, the Weimar *Book of Confutation* worked out precisely what its proponents had accused Melanchthon and his adherents of not doing in the formula of consensus of 1558: it defined Lutheran teaching on the basis of "antitheses," that is, the repudiation of false teachers and their doctrinal positions by name. The Frankfurt Recess had not chosen this procedure precisely because it wanted to create rapprochement between the feuding sides. The guiding principle of the Weimar *Book of Confutation* was not to set forth a summary of the topics or articles of teaching that expressed the faith and public confession but rather to identify the errors and heresies against which that faith and confession had to be defended. The *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* addressed this challenge in so far as it placed alongside the confessional and instructional texts that were recognized by all sides within the Wittenberg circle as its own "confutations." Melanchthon had made that more than clear in composing his responses to the Roman Catholic party, the Anti-Trinitarians, and others who stood as outsiders, like Stancarus, and also in his criticism of the Gnesio-Lutherans.⁴⁰

IV

This combination of setting standards for public confession and teaching with the apologetic substantiation of the continuity of the

teaching that Melanchthon presented in the *Corpus Doctrinae* can be seen especially and specifically in the topics and the problems under discussion in the controversies of that time. This is clear above all in the questions related to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and Christology.

Even if Melanchthon did not focus primarily upon the problematic of the Lord's Supper at any point in the *Corpus Doctrinae* or give it special emphasis in the polemical documents at the conclusion of the collection, nonetheless there are indications that the *Corpus Doctrinae* aimed at bringing together the positions of the various sides in that controversy. For in the Latin version the Altered Augsburg Confession was placed alongside the Unaltered text. Decisive was also the situating of the *Saxon Confession* together with the two versions of the Augsburg Confession, as if to function as a bridge between the two. Melanchthon had expressly composed the *Saxon Confession* as a parallel to the Unaltered Confession. In May 1551 he had created this confession at the command of the Saxon elector Moritz, so that it could be presented at the Council of Trent as the Saxon position (the Council's second session was supposed to begin in September 1551).⁴¹ At the same time through this *Confession* he succeeded in winning back the allegiance of some of his critics who had harbored deep distrust of him since the time of the Interim. The *Saxon Confession* found widespread support among the adherents of the Augsburg Confession. Even the theologians at the time in the service of the Mansfeld princes, Michael Coelius and Johannes Wigand, were among those who subscribed to it.⁴²

Indeed, Melanchthon had so formulated the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the *Saxon Confession* that it clearly taught that Christ is present "*vere et substantialiter*" [truly and substantially] in the proper use of the sacrament and that the distribution of the gift of his body and blood gives to those who receive the Lord's Supper communion with Christ and the forgiveness of sins.⁴³ But he avoided the precise wording that specified that this presence and distribution took place under the forms of bread and wine, as the German Unaltered Augsburg Confession had formulated the teaching.⁴⁴ Thereby the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the *Saxon*

Confession came close to that of the Latin Augsburg Confession of 1531, which also did not mention the elements of the Supper but did speak of the true presence and the distribution of the body and blood of Christ.⁴⁵ The *Saxon Confession* differed almost imperceptibly from this position but did so in a manner that became decisive for the further impact of the confession. The *Saxon Confession* did not emphasize the presence of Christ's body and blood but the presence of the entire person of Christ, and that "*in usu instituto*," that is, in the celebration of the sacrament according to its institution by Christ.⁴⁶ Within this context Melanchthon was able to speak of the distribution of the body and blood of Christ to those who receive the sacrament, without touching on the elements of the sacrament, the bread and wine. He used similar expressions in his *Examination of Candidates for Ordination* in 1552.⁴⁷ In this way Melanchthon focused the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, which the followers of Luther continued to emphasize, on the true presence of the *person* of the Son of God. In the Altered Augsburg Confession Melanchthon had gone one step further. Its tenth article had avoided any mention at all of the presence of Christ and recognized only a presentation of the body and blood *with* the elements.⁴⁸ In contrast, the *Confessio Saxonica* reintroduced mention of the "*vere et substantialiter adesse*" [being present truly and substantially] of the person of the mediator of salvation in the celebration of the sacrament according to its institution by Christ—it must be noted, not under the elements of the Supper—with an emphasis on the character of the Supper as witness, a guarantee of salvation.⁴⁹ The broad support that the *Confessio Saxonica* found even among the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans shows that at the point in time at which it was composed, it was understood to be in agreement with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and that the differences between the two offered no reason for disagreement with the prevailing understanding of the Lord's Supper among the Evangelicals.

When the *Saxon Confession* appeared in the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* in 1560, however, in the midst of the disputes over the Lord's Supper that had broken out anew since 1552,⁵⁰ its text made it possible for opponents of the Lutheran doctrine of the real pres-

ence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper (the Philippists and later also those sympathetic with Calvinism) to use it and the *Altered Augsburg Confession* as the basis of their claim that they held to the true sense of the teaching of the Augsburg Confession, of Melanchthon and of the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*, which served as interpreters of the real meaning of the Confession. In the eyes of the Gnesio-Lutherans this, of course, definitively cast suspicion upon the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*. For on the one hand it firmly maintained the true and essential presence of Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. But on the other hand the appended writings on the controversies opposed those streams of thought that were beginning to develop an argument for the real presence based upon the omnipresence of the humanity of Christ in the Lord's Supper.⁵¹

The *Corpus Doctrinae* reveals a second example of a doctrinal development in Melanchthon's own personal theological position, in distinction to that of others in the Wittenberg circle. This development proceeded from the doctrine of the personal union of Christ and sought to comprehend that union with the help of the paradigm of the "*communicatio idiomatum*,"⁵² the assignment of the characteristics of divine and human natures of Christ to the person of the Savior as the union of the two natures. Important to note is that some of the former students of Melanchthon who identified themselves as heirs of Luther had gradually developed a different focus in regard to the sharing of the characteristics of the two natures. Their view held that the divine characteristics of Christ were communicated to his human nature. The discussion of the real presence of Christ had come to a head within the context of this issue, focusing the problem of the formulation of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper on the definition of the real presence of the humanity of Christ in the sacrament. It is against this background that we must see Melanchthon's position opposing Servetus and Stancarus, and the inclusion of his polemic against them in the *Corpus Doctrinae*. In those positions Melanchthon had confronted two diametrically opposed doctrinal stances. While Servetus raised fundamental questions regarding the divine nature of Christ, Stancarus did not advance an anti-trinitarian point of view in any way.

In a dispute with Andreas Musculus and in opposition to Andreas Osiander, he formulated a doctrine of justification which emphasized only the human nature of Christ as he treated Christ's work for the salvation of sinners.⁵³ Therefore, in his writings against Servetus and Stancarus, Melanchthon's primary goal had to be to accent the unity of the human and divine natures in the person of the Savior. But neither in the *Response regarding the Controversies with Stancarus* nor in the *Refutation of the Error of Servetus* did he address individual elements of the views of these two. Instead, he developed his own Christology. By including the *Refutation* and the *Response* in the *Corpus Doctrinae* Melanchthon made Servetus and Stancarus exemplars through whom he addressed and refuted all his opponents in the various Christological questions that had been raised at that time. Thus, his comments expressed at the same time his opposition to the spiritualistic elements of Osiander's doctrine of justification. That doctrine, which had fueled violent controversies within Protestantism since 1551, was continually being brought into connection with the views of Caspar von Schwenckfeld.⁵⁴

These polemical treatises took on additional significance as reactions against those approaches advanced among the Gnesio-Lutherans that further developed the concept of the "*communicatio idiomatum*." Melanchthon himself had brought that term into the discussion, but he believed that the Gnesio-Lutherans were characterizing the personal union of Christ's two natures in a way that he found inappropriate and false. For instance, in the controversy over the Lord's Supper in Bremen (1557–1563) Johann Bötcker developed a doctrine of the "*communicatio idiomatum realis*" against the background of the Christology of Johann Brenz, with recourse to Luther. This view was being cited in some situations for support of an understanding of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Although the Lutheran side in the Second Controversy over the Lord's Supper (chiefly the Hamburg theologian Joachim Westphal) had been hesitant to undergird a doctrine of the Lord's Supper based on a literal understanding of the words of institution with the help of Christological argumentation, Bötcker's and Brenz's views brought the Christological question into the controversy

over the Lord's Supper. For some theologians had developed a position teaching the communication even of divine omnipresence to the human nature of Christ, an extension of the doctrine. Its opponents characterized this argument disparagingly as a "doctrine of ubiquity."

In his writings against Servetus as well as against Stancarus, Melanchthon made it unmistakably clear that opponents of his, such as Bötcker, who certainly were able to appeal to formulations Luther had made in his *Confession on the Supper of Christ* of 1528, had taken a decisive and in his view improper step that went well beyond his own doctrinal formulations. With the aid of the distinction between a proper way of speaking "*in concreto*" and an improper way of speaking "*in abstracto*,"⁵⁵ Melanchthon limited the term "*communicatio idiomatum*" specifically to the person of the Savior and insisted that the concept should not be put to use apart from its proper function as no more than a "*forma loquendi*," an expression that makes the substance of the idea clearer.⁵⁶ He wanted to employ the term only as "*communicatio idiomatum dialectica*," as an *expression*, a way of describing in a more comprehensible fashion what the relationship between the two natures of Christ is. He could not regard it as a "*communicatio idiomatum physica*," an actual sharing of characteristics, which he accused his opponents of teaching and which he regarded as an unjustified extension of the term.⁵⁷ Melanchthon thus used his writings against Servetus and Stancarus to sharpen his christological doctrine. By placing these two writings in his *Corpus Doctrinae* he intended to prevent this doctrine from being developed in a false direction.

With this two-fold focus—on the one side setting standards for public confession of the faith and on the other side defining Melanchthon's position apologetically and more precisely and placing Melanchthonian teaching into the historic continuity of the confession of the faith—the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* attained the status of an official confession of the faith in several territories or cities and for many individuals. Although it was not able in the long run to retain its function as a secondary authority, to be used to interpret the Holy Scripture, it remained a signpost for Prot-

estant standards of public teaching and confession and an important stage on the way to the development of *The Book of Concord*.

Translated by Robert Kolb from "Melanchthon und die Normierung des Bekenntnisses," in Der Theologe Melanchthon, Günter Frank, ed. (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), 195–211, with the permission of the editor and with slight alterations.

NOTES

1. In Pomerania, for example, in 1564 the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* was expanded chiefly through works of Luther. See Paul Tschackert, *Die Entstehung der lutherischen und der reformierten Kirchenlehre samt ihren innerprotestantischen Gegensätzen* (1919; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 613–620, and Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa, Die öffentlichen Diskussionen um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte 63; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 15–16.

2. See "Antichrist IV," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1977–2004) [henceforth TRE] 3 (1978): 28–43.

3. Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 37. ed. (Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder, 1991), §1501.

4. See Irene Dingel, "Ablehnung und Aneignung, Die Bewertung der Autorität Martin Luthers in den Auseinandersetzungen um die Konkordienformel," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 105 (1994): 38–43, esp. p. 41, n. 23.

5. See, for example, *Martin Luther und die Reformation in Deutschland. Ausstellung zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers* (Frankfurt/M: Insel Verlag, 1983), 177, Abb. 217, and 22, Abb. 280.

6. Günther Wartenberg has fundamentally corrected this picture of Moritz as betrayer. See the summary of his work in his article, "Moritz von Sachsen" in TRE 23 (1994): 302–311, and the other publications mentioned there.

7. On the controversies within Protestantism at this time see *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, ed. Carl Andresen, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 102–138.

8. See Irene Dingel, "Melanchthons Einigungsbemühungen zwischen den Fronten: der Frankfurter Rezeß," in *Philipp Melanchthon Ein Wegbereiter für die Ökumene*, ed. Jörg Hausteil (2. ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 121–143.

9. Wolf-Dieter Hauschild referred to this in the Church Order of Pomerania of 1535, in which the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and Luther's catechisms are stipulated as "criteria" for choosing Evangelical preachers; cf. his "Corpus Doctrinae und Bekenntnisschriften. Zur Vorgeschichte des Konkordienbuchs," in *Bekenntnis und Einheit der Kirche. Studien zum Konkordienbuch*, ed. Martin Brecht and Reinhard Schwarz (Stutt-

gart: Calwer Verlag, 1980), 236. The Church Order of Halle, 1541, by Justus Jonas offers a longer list of confessional texts for the orientation of Evangelical preaching, see Tschackert, *Entstehung*, 590.

10. See Johannes Wirsching, "Bekenntnisschriften," in TRE 5 (1980): 499 and 508, n. 48. On the further development, see Hauschild, "Corpus Doctrinae," 239–241.

11. Also the usage in the Wittenberg University statutes did not refer to a group of doctrinal writings. Wirsching states that it does, "Bekenntnisschriften," 499, but his interpretation is contradicted by the content of his own note 48, p. 508.

12. Compare Melancthon's letter to the pastors of Lower Saxony, January 21, 1557, in *Corpus Reformatorum. Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil (Halle and Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1834–1860) [henceforth CR] 9:34–35, #6164; *Melancthons Briefwechsel. Regesten*, ed. Heinz Scheible (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1977–1995) [henceforth MBW], 8:26, #8097.

13. For example, Melancthon's letters to Caspar Aquila, February 10, 1556, CR 8:675, #5926, MBW 7:392, #7715, and to Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg, December 9, 1556, CR 8:918–919, #8051, MBW 7:521–522.

14. Melancthon's letter to Hardenberg, January 26, 1557, CR 9:74–75, #6185, MBW 8:31, #8111.

15. See the Frankfurt Recess, 1558, in CR 9:494, #6483.

16. See Dingel, "Melancthons Einigungsbemühungen," 133–134, esp. n. 34; Hauschild, "Corpus Doctrinae," 240; and Wirsching, "Bekenntnisschriften," 499.

17. Compare *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930, 1991) [henceforth BSLK] 767,8–9; *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 486. "Summarischer Begriff" in this context is not simply the same thing as "Epitome;" see Dingel, *Concordia controversa*, 17, n. 9.

18. For example, in his letter to Johann Baptist Haintzel, CR 8:530, #5834 MBW 7:340, #7577.

19. "Habemus Confessionem Augustanam, Apologiam D. Philippi, Item et nostram Confessionem Saxoniarum Ecclesiarum, et locos communes D. Philippi, in quibus sunt formae verborum, in quibus nos et nostrae Ecclesiae se continent." Wittenberg Opinion for the Senate of Bremen on the Lord's Supper. At the end of the Opinion Bugenhagen's remark is found, CR 9:17, #6150.

20. According to Heinz Scheible, *Melancthon. Eine Biographie* (Munich: Beck, 1997), 243.

21. CR 9:929–931, 1050–1055, #6830, 6932.

22. See Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927), 65–66.

23. This goal was expressed for the first time in so many words by the Formula of Concord some twenty years later. In doing so it intended to differentiate its position from that of the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*. In contrast to the Formula of Concord the *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum* and all the *Corpora Doctrinae* that followed its model treated not only the points under dispute in the controversies of the time but also the entirety of evangelical teaching.

24. See Wilhelm Neuser, *Bibliographie der Confessio Augustana und Apologie 1530–1580* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1987), Nr. 52, 63, 64, 74, 76, 78, 105, and 116.

25. *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* [henceforth StA (Studien-Ausgabe)], 6 volumes, ed. Robert Stupperich (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955), volume 6 does not present the authentic *Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum*.

26. They constitute the foundational elements of the *Corpora Doctrinae* even if they take on a different theological or confessional orientation through the addition of other documents.

27. "Repetitio eiusdem Confessionis" and "Repetitio der Confessio," see the prefaces in CR 9:930 and 1053. On the *Saxon Confession*, see Günther Wartenberg, "Die 'Confessio Saxonica' als Bekenntnis evangelischer Reichsstände," in *Recht und Reich im Zeitalter der Reformation. Festschrift für Horst Rabe*, ed. Christine Roll (Frankfurt/M: Lang, 1996), 275–294.

28. StA 6:164.

29. See this preface, CR 22:47.

30. Preface to the Christian reader, CR 22:47.

31. Preface to the Christian reader, CR 22:48–49.

32. Heinz Scheible, "Melanchthon, Philip," in TRE 22 (1992): 384.

33. See Melanchthon's letter to Georg von Cracow, February 3, 1560, CR 9:1036, #6916, MBW 8:441, #9216.

34. Melanchthon designated this work as "my confession," CR 9:1098–1100, #6978, MBW 8:470, #9300. He directed it against the three chief opponents of his efforts at Reformation, "contra Pontificios, Anabaptistas, Flacianos et similes." Compare Melanchthon's critique on the doctrine of the free will advanced by Flacius and Nikolaus Gallus in his "Memorandum on the Weimar Book of Confutation," CR 9:766–769. See also Robert Kolb, "Melanchthon's Doctrinal Last Will and Testament: The *Responsiones ad articulos Bavaricae inquisitionis* as His Final Confession of Faith," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 36 (2005): 97–114.

35. CR 23: CXIII–CXIV.

36. The prefaces, German as well as Latin, mentioned expressly as opponents the following: the former student of Melanchthon who had converted to Roman Catholicism, Friedrich Staphylus, Franciscus Stancarus, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, and Nikolaus Gallus, CR 9:931, 1054.

37. CR 9: 931–934.

38. CR 9: 931–932.

39. Particularly Viktorin Strigel, professor of theology, and the ecclesiastical superintendent Andreas Hügel. See Tschackert, *Entstehung*, 523–524.

40. See Melanchthon's words in is *Refutation of the Errors of Servetus*: "Est autem certissimum signum verae Ecclesiae doctrinae Euangelii incorrupta, quam cum sonet confessio Ecclesiarum nostrarum firmissime retinens symbola, et cum puriore antiquitate consentiens, et damnans contrariam doctrinam et idola, affirmo nostras Ecclesias vere esse membra catholicae Ecclesiae Dei, et profiteor me earum civem esse, et ad earum societatem alios invito, ut unum simus in Deo, et hortor, ne sint erronei, qui nullius Ecclesiae cives esse velint," StA 6:366.

41. The *Saxon Confession* never fulfilled this purpose since the electoral delegation did not reach Trent because its journey was interrupted by the outbreak of the war between Emperor Charles V and Moritz along with other princes.

42. Theologians of the city of Strasbourg were also among its subscribers. As late as 1580 opponents of the city's ecclesiastical superintendent Johannes Pappus published the

Corpus Doctrinae Philippicum as he was trying to advance the cause of the Formula of Concord; see Dingel, *Concordia controversa*, 60–61. On the subscribers to the *Saxon Confession*, see Christian August Salig, *Vollständige Historie Der Augspurgischen Confession und derselben Apologie . . .*, I (Halle: Renger, 1730), 663–667.

43. “Confessio Saxonica,” article “De coena Domini” (StA 6:130): “. . . sed in usu instituto in hac communione vere et substantialiter adesse Christum et vere exhiberi sumentibus corpus et sanguinem Christi, Christum testari, quod sit in eis, et faciat eos sibi membra, et quod abluerit eos sanguine suo.”

44. See the CA invariata deutsch, article X, BSLK, 64, *Book of Concord*, 44.

45. *Ibid.*

46. See the *Confessio Saxonica*, “De coena Domini,” StA 6:130.

47. *Ibid.*, 202–204.

48. See *Das Augsburger Bekenntnis in der revidierten Fassung des Jahres 1540*, trans. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Texte, Dokumente 2; Speyer: Evangelischer Presseverlag Pfalz, 1990), 16.

49. See the *Confessio Saxonica*, article “De coena Domini,” StA 6:127. There it is stated, “Et baptismus et coena Domini sunt pignora et testimonia gratiae, . . .”

50. From 1552 to 1557 Joachim Westphal of Hamburg was locked in dispute with John Calvin in the “second controversy over the Lord’s Supper” which was followed by the dispute over the Lord’s Supper in Bremen (1557–1563). See Tschackert, *Entstehung*, 531–538, Ernst Bizer, *Studien zur Geschichte des Abendmahlsstreits im 16. Jahrhundert* (BFChTh 2. series, 46; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1940), 275–284, and Theodor Mahlmann, *Das neue Dogma der lutherischen Christologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1969), 44–61.

51. That did not include the entire group of the Gnesio-Lutherans but only a part of them, among those Johannes Bötker and Joachim Westphal, as well as the theologians of Württemberg, but not, for example, Tilemann Heshusius. On his position, see Dingel, *Concordia controversa*, 438–448.

52. Melancthon had developed his concept in dispute with Johannes Timann and his statements in the Second Controversy over the Lord’s Supper, Mahlmann, *Das neue Dogma*, 61–76.

53. According to Stancarus the three persons of the Holy Trinity together were responsible for sending the Savior, whose divine nature was therefore a participant in this sending. Thus, only the human nature of Christ was actually sent for the salvation of sinners. Only the human nature accomplished the reconciliation of sinners with God, in Stancarus’s view. See Tschackert, *Entstehung*, 497–501; also Ernst Koch, “‘Das Geheimnis unserer Erlösung’; Die Christologie des Andreas Musculus als Beitrag zur Formulierung verbindlicher christlicher Lehre im späten 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Veritas et Communicatio. Ökumenische Theologie auf der Suche nach einem verbindlichen Zeugnis. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Ulrich Kühn*, ed. Heiko Franke et al., (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 143–156.

54. Oslander’s name did not appear at all, while Schwenckfeld’s position was sharply criticized. See *Refutatio erroris Serveti*, StA 6:373, 377.

55. It was permissible to speak of a communication of characteristics only with concrete reference to the *person* of Christ and his *office*, according to Melancthon. That happens, for example, when we say that God became a human being, that God was born of a virgin and died. In contrast, to say these things in the abstract, that is, regarding the divine nature or to attribute divine characteristics to humanity was unacceptable to Me-

lanchthon. “Non dicitur: Natura divina est passa, sed Christus est passus, qui est Deus et homo,” *Refutatio erroris Serveti*, StA 6:376.

56. StA 374–375. Here he wrote, “Nequaquam dicitur in abstracto, Natura divina est humana. Sed in concreto dicitur, Deus est homo, cum Christo nato ex virgine loquimur. Item, Deus est natus ex virgine, Deus est passus. Et nominatur haec forma loquendi communicatio idiomatum, quae est praedicatio, in qua proprietas unius naturae dicitur de persona in concreto, et significatur in Christo duas esse naturas, non tantum ita, ut altera sit socia et separabilis, sicut in Elia et aliis Sanctis adest Deus societate, ut auxiliator, et separabiliter, sed sic, quod λογος assumerit humanam naturam miranda unione inseparabili et personali.” See also, on this topic, the *Responsio de controversiis Stancari*, StA 6:262–263.

57. See his reference to this in the *Responsio de controversiis Stancari*, StA 6:261. Melanchthon speaks of a two-fold sharing of characteristics, “communicatio idiomatum duplex”: “dialectica” and “physica.” The latter is a “confusio naturarum,” *Refutatio erroris Serveti*, StA 6:377. There were similar disputes regarding this terminology also among the Gnesio-Lutherans.