

Chemnitz And Authority

[Lecture I of the Reformation Lectures : Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary : October 30, 1985]
by Dr. Eugene Klug

1. Chemnitz was a man of the Word, committed to the Biblical text. If for Luther the guiding principle for doing theology was submission to the Biblical text—*haec regina debet dominari* (this queen must rule), and we must “bend low in reverence before its footprints,” he had said—the same mindset also characterized Martin Chemnitz. That spirit governed the Lutheran reformation.

2. Chemnitz made his reputation theologically the old fashioned way—he earned it. As is now generally known, he was more or less self-taught. The basic tools, expertise in the Biblical languages, were a fruit of his university years, but two and a half years as librarian of the ducal library in Königsberg, 1550-1552, afforded the opportunity to read himself deeply into theology. With a two-pronged approach he intensively pored through the Bible in the original languages and Luther’s works. He could not have chosen a better way to go. It prepared him for the gladiator’s role which he would soon be called on to fill. Terrible controversies brewed in the Lutheran church during the stormy years after the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims of 1548. Luther had died in 1546. Melancthon, though a valued friend and colleague at Wittenberg, proved insufficient to bear the mantle of leadership after him. Chemnitz emerged as one of the champions of orthodox Lutheran theology, along with theologians like Jacob Andreae, David Chytraeus, Nikolaus Selnecker, and laymen like Prince August of Saxony. The church is in their debt for the Formula of Concord and the Book of Concord.

3. But it was Martin Chemnitz who was the key figure in the Lutheran church in the generation after Luther. Well known is the Roman Catholic assessment—chiefly as a result of his remarkable rebuttal of counter-Reformation theology in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*: “If the second Martin had not come, the first would not have remained.” Sometimes a man’s true worth is discovered not first of all, or only, in the eyes of the beholders who are his friends, but especially by those who opposed him and learned first hand the true-tempered steel, the cutting edge of his theological acumen. Chemnitz’ *Examen Concilii Tridentini* had scored and deeply etched itself upon the minds of his Catholic opponents. “For this work Chemnitz received the title ‘the most villainous Lutheran’ (*sceleratissimus Lutheranus*) from Count Bartholomaeus v. Portia, the papal nuncio,” notes Werner Elert.¹ Without Chemnitz on the field Rome would have carried the day against the Lutheran church. He was the one who most incisively and definitively cut into Rome’s theological corpus and did the surgery on Trent’s (1545-1563) formulations, and his Roman opponents recognized it. Yet he had done it, as in all his work, with a gentle hand, calm and unhurried like a skillful surgeon intent on healing. The massive *Examen* occupied him for almost eight years, 1565-1573, midst other duties as superintendent of the churches and clergy in the Brunswick territory.

4. In his own autobiography Chemnitz explains his humble beginnings in the small town of Treuenbrietzen, about half way between Wittenberg and Berlin. The family had come on hard times and young Martin had to struggle for an education. An avid learner, he eventually attained a masters degree at the University of Wittenberg, 1548. Meanwhile he had taught the classics, Greek and Latin, to earn a living. His contact with Luther was minimal, even though he had been a student at Wittenberg the year before the Reformer’s death, 1545. Later he regretted having missed the opportunity to sit in the great teacher’s classroom, though he had heard him preach. Little did he then realize that one day he would be the man destined by God to assume his famous namesake’s mantle, the Lutheran church’s next ablest teacher.

5. During his years at the university Chemnitz had become quite expert in what he himself described as “judiciary astrology.” We would call it dabbling in horoscopes, calculating propitious moments and influences on a person’s life and events through the zodiacal signs, the positions of the stars and planets. One may question

just how much confidence he placed in this “art,” but by it he was able, as we say today, “to work his way through college.” Not insignificantly it also helped get him the appointment to the Prussian ducal library at Königsberg, since the rulers put much stock in these astrological tables.² Chemnitz was willing to oblige, even though he undoubtedly knew that Luther had viewed this practice of trying to tell the future by the stars not only as tom foolery but idolatry, contrary to the first commandment. Melanchthon also was “soft” on astrology, even while Luther was alive and in spite of Luther’s pointed remonstrances and opposition. In one of Luther’s exchanges with his colleague, the Reformer stated point-blank: “I do not want to tell Germany’s fortune on the basis of the stars; but on the basis of theology I announce to Germany the wrath of God.”³

6. Fortunately when it came to theology Chemnitz followed Luther, not the stars, nor even Melanchthon for that matter. The latter worthy tended to deviate from Luther on the very principle that mattered most, the question of authority in religion. How was one to know the things of God? What in fact could be said about God Himself? What were God’s intents and purposes towards mankind? These were crucial matters and man, if left to himself, always ended up making God in his own image or giving answers for God’s purpose which conformed to his own so-called best thoughts.

7. It is the epistemological problem. Ἐπιστήμη is the Greek word for knowledge or understanding. The science or discipline of getting at the source of such understanding is called epistemology, the study of knowledge, its origin, nature, and limits. For all intellectual pursuit, in whatever discipline, there is a *principium cognoscendi*, a principle of knowing, or understanding. Shall man find it in himself? In his own reason and intellect? Was he not virtually God-like in this respect? If it is outside of himself, where shall he look? Especially when it involves things beyond this natural realm, which can be empirically observed, which man can tabulate, and from which he can draw a certain number of generally valid conclusions?

8. Luther never doubted the lessons taught by the natural realm around him. He was a close observer of nature and its many wonders. But what about their origin? Whose was the hand behind them, that had made them? Only a blind man, a fool, deliberately closes his mind’s eye to what he sees, and denies the Creator’s handiwork or the Creator Himself. Luther never questioned the fact that there was such a thing as natural knowledge of God, nor that conscience itself informed man of God’s existence; in other words, that there was validity to what these natural sources revealed. This does not result from prior research, seeking, and structuring by man, but is a given by God, something He Himself intends. Commenting on Galatians 4:8-9, which refers to this very thing, Luther states that “there is a twofold knowledge of God, the general and the particular.”⁴

9. That there is a God, that He is the Creator, that He is of infinite power, and that He is all men’s judge—these are all things man has more than a small inkling of, as St. Paul also testifies in Romans 1:20. But who God truly is, what is in His heart, and what He has done for sinful man’s salvation—all these things lie beyond man’s competence, even to the slightest inkling. Here man needs the special revelation which only God can and has given through His Word, now not the word which man can, as it were, read in the trees but the Word which He reveals through His specially chosen veils or curtains, *larvae Dei*. These were. His wondrous theophanies in the Old Testament, His revelations to the prophets, also His inspiration of the written Word through these men, and then eventually through His apostles. Finally, in a most preeminent way God made Himself known through His own Son, born of the virgin Mary at Bethlehem.

10. Don’t despise God at the point where, and the manner in which, He approaches you in these revelations of Himself and His will toward sinful mankind, Luther cautioned. It is God’s way of revealing Himself and we should know that He “does not manifest Himself except through His works and the Word.”⁵ And because it is impossible for us to view God in his “uncovered divine essence,” He deigns to envelop “Himself in His works in certain forms, as today He wraps Himself up in Baptism, in absolution, etc.” To try to know God, therefore, beyond these stated limits, is to get beyond our depth immediately. “It is therefore insane to argue about God

and the divine nature without the Word or any covering (*larva*), as all the heretics are accustomed to do. But those who want to reach God apart from these coverings exert themselves to ascend to heaven without ladders (that is, without the Word). When God reveals Himself to us, it is necessary for Him to do so through some such veil or wrapper and to say: ‘Look! Under this wrapper you will be sure to take hold of Me.’”⁶

11. By “necessity,” of course, Luther did not mean that *God had* to do it, but rather that God graciously for man’s sake provided the avenue of escape from sin. Particularly God gave the revelation which made this known and available, in Word, in Baptism, and especially in Christ, the Savior, when He came to us sinful men in the lowly garments of our own sinful flesh—yet without sin!—and revealed Himself and His gracious disposition toward sinners as nowhere else. In the so-called foolishness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14) lay man’s salvation. This is the blessed *theologia crucis*. The way to God is not through mysticism, ascetism, observances—which are all rungs on the ladder of *theologia gloriae*, human self-elevating—but simply Christ!

12. Christ is at the center of the Word. He is the true focal point or hub of the whole of Sacred Scripture, the inspired prophetic and apostolic Word. Against Erasmus Luther had thundered: “*Tolle Christum e Scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies?* [Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what more will you find in them?]”⁷ For Luther, and so also for Chemnitz, there was only one way to go: *Nihil nisi Christus praedicandus* [Nothing but Christ must be preached].” Scripture had but one theme—Christ! On that point, as on all others, we must bend before Holy Scripture, for it is the “Holy Spirit’s book,” was Luther’s attitude. And what Christian would think otherwise, Luther challenges, probing Erasmus’ heart? Frankly too, “what can the church settle that Scripture did not settle first?”⁸ You, and others, may have trouble with some of the doctrinal claims Holy Scripture places upon you, Erasmus, but just remember this: “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic.”⁹

13. Chemnitz followed Luther precisely in this *Knechtsgestalt*, servant stance, before Scripture. One need look no further than the *Examen* to see this. More than 300 pages of evidence in the English translation, Vol. 1, state the case that he is making against the Council of Trent (especially against Andrada, Trent’s interpreter). God’s Word must be sought not in church councils and church traditions but only “according to the norm of the Scripture which has been divinely revealed.”¹⁰ The church has not been left in a quandary as to where to find God’s word—a plague that still burdens modern, skeptical theology!—but “God Himself revealed Himself and His will to the human race by giving a sure Word, which He confirmed with great miracles.”¹¹ History tells the story of how “God at all times graciously looked out for His church, that it might be certain which doctrine it was to embrace as undoubted, heavenly, and divine, and by what norm any errors (were to be) avoided, known, and judged.”¹²

14. With the patriarchs God used unique forms of communication. But from the time of Moses and onward God chose a new “way and method of preserving and retaining the purity of the heavenly doctrine by means of the divinely inspired Scriptures.”¹³ “The dignity and authority of the Holy Scripture” are grounded on God’s own initiative, for He did it “with His own finger.”¹⁴ Chemnitz surveys the “firm testimonies” which can be found in Scripture itself, with the reminder that “they set before us the judgment of the Holy Spirit Himself concerning the Scripture.” A “pious heart,” Chemnitz counsels, will rest on “what its author, the Holy Spirit, concludes and declares about His work.”¹⁵ Chemnitz assembles a truly impressive list of ancient authors, the early church fathers, who concurred in this view, but reminds his readers that “the truth of the Word of God does not depend on the church.”¹⁶ Just the reverse—the church has always depended upon the pure Word.

15. The canon of the Old Testament books is fixed by the New Testament, by the Lord Himself and His apostles. The canon of the New Testament, Chemnitz shows, rests on no less secure basis. Fundamentally it is fixed by God Himself, through the testimony which is inherent in the inspired writings themselves. The early church (*ecclesia primitiva*) played a role in this, for it was close to the happenings as recorded, knew the authors and could vouch for them, thus verifying that the things written corresponded with the preaching of the same

apostles. Citing the well-known text, 2 Tim. 3:14-17—so often neglected and passed over by modern critical theologians—Chemnitz stresses how “this text if it is diligently weighed will show that Paul is speaking not only of the sacred writings of the Old Testament but of the whole Scripture.” By the time of this writing—usually recognized as Paul’s last—we know today that virtually the whole New Testament had been completed; “this, therefore, is the true canonization of the writings of the New Testament,” Chemnitz confidently avers.¹⁷

16. In the same context Chemnitz underscored Scripture’s capacity to interpret itself, *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*, or *Scriptura interpret sui*. This is so because of its inherent clarity, *claritas Scripturae*. When Chemnitz asserts that “there are definite rules according to which interpretation must be carried out,” he recognizes the basic hermeneutical principles.¹⁸ They are built into all communication, and they are self-contained in God’s Word. Luther once remarked to Erasmus that God after all did not give us the Scriptural Word to add to our darkness but to our light. The notion that there is no light or meaning in the text until we bring our finest thoughts and insights into it, is the worst poison. “This is what I have called the Babylonian captivity,” Chemnitz states, when Scripture’s meaning must first be declared by the church, the fathers, or some other authority. This is to set Scriptures under the heel of man.

17. To illustrate how this goes, I can refer to a recent happening at the Lutheran-Methodist Dialogue. The topic under study was the ministry, ἐπισκοπή, in the church. After much discussion, the suggestion was made (by a Lutheran) that we ought really make a thorough study of the Biblical text on the subject. Instead of enthusiasm for this *modus operandi* there was silence and finally only the observation (by a Methodist): “But that would necessitate first addressing the whole hermeneutical problem.” What problem? Obviously that each of us would be interpreting according to his own slide rule, implying that it would be impossible to arrive at consensus. So, better skip the Biblical study.

18. Chemnitz was quite right: “it is truly a Pandora’s box, when once this postulate is granted, that proof and confirmation from the Scripture are not necessary.”¹⁹ The maneuver is quite obvious, elevating human opinion, traditions, to magisterial position over Scripture. By that tactic the Scriptures finally can say nothing binding at all upon the human heart. It was not that Chemnitz had little regard for the value of tradition(s) within the church. Painstakingly he tabulates and characterizes the benefits that have come down from the fathers through all the centuries, not least their faithful witness to pure teaching, practice, etc. But the rule of thumb must remain, that long usage by itself does not establish truth, particularly not when it opposes Scripture, for “custom without truth is ancient error” and no more than that!²⁰ In matters of Christian faith and life we must “take refuge in nothing else but the Scriptures.”²¹

19. Like Luther, Chemnitz refuses to pry into the nature of God Himself and he always disapproved of the expression or the idea of “God uncovered,” *Deus nudus*. The idea or attempt of knowing God as He is in Himself, as a *Ding an sich* (Goethe), a thing in itself, or in its nature, like some mathematical table or scale on the piano which we master, is an affront and sinful presumption. From this has resulted all manner of harmful speculation, the delight of human philosophies. God tells us of Himself and His attributes in His Word. This we should gladly accept, but this does not put God as it were in our hands, or in our heads, as a thing which we have mastered. To Chemnitz, as first of all to Luther, God as He is in Himself remains forever unknowable (1 Tim. 6:16; Ex. 33:18, 20).

20. Even God, the revealed, *deus revelatus*, as He has made Himself known to us in His Word, whom we know and love, whose purposes and mercy we have come to understand, is not now like a person with whom we stand on equal plane, whose nature and purposes we completely grasp. He still remains the hidden God, *deus absconditus*, to us, wherever and to the extent that He has not made Himself or His purposes known. Let God be God in His majesty and glory, Luther contended. If we wish to know Him, let us not run here and there, as St. Paul warns in Romans, Chapter 10, but let us go to His Word where He reveals Himself and all that is

necessary for our salvation. Luther's advice is, go to Bethlehem, if you want to know Him, and behold the virgin nursing the child, for there is your God, the infant made man for your sakes!

21. Chemnitz wrote a whole book on the subject. Not merely twenty or thirty pages, but well nigh 500 pages! Its single focus was also its title, *De duabus naturis in Christo* [*Concerning the Two Natures of Christ*], 1578. He saw the great need of showing that the Almighty God, by whom all things exist and hold together, is also the incarnate God, *Deus incarnatus*, who "united Himself with our nature." The divine Son of God did this, "in order that with the nature according to which He is closest to us, devoted and related to us as our Brother, and according to which we are also flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone, the divine nature may deal with us in grace to give us life."²² Chemnitz devotes his book to telling the "very sweet comforts" (*dulcissimae consolationes*) which are ours through the blessed doctrine of the two natures in Christ. Pious persons have at times stripped away the comfort that this great doctrine brings to man, elevating Christ, as they think, into some supraterritorial, spiritual being only, unattached to the human condition entirely. "This beautiful, necessary comfort is taken and stolen from us," spoke the church at Chemnitz' time, "when one teaches that Christ is present in His church on earth and acts only according to and with His divine nature and not at the same time according to and with His human nature."²³

22. "The true knowledge of the person and work of Christ is divinely revealed in the Word as something not only good and useful, but as absolutely necessary for salvation and eternal life," states Chemnitz in his prefatory remarks.²⁴ The Word of God upon which Chemnitz grounds his argument is the "Scripture (which) expressly teaches that these two natures do not subsist by themselves, but have been united into the one person of the Logos."²⁵ In typical fashion Chemnitz surrounds this propositional statement, as he does always, with salient, pertinent Scripture references or proof.

23. The church has been plagued with errors in Christology, in the teaching concerning Christ's holy person and work, but the fact is that "Scripture carefully treats of this doctrine and repeats it in many places."²⁶ "God has revealed to us in His Word, through His Spirit, as much concerning this mystery as He judged necessary and useful for us in this life for a true and saving knowledge of our Savior Christ."²⁷ Yet no other article of the faith, except perhaps the Trinity, has experienced "so many controversies, so many different opinions, so many heresies."²⁸ There is no other explanation for this than "that the curiosity of the human mind hates to limit itself to the bounds of divine revelation, (but) longs to wander (and) twist and turn the teachings of Scripture to conform to preconceived notions."²⁹ However, if there is to be a settlement of these controversies and a true consensus attained, then "the norm and rule of judgment must always be the voice of God as revealed in Scripture."³⁰ This is no simplistic sort of idea on the part of Chemnitz. It is Scripture's own presuppositional stance that in itself is its own best interpreter, *Scriptura interpres sui*.

24. As is commonly known Chemnitz was one of the principal authors of the *Formula of Concord* (1577) and thus also of the *Book of Concord* (1580). Jobst Ebel, describing Chemnitz' role in the origin of the Formula, says of him: "With Martin Chemnitz there came into the story of the origin of the Formula of Concord a man with his own unique theological imprint."³¹ We may safely assume that the work which he had done on the earlier and shorter version of the *De duabus naturis* in 1570 contributed heavily to his preparedness for the significant article (VIII) on the person and work of Christ in the *Formula*. The same conclusion must apply to Article VII on the Lord's Supper. One of the first assignments engaging him as co-adjutor with Joachim Moerlin in Brunswick was a definitive answer in the Hardenberg case. Dr. Albert Hardenberg was cathedral preacher in Bremen. On the matter of the Lord's Supper he leaned strongly in the direction of Zwinglianism. Moerlin sought a confrontation on the issue, to safeguard Lutheran parishes from the inroads of any form of Crypto-Calvinism. Chemnitz wrote the opinion (*Gutachten*), 1560/1561, which was utilized at the hearing by Moerlin. Hardenberg was dismissed eventually.

25. What Chemnitz had done was to expand on material previously worked out on the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. This he now published that same year (1561), somewhat expanded, under the title, *Repetitio sanae doctrinae de vera praesentia* [*Summary of Sound Doctrine on the Real Presence*]. In turn this work was expanded and revised, to appear in 1570 (with frequent reprintings till 1690) under the title *Fundamenta sanae doctrinae de vera et substantiali praesentia, exhibi tione et sumptione corporis et sanguinis Domini in coena*, available in translation today under the title, *The Lord's Supper*.³²

26. Like Luther, Chemnitz recognized how closely the articles on Christ and the Lord's Supper were interwoven, particularly when faulty theology entered in. The rudimentary error of the Crypto-Calvinists and their denial of the real presence really began with their failure to grasp and to grant the full communication of divine attributes to Christ according to His human nature, the *genus majesticum*. Chemnitz in Luther-like manner is held by the words of Christ, as given in the sacred record, and he bemoans the tragedy of how "some evil genius has brought these most holy words into controversy."³³ He deplores the fact that, while ordinarily the words of a testator are respected as sacrosanct and no one attempts even to substitute "the mind of the testator" for what is in fact written, yet in the case of Christ's sacred words all manner of subtleties have been introduced, all of them artful deviations from what Christ had so simply stated and promised.

27. Therefore, on the basis of Scripture, and with Luther's lucid teaching on the Real Presence in mind, Chemnitz explained that he was encouraged by the favorable response that he had received from pious believers when first he had written a brief in behalf of Christ's Supper, to show "that the dogma of the Lord's Supper has its own proper and peculiar setting (*sedes doctrinae*) in the words of institution and that in these words its true meaning must be sought."³⁴ If faith is to be sure, it must rest on what "the Holy Spirit has shown in Scripture itself." Therein are the "weighty arguments" which "compel us not to depart from the proper, simple, and natural meaning of the words of the last will and testament of the Son of God." The reader finds here the grist for the brilliant article (VII) on the Lord's Supper in the *Formula*. A key factor for the outcome is Chemnitz' (as well as his coworkers') attitude towards the Word of God, Holy Scripture. He refused to quibble with the *Haec dicit Dominus*, thus saith the Lord.

28. The *Formula* did not include a special article on the Scriptures as the authoritative Word governing Lutheran theology. It needed none. First, there was no dispute in the 16th century concerning the Scripture's inspiration and primacy in the church, though the departures from its authority were of course legion, to the right and to the left, in Romanism and in the radical groups. Second, the formulators declared very plainly their starting point in the preface of the *Formula*, stating that the Scriptures were the foundation, rule and plumb line "whereby all dogmas should be judged" and all "controversies should be explained and decided in a Christian manner." There was no higher court of appeal than "the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." These constituted what the confessors recognized "as the pure, clear fountain of Israel." There was "the foundation of divine truth," and nothing other, and on Scripture's authority the articles of faith were presented in thesis and antithesis.

29. Chemnitz and his colleagues left no doubt as regards their *modus operandi*; their work on the *Formula* bears its own testimony as to the faithfulness with which they bent themselves under Scripture's *magisterium*. *Deus locutus est*, God has spoken. Little wonder then that the Confessions became the very marrow of Scripture, *ipsa medulla scripturae*, because, they were a true exposition of God's Word.

30. There are other writings of Chemnitz which at least deserve mentioning. In fact they were major productions. Not least would be his dogmatics, published after his death by his understudy, Polycarp Leyser, a *loci theologici*.³⁵ Leyser also saw to it that Chemnitz' great work on the harmony of the Gospels was continued (it was completed by Johann Gerhard), *Harmonia evangelica*, and also a sermon book, *Postillen*.

31. Nor should we omit mention of the charming little handbook on doctrine, the *Enchiridion*, or *Handbüchlein der vornehmsten Hauptstücke der christlichen Lehre*, which first appeared in 1560.³⁶ It was intended for clergy and laity. Clearly and in uncomplicated catechetical arrangement it treats virtually all articles of the Christian faith. Its declared purpose was to raise the level and tone of theological knowledge in the churches of the Braunschweig territory. The sound Scriptural base, on the *sedes doctrinae*, so typical of Chemnitz' way of working, is everywhere evident. But it was not to be a substitute for Biblical study itself, for, as Chemnitz says in his preface, the "passages of Scripture are everywhere noted, so that the pastors themselves should learn to search in the Bible and be able to advance sure testimony of the Scripture on each point."³⁷ But its purpose was not only to help the pastors prepare for their regular qualifying examinations on fitness for office, but also, as Chemnitz states, it was "written in German so that the laity might read and know what is discussed in examinations" and be able to "judge whether their pastors follow the true voice of Christ."³⁸

32. Identifying the Holy Scriptures with God's Word is an absolute, unwavering principle for Chemnitz.³⁹ The *Enchiridion* is among the earliest doctrinal works in Christian theology which includes a special section on the Scriptural Word. "God saw to it that this Word of His was put into writing by faithful witnesses."⁴⁰ "The Holy Spirit included in Scripture the sum of the whole heavenly doctrine, as much as is necessary for the church," and for the individual believer to "obtain eternal life."⁴¹ As a result, God's church throughout its life has always viewed the Holy Scriptures as "a definite canon and a single norm or rule according to which all religion and doctrine ought to be examined, tested, and judged." Therefore, when in the church the question is, what is God's word on a given point, what does God say, then the rule must be that "that which does not have foundation in Holy Scripture and cannot be proved by it and is not in harmony with it, but contrary to it, this we neither can nor ought to set forth and receive as the Word of God."⁴² Stated positively, "this should be our axiom: Thus it is written; thus Scripture speaks and testifies—(this is the way) He bound His church (when) we want to know or show that a teaching is God's Word."⁴³

33. There are three relatively little known works of Chemnitz which played significant roles in the Lutheran churches which he was called on to serve. While they may be said to cover essentially the same doctrinal matters treated in the *Enchiridion*, their importance was in the service they rendered as confessions or symbols for the churches for which they were prepared. As such they also became significant precursors to the *Formula of Concord* itself. *Corpus doctrinae Prutenicum*, 1567, was prepared in behalf of the Lutheran church in the duchy of Prussia. It was addressed in part as an answer to the Osiandrian heresy on the doctrine of justification, which changed the forensic sense of righteousness, God's declaration of forgiveness upon sinners for Christ's sake, to a "being made righteous" through the indwelling of Christ's divine nature. As a church order it also included a summary of Christian doctrine, and was known as the *corpus doctrinae* for the Prussian territory.

34. The following year, 1568, Chemnitz joined forces with Jakob Andreae in working out a similar church-order for the Braunschweig-Wolfenbuettel territory. Again, a *corpus doctrinae* resulted, sometimes known as the *Kurtzer Bericht* of 1569, intended as a guide and norm for the churches and clergy espousing the Reformation. Later this was expanded into the *Wolgegründter Bericht* of 1575. Theodore Mahlmann, in his article on "Chemnitz" in the newly revised *Theologische Realencyclopädie*⁴⁴ points out that this important confessional document parallels closely the appearance of the *Formula of Concord*, 1577, and is therefore significant in any study or tracing of the sources for the *Formula*.

35. Of the *Corpus doctrinae Prutenicum* Mahlmann observes that Chemnitz very clearly cites the Scripture as the normative canon to which all doctrine must conform. "What is new here is the well-formulated doctrine of the Holy Scripture as the canon or rule, modeled after the *Examen*, and the (virtual) 'canonization' of 'Luther's writings' without much ado."⁴⁵ It is evident that by this time Chemnitz has clearly in mind some of the issues that needed to be addressed by the torn church, including such things as Christology (in view of what was happening on the Lord's Supper among Crypto-Calvinistic Lutherans), also the nature of sin, free will, and

tangent articles, all of which came to be involved through the Philippist and Flacian controversies. Each side wanted to claim fidelity to Luther. Chemnitz succeeded in showing where Melancthon and Flacius, the two principal Lutheran leaders after the Reformers death, had both departed from the Scriptural norm. To do so, of course, he had to be a master first of all of the Scriptures themselves, in the style of Luther, and then also he had to be totally familiar with the Reformer's works, not only as to given statements but also as to Luther's meaning in a given context.

36. Who were the true and genuine adherents and supporters of the Augsburg Confession, of Smalcald, of the Catechisms? If peace and concord were to be restored to the individual Lutheran territorial churches and to the church as a whole, it would be necessary, as Chemnitz rightly saw it, to restore first of all an inner peace, a true concord and unity of hearts joined together in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. 4:3. Unless there is agreement in doctrine, purely taught in keeping with Scripture, there cannot be external unity of the church. Chemnitz articulates this nicely in his prefatory remarks to the *Kurtzer Bericht* of 1569, stating: "Where a thoroughly lasting church-order is to be established and set up, it is a foremost concern that there be a proper foundation or basis, in order that the teaching be pure and in perfect accord."⁴⁶ This church-order was to provide the Braunschweig territory with a solid platform of doctrinal integrity, "so that both preachers and hearers would have a sure and an enduring basis for pure and saving teaching."⁴⁷ Chemnitz was very much aware of the tricks human reason likes to play, especially in undermining established doctrinal standards like the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran confessions of that time. Therefore he "strongly and repeatedly emphasizes that it is necessary to include the antithesis in the confessions, according to the example of Jesus and the apostle Paul."⁴⁸

37. The concern here is not for peace and unity in mere external affairs. In the church there is another sort of peace to be sought after. This peace "is not analogous to peace in ordinary human affairs, which is tantamount to friendship," states Ebel with reference to what Chemnitz was striving for in the territorial churches he was called on to serve and the Lutheran church at large.⁴⁹ Mere human orders, conventions, usages, norms, or authority would not avail. "What Chemnitz was striving for was real, substantial agreement," states Hoas, and "he had no regard for clever and crafty interpretations which at best resulted in verbal agreements."⁵⁰ That would be tantamount to constructing a building lacking solid foundation or proper structural design; it would soon collapse. In the constructing of any church order or system of doctrine there could be no substitute for the Word of God. For Chemnitz this meant Holy Scripture, if the doctrine was to be pure, sound, true, and saving or wholesome. "Hear Him! *hunc audite!*" Chemnitz exhorts in the opening line of the *Wolgegründter Bericht* which was prepared for the Braunschweig churches.⁵¹

38. For Chemnitz this was no mere academic commitment to the words of Scripture. The apostolic and prophetic Word had a focus. That focus was Christ, who was the chief cornerstone for the foundation upon which the prophets and apostles were grounded. "The one, pure, saving teaching God revealed in His Holy Word through the writings of the Old and New Testaments, (and) what God's mouth thus has spoken and revealed" must be received, therefore, as His Word.⁵² Chemnitz addressed every article of faith on the basis of Scripture with sure confidence that God had spoken. Holy Scripture is not a cleverly devised compilation of human thought and of human origin. "God himself has taught it (the true Christian religion) from heaven," stated Chemnitz, "through the mouth of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles."⁵³

39. Scripture's authority and sufficiency in all matters of doctrine must be beyond cavil in the church. There can be no system of doctrine other than the articles which Scripture clearly teaches. It is the only source. While Christ is the center of Scripture's teaching, Old and New Testament, it must also be clear and well-established that all other articles of the faith stand on the same base and derive from the same source. Though Chemnitz frequently quotes Luther, as in the *Formula*, his purpose is only to show how Luther's apt and lucid explanations conform to Scripture's clear teaching.

40. Pure teaching is fundamental to Chemnitz' work as a teacher in the church. The church cannot be served in any other way. False and faulty teaching can only do harm. Many claims are made to being "Christian," but if doctrine is to be true and pure it must conform precisely to the Word of God, as Luther once stated, like a mathematical point. Holy Scripture is God's own plumb line by which all doctrine is to be measured and assayed. Like pure gold Scripture is its own vindicator, its own interpreter, *interpretes sui*. This sufficiency is given by God Himself. Every commentary or explication, therefore, must deliver God's intended sense and meaning, not that of a clever interpreter who plays games with Scripture, as Luther reminded Erasmus. It is not open to the opinions of men. It must not "be bent, turned, and twisted" to suit the "individual interpreter's taste," cautions Chemnitz in the church-order for Braunschweig.⁵⁴ Against such "arbitrary handling of Scripture," Hoas states, "Chemnitz argues for the clarity of Scripture and its doctrinal unity."⁵⁵ This conforms closely to the position which Luther took against Erasmus who argued for a kind of freedom from textual commitment to the Scriptures because of its supposed obscurities, an argument which Luther absolutely refused to grant by demonstrating how Scripture itself repudiated such aspersions.

41. Chemnitz' concern for Scripture's integrity, purity, and authority was not a mere person fixation or arbitrary stance. He saw how all of doctrine hung from that thread. Chief of all doctrines, of course, was the justification of the sinner by the grace of God, for Christ's sake, through faith. If this article is not kept pure, the church perishes, as Luther before him had declared. Then the Gospel is lost. Then the Law will no longer be properly and rightly distinguished from the Gospel, and the two chief doctrines of the Bible will end in hopeless confusion.

42. It is evident that in his approach to doctrine and the writing of doctrinal statements (church-orders), or confessions, Chemnitz operated with unflinching commitment to a declared trust in Scripture's authority, as also its integrity as the inspired Word of God. Moreover, he saw the desirability of the church speaking out clearly concerning its faith and teaching. This was true particularly when strife and contention tore in demonic fashion at the articles of faith themselves, threatening them with destruction. The confessions which Chemnitz wrote prior to the *Formula* bear witness to the deep regard which he maintained always for the Scripture as the Word of God itself, as well as his attitude vis-a-vis the Lutheran confessions. Mahlmann criticizes him and implies that this activity in behalf of such doctrinal formulations helped to turn up the problems.⁵⁶ This charge is of course without foundation in fact, and the *Formula*, which is the final grand end for all of Chemnitz' yeoman work in behalf of doctrinal purity and integrity, stands as vindication of his efforts. Genuine, orthodox Lutheran theology has never been better served. If Lutherans today wish to be confessional according to the intent and meaning of the Augsburg Confession and the other symbols of the Christian faith, and, above all, to the authoritative Word of God itself, Holy Scripture, they will be ready to admit their debt to this intrepid warrior for the faith, the "second Martin."

43. Chemnitz stepped down from his work in 1584 and died in 1586, April 8. The epitaph marking his grave is Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live ..."—an appropriate commentary on his life, work, and meaning for the church.

44. In answering Trent, Chemnitz had devoted a major portion of his *Examen Concilii Tridentini* to the whole question of Scriptural authority. In great detail he treated both Holy Scripture's divine origin through inspiration and also the self-authenticating nature of the Biblical text. He recognized, and so also stated, that "the whole dispute" with Rome really turned on the authority question. For that reason he expended extensive care to the task of demonstrating Scripture's authority, though in the beginning, as he says, he had first thought of laying this groundwork "with a few words and with a few quotations."⁵⁷ He saw that this would not suffice. Therefore, he traversed the whole New Testament canon because he saw that the "individual epistles of the apostles contain some clear testimonies concerning this matter," that is, Scripture's undisputed and

not-to-be-disputed authority. “Taken all together, they present such firm and solid proofs concerning the authority, perfection, and sufficiency of Scripture that one cannot escape them or overthrow them.”⁵⁸

45. Readers of these initial pages of Chemnitz’ text express unexpected pleasure in the fine overview he has given them of the whole New Testament text. They resonate favorably to Chemnitz’ own observation at the end of his extended review of these apostolic writings, when he concludes: “This investigation has indeed instructed, delighted, and above all confirmed me, and I hope that by the grace of God some fruit will accrue from it to the reader.”⁵⁹

46. My investigation in Chemnitz on this topic has instructed, delighted, and confirmed me concerning Holy Scripture’s preeminence as authoritative norm in the church. Is it too much to hope that by the grace of God some fruit has accrued to the hearers (readers) also?

Endnotes

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- ¹ W. Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1962, p. 286.
- ² cf. E. F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz on Scripture and the Word*. Kampen (Netherlands): J. H. Kok, 1971, 126f.
- ³ WA, TR 3, 3711. cf. Elert, *op. cit.* 431, for translation.
- ⁴ LW 26, 399.
- ⁵ LW 1, 11.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-15 *passim*.
- ⁷ LW 33, 26.
- ⁸ LW 33, 22.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ¹⁰ M. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1971, I, 32.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 48.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 307.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 276.
- ²² Elert, *op. cit.*, 236.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Two Natures in Christ*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1971, 15.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ³¹ Jobst, Ebel, "Die Herkunft des Konzeptes der Konkordienformel," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 91, 1980, p. 237. This article continues the story begun earlier with a treatment of Andreae and adds vignettes on David Chytraeus, Nikolaus Selmedker, Andreas Musculus, and Christoph Cornerus, for which see pp. 237-282.
- ³² Translated by J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia, 1979.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.
- ³⁵ Chapters on "Free Will" and "Sin" are available in a translation in *The Doctrine of Man*, edited by Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962.
- ³⁶ 1574, according to some sources. It is available today in translation by Luther Poellot under the title *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1981.
- ³⁷ *Op. Cit.*, 17.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ cf. Jobst Christian Ebel, *Wort and Geist bei den Verfassern der Konkordienformel*. Munich: Kaiser, 1981, p. 109-171 *passim*.
- ⁴⁰ *Op., cit.*, 40.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ q.v., p. 717.
- ⁴⁵ RE, "Chemnitz," 716.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in Brynjulf Hoas, "The Doctrine of Conversion in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz," an unpublished STM manuscript in the library of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, 1985. This study, for which I served as adviser, is particularly noteworthy since it turns up new soil in the area of Chemnitz studies by focusing in the main on the three somewhat unknown productions of Chemnitz referred to in the text, the *Corpus Prutenicum*, *Kurtzer Bericht*, and *Wolgegründter Bericht*. Citations from this work hereafter designated by the author's name, Hoas.
- ⁴⁷ Hoas, *op. cit.*, p.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Ebe1, *op. cit.*, 36.

⁵⁰ Hoas, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* Quoted from the *Corpus prutenicum*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ cf. *RE*, "Chemnitz," 317.

⁵⁷ *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 148. cf. also p. 176: "The canonical Scripture has its eminent authority also from this, that it is divinely inspired, 2 Tim. 3, 16."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Cited by F. Pieper, Preface to *Lehre and Wehre*, January 1887, Vol. 33, p. 3. cf. E. F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz on Scripture and the Word*, p. 192: "The authority of Scripture means this, if it means anything at all: either in its Word nothing can be doubted, for it has divine, sacred authority; or else the alternative obtains, that nothing can be believed until human authority or experience have first verified or established it. The latter would be an insufferable affront to God Who gave the Word."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*