



Reformation Reflections

CHRISTIAN UNITY

On May 28, in the year of our Lord 1577, the Formula of Concord was presented to Elector Augustus of Saxony. Its purpose was to establish unity and concord through the truth of God's word because, sadly, discord had reigned since the death of Martin Luther three decades earlier.

There had been military discord as Roman Catholic rulers took up arms against the Lutheran rulers in the Smalcald War during the mid 1540s. Then there was political discord when **Maurice, Duke of Saxony**, betrayed the Lutherans by joining forces with the Roman Catholics. The Lutherans suffered defeat and Elector John Frederick I was imprisoned and compelled to give up the Saxon Electorate. Maurice became the new Saxon Elector until 1553 when he suddenly died and was succeeded by his brother, Augustus.



Religious discord was evident as Emperor Charles V sought to defeat the Lutheran "heretics" and restore his Empire to Roman Catholicism. Though Charles won the war, he could not force the Lutherans to stop being Lutheran. Therefore, he tried to achieve his ends by theological compromise which was not well received. He was eventually driven out of Germany in 1552 (*by Maurice, of all people!*) and settled for signing peace treaties which allowed Lutheran rulers to have Lutheran churches.

His earlier attempt at compromise, however, only led to theological discord among the Lutherans. They began arguing among themselves about which doctrines, if any, could be compromised. Even after the peace treaties were signed, the theological discord continued. They were divided over eleven significant issues including original sin, free will, good works, Communion, and God's eternal foreknowledge and election. Much needed concord required agreement with the word of God and with each other.

After all, we confess the unity of the Church in our creeds. Apostle Paul teaches that we are to be **"eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit ... There is one body and one Spirit"** (Ephesians 4:3-4). The Scriptures teach that such unity is a desirable and beautiful thing: **"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity"** (Psalm 133:1). But Jesus reminds us that Christian unity is established only by the truth of God's word (John 17:17-21).

Appropriately then, the movement from discord to concord began with a series of sermons preached by Jacob Andreae in 1573. After much encouragement, he later reformatted them as a formal confession of faith known as the Swabian Concord. It was then widely distributed for discussion and comment.

Martin Chemnitz and others, at Duke Julius of Brunswick's direction, used the suggestions, comments, and criticisms of Andreae's work to revise and rewrite the confession which, in 1575, resulted in the Swabian-Saxon Concord. Meanwhile, at the behest of Elector Augustus, another document was produced by Lucas Osiander and Balthasar Bidenbach known as the Maulbronn Formula.



In 1576, Augustus gathered six leading theologians who blended the Swabian-Saxon Concord and the Maulbronn Formula into a new document called the Torgau book, named for the castle where they met. It was circulated

around various parts of Germany for review, criticism, and comments. By May of 1577, the responses had been taken into consideration and the final form and content were completed. It was accepted by Augustus and over the next few years more than 8000 pastors, teachers, and rulers signed it as their own confession.

We know it as the Formula of Concord, which to this day uses the word of God alone to establish unity and harmony among us.



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