

The Marburg Colloquy—The Marburg Articles (1529)

Abstract

This text contains the articles of the agreement signed at Marburg by Luther, Zwingli, and eight other preachers. It documents how an affair that began with a quarrel about the doctrine of the literal Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (Luther for, Zwingli against) led to a joint statement that touched on all of the leading doctrinal points. The central issue, the Eucharist, is treated in the final and longest article (Article 15), which acknowledges the lack of full agreement and includes a pledge to tolerance until the matter could be finally settled. This strategy, which was meant to contain the chief source of the conflict, in fact probably expanded the range of the quarrel and made it easier for both sides to make and maintain their charges of heresy. As neither party felt bound by them, the articles had no effect on the quarrel, which broadened into a schism within what had been a united party. The split eventually led to two Protestant confessions, one Lutheran and the other Reformed (sometimes called “Calvinist”).

Source

The Marburg Articles

The following articles were written and signed in Marburg on October 3, 1529.

First, that we both sides unanimously believe and hold that there is one single, correct, natural God, Creator of all living things. [Furthermore], that this God is one in being and nature in the three persons of the Trinity, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, etc, as resolved at the Nicene Council and sung and read in the Nicene Creed by the Christian Church throughout the entire world.

Second, we believe that neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, but rather the Son of God the Father became man through the agency of the Holy Spirit [and was conceived] without male seed and born of the immaculate Virgin Mary. He was perfect in body and soul, and like other men but utterly free of sin.

Third, that very same Son of God and Mary, one in body, Jesus Christ, was crucified for us, died and was buried, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits to the right of God [the Father], Lord of all creation, and will [come again to] judge the living and the dead.

Fourth, we believe that we are born with and inherited original sin from Adam. It is so egregious that all of humanity would be damned had not Jesus Christ come to help with his life and death. Without him we would have been lost for eternity and excluded from God’s kingdom and salvation.

Fifth, we believe that we are saved from this sin and all other sin and eternal death if we believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who died for us. Without this faith no [good] deed, social status, or religious order, etc., can free us from our sins.

Sixth, such faith is a divine gift which we cannot earn with works or merit nor create of our own accord. Rather, it comes from and is created by the Holy Spirit, wherever it pleases, when we hear the Gospel or the words of Christ.

Seventh, such faith is our justification before God, on which basis he accounts us saved, pious, and holy without works or merit. We are thereby saved from sin and death, granted mercy and made holy for the sake of his Son, in whom we believe. Thus, we are allowed to take part in and enjoy the Son’s salvation, life, and all things.

Of the Outer Word

Eighth, [we believe] that the Holy Spirit, to speak properly, does not give anyone such faith or this gift without their having heard sermons or the Word or Gospel of Christ. Rather, it works through and with such oral proclamation and creates faith where and in whom it wishes. Ro. X.

On Baptism

Ninth, [we believe] that holy baptism is a sacrament which is an instrument of God for such faith and ordered by Him: “Go forth and baptize” [Matt. 28:15], and God promises thereby: “He who believes [...]” [Mark 16:16]. Thus it is not only a simple sign or symbol among Christians but rather a divine symbol and work which supports our faith, through which we are born again to [eternal] life.

On Good Works

Tenth, [we believe] that the faith effected by the Holy Spirit, having saved us and made us holy, practices good works through us, namely, brotherly love, prayer to God, and the ability to suffer all persecution, etc.

On Confession

Eleventh, that confession or seeking counsel with a pastor or [spiritual] brother should be uncoerced and free, but is of great use to those who are troubled, under [spiritual] attack, or burdened by sin or with a conscience that has been led astray, most of all because of the absolution and comfort offered by the Gospel, which is the true absolution.

On Authority

Twelfth, that all secular authorities, laws, courts, and ordinances, wherever they may be, are of a correct and proper standing and not forbidden, as many papists and Anabaptists teach and hold. Rather, that a Christian, if he is called or born into the ruling class, can be saved through faith in Christ, just as in the class of father and mother, husband and wife, etc.

Thirteenth, that that which we call traditions in our human order in spiritual and ecclesiastical business, so long as they are not clearly contrary to God’s Word, may be followed or abandoned so that those with whom we deal can be shielded from all nature of unnecessary annoyance and the weak and common peace can be aided through love.

Fourteenth, [we believe] that infant baptism is correct and that they [i.e. the children baptized] are thereby granted God’s mercy and accepted into Christendom.

On the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ

Fifteenth, regarding the Last Supper of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, we believe and hold that one should practice the use of both species as Christ himself did, and that the sacrament at the altar is a sacrament of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ and the spiritual enjoyment of this very body and blood is proper and necessary for every Christian. Furthermore, that the practice of the sacrament is given and ordered by God the Almighty like the Word, so that our weak conscience might be moved to faith through the Holy Spirit. And although we have not been able to agree at this time, whether the true body and blood of Christ are corporally present in the bread and wine [of communion], each party should display towards the other Christian love, as far as each respective conscience allows, and both should persistently ask God the Almighty for guidance so that through his Spirit he might bring us to a proper understanding. Amen.

Martin Luther

Justus Jonas

Philipp Melanchthon

Andreas Osiander

Stephan Agricola

Johannes Brenz

Johannes Oecolampadius

Huldreich Zwingli

Martin Bucer

Caspar Hedio

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