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Botched Protestant Amalgamation at the 1529 Marburg Colloquy

Lessons for Theological Disputes

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Abstract

The 1529 Marburg Colloquy was a pivotal turning point in the history of the Protestant movement. It marked the beginning of an avoidable schism in the nascent movement. The disintegrating tendencies of the movement came to a head when the subject of the Lord's Supper was not agreed upon, leading to loss of theological consolidation and a united Protestant front, which could have positively altered the course of Protestantism. This study focuses on the issues that characterized the Marburg Colloquy and the resultant consequential impact on the Protestant movement. Seventh-day Adventists, with their staunch Protestant ethos on the one hand, and a significant history of intra-theological disputes on the other hand, can glean valuable lessons from the consequential nature of ill-managed theological conversations, especially at a time when many theological incongruities have begun to threaten the unity and mission of the denomination. Adventist Studies will continue to benefit from a growing understanding of the Protestant Reformation.

The study of history is a critical part of Adventist Studies. And in studying history, we usually look back in order to look forward. But in attempting to explain the past, one soon realizes that we are limited and separated from past events and personalities by gaps of time, culture, language, and social and political milieus. This realization helps the student of history not to approach the past with unbridled assertiveness. History is not about judging the past and actors of the past. The touchstone of the study of the past should be the creative and objective learning from its events and actors.

There is no more monumental historical event that defined Christianity in Europe and by extension the world than the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformation was significant not just because of the tectonic shifts it caused in Christendom but was also notable for the theological framework that distinguished it (Lints 1993, 146). This theological landscape was shaped by individual actors, and many historians seem to agree that the Reformation had three leading theological luminaries: Martin Luther (1483−1546),[1] John Calvin (1509−1546),[2] and Huldrych Zwingli (1484−1531)[3]. Of the three, Luther and Calvin have often stood out, partly because they articulated items of faith that touch almost all aspects of life. And this they did with such passion, thoroughness, and skill that their works have remained classical theological reference points (McGrath 1996, 86; Dillenberger and Welch 1988, 23).

Yet, while Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all shaped the Reformation significantly, this paper argues that a major retrogression of the Reformation was occasioned by the early theological dispute between Luther and Zwingli, a dispute which precipitated a schism in the movement.

1. Luther and Zwingli: Contrasting Personalities

Patrick Collinson has suggested that "without Luther, we can be certain that there would be no Reformation, or not the same Reformation" (Collinson 2005, 4). Luther was boldly vocal against prevailing religious corrupt practices, while demanding that Scripture, rather Popes and councils, be the final arbiter of faith and doctrine. Even in the face of threat to life and privation, he maintained his boldness and his decision not to recant. According to Historian

[1] Born *Martinus Luder* in Eisleben, Germany, he later changed his name to Luther, following the custom of many humanists at the time. The name Luther echoed *eleutheria*, the Greek word for freedom. Luther was prolific in writing, primarily in the style of sermons, treatises, and biblical commentaries. He equally developed theological themes, notably the "justification by faith" theme. Yet, he did not undertake to write a major systematic work. For a concise work on Luther, see Wood 1969.

[2] Calvin wrote systematic works that further shaped Protestantism. His institutes of the Christian Religion (1539, 1559) is in many respects the "Protestant Summa". See King 2008, 1−34.

[3] It has been noted that "although Zwingli's theology included similarities with Martin Luther's theology, the two men differed on several important doctrines. Zürich was the cradle of Reformed Protestantism, and Zwingli's theology was its foundation" Baker 2003, 2080.

Roland Bainton, Luther "did more than any other man to establish the Protestant faith" (Bainton 1950, 1).

While Luther was a major pillar in the German Reformation,[4] in Switzerland came stirrings of a different nature. A revolutionist emerged, who enjoyed the support of his city, a city that claimed no allegiance to the emperor. The revolutionist himself claimed no allegiance to Luther. Zwingli was the man, and his city was Zurich. His contention was that he owed nothing to Luther's theological framework, but turned to Christ and Scripture in 1516, even before the public protests of Luther (MacCulloch 2004, 136–138). Rainer Wohlfeil has argued that Zwingli's preaching in Glarus in 1516 was as crucial to the Reformation as any initiatives in Luther's Wittenberg (Wohlfeil 1982, 48).

Nonetheless, historian Euan Cameron has questioned Zwingli's claims of independence of theological thought. Cameron argues that "if Zwingli really did develop the distinctively Reformation message of salvation by free forgiveness, apprehended through faith, simultaneously but entirely independent of Luther, it was the most breath-taking coincidence of the sixteenth century" (Cameron 1991, 182). This early claim to what can be described as the *monopoly of truth discovery* did not help the consolidation of Protestant calls for reforms in the Roman Church.

The clash of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism meant that Zurich entered into rivalry with Wittenberg on several fronts. This was a multifaceted rivalry. Whereas Luther saw the doctrine of justification by faith as key to his social and religious reforms, Zwingli and other early Reformed thinkers had relatively less interest in doctrinal exclusivity. Their reforms were more in social, ethical, and institutional lines. Another contrast between the two camps was their conflicting Christology. Luther emphasized the unity of the two natures in the person of Christ, while Zwingli stressed the distinction of the natures. This difference was to be accentuated in the Lord's supper or Eucharistic[5] controversy (McGrath 1999, 8; Stephens 2004, 98). I will dwell more on the Eucharistic argumentations of Luther and Zwingli in a subsequent section.

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[4] For an excellent collection of essays on the German Reformation, see Dixon 1999.

[5] Eucharist was the Christian service at which bread and wine were consecrated and consumed. It has had several appellations in history – "mass" (a term Luther retained), "the bread", "communion", and "Lord's supper".

Harold Grimm summed up the chief differences between Lutheranism and Zwinglianism to be found in the political conditions existing in the Swiss Confederation and its relations with the other European powers; in the cultural milieu of Switzerland and Southern Germany; in the unique role the Swiss cantons had played in the conciliar movement; and in the personalities and training of the respective reformers (Grimm 1973, 145).

The Reformers were not only contending with the Roman Church, but their intra-Protestant contestations also proved to be a major weak point for the movement. Luther's life, although interspersed with disputations with the emissaries of Rome, was constantly embroiled in disputes with other Reformers. These debates were to divide the movement profoundly. Some of the debates were focused on the confusion between political and ecclesiastical realms, the role of the law in Christian life, monastic vows, education, the interpretation of the sacraments and numerous other issues (Tomlin 2017, 7).

Perhaps the most significant of Luther's theological conflicts was the Eucharistic controversy. This controversy erupted over the very different views on the nature of the *real presence* held by Luther and Zwingli. Luther's view contrasted sharply with Zwingli's metaphorical or symbolic approach, and many leaders in the movement made efforts to reconcile these views in order to strengthen the movement, but nothing substantial was achieved. The Colloquy of Marburg (1529) was a significant attempt at arresting the impending fragmentation of the Protestant movement. It was also a unique opportunity for *Protestant amalgamation*, as that was the one and only time the key actors, Luther and Zwingli, met face to face in their lifetimes. Alister McGrath observes that the failure of the Colloquy "can be argued to have led to the permanent alienation of the German and Swiss reforming factions at a time when increasingly diverse political and military considerations made collaborations imperative" (McGrath 1999, 90).

2. Issues Leading to Marburg

The Marburg Colloquy was a veritable opportunity that could have galvanized the differing Protestant factions to withstand the external opposing forces of the day. But placed in its historical context, the Colloquy was basically an attempt to unify the Protestant lands into a fortified political entity. When young Philip of Hesse (1504–1567) proposed the colloquy, he was more interested in the defence of the Reformation's political bearing rather than a

keen interest in the theological issues of the day. The second Diet of Speyer that was held earlier that year had exposed fault lines that propelled German Protestant princes to court the cooperation of the Protestant regions of Zurich, Bern, and other Swiss cities, as well as those of south Germany (Byrd 1969, 2).

E.G. Schwiebert reasons that the Colloquy was plunged into a theological discord because the Wittenberg delegation had a mandate to achieve complete doctrinal unity before considering political union (Schwiebert 1950, 714). The Swiss delegation, although equally having theological interests, wanted a military alliance with the Germans more than theological congruence. The expedient military alliance was a pragmatic proposal to counter the concerted military aggression of the Roman Church and the emperor. Luther's firm resolve not to bend his theological stance may not have been the only reason for the collapse of this anticipated concord, as he had made it quite clear that he would not support any military endeavour against Rome and the emperor (see Grimm 1967, 195).

Another element of Marburg Colloquy was the collective attitude of the leading participants. The issues at stake were grand and timely, but the personalities of the actors became an unfortunate impediment to a consensus decision. Studying the Reformation involves understanding the humanness and character inconsistencies of the Reformers themselves. For instance, one cannot agree less with Gerhard Ebeling that "it is simply a fact that the study of Luther's theology involves us to a greater degree than in the case of almost any other theologian with his person" (Ebeling 2007, 32). But this not just about Luther, the same holds true for other Reformers. Rolf Pöhler notes that

> The Reformers were humans, not superhuman saints. They shared in the finiteness of all humanity. They were neither inerrant in their views nor infallible in their behaviour. We should not claim more for them, nor for any other messenger or prophet sent by God to guide his church through perilous times. To turn these saintly men and women into superhuman heroes, to ignore their intellectual, moral and spiritual limitations, to treat them as the final authority on each and every issue faced by the church today, is to misuse what God has given to them and to us (Pöhler 2009, 161).

It will be impolitic to put the character defects of the Reformers in the spotlight. We must learn from their humanness, while admiring their courage and exceptional braveness in the face of tyranny and derision. Commenting on

Luther, Richard Lints notes that he is misrepresented if there is a fixation on his temperament, defects of personality, and incorrigibility, while his devotion to his novel understanding of the gospel is disparaged (see Lints 1993, 149).

How does Marburg concern Christians and even Seventh-day Adventists who live in this century? No doubt, there is no direct correlation between Marburg and Adventism, and no forced contrasts should be made between them. Yet, Marburg can serve as a cautionary tale for Adventists, especially as they "see themselves as heirs of the Protestant Reformation started by Luther" (Campbell and Satelmajer 2017, 13). More so, Adventist historians have, rightly or wrongly, attempted to systemize the apparent correlations between the Reformers' approach to theological issues and Adventists' approach (Miller 2016, 89–99).

2.1 Pre-Marburg Lutheran and Zwinglian Theological Contestations

A series of lengthy and often heated theological treatises and counter-treatises culminated in the Marburg Colloquy (Tomlin 2017, 15). Marburg represents a crisscrossing of the Lutheran and Zwinglian wings of the Reformation. The Lutheran Reformation is particularly associated with the German territories and with those faraway lands that were influenced by Luther and his successors. It began in an academic context (Wittenberg) but was launched into prominence by the personal activities of Luther (posting of the ninety-five theses on October 31, 1517, and the Leipzig Disputation from June–July 1519). Contrastingly, the Zwinglian Reformation laid the foundation for the Reformed Church, which has its beginnings with the developments within the Swiss Confederation. It was a culmination of attempts to reform the morals and worship style of the church, but not necessarily its doctrines, according to a more biblical pattern. In essence, the Zwinglian Reformation sees the Lutheran version of the Reformation as not having gone far enough. While Luther stands tall in Lutheranism, the Reformed movement was graced by several luminaries – Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, Calvin, Theodore Beza. Also, many cities were prominent in the Zwinglian scope – Zurich, Berne, Basle, Geneva, the Lowlands and some parts of Germany. The Zwinglian wing of the Reformation originated in humanist circles and developed in the cities of Switzerland and the Rhineland, Lutheranism originated and devel-

oped in the relatively unpopular German University in Wittenberg. Also, Lutheranism was shaped to a remarkable extent by the personal theological insights of Luther, while Zwinglian theology in its nascent stage owed its beginnings to a group of thinkers (McGrath 1999, 5–11).

On the one hand, the Wittenberg Reformation was influenced by a direct engagement with scholasticism, although both Luther and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (the dean of the faculty of theology at Wittenberg) were unquestionably aided in this engagement by the newly developed humanist textual techniques. On the other hand, early Zwinglian theology was characterized by humanism, while any engagement with scholasticism was absent (McGrath 2004, 58, 184–185).

These contrasts show the nature of the theological formations that characterized the literary disputes between the two camps leading to Marburg. Between 1525–1527, at least nine different evangelical Reformers – including Zwingli, Martin Bucer, Johannes Oecolampadius, Wolfgang Capito, Johan Landtsperger – published no fewer than twenty-eight treatises, in Latin as well as in German, against Luther's views on the Eucharist, before the dramatic, face-to-face standoff at Marburg (Gregory 2012, 89; see also McLaughlin 1986, 181–210).

Luther and Zwingli, who were leading figures in the Magisterial Reformation[6], could not reconcile their views on the sacraments. And a few factors combined to bring about this contention, chief among them being the method of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics) and the different social contexts of the Wittenberg and Zurich Reformations (McGrath 1999, 171; Sasse 1959, 4).

On how hermeneutics played a role in the Eucharistic controversy, the theological formation of Zwingli is a case in point. As a Catholic priest, he had received a Humanist training. When Erasmus's New Testament appeared, he memorized all the epistles in Greek. This, he claims, was his *truth discovery* in the writings of Paul, without any influence from Wittenberg and Luther. His

[6] Also termed the 'mainstream Reformation' – connected with the Lutheran and Reformed churches and excluding the Anabaptists. This explains the way the different wings of the Reformation regarded secular authorities, such as princes, magistrates or city councils. Whereas the radical reformers (Anabaptism) regarded such authorities as having no rights within the church, the mainstream wing argued that the magistrate had a right to authority within the church, just as the church could rely on the authority of the magistrate to enforce discipline, suppress heresy, or maintain order. See McGrath 1999, 5–11.

mantra was the biblical text "the flesh profiteth nothing", the flesh which he conceptualized in a Platonic sense of the body. This was contrary to Luther's Hebraic conceptualization which sees the flesh as the evil heart which may not necessarily be physical. This theological framework made it easy for Zwingli to deny the *real presence* in the Eucharist, reducing it to a *memorial* of Christ's death. So, when Luther argued using the text "this is my body", Zwingli would retort that when Jesus made that statement in Aramaic the copulative verb was not used, so that what He said means "this – my body" (Bainton 1950, 206).

Since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Catholics had described the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist using the term *transubstantiation*. This means that the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine are miraculously transformed by the consecration of the priest into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, even while the bread and wine continue to look, taste, smell, and feel like the elements before consecration. Also, the Roman Church taught that the Eucharist was a sacrifice, an unbloody offering to God of transubstantiated bread and wine to obtain forgiveness which is available in no other way (see Steinmetz 2004, 125–126).

The Eucharist, which was the heart of medieval worship, became a bone of contention not only between Catholics and the Reformers, but also within the Reformation circles. Luther and Zwingli both rejected the idea that the Eucharist was a sacrifice. For them, it was God's gift to the church, and not a sacrifice by the church to God. Also, both Reformers were united in their opposition to the doctrine of transubstantiation. So, at what point did these two theologians begin to disparage each other's sacramental and Eucharistic theology?

Luther and Zwingli did not attack each other openly on the sacraments until 1527. Zwingli began his attack by publishing his *Friendly Exposition*, in which he criticized Luther's views in his *Sermon on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ Against the Radicals* (1926). Thereupon, Luther replied to Zwingli directly in his informative but vehement polemic, *That These Words, "This Is My Body," Still Stand Against the Radicals* (1527). Zwingli's caustic response, *That These Words … Retain Their Original Meaning* (1527), was followed by Luther's *Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper* (1528). The literary phase of the controversy concluded with a booklet by Oecolampadius and Zwingli, and in this strained relationship were they to meet in Marburg (see Grimm 1967, 156–157).

2.2 Luther's Sacramental and Eucharistic Theology

By the early 1520s the sacramental[7] system of the medieval church was coming under constant and considerable attack from reforming factions. Luther, in 1520, had redefined the sacraments using the latest Humanist philological scholarship, to challenge their number and meaning. For their number, he affirmed only *baptism* and the *Eucharist*, but rejected the remaining (although he had initially retained penance). It was his understanding of their meaning that formed the basis for their rejection. In his 1520 *Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche* (*On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*), Luther concluded that the two essential characteristics of a sacrament were the Word of God and an outward visible sign. And for him, the only true New Testament sacraments that meet these criteria were *baptism* and the *Eucharist*. He also pointed out the unjustified prominence given to the priest in the sacramental system. He saw the separation between the clergy and the laity as irrelevant (McGrath 1999, 174–176; Beutel 2003, 10).

Luther criticized the Eucharistic system of Catholicism on several fronts. Until the 12th century, it was the general practice to allow all present at the Eucharist to consume both bread and wine. However, historians believe that the increasing offense of some of the laity in spilling the wine (which was, according to the evolving theology of transubstantiation, the very blood of Christ) carelessly on church floors may have led to the ban of the laity, by the 13th century, from receiving the wine. This, for Luther, was unacceptable and unjustifiable and without scriptural or patristic antecedence. So strong was his insistence on the correction of this aberration that the giving of both the bread and the cup to the laity became a hallmark of a congregation's allegiance to his brand of Reformation (McGrath 1999, 176–177).

The doctrine of transubstantiation was also very absurd as far Luther was concerned, and an attempt to rationalize a mystery. The crucial thing for Luther was that Christ was really *present* in the Eucharist and not how He was present. No theory or explanation was needed as to how He was present. Equally for Luther, the idea that the priest offered a sacrifice, offering, or good

[7] Coming from the Latin *sacramentum*, meaning 'something which is consecrated', and refers to church rites which are believed as having the ability to convey the grace of God. They were seen as visible signs or channels of invisible grace. Seven sacraments were recognized – baptism, the Eucharist, penance, confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction. See McGrath 1999, 170–196; Bornkamm 1958, 81–97.

work on behalf of the people was unscriptural. He saw the Eucharist as a promise of the forgiveness of sins, to be received by faith (ibid., 177). Furthermore, for Luther, the only essential requirement is faith, faith in God's promise (Luther 1959, 52). But the aspect of Luther's Eucharistic theology[8] that continued to divide the fledging Protestant movement was the issue of the real presence – the question of whether and how Christ is present in the Eucharist.

It is important to state the need to differentiate Luther's views on the *real presence* from transubstantiation, which rested upon Aristotelian foundations (specifically on his distinction between *substance* and *accident*). This theory of transubstantiation states that the *substance* of something is its nature, whereas its *accidents* are its outward appearances (like colour, shape, smell, etc.). The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation affirms that the *accidents* of the bread and wine (colour, taste, smell, shape, etc.) remain unchanged after being consecrated, while the *substance* changes from that of bread and wine to that of the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ (McGrath 1999, 178). Luther rejected this explanation.

Adventist theologian Norman Gulley reasoned that the difference between Catholic *transubstantiation* and Luther's *consubstantiation* is that the former is a *change* of bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ, while the latter is a *comingling* of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. According to Gulley, "Roman theology has the bread and wine transformed into Christ's body and blood, and Luther has Christ's body and blood under the bread and wine" (Gulley 2016, 416).

It is equally important to note that Luther did not criticize the basic idea that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. He was just against the use of Aristotelian ideas, which to him were alien to Christian theology, in describing Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Luther believed in the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist; his grouse was against one specific way of explaining that presence. On this point, his reforming colleagues, especially those in Zurich, Basle and Strasbourg, felt he was inconsistent and conceding so much to the Roman Church (see McGrath 1999, 178–179).

[8] For a detailed study of Luther's Eucharistic theology, see Barth 2013, 233–246; Barth 2009; Lohse 2006, 167–179, 303–313; Lohse 1995; Jesen 2014, 322–332; Williams 1962, 101–103, 234–257; Kandler 1970.

In a sense, Luther sought to stick to his hermeneutics; wavering at this point would question his long held *sola scriptura* method of interpretation. When he read *hoc est corpus meum* ("this is my body") in Matthew 26:26, to him it must have literally meant that and nothing else. Even Karlstadt's[9] view that Christ pointed to Himself when saying those words could not dissuade him. Luther just saw Karlstadt's idea as a misreading of the text (McGrath 1999, 179). Luther advanced his *real presence* idea by his doctrine of the *ubiquity of Christ*, which is at the heart of his Christology (Strohl 2003, 158). His mind was made up on this and nothing was going to change his view. For Luther, it was his opponents who were mistaken in their hermeneutics, not himself.

2.3 Zwingli's Sacramental and Eucharistic Theology

Zwingli's disposition to the sacraments was largely controversial. He began by condemning the Roman Church's understanding of the sacrament in his March 1525 *A Commentary on the True and False Religion.* He rejected monastic vows, purgatory, and the invocation of the saints, while denouncing the Pope as antichrist (Baker 2003, 2082). He experienced a developmental change in his views of the sacraments. In 1524 he repudiated his earlier stance that the sacraments can strengthen faith. Key to his sacramental and Eucharistic theological formation is his stress on the inwardness of religion and his averseness to outward ceremonies (see Stephens 1997, 98–107; Grötzinger 1980, 89–97; Büsser 1973, 63–69; Gäbler 2004, 113–117).

Some historians observe that Zwingli did not like the word *sacrament* because it was not biblical and not German. He repudiated the sacred aura the word carries. Partly affected by Platonism, he reasoned that the sovereignty of God meant that the Spirit is not bound by the sacraments or limited to them, and that the outward cannot affect the inward. Building on Augustine's definition of a sacrament as *sign of a sacred thing*, Zwingli insisted that a sign cannot be what it signifies, otherwise it would not be a sign. He followed Luther in rejecting all but two sacraments, though he held on to penance as sacramental until 1520 (see Stephens 2004, 87–88; McGrath 1999, 188).

[9] Karlstadt, once Luther's colleague at Wittenberg, later became an opponent in 1520s. It was he who first began to have a symbolic view of the Eucharist at the university. See Wriedt 2003, 108–109.

Zwingli waged his sacramental *war* on two fronts – with the Anabaptists on *baptism* and with the Lutherans on the *Eucharist*. Before the radicals refused to baptize their infants, and in 1525, when the first rebaptisms were held, Zwingli had written little on baptism. His initial understanding was that faith, rather than baptism, was to be emphasized and that baptism was not necessary for infants, arguing that baptized infants should not be confirmed until they could confess their faith. He later recanted his view that baptism strengthens faith. However, from December 1524, Zwingli began to argue for infant baptism, arguing that baptism is an initiation both of those who have already believed and those who are going to believe. For him, baptism replaced circumcision, which infants received before believing. Furthermore, Zwingli even held that it is likely that children were in the households baptized in I Corinthians 1 and Acts 16, and that the New Testament, while not explicitly instructing infant baptism, does not forbid it (see Stephens 2004, 88).

Zwingli's theology of the sacrament of baptism evolved with the elaboration of old views and development of new ones. He accused Anabaptists, among others, of overemphasizing outward baptism, because according to him, no outward action can purify the soul since baptism was a pledge to God. But in 1525 he evolved from seeing baptism as our pledge to God, to speaking of it as God's pledge to us. Zwingli simply rejected the idea that unbaptized infants are damned, since as he argued, salvation does not depend on baptism, but ultimately on election (ibid., 88–89).

In the end, Zwingli held that a sacrament is a human act and belongs to the confession of the community of faith. This confession refers to the event of the cross; there man's pardon was accomplished, the sacrament points beyond itself. Therefore, the sacrament itself is forbidden to communicate grace or to relieve the burdened conscience; It presupposes faith (see Locher 1967, 567–579).

As early as 1524, Zwingli had begun articulating his Eucharistic theology[10] in Zurich. The Eucharist, argued Zwingli, was a symbolic meal which was the commemoration of the death of Christ on the cross. For him, it was a thanksgiving for Christ's work of salvation, and it brought together God's people as a community in which Christ was spiritually present. He saw the bread and

[10] For some insight into his Eucharistic theology, see Gäbler 1986, 131–139; Gestrich 1967, 20–41; Farner 1960, 227–232; Dickens 1966, 107–124; Staehlin 1897, 175–332).

wine as symbols of Christ's presence in the minds and hearts of believers, but he never believed that the Eucharistic elements became the body and blood of Christ. Zwingli was convinced from his reading of Augustine that this was the patristic understanding of the Eucharist. For this, Luther accused not only Zwingli, but also Oecolampadius, Reformer at Basel, of just following the Karlstadt tradition. He labelled them as being possessed by the same satanic spirit that controlled Thomas Müntzer and even the so-called *Zwickau prophets* (Edwards 2003, 197–200).

Zwingli and Oecolampadius were in substantial accord with Karlstadt in their Eucharistic thinking. For Karlstadt, the sacrament has no relation to forgiveness of sins. It is a rite in which we remember the meaning of Christ's death for us, the reality in which our forgiveness exists. Zwingli and Oecolampadius argued that the Eucharistic text must be taken symbolically, even though they agreed on the real spiritual presence of Christ. And this formed the two basic elements of the Zwinglian Eucharistic theology: Christ's ascension to be at God's right hand removed him physically from the world, and that John 6:63 made His physical presence unnecessary (Sider 1978, 78–79; Edwards 2003, 1999; see also Stephens 2004, 89–90).

Zwingli's Christology is evident here. In line with the Antioch school, he distinguishes between the *divine* and *human* natures of Christ. For Zwingli, Christ referred to his earthly body in His words of institution and not his risen body which is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. The reunion with his human nature will only be at His return and not at the commemoration of the Eucharist. And to claim that Christ was in the sacramental elements would mean denigrating His majesty. Zwingli also argued that if the laity continued to take the Eucharistic elements as the real body and blood of Christ, then they would persist in the pre-Reformation abuse of the sacraments (Wriedt 2003, 109; Hendrix 2004, 51).

However, Luther, in his many replies, notably in *That These Words of Christ "This Is My Body," Etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* (1527) and *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), brushed off the objections of his opponents by arguing that God's right hand refers not to a physical location in heaven but to God's almighty power, which is ubiquitous. And on John 6:63, Luther argued that accepting his opponents' interpretation of the text negates the incarnation. He refused to apply John 6:63 in interpreting the words of institution, insisting that it has nothing to do with the Eucharist. Luther

stressed that the doctrines of the ubiquity of Christ and the union of His natures are very crucial, not just in the Eucharist, but in the salvation of man. According to Luther, questioning these assertions subjects the foundations of the Christian faith to a collapse (Hendrix 2004, 51; Wriedt 2003, 109–110).

3. Reflection on the Intra-Reformation Theological Disputes

English Anglican historian James Atkinson concurred that "the differences between the Reformers received their bitterest expression in their Eucharistic theology" (Atkinson 1968, 268). The unsavoury manner of the dispute escalated until all hopes of forging a common front against their common adversaries were lost. I propose five factors that exacerbated the fragile unity that the Lutherans and Zwinglians shared, until the irreconcilable meetings at Marburg.

3.1 Conflicting Hermeneutics

It was obvious that both camps had different theological frameworks and hermeneutics. For instance, even when both retained the traditional practice of infant baptism, they did so for contrasting reasons. For Luther, sacraments could generate faith and hence baptism can do just that in an infant. But for Zwingli, sacraments demonstrated allegiance and membership to a community, hence baptism shows that an infant belonged to the community of faith (see McGrath 1999, 188). And long after the Reformers, it is hardly contestable today that differing hermeneutics are at the heart of a proliferation of theologies in Christendom and faith communities. The reasoning is clear: how we read and interpret the Bible determines and impacts how we understand it and affects how we live our lives. Theological disputes are conceived and nurtured in the womb of incongruent hermeneutics.

3.2 Labels

Luther branded Zwingli a fanatic. And Zwingli's involvement in politics and socialism made Luther to identify him with enthusiasts like Karlstadt and Müntzer. And this may have made Luther suspicious of Zwingli's views. However, Zwingli also put Luther under the same condemnation as the Pope, for he suspected him of having theological sympathies for Rome (Atkinson 1968, 270). Luther equally labelled Zwingli and Oecolampadius stooges of Karlstadt in the diatribe *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525). He accused them

of being possessed by the devil and worse than the papist. And calling them *Schwarmgeister* (swarm spirits) was not a problem for him (Collinson 2005, 66). It was a case of mutual suspicion, and theological discussions do not thrive in such an atmosphere. Theological labels are problematic because people are not usually static in their theological orientations and reflections; people grow and develop in their theology. Theological reasoning is a progressive enterprise. While truth as found in the Bible is inviolable, our understanding of it grows with time and study. Branding theological opponents makes for a difficult theological discussion. Often, virulent labels are put on the individual instead of keen and open discussion of the contending issue.

3.3 Personality Clash

The personalities of both men came to play. Luther seemed very confrontational and assertive about his theological discoveries. He appeared to have considered himself as having a major and leading role in the Reformation. It is difficult to know if he viewed his reforming colleagues as being as important as himself. According to Atkinson, he "sensed in them a carnal, speculative, revolutionary, radical mind" which would not accept the plain teachings of the Bible. Zwingli, although more moderate and courteous than Luther, exuded so much self-assurance in his many articles to Luther. And his indictment of Luther in the Peasant's War (1525) only ensured that when at last the pair met for the first and only time at Marburg, they met each other as foes (ibid., 270).

So, these Reformers turned a theological matter into a personality contest. Unquestionably Zwingli initially admired Luther. He called Luther the *Elijah of the Reformation*, or the *David who killed the Roman wild bear*, or even a soldier of God "who scrutinizes the Scriptures with such accuracy that a man like him is hardly to be found every thousand years" (Courvoisier 1963, 17). Unfortunately, Zwingli's good will was not sufficient to erase the theological *cold war* between the two men, because Luther considered those differences intractable. It was so bad that Luther, even at Zwingli's death in battle on October 11, 1531, could only speak ill of him. In recalling his November 1531 conversation with John Staupitz, Luther noted:

> While I was in Erfurt, I once said to Dr. Staupitz, 'dear doctor, our Lord God treats people too horribly. Who can serve him as long as He strikes people down right and left, as we see He does in many cases

> involving our adversaries?' Then Dr. Staupitz answered, 'dear fellow, learn to think of God differently. If He did not treat them in this way, how could God restrain these blockheads? God strikes us for our own good, in order that He might free us who would otherwise be crushed.' When I was in Coburg these comments about adversaries taught me the meaning of the words in the Decalogue, 'I the Lord your God am a jealous God.' It is not so much a cruel punishment of adversaries as it is a necessary defence of ourselves. They say Zwingli recently died thus; if his error had prevailed, we would have perished, and our church with us. It was a judgment of God (Luther 1955–1969, 11).

There is often a comingling of personalities in theological disputes, especially when it comes from the place and assumption of "defending the faith". In the theological industry that boasts of established and honed voices and names, any crude and dissenting voice from strange and obscure sources will be seen as an attack on the established order of things. It was so with the Reformers; it is unfortunately so with many contemporary faith communities.

3.4 Humanist Influence

The influence of the humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1467–1536)[11] was significant in the disputes. Luther accused Zwingli of leaning heavily on Erasmus, with whom he had many polemics, especially on *free will*. Luther and Erasmus began as friends who saw the church as needing reforms, but their paths parted as they saw incompatibilities in each other. Luther would say of Erasmus, "Erasmus is an eel. Nobody can grasp him except Christ alone. He is a double-dealing man" (Luther 1955–1969, 19). Luther speaks further of Erasmus:

> When Elector Frederick asked him in Cologne why Luther was condemned, what wrong he had done, Erasmus replied, 'He has done much wrong who attacks the monks in their bellies and the pope in his crown.' It was the remarkable astuteness of Satan that captivated the world when he attacked the superstitions of the pope. Then he corrupted the youth with the wicked opinions he expressed in his colloquies. God keep him in check! The stratagem of Satan is violent (ibid., 19).

[11] For insights in Erasmian theology, see Rummel 2004, 28–38; Erasmus 1961, 1–94).

This influence of humanism gave rise to conflicting hermeneutics in the ensuing disputes (McGrath 2004, 34–66, 149–166; McGrath 1999, 39–65). In direct connection with the Eucharistic controversy were the Christological emphases of Zwingli and Luther. Zwingli, like Erasmus, emphasized the separation of the two natures of Christ (Atkinson 1968, 270–271).[12] Luther saw as problematic, Zwingli's use of figures of speech derived from classical studies – trope, allegory, ellipsis, metathesis, aposiopesis, hyperbole, prolepsis, synecdoche, and alloiosis – the last of these being used by Zwingli to argue that Christ's humility could sometimes imply His divinity, and vice versa (Lindberg 2010, 185).

3.5 Theology's Importance

Overall, one can see the great role theology played during the Reformation. If theology was not of critical importance to the Reformers, why would they have theological controversies at first? Sasse has even argued that "no one can understand Luther unless he has understood his fight for the real presence" (Sasse 1977, 9). Luther must have felt that this crucial part of his theological framework was so indispensable that he was willing to jeopardize the unity of the movement rather than change his stance.

The intra-Reformation theological controversies also had deep political ramifications. The Eucharistic controversy injured the political integration of the Protestant Reformation. It was becoming obvious that unless the movement could achieve a significant degree of internal unity, it might be permanently separated, and the external forces of the pope and emperor might clamp down heavily on them. It was in the context of the impending political disaster that the Marburg Colloquy was convened as a last resort in attempting to forge a doctrinal, political, and military alliance. To achieve this political uniformity, the importance of intra-Protestant theological unity was accentuated. But what were the political issues that further necessitated the Marburg meetings?

[12] McGrath notes that "Zwingli's relation to both Erasmus and Luther is difficult to assess on the basis of explicit references in his published writings, in that he appears defensively to minimize his obligations to both for domestic political reasons" (McGrath 2004, 48; Neuser 1977, 38–74).

4. The Political Milieu of the Marburg Colloquy

Luther owed the political survival of the Reformation he was spearheading against the assault of Rome to three territorial princes – Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, and Frederick the Wise.[13] But Philip stands at the centre of the political circumstances preceding the Marburg Colloquy. The colloquy was his attempt to form a pan-Protestant alliance of all evangelical territories, including the Swiss cantons, against the emperor and Rome. Every Protestant sovereign claimed and exercised the *jus reformandi religionem* and settled the question of which church to allow in their territory. Saxony, Hesse, Prussia, Anhalt, Lüneburg, East Friesland, Schleswig-Holstein, Silesia, and the cities of Nürnberg, Augsburg, Frankfurt, Ulm, Strassburg, Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck all supported the Reformation. But the dukes of Bavaria, the house of Austria and the emperor never did (see Atkinson 1968, 278; Green 1964, 140–143; Grimm 1967, 195).

The Landgrave agreed with Zwingli and the Strasbourg group that nothing short of a federation of all Protestant territories could save the cause of the Protestant Reformation. Philip, a Lutheran by conviction (he had, alongside Elector John of Saxony assumed the leadership of the Gotha-Torgau League[14] of the Lutheran princes in 1526 after accepting the Lutheran cause for himself and his territory in 1524) was willing to forge a political alliance with those of a different belief, though the collective threat felt by both the Lutheran and Zwinglian camps after the second Diet of Speyer (1529) made such arrangement an explorable option. Martin Bucer had also persuaded Philip that the differences between Luther and Zwingli were not insuperable and that there should be an accord based on a mutual examination and study of the Bible (Sasse 1959, 199–200).

By withdrawing the religious freedom previously extended to Lutherans in areas where they constituted a minority, the second Diet of Speyer in 1529 had

[13] For more on these men and others, see Tillmanns 1959.

[14] This may have been a reaction to similar leagues formed to counter the spread of Lutheranism. In 1524 papal legate, Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio had formed the Regensburg Union, consisting of Archduke Ferdinand, the two dukes of Bavaria, the cardinal-archbishop of Salzburg, and some bishops of southern Germany. Also, in 1525 a similar league was formed in northern Germany, called the League of Dessau. Its leading members were Duke George of Saxony, Archbishop Albert of Mainz, the elector of Brandenburg, and the two dukes of Brunswick (see Grimm 1967, 164).

placed the very existence of Lutherans and Zwinglians in danger. Philip reasoned that Protestants should seek protection through a common confession and confederation. His goal was to unite the Lutherans, the Swiss, and the Strassburgers, who took an intermediate position on the Eucharist (Byrd 1969, 19).

After the second Diet of Speyer in 1529, Germany was divided into two camps. Archduke Ferdinand had discarded the caution of his brother Charles the Emperor and had demanded the immediate annihilation of those considered as heretics, even citing the Turkish invasion of Vienna as God's anger over the Lutheran heresy. Ferdinand's action unified the Evangelicals, who themselves had been divided on faith and strategy. Despite Ferdinand's obstinacy, the decree of the diet failed to impose the far-reaching requirements that he desired. In Catholic territories there was to be no religious liberty for Lutherans, but the privilege of worship was to be extended to Catholics in the Lutheran controlled territories. However, on April 19, six of the territorial princes, with the support of several representatives from the city, objected to this arrangement, and because of their *protest* the name *Protestant* was born. They pointed out that the action breached the agreement they had made in Speyer in 1526. Neither side was tolerant. It is significant to note that in this protest the Zwinglians and Lutherans were joined. These protesting estates held that "in matters patterning to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls, everyone must himself give an answer to God" (Reu 1930, 489; Kittelson 1986, 220–221).

On April 18, 1524, the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* (meaning that each territory should have its own religion and the religion of the prince determines the religion of the people) was reinforced at the Diet of Nürnberg (three diets held between 1522–1524) and each prince was to enforce the Edit of Worms in his territory in so far as possible. The long absence of the newly elected emperor Charles V played an important role in the realization of the Marburg Colloquy. Soon after the Diet of Worms in 1521, which condemned Lutheranism as heretical, Charles V left Germany. Throughout the 1520s, he was constantly in conflicts with Francis I of France and the pope until the three parties reached an agreement in 1529. At Charles' return to Germany to stamp out the Protestant movement, the Ottoman Empire's army was approaching Vienna, forcing him to set aside religious differences and, together with the German Protestant princes, defend the empire (Byrd 1969, 20).

It was in this heightened imminence of a collective disaster that a Protestant alliance became very necessary. But the leading Reformers were divided as to the nature of the proposed alliance. Luther and Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) were particularly opposed to any political and military alliance to buttress the Reformation. For them, the truth of the Gospel would prevail of itself, since it was established without arms and would maintain itself without arms. Also, they could not sanction any insurrection against the emperor. Zwingli was, however, supportive of any such alliance. Philip, who was Lutheran in name, but Zwinglian in political attitude, was committed to forging a common Protestant front (see Atkinson 1968, 271–272). In a letter to Zwingli on April 22, 1529, Philip remarked that

> we are endeavouring to bring together at some suitable place Luther and Melanchthon and some of those who hold your view of the sacrament, so that, if a merciful God grants us His favour, they may come to some scriptural agreement about that doctrine and live in harmony, as becomes Christians (Sasse 1959, 210).

Philip also initiated contacts with Francis I, Zapolya, and the south-German cities. And after the protest of Speyer, he formed a secret alliance with Electoral Saxony, Strasbourg, Nürnberg and Ulm in anticipation for a larger alliance (Grimm 1967, 165, 166). Rumours peddled by Otto von Pack, an official of the duke of Saxony, who in 1528 told Philip that he had discovered a treaty made by the Catholic princes to exterminate the Lutherans, only heightened tensions between the Catholic and Lutheran princes, even though this purported letter was found to be a forgery. In the intervening time, at the behest of Margrave George of Brandenburg, Elector John of Saxony, and the city of Nürnberg, series of meetings were held by theologians and princes for the purpose of finding a theological springboard for the desired political union. The results of these deliberations birthed seventeen articles known as the *Schwabach Articles* (Grimm 1967, 1965, 166).

As the political situation of the Protestants worsened in 1528, there were increasing efforts to build bridges between Lutheran and Zwinglian views in order to unify the anti-papal forces. The impetus for such a reconciliation lay in Strasbourg. Wolfgang Capito and Bucer thought of a common ground and promoted the plan to settle the differences through a learned disputation. Bucer mediated between Zwingli and Luther. He rejected the *real presence* with Zwingli and emphasized spiritual nourishment; with Luther he recognized in

the Eucharist a wholesome gift for the soul. Bucer was convinced the conflicting views of the Reformers could be reconciled. Politically, Philip worked to unite all Protestant forces. Therefore, he took up the plan of a theologians' meeting as a means of unification and invited the opponents to Marburg. Zwingli agreed to participate because he still expected to be able to convince Luther. Joyfully he rode to Hesse. The Wittenberger, on the other hand, did not expect anything from such an event and had to be urged by his prince to participate (see Gäbler 2004, 121–122).

Although Zwingli had welcomed the idea of the Colloquy, for both religious and political considerations, Luther opposed it because he felt force should not be used in matters of faith. Melanchthon had hesitated to unite with a people he saw as radical for fear of offending Rome, with whom he still hoped to come to an agreement. But just in reluctant deference to the Landgrave and their prince, Luther and Melanchthon agreed to come, even though they were fixated on the belief that Zwingli's theology was in common with the radicals and leaders of the Peasants' Revolt. Zwingli, on the other hand, was highly suspicious of any theological leanings with Catholicism. Also, he did not think the sacraments were as important as the urgently needed common front. So, he was willing to forge an alliance with Luther's camp, even without all the doctrines sorted out. But for Luther, the Zwinglians and their acquaintances were not his brethren, and theology could not be sacrificed for uniformity. This was the charged atmosphere that hovered around Marburg (Grimm 1967, 159, 161).

5. Botched Amalgamation at Marburg

The Marburg Colloquy was held from October 1–4, 1529. Marburg was a small town in a large forest to the north of Frankfurt am Main. It is far west and a little south of Wittenberg and is much easier to reach from the south. Bucer, Hedio, Zwingli, and Oecolampadius could simply float down the Rhine River, go up the Main to Frankfurt, and then travel overland, while for Luther and his party the entire trip was by wagon (Kittelson 1986, 222; see also Mayer 1982, 175–185; Haas 1996, 249–260; Brecht 1986, 315–324; Brady 1995, 70–71; Schäfer 1952, 175–100; Hug 1931, 169–180; Farner 1960, 339–381; Schwiebert 1950, 695–714; Staehelin 1897, 381–409).

Luther was anticipating something like his public appearances at Leipzig in 1519 and when he faced Eck and at Worms in 1521, standing before the

emperor and defending his faith against the Roman Church. At Marburg, he stood for his doctrinal position against that of his reforming colleagues. It was the elector of Saxony who urged Luther and Melanchthon to attend the meeting, and as a way to persuade them, he commissioned theologians of the University of Wittenberg to draft the so-called *Articles of Schwabach* to serve as a basis for the talks. Their minds were already made up and armed with this document they were not going to shift grounds.

Luther and Melanchthon were accompanied by Justus Jonas, Johann Brenz, Justus Menius, Kasper Cruciger, Georg Rörer, Fredrich Myconius, Stephan Agricola (who stood in for Urbanus Rhegius who had fallen ill), and Andreas Osiander. This contingent was poised to engage Zwingli who had arrived two days earlier in the company of Oecolampadius. Bucer, Hedio, Capito, and Johannes Sturm, Rudolf Collin, Ulrich Funk, and Felix from Basel were also present on the Zwinglian divide. Besides these main debaters, theologians from Wittenberg, Strasbourg, Ulm, Nuremberg and Hall also participated (Gäbler 2004, 122).

A number of people were excluded from the colloquy. The *sweating plague* has been noted as a possible reason, while others think that the disputants felt that nothing could be gained by allowing the attendance of a large crowd. The composition of the group finally admitted included the Landgrave, his chancellors, some lesser nobles and learned men. Brenz states that there were fifty or sixty people present, while Zwingli records at the most twenty-four. Brenz undoubtedly has a more plausible figure since Jonas lists by name nineteen individuals who were present. And he admits that he is listing only prominent personages (Koehler 1929, 49–51; Byrd 1969, 75–76).

When the discussions began, no new arguments were presented on either side, and no new aspects were raised beyond those already expressed in the many literary disputes that preceded the meetings (Loewenich 1982, 286–292; Gäbler 2004, 122). The first technical issue to be resolved was the use of language. Zwingli had proposed to Philip as early as May 7, 1529, that in any colloquy he should use Latin because the Swiss tongue was strange to German ears. Again, on July 14th of the same year Zwingli wrote: "I fear that if we meet, I shall not be understood in my tongue. So, I do not know whether it would not be better if we used Latin" (Jackson 1901, 311). When the subject of which language should be used came up at Marburg, Zwingli preferred Latin, and Luther seemed to have preferred same in the past. For he once wrote

> There are so many German dialects . . . that the Germans don't understand one another. The Swiss have almost no diphthongs at all. The Swabians and Hessians don't understand each other, and the Bavarians are such barbarians among themselves that at times they can't understand one another (Luther 1955–1969, 310).

However, the option of German carried the day, maybe because of Luther's penchant for the use of the vernacular instead of Latin; and if ever any vernacular will be chosen, it must be the German, since Luther had acknowledged that the German tongue was the most perfect of all. He even chided Zwingli's use of the Greek New Testament as mere pride and desire to be famous (Luther 1955–1969, 310, 376).

Furthermore, Zwingli clashed with Luther's demands concerning the official recording of the discussions. Luther's insistence that no shorthand reports of the speeches be made helped to create an atmosphere of candidness, with no one fearing of what might be written of their utterances. This concession of recorded speech has left historians bereft of official minutes of the meetings. Hence today, there exist only reports written from notes made after the debate from which historians attempt to reconstruct the picture of the deliberative sessions at Marburg (Byrd 1969, 89, 90). Contemporary knowledge of the proceedings of October 2 and 3 are primarily derived from a careful reconstruction Walter Koehler has produced from piecemeal reports of some eyewitnesses (Koehler 1929).

The primary sources on the Marburg Colloquy are comparatively numerous. While an official transcript of the proceedings was not kept, certain observers took notes and immediately after the conference supplemented these notes with the material they had retained in their memories. All the sources are untranslated and are found in either German or Latin. Some of the individual accounts are those of (a) Hedio (*Itinerarium*), a theologian who accompanied Zwingli to Marburg. His account was written based on copious notes taken during the debate. The account is subjective, clearly championing the cause of the Swiss. (b) Rudolph Collin, professor of Greek at Zurich, ranks second in importance. Some scholars are of the opinion that Hedio and Collin met immediately after the Colloquy or during the recesses and supplemented each other's notes. (c) Not as complete as the above-mentioned, but not wholly lacking in value is the account of the so-called Anonymous. He states that his words are a *quodam qui interfuit* (something that was present). The

author is evidently a Lutheran; perhaps he was Friederich Myconius, Lutheran pastor at Gotha, who was present at the Colloquy. (d) In the Stadtbibliothek of Nürnberg reposes the original account of Osiander, the Lutheran. He came to Marburg sometime after the Colloquy began. Therefore, the forepart of his account has hearsay as its basis. The rest of his account was written based on recollection or perhaps notes. (e) Bullinger, Zwingli's successor at Zurich, in his *History of the Reformation* has an account of the debate. It is evident that Bullinger used Collin as his source. (f) Brenz, the precocious student of Luther, wrote three reports of the debate. The importance of his accounts lies in their emphasis on Zwingli's citations from the Church Fathers. (g) There is also the *Rhapsodie colloquii ad Marburgum* (rhapsody of the colloquy at Marburg). The author is unknown. Luther is largely ignored throughout the account. (h) There is also the account of Heinrich Utinger. It is evident that this work does not have notes taken during the Colloquy as its basis (Beto 1945, 73–74).

After the Zwinglians and the Lutherans arrived at Marburg, Zwingli with Melanchthon, and Luther with Oecolampadius held private discussions before the general colloquy began. Zwingli and Melanchthon have written detailed accounts of their preliminary discussion. Their discussion hinged on the doctrines of Original Sin, the part the Word and Sacrament play in the operation of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of the Eucharist. Both disputants agreed on all doctrines save that of the Eucharist. In arguing with Melanchthon, Zwingli used the same proofs he had been using in his previous polemical writings – John 6: 63 and the local presence of Christ at the right hand of the Father. But Melanchthon's repeated response to these *proofs* was Matt. 26: 26 – "This is My body". Zwingli finally accused the Wittenberg theologian of begging the question. While they were disputing, Luther and Oecolampadius were also in a private discussion, but no account mentions the subject discussed (Koehler 1929, 40–48).

The Colloquy was officially declared open by Philip's chancellor, Feige, who thanked the participants for coming, stated the purpose of the meetings, and called on the disputants not to seek their glory but God's glory. Luther also made some introductory remarks and also opined that other doctrines (trinity, original sin, the person of Christ, baptism, purgatory, justification, and the function of the Word of God) be discussed, claiming that the Swiss had been in error in them. Zwingli retorted that himself and Melanchthon had

agreed on those, and that his primary aim of coming to Marburg was to discuss the Eucharist. Oecolampadius was in concord with Zwingli on this point. At this juncture Luther wrote the words *hoc est corpus meum* ("this is my body") on the table before him, contending that these words of Christ were to be the fundamental thesis of the Colloquy (ibid., 59–60).

For the next few hours, the colloquy assumed the form of a debate between Luther and Oecolampadius. The later argued that the words of institution could be understood figuratively, citing as proof text, Christ's words in John 15:1, "I am the true Vine". Luther admitted that the Bible uses figures of speech, but he was unwilling to admit that John 15:1 and the words of *institution* were such figures. He appealed to the Church Fathers for support. But Oecolampadius reiterated that the text could be interpreted as figures. Luther further maintained that before any passage of Scripture could be interpreted figuratively, it must be proved that such an interpretation is the only possible one. Oecolampadius then tried a new approach to support his position, John 6:63 became the *locus classicus* of the Swiss and he contended that Christ for all time rejected a carnal eating of His body (ibid., 59–60).

Staying with John 6:63, Luther interpreted it in a way not to negate his doctrine of the *real presence*. Luther argued that in John 6 the Lord is speaking of the Jews of Capernaum and is trying to impress upon their all too carnal minds the fact that His body was not to be eaten as meat on a plate but in a more spiritual manner (ibid., 60–61). The intense argument went on for a while and Luther, not willing to move from his stand, even asserted that he would and could eat manure if God required him so. Luther and Oecolampadius closed their argument by a restatement of their *loci classici*, Matt. 26:26 and John 6:63, respectively. Oecolampadius then retired for a time from active involvement in the disputations at the colloquy, and Zwingli came to the fore (see Beto 1945, 79).

Zwingli began by accusing Luther of coming to the meetings with a preconceived notion since he was not willing to recant his Eucharistic theology even when his views were found wanting. Zwingli's speech was very lengthy. His opening argument includes quoting the Greek of John 6:63 and emphasising the exclusion of a bodily eating; he berated Luther for his insistence on a literal interpretation and the absurdity of suggesting he could eat manure if God required him so; and then he apologized for speaking so harshly and

insisted that doctrinal concord was not indispensable for achieving unity. Luther, nonetheless, did not give in. he labelled the texts used by his opponents as allegorical and not figurative, and argued that John 6:63 has nothing to do with the Eucharist. Zwingli would not also give in, citing John 6 as his stronghold and the correct understanding of the true eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. Now Luther accused Zwingli of becoming bitter and of using sophistical dialectic. But Zwingli retorted that it was not about sophistical dialectic but about John 6:63 which was a *neck breaker* for Luther. However, Luther in a friendly fashion urged Zwingli to keep rancor out of the debate and to refrain from "tedious, unnecessary, irrelevant, and disgusting drivel" (*lanng, unnoetig, undienstlich, und verdriesslich geschwetz*) (Koehler, 66–69, 73–76; Beto, 82).

The heated theological diatribe between the two reformers continued in new dimensions. Zwingli stretched his argument by even pointing out disparities in Luther and Melanchthon's views on the Eucharist, noting that the latter lends credence to a symbolic rendering of the words of *institution*. Another unresolved aspect was about the role of the faith of the officiant and the recipient at the Eucharist. Then Zwingli relinquished the defence of the Reformed position to Oecolampadius, but Luther and Melanchthon continued the defence of the German position. Oecolampadius expressed dissatisfaction with Luther's exposition of John 6, accusing him of violating Scripture. Citing Christ's conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, where Christ demands rebirth, or regeneration, as the prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of God, Oecolampadius asserted that that prerequisite makes actual reception of Christ's body in the Eucharist unnecessary. Luther firmly agreed with Oecolampadius on the inviolability of Scripture but rejected his hermeneutics of John 3. Then both men had an unresolvable dispute on the natures of Christ, and this only deepened the theological discord that had already festered. The rest of the Colloquy was a round of back-and-forth argumentation among Zwingli, Luther, Melanchthon, and others (Koehler 80–83, 85–94; also see Linberg 2000, 121–123; Wandel 2011, 236–243; Kittelson, 222–227).

On Sunday afternoon, October 3, the debate ended with a protest on the part of the mediating Strassburg theologians against Luther's statement at the beginning of the colloquy regarding their unorthodoxy. Jacob Sturm and Bucer took to the defence of the Strassburgers. Luther made light of his previous accusation by stating that the Strassburg theologians were not his disciples,

therefore, he was not much concerned with what they taught. The debate was formally declared closed by Chancellor Feige. More so, the outbreak of an epidemic expedited the hasty calling off of the meetings (Beto, 90).

Alister McGrath reasons that by Luther and Zwingli failing to settle their differences, Philip of Hesse's hope of a united evangelical front against the newly regrouped Catholic forces was dashed, and the political credibility of the Reformation seriously compromised. While some partial alignments of vision and policy were achieved, in practice these were insufficient to hold the movement together (McGrath 2007, 75).

Although the opposing Reformers agreed on fourteen articles of doctrine (such as clerical marriage, the priesthood of all believers, baptism, and church-state relations, etc) in Marburg, they could not find a common ground on the issue of Christ's presence in the sacrament. This sole point of discord was the proverbial *straw that broke the camel's back*. The controversy continued even after Marburg, as both wings left there claiming victory respectively. In fact, the Lutheran wing preferred going into a religious concord with heathens than with the Zwinglians, who took the Eucharist symbolically. And since the attempt at theological unity – the prerequisite for political uniformity – failed, Philip's plan for a pan-Protestant union also failed. The following year at the Diet of Augsburg there was a clearly divided Protestant front. Three separate confessions were presented to the emperor: the *Augsburg Confession* from the Lutherans, the *Tetrapolitan* Confession by Bucer and Strasbourg, and Zwingli's own personal confession, *Fidei Ratio* (see Mullett 2010, 312; Beto 91).

6. Any Marburg Lessons?

Separated from the 1529 Marburg Colloquy by time, political circumstances, religious milieu, and culture, can contemporary Christians and Adventists glean anything from the events and personalities at Marburg? It is almost a consensus by Reformation historians that the theological discord that could not be reconciled at Marburg lay at the foundation of the splintering of the Protestant movement. Things could have been quite different had the Colloquy reached a theological agreement (Kolb 2017, 147).

I suggest six lessons Christians (and Adventists) can learn from Marburg.

6.1 Theology is Dynamic

Our theological understanding ought to keep growing. Especially for Luther, his understanding of the Eucharist was final, and he was not going to swerve. His argumentation at Marburg seemed a mere formality as he had placed his opponents in the wrong even before the meetings. Our understanding of truth is progressive because truth itself has a dynamic nature. As many theological voices continue to be heard in the church, it is important that humility and openness attend theological discussions.

The critical balance that must be maintained is between loyalty to the theological heritage of the church and the liberty to seek deeper and clearer understanding of such heritage. It will be preposterous to reason that our faith pioneers have done all the theologizing that needs to be done, or that they have sorted all the issues in our theological menu and our own role is just to do the lazy work of consuming their theology.

What Luther exhibited by not being tolerant to the views of his reforming brethren was the same spirit that he rejected when the Roman Catholic authorities rejected his novel understanding of the Bible. Theology, being contextual, ought to be a colourful enterprise that allows for enriching reflections from the different standpoints of theologians. What remains irreducible is the permanency of Bible truth. But there must be an intentional creation of "safe space" for the theological business in the church and its theological institutions. The church and its leading hierarchies should refrain from "theological gagging" of those who think outside of the doctrinal box of the church. While outright "heresy" is to be addressed, dynamic theological thinking should be allowed unhindered, for by so doing the theology of the church is pruned and reinforced. Even Ellen G. White (1827–1915), the prophetic voice of the Adventist Church, counselled that "it is the work of true education … to train young people to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other people's thought (White 2000, 12).[15]

6.2 Hermeneutics is Critical

Hermeneutics is crucial in engendering theological congruence. The conflicting hermeneutics that climaxed at Marburg led to conflicting understanding

[15] I find Pöhler's *Dynamic Truth* (2020) a rich resource in the discussion of the dynamic nature of theology.

and conclusions. Doctrinal unity in a faith community would remain unattainable when conflicting methods of hermeneutics operate. However, it is also narrow minded if just one hermeneutical method is enforced. The safer option seems to be a balanced and healthy interplay of methods. Different genres might not always require the same hermeneutical method. Luther's literal reading of the Eucharistic texts may not always apply to every text, while Zwingli's symbolic reading also has its limitations and contexts.

A friendly Bible conference could do a better job than hurling one's hermeneutical method at opponents, which was the case at Marburg where the hasty quest for political concord and expediency did not allow for the needed quality time for robust theological reflection. Theology, as an enterprise, requires time. It is true that communities of faith make conclusive theological statements in order to unify the faith of their adherents, yet, windows should be provided for new questions and unasked questions to be asked of previously held beliefs. This is even more important in the ever-changing contexts the church operates in. For the church to be relevant in its context, its theology must be relevant too. Afterall, what is the use of faith or belief if it has lost its relevance?

Despite this need for theological liberty, the church's theologians must learn that the unity of the church is more important than making a point as a theologian. While "truth discovery" must not be sacrificed for uniformity in the church (which was what the reformers stood for in their contestations with the papal legates), theologians and Bible scholars must possess a kind of "critical humility" in their theological enterprise, especially in the use of hermeneutics and other tools and methods of Bible study. All tools, no matter how plausible and widely accepted they are in academic world, that lead to the denigration of the Bible and by extension the faith of believers should be abandoned for the sake of unity of faith.

6.3 Love is the Grand Theology

Christian love transcends theology. The command to love is itself a doctrine. The Reformers readily criticized each other to a deplorable level. Name calling and negative theological labels became commonplace. At Marburg, the hostile and often incensed nature of the debates was glaring. Luther did not believe his opponents were of the same spirit with him and even refused Zwingli's

hand of fellowship. Theologising was taken so far that simple Christian courtesy was relegated.

The sharp theological lines among believers today are indicative of the same spirit that was at work at Marburg. Members of the same community of faith have arrayed themselves in theological cliques – conservative and liberal, progressive and traditional, historic and modern, present truth and new light, and a plethora of other labels. But these labels are deceptive and breed ill-feelings. It is unusual, for instance, to be liberal in every element of theology. But once a label is attached to an individual or a group, its blinding effect makes it difficult to listen from the heart.

The meeting point should be that the church accommodates all hues of believers and through nurture bring all to reflect the Lord Jesus Christ. Theology is about God and not about us. Theology is not how we see faith but how God accepts our faith in Him. Theology is not how we come to God but how God comes in search of us. When we realize that all of us are deficient and imperfect in our theologies, no matter how sophisticated and honed they are, then we will allow love to be our grand theology and lead to completeness in God.

6.4 Contexts Differ

Respect for different contexts is important. The Swiss delegation to Marburg needed the political alliance more for military protection. That was their context. But Luther felt otherwise. He would not approve of any military alliance in defence of the faith. And for him, the acceptance of his interpretation of the Eucharist was more important than whatever societal need and peculiarities the Swiss brethren had. This implies that local uniqueness of the different constituencies of a faith community should be respected. Making local or cultural issues the foundational norm for others' theological reflection has always generated discord. And proffering theological answers for cultural/societal/political issues has proven to be counterproductive.

Communities of faith should be sensitive to the different contexts of their adherents. Learning how to think global but act local is crucial in contemporary faith life where the church has become an amalgam and melange of cultures and peculiar but contrasting political contexts. This does not suggest that theology should be bent to satisfy the "contextual urges" of everyone, but that one context should not be positioned as the meta-context.

In the end, everyone in a community of faith, theologian and non-theologian alike, must be willing to accept the Bible as supra-cultural. When we do theology, we must not come with the mindset of seeking validation for our cultural and contextual baggage. Our theology should judge or prune our cultural contexts and not our contexts judge theology.

6.5 Emphasize Unifying Themes

Emphasis should be on the issues that unite, not the ones that divide. The Eucharistic controversy took the undue attention of the Reformers, even when it was about the *how* and not the *what* of faith. There were many points on which the Protestant movement could have been united, but Luther saw the whole sacramental question as part of the central teaching of Salvation. It is also strange to think that the Lord's Supper which was given to Christians as a memorial that unites faith should cause such schism among the leading brethren of the Reformation.

Although every aspect of theology is important, there are times when so much time and resources are expended on subjects that have no bearings on the unity of the church. Local issues that have no universal applicability or relevance should be spared the stress of being made a theological item in a global church.

The question of unity should be the touchstone for every communal theologizing. Individual opinions that imperil the faith of many should be thoroughly considered and only advanced in a conciliatory manner that does not promote schism. Sometimes, individuals seek to foist their opinions on the church in abrasive forms. But history has shown, as the Eucharistic disputes also indicate, that change in a community of faith is a continuous and slow process, rather than a punctiliar event. If the reader lived in the days of the Eucharistic controversy, it would have been unclear on whose side – Luther or Zwingli – one would have stood. For the Adventist reader for instance, it is easy to agree with the Zwinglian position that the Lord's Supper is symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus and not the actual as argued by Luther. But this is only because of the centuries of theologizing that birthed in this Adventist position. Theology needs time. Does Luther's "error" in this instance nullify his "correctness" in other points? The point remains that theology is an ever-progressive activity.

6.6 Intolerance Divides

Division and schism ensue from intolerance. The conflicting factions at Marburg had a chance to forestall the schism that followed their theological discord. Tolerance would have made the difference. Tolerance entails not muffling theological voices that don't sound like what we have always known and believed.

Does Marburg have anything to do with Adventism? It does not directly. However, if Adventism claims the Protestant heritage, then this epic part of the Reformation story would serve as a needed reminder of the challenges that result from ill-managed theological disputes. From its inception, there have been some unresolved theological discussions in the Adventist Church. Such watershed moments include the pivotal 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session where the atmosphere before, during, and after the meeting was nothing close to Christian. The issue was about righteousness by faith, and at the time the leaders of the Church at Battle Creek were very intolerant of the new view and those pushing it. Another interesting historical episode that resulted in a split in the German Adventist Church was the heated issue of military service which came to its head when the conflicting parties could not resolve their dispute, even when they met with General Conference leaders at Friedensau (Hartlapp 1993). In recent times, the 2015 San Antonio General Conference session and the women's ordination vote has since caused so much rift and polarization (see Johnsson 2017).

There will always be theological issues that will threaten the unity and the communal faith of the church. The response to such issues is what really matters. Perhaps, the Protestant movement would have achieved more, or had a different history, if a theological amalgamation of its splintered units had been achieved at Marburg.

7. Conclusion

This paper has articulated the issues that necessitated the convening of the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, where the Lutheran and Zwinglian wings of the Protestant Reformation had a botched attempt at an amalgamation of their theological opinions. It has also provided a close to detailed and comprehensive analysis of the Eucharistic disputes that marred Protestantism during Luther's days.

Marburg stands as a monument of a missed opportunity in the history of Protestant churches. Perhaps the turn of events would have been different had the conflicting parties reached an amicable consensus. For contemporary Protestant churches, the Reformers at Marburg serve as a constant reminder that unresolved theological differences can lead to outright dissidence and that one's theological views are not absolute. Tolerance and a healthy and honest theological conversation can achieve what tirades, vendettas, theological labels, hate, disdain, pride, and impetuousness never can. The key roles of Luther and Zwingli suggest that when personalities take precedence in theological discussions, issues are hardly considered on their merit. Had those individuals behaved differently, the contours of the Reformation might have taken a different course.

The Christian church, and in particular, the Seventh-day Adventist Church can glean valuable lessons from this remarkable event of history. The past is of no value if we only blame its actors for their failure while we learn no lessons from their action. We are not to judge the actors of events in history, we are to learn from them. But whether we learn from or judge history (as this paper and my arguments might have judged the reformers wrongly), we are already making history and will either teach the future or be judged by the future.

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Zusammenfassung

Das Marburger Religionsgespräch von 1529 war ein entscheidender Wendepunkt in der Geschichte des Protestantismus. Es markierte den Beginn eines vermeidbaren Schismas in der entstehenden protestantischen Bewegung. Die zersetzenden Tendenzen der Bewegung spitzten sich zu, als man sich nicht auf das Thema des Abendmahls einigen konnte, was zum Verlust der theologischen Konsolidierung und einer einheitlichen protestantischen Front führte, die den Kurs des Protestantismus positiv hätte verändern können. Die vorliegende Studie konzentriert sich auf die Themen, die das Marburger Religionsgespräch prägten, sowie die daraus resultierenden Folgen für die protestantische Bewegung. Die Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten mit ihrem entschiedenen protestantischen Ethos einerseits und einer bedeutenden Geschichte innertheologischer Auseinandersetzungen andererseits können aus den Folgen schlecht geführter theologischer Gespräche wertvolle Lehren ziehen, insbesondere in einer Zeit, in der viele theologische Unstimmigkeiten die Einheit und den Auftrag der adventistischen Kirche zu bedrohen beginnen. Adventismus-Studien werden weiterhin von einem wachsenden Verständnis der protestantischen Reformation profitieren.

Résumé

Le colloque de Marbourg de 1529 a été un tournant décisif dans l'histoire du mouvement protestant. Il a marqué le début d'un schisme évitable dans le mouvement protestant naissant. Les tendances à la désintégration du mouvement ont atteint leur paroxysme lorsque le sujet du repas du Seigneur n'a pas fait l'objet d'un accord, entraînant la perte de la consolidation théologique et d'un front protestant uni, ce qui aurait pu modifier positivement le cours du protestantisme. Cette étude se concentre sur les questions qui ont caractérisé le colloque de Marbourg et sur les conséquences qui en ont découlé pour le mouvement protestant. Les adventistes du septième jour, avec leur identité protestante d'une part, et une histoire significative de disputes intra-théologiques d'autre part, peuvent tirer des leçons précieuses de la nature des conséquences de conversations théologiques mal gérées, en particulier à une époque où de nombreuses incongruités théologiques ont commencé à menacer l'unité et la mission de l'église adventiste. Les études adventistes continueront à bénéficier d'une meilleure compréhension de la Réforme protestante.

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