

Patriarch Jeremias II, the Tübingen Lutherans,
and the Greek Version of the Augsburg Confession:
A Sixteenth Century Encounter

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Introduction

After the seventh century and the rise of Islam, the Orthodox East became increasingly isolated from the Roman Catholic West. Large sections of Eastern Orthodox Christianity existed for centuries under Muslim and later under Ottoman rule – all hostile in varying degrees to Christianity. These historical, cultural, political and economic experiences have formed the Orthodox Churches in ways that are difficult for Western Christians to comprehend. Conversely, the Orthodox had little first-hand experience with the distinctive religious and theological concerns of the Reformation of the sixteenth century since it took place only in Western Christendom. Thus, it is extremely noteworthy that a group of Lutheran theologians from the University of Tübingen in Germany during the last quarter of the sixteenth century would initiate a dialogue with – and even seek approval from – the Patriarch of Constantinople, leader of the Orthodox Christians under Ottoman oppression in the East.

The correspondence between the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias II and the Tübingen theologians are ecumenical documents of great importance and interest, representing the first systematic exchange of theological views between the Orthodox East and the new Protestant West. The tone was friendly, personal, polite and irenic in nature. There was sincerity and open-mindedness, especially in the beginning. The true reasons which initiated and perpetuated the exchange can only be speculated upon. Was the motive purely a theological exchange of an ecumenical nature or were other factors involved? What adds a note of intrigue to this speculation is that the Greek version of the Augsburg Confession which accompanied the initial Lutheran letters was itself a very unusual document - no mere translation but a significant re-working of the Confession, with extensive additions in the Byzantine Liturgical language with which the Orthodox East would be most familiar. While the questions of motive will never be fully answered, the most significant impact of the correspondence was surely ecumenical – friendly contact had at least been made. This paper

will briefly explore the religious climate in which the first seed of this contact was planted, and a background for understanding how this unique Greek Augsburg Confession and the correspondence are considered to be a very important framework for contemporary Lutheran-Orthodox ecumenical dialogues.

Overview of the Exchanges

Already by the sixteenth century language and culture was a barrier between the East and the West. The Reformers certainly knew Greek – Philip Melanchthon, for example was a distinguished Lutheran humanist and Greek scholar – but biblical terms had come to assume different meanings in the two traditions.¹ In the West, the Reformers' piety and theology was shaped by the scholastic debates of medieval western theology. Their roots were in the Western Catholic tradition which had developed independently of the East for almost a thousand years before the Reformation. In the East, theology was discussed in terms of the Patristic and Apostolic Tradition of the unified Church of the first eight centuries – a Tradition which the Orthodox had fiercely and successfully preserved, even under oppression.

Then what impressed the West about the East enough to propel their interest in dialogue? The late Orthodox theologian, Georges Florovsky, Emeritus Professor of Eastern Church History at Harvard, points out that the early Reformers had no intention of "innovating" in doctrine. They struggled to purify the Church from all those "innovations" and additions which, in their opinion, had been accumulated in the course of ages, particularly in the West. The West recognized that however unfortunate was its political situation, the East was a faithful guardian of the apostolic tradition. It is interesting to note that Ecclesiastical History, as a distinct theological discipline had been first introduced in the University curriculum in the West, first by the Protestants, and precisely for polemical purposes against Rome. So the crux of the heated political and religious debates between

¹ Robert L. Wilken, "Lutheran/Orthodox Dialogue in the United States" from *Ecumenical Trends*, Vol 19 No. 5 May 1990, p. 69.

Rome and the Reformers was whether or not Rome had been loyal to the ancient tradition, or was it guilty of innovations and unwarranted accretions. Conversely, was the Reformation really a return to the doctrine and practice of the primitive Church, or was it a deviation from it? So the witness of the Eastern Church was considered to be of critical importance to both sides of the Western debate.²

Florovsky further states that: "many of these ecumenical conversations were initiated, not so much because of any immediate theological concern, as from heavy diplomatic pressure arising from the general international situation."³ So one must also ask what it was about the West that may have impressed the East? If the West was interested in moral support against Rome, the East no doubt was looking to the West for political support against the Ottoman Empire. As the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire were becoming increasingly less tolerant of Christianity, and more generally corrupt, the Greeks increasingly looked to the West for liberation from the oppressive yoke. But the Greeks out of necessity kept a watchful eye on the Protestant-Roman debates and developments. According to Byzantine historian Constantine Tsirpanlis, there may be evidence that Jeremias was on relatively good terms with the Papacy leading to the possibility of military support against the Sultan.⁴ But the new religious divisions in the West created new political divisions as well, weakening the European muscle that the Greeks needed if liberation from the Turks was ever to be achieved.⁵

² Georges Florovsky, "The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Movement Prior to 1910" in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* eds., R. Rouse and S.C. Neill (London, 1954) reprint ed., *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol 2, *Christianity and Culture* (Belmont, MA:Norland Publishing, 1974), pp. 169-170.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Constantine N. Tsirpanlis "Jeremias II and the Lutherans" from *The Historical and Ecumenical Significance of Jeremias II's Correspondence With the Lutherans (1573-1581)* Volume One. (Kingston, New York: American Institute For Patristic and Byzantine Studies, 1982), p. 14.

⁵ John Travis, "Orthodox-Lutheran Relations: Their Historical Beginnings" in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*. 29 (Wint 1984), p. 311.

Historical Context of the Exchanges

In order to better understand the initial contact and exchanges, a brief background of the religious and political context on both sides is necessary. The framework will be given in terms of the unique struggles of the Eastern Church in captivity, and the Western Protestant attempts to reform the Roman West, resulting ultimately in Lutheranism.

The East

The Sack of Constantinople

On Tuesday, May 29, 1453, the Emperor of Constantinople was dead and lying on the battlefield. Also dead was the Byzantine Empire, which had been a powerful Christian empire since Constantine the Great legalized the practice of Christianity, changing the complexion of the world from that point forward. The Church of Constantinople – the Orthodox East – instantly became the Church of a subject people. She had been the partner of an Orthodox state for more than a thousand years, but was now merely an association of second class citizens, dependent upon the whims of a Muslim master, whose outlook and entire way of life now had to be abruptly changed.⁶

Muslim rulers had historically treated the religious minorities within their dominions as *millets*, or nations, allowing them to govern their own affairs according to their own laws and customs, and making the religious head of the sect responsible for its administration and its good behavior towards the paramount power.⁷ So a Greek millet was organized, and a new Patriarch was found. The most eminent scholar living in Constantinople at the time of the conquest was a monk, Gennadius, who was persuaded to accept the Patriarchal throne in January 1454 and became Ethnarch, the ruler of the millet and first Patriarch under Turkish rule. Gennadius and the conquering Sultan, Mehmet met to work out the constitution to be

⁶ Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the eve of the Turkish conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p. 165, 168.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

granted to the Orthodox. The acknowledgement of Christian marriage, burial customs, freedom of movement during the three Easter feast-days and freedom from losing any more churches converted into mosques were among the issues noted in the constitution.⁸ Mehmet, who regarded these well-educated, hard-working and wealthy Greek subjects as a valuable asset to his empire, personally invested the Patriarch with these words: "Be Patriarch, with good fortune, and be assured of our friendship, keeping all the privileges that the Patriarchs before you enjoyed."

But these were merely words. The Great Cathedral of Agia Sophia had already been converted into a mosque. Also unfortunate was that this new constitution was never written down. Later Sultans disregarded the initial respect shown to the Church authorities, and when no documents could be produced, the sanctions originally granted the Orthodox gradually disappeared.

Orthodox Christians were never allowed to forget that they were a subject people. They had to get permission for the repair of churches, which was seldom granted. They were required to wear distinctive clothes from the regular citizens. Sons were seized arbitrarily to be converted to Islam and enrolled in the military. If a Christian was converted to Islam (even involuntarily as a child) and reverted to Christianity, he was liable to the death penalty. All rights and privileges of the Christians depended on the good will – and the whim – of the Sultan.⁹

Mehmet's son, Selim I, actively disliked Christians. In about 1520, he was nearly successful in an attempt to forcibly convert all Christians to Islam. Unfortunately, later Sultans were even less indulgent. With the accession of his grandson, Selim II, the Drunkard, decline set in at the top of the Ottoman empire. More and more churches were converted to mosques under Selim II and following. The Sublime Porte, the seat of the

⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

Sultan's government, was controlled by greedy and unscrupulous ministers. It had become the regular custom that the Patriarch had to provide a substantial annual offering to the Sublime Porte, and gifts of money soon became the way the Greeks got along with their masters.¹⁰ But at the back of the mind of every Greek, however faithfully he might collaborate with his new Turkish masters, there lurked the belief that one day the power of Antichrist would crumble and that then the united Greek people would rise again and recreate their holy Empire.¹¹

Authority of Constantinople in the Eastern Church

The triumph of Selim I was the completion of the conquest of Syria, Egypt and Arabia, thus absorbing the lands of the Orthodox Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The Sublime Porte wanted to centralize everything at Constantinople and as a result the other Orthodox Patriarchates were put into a position of inferiority in comparison with that of Constantinople. They lost none of their ecclesiastical rights or autonomy, and they continued to administer the Orthodox within their sees, but in practice they could only negotiate with the Sublime Porte through their brother in Constantinople. So the Patriarch of Constantinople effectively became the spokesperson for all of Eastern Christendom.¹²

Patriarch Jeremias II

Metrophanes III, was deposed because he was believed to have pro-Roman tendencies and was succeeded (in 1572) by Jeremias II (1536-1595), then only 36 years old, who was elected to the Patriarchal throne as a result of the noisy demonstrations of the Greek congregations. He was the 173rd successor of the first founder of the Church at Constantinople, the Apostle Andrew, and the 19th ecumenical Patriarch since the fall of Byzantium (1453). He was elected and re-elected to the Patriarchate three times: 1572-1579, 1580-1584, 1586-1595.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 179, 182.

¹² Ibid. pp. 176-177.

¹³ Tsirpanlis, "A Prosopography of Jeremias Tranos (1536-1595) and His Place in the History of the Eastern Church" *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* Volume 4 Number 3, 1985. pp. 156-157.

Known as Jeremias Tranos, he was born at Anchialos on the Black Sea from a noble family reputable for its piety and high social rank and influence. His nickname Tranos means a person of "penetrating intellect."¹⁴ Byzantine historian, Sir Steven Runciman, suggest that his education might have been at the Patriarchal Academy at Constantinople. He surrounded himself with learned men who were steeped in Greek and Latin thought and was the first to found a publishing house in Constantinople.¹⁵ According to Runciman, Jeremias II was "...probably the ablest man to sit on the Patriarchal throne during the Captivity. He was a sound theologian, an ardent reformer and a fierce enemy to simony."¹⁶

The West

Luther and the German Reformers

The Reformers had felt a certain kinship with the Orthodox since Rome considered both the Christian East and the Reformers to be heretics. The Protestant Reformers often used Eastern Christianity for propaganda and polemics. At the Leipzig Debate in 1519, Martin Luther, pressed to defend his view that the authority of the pope was not normative for Christian doctrine and life, cited the example of "the Greek Christians during the past thousand years...who had not been under the authority of the Roman pontiff."¹⁷ The next year he declared that the Orthodox "...believe as we do, baptize as we do, preach as we do, live as we do."¹⁸ In 1521 Martin Luther wrote about Holy Communion: "Moreover, he [the Roman perverter] has against him the long continued practice of the whole church in all the world, the practice [the reception of both elements by the laity] that still continues among the Greeks, whom even Rome itself dare not call heretics or schismatics because of it... I now

¹⁴ George Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople: The Correspondence between the Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession*, (Brookline, Ma: Holy Cross Press., 1982), p. 13.

¹⁵ Travis, *Orthodox Lutheran Relations*, p. 305.

¹⁶ Runciman *The Great Church in Captivity*, p. 200.

¹⁷ Martin Luther. *The Leipzig Debate*, "Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer: I" Volume 31, eds. H.Grimm, H. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957) p. 322.

¹⁸ Martin Luther. "Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer: II" Volume 32, eds. G. Forell, H. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958) p. 58, 59.

say that on this point the Greeks and Bohemians are not heretics and schismatics but the most Christian people and the best followers of the Gospel on earth."¹⁹

According to the noted Lutheran-turned-Orthodox historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, what was only a polemical intuition in Luther became a more substantial ecumenical overture in his colleague, Philip Melanchthon, and later in Melanchthon's pupils. The most substantial of these overtures was the translation into Greek of the Augsburg Confession.²⁰ Philip Melanchthon fathered the movement to bring an understanding between Wittenberg and the East. He was entirely dedicated to this task. He was a kind and gentle humanist with an irenic tendency and a desire to preserve or restore the unity of the Christian Church. He expressed this desire in the Augsburg Confession, where he tried to show the true catholicity of the Lutheran Church.²¹ Philip Melanchthon's personality stood in marked contrast to Luther's. He was timid and gentle, no prophetic leader of men. Luther was the experiential theologian, the fiery preacher and popular writer who inspired others through his own faith-conversion; Melanchthon was "the quiet Reformer," the methodical thinker, the theologians' theologian – and a literary genius.²² Melanchthon's humanist education and linguistic proclivities made it uniquely appropriate for him eventually to seek out contact with the sixteenth-century heirs of the Greek patristic legacy.²³

The Augsburg Confession

The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V repelled the advances of the Turkish hordes at Vienna in 1529. He then turned his attention to his troubled German situation, from which external political matters had kept him absent since 1521. The faith of the Holy Roman

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*(Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 281.

²¹ Berthold F. Korte, "Early Lutheran Relations with the Eastern Orthodox" *The Lutheran Quarterly* Volume IX Number I February 1957, p. 53.

²² Wayne James Jorgensen, *The Augustana Graeca and the Correspondence Between the Tübingen Lutherans and Patriarch Jeremias: Scripture and Tradition in Theological Methodology*. Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Boston University Graduate School, 1979. pp. 13-14.

²³ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 16.

Empire was the only solidarity of which it could boast, and the religious dissention in Germany was rapidly damaging its unity of faith. On January 21, 1530 Charles proclaimed a diet of German lands to be held in Augsburg in the spring to allay divisions over the religious issue. The evangelical leaders wanted to produce a relatively simple apologetic document summarizing their own teachings as they differed from Roman dogma, especially in the area of salvation by good works and justification by faith. But the slanderous accusations by the Romans that the Lutherans lived godless lives without faith and true religion, led the Lutherans to the conclusion that a more substantial statement of their faith was needed. The Schwabach Articles had already been composed by Luther, Melanchthon, Jonas, Brenz and Agricola in 1529. They were appropriate to the task and conveniently at hand in order to become the first seventeen chapters of what would become known as the Augsburg Confession. During the proceedings of the diet, Luther was still under the ban of the empire. But even during his sequester, messengers kept him abreast of the proceedings and he communicated regularly with the Lutheran divines in attendance. Although Melanchthon was the general editor of the document which was presented at Augsburg, it was said to be entirely in accord with Luther's thinking.²⁴

The public reading took place on June 25, 1530 at 3:00 p.m. at the Bishops Palace in Augsburg. Although the Confession had been prepared in both German and Latin, it was read in German since many of the princes in attendance did not understand Latin. It is for this reason that the German is considered to be the official version. The reading took two hours. Some stood in respect. Many Roman bishops and theologians indicated their approval during the reading, but Emperor Charles, who knew little German, was said to have fallen asleep. Jorgensen states that the "detached observer will doubtlessly notice its essentially conservative and catholic character."²⁵ What was originally intended to be a

²⁴ Jorgensen quotes from Bente, p. 17 "juxtga sententiam Lutheri" in *Augustana Graeca*, p. 23.

²⁵ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 24

positive witness to the catholic and orthodox faith of the Church came to be considered, especially by Charles V, as a negative protest and a rebellious declaration of independence. So he threatened to use force to compel the confessors to submit to Rome, which produced only greater solidarity among the Lutherans. Hence, June 25, 1530 the anniversary of the first reading of the Augsburg Confession became the birthday of the Lutheran Church – "a body united by a public confession and separated from the Roman Church."²⁶

Charles V additionally forbade the dissemination and publication of the Confession, and the originals were considered to be lost. But the Confession immediately became the rallying cry and symbol of the Lutheran movement, and its publication was only a matter of time. Following is a brief discussion of the various printed editions of the Augsburg Confession:

The **1530 *invariata*** was the first edition of the Augsburg Confession ever to be published. It contains both the German and Latin texts along with Melanchthon's Apology. This is considered the official unaltered (*invariata*) version which is chronologically and theologically closest to the actual profession at Augsburg in 1530. This version is sanctioned by the Lutheran Book of Concord. The **Octavo edition of 1531** has several alterations, especially in the article on justification, and so it is know as the **1531 *variata***. **The 1533 German *variata*** version reveals considerable alterations but no doctrinal changes. **The 1540 *variata*** is a Latin edition and express shifts in doctrinal perspectives which became a source of contention in Lutheranism. The most notable is the change in the teaching on the Eucharist, which further removed Lutheran Eucharistic theology from the Roman viewpoints and made the Augsburg Confession acceptable to many Calvinists. **The Greek Version of the Augsburg Confession** was based on the **1540 *variata***, although it did not make its first

²⁶ Bente, Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921; reprint ed., 1965) p. 22.

appearance until 1559.²⁷ It is not a literal translation, or even a translation with alterations, but a significant re-working of the document with numerous additions, paraphrases, expansions, and doctrinal excursions, and will be discussed in greater detail following.

The Greek Version of the Augsburg Confession

Professor Ernst Benz of Marburg was the first to call attention to this curious document. His publication of *Wittenberg und Byzanz*, "Die grechische Übersetzung der Confession Augustana aus dem Jahre 1559" in 1949 is used as the basis for much contemporary research on the topic. Georges Florovsky cites Benz as calling this Greek Version of the Augsburg Confession, or *Augustana Graeca* "a document of very peculiar character."²⁸ As a significant part of his Doctoral Dissertation entitled "The Augustana Graeca and the Correspondence Between the Tübingen Lutherans and Patriarch Jeremias: Scripture and Tradition in Theological Methodology" Wayne James Jorgensen translated the *Augustana Graeca* into English and calls it, "The greatest *variata* of them all." Jorgensen describes the *Augustana Graeca* as:

...in a class by itself, markedly departing from all Latin or German versions of the Confession and far surpassing them in the scope and purpose of its changes. It addresses itself to readers who are not immediately familiar with the issues which resulted in the fashioning of this statement of faith and to whom its basic concepts and formations must be repeated and frequently emphasized.²⁹

Purpose of the *Augustana Graeca*

Two significant questions immediately come to mind about this unusual document. Who translated it and what purpose did its translator intend it to serve? Given the reign of humanism in the academic world at that time, it is not at all exceptional that a Lutheran would be inspired to produce a Greek translation as the symbol of his faith. The translation

²⁷ This primary edition is very rare, and contains only the Greek text, but the more common version is a literal reprint, the *Acta et Scripta* of 1584 also includes a parallel Latin version (the *variatiissima*) of the Augsburg Confession the six doctrinal letters of Tübingen and Constantinople and several other brief letters. (Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 30)

²⁸ Florovsky, "An Early Ecumenical Correspondence" in *World Lutheranism of Today* (1950) pp. 98-111 reprinted as "Patriarch Jeremiah II and the Lutheran Divines" reprint ed., *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol 2, *Christianity and Culture* (Belmont, MA:Norland Publishing, 1974), p. 148.

²⁹ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 31.

of the *Augustana Graeca* is attributed to Paul Dolscius,³⁰ a renowned Greek scholar. His dedication only appears as a preface in the rare 1559 edition of the Augsburg Confession in which he states "I have rendered it in a very simple way... as a translator should, adding nothing of his own to that which he has undertaken to translate into a foreign language."³¹ But Jorgensen's studies reveal that this is simply not true. In response to Dolscius' preface he notes:

Yet every word of the *Augustana Graeca* belies this remark! The preface is surely a red herring, serving to camouflage the real purpose of the enterprise. It is not a "simple" translation; nor is it intended for intra-ecclesiastical purpose in Germany. The author is in fact adding much of his own.... The document is clearly an ecumenical overture to readers who are unfamiliar with the religious developments of sixteenth-century Germany."³²

According to Jorgensen, Dolscius or any of the dozens of Greek scholars in German could have produced an accurate and literal translation of the Augsburg Confession. "The complicated nature and the tendentious purpose camouflaged by the diversionary preface tempt us to look elsewhere for the inspiration, and perhaps also the author, of the document."³³ Benz argues most convincingly that the author must have been Melanchthon himself. Jorgensen has summarized Benz' arguments which are paraphrased here in this way: 1) Only Melanchthon had the ecumenical vision to approach the Greek Church in the late 1550's. Among the Reformers he was without peer in his knowledge of and interest in the ecclesiastical writers of the early Church. 2) Much of the information about the minutiae of Greek Church life which appears in the *Augustana Graeca* was most likely unknown even to an expert Western theologian. But it so happens that from the end of March through September of 1559 Melanchthon provided hospitality to Demetrios Mysos, a Serbian deacon from the Church of Constantinople, whose collaboration would account for the document's occasional familiarity with some of the more peculiar aspects of Greek ecclesiastical life, liturgy and phraseology. 3) No other Lutheran would have dared to tamper with the

³⁰ Dolscius was born in 1526 in Plauen in Saxony. A physician by profession, he became rector of the Latin School in Halle and later mayor of Halle.

³¹ Research of Benz in *Wittenberg und Byzanz*, "Die griechische Übersetzung der Confession Augustana aus dem Jahre 1559" (Marburg/Lahn: Elwert-Gräfe und Unzer Verlag, 1949), quoted in Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 35.

³² Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Augsburg Confession. Only one who considered himself father and master of the text, who revised it as his personal property while his thought progressed, would have presumed to produce so bold and unprecedented a version of the Lutheran symbol. 4) The concerns elaborated in the *Augustana Graeca* are often close to the explanations offered by Melanchthon in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession of 1531. 5) In the religious atmosphere of German Lutheranism, there would have been a mighty uproar if Melanchthon had produced yet another *variata*. So the authorship is assigned to his friend and former student, Dolscius, and the preface are smoke screens for both Melanchthon's authorship and the primary ecumenical intention of the work. 6) Finally, the most concrete evidence for Melanchthon's authorship comes from Martin Crusius, his successor as foremost humanist in Germany who writes that the Greek exemplar of the Augsburg Confession was ... "edited under the name of Dolscius, but composed by Philip."³⁴

Nuances in the Text of the *Augustana Graeca*

As stated previously, the Greek rendering of the Augsburg Confession is not merely a translation but a revision, no doubt in the interest of building a bridge between the East and West. Terms of the Greek Liturgy were employed not only to make matters clear to the Greek mind, according to Korte, but very often to remove theological obstacles which hindered union.³⁵

The linguistic style of the *Augustana Graeca* is termed by Jorgensen as ecclesiastical Greek – neither classical Greek nor Byzantine Greek, but a theological Greek – intended for a theologically educated readership. Jorgensen notes that the author is particularly fond of rendering a single Latin expression by a double Greek expression. i.e. "three hypostases [or persons.]"³⁶ The Latin section "concerning Confession" speaks of "the confession or

³⁴ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, pp. 36-38.

³⁵ Berthold F. Korte, "Early Lutheran Relations with the Eastern Orthodox" *The Lutheran Quarterly* Volume IX Number I February 1957, p. 57.

³⁶ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, pp. 39-40

divulging of sins." Benz describes these double expressions as entailing "not only a nuance and differentiation, but a greater sublimity and dignity in the sense of Orthodox ecclesiastical language." Distinctively Greek liturgical and dogmatic expressions are sprinkled throughout. Mary is "ever-Virgin (ἀειπάρθενος)." Any saints or theologians are deferred to in a hieratic conventionalized way as "our holy Father among the saints, N...."³⁷ The pope is mentioned only as "archbishop of Rome" never as "pope." Article Four "on Justification" is a brief paragraph in the Augsburg Confession, but expanded to a "virtually independent treatise" of almost two pages in the *Augustana Graeca*. Chapter Two "on Original Sin" is two brief paragraphs in the Confession and became over a page in the *Augustana Graeca*. The word "orthodox(y)" appears several times in the *Augustana Graeca* without any corresponding references in the text of the Confession. "The use of this favorite word of the Orthodox lends an air of authenticity and common cause to the content of the statement of faith of the Reformers."³⁸

Lutheran theologian, Berthold Korte, believes that adapting the language to suit the reader was not only acceptable, but necessary, in order to counter the vast differences between the Greek and Roman mind:

In all justice to the translator of the Augsburg Confession into Greek, we must see the great difficulties he encountered. These involved differences in language and piety. The Latin language was formed by the Roman mind, its laws, and its institutions, and these Roman conceptions were transferred to the religious realm.³⁹

With regard to soteriological ideas, the translators either knew that the Lutheran conception of justification as a forensic act of God was hardly comprehensible to the East, or that the East fully understood this Augustinian-based view, and simply disagreed. In either event, Korte believes that the Lutheran ideas were diluted in order to be more palatable to the reader in the East:

³⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁸ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 44.

³⁹ Korte, *Early Lutheran Relations*, p. 56.

Besides, Eastern piety circled around the three divine attributes, life, love, and light. Sin and forgiveness of sin were only secondary, contributory factors. Man is saved by the healing process of divine grace. Christ is the great physician whose healing power causes man to be saved. To meet this Eastern conception something had to be done: justification had to be sacrificed in favor of reconciliation.⁴⁰

But Jorgensen, who studied the document at length while translating it into English would contend that the crux of Lutheran doctrine was not sacrificed:

Despite all these emphases, expansions, nuances and accommodations for the Greek reader, the *Augustana Graeca* undeniably remains a Lutheran document. The author intended no deceptions. There are no distortions of Lutheran dogma. The *Augustana Graeca* is an extraordinarily fascinating exercise in sixteenth-century ecumenics.⁴¹

And ultimately, Korte believes that a spirit of ecumenism was really at the heart of the accommodations and expansions in the *Augustana Graeca*:

Accordingly the Greek rendering of the Augsburg Confession is not merely a translation but a revision in the interest of building a bridge between the East and the West. Terms of the Greek liturgy were employed not only to make matters clear to the Greek mind but very often to remove theological obstacles which hindered union.⁴²

Chronology of Contact

In 1558 (1559) Patriarch Joasaph II (1555-65) of Constantinople sent Deacon Demetrios Mysos to Wittenberg to gather first-hand opinions about the faith, worship, and customs of the Reformers. It was there that Melanchthon and Mysos worked together on the Greek version of the Augsburg Confession. This Greek translation of the Augsburg Confession had supposedly been sent to the Ecumenical Patriarch around 1558 through the Serbian Demetrios, but Korte find evidence that Demetrios was killed in a rebellion in Wallachia and that Melanchthon's letter and this first copy translation of the Augsburg Confession never reached Constantinople.

Initial Contact

The initial contact was begun in October, 1573. The new imperial ambassador to Turkey, Baron David Ungnad von Sonnegg, a Protestant aristocrat and pious Lutheran who

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴¹ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, pp. 46, 47.

⁴² Berthold F. Korte, "Early Lutheran Relations with the Eastern Orthodox" *The Lutheran Quarterly* Volume IX Number I February 1957, p. 56.

had studied law at the University of Tübingen, was going to Constantinople for a prolonged stay, accompanied by his Lutheran chaplain, Stephan Gerlach. Gerlach was carrying with him private introductory letters from Martin Crusius and Jakob Andreae. Jakob Andreae (1528-90) was the most famous theologian of the period. He worked unceasingly for unity and purity in Lutheran doctrine.⁴³ The second most important Lutheran involved in the exchange was Martin Crusius (1526-1607) who was a leading classicist and philhellene in Europe, and known for his significant influence shaping the humanistic mold of the Renaissance.

At Constantinople, Gerlach established personal contacts with various dignitaries of the Church and had several interviews with the Patriarch himself, and over a period of some eighteen months had brought and presented the initial introductory letters of recommendation, two other short letters from Andreae and Crusius, as well as two of Andreae's homilies on John 10:11 and Luke 10:9. In his diary, Gerlach writes that he was impressed with Jeremias' erudition and also with his physical stature. "He is a friendly and charming man, robust and tall, with a fat face and long brown and red hair, a rather full but not very long brown beard, and he carries a black patriarch's staff."⁴⁴

Exchange of Theological Correspondence

The period of the exchange of theological correspondence between Constantinople and Tübingen took place during the years 1574-1582. On May 24, 1575, Gerlach personally presented to the Patriarch the *Augustana Graeca* (which the Lutherans had titled "a Confession of the Orthodox Faith") together with letters from Andreae and Crusius.⁴⁵

Although the Patriarch had answered the prior letters and two homilies with kindness and fatherly love, he exhorted them to cautiously follow the true Faith, and displayed an uncommitted reserve and caution. But from the very beginning, the Germans expressed great

⁴³ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 305.

⁴⁴ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations* pp. 304, 305.

optimism, enthusiasm and respect,⁴⁶ addressing the Patriarch with terms such as: "Most Honorable Lord," "All-Holy Sir," "Most God-Beloved Sir," and "Your Holiness."⁴⁷ This is all-the-more noteworthy when it is compared to how the Reformers spoke of Roman Catholic bishops. Even the irenic Melanchthon referred to Roman Catholic hierarchs at the Council of Trent as "epicurean bishops who know about as much about Christian doctrine as the asses upon which they ride."⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the Patriarch remained doctrinally rigid and uncompromising throughout these dialogue, the Germans maintained a high degree of respect and deference to the office of Patriarch throughout their correspondence. The late Father George Mastrantonis has translated the preliminary correspondence as well as the theological exchange into English. Clearly, from the first letter from the Tübingen theologians to Patriarch Jeremias, dated September 16, 1575, one can glean a sense that the Lutherans genuinely believed they had not been innovative, but were merely returning to the basics of the Christian Faith. After thanking the Patriarch for the "paternal kindness of Your Holiness" Andreae wrote:

I am sending you a little book that contains the main parts of our entire faith, so that Your Holiness may see what our religion is, and whether we agree with the teaching of the churches under the jurisdiction of Your Holiness; or whether perhaps, there might be something that is not in agreement (which I would not desire.)⁴⁹

Also quite apparent in the same letter is that the Germans were **not** seeking to "convert" the Orthodox, or to correct them because they had "strayed so far from the truth" as Lutheran Church History professor, Jane Strohl sees it,⁵⁰ but clearly seeking the paternal approval of Jeremias, with high regard for his authority as the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church:

⁴⁵ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p. 15. Also Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, p. 145.

⁴⁶ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 72.

⁴⁷ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, pp. 27-30.

⁴⁸ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Jane E. Strohl, "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue: A Sixteenth-Century Encounter" *Dialog* Vol 32, No. 2. Spring 1993, p. 91. Strohl is unique among the many other Lutherans studied. She calls Jeremias "ignorant," having "obstinacy combined with a lack of knowledge", "seriously in error" "greviously contradict[ing] the Bible" when history clearly shows both he and his colleagues to be highly educated, fair minded and well-informed theologians, strongly connected to the apostolic heritage of the Church, and highly regarded as such by the

I earnestly ask Your Holiness to receive it with the same good favor with which you have accepted my previous communications and, if it is not too much for your wise person, to kindly express your most favorable judgment concerning these articles, if God would grant that we think alike in Christ. Farewell, most Holy Father, together with the entire Church that is with you, for many years. And look upon my Christ-respecting study with a fatherly disposition.

The second letter from Germany to Constantinople was even more complimentary and self-effacing. The Germans thanked the Patriarch for his benevolence, because it is an honor that:

Your Holiness, with so exalted a degree of dignity, should have thought us, whose station is so much below that of Your Holiness, worthy of a reply. And what a reply it was! A wise, and, indeed, a most pious one.⁵¹

A second personal letter, dated May, 1575 from Patriarch Jeremias II to Andreae and Crusius notes the existence of doctrinal differences, and again urges them to accept the teachings of the Church of Christ. The Lutherans worked from the presupposition that they were in basic agreement with Orthodox doctrine. Whatever divergence might be apparent, according to the Reformers, was only in secondary matters, namely, customs and ritual practices.⁵² Answering Jeremias' letter in which the Patriarch acknowledges receipt of a copy of the Augsburg Confession, Andreae writes in 1575:

If perhaps, we differ in some customs because of the great geographical distances that separate us, nevertheless, we hope that we have in no way innovated on the principal articles of salvation. As far as we know, we have both embraced and preserved the faith which has been handed down [to us] by the holy apostles and prophets, the God-bearing fathers and patriarchs, and the seven [ecumenical] synods that were built upon the God-given scriptures.⁵³

According to Travis, clearly, the intent of the Greek version of the Augsburg Confession was to connect Lutheran doctrine with patristic tradition, which remained a constant and deep conviction throughout the correspondence.⁵⁴ On November 16, 1575, Jeremias wrote to the Germans indicating that he was preparing a careful, detailed official response to their symbol

Tübingen theologians. Her conclusion is that the *Augustana Graeca* was sent only to "instruct the Greeks in proper theology, beginning with the basics" even though the correspondence itself does not support her opinion.

⁵¹ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople* p. 28.

⁵² Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 313.

⁵³ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 313.

of faith, but clearly informed them that the basis for his response would be how the Scriptures have been interpreted by the Councils and Fathers.

Finally, the eagerly awaited First Response of the Patriarch was received at the University of Tübingen on June 18, 1576. In the cover letter, Jeremias advises the "most wise Germans" and his "spiritual sons" to avoid innovation and to accept the truth; he extends the polite invitation to unite with the Church of Christ, and "there will be joy in heaven and on earth over the union of both churches."⁵⁵ Jeremias' First Answer to Tübingen contains some brief lines of introduction, comments on the Nicene Creed, and then the Patriarch devoted some eighty pages to the questions of free will, justification, sacraments, the invocation of the saints, and monasticism.

This initial response of Patriarch Jeremias II is considered to be the last example of pure Byzantine theology without any western influence whatsoever. Mastrantonis cites substantial evidence that Jeremias was the primary author. The document was by no means an original composition, but rather a deliberate compilation from traditional sources with citations from Nicolas Cabasilas, Symeon of Thessalonica, Joseph Bryennios, and especially St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom. All novelty was strictly avoided. It was not so much an analysis of the *Augustana* itself, as a parallel exposition of Orthodox doctrine. It has been suggested that the main value of the document lies precisely in its un-originality.⁵⁶ No doubt, Jeremias saw this as a pastoral opportunity to impress upon the Tübingen theologians by his example, that no religious leader – whether Patriarch, or Pope, or Lutheran divine, for that matter – has the right to innovate in doctrine, especially when such innovation contradicts the consensus of the Holy Tradition of the Church throughout her existence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople* pp. 30, 31.

⁵⁶ Florovsky, *Patriarch Jeremiah II and the Lutheran Divines* p. 150.

⁵⁷ Simply stated, "Holy Tradition" in the Orthodox Church can be described as "the work of the Holy Spirit within the Church" and thus, by definition can never contradict Holy Scripture. Although the Greek Fathers do weigh

The Reformers were already very sensitive to the accusation of being innovators, rather than traditionalists, having been harshly accused by the Roman Catholics. If they were elated with Jeremias' first letter, which did not accuse them, as did the Roman Catholics of being innovators, this was not the case now. One can imagine their disappointment upon receipt of this document from the leader of the Greek Church. The outlook for any union or theological coalition against Rome was bleak. The ancient Church had sided with Rome in rejecting the Lutheran faith as an "innovation." Their only recourse was to convince the Orthodox otherwise, which became the basis of all succeeding correspondence coming out of Tübingen.⁵⁸ The dialogue had taken a notable turn from seeking union to apologetics which continued throughout the remaining correspondence. The bilateral agenda of the second exchange was restricted to six topics: filioque, free will, justification by faith and good works, sacraments, invocation of the saints, and monastic life.

The third exchange was largely a parting summary of two sides, with some refinement of positions. The Patriarch devotes almost his entire third reply of June 1581 to the issue of the filioque clause, but seems resigned to accept the fact that the Lutherans would not be moved on this point:

...We reiterate these matters again, although we have been well-informed by your letters that you will never be able to agree with us or rather, we should say, with the truth.⁵⁹

The cordiality never disappears, but the breakdown of the dialogue is becoming apparent. In this same third reply, Jeremias, accuses the Lutherans of being "Judaizers" because of their contempt for icons and the preference for the Masoretic text rather than the Septuagint.⁶⁰ Finally, at the conclusion of his third reply, Jeremias is clearly taxed by the impasse.

heavily in the formation of Orthodox doctrine, there were flaws even in some of their teachings. Not everything each Church father said was accepted wholesale. Therefore, the Orthodox hold that all theology must be measured against a historical consensus of catholic thought, according to the whole (pre-divided) Church - such as the Ecumenical Councils, which have revealed correct doctrine and practice through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁸ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 313.

⁵⁹ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p. 290.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Jeremias believed it was necessary to respond only according to the consensus of Patristic thought, but he now realizes the Lutheran divines will clearly never consider any source as authoritative which might reveal their own doctrines to be innovative. Jeremias writes:

Therefore we request that from henceforth you do not cause us more grief, nor write to us on the same subject if you should wish to treat these luminaries and theologians of the Church in a different manner. You honor and exalt them in words, but you reject them in deeds. For you try to prove our weapons which are their holy and divine discourses as unsuitable. And it is with these documents that we would have to write and contradict you. Thus, as for you, please release us from these cares. Therefore, going about your own ways, write no longer concerning dogmas; but if you do, write only for friendships sake. Farewell.⁶¹

But the Lutherans nevertheless wrote again. In the brief salutation they expressed mutual suffering, distress and confusion, with sincerity - but with noticeably more reserve - still referring to him as "Your Holiness" and "Most Holy Sir" and for the first time including the Patriarch's advisors in the salutation. They include brief clarifications on their positions concerning free will, the sacraments, the saints, confession, the monastic life, and rejected the accusations of heresy, schism, and Judaism. Nevertheless, their conclusion was gracious and friendly:

And even if you ask us to no longer trouble you with such writings (although we have conversed with you with much love and much kindness and with due respect) yet we are hopeful that the matters which have been written to you by us up to now will in time be re-examined and reconsidered more accurately and much better. ... Therefore, standing together with Your Holiness, Patriarch and Most Reverent Sir, we offer to the God of all, our true friendship which we have shown to you and which we will continuously afterwards keep.⁶²

Doctrinal Agreement and Disagreement

Jorgensen has outlined a very helpful summary (and by his own assessment, a "gross over-simplification") of the points of doctrinal agreements and disagreement in these exchanges, as noted:

Points of Doctrinal Agreement

- a. The fundamental authority of Scripture, its inspiration, and its translation into the language of the people;
- b. God and the Trinity in general;
- c. Ancestral sin and its transmission to the entire human race;
- d. That humanity, not God, is the cause of evil;
- e. The two natures of Christ;

⁶¹ Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p.306.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

- f. The head of the Church is Jesus Christ alone;
- g. The second Coming, the judgment and future life, and the endlessness of reward and punishments;
- h. The reception of the Eucharist in both kinds;
- i. Rejection of papal satisfactions, indulgences, the treasury of the saints, purgatorial fire, and compulsory clerical celibacy.

Points of Doctrinal Disagreement

- a. Holy Tradition;
- b. The Procession of the Holy Spirit (filioque);⁶³
- c. Free Will;
- d. Divine Predestination;
- e. Justification;
- f. The number of sacraments;
- g. The performance of Baptism by immersion (Orthodox) vs. sprinkling or pouring (Lutheran), and the immediate performance of Chrismation and the giving of the Eucharist to those baptized (Orthodox);
- h. The meaning of the change in the Holy Eucharist, and the use of unleavened bread;
- i. The infallibility of the Church and of the Ecumenical Councils;
- j. The veneration, feasts, and invocation of saints, and their icons and relics;
- k. Fasts and other ecclesiastical traditions and customs.⁶⁴

Long-term Impact on Ecumenical Dialogue

The most important outcome of these dialogues was that the silence between the Orthodox East and Lutheran West was broken for the first time. There was mutual ignorance about each other's theology, culture and politics at first, but their willingness to learn from one another was significant and commendable. Although the dialogue was certainly friendly, there was an obvious resultant disillusionment, disappointment and frustration on both sides – clearly no agreement had been reached, and there was little hope of reconciliation. But Travis reminds us to appreciate the correspondence as being part of a process generating far-reaching results. To say the correspondence was completely negative is:

...a harsh verdict which impatiently assumes that every moment of history must constitute either a monumental breakthrough or a bitter disappointment. No assessment can change what has already taken place. Rather, an understanding of the past can enable us to reflect upon the present and the possibilities of the future.⁶⁵

⁶³ Jorgensen notes that twenty percent of the correspondence focused on the filioque debate. p. 134.

⁶⁴ Jorgensen, *Augustana Graeca*, pp. 84, 85.

⁶⁵ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 323.

And even though the dialogues seemed to emphasize more the diversities rather than the shared Christian life of both, even this was still not a completely negative reality, says Travis. "By bringing to the fore the points of divergence between Orthodox and Protestantism, it enabled both to become familiar with the other's religious and attitudinal way of looking at each other."⁶⁶

In the course of history, the East ultimately grew weaker and weaker. It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Orthodox Christian East began to become free from her various oppressors around the world. Even to this day, the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, now Istanbul, continues to be under the relatively fierce authority of the Turkish government, which still demands control over even the most minute details of Church management and polity, and has become even more hostile to Orthodox Christianity in recent decades. The West, however, continued to flourish and grow increasingly strong. Because of its strength, the West has tended to regard its Christianity as normative Christianity, and to look upon the classical, patristic tradition of the East as an exotic Christian sect. According to the late Florovsky, who was a well-respected scholar and participant in the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues of the twentieth century:

Byzantium has been either tacitly ignored or disapproved. Byzantium has sometimes slept. But Byzantium is still alive in the things of the spirit, the representative of an authentic Christian tradition, linked by unbroken continuity with the thought of the apostolic age. Recovery of a genuine ecumenical unity will be possible only through mutual rediscovery of East and West and a wider synthesis, such as has sometimes been attempted but never yet achieved.⁶⁷

And the first task of this "mutual rediscovery of East and West" is the same first task of those involved in any ecumenical dialogue – to discover common ground and to adopt a common idiom. The sixteenth century Tübingen-Jeremias correspondence accomplished exactly that. Melancthon's Greek version of the *Augustana* deserves the close attention of modern ecumenical theologians, according to Florovsky, who believes that this attempt to interpret

⁶⁶ Travis, *Orthodox-Lutheran Relations*, p. 323.

⁶⁷ Florovsky. "The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Movement prior to 1910," in *Christianity and Culture*, Vol 2 of the Collected works of Georges Florovsky" p. 163.

the message of the Reformation in the wider context of an ecumenical tradition embracing the East and the West should be repeated.⁶⁸

Archbishop Iakovos, Archbishop of North and South America for thirty five years, who retired in 1996, was an active leader in the ecumenical dialogs between the Lutheran West and Orthodoxy in the twentieth century. Writing in the late 1950's in a Lutheran journal on the topic of ecumenical dialogue, he first defines his concept of Orthodoxy as: "...the Christian church's doctrine, order, worship and tradition of the first eight centuries of united Christendom..." then discusses what he believes to be the scope of Orthodoxy's contribution to any ecumenical dialogue:

The common use of the term "Orthodox" to signify the church of the East should signify to the churches of the West that the Eastern Church is committed to maintain the genuine characteristics of the one church of Christ. Orthodoxy, being true to her history and traditions and compelled by the consciousness of her God-ordained task, is present and intends to be present and participate actively in all ecumenical conversations as long as their aim is to restore the disrupted unity of Christendom. Orthodoxy's principal aim in participating in the ecumenical movement is to make known the riches of her faith, worship and order, and of her spiritual and ascetic life and experience.⁶⁹

Lutheran pastor, Ross Aden, also sees great benefits in what the Lutheran Church might gain from continuing in dialogue with the Orthodox, especially in the area of piety and soteriology. In his article, "Justification and Divinization" he quotes Canadian Lutheran Henry Edwards as suggesting that "Eastern theology acts like a prism which allows Lutherans to see their own theology in a different manner..." Aden articulates at length the various differences in the Lutheran/Orthodox salvation metaphors pertaining to justification/sanctification vs. divinization in his article and concludes that continued discussion is of benefit to Lutheran understanding, articulation, and piety:

Ongoing exposure to Orthodoxy will encourage us in the important task of developing a more positive attitude toward the personal and corporate practices of the spiritual life, for Eastern Christianity proves that the categories of justification and sanctification can be brought together in a way that does not violate the principle of salvation grace. This theology of

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁶⁹ Archbishop Iakovos, "The Contribution of Eastern Orthodoxy to the Ecumenical Movement" *Lutheran World* September 1959, Vol VI No. 2 p. 140.

Eastern Orthodoxy is permeated by the thought of divine grace; it is an approach to understanding the saving action of God that is relational not mechanical, that is dynamic not static.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Perhaps we will never know what motivated this initial Lutheran contact with Constantinople in the mid-sixteenth century. The Lutheran theologians clearly had a generally favorable image of the Orthodox Church in their minds. Might they indeed have genuinely been seeking unity with the Church of the East, whom they considered guardians of the Apostolic Faith? Perhaps they truly had not realized that the East would consider their new Lutheranism to be "innovative."

It also would be naïve to suggest that theology alone was the driving force behind this sixteenth century correspondence. Political factors were also strong motivators. The religious and political situation in the West with Rome undoubtedly prompted the initial contact of the Reformers with the East, who were seeking an ally in the great theological and political debates of 16th century Western Europe. The hopes of a Protestant ally against Turkish oppressors may indeed have propelled the Patriarch to greater personal generosity and open-mindedness to dialogue than he otherwise might have expressed.

Regardless of the motives on either side, the letters themselves stand as ecumenical documents of the highest theological significance and scholastic caliber. The sincere and genuine personal regard which was apparent on both sides of the correspondence should also stand as an exemplary model for any present and future ecumenical dialogue.

⁷⁰ Ross Aden, "Justification and Divinization" *Dialog* Vol 32, No. 2. Spring 1993, p. 107.

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